



VOTERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE LEFT–RIGHT DIVISION ON THE POLISH POLITICAL SCENE

WYBORCY WOBEC ROZDZIAŁU KOŚCIOŁA I PAŃSTWA
W KONTEKŚCIE PODZIAŁU LEWICA–PRAWICA NA POLSKIEJ
SCENIE POLITYCZNEJ

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— ABSTRACT —

The article presents the research results concerning the attitude of Poles towards the presence of the Church in public life. The research was conducted in 2019 on a national sample size (n = 2110) based on stratified quota sampling method. The majority of the surveyed supported the division of the Church and state, at the same time accepting the presence of Christian values in the activities of state institutions. The surveyed definitely disagreed with the statement that the Church may support particular candidates in elections. The declared political preferences of the respondents proved to be significant, as well as wealth and place of residence. The supporters of the division of Church and state were more frequently respondents with leftist preferences rather than rightist, wealthier rather than poorer, and residing in cities rather than in the country.

— ABSTRAKT —

W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badań dotyczące opinii Polaków wobec aktywności Kościoła w życiu publicznym. Badania przeprowadzono w 2019 roku na ogólnopolskiej próbie badawczej (n = 2110) opartej o dobór kwotowo-warstwowy. Większość badanych poparła rozdział Kościoła od państwa, a jednocześnie akceptowała obecność wartości chrześcijańskich w działaniach przedstawicieli instytucji państwa. Badani stanowczo sprzeciwili się popieraniu przez Kościół kandydatów w wyborach. Istotne okazały się deklarowane preferencje polityczne, zamożność oraz miejsce zamieszkania respondentów. Zwolennikami rozdziału Kościoła od państwa były częściej osoby o poglądach lewicowych niż prawicowych, zamożniejsze niż biedniejsze, mieszkające w miastach niż mieszkańcy wsi.

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Słowa kluczowe: sekularyzacja; katolicyzm w Polsce; partycypacja wyborcza; lewica; prawica

The attitude towards the place of the Catholic Church in public life is of particular importance in Poland and constitutes one of the cleavages on the Polish political scene. The historical context of the importance of religion is relevant in developing national and ethnic identity (Müller, 2011, p. 32) in societies of Central and Eastern Europe. The high level of religiousness in Poland is historically connected with the role the Catholic Church played in opposing the undemocratic government in the past (Need & Evans, 2001, p. 233). In the period with no independence, Catholicism was the element which united the nation, leading to the combination of 'a Pole' and 'a Catholic' into one national identity, as opposed to Protestantism and Eastern Orthodoxy which prevailed in partitioning states. The Catholic Church had a symbolic role as a carrier of this identity, related to ethnic culture and mythologised history. It is the reason why conservative culture of values has deep roots in Polish identity (Swindal, 2011, p. 190). In Poland, Church, as an institution, aimed to secure the values it proclaimed through the influence on the legal system. It assumed that social and state institutions ought to be guided in life by the principles of Catholic Social Teaching (Wichmanowski, 2008, p. 38).

The process aiming at limitation of the role of the Church – secularization – has two dimensions. The first one depicts institutional relations between religion or the Church and the state, and the other one concerns beliefs and being a member of a particular church (Kaufmann, Goujon, & Skirbekk, 2012, p. 72). Perceiving the faith as a private matter is a predominating view in liberal democracies. The theory of secularization assumes that a higher level of modernization, along with accompanying social differentiation, urbanization and industrialization, lead to a decrease in religiousness (Voas & Doebler, 2011, p. 40). Such changes have taken place in the majority of Western societies (Need & Evans, 2001, p. 230). Whereas many countries of Central and Eastern Europe, contrary to the universality of secularization process, have observed a rise in religiousness after the fall of communism (Voas & Doebler, 2011, p. 41). A low level of religiosity is observed in the European countries. However, there are some exceptions, such as Ireland, Spain, or Poland, where religiousness remained on a high level, although a decline is noticeable (Kaufmann et al., 2012, p. 85).

Political changes in Poland, beginning in 1989, resulted in introducing a democratic and multi-party system. Social modernization and pluralism began a social differentiation process, where the Church was losing its position. Simultaneously, secularization trends appeared, and demanded a more significant reduction of influence of the Catholic hierarchy (Requena & Stanek, 2013, p. 97).

Since the end of the 1990s, between 92 and 97% of Poles considered themselves believers, mostly Catholics. People who identified as non-believers amounted to 3 up to 8%. After the year 2005, a slight increase of people perceiving themselves as non-believers was noticeable, and a decrease of deeply religious people was observed (CBOS, 2018). The Church derived its power from the fact that the society was considered Catholic, by voters as well as by politicians (Heinen & Portet, 2010, p. 1011). The Catholic Church entered the political scene through the support of particular parties and groupings. It was expressed, *inter alia*, through maintaining the relations between Catholic hierarchs and politicians, indicating who to vote for in the elections, or influencing legislative process (Kowalczyk, 2019, p. 158).

Signing of the Concordat in 1993 was a significant event in the relationship between the state and the Church (Heinen & Portet, 2010, p. 1010). It secured financial resources from the government budget to support the Church, allowing it to have an impact on the education system, and according to many researchers, thus questioning the secular status of the state (Calkin & Kamińska, 2020, p. 124). The influence of Catholic Church on the politics was implemented via direct access to the policy-making process, and a symbiotic relation between the Church and power circles (Calkin & Kamińska, 2020, p. 97). The strengthening of presence of the Church in the area of politics was accompanied by the decrease of social acceptance for the Church as an institution and an increase of support for limiting its influence on politics. In 2002, 42% of Polish citizens believed that the Church should be less involved in politics, and 57% noticed that the Church had a profound influence on politics (Burdziej, 2005, p. 170).

When observing the changes between the state and the Church in Poland, it is often compared to the changes occurring in Ireland and Spain. A relation between an authoritarian regime and the Church in Spain was characterized by interdependence and cooperation, and in Poland the Church was the main institution supporting and helping in the development of political opposition movements. It is why the establishment of religious freedom in Spain influenced the intensity of secularization process, and in Poland – a strong position of the Church survived the democratic changes (Requena & Stanek, 2014, p. 364). The

Church in Ireland has historically played an important role, being viewed as 'an advocate' of Irishness under the colonial rule. On symbolic levels, Irishness and Catholicism merged in the opposition to Britishness and Protestantism. In the first decades of an independent country, the Church strengthened its position through a direct political influence on ruling parties. However, it lost its institutional and political power upon the disclosure of a series of scandals. The majority of the Irish identify with the Church, however, research shows a constant decrease of the number of followers (Calkin & Kamińska, 2020, p. 89).

Religion has an impact on political values and attitudes, and these in turn influence party preferences. The voters choose parties who have the same political values. Research shows that religious people are more socially conservative (Langsæther, 2019, p. 2). In turn, more religious people, socially conservative, nationalistic, are more likely to vote for the right rather than the left (Swindal, 2011, p. 197). There are some noticeable dependencies between attending church and the faith, and the support given to political parties. For instance, in the 2005 election in Germany, the CDU/CSU parliamentary group was supported by over two thirds of those who regularly go to church, especially Catholics (Elff & Rossteutscher, 2011, p. 115). Ideological polarization influences the relation between religiousness and the willingness to vote for parties. The bigger the differences between parties on relevant ideological matters, for instance abortion, the bigger the connection between moral traditionalism and party preferences of the voters. Research indicated that the connection between voting and religiosity changes along with the change of polarization of the conflict sides connected with traditional morality (Langsæther, 2019, p. 2).

There has been a deep division on the Polish political scene into political groupings that aim to limit the role and those accepting the active presence of the Church in politics (Kowalczyk, 2012, p. 420). In Western societies, it was the economic criteria that determined the division into the left and the right, in Poland – the division was mostly based on the realm of values (Filipczak-Białkowska, 2021, p. 25). The right referred to the Polish cultural heritage, appealing to the threat to identity and unity of the nation, the acquisition of economic benefits at the expense of 'real' Poles by external forces (Swindal, 2011, p. 190). The leftist and liberal circles supported the limitation of the Church presence in public life. However, there was no political party in Poland which during their governing would dare to deal with scandals and misconducts in the Church appearing in media reports (Calkin & Kamińska, 2020, p. 124).

The research shows that an increased level of participation in religious practices may result in a greater participation in political life (Driskell, Embry, & Lyon, 2008, p. 295). Clergymen and religious leaders may encourage the followers to participate in elections. For example, in the USA, there have been instances of putting the materials in churches informing on the candidates' attitudes to the matters relevant from the congregation's point of view (Wilcox & Sigelman, 2001, p. 525). In Poland, there have been cases where churches were used or surrounded to canvass for the benefit of particular parties or candidates. For instance, the meetings with candidates were organized in church halls (*Kampania wyborcza w kościele...*, 2018). Approximately 9% of the surveyed in 2019, who participated in religious practices, declared that there have been instances where a priest suggested the congregation who to vote for in elections, and 24% claimed to have heard of such cases (CBOS, 2019).

THE AIM OF RESEARCH AND HYPOTHESIS

The following research questions have been formulated: What is the attitude of the surveyed towards the division of the Church and state institutionally and in terms of values? Is the active participation of the Church in influencing the politics and state ceremonies accepted by the voters? Do the surveyed approve of the priests supporting candidates in elections? The following research problem has been formulated: Are there any dependencies between the attitude towards the division of the Church and state, and the sex, place of residence, age, education, and political preferences of the surveyed?

Based on the existing research results, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: People with rightist views manifest a greater tolerance for the presence of the Church representatives in state celebrations.
- H2: Respondents with leftist views are more likely to support the division of the Church and state.
- H3: Respecting Christian values by state representatives and institutions is of greater importance for respondents with rightist views.
- H4: Respondents with rightist views, regardless of sex, are more likely to accept the Church supporting some candidates in elections.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted basing on the authors' questionnaire survey conducted in 2019 in Poland. The respondents could determine the acceptance level using Likert scale referring to the following five statements:

[A] – Priests and Church dignitaries should participate in state ceremonies.

[B] – State institutions and representatives should respect Christian values.

[C] – Catholicism should be a state religion.

[D] – The state should follow the principle of the division of Church and state.

[E] – Meetings with candidates may take place in churches.

Stratified quota sampling method was applied in the research. The sample size was calculated individually for each province, proportionately to the population. In the process of collecting data, pollsters used the research implementation card, where the following were taken into account: age (6 categories), sex and place of residence of the respondents (6 categories). Polish nationwide research sample was determined at the level of 2110 respondents, which constitutes a double-sample level for representative national research with the confidence level of 95%, 0.05 size fraction, and 3% maximum error.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Features of the Researched Population

Sex			
Women		52.1%	
Men		47.9%	
Age		Political preferences	
18-24 years	9.7%	The left	10.3%
25-34 years	18.1%	Centre-left	10.8%
35-44 years	19.2%	Centre	22.8%
45-54 years	15.3%	Centre-right	11.7%
55-64 years	17.4%	The right	21.1%
65 and more years	20.3%	I don't know	23.3%
Place of residence		Number of members in the household	
Village	39.5%	1	13.4%
Cities up to 20.000	13%	2	27.1%
Cities over 20.000 up to 100.000	11.7%	3	22.3%
Cities over 100.000 up to 200.000	9.4%	4	23.3%
Cities over 200.000 up to 500.000	12.7%	5	9.9%
Cities over 500.000	13.7%	6	4.0%

Education		Income	
Primary and lower secondary	4.5%	to 1000	10.8%
Vocational	16.2%	from 1001 to 2000	36.6%
Secondary	37.1%	from 2001 to 3000	28.0%
Higher	42.2%	from 3001 to 5000	16.4%
		over 5001	8.2%

Source: Authors' own study.

RESULTS

Every fifth respondent definitely disagreed with the statement [A], and 19.1% expressed a moderate disagreement. Every fourth respondent did not form their opinion on this matter. Over one third of the surveyed were against, and only every tenth respondent strongly supported the participation of Church representatives in state celebrations.

Table 2. Quantitative and Percentage Distribution of Answers to Statements

Statement	Definitely no	Rather no	Hard to say	Rather yes	Definitely yes
[A]	421	400	532	514	232
	20.1%	19.1%	25.3%	24.5%	11.1%
[B]	215	266	541	681	393
	10.3%	12.7%	25.8%	32.5%	18.8%
[C]	619	431	496	330	216
	29.6%	20.6%	23.7%	15.8%	10.3%
[D]	152	226	346	555	811
	7.3%	10.8%	16.6%	26.6%	38.8%
[E]	1023	572	276	165	63
	48.7%	27.3%	13.1%	7.9%	3.0%

Source: Authors' own study.

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test for variables of not numerous categories indicate the statistically significant differences in the distribution of answers for all the analysed independent variables. The lower the age of the respondents, the lower the percentage of the surveyed supporting the statement [A]. In the category of 18–24 years, 27% of the surveyed agreed, whereas in the oldest

group of respondents, 65 years and more – 42%. There are noticeable differences between the residents of cities and rural areas. In the case of residents of rural areas, 27% disagreed with the statement [A], and in the case of people living in the city – over 43% of the surveyed. A higher support for the statement [A] was observed in the group of respondents with primary education – 43%, and in the group of the surveyed with higher education – 30.6% agreed with the statement. Two thirds of respondents (66.6%) with leftist views disagreed with the statement that Church representatives should take part in state celebrations, 38.1% of the respondents who did not specify their political leanings disagreed, and 21.9% with rightist views also did not support this statement. The higher the income, the lower the percentage of respondents who agree with the statement under analysis. The support for the statement in a group of the surveyed with the income lower than 1000 PLN was expressed by 46.1%, whereas in the group of respondents whose income amounted to 5000 PLN or more, the support dropped to 26.9%. A significantly higher support was manifested from the households with a bigger number of members. In the case of households with one up to 3 people, approximately one third of the surveyed agreed with the statement, and in the case of households with 6 members, 58.7% of the respondents agreed, and in the case of the households of 7 people – 83.3%.

Table 3. The Kruskal-Wallis Test for Variables: Age, Place of Residence, Education, Political Preferences, Income, and the Number of Household Members

Statement	Independent variables					
	age	place of residence	education	political preferences	income	number of household members
[A]	.0181	.0000	.0000	.0000	.0000	.0000
[B]	.0000	.0000	.0000	.0000	.0000	.0001
[C]	.0003	.0000	.0000	.0000	.0000	.0000
[D]	.5043	.0000	.0000	.0000	.0000	.0527
[E]	.5229	.0161	.0000	.0000	.0000	.0967

Source: Authors' own study.

More than half of the respondents agreed with the statement [B] (51.3%), and 18.8% definitely agreed. The opposing view was held by 23% of the respondents, and every fourth surveyed did not form an opinion on the matter. The applied

tests of significance showed differences in the distribution of answers in terms of the age of respondents. The support for the statement [B] grew along with the age of the surveyed. In the youngest group of respondents – 18–24 years – 42.2% of the surveyed agreed with the statement [B], whereas in the group 65 years or more it was 59.4%. A greater support was also noted in the group of respondents living in the country 60.2%, in the case of the residents of the cities, the support was approximately 12% lower. The statistically significant differences in the distribution of answers were observed for variable education. The surveyed with higher education most often disagreed (26.9%) with the statement [B], and the lower the education, the lesser disagreement. In the group of respondents with primary education, 15% disagreed with the statement. More than one fourth of the respondents (26.3%) with leftist preferences agreed with the statement [B], every fifth respondent did not form an opinion on this matter, and the remaining respondents were against. At the other extreme are the surveyed with rightist views. This group supported the statement in the amount of 75.8%, 14.5% did not form an opinion, and the rest was against. The lower the income, the greater the support for the statement [B]. In the group of respondents with the income up to 1000 PLN per person in the family, 59.4% expressed their support. Whereas in the case of respondents with the highest income, more than 5000 PLN per person in the family, the support amounted to 39%.

The respondents who disagreed with the statement [C] amounted to 50.2%, approximately one fourth of them (23.7%) did not form an opinion, and 26.1% agreed with the statement, including every tenth respondent who definitely agreed. The highest percentage of answers opposing the statement [C] was noted in the age group 35–44 years, and amounted to 56.9%, and 55–64 years – 48.8%. 47.1% of the respondents in the youngest group disagreed, and in the oldest group of 65 years and more – 44.3%. The statement [C] was supported by nearly every third rural resident (32.9%). The bigger the town, the lower the support; in the cities with the population of more than 200.000, the support was only 19.6%. The respondents with higher education disagreed with the statement most frequently (59%), in the case of the respondents with primary and lower secondary education, 29.8% of them disagreed. A vast majority in the group of respondents with leftist preferences (76.2%) disagreed with the statement [C], and every tenth respondent of this group supported the statement (11%). In the group of respondents with rightist views, 28.4% disagreed with the statement [C], 47.6% supported it, and 24.8% definitely agreed with the statement. In terms of income statistically significant differences in the distribution of answers

were also noted. 36.5% of the respondents with the lowest income agreed with the statement [C], at the other extreme were the respondents with the highest income, where 15.9% of the respondents agreed with the statement. The more numerous the household, the lesser disagreement with the statement [C]. In the case of people who live alone, 56.4% disagreed, whereas in the households with 6 or more members, 30.1% of the surveyed disagreed.

65.4% of the respondents agreed with the statement [D], and nearly every fifth respondent (18.1%) held the opposing view. The Kruskal-Wallis test carried out for variables of not numerous categories indicated statistically significant differences in the distribution of answers to statement [D] for variables: place of residence, education, and income. The greatest support for the statement [D] was noted in the group of respondents residing in cities with the population of more than 200.000 (78.1%). The support decreased along with the size of the place of residence. In the case of residents of rural areas, it amounted to 57.3%. 32.9% of the surveyed with primary education, and 13.2% with higher education were against the division of the Church and state. In the case of variable connected with political leanings, it was noted that the respondents with rightist preferences expressed their objection more often (29.4%) than the respondents with leftist views (13.4%). Nevertheless, the lowest percentage of respondents against was noted in the group with centre-left leanings (6.6%). 53.8% of the surveyed with the income of less than 1000 PLN a month per person in the household agreed with the statement [D]. The support grew along with the income, and in the group of the wealthiest respondents, it amounted to 70.6%.

The majority of respondents (76%) disagreed with the statement [E], while every tenth surveyed held the opposite view (10.9%). The Mann-Whitney test showed statistically significant differences in terms of the distribution of answers for variable sex ($p = 0.0037$). 13% of women expressed their support for the statement [E], whereas in the group of men the support was manifested by 8.8% of the respondents. In the case of variables of numerous categories, the Kruskal-Wallis test indicated statistically significant differences for variables: place of residence, education, political preferences, and income. In the case of variable place of residence, 11% of rural residents agreed with the statement. In the case of urban residents, the support for the statement was noted in cities with population of more than 200.000 (7.8%). 63.8% of the respondents with primary or lower secondary education disagreed with the statement [E], and a higher percentage of disagreement was noted in the remaining groups – the highest in the group of respondents with higher education (78.4%). 71.3% of the surveyed with rightist

views, 87.1% with centre-leftist views (the highest percentage), and 82.4% with leftist views disagreed with the statement [E]. In the case of respondents whose income does not exceed 1000 PLN, 73.6% of them disagreed with the statement. Whereas a slightly higher percentage of the respondents opposing the statement [E] appeared in the group of respondents with the highest income, and amounted to 82.2%.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Two thirds of the surveyed with leftist views opposed the participation of the Church representatives in state celebrations, while in terms of the rightist views – every fifth respondent. It confirms the hypothesis (H1) that people with rightist preferences show more acceptance for such activities of the Church. Similarly, in CBOS research, the respondents with leftist leanings were more frequently against (55%) the clergymen's participation in state celebrations, and the respondents with rightist views held the opposing view (84%) (CBOS, 2022, p. 5).

The majority of the surveyed supported the division of Church and state. The hypothesis that the respondents with leftist preferences more often support the separation of the Church from the state was verified positively. The respondents with rightist views twice more often expressed their objection to the division of Church and state than the respondents whose leanings were leftist. The respondents who were wealthier and lived in cities more frequently supported the division of the Church and state than the poorer respondents who lived in the country.

A vast majority, more than two thirds, of the surveyed with leftist preferences disagreed with the statement that Catholicism ought to be a state religion, whilst among the respondents with rightist leanings nearly a half supported this statement. The education of the respondents proved to be of particular significance. The respondents with higher education objected Catholicism as a state religion more often than the respondents with primary education. Similarly, people with lower education almost twice more often than those with higher education objected to the separation of Church and state. It may be connected with a higher level of religiosity and involvement in the life of Church among the people with lower education. What is more, a negative relationship between the level of education and involvement in the Church activities was observed in almost all European countries. A higher level of education and residing in the city correlated

negatively with church membership and attendance (Need & Evans, 2001, p. 239). The attitudes supporting the separation of Church from the state, and negative towards the establishment of one official religion, predominated in the whole group of the surveyed, which confirms the results of other research. The research by A. Turska-Kawa and W. Wojtasik indicated that 49.9% of the voters in 2009 claimed that the role of Catholic Church in Poland is too strong, 42.0% considered it appropriate, and only 8.1% decided it was too weak (2014, p. 15).

The majority of the surveyed agreed with the statement that institutions and government representatives should respect Christian values. The voters with leftist and rightist leanings differed significantly. The research supported the hypothesis (H3) that for the respondents with rightist views, regardless of sex, it is more relevant to respect Christian values by public institutions and representatives. In 2010, over half of the surveyed voters, 54.7%, believed that religious values should be respected in public life, and 22.6% of the respondents disagreed (Turska -Kawa & Wojtasik, 2014, p. 16). The more rightist preferences the respondents manifested, the more frequently they declared respect for Christian values and acceptance of Church institutions in public life. When studying radical right-wing parties in Eastern Europe, it was noted that clericalism is one of their common ideological traits (Pirro, 2014, p. 622). The younger respondents attached less importance to Christian values than older ones. It may suggest that, similarly to Ireland, and unlike previous generations, religion is not the centre of life for young Catholics (Andersen, 2010, p. 36).

The majority of the surveyed did not support organizing the meetings with candidates in churches. In the group of respondents with leftist leanings the percentage was higher as compared to those with rightist preferences. It confirms the hypothesis that the respondents with rightist views, regardless of sex, are more likely to accept supporting the candidates by the Church (H4). However, the unwillingness to approve the active participation of the Church representatives in political canvassing predominated in all the research groups. According to CBOS, a situation where priests tell people how to vote in elections offended 81% of the respondents, 69% of those with rightist views and 95% with leftist preferences (CBOS, 2022).

The process of secularization is noticeable in the last decades in the Polish society. Although the percentage of people identifying as believers decreased, and the continuous decline in attendance in religious events is visible, the Catholic Church is still an important and active player on the Polish political scene. In the last years, from the moment a party with a very conservative profile came

to power, the role and significance of the Church in public life, especially in terms of politics, increased. The presented research results indicate that every fourth respondent is prone to maintain the current position of the Church in political life. This group is prevailed by people with rightist preferences, though it is not a homogeneous electorate. The reasons for the progressive secularization in Poland include, among others, the involvement of the Church in politics, support for the prohibition of abortion, and scandals involving people associated with the Church. The example of Ireland shows that these issues can quickly turn a Catholic state into a secular state. For the younger generations of Poles, the Catholic Church and its moral message have become just one of many lifestyle options. It may be expected that in the coming years Poland will witness processes connected with the limitation of the role and importance of the Church, however due to cultural background, it will be a gradual process, related mainly to the generational-demographic changes. Future research should focus on the causes of secularization in Poland and their political consequences.

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