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Polish Human Rights Organizations: Resisting Institutional Pressures

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Introduction

The coming to power of the Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*) party in 2015 represented a critical juncture for civil society organizations in Poland. One of the explicit ambitions of the new government has been to redesign the structure of Polish civil society. To this end, a new funding institution was created: the National Freedom Institute—Centre for Civil Society Development,

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the first executive agency in the history of Poland responsible for support-ing civil society, public benefit activities, and volunteering […] provid[ing] non-governmental organizations with content-related and financial sup-port programmes. (National Freedom Institute, 2021)

While it is undeniable that this entailed a major increase in state fund-ing for civil society organizations, this government agency has systemati-cally redesigned the composition of Polish civil society, clearly prioritizing civil society organizations that align ideologically with the government (Szczygielska, 2019). In effect, civil society has undergone a significant reconfiguration (Toepler et al., 2020). According to the official govern-ment narrative, legislation and funding schemes prior to 2015 privileged liberal and left-oriented civil society organizations (Korolczuk, 2021); this imbalance would now be corrected by prioritizing civil society orga-nizations with conservative views. There is sufficient evidence in the aca-demic literature that the balancing act was accompanied by a wide range of institutional pressures through funding programs and regulations for reporting and accountability, as well as public smearing and legal harass-ment against liberal civil society organizations (e.g. Bill & Stanley, 2020; Marzec & Neubacher, 2020; Roggeband & Krizsán, 2021; Szuleka, 2018). This chapter focuses on how human rights organizations handle such institutional pressures, analyzing both the various resources at their disposal and the resourceful use of those resources.

The conceptual framework for the analysis is based on Christine Oliver's (1991) seminal work on organizational responses to institutional pressures. Oliver argues that organizations are not invariably passive, con-forming to the expectations and demands generated by regulatory struc-tures, government agencies, laws, donors, and other stakeholders. On the

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contrary, they are capable of demonstrating varying degrees of awareness, proactiveness, self-interest, and influence, depending on the origins and forms of institutional coercion as well as on the broader institutional and organizational environment. Following this volume's analytical approach (see Kravchenko et al., Chap. 1 in this volume), we suggest that a thorough examination of the resources used to exert pressure on organizations, and of the resources that organizations mobilize in response, may contribute to a better understanding of the strategic and tactical choices that organizations make. In this study, we systematically examine opportunities and limitations that have shaped the economic, symbolic, social, and human resources of human rights organizations in Poland since 2015, focusing on organizational characteristics and the environmental conditions that determine their action repertoire.

The data used in this chapter were drawn from two studies conducted by the Klon/Jawor Association. The first study, entitled "The capacity of human rights organizations," was carried out in late 2018 and early 2019 (Klon/Jawor, 2019b). It defined human rights organizations as associations and foundations that focus on issues of social justice and equality, protection of human rights and freedoms in general, and those of ethnic, gender, and sexual minorities in particular. According to the Directory of Civil Society Organizations (Portal organizacji pozarządowych, 2021), the number of human rights organizations in Poland is approximately 200. However, since no specific legal or organizational form is associated with these spheres of civic activities, the study's research design recognized organizations' self-identification as human rights organizations as an important element of the analytical definition. The data collection strategy was therefore based on reaching out to a significantly larger sample of 460 organizations in order to ensure the inclusion of organizations that may not have met formal criteria but that identified human rights advocacy in their activities. Data collection was carried out in two stages. First, an online survey was sent out to the organizations included in the sample, drawing a response rate of approximately 25% (N = 109). The low response rate resulted from the oversampling strategy (Davern, 2013; Johnson & Wislar, 2012) and was addressed at the second stage of data collection, which included in-depth interviews with representatives of ten organizations. The qualitative sample included organizations working

with a broad range of issues (social justice and equality, human rights, anti-discrimination education, and issues related to migrants and refugees, sexual minorities, and women) and geographical locations (provinces of Lower Silesia, Łódź, Lesser Poland, Mazovia, Podlasie, Podkarpacie, and Silesia).[1]

The second study used in this chapter is a recurring survey called "The capacity of the nongovernmental sector," based on a representative sample of all Polish associations and foundations (N = 1300). It has been conducted every two to three years since 2002 (Klon/Jawor, 2019a). In the analysis below, we combine the results of the two surveys described here in order to examine human rights organizations in the broader context of Polish civil society.

For the purposes of this chapter, we divide the resources used by human rights organizations into four broad categories: (1) *economic*, in the form of financial revenues at their disposal; (2) *symbolic*, expressed as meanings assigned to an organization's mission and vision for the civil society as a whole; (3) *social*, referring to networks and connections with other actors in the field; and (4) *human* resources, consisting of various categories of staff that organizations can mobilize. Further developing Oliver's (1991) conceptual framework, we suggest that the structure and scope of economic resources are largely shaped by the specific instruments that the current political regime is using to influence not only organizational efficiency but the conditions for organizations' very survival. While the state's monopoly on public finances and their discretionary distribution is difficult to challenge, human rights organizations develop instruments for maneuvering within limitations and finding alternative sources. Our analysis offers a detailed examination of the ways in which human rights organizations meet institutional demands to ensure their survival while striving to accomplish their missions.

Economic Resources

As our data demonstrate, human rights organizations are located mainly in Poland's largest cities; approximately 60% operate in cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants, and few are found in rural areas; meanwhile,

25% of all civil society associations and foundations are based in rural areas. Human rights organizations also operate widely—almost half of them on a national scale and one in three on an international scale—whereas the share of organizations with such a wide range in the entire nongovernmental sector is smaller; only 31% operate nationwide and 9% abroad. Organizations' orientation toward national and international audiences is defined by their advocacy work, but they also receive significant financial support from these bases. Although the most common sources of funding are membership fees, local government funds, and private donations, the largest share of funding is provided through state-run programs, including the distribution of domestic and foreign money (Klon/Jawor, 2019a).

As Fig. 4.1 illustrates, human rights organizations have significantly higher revenues than the entire sector: in 2017, the budget of an average human rights organization was 123,000 PLN as compared to an average of 28,000 PLN for the sector as a whole. This discrepancy can be explained in part by greater diversification of sources of income; on average, human rights organizations have four different types of funding in their budget,
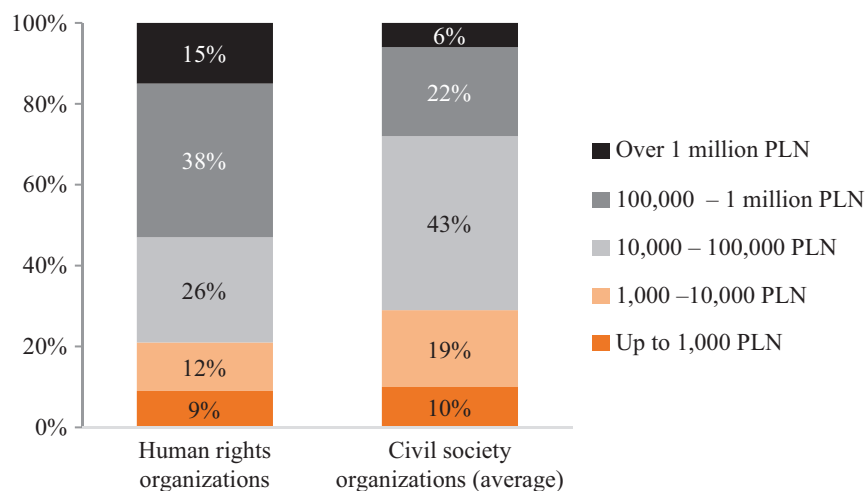

Fig. 4.1 Distribution of organizations by revenue size, 2017. (Source: Klon/Jawor (2019b, p. 4). Note: Human rights organizations *N* = 100, civil society organizations [average] *N* = 1091)

compared to three across the sector. However, this does not mean that no entities classified as human rights organizations operate with very limited funds—the percentage with the smallest incomes (up to 1000 PLN) was similar to that among all Polish civil society organizations. The revenue structure of human rights organizations is set apart by the significantly higher share of organizations with revenues above 100,000 PLN—53% among human rights organizations and 28% on average.

The financial viability of Polish human rights organizations has been largely affected by the overall process of centralization and increased state scrutiny. In 2017, the National Freedom Institute—Centre for Civil Society Development, a government agency established to distribute all public funds, followed guidelines that allowed for arbitrary decisions in the allocation of those funds. Although formal public consultations on the guidelines were held, the government failed to address any of the critical remarks submitted by civil society organizations; it also provided special support to organizations that supported its agenda. According to a report by USAID, 16% of the Civil Organization Development Program, managed by the National Freedom Institute, went to organizational units of the Catholic Church, while 12% went to organizations that not only support far-right ideology but even utilize violent tactics (USAID, 2019, p. 170).

In the face of diminished access to state funding, which for a significant period of time was one of the most substantial providers of economic resources, many human rights organizations are experiencing problems with maintaining financial continuity and thus with employing workers and collaborators, paying office rents, and even carrying out their statutory activities:

> In terms of finances, we are in the same situation as the women who come to us. When I went to the meeting, I realized that I am working in jobs that are low-paid—childcare, child rearing, where it is clear that salaries will be the lowest, that nothing can be gained there. (R9)

According to the interviewees, this dire economic situation was exacerbated after 2015. Interviewees repeatedly brought up the impact of political changes, mentioning the cutting off of public funds that had

previously been available to human rights organizations (both at the local and government levels), the withholding of funding by some government agencies, and delays in appointing the operator for one of the largest international grant programs, the European Economic Area (EEA) and Norway Grants,[2] which is a condition for allocating the funding. These changes led to limitations on the realization of many statutory activities and projects by human rights organizations; it also affected their ongoing financial stability, as stated by one interviewee: "Financially, 2016 was the most difficult year in our history. For me, it was even a moment when we strongly doubted that we would survive" (R6).

In 2018, the majority of human rights organizations (about 70%) had guarantees for less than half of their budgets for activities until the end of that year. In this way, they resemble average Polish civil society organizations. However, in the case of human rights organizations, current financial instability is partly explained by the political situation, which forces some of them into what is known as "hibernation" as they wait out the period of this unfavorable political opportunity structure:

> There are some organizations that have hibernated. There are some which used to have an office, a few employees and various creative programs and used to go out to people, and at the moment they have two experts, they don't have an office and they operate from home; on a call basis they are able to do something. The qualitative difference is gigantic. (R7)

Moreover, after 2015, a dilemma emerged for human rights organizations that acquired public funding, a dominant source of income for most. Not only is public funding in short supply; more importantly, it is tainted by the illiberal orientation of the Law and Justice government. Accepting such funding could be compromising for human rights organizations, damaging perceptions of their independence and autonomy (see Jezierska, Chap. 2 in this volume). One interviewee decried the fact that, after winning a public procurement grant, their organization had clearly been ostracized by fellow human rights organizations. Applying for and accepting grants from public funds was seen as an expression of approval of the current regime, which was unacceptable to the more uncompromising group of human rights organizations.

In an environment that does not consider their work legitimate or beneficial to society, human rights organizations have no tools with which to defy funding regulations; instead, they diversify their economic resources as a means of addressing the various costs generated by the ideological bias of state funding channels.

The structure of revenue sources (Table 4.1) presents an important distinguishing characteristic. Although human rights organizations are often considered a part of the overall NGO-ization trend (Jacobsson & Saxonberg, 2013b), membership fees were reported as a source of revenues by 45% of organizations in the sample. Although this number is smaller than that among civil society organizations on average, it indicates that a significant share of human rights organizations relies on a grassroots membership base. It is also noteworthy that human rights organizations are significantly less likely than other civil society organizations to apply to local authorities (town hall/municipality) for a grant. In

Table 4.1 Sources of funding, 2017, % of organizations identified

	Human rights organizations	Civil society organizations (average)
Membership fees	45	63
Private donations	66	50
Corporate donations	37	35
1% of tax	25	25
Bank interest, profits from endowments, etc.	22	13
Economic activities	15	7
Income from assets	6	5
Paid statutory activity	19	18
Campaign income, public collections	17	10
Local government sources	36	61
Government and central administration sources	34	20
Support from national NGOs	33	12
Support from foreign NGOs	25	3
European Union funds	30	11
Foreign public sources outside the EU	16	1
Other sources	6	7
N	103	1290

Source: Klon/Jawor (2019b, p. 16)

2017, such support was applied for by 36% of human rights organizations and 60% of all civil society organizations.

As data also demonstrate, human rights organizations are more likely to take advantage of sources such as European Union funds, donations from private individuals, and foreign public sources from outside the EU (these include grants from embassies, such as that of the United States). However, there is great variation in the financial situations of human rights organizations. For instance, one interviewed representative reported that their human rights organization was maintained by a foreign parent foundation which financed its basic costs every year (employment of full-time staff, costs of office maintenance, and statutory activities). In contrast, most of the other organizations must utilize resourcefulness in securing foreign funding or the basis of short-term projects. Still, they attempt to compete for domestic and/or alternative resources, proactively building economic security:

> We have liquidity. In our opinion, we managed to achieve considerable savings over the past 10 years, which secured us in the event of a project failure. If we lack funds from project activities, we can freely decide to use these savings to carry out statutory activities. Sometimes we use it, also from the 1%. Now we want to strengthen our statutory activity. (R8)

The abovementioned 1% tax revenue refers to the legally established procedure that allows Polish citizens, as part of their tax declarations, to directly support a public benefit civil society organization of their choice. This system was introduced in 2003 to stimulate civic engagement, raise awareness about civil society activities, and help Polish civil society organizations become less financially dependent on the state (Nałęcz et al., 2015). Earlier research has shown that organizations running socially oriented campaigns are more often recipients of this type of donation (Piechota, 2015). As shown in Table 4.1, human rights organizations also engage successfully with individual donors in this way, reporting donation levels similar to those of Poland's general population of civil society organizations.

One innovation mentioned as a possible way to avoid dependency on public funding is fundraising. However, fundraising remains more an

ambition than a reality among human rights organizations. Only a few of the studied organizations had developed a professional approach to fundraising:

> We are working on something like a loyalty program. We were also thinking about doing some fundraising abroad—London, Paris or something like that. It is still an uncharted topic. (R5)

Most human rights organizations use a learning-by-doing approach to fundraising, a task that is often distributed among all members of the board or assigned to specific individuals in addition to other responsibilities. Representatives of the surveyed organizations admitted that neither they nor others involved in their organizations had the experience and competence necessary for success in fundraising:

> Fundraising was generally here, but in a somewhat trivial form. We had what we had, but we did not work on it so much. I know that we are supposed to do it more intensively this year. (R4)

Still, in the broader sector, only 38% of civil society organizations declare that they undertake fundraising activities, while 54% of human rights organizations do so. Interestingly, when we compare the activities undertaken by human rights organizations and other third-sector entities in order to raise funds (from individuals, companies, or private foundations), the strategies adopted differ significantly. Human rights organizations are more innovative, more often attempting to raise funds by reaching out to potential donors via the Internet (via email, through their websites or social media profiles, or on crowdfunding platforms), while other organizations more often choose traditional offline tools and methods. Human rights organizations also stand out in their more frequent use of donations and public collections, as well as greater numbers of contributions from individuals (while there is no significant difference in the number of corporate donations). Undoubtedly, the effectiveness of fundraising is also influenced by the staff resources available to organizations, of which human rights organizations have more. Although fewer than one in four (24%) have at least one staff member dedicated to

fundraising (full-time or part-time), this equates to twice the dedicated fundraising staff of other organizations (11% of which have such staff).

Interviewees emphasized financial stability as necessary for carrying out their organizations' statutory activities, including identifying human rights violations, collecting incident data, analyzing and disseminating the results, promoting public awareness, and lobbying for institutional means to halt those violations. Financial stability is equally important for organizational development and professionalization. The Polish governing party and its allies in civil society and the media, as well as regional and local administrations, suppress human rights ideas by oppressing the organizational forms that transmit those ideas. The governing party and its allies are equipped with a variety of coercive means that target human rights organizations; avoidance of dependency on the state through diversification of funding and innovative approaches to fundraising are the main strategic responses available to such organizations. In the next section, we focus on more proactive tactics that allow them to challenge the legitimacy of the state's claims.

Symbolic Resources

As mentioned above, human rights organizations have been subject to smear campaigns and defamation. For instance, several women's and LGBTQI+ rights organizations, such as Ponton, Autonomia, and Feminoteka, have been repeatedly accused in the public media and in public statements by various politicians of misusing public funds for private purposes as well as for promoting foreign, liberal values that are destroying the institution of the Polish family (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Similar efforts have been aimed at other organizations with the purposes of creating a hostile environment for human rights organizations and undermining their ability to address the public, form coalitions, and accumulate funding. The values in the name of which human rights organizations work—for instance, gender equality, LGBTQI+ rights, support for refugees and migrants—have been used by representatives of the ruling party to excite public sentiment and to play out the conflict between supporters of mainstream conservative views and their

opponents with liberal and leftist views. In 2019, equality marches in Rzeszów, Kielce, Lublin, and several other cities were banned by local authorities, while in Białystok members of a peaceful assembly were physically attacked by adherents of radical right groups; law enforcement authorities failed to react adequately (USAID, 2019).

Nevertheless, these organizations continue to engage in actions to influence the public debate; they draft public letters and petitions, organize street-based mass protests, and run information campaigns. The social significance of this group of organizations is in the explicit opposition they present to the political regime established since 2015. Moreover, human rights organizations arouse much more intense emotions in representatives of Polish society than other civil society organizations—not only negative (going so far as to be manifested in physical attacks) but also strongly positive (resulting in support through donations or voluntary work, among other forms). They are also more visible and recognizable than other organizations. According to a survey conducted in November 2020 (Portal organizacji pozarządowych, 2020), Poles are much more likely to encounter organizations dealing with gender equality, LGBTQI+ rights, or defending democracy than those working with sport, culture, or local development organizations (of which there are many more in Poland).

One distinguishing feature of human rights organizations is that they can challenge the legitimacy of state attacks by emphasizing the consistency of the norms that they represent, their strong identification with their mission, and a sense of being active members of society pursuing specific goals. It can be concluded that these organizations are characterized by consistent and firm views on their missions and high degrees of integrity in defending them. In contrast to the academic debate about mission drift (Jones, 2007) and "grantosis" (Socha, 2011), that is, instrumental adaptation of the activities of civil society organizations to please grant benefactors, the human rights organizations in this study were quite uncompromising and determined to stand by their missions. As one respondent asserted: "We don't adjust to what is on the market, what they give money for" (R1). Furthermore, human rights organizations were more prone than other civil society organizations in Poland to take risks in order to fulfill their missions. Interviewees also stressed that

independence is crucial for success in their missions: "We are not dependent on the city or other public institutions" [R2]. These elements indicate a strong sense of integrity of mission among civil society organizations.

The interviews indicated that human rights organizations think not only in terms of social inclusion or the emancipation of certain groups but also in terms of responsibility for minority groups in general:

> It seems to me that we represent a movement of organizations, people, activists, female activists, who work for an open civil society engaged in social life, where undervalued groups can meet with emancipating actions, dominant groups can meet with actions introducing thinking about the minority perspective or educating for inclusion. Such an organization is a real puzzle in this construction of civil society. (R1)

The respondent quoted above saw their organization as an important intermediary gluing together the various parts of Polish society. This puzzle piece renders the society a democratic whole, teaching the majority about their responsibilities and the minority about their rights. Several interviewees stressed that the purpose of their activities was not only to support excluded groups but first of all to build a civil society in which the needs of all people are met and their rights equally protected. As Table 4.2 illustrates, the notion that civil society organizations' role is to exert influence over various stakeholders at the national level to solve important social problems finds more significant support among representatives of human rights organizations (more than 50% of respondents) than among civil society organizations on average (approximately 41%). This is striking, considering that human rights organizations are regularly attacked by state agencies and state-controlled media outlets.

The self-identification of human rights organizations and the assessment of their place in the third sector hinges upon this broader perspective and the sense of responsibility they have for Polish society. Regardless of the main direction of statutory activity of the interviewed organizations, they stressed their fundamental role as helping *all* those who need assistance. They also underscored that all social activity should be based on wide cooperation within the sector, regardless of differences in

Table 4.2 Organizations' understanding of their missions and places in society

	Human rights organizations	Civil society organizations (average)
Statement 1. NGOs generally have a strong influence on solving important social problems on a national scale		
Strongly agree	16.7	14.7
Agree	37.0	27.0
Neither agree nor disagree	11.1	20.6
Disagree	21.3	16.9
Strongly disagree	11.1	8.6
Difficult to say	2.8	12.2
Statement 2. Each organization should take care of its own development first, so there is no point in creating a vision for the development of the whole sector		
Strongly agree	5.6	7.9
Agree	4.6	17.0
Neither agree nor disagree	13.0	20.9
Disagree	32.4	28.9
Strongly disagree	39.0	15.2
Difficult to say	5.6	10.2
Statement 3. Cooperation between different organizations is very difficult or even impossible due to political divisions in Polish society		
Strongly agree	10.2	9.3
Agree	23.2	22.0
Neither agree nor disagree	23.2	27.2
Disagree	32.4	15.9
Strongly disagree	4.6	8.6
Difficult to say	6.5	17.0
N	1232[a]	108

Source: reworked from Klon/Jawor (2019b, pp. 9–10, 13)
Note: Respondents were asked to express their opinions about the given statements
[a] For Statement 3, N=1231

worldview. In the polarized post-2015 social climate, this seems an even greater challenge. However, human rights organizations appear comparatively strongly convinced that organizations should work together to create a common vision for the development of the sector. Compared to the sector as a whole, they are much more likely to reject a statement suggesting that each organization should primarily focus on its own development (44%, compared to 71% in the sector as a whole) (Table 4.2). Although human rights organizations suffer more from the divisions in Polish society than do less politically salient civil society organizations,

these organizations stand out with their strong belief in the possibility of agreement across divisions. Thirty-seven percent of human rights organizations and twenty-five percent of the sample of civil society organizations overall disagreed with the statement that "cooperation between organizations is highly difficult or even impossible due to political divisions in Polish society" (Table 4.2).

Identifying strongly with the broader development of society and contributing to its democratization with their activities, human rights organizations feel empowered by the accompanying sense of agency:

> I am motivated by the fact that someone comes to us and it turns out that this is what they were looking for. Then such a person thinks that it is possible to live here, to function somehow in this country. (R4)

The belief in their own agency and in organizations' impact on their environment, as well as the sense of cooperation that characterizes human rights organizations, helps them to challenge the validity and consistency of the coercive institutional norms in place and to overcome the uncertainty inherent in their environment, thus defying the pressures it imposes. The symbolic resources that human rights organizations have accumulated over time, in the forms of strong mission integrity and a sense of being an important puzzle piece in Polish society, as well as sector solidarity and a sense of agency in solving social problems, helps these organizations survive in a hostile environment. They feel that what they do is not only important for them as organizations and their immediate constituents and beneficiaries but also crucial for the entire society. In the strongly polarized Polish society, and in the face of the pushbacks from the government and the media that have been occurring since 2015, this symbolic resilience becomes a means of (re)generating other resources.

Human Resources

One of the lines of attack against civil society organizations in Poland has been focused on creating division within civil society as well as between organizations and their constituents and target groups. For instance, in

their program from 2014, the Law and Justice party framed their illiberal populist agenda by presenting civil society organizations as not only professional and bureaucratized, but as elitist and much better off than the citizenry and, thus, an impediment to direct democratic participation (Korolczuk, 2021). As in other East European countries, the supposed professionalization and elitism of civil society organizations has been explained by the dominance of organizational cultures introduced through international networks of partners and donors (Kuti, 1999). However, the local embeddedness of individual norms, motivations, commitment opportunities, and engagement patterns for the institutionalization and development of civil society organizations, as well as variations in these elements, have also been demonstrated (Chimiak, 2006; see also Chimiak, Chap. 9 in this volume). In our analysis, we thoroughly consider the places of individuals in their organizations as well as the contributions they make in various organizational roles. We also trace the ways in which discursive pressures—such as the characterization of those working in human rights organizations as serving foreign or their own interests to the detriment of Polish values—impact human resources in these organizations.

In this study, we distinguish between several groups of people involved in the activities of associations and foundations: employees, volunteers, and experts cooperating with organizations. In all, 60% of civil society organizations in Poland have no employees. Among those that employ personnel, the majority of organizations have no more than five employees. In 2018, the entire non-profit sector employed 176,600 people, many of them part-time, and 86.7% of all civil society organizations declared using volunteers—approximately 3.3 million people in total, of whom 71.2% were members (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2020).[3] Sixty-six percent of human rights organizations in our study had paid permanent staff members; 39% of those studied employed at least one person on a permanent employment contract, and the remaining 27% used other, less permanent types of contracts such as commission agreements. The employment rate among human rights organizations is thus almost twice that of the broader sector. Among all civil society organizations, 37% of organizations had permanent staff teams, with 19% offering permanent employment contracts. Only 18% of human rights organizations

based their activities solely on volunteering, while 36% of all civil society organizations relied exclusively on community service.

Despite the fact that human rights organizations employ permanent staff more regularly than the sector as a whole, they also demonstrate a tendency to use civil law contracts as a basis for cooperations. Our interviews showed that hiring employees on the basis of employment contracts remains rare. When it takes place, it is often in the case of project coordinators who are employed for the project implementation period. Characteristic for most human rights organizations is that their employees also work professionally in other entities, including corporations and administrative institutions but also other civil society organizations:

> Each of us [board members] runs a business, so we don't sign employment contracts [with the civil society organizations], but those are our decisions. Our organization tries to provide employment contracts to people so that we don't massively generate commission contracts. We really want to plan to get grants in such a way that there is continuity of staff. We are starting to think about whether to change the statute and allow for remunerating people on the board, because the amount of work is enormous. (R8)

In the field of volunteering, human rights organizations stressed that there was room for improvement and development of more professional approaches. Currently, more ad hoc campaign volunteering prevails over systematic recruitment and engagement of volunteers. None of the interviewed organizations had a person responsible for coordinating volunteers; rather, volunteers were sought for specific projects. These are, admittedly, problems shared with the entire third sector in Poland. The specific characteristics of volunteer work require guidance from those more permanently immersed in the organization. Such engagement, however, demands resources in terms of the time of permanent staff; as stated by one interviewee, "Volunteers come and go. It is hard with volunteers if we don't have fixed working hours. Someone has to train them; someone has to prepare them" (R9).

Nevertheless, 80% of human rights organizations work with volunteers.[4] In the sector as a whole, civil society organizations using voluntary support are significantly fewer at 63%. Human rights organizations not

only work more frequently with volunteers but also have larger volunteer teams than do other associations and foundations. Moreover, human rights organizations have increased the sizes of volunteer teams in the last year, despite the fact that these organizations report the same levels of recruitment activities as the other civil society organizations. The broader recognizability of human rights organizations with respect to other civil society organizations might be an important factor explaining the relative ease with which they recruit volunteers. Another explanation might be that in the face of governmental attacks and the illiberal orientation of government policies, a greater portion of society feels the urge to help these organizations.

Interviewees stressed that the organizational mission is a strong factor in the motivations of potential volunteers. According to interviewees, the fact that an organization works for equality and human rights was of great importance for those providing services on a volunteer basis. Respondents pointed out that potential volunteers are attracted by their sharing of ideas recognizable in an organization's activities or by a community of values. On the other hand, a mission that involves counteracting discrimination, such as anti-Semitism, and protecting human rights also limits the circle of potentially interested parties: one interviewee admitted that "I think our mission statement can make it a little harder to get volunteers. Not everyone wants to volunteer at a place with 'Jewish' in the name" (R2).

Involvement in the activities of organizations with a specific profile often requires specific knowledge; for instance, an organization supporting migrants is much more likely to need translators than accountants. It is also a challenge to organize peer volunteering or to involve the target group as volunteers. The following statement demonstrates that human rights organizations with specific missions attract volunteers with specific views and expectations: "I think our message is important, that we are a safe organization in that broad sense. We use equality language, sensitive to different identities" (R1).

In interviewees' opinions, the political situation in Poland was an important factor motivating citizens to engage in the activities of human rights organizations. In fact, all interviewees referred to this issue. For example: "Politics has kicked in so much, people are so mad that they will

do anything and get socially involved" (R2). Greater social mobilization and support for human rights organizations can be seen as an unintended result of the government-orchestrated attacks on these very organizations. The difficulties faced by human rights organizations, and their uncompromising nature, act as a magnet for like-minded people. The salience of the unresolved and growing polarization in Poland (Tworzecki, 2019) is propelling human rights organizations into national and international prominence.

As far as cooperations between human rights organizations and experts are concerned, it must be emphasized that expert backgrounds are an important asset. Experts are often members of an organization, but just as often, they are allies. The interviewed representatives of human rights organizations surrounded themselves with specialists in various fields such as law, psychology, and sociology:

> We have been working with the same people for years. What changes is the level of their education. One of the psychologists has chosen to further her studies in order to improve her qualifications and be able to help us more. (R3)

However, in the context of cooperation with experts and external experts, discouragement or even burnout can arise. In the words of one of the interviewees:

> I have a feeling that the experts […] are waning. They literally don't have the energy to deal with it anymore. If they feel that they are kicking the horse all the time, they either need a break, or they need to change their occupation altogether. (R7)

It is this discouragement, combined with the difficult situation in which human rights organizations find themselves and official hostility toward human rights, that adversely affects the motivation not only of external experts but also of staff and volunteer teams.

As the evidence suggests, human rights organizations mobilize employees, volunteers, and experts to resist institutional pressures by offering more stable employment contracts and working consistently in recruitment and engagement. Although they often lack the means and skills to

manage volunteers and absorb the costs of engagement for individuals and for the organizations—which sometimes involve threats to physical safety—they reach out to their stakeholders as bearers of ideals of social justice and equality, displaying integrity of mission and subverting negative media campaigns. The persistent conflict between the protagonists of human rights and democracy and the radical right-wing political regime not only diminishes the regime's legitimacy but regenerates the connection between human rights organizations and those stakeholders that take on volunteer roles, thus exerting external pressures of their own.

Social Resources

In the past, horizontal cooperation, norms of solidarity, and civic participation were commonly considered to be lacking among professionalized, often foreign-funded, advocacy-oriented organizations across Eastern Europe (Jacobsson & Saxonberg, 2013a). Accountability to external donors and an inability to connect human rights and democracy to local needs and concerns were seen as barriers to building social (and human) capital, resulting in fragmentation and interorganizational competition (Fagan, 2005; Henderson, 2002; Jacobsson, 2012). Although Polish civil society has been a part of this trend, sectorial infrastructure is also well developed in the country. Civil society organizations continue to have access to various support centers, locally and online, thus obtaining information on both funding opportunities and training (USAID, 2019). They also frequently cooperate and form coalitions; for instance, the formally registered Great Coalition for Equal Opportunities gathered more than eighty organizations standing for women's rights, and nine organizations are members of an informal consortium on refugee and migrant issues.

Human rights organizations are especially well connected with other actors. In line with the ambition to become important actors contributing to the greater society "through dialogue, through openness" (R3), they make efforts to develop broad and active networks. They cultivate more contacts with various partners: "We work with everyone around a particular issue. That is a big value for us" (R10). As another interviewee said, "We are not the kind of environment that burns bridges" (R1).
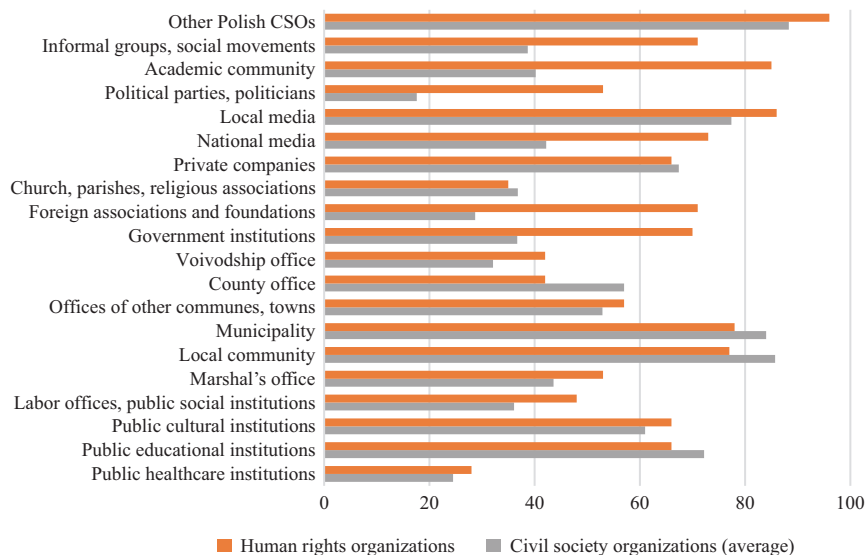
Fig. 4.2 Human rights organizations and their partners. (Source: Klon/Jawor (2019b, p. 31))

Figure 4.2 illustrates the variety of organizations with which human rights organizations in our study partnered. The results of the survey demonstrate that the most important partner for human rights organizations is Polish civil society—as many as 96% of human rights organizations have relationships with other civil society organizations. The second most important partner is the local media (86%), and the third is the academic community (85%). Interestingly, in the ranking of partners among all civil society organizations, local media are ranked fourth (77% of all organizations have relationships with them) and the academic world is not even in the top ten (40%). More developed connections with academics might be explained by the relationships formed in the preparation of expert reports commissioned by human rights organizations.

There are significant differences in the ways in which human rights organizations build their social capital as well as in the connections they choose to cultivate. On one hand, human rights organizations have many more contacts than all civil society organizations with national media and

government institutions as well as informal groups, political parties, and politicians. On the other hand, they have fewer relationships with local governments, local communities, and district authorities. Certainly, maintaining contacts with nationwide partners (ministries, media) is facilitated by the nationwide scale of activities typical for human rights organizations. That same feature, in turn, translates into less frequent relations with local partners and fewer direct connections to local constituencies.

However, and unsurprisingly, the interviewed organizational representatives pointed to relative difficulty in recent cooperations with public institutions in the context of the closing democratic space (Smith, 2018). Such cooperations, both with national and local governments, are conditioned by political factors. The replacement of a governmental decision-maker may influence the direction of a cooperation or even result in its complete termination, regardless of its success to that point. In addition, human rights organizations seem to be a much more consolidated group of civil society organizations than other groups of organizations with aligned missions. Almost all human rights organizations (94%) declared that other civil society organizations active in the field of human rights were key partners in their activities. Lastly, human rights organizations are much better connected to foreign civil society organizations than are those in the broader sector; 71% of human rights organizations are part of international networks, while only 29% of all Polish civil society organizations maintain relations with foreign organizations.

Interviewees revealed that the specificity of the work of human rights organizations involves substantive cooperation with various entities, such as legal authorities, international human rights institutions, academic centers, and research networks. It should be added that almost all of the studied organizations had experience managing educational activities for children, young people, and educational staff (according to the results of the survey, 66% of human rights organizations have contacts with schools). These specific contacts and activities, however, have become more difficult since 2015. It was pointed out that, in recent years, schools have closed themselves off from such cooperations and abandoned human rights training for students. As one interviewee explained:

We had an unpleasant experience during anti-discrimination workshops. The city office put pressure on schools. I know that there were unofficial talks with school principals so that they would not register young people for our workshops. (R1)

These discouragements were seen as politically motivated, that is, as attempts to turn teachers and students against liberal values: "In my opinion these are very political decisions, what subject matter is good and what subject matter is not and what we are going to teach our teachers" (R8). The politicization of anti-discrimination topics has forced human rights organizations to move classes to their headquarters and, as a result, to step back from direct contact with students. Since 2015, these organizations more often train teachers, who can then use the shared content in their lessons.

In summary, in the current environmental context, characterized by the political regime's attacks on fundamental democratic institutions such as the rule of law and freedom of speech and assembly, as well as its enabling of discrimination and its intimidation of civil society organizations, Polish human rights organizations have been mobilizing into intersectoral and cross-sectoral networks. In terms of institutional pressures, this tactic creates an alternative source of pressure: that of constituents and peers. The expression of solidarity through coalitions and consortia is intended to alleviate environmental uncertainty and to stimulate collective defiance and/or manipulation of the norms and demands imposed by the state. Relational networks also serve to support and elaborate collective values, presenting a coherent and stable narrative to oppose the values and myths proliferated by official state narratives.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined Polish human rights organizations, which are facing increased regulatory, political, and financial constraints on their operations. In our analysis, based on Christine Oliver's (1991) theoretical framework bringing together institutional and resource dependence theories, we have identified strategic responses developed by human rights

organizations as they strive for continued autonomy and survival. In Oliver's original conceptualization, the sources of institutional norms that constrain or enable organizations are intangible, with multiple institutional agencies. In our case, however, institutional pressures are defined specifically as those emanating from the state's regulatory structures and its affiliates. The political regime established in Poland since 2015 has been undermining democratic institutions, decreasing government's accountability to its citizenry, and increasing pressures on nongovernmental actors, especially civil society organizations, to comply with its illiberal norms and practices. Such pressures have taken the forms of diminished financial support, smear campaigns, and intimidation practices that have affected the scope of the economic, symbolic, human, and social resources available to civil society.

As our analysis demonstrates, human rights organizations compensate for the instability and the smaller scope of state funding by diversifying their sources of revenues, expanding their base of constituents, and building the capacity of their staffs, members, and volunteers. These organizations mobilize their own symbols and the meanings attributed to their missions through information and fundraising campaigns to present an oppositional normative framework and rally societal support. They strive for a coherent representation of their values and goals, simultaneously challenging the cohesiveness of the regime's illiberal agenda. Human rights organizations stand out in the context of broader civil society; with their stronger integrity of mission and belief in their potential to positively affect societal processes, they may go so far as to risk their personal safety in order to achieve success. This sense of agency strengthens their propensity to endure in a challenging environment. Resource convertibility becomes a resource in itself: organizations' integrity of mission helps them attract volunteers, and their sense of responsibility for the entirety of Polish society translates to broader cooperation patterns across political divides.

Human rights organizations use the interconnectedness of their organizational environment to challenge the state's illiberal narrative and to respond to its threats. The effervescent character of the Polish civil society that emerged in the process of institutional adjustment within the associational sphere inherited from the state-socialist political regime, and the

new organizations that appeared in its aftermath (Ekiert & Kubik, 2013, 2014), resist the closing of the democratic space in Poland. The institutional pressures, while significant, are not monolithic. Whereas the state threatens the mission or survival of human rights organizations, other actors show support and reinforce their commitment to human rights and democracy. Under such circumstances, yielding to institutional pressures would diminish organizational legitimacy in society rather than increasing it. Resistance, on the other hand, utilizes fragmentation, polarization, and contention; connects human rights organizations to their constituents and other organizations; and brings visibility and resources.

Notes

1. In order to preserve respondents' confidentiality, we do not disclose the details of organizations' profiles.
2. A funding program run as an international collaboration between Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway aiming to reduce social and economic disparities in the European Economic Area (EEA) and to strengthen bilateral relations with fifteen EU countries in central and southern Europe. Taking part in this program is a condition for these countries to gain access to the common internal market of the EU.
3. The GUS methodology includes trade unions and political parties as non-governmental organizations.
4. In contrast to GUS, the Klon/Jawor Association does not include members in their definition of volunteers.

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