

Is Poland Being Flooded with Xenophobia and Racism? Statistics and Myths

Krzysztof Brzechczyn

Because of the temperature of the political conflict in Poland, some problems that should be solved after a thorough discussion of the subject matter—leading to constructive actions acceptable to everyone—have instead become instruments of media attacks on the democratically elected government, to the detriment of Polish society. One example is the issue of crimes against foreigners. Fortunately, they are rare and Poland is still a relatively safe place, compared to Western European countries. However, these crimes, presented in newspapers and popular television channels as proof of the increase in nationalism, xenophobia, and chauvinism, fuel the fight of the opposition against the rightist-conservative government.

In order to get a full picture of crime in Poland, it is necessary to know that in 2016, a total of 748,464 crimes were committed in Poland (<http://statystyka.policja.pl/st/przestepstwa-ogolem/121940,Przestepstwa-ogolem.html>).

This figure includes all kinds of crimes, from petty theft of a candy baton to murder. The Wielkopolskie voivodeship where the Adam Mickiewicz University is located registered 61,705 crimes. Within this number there were just a few cases of racially aggravated battery of foreign students and generally foreigners. The most recent such case took place on March 31, 2017. A student from India was hit as he was getting off a streetcar. The attacker ran away, and after witnesses gave their testimony the police ruled out racism as the motive for that attack. In spite of that, the incident activated the circles in Poznań who are against the governing coalition and like to describe themselves as “the total opposition” (*totalna opozycja*). Poznańska Federacja Anarchistyczna (the Poznań

Federation of Anarchists) posted an anonymous statement on its website, titled *Oświadczenie – Nacjonalizm nie przejdzie!* (Statement–Nationalism Won’t Pass!), in which it called for a demonstration on April 8, 2017. They wrote the following:

“In the last few years a wave of nationalism, racism, and xenophobia has flooded Poland in its entirety. The growth of popularity of these ideas, supported by the ruling party, has been on the increase from month to month. More and more often one hears that ethnicity and religion play the key role in these attacks. Everywhere you go you see people wearing T-shirts with slogans about killing the enemies of the nation. Antirefugee news has become the norm in the government-owned media. In 2015 the number of reported racist crimes grew by 20 percent compared to the year before.” Notably, the figure of 40 percent appears in the Polish version (the Statement was issued in two languages):

<http://www.rozbrat.org/dokumenty/lokalizm/4521-owiadczenie-nacjonalizm-nie-przejdzie>, accessed 06/23/ 2017.

This anonymous statement was reposted on the Facebook website of the Institute of Philosophy and, for a time, of the Institute of Sociology of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. The initiators of the demonstration mentioned in the statement, supported by the local edition of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, organized a press conference and asked university authorities to join the demonstration and publish a call to participate on official university websites. Robert Winnicki, a nonattached member of the Polish parliament, a former member of the Kukiz 15 parliamentary club and president of Ruch Narodowy (a small right-wing party), issued an interpellation about the support given to the radical left by the academic entities of Adam Mickiewicz University. Winnicki addressed his interpellation to Jarosław Gowin, Minister of Science and Higher Education (<http://www.sejm.gov.pl/sejm8.nsf/InterpelacjaTresc.xsp?key=62A8E6C8>, accessed June 23, 2017). Although he does not have any connections with Poznań and its university, he availed himself of this opportunity to attract the attention of the mass media. The university’s

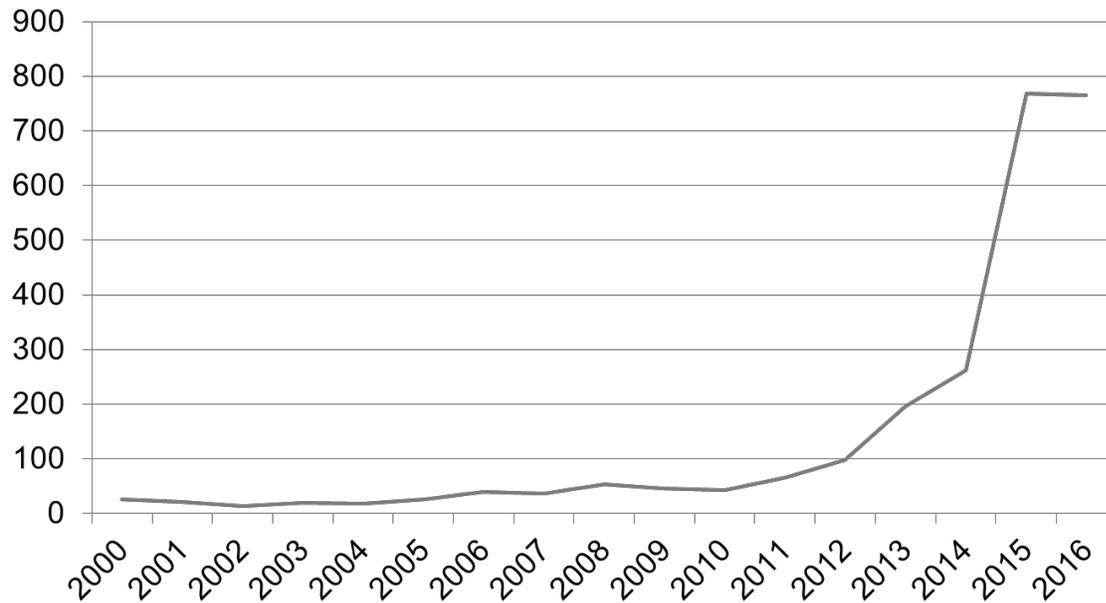
president judged Winnicki's action to be an attempt to breach university autonomy, while the local and national media presented the interpellation as a denunciation and a governmental attack on academic freedom. On April 6, 2017, AMU's Vice-Chancellor Tadeusz Wallas met with the demonstration organizers, while President Andrzej Lesicki wrote a letter in which he presented the position of the university authorities on the matter. In the end, the university authorities did not give in to pressure and did not join the demonstration.

The described event can be interpreted as an attempt to involve the university in a fight against the government and to shift political conflict to university territory. The structure of the *Statement* itself favors such an interpretation: the *Statement* contains 3,431 characters with spaces, while the description of the alleged hate crimes takes up only 624 characters. The remainder (2,807 characters, or 81.8 percent of the text) consists of accusations against the current government of the Republic of Poland and of reflections on worldview and ideology.

It is worth noting that the quoted excerpt from the *Statement*, which refers to crimes motivated by ethnic, racial, and religious prejudice, does not contain complete data (they stop at 2015), and the data is quoted without referencing sources. In my opinion, this falsifies the big picture. Beata Szydło's government, which allegedly supports the growth of "nationalism, racism, and xenophobia," took office on November 18, 2015. How then can the government and the supporting party be responsible for the increase of crimes pursuant to section 257 of the Criminal Code in that entire year? There is no mention in the *Statement* of the fact that before November 18, 2015, Ewa Kopacz was the prime minister and the government was controlled by the PO-PSL coalition.

When we take a look at the statistics of crimes motivated by ethnic, racial, and religious prejudice, which are publicly available on the Internet website of the National Police Headquarters (<http://statystyka.policja.pl/st/>, accessed April 8, 2017), it turns out that in 2005 (when SLD, the communist party that morphed into a social democratic party, was still in power), the number of initiated proceedings was twenty-five. In 2006 it grew to thirty-nine, but in 2007 fell to thirty-seven. Between 2008 and 2014 the number of crimes of this type was growing slowly but systematically. In 2013 there was the first sudden increase of the number of hate crimes—by over 100 percent in comparison to the previous year (from 98 cases in 2012 to 196 in 2013). A similar increase took place in 2014 (262 committed crimes). At that time, no one alarmed public opinion or accused the PO-PSL coalition of supporting "nationalism, racism, and xenophobia." No one organized antigovernment demonstrations. There was indeed a huge increase of the number of hate crimes motivated by ethnic, racial, and religious prejudice in 2015 (768 recorded cases). However, in 2016, when the rule of the "nationalist-racist-xenophobic" PiS began, the number of such crimes did not grow but actually fell by three, to 765 (in words: seven hundred and sixty five) (<https://oko.press/2016-byly-o-przestepstwa-nienawisci-niz-2015-razy-wiecej-niz-2014/>, accessed April 8, 2017), in comparison to the 748,464 recorded cases in 2016. Although the number of hate crimes did not fall to the 2014 level, the growth tendency was stopped for the first time since 2012 (see chart 1). Yet the anonymous authors of the *Statement* do not notice this and mislead readers into believing that the number of hate crimes grew under the present conservative government.

Chart 1. Crimes motivated by ethnic, racial, or religious prejudice by year



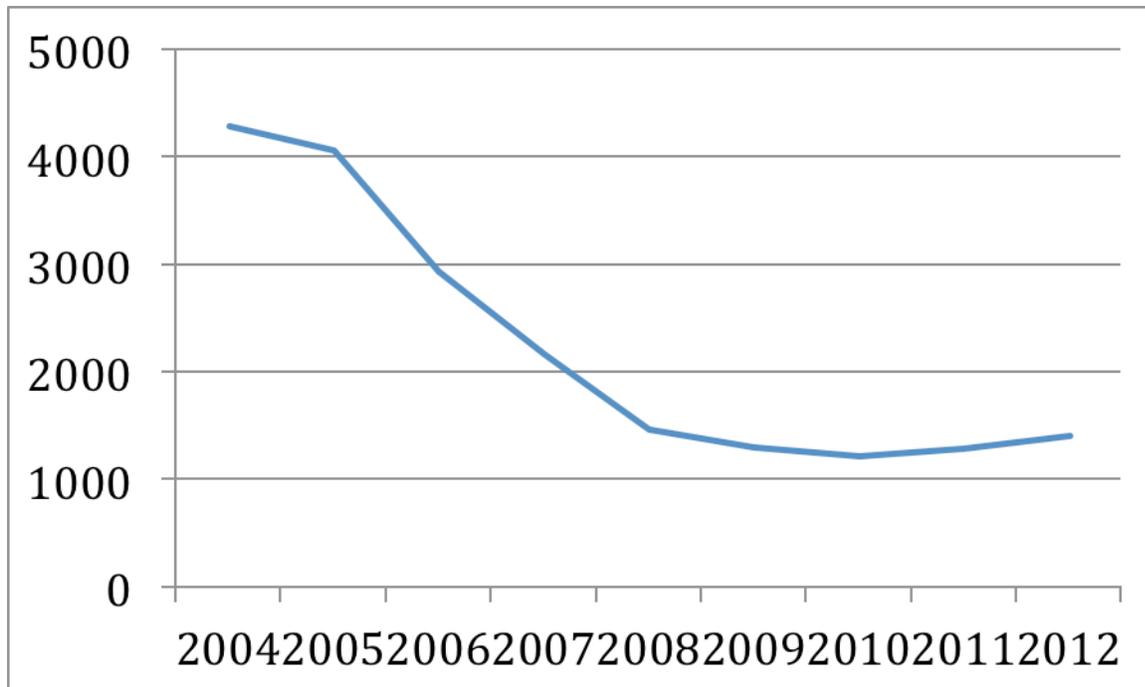
The question of why such growth took place during the terms of the PO-PSL government (until November 18, 2015) and why the PiS government (since November 18, 2015) has not been able to stop it should be the subject matter of serious analyses and not a mere pretext for attacking the political party one does not like. It seems that one of the reasons for the increase in crimes committed against foreigners is the rise in the number of foreigners living and working in Poland. For example, in 2013 there were 400,000 Ukrainians working in Poland. In four years this number has tripled to 1,200,000. It is expected that by the end of the year two million Ukrainians will be working in Poland (<http://wschodnik.pl/ukraina/item/11105-ilu-ukraincow-wyjechalo-do-pracy-w-polsce.html>).

If the anonymous authors truly cared about the safety of foreigners in Poland they would acquaint themselves with other statistics, such as the number of crimes committed against foreigners in Poland. Crimes against foreigners are often committed not because of ideologically motivated hatred but because foreigners are an

easier prey for the criminal than permanent residents of a locality. There is no mention of that in the *Statement*, which is a pity because there are many more crimes committed for nonideological reasons than crimes pursuant to section 257 of the Criminal Code—the victims of which, by the way, can also be Poles.

In 2005, when the SLD party was in power, the number of crimes against foreigners was 4,056 (<http://statystyka.policja.pl/st/wybrane-statystyki/przestepczosc-cudzozie/50867,Cudzoziemcy-przestepczosc.html>, accessed July 5, 2017). In 2006, when the “nationalist-racist-xenophobic” PiS came to power (in coalition with Liga Polskich Rodzin and Samoobrona), the number of such crimes fell to 2,936. In 2007 with PiS still in power, the number of crimes against foreigners decreased again, to 2,161. The falling trend continued until 2010; since that time the number of crimes against foreigners has been slowly increasing. The statistics on the website of the National Police Headquarters cover the period from 2004 to 2012. In 2012 1,043 such crimes were committed (see chart 2).

Chart 2. Crimes against foreigners by year



A few hundred people participated in the demonstration in Poznań. The invited speakers made fiery antigovernment speeches. Toward the end there were scuffles between pseudofootball fans and anarchists, and between anarchists and the police. Have the foreigners living in Poland benefited in any way from the demonstration? Probably not, since that was not the point of the whole affair. The reason for this demonstration and probably many others has been the opposition's inability to create a credible political program assuring its return to power in the nearest democratic election. The unfolding of the numerous corruption cases that has been going on in Poland in mid-2017, starting with the Amber Gold affair, makes this supposition probable. In the recent opinion polls PiS leads over the rest of political parties. According to poll results conducted by TNS Polska between June 3–8, 2017, PiS is supported by 40 percent, PO by 17 percent, and Nowoczesna and Kukiz-15 by 9 percent of respondents

<http://wpolityce.pl/polityka/296643-pogrom-tns-polska-pis-z-40-proc-poparciem-miazdzy-rywali-platforma-17-nowoczesna-tylko-9-sprawdz-wyniki>, accessed 07/01/2017).

The solid public support for the rightist-conservative government that has introduced social reforms that have diminished economic inequalities is the reason that the opposition has been testing nondemocratic means of action as possibly the only way to lower public support for the present government. △

Miłosz, Eliot, and the Generative Canon Literature, the Past, and the Future

Peter Dale Scott

“The poetic act both anticipates the future and speeds
its coming.”¹

MIŁOSZ, ELIOT. AND THE CANON

In his lecture accepting the Nobel Prize in 1980, Czesław Miłosz acknowledged his debt to authors preceding him like William Blake, and also his duty to maintain their tradition by rescuing it from what was now dated: