

# Dimensions of Religiosity and Perception of the Importance of Religion in Everyday Life and Politics

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## **Abstract:**

The Catholic religion has been inextricably connected with the Polish state through numerous historical experiences. Being an important aspect of connecting society, it can be used in an instrumental way on the political agenda. Moreover, religiousness is an important determinant of electoral decisions. The aim of the research (N=238) is to check whether religiosity affects the perception of the importance of religious principles in everyday life and religion in political life. In the presented approach, religiosity was a multidimensional variable and was conceptualized using a modified five-point Religiosity Centrality Scale (Huber 2003). It was confirmed that all dimensions of religiosity are significantly related to the assessment of the importance of religious principles. The dimension that showed the strongest correlation with the created variables was the dimension of religious cult, and the dimension that correlated the least was the dimension of reading the Catholic press.

**Keywords:** religiosity; centrality of religiosity; political life; social life

## ***Introduction***

The term ‘electoral behavior’ refers directly to the elections and how individuals are legitimized to play important roles in the state. Currently, elections in Poland embody the principle of national sovereignty, meaning that the nation holds supreme power. It is worth noting, however, that certain phenomena, such as religion, can unite the nation and extract a commonness from the diverse group of citizens. In Poland, the Catholic religion is the most prevalent denomination, with 32,496,513 people declaring themselves Catholic in 2020 (GUS, 2021).

The popularity of Catholicism in Poland may be due in part to its strong roots in the country's tradition and culture. Even during the times of partitions, which were a difficult period for the Polish people, the Church served as a cross-partition structure that united Catholics and

supported the national identity of Polish society (Gaworski, 2019). The Church's history in Poland also continues to influence the current reality. The significant role of the Catholic Church during the democratic transformation, including the instrumental use of its teachings by politicians and the negotiation and signing of a concordat between the Holy See and Poland (in this matter, the position of the church regarding the autonomy and independence of the religious and political spheres was undoubtedly adopted), as well as the adoption of a new Constitution and the papacy of Polish Pope John Paul II, strengthened the union between the Church and the Polish state (Glajcar, 2012). In later years, the Church was again used in political battles. The presence and expansiveness of the Church during the transformation period shows that it played a significant role in shaping political relationships and was inherently connected to politics. Religion can unite parts of society, imposing separate rules of conduct and a specific set of values. In this regard, political scientists cannot ignore the importance of religion in everyday and political life.

When it comes to the perception of the Church by Polish citizens in the public sphere, numerous studies have been conducted on the subject. Currently, there is a widespread acceptance of the placement of crosses in public buildings (CBOS, 2022). In addition, a decade ago, there was also public acceptance of the religious character of the military oath, religion lessons in school, the participation of clergy in state ceremonies, and the consecration of public utility places (CBOS, 2013). However, in the study cited, it can be found that a large number of people are bothered, when priests tell them how to vote. A similar study conducted in 2022 confirms this trend. These studies show some inconsistency, as it appears that Poles generally accept the placement of crosses in buildings and public places, which combines the sacred and profane spheres, but when it comes to the Church speaking out and fulfilling its mission to proclaim faith and teach life according to it, many voters oppose it.

In this matter, the Church's position on the autonomy and independence of the religious and political spheres is not clear. The model illustrating the relationship between the state and the Church is one of autonomy and cooperation. This model is based on specific provisions in the constitutions of these countries or in bilateral concordat agreements. These provisions define the relationship between the state and the Church as one of friendly separation or graduated cooperation. Based on the principle of non-identification with religious organizations, nation states respect their independence and autonomy and guarantee freedom of religion and religious

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practices to all. At the same time, they declare their willingness to cooperate with religious organizations, recognizing the historical religiosity of their citizens and the social value of religion. This is why references to God can be found in the constitutions of these nation states (Grabowska, 2003). The formal separation of the religious and political spheres is defined in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, which in Article 25 establishes the principle of respect for the autonomy and mutual independence of the Church and the state. Of course, this does not mean that the practice of worship is unrelated to political life. Article 53 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland contains provisions on the freedom of conscience and religion. These freedoms are considered personal freedoms and their recognition by the state is inherently linked to the obligation to protect human dignity. Therefore, the freedom of conscience and religion is not only granted to citizens of Poland, but to everyone. The second paragraph of this article refers to “accepting religion according to one's own choice”, which refers to the unrestricted ability to adopt any worldview. The freedom to choose one's own religion is an expression of freedom of conscience.

Currently, there are several different positions that Polish political parties present connected with the Catholic Church. The Left and Law and Justice (PiS) are completely opposed, when it comes to religious issues. The Left advocates for treating the Church like any other non-governmental organization, that is, giving it some independence and autonomy. On the other hand, representatives of Law and Justice claim that religious values are inherently connected to Polish culture and tradition, so the Left's demands do not fit the reality (Kolenda-Zaleska, 2019). In addition, Law and Justice's election program states that “the Catholic Church is the custodian and preacher of the widely known moral teaching in Poland and also plays a unique role in Poland” (Election Program of PiS, 2019). Moreover, Law and Justice is currently the strongest party in Polish politics and its electorate is largely made up of Roman Catholic believers. Civic Coalition has a more moderate approach. Although like the Left, it separates state and Church affairs, it is in favor of maintaining the concordat. The leader of the party Poland 2050 - Szymon Hołownia, released demands that are supposed to help in the orderly relations between these two entities. Specific recommendations by Hołownia include the liquidation of the Church Fund, the removal of grades for religion from school transcripts, and shifting the financial burden for these lessons to the Church. It is important to note that Hołownia is not in favor of a decisive separation of the Church from the state, but rather wants to introduce order in this matter. The

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leader often emphasizes the historical and current merits of the church during the historical Polish People's Republic era (Makarewicz, 2022). Confederation is a party that believes that the separation of Church and state is fiction. However, this does not diminish the undeniable merits that the Church has had in the past. Despite its strong desire to separate Church and state, Confederation ideologically wants to protect life, which aligns with Church teachings. The party is also in favor of removing religion from schools and replacing it with ethics, where students would learn about Christian sources of ethics (Dudkiewicz, 2022). Polish People's Party (PSL), in terms of the Church, wants to defend the Christian roots of Europe. As a conservative party, the PSL expects the Church to unite people and reactivate the brotherhood of people. The leader of the group, Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, proposes that the Church should not get involved in political battles and take sides with any party. Nonetheless, Kosiniak-Kamysz supports the separation of Church and state, but wants to maintain cooperation to create a Christian community (Szczęśniak & Sitnicka, 2022).

Information about the influence of religion on electoral behavior can be explained using a sociological model of electoral decision-making. This model shows that voters who are part of a religious group are likely to vote in a similar way to that community (Olszanecka-Marmola, 2020, p. 22). The theory of two-step flow is also relevant to voting based on the sociological model. This theory posits the existence of opinion leaders and recipients of messages. The two-step nature of this process occurs, when opinion leaders are the primary recipients of mass media information, which they then edit using their knowledge and pass on to further recipients (Katz, 1957). In the context of voting, such opinion leaders may be members of the clergy who are more involved in politics, while further recipients are less active individuals. The sociological model of electoral behavior also identifies social contact as a determinant of class voting (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954). Members of various religious groups express their needs and exchange information through interactions with each other, deepening their political awareness. Access to information, such as through Catholic media outlets that circulate news (often of a propaganda nature), is an example of the process of social contact that can lead an individual to unite with members of a given community and solidify their beliefs and views.

Another important connection between religion and politics is the politicization of various aspects of social life (Legutko, 2012, pp. 249-251). Depending on how representatives of liberal tendencies and agents with Christian views understand different issues of individual and

collective life, ideological conflicts may arise, particularly when discussing ethical issues such as euthanasia, abortion, or the legalization of civil partnerships. If a voter who is considering these issues has a strong connection to the Catholic Church, they may be more likely to adhere to the views proclaimed by the Church. Additionally, research shows that religious people are more likely to vote. Participating in religious practices at least once a week increases the probability of voting (Czeńnik, 2009). This can be explained by the mobilization of clergy members and the process of social contact with others in the church community, which supports the assumptions of the sociological model of electoral behavior.

Another example of the inseparability of religion and politics is that religiosity, or the frequency of participation in religious practices, is the best predictor of political sympathies, especially toward right-wing and left-wing politicians (Jasiewicz, 2003). This was demonstrated in 1995 when analyzing the presidential election. A model was developed to explain voting behavior based on objective socio-demographic variables, and it was found that religiosity had a stronger connection to support for Lech Wałęsa, than other socio-demographic variables. Similar conclusions were reached several years later, when researchers created a socio-economic model to explain electoral decisions. This model posits that the likelihood of supporting certain parties is influenced by factors such as religiosity, size of place of residence, economic status, education, age, and gender of voters (Żerkowska-Balas, Lyubashenko, & Kwiatkowska, 2016).

The academic community is interested in studying how religion is manifested in the modern world. Researchers debate whether religiosity is shaped by the upbringing, tradition, and environment or whether it is an inherent part of human nature. Some view religiosity as an intrinsic value that is determined by the individual's level of spiritual maturity. The opposite of mature religiosity is immature religiosity, which refers to an inability to fully adopt a religious belief system (Allport, 1963). This theory has been referred to as the Religious Orientation Scale, but it has been widely agreed upon by researchers that this dualistic approach should be abandoned (Hunt, 1971). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, discussions about the distinction between religious beliefs and religious practices, deeds, and feelings arose. As a result, a multidimensional concept of human religiosity was developed that included dimensions such as ideology, ritual, consequences, experience, and intellectual dimension. This led to the conceptualization of religious commitment on a five-dimensional scale. In contrast to religiosity as an intrinsic value, religious commitment extends beyond individual boundaries as it is

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characterized by a social and relational dimension. This means that it exists concerning something or someone, such as people, sacred objects, or rituals. This understanding of religiosity is easier to understand than psychological concepts that describe religiosity as a subjective feeling. This understanding has been further refined through the psychological concept of religiosity as a system of personal religious constructs, which combines the approaches of Allport and Ross (1967) and Stark and Glock (1968). In this synthesis, the mobilizing aspect of religiosity mentioned by Allport is considered by Glock using four structural dimensions of religious involvement. The dimension of religious practice is divided into two separate constructs: cult and prayer. The intellectual dimension is also modified, as it was previously difficult to accurately describe religious knowledge. Instead, the dimension of interest in religious issues is used. The final dimensions are religious experience, cult, prayer, religious beliefs, and interest in religious issues. The Religiosity Centrality Scale is an operationalization of this new model of religiosity. It consists of a survey with specific questions about each of these dimensions, and responses are given on a five-point scale (Huber, 2003). With the author's permission, the Polish version of the Centrality Scale was prepared using a translation procedure, and the obtained psychometric indicators confirmed the high validity and reliability of the tool (Zarzycka, 2007).

### ***Methods***

The study was conducted on October 1-31, 2022 using the survey method, specifically, the Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) technique. The survey questionnaire consisted of 30 single-choice questions and was distributed on social media groups (specifically Facebook). The Likert Scale was used in most of the research tool's answers, which allows the evaluation of the degree of acceptance of phenomena and the measurement of attitudes.

There were 238 respondents in the sample, 133 men, 102 women, and 3 people who did not specify their gender. The largest number of respondents were aged 18-24, with 111 (46.6%) in that age group. In addition, the sample included 63 people (26.5%) aged 25-34, 20 people (8.4%) aged 35-44, 17 respondents (7.1%) aged 45-54, 9 people (3.8%) aged 55-65, 10 people (4.2%) over 65, and 8 people (3.4%) under 18. There were 90 respondents (37.8%) living in cities with over 200,000 inhabitants. 62 respondents (26.1%) lived in towns with 20,000 to 100,000 inhabitants, 47 respondents (19.7%) lived in cities with 100,000 to 200,000 inhabitants, 27

respondents (11.4%) declared their place of residence as a village, and there were 11 people (4.6%) from among the respondents living in towns with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants.

Regarding declared electoral preferences, the sample was dominated by supporters of the Civic Coalition (PO, N, IPL, the Greens) with 63 respondents (26.8%) expressing their support. Other respondents said they would vote for the Left (New Left, Left Together) - 38 people (16%), Szymon Hołownia's Poland 2050 - 34 people (14.4%), Confederation - 28 people (12%), Law and Justice - 8 (3.4%), and Polish People's Party - 3 votes (1.3%). Three respondents would vote for another party, 27 of them (11.5%) marked the "hard to tell" option, 19 (8%) would not vote, and 12 (5.1%) would deliberately cast an invalid vote.

When asked if they considered themselves believers, 104 respondents answered affirmatively, 89 said no, 39 respondents could not answer the question, and 3 refused to answer. Among all the survey respondents 124 identified as Catholics.

The research part includes questions about the religiosity of the respondents and the importance of religion in socio-political reality. As a result of previous research, I aim to compare how religiosity (as a five-dimensional variable) influences the perception of the importance of religious and political principles in life. Through this, I hope to determine the relationship between the dimensions of religiosity and the perception of political life, as well as which aspects of the Catholic faith are most important from a societal point of view. Two hypotheses were established for this research study:

H1: All dimensions of religiosity are positively related to the perception of religious principles in everyday life and religion in political life.

H2: The dimension of the religious cult will produce the strongest connection with the variables.

To verify these hypotheses, there are two separate variables – religious principles in everyday life and religion in political life. The first variable consists of four questions developed in research tools, and the second variable consists of five questions. The design for these variables is shown in table 1.

Table 1. Questions forming the scale of religious principles in everyday life and religion in political life used for the study

Variable	Questionnaire questions	scale reliability (Cronbach's alpha)
Religious principles in everyday life	Do you raise (or will you raise) your children by the principles of the Catholic faith?	$\alpha = .731$
	Are you guided by the Christian principle of love for your neighbor in your life?	
	Do you consider the Decalogue to be the basic set of moral principles that should be followed in life?	
	Do you think that the biblical principle of "turning the other cheek" (i.e. not using force and violence to oppose evil) should be the basis for the functioning of society?	
Religion in political life	Do you think that politicians in the legislative process (law-making) should take into consideration Catholic values?	$\alpha = .940$
	Do you think that the President of Poland should take into consideration Catholic values in the performance of his duties?	
	Do you think that the judicial authorities should be guided by Catholic values in their decisions?	
	Do you think that respecting Catholic principles (e.g. decalogue, commandments) is as important as obeying the law enacted by the parliament?	
	Do you think that foreign policy should be guided by Catholic values?	

*Source: own research.*

The variables were correlated with the dimensions of religiosity, including reading the Catholic press, religious beliefs, prayer, religious experiences, and cult. These dimensions were based on the Polish version of the Religious Centrality Scale (Zarzycka, 2007). The ideas behind each dimension are explained in Table 2, along with the presentation of the questions from the original Religiosity Centrality Scale and their modifications for this paper. The scales showing the dimensions of religiosity showed a satisfactory level of reliability (religious beliefs:  $\alpha = .903$ , prayer:  $\alpha = .734$ , religious experiences:  $\alpha = .917$ , cult:  $\alpha = .649$ ).



*Table 2. Construction of questions used to measure religiosity based on the Religiosity Centrality Scale*

<b>Dimension of religiosity</b>	<b>The importance of the religiousness dimension</b>	<b>Original questions from the Polish version of the Religiosity Centrality Scale (Zarzycka, 2007)</b>	<b>Questions used in the presented study</b>
Interest in religious problems	Cognitive, intellectual confrontations with religious content, but it does not take into consideration the aspect of personal acceptance, i.e. religious certainty or doubts.	How much do you care about researching religious issues? How often do you think about religious problems? How often do you look for information on religious issues on the radio, television, the press, or in books?	How often do you read the Catholic press (e.g. "Mały Gość Niedzielny", "Gość Niedzielny")?
Religious beliefs	It measures the degree of the subjectively assessed probability of the existence of transcendental reality and the intensity of the attitude of openness to various forms of transcendence.	How confident are you that God really exists and is not just a human invention? How strong is your belief in life after death? How strong is your belief in the existence of a Higher Being?	How strong is your belief in the existence of God in your life? How strong is your belief in the existence of life after death?
Prayer	The frequency of establishing contact with the transcendent reality and its subjective meaning for man.	How often do you usually pray? How important is a personal prayer to you? How often during the week do you offer a short prayer to God?	How often do you pray? How often do you read the Holy Bible?
Religious experiences	How often transcendence, as a dynamically understood reality, becomes an element of human experience. This dimension provides information about the individual confirmation of the transcendent world of meanings.	How often do you experience situations in which you feel that God wants to tell you something? How often do you experience situations in which you feel that God is intervening in your life? How often do you experience situations where you feel God's presence?	Do you experience situations in which you feel divine intervention? How strong is your belief that God is constantly looking after your life?
Cult	Frequency and subjective importance of human participation in religious rituals.	How often do you attend church practices, also via radio or television? How important is it for you to attend church practices? How important is your relationship with the religious community to you?	Do you celebrate holidays (such as Christmas, and Easter) according to the Catholic religion? How often do you attend masses/rituals? How often do you go on pilgrimages?

*Source: own research.*

**Results**

To examine the relationships between the dimensions of religiosity and the created scales, two-sided Spearman correlation coefficients were calculated. The results indicate a significant relationship between religiosity, conceptualized as a five-dimensional scale, and the variables that determine the importance of religious principles in everyday life and religion in political life. Therefore, the first hypothesis, stating that all dimensions of religiosity are positively related to the perception of religious principles in everyday life and religion in political life, is confirmed. Statistically significant relationships were noted in all cases, which can be considered quite strong.

*Table 3. Correlations between religiosity and the studied variables*

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<b>Dimensions of religiosity and the studied variables</b>	Interest in religious problems	Religious beliefs	Prayer	Religious experiences	Cult
Religious principles in everyday life	.326***	.640***	.650***	.665***	.688***
Religion in political life	.350***	.562***	.576***	.622***	.648***

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\*\*\* correlation coefficient significant at the level  $p > .001$

Source: own research.

Referring to the variable concerning religion in political life, the strongest correlation, according to the second hypothesis, is shown by the dimension of a religious cult (.648). However, it is only slightly stronger than the association of this variable with religious experiences, prayer, and religious beliefs. A weaker (although statistically significant) relationship was observed between religion in political life and interest in religious issues (operationalized in this study as reading the Catholic press).

Regarding the variable of religious principles in everyday life, the strongest correlation is also presented by the dimension of a religious cult (.668). This time, the differences between the other dimensions are even smaller. Three other dimensions of religiosity (religious beliefs,

prayer, and religious experiences) are almost equally strongly related to the examined variable, with correlation coefficients of .640, .650, and .665, respectively.

Importantly, religiosity is slightly more related to the variable of perceiving religious principles in everyday life than to the importance of religion in political life. Only reading the Catholic press correlates more strongly with religion in political life than with religious principles in everyday life. The remaining dimensions (religious beliefs, prayer, and religious experiences) concerning the variable of religion in political life show a weaker relationship than in the case of the variable of religious principles in everyday life.

### *Discussion*

The presented research confirms that there is a relationship between religiosity and attitudes toward politics. All dimensions of religiosity were found to be significantly related to the perception of the importance of religious principles in everyday life and religion in political life. The dimension of the religious cult had the strongest correlation with these variables, while the dimension of interest in religious issues had the weakest correlation. In addition, the variable relating to religious principles in everyday life had a stronger correlation with the dimensions of religious beliefs, prayer, religious experiences, and worship than the second variable. The reason for this is unclear, but it may be caused by the fact that the Catholic values are deeply ingrained in Polish culture and are an integral part of everyday life for many Catholics. However, the relationship between religion and politics is often more controversial. While the Constitution of Poland formally separates the Church and the state, it does not mean that religious practices do not influence political life. The research confirms this, with the dimension of religious cult showing the strongest correlation with the variables. It is worth considering the role of clergy and membership in a religious community in this context.

The presented research has several limitations, including the construction of the dimension of interest in religious issues, which only refers to reading the Catholic press, and the method of selecting the sample, which limits the generalizability of the results to the population. However, the research does confirm that a religious cult, understood as practicing religious services, celebrating Catholic holidays, and going on pilgrimages, is the strongest determinant of the transfer of Catholic values to social reality. It would be useful to conduct a qualitative study

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to investigate why the cult dimension is most strongly associated with the perception of the importance of religion in everyday life and politics. Additionally, it would be valuable to repeat similar studies with more diverse samples and improve the measurement of various dimensions of religiosity to ensure that the questions used are well-suited to Polish conditions.

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