From Protecting State Borders to Corruption in Border Management: The Case of the 2023 "Cash-for-Visa Scandal" in Poland

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Abstract: *The purpose of this article is to explore intersections between politics, border protection, and corruption in the context of growing international migrations by studying the case of the "cash for visa scandal," which erupted in the midst of the parliamentary elections in Poland in 2023. The research employs the critical border studies perspective and the instrumental case study method. The research questions address the political environment conducive to the corruption scandal concerning irregular border crossing and its role in the dynamics of the electoral campaign. The study demonstrates a paradoxical situation in which the nationalist-conservative government ruling in 2015–2023 used tough action and rhetoric in favor of protecting state borders. At the same time, however, it created an institutional and discursive environment that increased the risk of the corruption scandal regarding the illegal entry of immigrants, thus undermining central features of its political identity as a protector of national boundaries.*

Keywords: ***corruption, border protection, critical border studies, cash for visa scandal, securitization of migration, Poland***

Introduction

On October 1, 2023, opposition parties in Poland organized a huge anti-governmental march on the streets of Warsaw, which gathered between 600,000 and 800,000 protesters according to the most reliable estimates (Onet.PL 2023a). Some protesters were carrying banners with a variety of anti-governmental

slogans, among them a man pretending to be a street vendor who was selling Polish visas "cheaply" (see the picture in the appendix). He had his own caricatural market stall with the Polish visas, which was a clear reference to the "cash for visa scandal" that had erupted two weeks earlier, becoming a significant issue of the parliamentary election campaign. Exactly 20 days after the march, Jarosław Kaczyński, leader of the coalition that governed Poland for eight years, met with his followers in the town of Spała to summarize reasons behind the electoral defeat of the Law and Justice party in the October 15 parliamentary elections.[1] Among several factors, he pointed to the "visa scandal," estimating that the scandal deprived the party of approximately 3–4% of votes (Rogoziński 2023). He made this claim despite the fact that when the corruption story first gained public attention in September, he had dismissed its importance, insisting that no scandal existed at all (Nizinkiewicz 2023). These two figures—the protester and the leader of the governing coalition that is about to lose power—demonstrate that the "cash for visa scandal" became a significant issue during the electoral campaign, resonating in the popular consciousness and influencing the dynamics of the election. Its importance derives from combining two broad governance problems of contemporary politics, usually considered two separate issues: protection of state borders and corruption.

This article builds on existing scholarship on border corruption; however, it develops the literature by focusing on the political significance of the problem and how it became an important issue within a power struggle between major contending parties. By employing the critical border studies perspective, with its non-territorial understanding of borders as constructions embedded in group identities (Newman 2003; Scott 2011), the study explores the 2023 scandal in Poland, which concerned corrupt issuance of visas that facilitated irregular border-crossing. The author is mainly interested in tracing intersections between politics, border protection, and corruption by addressing the following research questions:

1. What was the political context conducive to the corruption scandal?
2. What was the importance of the scandal in terms of its implications for the electoral campaign in Poland in 2023?

The main argument of the article is that in 2023 Poland witnessed a paradoxical situation wherein the nationalist-conservative government of the United Right used tough action and rhetoric in favor of protecting state borders against unwanted immigrants. At the same time, however, this government implemented institutional and discursive transformations which increased the risk of a cor-

1 It must be noted that the ruling party secured the highest number of votes in the 2023 elections (35.4 % as compared to 43.6% in the 2019 parliamentary elections); however, it did not have a coalition building capacity, thus shifting to opposition status.

ruption scandal regarding the illegal entry of immigrants into Polish territory. Thus, the government created an environment undermining central points of its political identity and its electoral message, in which protecting the border against immigrants depicted as a security threat was presented as part of its mission and strength.

The article has the following structure. First, a brief literature review on border corruption is presented by enumerating five "meeting points," which means research streams where borders and corruption are studied together. Next, Poland's position is put into a broader perspective, and the main theoretical assumptions are presented in order to elucidate a global and domestic context of the studied case. It is followed by the section concerning research design. The main part of the study starts with a brief description of the nature of the corrupt scheme established in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, commonly known as the "cash for visa scandal." Then, the institutional and discursive conditions that contributed to the scandal are outlined. Finally, the analysis focuses on the eruption of the scandal in the midst of the October 15 parliamentary elections and how it was framed by the political opposition and perceived by the general public. The article is then concluded.

Literature review: Looking for "meeting points" between border studies and corruption studies

In the 1990s, we saw a fast-growing interest in studying and tackling corruption as an issue of significance for social, economic, and political development (Mauro 2005; Myrdal 2005; Sampson 2010; Rothstein & Varraich 2017). At the same time, the borders and borderlands were discovered anew by social scientists (Eva 1994; Newman & Paasi 1998) as the phenomena substantially reshaped by globalization, international migrations, integration/disintegration processes, and the revitalization of national and ethnic identities (Scott 2011; Newman 2011). It should be pointed out that both raising academic focus on corruption and shifting towards border studies were sparked off by similar structural changes. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the next wave of democratization, and accelerated globalization created new conditions not only for corrupt practices, but also for exposing, debating, and measuring this phenomenon (Miller 2006; Mungiu-Pippidi & Heywood 2020). The same set of changes contributed to the redrawing the borders by newly independent states, the revival of old border disputes, the revitalization of national/ethnic boundaries, and the intensification of border crossings and cross-border cooperation (Forsberg 1995; Eskelinen, Liikanen & Scott 2012; Scott 2018). Despite similar conditions behind the flourishing of research on corruption and borders, these two fields of study remain largely disconnected, with studies of corruption rarely approaching border realities and border scholars remaining indifferent to corrupt phenomena.

This does not mean, however, that the two fields do not occasionally overlap. We can identify some "meeting points," which are research streams within which corruption and borders are studied together. For the sake of basic systematization, we can distinguish five such threads:

1. Research focusing on corruption among border guards and customs officers and possible anti-corruption measures. Within this stream, attention is paid to factors behind corruption risks, types of corruption, methods of combating it, and cross-border forms of anti-corruption cooperation (Michael & Moore 2009; Aromaa 2009; Dzhekova & Bezlov 2012; Jancsics 2019).
2. Research focusing on relations between corruption and human smuggling/trafficking in which border corruption is a crucial instrument facilitating an irregular flow of migrants. Within this stream, attention is paid to intersections between corruption and criminal networks operating across borders under the protection of corrupt agents. In this perspective, a variety of actors might be engaged in corruption, facilitating illegal border crossings and unauthorized stays in a given country: embassy and consulate officials, immigration officers, border guards, police, tourism and employment agencies, and transportation companies (Richards 2004; Nikolic-Restanovic 2004; Holmes 2009; Rusev 2013).
3. Research on borderland culture, in which corruption is considered an important part of the social landscape and the survival economy of border communities. Within this stream, corruption is an institutionalized part of everyday life; it is an earning strategy among locals living along the state border and for whom the border is not only a barrier, but also a source of income. Through this lens, the formal institutions of border control clash with the culture of informal connections, while corruption is approached from the point of view of the local circles practicing it (like smugglers) and defined as an integral part of the border landscape (Wiegand 1993; Galemba 2012; Suber 2024).
4. Research focusing on corruption in cross-border/international business transactions, in which corruption becomes internationalized in the form of multinational corporations or organize crime networks bribing foreign officials. Within this stream, corruption is not viewed as an instrument for "softening" border control, but rather as a consequence of the disappearance of borders in the era of globalization. The economic and political expansion across the borders is accompanied by corruption, which expanding actors use to strengthen their position in the borderless world (Johnston 1998; Baughn et al. 2010; Bahoo, Alon & Paltrinieri 2020).
5. Research focusing on the experiences and strategies of irregular migrants who might use corruption as a method of negotiating with law enforce-

ment officials staying within the borders of a given state. Within this optic, strongly embedded in critical border studies, the state borders are not only tangible lines on the fringes of the state territory but might also be experienced as internal state borders embodied by law enforcement officials with powers of exclusion. Consequently, the state border might "move" and can be reshaped by irregular migrants offering (or being extorted for) bribes upon detection and when facing the threat of deportation, thereby negotiating their inclusion within the state borders. Here, corruption becomes an instrument of reconstructing internal state borders (Vigneswaran et al. 2010; Garcés-Mascareñas 2015; Franck 2018).

There are two highly important conclusions when one looks at the "meeting points" above. Firstly, there is a scarcity of research on how corruption undermining border security resonates in the political system in terms of its impact on public debate, political competition, and electoral dynamics. This is rather surprising, particularly when one considers that contemporary political discourse on borders and migratory movements is increasingly framed through the lens of securitization (Deleixhe, Dembinska & Danero Iglesias 2019). Secondly, the state border is not only reduced to a tangible, physical line demarcating two states, but it might also exist as an internal border in the country of origin and country of destination, represented by the officials controlling borders. We can call them border gatekeepers, meaning those with powers and resources that allow them to control (and thereby facilitate) border crossings at different stages of migration (in the country of origin, when crossing the physically demarcated border and in the country of destination). Such an understanding of a border implies that the processes of irregular migration and irregular border crossings might be facilitated by corruption already in the country of origin, involving border gatekeepers representing the country of destination, such as consuls or other employees of embassies. These corrupt practices aim to establish apparent eligibility, for example, by purchasing visas, speeding up their issuance, or obtaining other documents, such as confirmation of employment or school enrollment in the country of destination, that entitle one to apply for a visa and subsequently enter the country. From this perspective, visa-related corruption, as examined in this article, enables irregular migration and border crossing by undermining the border regime within which states nowadays externalize and internalize border control to encompass the entire migratory process (Menjívar 2014). The second conclusion makes the critical border studies perspective, which will be elaborated further, particularly useful as a theoretical background for the case under study. When borders are understood as flexible social constructions resulting from the bordering process (Parker & Vaughan-Williams 2009), the idea of border protection goes beyond territorial boundaries of the state and reveals its multidimensional meaning as

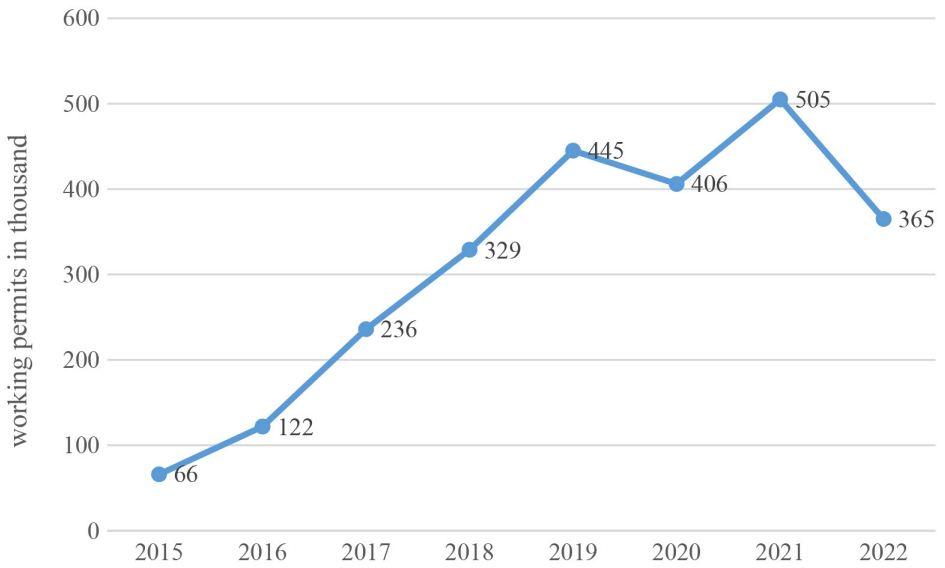
defense of various non-territorial boundaries, such as cultural, religious, and national ones. This offers a new interpretative frame for visa-related corruption.

Putting Poland into the wider context: Globalization, immigration, and protecting non-territorial borders

There is an ongoing academic debate on relations between globalization and state sovereignty, within which international migrations are treated as one of the main global processes affecting state sovereignty. It is argued that the internationalization of the economy accompanied by the growing mobility of people and the emergence of an international human rights regime puts pressure on nation-states to liberalize their border regimes (Sassen 1996; Castles 2002). The result is a decline of state sovereignty indicated by limiting the state's capacity to control its own borders (Guiraudon & Lahav 2000; Dauvergne 2004). However, scholars argue that despite the pressure of global forces, the nation-state still maintains its effective control over its borders and migratory flows and has even greater powers to control entrance into its territory (Freeman 1995; Joppke 1998; Mitsilegas 2012). This does not suggest that global economic pressures and international regimes are irrelevant or without constraint; rather, it highlights the importance of examining how individual nation-states interpret and respond to those pressures.

Poland, especially since its accession to the EU in 2004, might be an illustrative example of a country experiencing the tension between global pressures and historically grounded striving for sovereignty, with effective border control being its embodiment. On the one hand, the country needs to be open to the global flows of migration and normative expectations of the international community, but on the other, there are segments of the society becoming anxious about losing effective control over Polish territory, its borders, and migration inflow. This tension is reflected in the contradictory motives of border and migration management. The accession of Poland to the EU and its economic growth made it an attractive labor market (but also a transit country) for foreigners from around the world, who were ready to invest time and money to get to Poland. From the Polish perspective, population decline, an ageing population, and domestic labor shortages had to be compensated by inviting labor immigrants, which was clearly articulated in the two governmental documents concerning migration and development (Ministry of Internal Affairs of Poland 2012; Council of Ministers of Poland 2017). As a result, Poland, for years a country of emigration, has become a country of both emigration and immigration (see figure 1), with the influx of immigrants accelerating particularly in 2014 and 2022 because of economic and political immigration from Ukraine (Gul-Rechlewicz 2023). Although Ukrainians constituted the biggest share of this influx, Poland also opened its labor market to immigrants from Asia and Africa (Józefiak 2023).

Figure 1: Number of work permits issued in Poland for non-EU citizens between 2015 and 2022



Source: Author's own elaboration based on: (Ministry of Family and Social Policy 2023).

However, this opening was accompanied by the deliberate politicization of the immigration issue, when the so-called "immigration crisis" of 2015 in Europe overlapped with the October 2015 parliamentary elections. Before 2015, the immigration policy was not politicized, and we can speak of an "administrative-managerial" approach towards immigrants (Łoziński & Szonert 2023). However, the electoral success of the national-conservative United Right utilizing anti-immigrant rhetoric showed that framing those from the Middle East and Africa as a security threat might be an effective instrument of fear management and political mobilization (Cywiński, Katner & Ziółkowski 2019). Thus, immigration in Poland has undergone increasing securitization since 2015, going from an economic and social issue to be managed to a security threat to be dealt with (Buzan, Wæver & De Wilde 1998). This was further incentivized (and justified to many Poles) by the 2021 developments along the Polish-Belarusian border, when the Belarusian regime started weaponizing immigrants to destabilize Poland and the external border of the EU. Thus, Poland's border management in 2023 was characterized by contradictory motives. While global pressures and domestic labor needs resulted in opening its borders for immigrants, Poland simultaneously struggled for effective control of the eastern border and depicted immigrants from "culturally distant" countries as a security threat.

However, for better elucidation of how relations between border protection and securitizing immigrants resonated in the public discourse, we must go beyond the meaning of borders as the spatial edges of the state's territory. The view expressed by David Newman, that the agenda for border research should go "beyond its traditional territorial sense to include the many other notions of border which enclose groups and identities" (Newman 2003: 22), seems to be a promising approach to grasping these relations. In particular, the concept of bordering, understood as the "everyday construction of borders through ideology, discourses, political institutions, attitudes and agency" (Scott 2011: 134) corresponds well with developments in Poland between 2015 and 2023. Over that period, Polish society witnessed systematic actions that were steered from above and aimed at strengthening ethnic-based national unity, while articulated the significance of invisible cultural, religious, and economic boundaries (Krzyżanowski 2020). The rhetoric of border protection against unwanted immigrants simultaneously presented them as a threat to the moral and cultural order (Adamczyk 2019). In this context, the non-territorial meaning of borders shows its analytical usefulness, because it reveals that the protection of state borders might resonate in different ways within public discourse. Consequently, the border protection under the United Right government was characterized by the co-existence of the territorial and non-territorial meanings of the word, with effective protection of the territorial border being a primary guarantee for securing the non-territorial borders of the Polish nation.

From this perspective, the territorial state borders are protected not only to ensure territorial integrity and the physical safety of "our women and children," these borders must also be protected to safeguard Polish cultural borders and "our way of life," against the intrusion of strangers. Subsequently, the religious boundaries must also be preserved, mainly the dominant Roman-Catholic religion as a backbone of the Polish nationhood. The myth of Poland as a "bulwark of Christianity" allows one to expand this line of thinking further, when protection of the Polish state borders becomes a guarantee for preserving the religious boundaries of all of Western Europe. Lastly, the economic prosperity and welfare will be better protected if strangers do not enter the confines of the Polish welfare system. Through these lenses, we can see that a tangible, territorial border is very close to the intangible ones embedded in the group identities. Most importantly, however, we can interpret the United Right's rhetoric and actions aimed at border protection as a form of identity protection and building its political brand in this field.

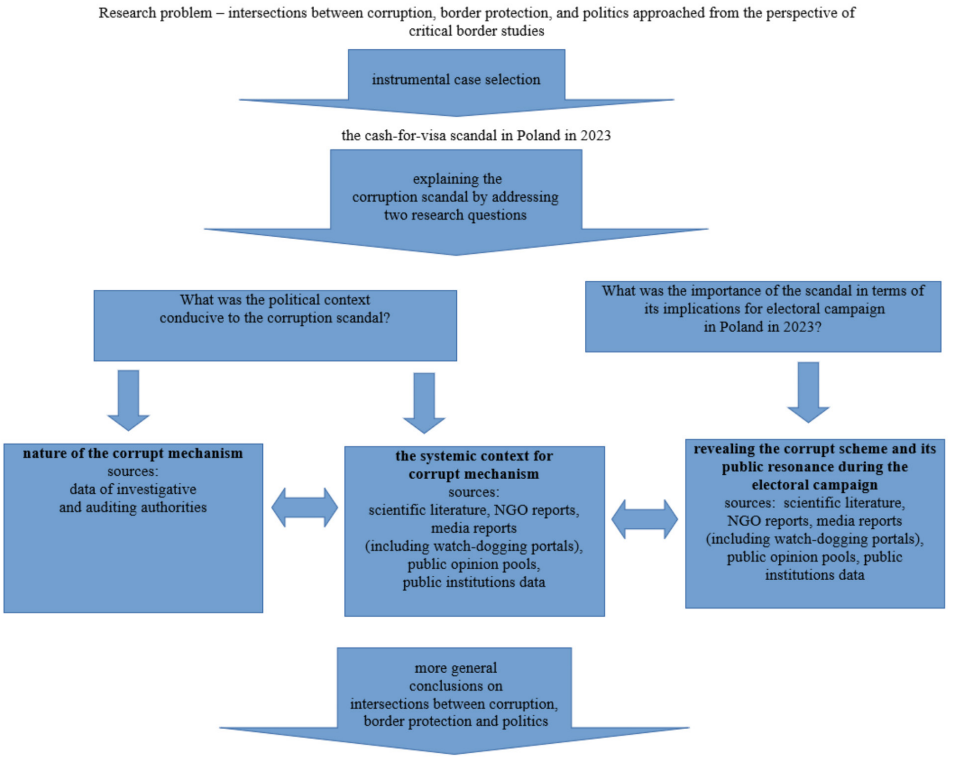
Research design

The presented research employs the case study method, which is generally acknowledged as a qualitative investigation relying on various sources that refer to a single case or multiple cases (Yin 2009). It is especially useful when the phenomenon of interest is developing in a complex, single setting, the research area is poorly explored, and a holistic picture is needed (Eisenhardt 1989; Ebneyamini & Moghadam 2018). Thus, it seems to be suitable for studying complicated relations between corruption and border protection as a highly relevant political issue. It must be noted that research on corruption is generally challenging because of the hidden nature of the phenomenon, which makes it difficult to access systematic data for specific sectors and creates difficulties with measurement compounded by contending definitions of corruption in public discourse (Mungiu-Pippidi & Fazekas 2020). Therefore, studying a single case where corruption has already been revealed to the general public provides an advantage of richer details and the ability to explore corrupt mechanisms in their cultural and institutional contexts (De Graaf & Huberts 2008). Among various types of case studies, this one corresponds with what Robert Stake called an instrumental case study, in which the case is selected and explored not only because of its intrinsic features, but because it might be useful (instrumental) "to understand something else" (1995: 3), meaning the more general problem of intersections between corruption, border protection, and politics. However, it is also close to the explanatory type, because it tries to explain why and how a specific phenomenon occurred, and only after that can a more general problem be tackled (Yin 2009).

The instrumental dimension was the primary starting point behind selecting the case. There are two main reasons why the "cash for visa scandal" is suitable as an instrumental case. Firstly, it is rather unique among various corruption scandals that occurred in Poland, because it refers to the corruption of the border regime revealed to the general public in the heyday of parliamentary elections.[2] This creates an opportunity to study how corruption of the border regime resonates in electoral politics. Secondly, it is suitable to demonstrate challenging contradictions faced by contemporary states when the need for openness for global forces is confronted with the necessity to maintain effective control over their own borders, which might be undermined by the decline of governance standards.

2 This is not to say that there were no cases of border corruption before, including corruption of the visa issuance. In 2012, journalists reported about irregularities concerning visa issuance in the Polish consulate in Łuck, western Ukraine. Soon, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs started an audit, which confirmed irregularities and resulted in the dismissal of all those consuls responsible for visa issuance in Łuck. However, that case never reached public attention like the case from 2023 (Wierzchołowski & Misiak 2012).

Figure 2: The scheme describing the research design



Source: Author's own elaboration.

The analysis covers the years 2015–2023, with special attention paid to September/October 2023 when the scandal broke and unfolded. The study is based on secondary data referring to the three intertwined dimensions distinguished on the basis of the two research questions (see Figure 2). So the boundary of the case goes beyond the mechanism of corruption, also covering its systemic context and public resonance during the elections. Thus, the study relies on various types of secondary sources, which should ensure deeper within-case analysis and its three dimensions. It is assumed that the mechanism of corruption would be better described by using data from investigative and auditing authorities, while the systemic context and public resonance demand inclusion of differentiated sources touching upon institutional, discursive, and attitudinal aspects of the scandal.

A brief explanation must be provided on some of the sources used. Firstly, the most crucial source for describing the corrupt mechanism in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are public releases from the Prosecutor's Office, supplemented by the audit report from the Supreme Audit Office. As will be demonstrated

further, there were serious and well-founded concerns about the impartiality of the prosecutorial authorities during the United Right's time in power. When the scandal erupted, the Prosecutor's Office announced a few hundred cases of visa issuance under investigation (Prosecutor's Office 2023), briefly specifying the number on its official Twitter account as 268 cases (Łuniewska 2023). This number was treated with an open distrust by media and opposition; however, after the change of government in 2023 and appointing a new minister of justice/prosecutor general, the number of investigated cases turned out to be 358, taken from the list of 607 names delivered informally to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Prosecutor's Office 2024). This shows that the very essence of the corrupt mechanism and the number of visas that might have been issued corruptly were identified in quite a similar manner by prosecutors under both governments, allowing the author to use this data as a reliable source for reconstruction.

Secondly, a significant number of sources comes from the media. Several factors account for this. It was impossible to avoid referring to journalistic sources, as journalists had exposed the irregularities to the general public and subsequently reported on the issue, thereby shaping public discourse. Additionally, the media not only covered the developments concerning the corrupt scheme and reactions from the political class, but also commissioned public opinion polls regarding the "cash for visa scandal" and voters' political attitudes. Media reports were the only available source of information on that matter, as the polling centers did not make their results available. Last but not least, free media engaged in investigative journalism constitutes important and legitimate sources of information for those studying corruption, though it also obviously has its drawbacks. It must be noted that the selected media sources represent well-known, opinion-forming media outlets and watchdog portals. According to the Polish Institute of Media Monitoring in September 2023, media outlets like "Onet.PL," "Rzeczpospolita," and "WP.Pl"—quite frequently used in this study—belonged to the top five opinion-forming media outlets (Institute of Media Monitoring 2023), and are thus a legitimate source of information and insight into the public debate.

However, the study has its limitations. The first is the problem of generalizing findings, which is typical for case studies, as pointed out by Robert Stake, who noted that "the real business of case study is particularization, not generalization" (1995: 8). Although this analysis aims to make a theoretical contribution, we must remember that single-case studies (contrary to multiple case studies) have serious limitations in finding general patterns. The second is that it is based only on secondary data. The primary data, mainly interviews, could provide valuable insight into the studied case; however, it must be noted that recruiting respondents to inquire on such a sensitive issue might be challenging. Finally, the qualitative analysis is usually characterized by an emphasis on interpreta-

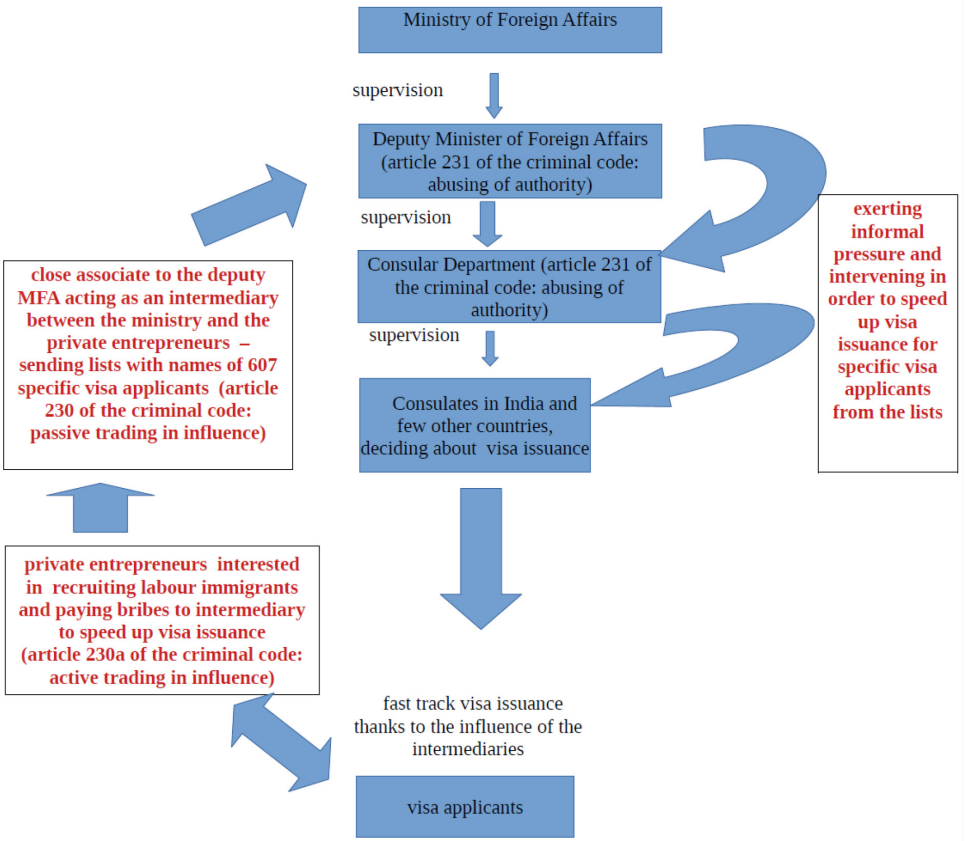
tion, which creates a risk of distortion in providing a full and comprehensive picture of the studied case. The author tried to reduce that by cross-checking various types of secondary sources and providing, when necessary, additional stipulations.

The nature of the corrupt mechanism in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The common term "cash for visa scandal" refers to the corrupt mechanism that was established within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2022, which allowed for the favorable treatment of selected visa applicants waiting for the consulates to examine their applications. The prosecutor's office started an investigation on possible corruption as early as March 2023, and the deputy MFA responsible for the consular matters was dismissed on August 31, 2023, officially on the grounds of "unsatisfactory cooperation" with the prime minister. However, September 14 was when the main wrongdoings were exposed by investigative material published by the portal "Onet.Pl" (Stankiewicz 2023a). The unfolding of the scandal was accompanied by a growing body of information being revealed, which allows us to reconstruct the essence of a corrupt scheme that germinated within the MFA. As we are less interested in the corrupt mechanism itself and more in the environment conducive to the scandal, together with its political implications, this is the most rudimentary description of the corrupt mechanism (visualized in Figure 3). It must be stipulated that the final reports published by the Supreme Audit Office (Supreme Audit Office 2024) and the Parliamentary Investigative Commission (Sejm of the Republic of Poland 2024) reveal a much more complicated picture, which also includes additional strands of investigation like the special treatment of one of the private recruitment agencies, legislative works on visa policy, and fast track visa issuance within the "Poland. Business Harbour Programme."

The essence of the corrupt scheme depended on intermediation by third parties between visa applicants on the ground and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The central figure within the scheme was a close associate of the deputy MFA (not employed in the MFA), who used his connection with the deputy to send him lists with a total of 607 names of those whose visas should be issued faster. The deputy responsible for consular matters then exerted informal pressure on consuls through the Consular Department, prompting them to give special treatment to specific applicants. According to the prosecutor's office, the scheme operated between February 2022 and May 2023, resulting in the issuance of visas to 358 people from the lists. The intermediary (charged with passive trading in influence) received approximately PLN 500,000 (approximately EUR 120,000) in bribes from six private entrepreneurs and consultants interested in recruiting labor immigrants (charged with active trading in influence), from

Figure 3: Visualization of the corrupt scheme in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs between February 2022 and May 2023



Source: Author's own elaboration based on: (Prosecutor's Office 2024; Prosecutor's Office 2025; Supreme Audit Office 2024).

countries like India, Taiwan, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar (Prosecutor's Office 2024).[3] The deputy MFA was arrested by the Central Anti-corruption Bureau in January 2024 (on charges of abuse of authority), just after the new government was established, but he pleaded not guilty. In April 2025, the director of the Consular Department and her deputy heard similar charges pleading not guilty. Altogether, 11 people directly connected with the scheme were charged in the investigation, including three employees of the MFA (Prosecutor's Office 2025).

3 According to Polish law, a visa application might be submitted to the Polish consulate in the applicant's country of citizenship or legal stay. This means, for example, that an immigrant from Bangladesh staying legally in Qatar might apply there for the Polish visa.

Setting the scene: Institutional and discursive environment of the "cash-for- visa scandal"

After the coalition of three parties, known as the United Right, had formed a government in November 2015, a series of institutional and discursive transformations were introduced, which gradually created an environment that increased the risk of a corruption scandal. Use of the term "institutional environment" means formal and informal rules determining governance processes, while the discursive environment refers to the main issues articulated and communicated by the governing coalition before and during the electoral campaign of 2023, together with accompanying slogans/narratives.

The most important feature of institutional transformation which increased the risk of corruption was the systematic dismantling of the anti-corruption safeguards in the political system, accompanied by lowering professional standards and supervision in the MFA. The list of changes might be long here, but a few of them seem to be the most important. Since 2015, we have seen a concentration of legislative and executive power—the latter at both the presidential and governmental levels—in the hands of one governing coalition with the hegemonic position of the Law and Justice party. This later appeared to be detrimental to the separation of power, especially the controlling function of parliament, because the parliamentary majority changed the parliament's regulations and the Act on holding the positions of deputy and senator. As a result, stricter penalties could be imposed on opposition MPs, and their ability to ask the ministers questions or to submit formal motions was limited. Because of limited parliamentary control and lack of presidential veto, many controversial laws—some of them unconstitutional—could be enacted by the parliamentary majority (Makowski 2020). These laws further reshaped crucial institutions of the accountability system like the constitutional tribunal, the public prosecutor's office, juridical authorities, and the civil service.

As early as November 19, 2015, the new parliamentary majority amended the Act on Constitutional Tribunal. Together with other measures, this amendment facilitated the gradual replacement of Constitutional Tribunal judges with those appointed by the new governing coalition. These measures included the refusal to recognize five judges elected by the previous majority and the president's refusal to administer the oath of office to them, while instead administering the oath to five judges elected by the new majority (Kłos 2024). As a result, the constitutional review of the laws enacted and the check on arbitrary power were dismantled, paving the way for other unconstitutional acts (Sadurski 2018). On January 28, 2016, the new Act on the Public Prosecutor's office was adopted, which overhauled the architecture of prosecutorial authorities in Poland by combining the position of the minister of justice with the prosecutor general, thus undermining the political independence of the general prosecutor, who became

an active politician (and MP). This was accompanied by giving discretionary power to the organ to intervene in specific investigations conducted by rank-and-file prosecutors, giving orders regarding specific cases, transferring cases between prosecutors, and revoking decisions made by them. Subsequently, a series of reforms in the juridical system, introduced through three laws adopted in 2017 concerning the National Council of Judiciary, the Supreme Court, and Common Courts, gave the legislative and executive branches of power greater control over appointing judges and the everyday functioning of the common courts, thus undermining the principle of juridical independence (Ibid).

It is also worth adding that the December 15, 2015 amendment to the Act on Civil Service changed the criteria for recruitment to the top administrative positions in the civil service (i.e., general directors and departmental directors—approximately 1,500 positions). The new criteria replaced open, contest-based recruitment with discretionary appointment, opening the legal path for the spoils system (Kopińska 2018). The Central Anti-Corruption Bureau, which has been accused of partisanship since its inception in 2006, not only failed to initiate investigations into a variety of irregularities identified by the opposition and journalists, but also purchased the Pegasus spyware, later used to surveil journalists, lawyers, and monitor members of the political opposition (Makowski 2023). Last but not least, media freedom plummeted, with the public media becoming an instrument of pro-governmental propaganda and the governmental gaining control over the most important regional daily newspapers in 2021 through the state-owned energy company PKN Orlen (Media Freedom Rapid Response 2023). The result of all these changes was reflected in the 2023 assessment of the Polish state's resilience to abuse of power, which showed significant flaws in the five anti-corruption pillars under examination (Makowski, Materska-Sosnowska & Marczewski 2024).

At this point, it should be recalled that the prosecutorial authorities, together with the Central Anti-Corruption Bureau, began an investigation into corruption in the MFA as early as March 2023. However, at that time none of the officials from the ministry were charged, despite the arrest of a close associate of the deputy MFA, who was a central figure in the mechanism and whose mobile-phone data revealed that he had sent the lists of 607 visa applicants to the deputy (Sejm of the Republic of Poland 2024: 160). The deputy himself (also an MP protected by immunity at that time) was dismissed on August 31, on the grounds of "unsatisfactory cooperation" with the prime minister. Only after journalists revealed that the dismissal might be connected with corruption in the Consular Department (Wroński & Czuchnowski 2023) did the public learn about the irregularities. The opposition and journalists investigating the case interpreted that as an attempt to hush up the wrongdoings of the public officials and openly questioned the impartiality of the institutions involved in the investigation (Stankiewicz 2023a). The three officials from the MFA were

charged in 2024, only after the new government and the new minister of justice had been appointed. Thus, one of the justifications behind establishing the parliamentary investigative commission to scrutinize the case was the "passivity of the public organs and institutions accompanied by a lack of reactions to signals concerning the irregularities" (Sejm of the Republic of Poland 2024: 6). The commission concluded its proceedings in December 2024 and published a report from the investigation, which pointed out the negligence of duties and the irregularities in the investigation conducted by the Central Anti-Corruption Bureau and the Prosecutor's Office (Ibid: 48–49; 158–195).

Aside from the accountability mechanisms at the state-wide level, we can point to further institutional changes that undermined professional standards and supervision in the MFA, thus increasing the risks of irregularities. In 2016, the government liquidated the Polish Institute of Diplomacy, which was a training center for future diplomats, despite positive recommendations for maintaining its operation from auditing bodies (Pankowska 2021a). In 2021, the new Act on Foreign Service was adopted, replacing the previous Act of 2001 and changing the model of Polish foreign service. The new act was criticized by the trade union of employees of the foreign service, who referred to the anonymous survey conducted between December 2020 and January 2021 among those working in the MFA. The survey showed that two-thirds of them had considered leaving their office due to discrimination, lack of respect from superiors, and low salaries (Pankowska 2021b). The act lowered the merit-based requirements for entry into the diplomatic service, officially on the grounds of opening it up to candidates from outside the diplomatic establishment. For example, the position of ambassador became a purely political appointment following the elimination of professional requirements for the job, such as a master's degree, command of two foreign languages, and passing the diplomatic-consular exams. Additionally, the new office of the Head of Foreign Service was established and equipped with broad responsibilities like human resources management, organization of training, and heading the Diplomatic Academy. However, it was enough to have three years of management experience in a "position connected with international relations" to meet the necessary requirements for this top office, responsible for the professional qualifications of the country's diplomats (Pankowska 2021a). The result was the transformation of the MFA into another source of the governing party's patronage and its instrument of power consolidation, instead of professional foreign policy-making (Kuźniar 2023). Former diplomats commenting on these changes pointed to building a system based on total loyalty towards the ministry's leadership equipped with discretionary power over appointments and dismissals, while expertise in foreign service was devalued (Pankowska 2021a). The parliamentary elections of 2023 worsened the situation, showing that the MFA was affected by the short-term cycle of electoral gains. Journalists, referring to the anonymous sources working in the

MFA, described its poor management. The head of the ministry rarely visited his workplace, partly because of health problems. More significantly, however, the minister and his deputies were candidates in the parliamentary elections, further diverting their attention from their ministerial duties. The supervision suffered because of the leadership's engagement in its own electoral campaigns. There was a general feeling of decay among officials of the ministry and an incapacity to make important decisions, like appointing ambassadors for important diplomatic posts (Gajcy 2023). This view was later confirmed by the Supreme Audit Office, which investigated the quality of the supervisory function over the consular activity between 2018 and 2023, including visa issuance. The audit found that the supervisory competences ceded to the deputy minister did not have proper legal grounds, and the consulates facing migration pressures were not sufficiently staffed, managed, and organized; meanwhile, the visa issuance process was improvised, inefficient, and protracted, with inadequate reporting. The audit report concluded that in the MFA there was a "non-transparent and corruption-prone mechanism for influencing certain Polish consuls to expedite the processing of visa applications and secure favorable visa procedure decisions" (Supreme Audit Office 2024: 8).

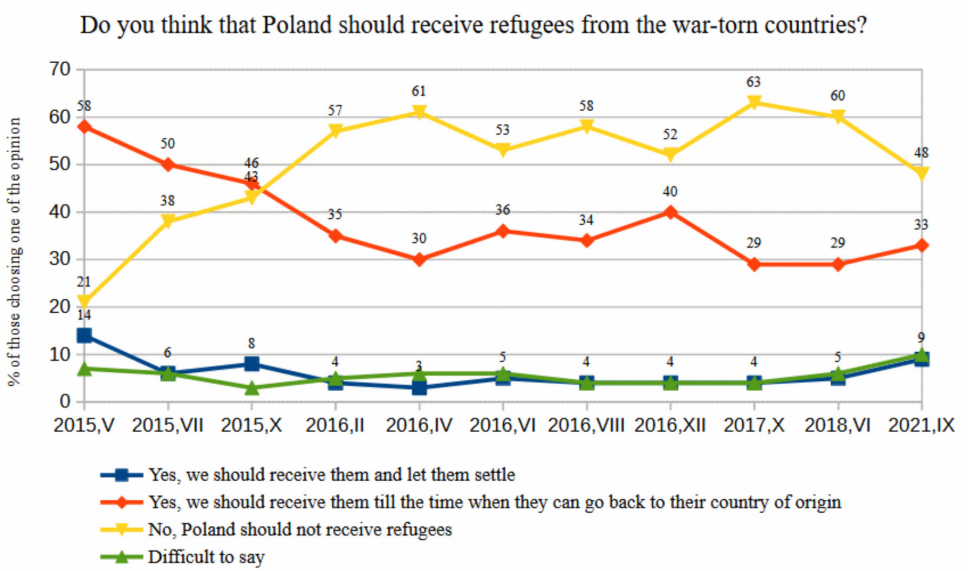
This picture of the institutional environment must also take into account the lack of a cohesive migration policy strategy capable of effectively and efficiently managing rapidly growing migration pressures (Sejm of the Republic of Poland 2024). In 2016, the government annulled the migration strategy inherited from the predecessors arguing that there was a need for reformulating migration policy in the context of new challenges. However, work over the new strategy failed, with some experts describing it as a "garbage policy," characterized by a lack of compromise on the main priorities, the absence of one leading institution, and a lack of clear rules of cooperation between governmental agencies involved in developing the program (Łoziński & Szonert 2023: 7). The transformation of the institutional environment was accompanied and reinforced by discursive conditions. Since 2015, the governing coalition has been injecting the importance of protecting the national border and territory against immigration threats into public discourse and collective awareness; at the same time it has been portraying itself as the only dependable defender of Polish borders, sovereignty, and national culture. The parliamentary elections of 2015 saw an immigration issue politicized as never before (Hutter & Kries 2022), leading to the victory of the United Right. Subsequently, a study published by the Stefan Batory Foundation concluded that the fear-management politics directed against the immigrants from the Middle East and Africa was strategically employed by the governing elite, harnessing highly partisan public media (Cywiński, Katner & Ziółkowski 2019). The United Right opposed the scheme of relocation adopted by the EU and rejected obligations of the pre-2015 government to receive approximately 7,000 refugees on the grounds of

protection against crime, terrorism, and threats to the domestic cultural order (Adamczyk 2019). One of the four pillars of the Polish National Security Strategy, adopted in 2020, was a strengthening of the national identity and protection of the national heritage, embedded in the "Christian legacy and universal values" (National Security Bureau 2020: 28).

The 2020–2021 migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border created further opportunities to reinforce that discourse. The study of the government-controlled media covering the crisis found that the immigrants were systematically framed as terrorists, criminals, and barbarians who are a threat to the Christian civilization (Jas-Koziarkiewicz 2023). One of the most indicative examples of this occurred at a press conference organized by the ministers of defense and internal affairs in September 2021. During the meeting, a photo depicting a zoophile act was presented as having been found on the mobile phone of a migrant detained on the border. The ministers insinuated that the owner of the mobile phone was the creator of the photo and a zoophile, while the government-controlled television claimed that the zoophile wanted to enter Poland. A fact-checking portal later found that the photo was a screenshot from an old video circulating online (Sitnicka 2021). In 2021, the government militarized the borderland area by introducing a state of emergency and building the 180-kilometer-long fence on the Polish-Belarusian border, with 57% of surveyed Poles supporting the fencing (Rzeczpospolita 2021). The importance of protecting Polish territory against immigrants was once again articulated in the referendum, held on the day of the parliamentary election in 2023, with two out of the four questions referring to the border fence and acceptance of "illegal immigrants" from the Middle East and Africa. The questions were biased and corresponded with the main election slogans of the governing parties (Musiał-Karg & Casal Bértoa 2023).[4] These narratives and actions had a profound influence on social attitudes, as demonstrated by Figure 4. Between 2015 and 2016, the proportion of those against accepting refugees increased from 21% to 61%. When asked specifically about refugees from the Middle East and Africa, Poles expressed even more negative attitudes, with the level of opposition varying according to party affiliation. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that opposition was highest among supporters of the governing parties (see Figure 5), indicating their sensitivity to the issue.

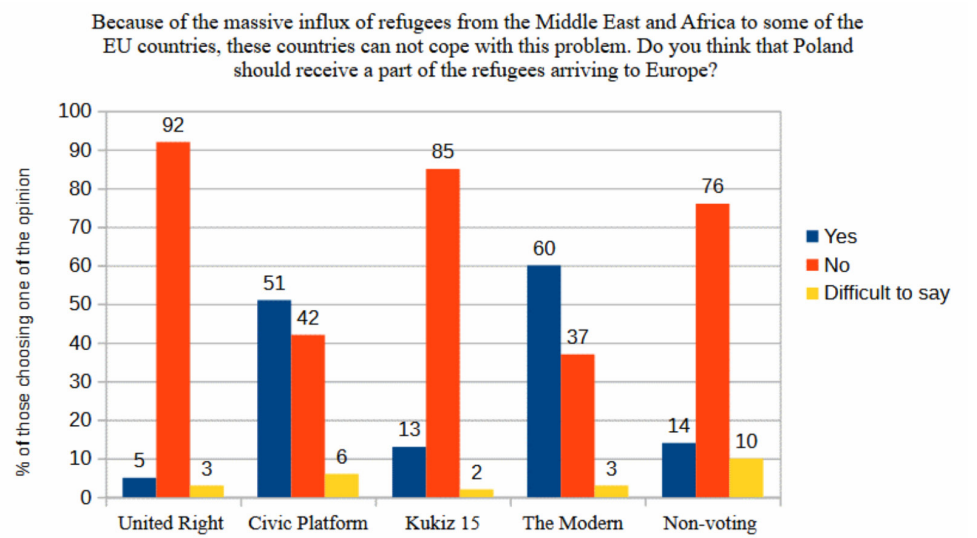
4 The two questions were as followed: Do you support the liquidation of the barrier on the border between the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Belarus? Do you support the reception of thousands of illegal immigrants from the Middle East and Africa, in accordance with the compulsory relocation mechanism imposed by the European bureaucracy?

Figure 4: Changes of attitudes towards receiving refugees among Poles between 2015 and 2021



Source: Author's own elaboration based on: (CBOS 2021).

Figure 5: Acceptance of refugees from the Middle East and Africa as for June 2018 according to different electorates



Source: Author's own elaboration based on (CBOS 2018).

The institutional and discursive environment outlined above was conducive to the cash-for-visa scandal not only because of the systematic dismantling of anti-corruption safeguards and the absence of well-designed migration governance, but also owing to the elevation of border protection into one of the top values and issues on the public agenda. The protection of borders against unwanted immigrants was framed in wider terms of protecting the cultural and religious identity of Poles, thus becoming an issue of national survival monopolized and exploited by the national-conservative government, with growing (and facilitated) support of broader sections of Polish society. Since 2015, this has become a brand and an integral part of the political identity of the United Right, professing ideas of national homogeneity embedded in Catholicism (Folvarčny & Kopeček 2020), while at the same time portraying the opposition as those who succumbed to the EU "dictate" by agreeing to the relocation of Syrian immigrants before 2015. Thus, the weakening of anti-corruption safeguards overlapped with a growing political sensitivity of border/migration management; both environments were engineered by the government and unexpectedly backfired in September 2023.

Cash-for-visa scandal in the context of the October 15, 2023 parliamentary elections

If we trace interest in the phrase *afera wizowa* (visa scandal) in Poland as measured by Google Trends, we see that the scandal attracted the biggest attention in the four weeks preceding election day (see the timeline in the appendix). The corrupt scheme in the MFA had been making headlines since September 14 thanks to investigative journalists;[5] however, it was the political opposition that quickly harnessed it into its election campaign as proof of the government's lack of credibility in the field of border protection. The corrupt mechanism occurred in the field of high political sensitivity, undermining values and promises that were central to the ruling coalition's identity: protection of Polishness by effective control over immigration. This gave the political opposition very handy "ammunition" to aim towards the governing party on its own battlefield, traditionally reserved and politically viable for national-conservative parties. A study of 202 electoral ads posted by the main political parties on YouTube channels showed that 54 of the ads related to different forms of threats faced by Poland, with the immigration threat featuring as the central topic in 34 ads. The Law and Justice Party posted 17 such ads, while the main opposition party, the Civic Coalition, posted 11, predominantly referring to the visa scandal (Sobera 2024). As early as September 14, the then leader of the opposition, Donald Tusk, held

5 The media reported on possible irregularities in the MFA already after the dismissal of the deputy of the MFA on August 31, but the critical juncture was the September 14 investigative report.

a press conference at which he commented on the media report, referring to the issuance of about 250,000 visas to citizens of Africa and Asia over a period of 30 months as "the biggest scandal in Poland in the 21st century." He also challenged the top five public officials responsible for the "security of borders, our territory, citizens, and foreign policy" with five questions regarding the corrupt scheme (Wieczorek 2023). The corruption was framed as something wrong not because public officials misused power, but because it allegedly allowed for the uncontrolled entrance of hundreds of thousands of immigrants from Africa and Asia, now portrayed by the opposition leader as a security concern. Thus, the securitization of immigration was followed by securitization of corruption. At the same time, the governing coalition sought to dismiss the accusations by downplaying the scale of corruption and portraying the scheme as one devised by private individuals without connections to the governing party. The fact that the Central Anti-Corruption Bureau and the Prosecutor's Office started an investigation over the case as early as March was presented as proof that the state apparatus had reacted correctly (Stelmach 2023). However, as already described, the credibility of these institutions was commonly questioned, thus the opposition disputed the reliability and the impartiality of the investigation.

One of the most prominent examples of challenging the government was a 4.5-minute televised address to the nation by the Speaker of Senate, who on September 15 devoted his entire speech to the scandal. It is meaningful because it combines the most important narratives circulating among the opposition seeking to undermine the government's credibility. It was also broadcast via government-controlled TV, which at that time lacked any content exposing the wrongdoings of the ruling coalition. As the opposition had a narrow majority in the Senate, they appointed its Speaker, who by law had a right to address the nation during the parliamentary elections. He informed the audience that "Polish visas, the documents entitling one to enter the territory of our country, were sold on the market stalls in the countries of Africa and Asia" (Senate of Poland 2023). The main point he made connected the whole government with the corrupt scheme by repeating the five questions previously asked by the opposition's leader and the number of visas issued:

> The top state officials organized a transfer of people to Poland on a massive scale. As reported by media, over 250 thousand working visas were issued to the citizens of African and Asian countries, including Muslim countries, in the last 30 months. The visas for which proper people had to be bribed. (Ibid)[6]

6 The number is based on the data from the MFA. According to the MFA in the period of 2.5 years (2021, 2022, and the first half of 2023), there were 1.95 million visas issued, including 250,000 for citizens of African and Asian countries. However, there was no proof that all these visas were issued in exchange for bribes. The journalists who exposed the scheme wrote about a few

The security threats, including terrorism, were also clearly articulated to indicate that the risks might affect the whole EU area: "The transfer of people occurred with virtually no oversight, raising the risk that hundreds of individuals recognised as terrorists could have entered EU territory, posing a threat to our security" (Ibid). As the corruption scheme also affected the external borders of the EU, the scandal was debated later in the European Parliament under the title "Corrupt large-scale sale of Schengen visas," which further elevated its magnitude and public visibility (European Parliament 2023).

In order to get deeper into the political salience of the scandal, we can trace various public opinion polls, which at that time heavily covered the issue. The survey from September 21 showed that 76% of respondents had heard about the corruption scandal. This percentage was highest among voters of the Civic Coalition (89%), but it was also quite high among voters of the Law and Justice Party (79%) (Onet.Pl 2023b). However, the perceived influence of the scandal on the electoral score of Law and Justice, which was measured by two very similar surveys conducted just after the scandal erupted, presented a more nuanced picture (Table 1).

Table 1: Perceived impact of the scandal on the future electoral result of the ruling party as for September 15–17, 2023 (questions from the two public opinion pools compared)

Will the visa scandal have or have not an influence on the electoral score of the Law and Justice? (September 15–17, 2023 by the United Surveys).		**In your opinion do you think that the so-called visa scandal will be harmful for the Law and Justice in the upcoming elections? (September 15–16, 2023 by IBRIS)**	
Yes, it will lower the score	30.4 %	Definitely yes + Rather yes	10.8 % + 20.2 % (31%)
No, it will not have any influence on the score	37.7%	Rather no + Definitely no	16.1% +23.6 (39,7%)
I have not heard about the case	24.1%	I have not heard about the case	21.4 %
Do not know/Hard to say	7.7%	Do not know/Hard to say	7.9%

Source: Author's own elaboration based on: (Nycz 2023; Rzeczpospolita 2023).

The majority of respondents (average 39%) did not believe that the governing party would suffer, but there was still a significant share of those believed its impact would be harmful (approx. average 30 %). On September 26, respondents were asked "who takes the main burden of responsibility for the visa scandal?" with 48.6% placing the responsibility on the whole governing coalition. The responsibility attribution looked different among voters of the governing

hundred cases and the prosecutor's office, under the new government formed by the previous opposition, reports about 358 cases (Słowik 2023).

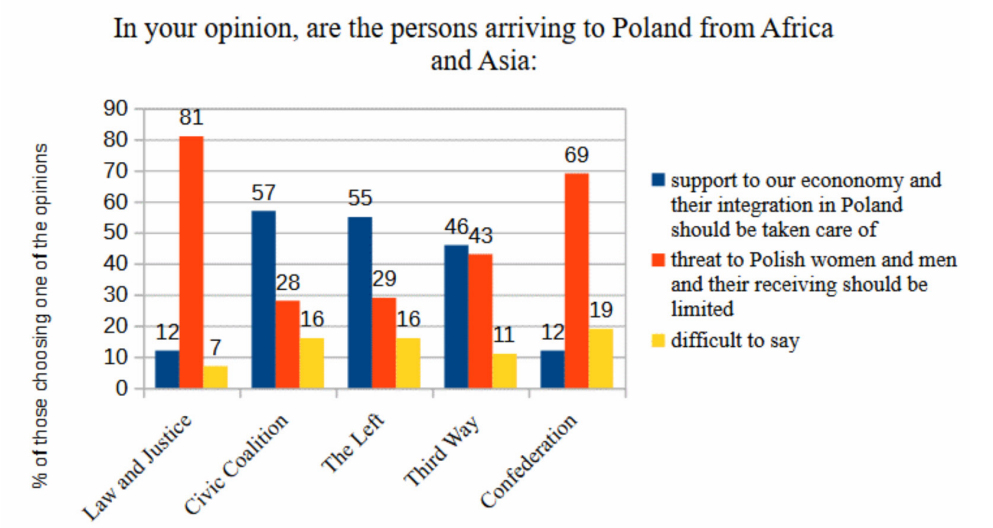
coalition, with only 23% placing the blame on the whole governing coalition (Dąbrowska 2023). But when we consider the "distribution of fear" of immigrants from Africa and Asia, this was the most sensitive group, compared to supporters of other parties (see Figures 5 and 6). Suddenly, 79% of this group were informed about the corruption scheme created in the MFA, which allowed for the uncontrolled entrance of those they considered, in an overwhelming majority, a threat.

When interpreting these data, one stipulation must be made clear. The author is not trying to argue that the scandal eroded electoral support for the governing coalition, because the polls on the perceived electoral consequences (notwithstanding the estimate of the party's leader) do not allow for conclusions on the actual impact of the scandal on electoral behavior. Actually, the scholarship on the influence of corruption scandals, or the perception of corruption, on the electoral outcomes provides mixed results showing that politicians might be punished for corruption with a minor loss of votes, but may sometimes even get reelected (Chang, Golden & Hill 2010; Bågenholm 2013; De Vries & Solaz 2017). Scholars point to various factors influencing how corruption might eventually affect electoral outcomes—e.g., the type of political system and degree of democratic consolidation (Krause & Fabio 2009), the level of corruption and salience of the issue in the political system (Ecker, Glinitzer & Meyer 2016), the delivery of welfare provisions (Breitenstein & Hernández 2025), information available to voters and blame attribution (De Vries & Solaz 2017), or the shielding effect of partisan bias (Anduiza, Gallego & Muñoz 2013; Chelidonopoulos 2026).

Therefore, there is no simple link between exposed corruption and the withdrawal of electoral support for incumbents. The main point of this section is that the scandal was a significant flaw in the systematically built identity of the Law and Justice Party. The public visibility of the issue was high as indicated by the ranking of the most opinion-forming media in September 2023—the top two most-cited media outlets were those which published a series of articles covering the irregularities in the MFA (Institute of Media Monitoring 2023). The survey of the biggest image crisis in the public sector, conducted among the panel of 107 public relations professionals, put the scandal at the top of the 2023 ranking (Alert Media Communication 2024). Thus, the governing party was put into a defensive position amid a serious communication burden undermining its monopoly on controlling the discourse over border protection.

After the elections, in December 2023, a new government established a parliamentary investigative commission to examine the wrongdoings. During its 42 sessions, the investigative commission interrogated 37 witnesses, providing the general public with 110 hours of recordings. However, the "cash-for-visa scandal" lost its earlier prominence, returning to public attention only when the most important officials were interrogated. The commission ended its proceedings in December 2024 having submitted 11 notifications of suspected

Figure 6: A "distribution of fear" towards immigrants from Africa and Asia according to the main electorates (as for September 25–27, 2023)



Source: Author's own elaboration based on (Pacewicz 2023).

criminal offences to the prosecutor general (Gądek 2024). The suspicions of abuse of authority or negligence of duties concerned top public figures, including the former prime minister, the minister of foreign affairs, the minister of internal affairs, and the head of the Central Anti-Corruption Bureau. However, the high profiles of those suspected might be an obstacle to criminal accountability, encumbering further investigation with the burden and bias of partisan struggle. Nevertheless, reminding people about the scandal has become a handy rhetorical tactic for the subsequent government to discredit politicians of the Law and Justice Party whenever they touch upon the issue of border protection against unwanted immigrants.

Discussion and conclusions

So far, the scholarship focusing on borders and corruption rarely investigated a political dimension of interconnections between the two phenomena. Corruption of borders was approached in various ways—as an institutional dysfunction undermining border control, an instrument facilitating irregular migration or cross-border business transactions, an integral element of borderland cultures, or a method used to reshape internal borders in confrontation with the border gatekeepers. These research threads seem to overlook the growing political significance of the problem in an era when border protection has become one

of the central issues and public concerns. The studied case demonstrates how border corruption might develop and resonate within the political systems characterized by contradictions between openness to global migratory flows, the securitization of migration, and the decline of governance standards. If we go beyond the physical understanding of state borders, approaching them as invisible lines produced by the bordering practices of politicians, we can grasp how corruption of border gatekeepers might turn into another multidimensional security threat. In such a perspective, the "cash for visa scandal" was not just another corruption scandal during United Right rule. It was exceptional because it occurred in a highly sensitive political field undermining essential elements of the ruling party's image, anchored in the protection of territorial and non-territorial national boundaries. The corruption was scandalous not because a few people made illicit gains and misused their authority, but because it was defined as a threat to the physical, cultural, and religious security of Poles. Such securitization of corruption found fertile ground after years of the securitization of immigration. Opposition politicians used a strategy of securitizing immigrants, to some degree reproducing the language and assumptions of the ruling coalition, but they combined it with securitizing corruption.

It must be stipulated that the securitization of corruption is not a new phenomenon. After defining it as a hindrance to development by the global anti-corruption industry (Sampson 2010), its potential for undermining various dimensions of global security has also been discerned by international organizations, experts, and governments (Rotberg 2009). Corruption has been reframed from an economic, criminal, and governance issue into a broader issue of national and international security. The list of security threats facilitated by corruption is long. Above all, it includes the distortion of defense procurement, abuses of human rights, political destabilization, insurgency and social unrest, the undermining peacekeeping efforts and post-war reconstruction, international terrorism and organized crime, as well as the weaponization of corruption in hybrid warfare (Chayes 2014; White et al. 2025; Lang, Alvarez & Hogic 2026). However, the studied case demonstrates that it was the migrants themselves who constituted a security threat facilitated by corruption, because the two strategies of securitization overlapped during a highly competitive and polarising electoral campaign. The primary one, targeting migrants from Africa and Asia, fueled the secondary one targeting the corruption of the border regime. The regime's gatekeeping function surrounded by symbolic images of uncontrolled migratory pressures, made the border regime's corruption especially vulnerable to securitizing rhetoric, as the regime appeared to be porous and fragile.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this study concerning the intersections between corruption, border protection, and politics. The processes of revitalizing state borders accompanied by actions and the discourse of border protection might put border corruption into a new interpretative frame,

transforming the problem into a multidimensional security threat. If nation-state borders are defined not only as tangible, geographic lines, but also as intangible cultural and religious boundaries, then the phenomenon of border corruption gains a new significance in public discourse, because it might be framed as a threat to these intangible boundaries. The elevation of border protection—designed to defend the ethnically based and culturally homogeneous nationhood—to one of the central issues on the public agenda makes border corruption an "identity threat." Thus, this type of corruption might be especially detrimental to the image of political parties professing the idea of a culturally homogeneous nation that must be defended against the "invasion" of outsiders.

Furthermore, border corruption might happen at different phases of migration covered by the externalized and internalized border regime. The corrupt border gatekeepers might operate in the country of origin, along the territorial state border, and in the country of destination. Moreover, those in the country of destination (e.g., officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and their private associates) might instruct those operating in the country of origin (e.g., consuls) to facilitate migration. In an era of easy global communication, such arrangements between border-gate keepers scattered around the world are more plausible, making the border-crossing corruption a complex, network-based phenomenon.

Last but not least, the populist government that uses anti-immigration actions as an instrument of political mobilization can, somewhat unwittingly, create an environment that increases the risk of corrupt entrance of "unwanted" immigrants. Democratic backsliding, usually intertwined with the decline of governance standards, constitutes fertile ground for corrupt networks in different sectors of the state apparatus, including institutions responsible for border and migration management. This might result in a loss of firm control over the entry process and undermining the government's image as an identity protector.

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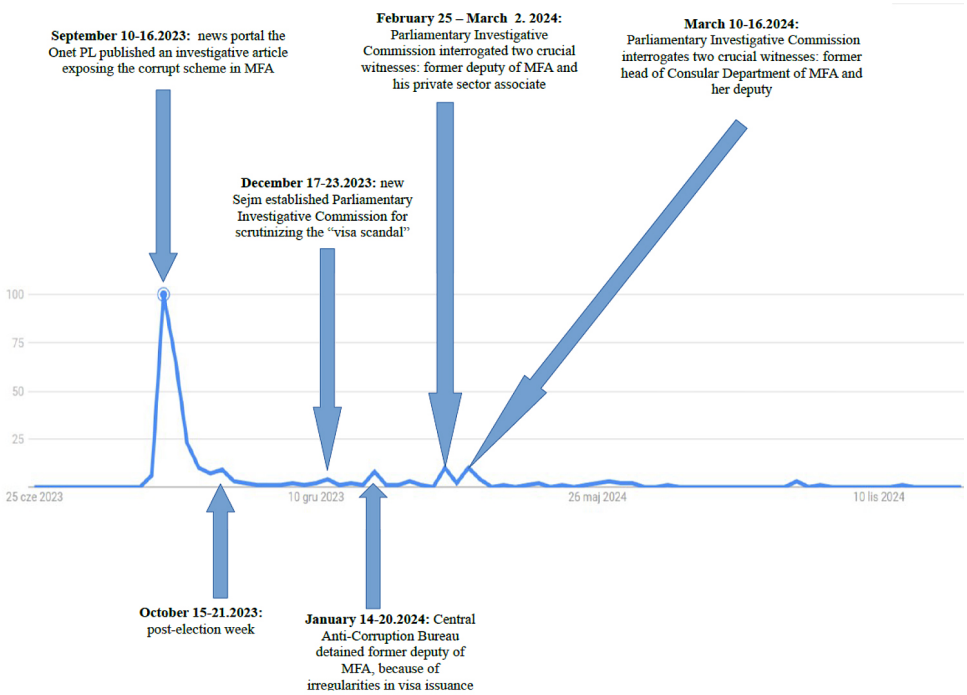
Appendix

A street vendor "selling" Polish visas "cheaply"—a caricature of the "cash-for-visa scandal" on the streets of Warsaw during the opposition march held on October 1st 2023



Source: Author's own photograph.

Timeline: Interest in the phrase *afera wizowa* (visa scandal) in Poland between 01.07.2023-01.01.2025 (1,5 year) according to the Google Trends



Source: Author's own elaboration by using Google Trends.