

Identifying Partisan Efforts to Generate Authoritarian Legitimacy

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Abstract

Informed by the puzzle of differentiating between democratic and authoritarian legitimacy-generating actions, the chapter aims to propose and test a theoretical tool for measuring partisan efforts to generate a regime's legitimacy. The study contributes theoretically to our understanding of generating a regime's legitimacy by modifying and combining the theories of mind engineering and ideology-based education. The modification departs from normative significance-based evaluation of mind engineering consequences. This feature of mind engineering is replaced with a type of political system to capture what ideology it instills. Also, the chapter proposes sensitive criteria for differentiating between democratic and authoritarian frames. A methodological contribution lies in offering and testing a theory-based tool useful to unpack cognition- and behavior-oriented claims to democratic and authoritarian legitimacy. The new empirical approach uncovers the mechanisms of mind engineering aimed at influencing cognitive and behavioral aspects of the public's involvement in supporting political systems.

Introduction

The crises of democratic legitimacy reveal that democracies in various stages of their institutions' erosion are vulnerable to threats from anti-democratic actors (Schmidt 2020: 139). Partisan institutions that are subordinate to the ruling parties use their resources to generate authoritarian legitimacy under the guise of protecting democracy, translating into a rise in social support for authoritarianism (Rak and Bäcker 2022). Legitimacy allows authoritarian rulers to stabilize political regimes (Gerschewski 2013; Grauvogel and Von Soest 2014). Simultaneously, an increase in authoritarian legitimacy uncovers the effectiveness of using mind engineering through discursive frames to embed ideology in government propaganda (Bray, Shriver and Adams 2019). Johannes Gerschewski (2013: 14) formulated a classic theory of authoritarian stability to explain why some autocracies collapse while others remain stable. It draws on the assumption that the longevity of autocracies depends on legitimacy, repression, and co-optation. However, the study of legitimacy in non-democratic regimes raises methodological difficulties. It requires conducting surveys to explore political consciousness, whereas fear of the consequences of disclosing opposition to rulers may result in hiding genuine attitudes. Accordingly, the declared attitudes may differ from the actual ones. Thus, such studies may be biased and lead to erroneous conclusions. Constantine Boussalis, Alexander Dukalskis, and Johannes Gerschewski (2023: 2) developed the theory to overcome the difficulties. The modification consists in redirecting the scholarly attention from legitimacy as the belief in regime legitimacy toward claims to legitimacy. As they assume, the state-controlled and pro-government distribution of information keeps authoritarian rulers in power. The remaining factors include elite cohesion enforced by co-optation and selective repression.

Embedded in the body of works on claims to legitimacy as a pillar of stability, recent studies present how authoritarian regimes and other anti-democratic actors use media to shape their power position (Gerschewski 2018). They deliver empirical evidence to confirm that the strategic use of

state-controlled information allows authoritarian rulers to avert threats to a political regime. On the one hand, the focus is on targeting the opposition and ordinary people who engage in anti-government protests (e.g., Thyen and Gerschewski 2018). It takes a form of delegitimization, considered soft repression (Rak 2021). On the other hand, researchers address self-legitimacy to reveal how authoritarian rulers claim and justify the right to rule (e.g., Dukalskis and Gerschewski 2017). Authoritarian rulers socially construct meaning when they produce and distribute 'elite frames', also called 'state official frames' (Bray, Shriver and Adams 2019: 685). When directed internally, frames serve to influence other elites' perceptions of challengers, i.e., protesters and opposition. Externally directed frames facilitate the mobilization of mass support (Bray, Shriver and Adams 2019: 685). Both democratic and autocratic rulers claim the right to rule, and the stability of the political system depends on their effectiveness.

Nevertheless, not all claims by non-democratic actors are overtly anti-democratic. Some calls for autocratic legitimacy rely on references to respect for democratic values and institutions (Sanfilippo 2022). Others rest on similarities to militant democracy (Malkopoulou and Kirshner 2019), which is the principle of limiting the rights and freedoms of the enemies of democracy to prevent the latter from using them to change their political roles and become rulers (Loewenstein 1937a; 1937b). This practice is quasi-militant democracy, which means that a non-democratic actor restricts civil rights and freedoms under the guise of protecting the values of a higher order, such as democracy, public order, or health. However, the actor limits the sovereignty of a political nation (Rezmer-Plotka 2022). Identifying and distinguishing between democratic and authoritarian claims to legitimacy remains challenging for students of political system stability (Bäcker 2021). At the same time, these are essential civic competencies for those who consciously strive to participate in politics.

Informed by the puzzle of differentiating between democratic and authoritarian legitimacy-generating actions, the chapter aims to propose and test a theoretical tool for measuring partisan efforts to generate a regime's legitimacy. The tool also applies to unpacking legitimacy-generating actions independently, and, as such, it is of practical use for non-specialists. Based on a qualitative news frame analysis, the tool undergoes an empirical test through an illustrative case study of Polish state-led mind engineering. The test covers state media efforts to generate legitimacy during the largest wave of social mobilization in democratic Poland that expressed opposition to restricting women's reproductive rights combined with anti-government views. In a non-democratic setting, protest activities, taking a form of civil disorder, undermine the stability of political regimes since they put state legitimacy at risk (Bray, Shriver, and Adams 2019: 682). Moreover, anti-government protests as communication situations offer rich material for understanding discursive efforts to maintain and rebuild the rulers' endangered legitimacy and limit political pluralism and participation. The main argument is that the Polish state media, as partisan institutions, used interpretative frames typical of authoritarian mind engineering to generate authoritarian legitimacy during the 2020–2021 mobilization for women's reproductive rights in Poland.

The study contributes theoretically to our understanding of generating a regime's legitimacy by modifying and combining the theories of mind engineering and ideology-based education. The modification departs from normative significance-based evaluation of mind engineering consequences. This feature of mind engineering is replaced with a type of political system to

capture what ideology it instills. Also, the study proposes sensitive criteria for differentiating between democratic and authoritarian frames. A methodological contribution lies in offering and testing a theory-based tool useful to unpack cognition- and behavior-oriented claims to democratic and authoritarian legitimacy. The new empirical approach uncovers the mechanisms of mind engineering aimed at influencing cognitive and behavioral aspects of the public's involvement in supporting political systems. What is new is the broadening of the perspective to generate legitimacy expressed through views and controlled behavior. Besides, the test demonstrates how to apply the tool to analyze media news. It helps develop civic competencies in understanding the language used by partisan institutions, and, as such, it can be incorporated into language and civic education.

The remainder of the chapter consists of four parts. The first introduces a critical literature review on mind engineering as a means of generating democratic and authoritarian legitimacy. It offers a discussion on applying the theory of mind engineering in studies on political systems. The discussion uncovers the theory's strengths and possible difficulties in its application. Simultaneously, it gives grounds for developing a theoretical tool for measuring partisan efforts to generate democratic and authoritarian legitimacy. The tool's presentation concludes the discussion. Then, the chapter sheds light on a research design. Apart from justifying methodological choices related to the source corpus and methods, it shows how to apply the tool step by step to analyze news. The two final sections deliver research findings and conclusions. They locate Polish state-led mind engineering between the Weberian ideal types of democratic and authoritarian legitimacy claim-making efforts.

Overview of Research on Mind Engineering

Mind engineering is crucial in stabilizing political systems since it underlies the processes of generating legitimacy. In studies on political regimes, the category of 'mind engineering' is usually associated with 'brainwashing', 'propaganda', 'mind control', 'manipulation', and 'coercive persuasion' (cf., e.g., Donskis 2003: 81; Ivančić 1994: 101). Andrii Leonov (2022: 191) argues that it results from treating mind engineering as a tool to instill political agendas and ideologies into supporters and opponents. Based on David Chalmers's and Charles Peirce's theories, Leonov (2022: 191) defined mind engineering as the 'design, implementation, and evaluation of minds'. Minds are sets of beliefs, whereas beliefs are pragmatically hermeneutically interpreted as habits. What is more, the latter is a "fixed" functional interpretation of the world, and one's place in it that either works or does not work' (Leonov 2022: 192). As a result, in Leonov's (2022: 192) approach, mind engineering is 'the process of design/redesign, implementation/reimplementation, and evaluation/re-evaluation of the "fixed" functional interpretations of the world, and one's place in it that either work or do not work'. The process can be deliberate or forceful. While the former means education, the latter signifies driving somebody to do something against one's will and desire. Finally, mind engineering can differ in terms of its normative significance. As such, it can be positive when it signifies the acquisition of good habits or negative when it results in the acquisition of bad habits (Leonov 2022: 192).

Leonov's (2022) theoretical approach may cause two application difficulties. First, although the differentiation between deliberate and forceful mind engineering reveals two distinctive influence aspects, their measurement poses several challenges. Education may lead people to act against

their will and desire. The criteria for when deliberate mind engineering becomes a forceful action are underdetermined. Still, Leonov revealed a hitherto marginalized, in mind engineering studies, aspect of the impact on cognitive and behavioral spheres. Notably, this distinction is present in public engagement studies that account for the mechanism of generating the involvement of various communities in public affairs. According to the current studies, building cognitive public engagement is about shaping beliefs. In turn, generating behavioral public engagement boils down to stimulating people to take actions in the public sphere that go beyond passive acceptance or lack thereof (e.g., Dubovi and Tabak 2021; Kucuk and Richardson 2019).

Considering the influence on cognition and behavior through legitimacy claims allows for a more in-depth understanding of legitimacy claim-making efforts. Leonov's theoretical approach (2022) directs scholarly attention to generating a regime's legitimacy through attitudes and actions. While the former includes calls to internalize a particular vision of a political reality, the latter involves calls to act expectedly in this reality. For instance, mind engineering oriented on cognition can draw upon a call to interpret unjust, partisan, and partial policing of anti-government protest as a necessary and adequate means of establishing relationships between the government and its opponents or the only means to restore public order. Mind engineering focused on behavior can rest on a call to join a pro-government meeting or vote. Regardless of orientation, mind engineering develops interpretations and justifications to spark cognitive or behavioral reactions. These different calls can coexist, complement, and reinforce or weaken each other.

Second, applying Leonov's theoretical approach requires intersubjective identification from whose perspective habits are good or bad. Additionally, it tells little about whether the motivations or consequences of habits undergo normative evaluation. However, in studies on political systems, the type of generated legitimacy, either democratic or authoritarian, is much more important than normative significance because it uncovers a political regime under construction (Burnell 2006). Legitimacy claim-making efforts aim at justifying and gaining support for democratic or autocratic institutions, values, and norms, respectively.

Studies on ideology-based education provide tools for research inscribed in mind engineering. They treat education as a means of instilling in recipients the values and norms that underpin political regimes. Simultaneously, they allow for systematic differentiation between democratic and authoritarian values and norms characteristic of the regimes (Österman and Robinson 2023: 1). It is an essential step toward an intersubjective comparison of mind engineering in diverse political settings. Accordingly, less normative approaches and comparative research begin replacing the current distinction between pro-democratic civic education and authoritarian propaganda (cf. Şanlı and Altun 2015). However, it is still problematic to classify such elements of education that, under the guise of praising and promoting democratic values and norms, are anti-democratic.

Based on William A. Galston's (2004) model of civic education, Joanna Rak and Kamila Rezmer-Plotka (2022) formulated a tool for measuring media engagement in civic education. It rests on the assumption that ideology-based and state-orchestrated education shapes an ideal citizen's civic attitudes and behavior. The ideal of citizenship varies according to the type of political system that education serves. Rak and Rezmer-Plotka's tool is a dyad of antinomic ideal types of democratic and autocratic civic knowledge. The democratic variant's essential features include (1) promoting

support for democratic values, (2) promoting political participation, (3) helping citizens learn about civic affairs, (4) assisting citizens in reducing mistrust and fear of public life, and (5) preventing political divisions based on hostility (Rak and Rezmer-Płotka 2022: 85). In turn, the characteristics of the autocratic variant are (1) devaluing democratic values, (2) discouraging political participation, (3) convincing citizens of the rightness of the ruling's policy, (4) spreading mistrust and fear of public life, (5) forging political divisions based on hostility (Rak and Rezmer-Płotka 2022: 85–86).

Rak and Rezmer-Płotka's (2022: 85–86) contribution to studies on knowledge distributed under democratic and authoritarian education lies beyond evaluating orientation on democratic values. Still, it includes 'promoting support for democratic values' and 'devaluing democratic values'. Nevertheless, they are not indicative of democratic and authoritarian discursive frames since autocratic and anti-democratic actors discursively recognize the protection of democratic values and norms as their objective (e.g., Sharafutdinova 2014). Removing this indicator from the model might optimize its use in comparative studies.

In sum, the theory of mind engineering offers a theoretical framework that enables a researcher to make sense of legitimacy claims. It applies to unpack frames that shape attitudes and actions relevant to the political regime's stability. Moreover, after expansion, it allows for a differentiation between democratic and authoritarian frames used to stabilize different systems.

Drawing on the theoretical developments in mind engineering and ideology-based education studies, the chapter proposes a theoretical tool for measuring partisan efforts to generate democratic and authoritarian legitimacy. It rests on Leonov's (2022: 192) definition of mind engineering as the 'process of design/redesign, implementation/reimplementation, and evaluation/re-evaluation of the "fixed" functional interpretations of the world, and one's place in it that either work or do not work'. Mind engineering draws on democratic and authoritarian frames embedded in 'interpretations of the world'. It is a means of making a regime's legitimacy claims understood as pressurizing the population to accept a political and social order proposed by the rulers (von Soest and Grauvogel 2015: 5).

Following Rak and Rezmer-Płotka's (2022: 85–86) differentiation between democratic and authoritarian knowledge, the chapter proposes cognition- and behavior-based democratic and authoritarian claims. The cognition-based ones are interpretative schemas imposing a peculiar interpretation of political and social order. Behavior-based democratic and authoritarian claims are requests for action that manifests legitimacy.

At a cognition-based level, democratic claims include (CD1) helping citizens learn about resolving civic affairs, (CD2) assisting citizens in reducing mistrust and fear of public life, and (CD3) preventing political divisions based on hostility. In turn, authoritarian claims are (CA1) convincing citizens of the rightness of the ruling's policy, (CA2) spreading mistrust and fear of public life, and (CA3) forging political divisions based on hostility. At a behavior-based level, while democratic claims include (BD1) encouraging independent political participation, authoritarian ones involve (BA1) discouraging independent political participation (Rak and Rezmer-Płotka 2022: 85–86). In contrast to the original framework, the modified model specifies the orientation toward independent political participation to avoid misinterpretation of managed behaviors. The

antinomic features constitute dyads, the antinomic ideal types in Max Weber's meaning. Each thematic claim distributed by a state actor can be located on one of four continua.

Research Design

A case study approach was applied to develop an in-depth understanding of the mechanisms involved in state-led mind engineering through claims to legitimacy. It facilitated delving into the claims homogenous regarding claimants and their recipients and embedded in the same political, social, and cultural context. Simultaneously, a case study approach effectively elaborates and tests theoretical tools (Dooley 2002: 351). It facilitates finding significant features of phenomena under scrutiny, developing their comprehension, and conceptualizing for further studies (Punch 2014: 124).

The study is theoretically embedded in mind engineering and ideology-based education studies. It rests on qualitative news frame analysis to answer the question: what types of mind engineering did the Polish state media use to generate a regime's legitimacy during the 2020–2021 mobilization for women's reproductive rights in Poland.

The types of mind engineering were analyzed through discursive frames in Michelle D. Bonner and Lucia Dammert's (2022: 632) meaning. The frames are interpretative schemas that show situations by simplifying and accounting for them to make sense to the targeted audience. Delving into discursive frames employed to generate a regime's legitimacy, the analysis captures two variants of mind engineering. While cognition-based claims address knowledge spread to claim legitimacy, behavior-based claims focus on action expressing legitimacy. It uncovers how different frames or narratives used in communication can influence how people interpret information and subsequently guide their thoughts and actions. This theory is relevant to understanding cognition- and behavior-based strategies of mind engineering by unpacking the attempts to influence individuals' thinking about politics and political actions.

Cognition-based and behavior-based strategies of mind engineering are two distinct approaches used to influence individuals' attitudes and actions. They differ in their focus and methods of persuasion. Cognition-based strategies center on shaping individuals' cognitive processes, including their thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, and understanding of the world. The primary goal of cognition-based strategies is to impact how people interpret information and make sense of the environment around them. These strategies aim to change or reinforce existing mental frameworks and schemas, which, in turn, influence decision-making and behavior. Behavior-based strategies, on the contrary, concentrate on directly influencing individuals' actions and behaviors. These strategies are focused on encouraging or discouraging specific actions without necessarily changing the underlying cognitive processes. Behavior-based approaches often leverage rewards, punishments, incentives, and social norms to shape behavior. The distinction between cognition-based and behavior-based strategies is crucial as they represent different paths of mind engineering. Cognition-based strategies aim for deeper, more lasting changes in individuals' cognitive frameworks, which can have broader and long-term effects on behavior. In turn, behavior-based strategies may achieve more immediate and observable changes in actions but might not necessarily result in long-term shifts in attitudes or beliefs.

The study covers frames used by state media to claim the right to rule to the incumbent rulers during a period critical to their legitimacy and, thus, the political regime's stability. It was the 2020–2021 All-Poland Women's Strike (*Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet*) protests, the largest wave of social mobilization in democratic Poland that lasted from October 22, 2020, to January 29, 2021. The movement won the support of 70% of Poles (Kielczykowska 2021). The analysis is limited to the period of mass mobilization. With the emergence of a powerful challenger, there was a threat of the political system's collapse and the replacement of the ruling elites (Polynczuk-Alenius 2022). The threat came from ordinary citizens who protested against restricting women's reproductive rights and the ongoing erosion of democracy in Poland. It is worth mentioning that the protests continued during the coronavirus pandemic, lockdown, and other restrictions. The rulers struggled with a public health crisis, winning legitimacy for their crisis management policies and extending executive power competencies (Kustra-Rogatka 2023).

The source corpus contains 1,481 news articles and videos archived on the TVP Info portal, the Polish state media's (TVP – Telewizja Polska S.A., Polish Television) comprehensive digital archive. It consists of original news articles and video materials spread on all nationwide public stations during *Wiadomości* (a major news release on TVP1), *Teleexpress* (an afternoon news release on TVP1 and TVP Info), and *Panorama* (a major news release on TVP2). The subject scope of materials determines the theme of mobilization for women's reproductive rights. Therefore, the source corpus includes only the materials that contain at least one of the following searching phrases 'women's strike', 'women's protest', 'women's demonstration', 'women's manifestation', and 'abortion'.

TVP is a Polish state media corporation. After the 2015 parliamentary election, PiS passed a new media law, thus providing the government with complete control over public broadcasting. As a result, TVP became a tool for disseminating pro-government news and pursuing the rulers' political agenda. Compared to other Polish media, it has one of the lowest brand trust scores. Nevertheless, the Institute for Media Monitoring Report (2020) informed that TVP Info was the most opinion-forming state media during the 2020 world crisis of public health. Also, during the mobilization for women's reproductive rights, TVP news had more viewers than other stations. From the perspective of the research objectives, the state media must aim to regain, win, and maintain support for the rulers. Utterly dependent on and subordinated to the ruling party, they loyally created the regime's legitimacy in times of crisis. Also, their unique role resulted from nationwide mass coverage (cf. Otwinowski 2022).

Qualitative news frame analysis followed Margaret Linström and Willemien Marais's (2012) methodology. First, data was collected from the source corpus by determining excerpts related to women's protests and their participants. News excerpts from articles and transcribed videos were treated as units of analysis. In one excerpt, more than one legitimacy claim may occur. Moreover, legitimacy claims were counted to determine the configuration and number of democratic and authoritarian frames in the news. It was assumed that regardless of the number of sentences, words, or signs used to make a claim, one excerpt introducing a whole idea of a regime's legitimacy claim was counted as a single employment of a democratic or authoritarian frame. An idea repeatedly emerging in one piece of news was counted as one excerpt.

The next step involved a pilot study aimed at elaborating a codebook. Frames that occurred when scrutinizing excerpts were inductively chosen. Drawing upon the investigation of 40 randomly selected excerpts, news frames (codes) for eight democratic and authoritarian cognition- and behavior-based legitimacy claims were formulated and their operational definition was developed. While the first three dyads concentrate on cognition-based claims, the last one addresses a behavioral sphere. The first set of antinomic ideal types consists of (CD1) helping citizens learn about resolving civic affairs and (CA1) convincing citizens of the rightness of the ruling's policy. CD1 frames are (1) 'pluralization of information sources' by encouraging to search, compare, and verify information from different sources; (2) 'tackling problematic issues' by informing about the whole complexity of a situation without concealing inconvenient facts; and (3) 'giving a voice to conflicting positions' by providing the opportunity to people representing various environments, having different political interests, and conflicting opinions to present their positions. CA1 frames are (1) 'monopolization of information sources' by recommending only state-controlled information sources and warning against obtaining information from other sources as unreliable and misleading; (2) 'political tabooing' by depicting anti-government contentious performances, related situations, or their participants without referring to the social movement; and (3) 'blocking a voice' by not giving a voice to contentious performance participants when discussing their actions and ideas.

The second dyad covers (CD2) assisting citizens in reducing mistrust and fear of public life and (CA2) spreading mistrust and fear of public life. CD2 frames are (1) 'preventing prejudice' by explaining emerging views and beliefs and (2) 'introducing contentious performances' by depicting them as a component of political life rather than disruption. CA2 frames are (1) 'making people threats' by convincing the audience that those who oppose the government put their health, lives, interests, and public goods at risk and (2) 'making anti-government contentious performances a dangerous experience' by presenting harmful consequences of anti-government contentious performances and engagement in them.

The third dyad involves (CD3) preventing political divisions based on hostility. In turn, authoritarian frames are (CA3) forging political divisions based on hostility. CD3 frames are (1) 'including in a political community' by encouraging social unity and solidarity beyond possible divisions and (2) 'respecting variety' by showing that everyone, regardless of their views and behavior, deserves to be heard and respected as a part of a political community. CA3 frames are (1) 'excluding from a political community' by pointing to 'them' and arguing that 'they' do not belong to 'our' community due to their characteristics or deeds and (2) 'normalizing' by setting standards of normality and stimulating hostility and non-acceptance of those who fail to meet the set criteria.

Finally, the fourth dyad includes (BD1) encouraging independent political participation and (BA1) discouraging independent political participation. BD1 frames are (1) 'assisting free contentious performance participants in need' by calling for providing help to those making public claims independently, if needed, and informing them about what help is expected and (2) 'facilitating voluntary activities to influence public policy' by encouraging and supporting organization and participation in contentious performances, regardless of the political side the media favor. BA1 frames are (1) 'establishing counter-movements' by encouraging to oppose anti-government contentious performances by taking to the streets or organizing vigilante action and (2) 'staying

home' by discouraging from engaging in contentious performances and assuring that the state actors solve all problems on their own.

In line with Linström and Marais's (2012) methodology, the study used a comparative technique for manual qualitative analysis to classify news frames. The analysis commenced with the comparative assignment of excerpts to categories (CD13, CA13, BD1, BD2) and then to frames, which resulted in grouping the excerpts. The following steps involved refining and counting data, which were crucial to locating the clusters of a regime's legitimacy claims on the four continua and evaluating the mind engineering variants. The last analysis stage involved simplifying, generalizing findings, and integrating them into a coherent theoretical framework. It finished with a conclusion on the type of state-led mind engineering during the Polish mobilization for reproductive rights, which was shaped to generate a particular regime's legitimacy.

Research Findings

The characteristics of cognition-based claims locate the state-led mind engineering very close to the ideal type of authoritarian regime's legitimacy claims (Table 4.1). However, a few democratic claims emerged (0.5% of all claims). The latter helped citizens learn about resolving civic affairs and boiled down to giving a voice to conflicting positions (64 excerpts). These few attempts appeared only in journalistic articles published on the TVP Info portal but not on television, which limited their reach. Giving the floor to conflicting positions consisted of presenting various opinions to demonstrate that the decisions taken by PiS were correct and just (Gąbka 2020a). They were selective, often put PiS opponents in a negative light, and ridiculed them. Still, no attempts to pluralize information sources or tackle problematic issues occurred.

Among the authoritarian frames of convincing citizens of the rightness of the ruling party's policy, the most important strategy was blocking a voice (372 excerpts). The state media presented public gatherings as collective actions supporting abortion. By selective presentation of claims and ignoring the movement's voice, the state media avoided discussing the complex demands, including protecting women's reproductive rights, legally protecting LGBTQI+ minorities, limiting the Catholic Church's meddling in politics, and stopping democratic backsliding. Despite different political views, journalists from the state and PiS-favoring media, PiS politicians, and experts supporting them explained the anti-government movement's motivations, goals, and demands. Opponents of ideas presented their interpretations, not ideas. At the same time, the media aimed to conceal that the anti-government social movement had a collective identity (JMK 2020). They replaced it with the image of scattered individuals whose hazardous behavior was representative of the protests.

Imposing a political taboo was a less popular strategy (163 excerpts). The state media avoided referring to the massiveness of the movement's support. Journalists highlighted that few protested, and they failed to mobilize others. Second, TVP silenced claims unrelated to abortion to limit the discussion and trigger unequivocal condemnation of activists. The third taboo was avoiding naming the movement by its name and presenting its members or supporters. Accordingly, protests were 'few', attended by a 'handful of people' or 'only by their organizers'. The movement was a 'so-called women's strike' (SJ and KF 2020), and its leaders often remained unnamed or called 'pro-abortionists', 'abortion advocates', and 'those women', e.g.,

God, save us from such women – I thought deeply, listening to the two leaders of the Women’s Strike. The first name begins with L, and the second with S. I will not write their names in full, not to save them, but so as not to make them popular. Presence in the media, regardless of the context, satisfies their psychological needs to the greatest extent. They represent two crude, vulgar people, resembling horror movie characters living on the margins of society.

(Jachowicz 2020)

The monopolization of information sources was unimportant due to the TVP’s targeting of the PiS-supporting viewers and readers, which constituted the state media’s audience. The few references (12 excerpts) were the warnings against using non-governmental information sources as unreliable and likely to spread disinformation typical during election campaigns and crises. It means the state media were not afraid of their position in national broadcasting as opinion-making actors.

The second type of cognition-based claims referred to attitudes toward mistrust and fear of public life. The state media did not prevent prejudice regarding protesters, including the LGBTQI+ community, and avoided introducing contentious performances. Instead, they fueled it by presenting the protests as unjust violence. Any democratic challenge to prejudice-based frames could weaken the basis for authoritarian behavior-based claims. The latter were coherent with the most numerous authoritarian frames of making people threats (4,731 excerpts) and depicting anti-government contentious performances as a dangerous experience (3,626 excerpts). They provided the grounds for and strengthened arguments against joining the movement. Protesters were threats due to being offenders (multiple criminals, convicted before the protests by final court judgments, committing crimes during the women’s protests, and breaking pandemic-induced restrictions), vandals, and prone to risky and unpredictable behavior. Their involvement in contentious performances turned the latter into dangerous experiences. Peaceful demonstrations transformed into violent clashes with the police, and public order transformed into civil disorder. State media incited and sustained fear of protest participants instead of facilitating comprehension of their claims.

The final cognition-based category of a regime’s legitimacy claims is an attitude toward political divisions based on hostility. No democratic attempts to eliminate divisions between PiS’s supporters and opponents occurred. The state media avoided shaping Poles’ image as an inclusive nation and did not appeal for respect for the diversity of political views. Instead, they used authoritarian frames to determine relationships between those who opposed the ruling party and those who did not. A criterion for excluding from the community of Poles (2,678 excerpts) was political and related to the PiS’s political agenda. The participants of the anti-government protests and the opposition supporting the protesters were excluded. According to TVP, their views and behavior deviated from the norms of Poles that should have been united and shown solidarity in times of crisis.

Normalizing (1,989 excerpts) justified exclusion from the community and drew upon the three standards. The first assumed that it is normal for people to be Pole-Catholic and defend human life from conception, regardless of the costs, such as the mother’s life and health. Thus, whoever supported abortion was an ‘abortion advocate’ (SJ and SC 2020) not up to the standard. The second

benchmark was heteronormativity. Any deviation from the state-established norm was treated as a deviation (e.g., creating ‘LGBT-free zones’ as an acceptable political practice (Gąbka 2020c)). The third standard was belonging to a group of polite Poles. It appeared in response to the vulgarization of the movement’s slogans, which were supposed to express the extreme stage of resistance to government policies that did not respect the rights of women and LGBTQI+ minorities. Anyone who used profanity deviated from the norm (e.g., ‘this is the language used by women (...) As if they had left a hard prison for hardened criminals a few hours ago after a long sentence for using violence against loved ones’ (Jachowicz 2020)). Normalizing was at the ideological and political levels and in opposition to the movement’s beliefs and collective behavior.

Table 4.1 A regime’s legitimacy claims in the Polish state media during the 2020–2021 mobilization for women’s reproductive rights

Categories of a regime’s legitimacy claims	Discursive frames	The number of a regime’s legitimacy claims across excerpts
(CD1) helping citizens learn about resolving civic affairs	(1) ‘pluralization of information sources’	0
	(2) ‘tackling problematic issues’	0
	(3) ‘giving a voice to conflicting positions’	64
(CA1) convincing citizens of the rightness of the ruling’s policy	(1) ‘monopolization of information sources’	12
	(2) ‘political tabooing’	163
	(3) ‘blocking a voice’	372
(CD2) assisting citizens in reducing mistrust and fear of public life	(1) ‘preventing prejudice’	0
	(2) ‘introducing contentious performances’	0
(CA2) spreading mistrust and fear of public life	(1) ‘making people threats’	4,731
	(2) ‘making anti-government contentious performances a dangerous experience’	3,626
(CD3) preventing political divisions based on hostility	(1) ‘including in a political community’	0
	(2) ‘respecting variety’	0
(CA3) forging political divisions based on hostility	(1) ‘excluding from a political community’	2,678
	(2) ‘normalizing’	1,989
(BD1) encouraging independent political participation	(1) ‘assisting contentious performance participants in need’	0
	(2) ‘facilitating voluntary activities to influence public policy’	0

(BA1) independent participation	discouraging political	(1) ‘establishing counter- movements’	312
		(2) ‘staying home’	904

Source: Own study.

Behavior-based claims for action manifesting the regime’s legitimacy also locate the state-led mind engineering on the side of securing support for the authoritarian regime (Table 4.1). They unequivocally aimed to discourage independent political participation. The unambiguity resulted from diagnosing the real threat to the PiS government. The dominant frames were calls for keeping from action and staying home (904 excerpts). Noteworthy, mass protests continued during the coronavirus pandemic. The need to stop the lethal virus spread provided additional justification for staying home. Calls to refrain from taking to the streets and joining ongoing public gatherings referred to a public duty to protect the health and life of oneself and other citizens. They determined the relationship between participation in protests and respect for health and life:

The Civic Platform and the Left are pulling Poles onto the street to take power. If the protests do not work, they may take power thanks to many more infections. Taking power with blood on their hands is unacceptable.

(Gąbka 2020b)

The media shifted the responsibility for the increase in coronavirus infections to the participants of anti-government protests, ignoring, for example, pro-government gatherings or meetings of PiS politicians with their supporters. The news reported that people who participated in the protests were infected with the coronavirus and assumed that it was there that the infection took place. Contagion was shown as a deliberate and conscious act against Poles (AB and MNIE 2021; FA and MNIE 2020). At the same time, calls to keep from action aimed to prevent contention and to stop activists from engaging in protests. They were also supposed to decrease the number and turnout of mass protests considered a threat to the political system.

Moreover, the media discouraged participation in the protests due to the perceived physical danger posed by their participants. First, the protesters allegedly attacked other participants, witnesses of contentious performances, and police officers, including policewomen (MK and MNIE 2020). Noteworthy, in Polish culture, there is an image of a woman’s bodily inviolability, and breaking it is widely condemned. Second, the protests were to be attended by dangerous criminals convicted by final court judgments. During public gatherings, they were to commit further crimes because they viewed the protests as an opportunity to do so. Simultaneously, the media showed the irrationality of the protesters. For example, women’s protests were attended by men convicted of mistreating women (PO, KF, and SC 2020) or who did not know what they had come for (SJ and SC 2020). Arguing that the protests were few, unattended, and internet-based calls for action went unanswered (PO 2020) supported the interpretation that risking life and health through political participation was pointless. The protests were depicted as insignificant, supported by those from the margins of society, and without a clearly defined goal.

Based on the ruling party's leader Jarosław Kaczyński's call for vigilantism on October 27, 2020, the state media encouraged Poles to establish counter-movements (312 excerpts). They repeatedly cited the following excerpts from the call:

In particular, we must defend Polish churches; we must defend them at any cost. I call on all PiS members and all those who support us to take part in defense of the Church, in defense of what is being attacked today, not by chance (...) the judgment of the Constitutional Tribunal cannot be changed during the validity of the current constitution. All the more, it is impossible to pass a law that would allow abortion on demand, and this is the demand of the extreme left.

(SJ and KF 2020)

Kaczyński created a community of interests to protect the Catholic Church, its buildings, and the fetus's life. The leader asked PiS members and its supporters to stand up for shared values. He considered the behavior of the 'extreme left' represented by the protesters and the opposition to be a threat to these values. It began a state-led counter-movement established to oppose political actors threatening the political system's stability. The media portrayed the call as the founding act of vigilante activism, supporting the police and allowing the use of physical force. Additionally, the news referred to Kaczyński's call and illustrated the acts of vandalism by the movement's participants against churches, other public buildings, and people defending them. TVP regularly reported the counter-movement's successes. Thereby, it delivered and maintained motivation for the action that confirmed the regime's legitimacy.

At the same time, the state media avoided encouraging the independent political participation characteristic of democracy. They neither encouraged Poles to support contentious performance participants in need nor facilitated voluntary activities to impact public policy. Protests for women's reproductive rights emerged during a particular communication situation. The tightening of the abortion law took place, bypassing the legislative route by the Constitutional Tribunal, which is subordinated to the ruling party. Therefore, the protests were also against violating the rule of law and manifested anti-government stances. Especially during mass mobilization, the widely supported protesters posed a severe threat to the stability of the political system created by PiS. Moreover, PiS faced a public health crisis and accusations of ineffective crisis management. Deepening economic and social difficulties gave rise to further protests by new groups. It was essential to stop large social groups with different interests from publicly expressing opposition and to limit independent political participation against the government. The state media diagnosed the critical moment for the political system and the threat of its collapse due to the protests and the emerging opportunities for the opposition.

Conclusion

The state-led mind engineering was oriented toward creating absolute subordination to PiS, generating the regime's legitimacy, and depriving its opponents of the legitimacy to perform political roles. Claim-making drew upon (re)designing, (re)implementing, and (re)evaluating attitudes and behaviors considered significant to the political system stability. Using systematic means, TVP pressurized its readers and viewers into adopting beliefs radically different from those held by 70% of Polish society supporting the movement for women's rights (Kiełczykowska

2021). Also, the instilled beliefs radically differed from those typical of democratic discourse shaped before 2015, i.e., until PiS started changing the political system.

Unpacking legitimacy claims, the study reveals that Polish state-owned media proved loyalty to PiS and acted as a partisan institution. It sought authoritarian legitimacy at the cognitive and behavioral levels, and the former was dominant. The state-controlled message gave coherent and consistent interpretations of current politics. Frames on various aspects of authoritarian power relations strengthened and complemented each other.

Among 13,635 excerpts containing cognition-based claims, as many as 13,571 aimed at generating authoritarian legitimacy (99.5%). At the cognitive level, it was crucial to undermine the protests' image created by the independent media or to limit its impact on the TVP audience's awareness. The movement's representatives did not receive the opportunity to explain their demands, and the media's viewers and readers were not given information to understand the complexity of the contention.

The main type of authoritarian claims drew upon spreading mistrust and fear of public life (8,357 excerpts). Fear, anxiety, and doubts about what was true were supposed to make it difficult to assess the situation rationally. They also weakened the will to create or demand social and political change. Distrust facilitated confusion. TVP questioned the seriousness of the movement's demands and did not recognize their common collective identity.

The second-most crucial authoritarian category was the forging of hostility-based political divisions (4,667 excerpts). The state media made anti-democratic efforts to exclude some Poles from the national community due to their worldviews and political views. Instead of democratic assurances of respect for diversity and tolerance, hostility-based divisions emerged. The movement was not an opponent with whom PiS could negotiate but a dangerous and unpredictable enemy to be fought. The latter was unworthy of trust and respect because it endangered Poles' health and lives and introduced civil disorder on the streets.

Information about resolving current affairs and the changing political situation was less frequent than perpetuating divisions and spreading distrust. TVP rarely referred to the positions of the opposition and protesters (64 excerpts). The democratic juxtaposition of opinions created the illusion of pluralism and diverse political views. Still, their selectiveness favored PiS and discredited opponents. A more frequent strategy was convincing citizens of the rightness of the ruling's policy (547 excerpts). It left no room for misinterpretation. TVP achieved this by blocking informative statements, disallowing people presented by the media, i.e., those directly interested, to speak. Selected activists, especially the movement leaders, were openly excluded from the state discourse. These strategies of divesting media attention and directing it to selected actors and positions were more potent than strident self-promotion. Finally, there were only a few recommendations to limit information sources to state-owned ones.

TVP used 1,216 excerpts to make behavior-based authoritarian claims without references to pro-democratic behavior. Calls to action and to prove support to PiS by deeds resulted from a critical situation for the political system stability. The most desirable social behavior was to keep from

independent political participation. Weakening the protests and depriving the protesters of support was supposed to eliminate the threat to the political system.

At the same time, institutions subordinated to the ruling party sought allies in averting the threat of political system collapse. In response to Kaczyński's call recurring in TVP, the counter-movement emerged. The state-managed vigilantes supported the state police in escalated force protest policing. However, stabilizing the political system through repression was impossible in the long run without at least the passive consent of the Poles. Distrust and hostility to protesters considered enemies served to legitimize months of their repression.

The study confirms the mind engineering measurement tool's analytical usefulness in exploring cognition- and behavior-based legitimacy claims. It allows researchers to distinguish which frames serve to shape views, which can justify action, and which are a call to action. The research findings proved the exploratory power of distinguishing these aspects of claims and considering action claims. Furthermore, the tool effectively differentiates and classifies claims to legitimacy based on the type of regime they support. Non-specialists can use it to analyze selected political texts without any specialist software independently. However, its application to broadly based comparative research can be time consuming. Thus, the challenge for state-led mind engineering researchers is to develop IT tools to automate and accelerate the analysis. Automation also could help reduce the likelihood of researchers' possible mistakes at the data coding and counting stages. More research is still needed to understand changes in political systems, not only their effects but also their mechanisms.

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