

IS RELIGIOSITY LINKED TO VOTER PREFERENCE? THE HUBER CENTRALITY OF RELIGIOSITY SCALE AND POLISH VOTERS

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Abstract

The purpose of conducting the present study was to attempt to link religiosity with the electoral preferences of Poles, as expressed during the 2023 parliamentary elections. In view of the diversification of religious practices in Polish society and the intensification of secularisation tendencies, it was noted that it is religiosity and attitudes to it that may constitute the contemporary axis of socio-political divisions in Poland. Since the indicated religiosity is gradable, and the results of analyses based on the declarative sphere do not provide a solution to the indicated issue, the Huber Centrality of Religiosity Scale was used in the research. The statistical analysis of the survey conducted after the 2023 parliamentary elections in Poland (N=1069) allowed us to solve the following research questions: Q1: Are the electoral preferences of Poles related to their religiosity? Q2: Which electoral committees are supported by the most religious voters? Q3: Which electoral committees are supported by the least religious voters? The analysis as a whole indicates that the religiosity of Poles in the declarative sphere differs from their actual religiosity, and that the degree of religiousness of the respondents determines the diversity of their electoral preferences.

Keywords: Religiosity, Voting preferences, Voting behaviour, General elections, Centrality of Religiosity Scale.

INTRODUCTION

According to Yilmaz Esmer and Thorleif Pettersson (2007), religion plays a significant role in shaping election outcomes. This role is stronger if the stronger is religiosity in the country and society (Haynes, 1998; Stark, Finke, 2000). Poland is a country with strong religious traditions, where for centuries Christianity and especially Catholicism played an important role in social and political life (Dzidek, 2007; Kracik, 2010). During the most difficult times for Polish statehood, i.e. both the 123 years of partitions, the period of the two world wars and later, the rule of the communist regime, the Church was the mainstay of Polish freedom, when the word 'Pole' came

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to be equated with the word 'Catholic' (Cywiński, 1982; Gaworski, 2019; Pieniężny, 2024; Płachecka, 2022; Żaryn, 2003).

Despite the significant role of the Church in the political transformations made in Poland in 1989 (Kowalczyk, 2012), recent years have seen a diversification of religious practices in Polish society with a marked intensification of secularisation tendencies (Błaszczński, 2024; Mariański, 2024). As Irena Borowik (2016, pp. 10-12) points out, these tendencies manifest themselves significantly in four areas: (1) a decrease in participation in religious services and reception of Holy Communion, (2) the similarity of the model of religiosity of young women, to the model previously characteristic of young men, (3) frequent protests against the activities of the Catholic Church, and (4) criticism towards the Church as an institution, clergy and catechists. Arkadiusz Fordoński (2021, p. 11) further points out that Polish society has already transformed from a 'society of fate', commonly sharing religious values and norms, into a pluralised, also religiously 'society of choice'.

The issue of introducing a strong separation of the state from the Church, i.e. from the institution representing the religious sphere, was also raised more and more boldly in political discourse, especially in the election campaign before the 2023 parliamentary elections (Szczerbiak, 2025). The most significant demands of this type are: the desire to remove crosses from public space, the desire to remove or limit religious teaching in schools, to terminate the concordat or to close down religious broadcasting stations (Pieniężny, 2024, p. 45-46).

Research in recent years has increasingly indicated that religiosity does not unite but divides Poles (Pieniężny, 2024; Turska-Kawa, Wojtasik, 2017). Therefore, the social cleavages theory, proposed by Stein Rokkan and Seymour Lipset (1967), is taken as the starting point for the present discussion. As the studies of the cited authors indicate, the religious divide is an important sociopolitical division for voter preferences (state vs. church as one of the four main axes of sociopolitical divisions). Confirmation of this thesis as a permanent element of Polish reality is visible in research on Polish voters over the years, almost from the beginning of the systemic transformation initiated in 1989 (Borowik, 2010; Grabowska, 2003; Jasiewicz, 1993; Mariański, 2016).

However, it is important to note that the declarative sphere does not indicate the causes of the analysed problem, as analyses indicate that people declaring themselves to be religious vote in different ways, as the understanding of religiosity itself is diverse and gradable (Secler, 2016;

Turska-Kawa, Wojtasik, 2017). In view of such a transformation of the understanding of religiosity in Polish society, the use of the Huber Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS), which allows for the gradation of religiosity (Huber, 2003; Zarzycka, 2007), should be considered justified. It is the fact that religiosity (its understanding and relevance in the perception of individuals) is gradable, and at the same time differentiates Polish voters, that has provided the stimulus for the present study.

The aim of the research was therefore to attempt to differentiate the religiosity of Poles and its relationship with their voting preferences expressed during the 2023 parliamentary elections. After the indicated election, a survey was conducted on a group of adult Poles (N=1069), the statistical analysis of which allowed to solve the following research problems: Q1: Are the electoral preferences of Poles related to their religiosity? Q2: Which electoral committees are supported by the most religious voters? Q3: Which electoral committees are supported by the least religious voters? The following hypotheses were attempted to be answered: H1: The degree of religiosity of voters differentiates their electoral preferences. H2: The most religious voters prefer groupings that are conservative in ideology. H3: The least religious voters choose groupings that are ideologically liberal.

1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

As indicated in the introduction, the social cleavage theory proposed by Rokkan and Lipset (1967) is the starting point for the reflections carried out. Its authors focused on a historical perspective in the study of their contemporary social and political divisions. In doing so, they pointed out that history, and especially the conflicts rooted in it, are the determinants of these divisions. Stein Rokkan (1962) noted that there is a certain framework within which voters make their decisions.

This theory assumes three main points: (1) Societies differentiate into groups along demographic or socio-economic dividing lines. (2) Within these groups there is a commonly shared collective identity and shared values and attitudes. (3) There are also some organisational expressions of collective identity that make collective action possible (Bartolini, Mair, 1990).

Lipset and Rokkan attempted to conceptualise the relationship between major historical processes, divisions in society and the institutionalisation of the party system, and analysed in historical perspective the processes of democratisation and the formation of party systems taking place in Western

European states (Potulski, 2019). In doing so, they noted that there are four main categories of socio-political divisions in contemporary Western European states that have not changed since the 1920s. Lipset and Rokkan have succumbed to a phenomenon that can be compared to the freezing of party divisions even after the indicated social conflicts have ceased. One such division (alongside that between centre vs. periphery, agriculture vs. industry and landlords vs. workers) was that between state and church. As the authors of the theory pointed out, this was a division on an ideological level, in which the interests of the church striving for certain moral standards are juxtaposed with the state's desire to control all areas of life. This conflict also manifested itself in economic issues (Lipset, Rokkan, 1967).

Importantly, however, especially today, the transformation associated with the formation of the information society implies a transformation of the social structure and thus the emergence of new lines of social division and related conflicts. Conflicts related to the formation of the information society may become politicised, affecting the nature of political competition (Potulski, 2019).

Although the theory originated many years ago, having been criticised quite strongly and legitimately in the later period (Dalton, Flanagan, Beck, 1984; Franklin, Mackie, Velen, 1992; Knutsen, 2006; Nieuwbeerta, Ultee, 1999), it is so well established in the social sciences and historically enduring in its basis and nature that it can be constantly reinterpreted and adapted to specific, changing social and political systems. It is this feature that is its strongest point.

It is not the disappearance of the left-right axis that has given rise to criticism of Rokkan's and Lipset's theory, but precisely the emergence of new axes of division, which are also visible in Poland, which is also the subject of this work. It would seem that in the face of the rapid development of the world, great social changes and revisions of key sociopolitical issues had to and still have to take place. Thus, it seems that in Poland it is the political parties that shape the conflicts or at least are active players in them, when it comes to defining the meaning of these conflicts and their boundaries. As Hubert Tworzecki (2019) points out, polarisation in Poland has taken on the character of top-down polarisation and was, or even still is, driven by a large segment of the political class. In this context, a valuable observation from the point of view of the present work was made by Wojciech Łukomski and Ireneusz Sadowski (2013), who noted that institutions such as trade unions and churches are often vehicles for alignments in opposition to each other, and thus that religion is used to build support among the electorate

(both in a positive way, which involves winning over religious voters, and in a negative way, which involves attracting voters who are negative towards religion or a religious institution).

A review of this theory through the prism of new socio-political divisions in Poland (Zarycki, 2007), focusing on the electoral act itself, indicates the reason for the formation and transfer of political support expressed by the electoral act, in the face of the mixing of 'old' and 'new' sociopolitical divisions in contemporary Polish society. The emergence of new problems, or rather new political issues, while increasing the importance of cultural values, including religious values, at the expense of economic values (Hooghe, Marks, 2018), changes the nature of political conflicts. It is no longer a struggle to improve the quality of existence in the material sense, but a struggle for values, as confirmed by research conducted in Poland (Jasiewicz, 2022; Pieniężny, 2025; Szczerbiak, 2025).

Although many years have passed since the emergence of Rokkan's and Lipset's theories, what has not changed is the fact that social and political divisions exist around momentous issues. However, this momentousness is nowadays understood differently, and issues once considered trivial, such as the presence of religious symbols in public space, for example, are rising to become crucial for societies. However, these divisions play a politically identical role as at the time of the emergence of the theory of social divisions, allowing not a rejection of the theory, but a more advisable reinterpretation adapting the theory to contemporary social and political reality. From the perspective of this work, it is also very relevant that Rokkan and Lipset focused on the relationship between state and church as a social conflict that gives a possibilities to political competition in the contemporary world. This relationship has a particular expression in a rapidly secularising Poland, where religion itself occupies a differentiated place in the consciousness of individuals.

The strength of Rokkan and Lipset's concept of linking individual voting behaviour, with something understood as 'historical memory', or relating it to large, socially influential historical processes, is undeniable. The theory is universal and has not become obsolete, making it useful in explaining the electoral preferences of Poles. It draws attention to one of the key divisions on the 'secular state' - 'religious state' axis, which can be constructed or only reinforced by political elites seeking an electorate (Kitschelt, 1995).

1.1 Measuring religiosity - Centrality of Religiosity Scale

The verification of the indicated individualisation of religion on the part of individuals had to be examined on an empirical level. In view of the noticeable change in the understanding of religiosity by Poles, from the historically shaped society of fate, characterised by the unification of the role and importance of religion in social life, to the contemporary one - the society of choice, in which a differentiated approach to religiosity is visible, which is no longer a constant, but a variable that can be differentiated, the best tool for this was the use of the Centrality of Religiosity Scale proposed by Stefan Huber (1996; 2003; 2004).

The proposed scale is derived from two classic approaches to the study of religiosity: The Allport-Ross Religious Orientation Scale and the Glock-Stark Dimensions of Religiosity Scale. The first of these approaches, proposed by Glock and Stark (1965), is a multidimensional sociological approach. As understood by these authors, religiosity is a multidimensional structure that is shaped independently by five representative and common dimensions: religious beliefs, religious practices, religious experiences, religious knowledge and the consequences of religiosity.

The approach proposed by Allport and Ross (1967) opts for a psychological recognition, of religiosity as a personal reference to the value at the basis of all things. Religiosity in this sense can be measured by pointing to the individual as a point on the axis spanning between an external and an internal religious orientation. If this orientation is internal, religiosity becomes mature, and thus, in contrast to external (immature) religiosity, the motivations centred around religiosity are stable in nature. Consequently, religiosity becomes a personal experience of the religion adhered to, which can be relevant or irrelevant to the individual and thus to the choices he or she makes.

From these foundations comes the theoretical combination of both approaches, proposed by Stefan Huber (1996; 2003; 2004), which seems to capture the essence of religiosity most fully. For in it, religiosity is understood as a system of personal religious constructs. This is because the strength of a person's experiences and behaviour derives from these constructs. The more often religiosity takes centre stage, the more religious the individual is and the more often his or her choices are motivated by religious issues. In this approach, the contents and meanings given to religious constructs, which can take different forms, are crucial, so that religious experiences and behaviours are a function of the centrality and content specificity of the system of personal religious constructs of individuals (Zarzycka, 2007).

Huber proposed to operationalise the model of religiosity thus proposed on a constructed scale comprising 15 questions divided into 5 essential dimensions of relevance. Among them, he distinguished: worship (which asked about the frequency and subjective importance of an individual's participation in religious services), religious experience (which asked about the experience of transcendence), prayer (which asked about the frequency and importance of an individual's contact with the transcendent sphere), religious beliefs (which asked about the subjective evaluation of the existence of forms of transcendent reality), and interest in religious issues (which asked about thinking and seeking information related to religion). The analysis of the answers to the indicated questions makes it possible to indicate the variation in the level of religiosity of individuals and its importance for the respondents, which provides an opportunity for further analyses that also address other variables, such as the voting preferences analysed in this work.

1.2 Data and methodology

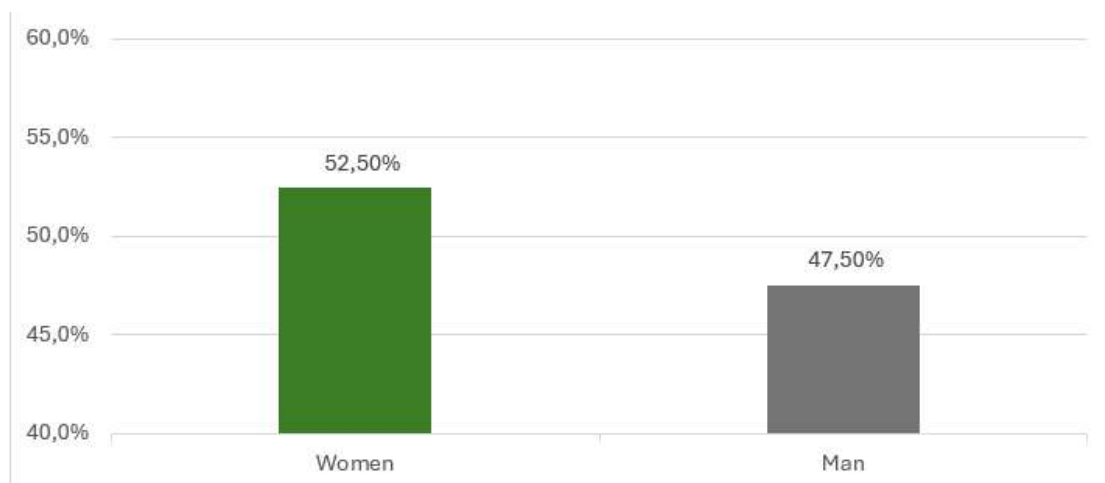
In order to realise the aim of the study and to indicate the link between religiosity and the electoral preferences of Poles in the 2023 parliamentary election, a survey was conducted using the direct survey technique. It took place immediately after the indicated election, as it was assumed that such temporal proximity would allow respondents to keep their own electoral preferences in mind. The survey was conducted between 1 December 2023 and 26 April 2024.

The survey sample consisted of 1,069 people. This number was calculated on the basis of the annual reports of the Central Statistical Office (Główny Urząd Statystyczny) on the population of Poland. The study population was divided by stratified-quota selection. Quota selection included variables such as gender and age, while stratified selection included place of residence by voivodeship and urban-rural. The percentage of each of these variables in the research sample corresponded to the percentage of each group in the entire adult population of Poland, as expressed in the annual publications of the Central Statistical Office, in this case for the year 2023, when the research began. It was conducted using the accessibility method, by means of direct questionnaire interviews. In the course of the survey, 1,712 questionnaires were distributed, of which 1,371 (80.1%) were completed. Of these, 1,069 (62.4%) were qualified for analysis. The only qualifying criterion was the completeness of the questionnaire. The study was conducted by the Author

of this article, with the help of researchers from various academic centers in Poland, who assisted in distributing the questionnaire. Importantly, neither the Author nor the researchers distributing the questionnaires helped respondents fill out the survey, provided comments, or answered their questions, so they did not influence the results of the study.

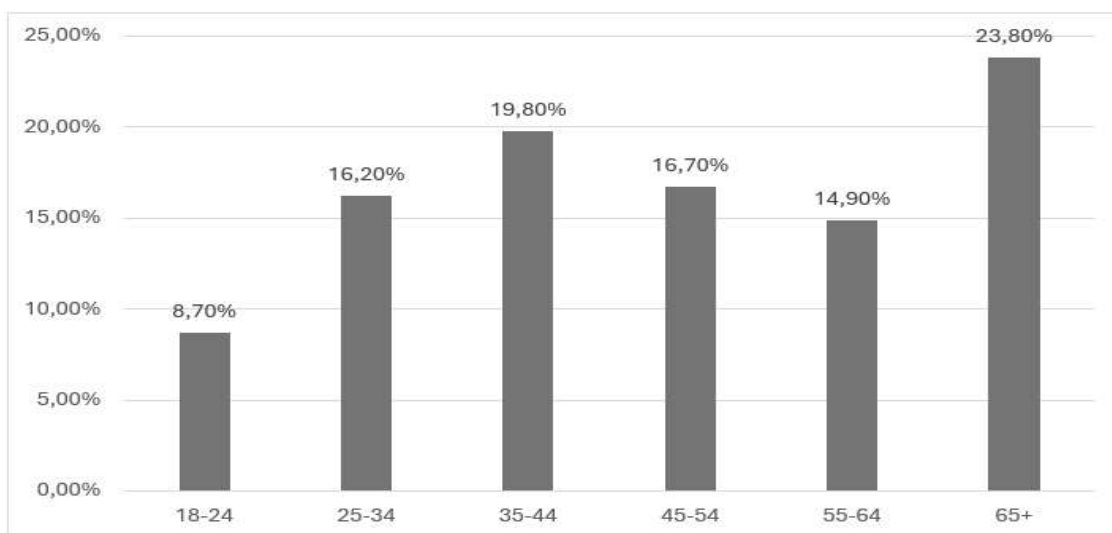
The breakdown of the sample by quota-matched variables - gender and age - is shown in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1: *Gender breakdown of the research sample in percentage term*



Source: own elaboration.

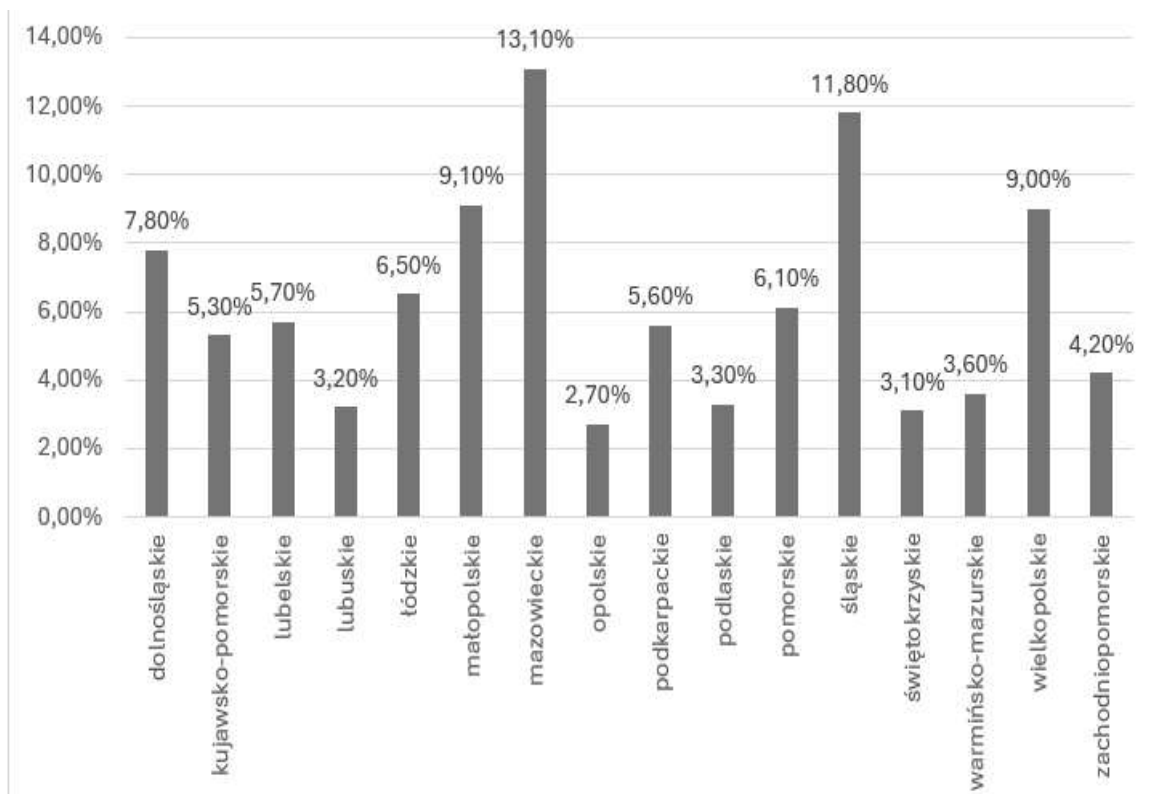
Figure 2: *Distribution of the research sample by age in percentage terms*



Source: own elaboration.

In terms of place of residence, 421 (39.4%) respondents declared they lived in a rural area, while 648 (60.6%) declared they lived in a city. In the latter group, a city of up to 20 thousand inhabitants was inhabited by 203 (19.0%) respondents, a city of over 20 thousand but up to 50 thousand inhabitants was inhabited by 77 (7.2%) respondents. A city of over 50,000, but up to 100,000 inhabitants was inhabited by 46 (4.3%) respondents. 240 (22.5%) respondents lived in a city with more than 100,000 to 500,000 inhabitants, and 82 (7.7%) respondents lived in cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants. The breakdown of respondents by province of residence is presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Respondents' place of residence by province (voivodeship) in percentage terms

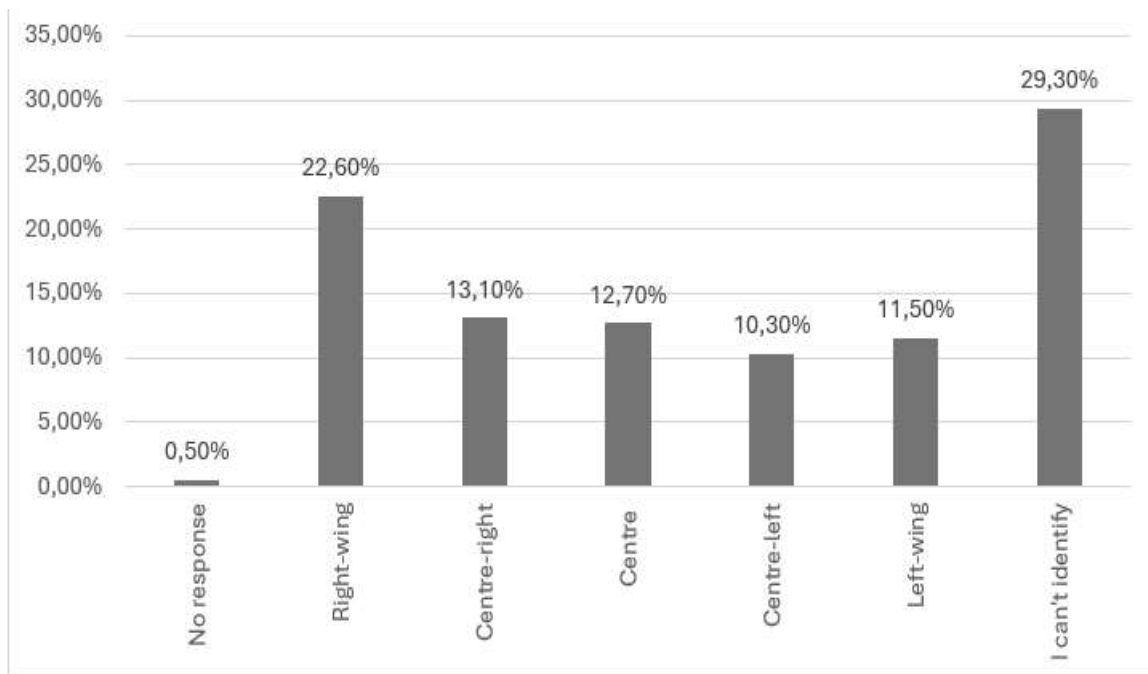


Source: own elaboration.

The metric section of the questionnaire also examined other variables, which, however, were not representative strata of measurement. These included, for example, the education of the respondents.

The political views declared by respondents varied. These are shown in Figure 4

Figure 4: *Political views declared by respondents*

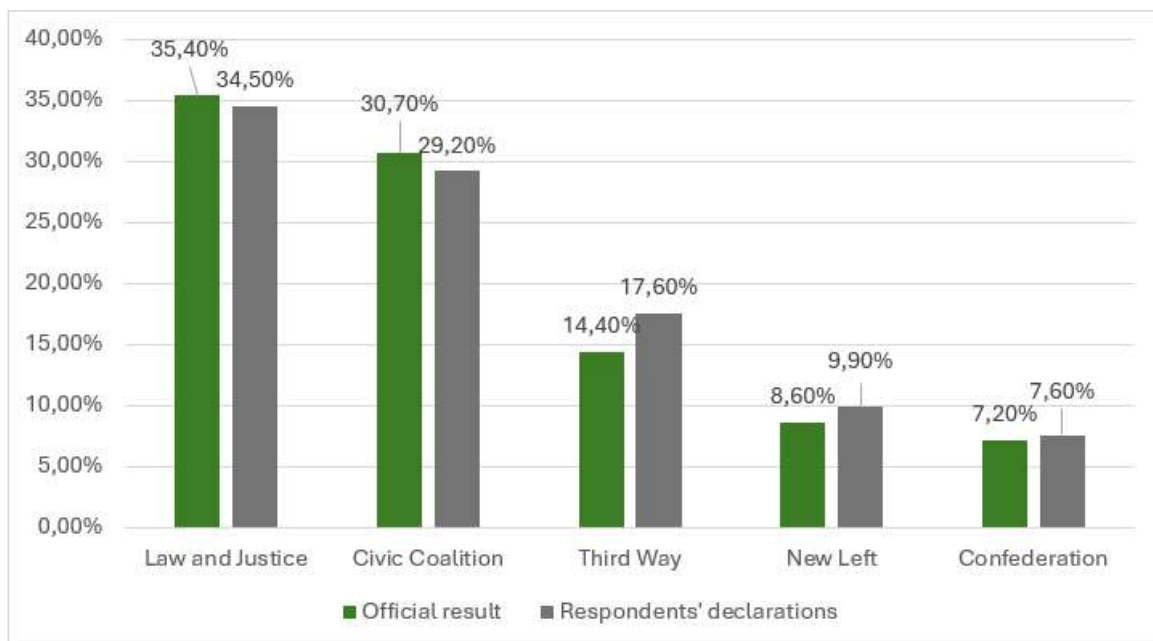


Source: own elaboration.

5 people (0.5%) chose not to answer this question. 242 respondents (22.6%) declared having right-wing views. Centre-right views were closest to 140 respondents (13.1%). 136 respondents (12.7%) declared holding centrist views. 110 respondents (10.3%) held centre-left views and 123 (11.5%) held left-wing views. The largest group - 313 respondents (29.3%) indicated the answer 'don't know/can't tell'.

As for the voting preferences presented by the respondents in 2023, they seemed to mostly coincide with the official election results presented by the State Electoral Commission. This is evident in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Respondents' election preferences in 2023 against the official results of the elections to the Sejm of the Republic of Poland



Source: own elaboration based on data from the State Election Commission (Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza).

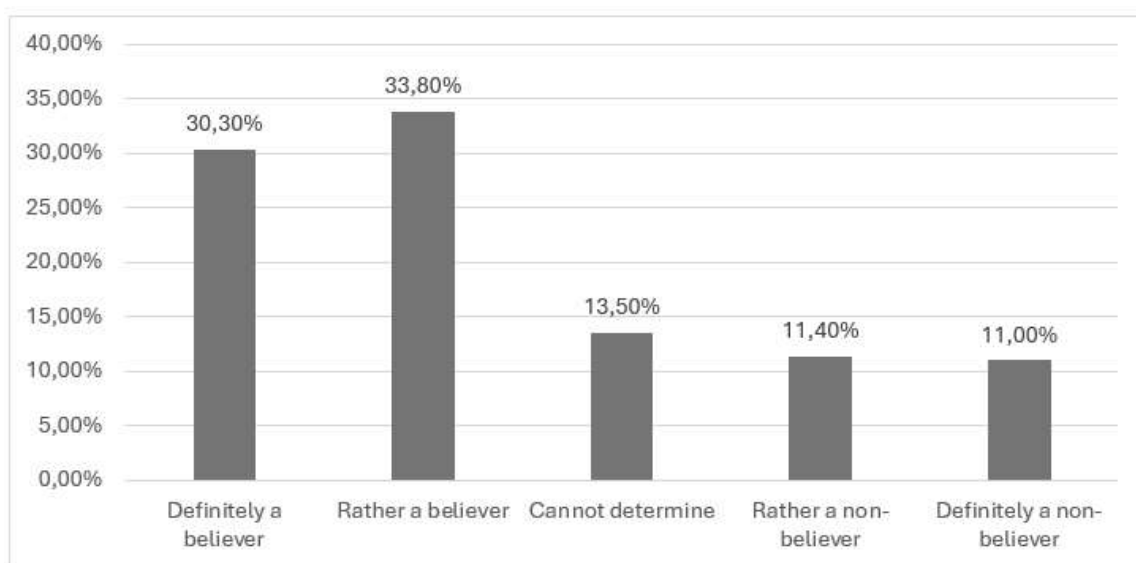
However, the declared voter turnout in the survey exceeded the actual turnout. 933 respondents (87.3%) declared their vote for a specific election committee in 2023. The actual turnout for the 2023 parliamentary elections was 74.4%.

The survey conducted in this way was then subjected to statistical analysis, carried out using SPSS Statistics software. In the course of the overall analyses, missing responses or incomplete responses were rejected for specific analyses. Due to the nature of the analyses carried out, the focus was on the analysis of frequency tables and cross-tabulations, which sufficiently allowed the necessary analyses to be carried out, indicating significant conclusions.

2 RESULTS

Consideration of the relationship between religiosity and respondents' voting preferences began with an indication of the religiosity of the surveyed group itself. This was initially done at the level of the individual declarations of the respondents. The distribution of respondents' declarations of religiosity is presented in Figure 6.

Figure 6: *Distribution of respondents' declarations of religiosity in percentage terms²*



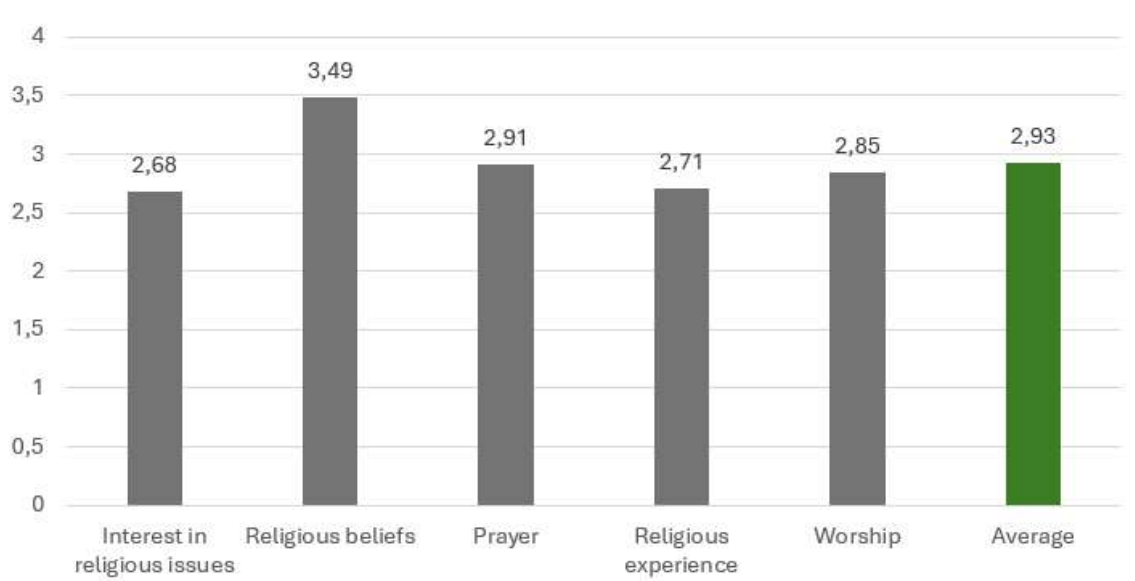
Source: own elaboration.

On a declarative level, more than 64% of respondents describe themselves as believers. A total of more than 22% of the respondents consider themselves to be non-believers. It is interesting to note the indication of 13.5% of those who could not specify whether they are believers or not. This percentage seems to represent the same group that, at the time of the 2020 National Census, just over 20% refused to answer the question on religious affiliation (Koseła, Grabowska, 2024).

This fact, as well as issues related to the changes in religiosity evident in Poland, urged us to reach for a more sophisticated tool for measuring religiosity. This was, as already mentioned, the Centrality of Religiosity Scale. The average responses to each of the five dimensions of religiosity relevance are shown in Figure 7.

¹ Scale mean: 1-5: 2,38; median: 2,0; dominant: 2; SD: 1,326.

Figure 7: Mean responses to the five CRS dimensions of religiosity relevance³



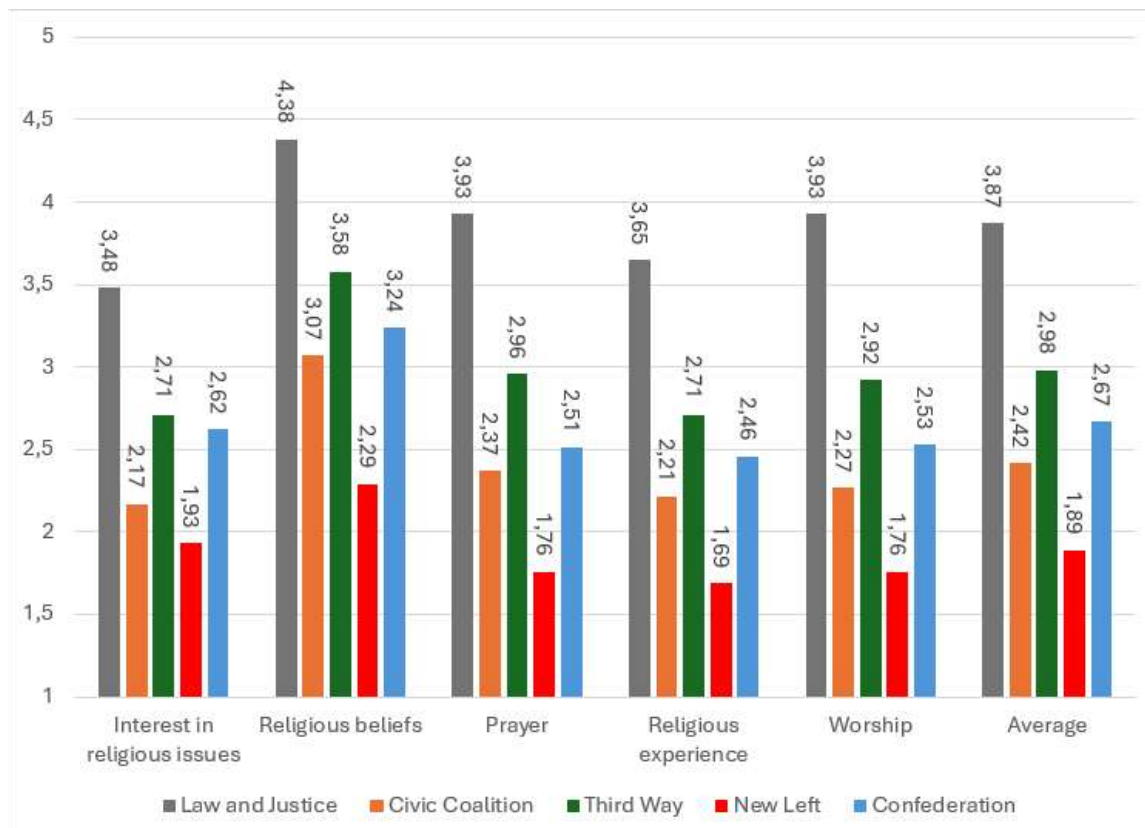
Source: own elaboration.

Although the mean of the five-point declarative scale was 2.38, the mean of the also five-point CRS scale was already 2.93. This means that subconsciously religiosity is more important to the overall respondents than in their own evaluations. The graph indicates that respondents' interest in religiosity and religious experience in their lives are most below average, while respondents' religious beliefs are strongest among them.

After pointing out the relationship described above confirming that it is the CSR that provides a reliable and complete indication of respondents' religiosity, taking into account the nuanced nature of the problem, an attempt was made to link religiosity to the voting preferences of the group surveyed as expressed in the 2023 general elections. To this end, the averages for all dimensions of relevance of the respondents' religiosity were crossed with the declarations of their electoral preferences. In this way, characteristics of the religiosity of the electorates of the five electoral committees that won representation in the Polish Parliament were prepared. These were: Law and Justice, Civic Coalition, Third Way, New Left and the Confederation.

³ 1-5 Scale mean: 2,93; Statistics of the following dimensions: (1) Interest in religious issues: median: 3.0; dominant: 3; SD: 1.195; (2) Religious beliefs: median: 4.0; dominant: 5; SD: 1.337; (3) Prayer: median: 3.0; dominant: 2; SD: 1.400; (4) Religious experience: median: 3.0; dominant: 2; SD: 1.301; (5) Worship: median: 3.0; dominant: 2; SD: 1,39

Figure 8: Mean responses to the five CRS dimensions of religiosity relevance among voters of each political party



Source: own elaboration.

The analysis of the data collected in the chart above shows that the electorates of the different political parties vary considerably in terms of religiosity. Importantly, religiosity corresponds to the ideological profiles of the political parties. The electorate of Law and Justice, which often refers to Christian heritage and values, is by far the most religious of the electorates of all political parties with parliamentary representation. The electorate of the Third Way and the Confederation should be considered as moderately religious voters. The former of these committees can be described as centrist, while the latter as right-wing, but both of them declare respect for the Christian tradition. The electorate of the ideologically centre-left Civic Coalition and the left-wing New Left should be considered the least religious voters. The ideological embedding of Polish political parties on the conservatism-liberalism axis would be an ideal reflection of the religiosity of their electorate, set on an identical axis.

CONCLUSION

The entirety of the considerations carried out allows linking the religiosity of voters in Poland with their electoral preferences. The aim of the present research, which was to attempt to differentiate the religiosity of Poles and its connection with their electoral preferences expressed during the 2023 parliamentary elections, has been achieved.

The analysis allowed a number of important conclusions to be drawn. Firstly, the religiosity of Poles in the declarative sphere differs from their actual religiosity, expressed through the use of the Centrality of Religiosity Scale, a scale that has proved to be very useful in view of the changes in religiosity in Poland, consisting in its individualisation and gradation in the lives of individuals. Indeed, the results of the analysis show that religiosity at the conscious level is often defined less significantly than at the subconscious level.

Secondly, the analysis showed that the degree of religiousness of the respondents thus determined differentiates their voting preferences. The analysis showed a correlation that the more religious the respondent, the more often he/she declares support for ideologically conservative groupings, while the less religious the respondent, the more willingly he/she transfers his/her support to liberal and left-wing ideological groupings, which may indicate religiosity as one of the key axes of sociopolitical divisions in Poland, referring positively to the social cleavage theory. These observations also made it possible to positively address all proposed hypotheses.

The whole analysis carried out proved that the social cleavage theory, proposed in the 1960s, by Stein Rokkan and Seymour Lipset, especially the division into rival actors: Church and State as one of the key axes of sociopolitical dispute, is still relevant today. Using a revision of some of its assumptions, explaining the place of religion in Poland through this prism, especially after the 2023 parliamentary elections, is possible and legitimate. This is because the analysis has shown that Law and Justice voters are those who should be considered the most religious. At the opposite pole would be the voters of the Civic Coalition and the New Left, who are religious to the least extent.

The demands to revise or terminate the concordat and to limit the role of the Church in the state are, in a way, a continuation of the conflict of the Church in Poland with the partitioners, occupiers and later with the state authorities during the People's Republic of Poland. Even at a time when the Church appeared to be close to the state authorities, there was rivalry

on many levels. The key here is to point out that the State-Church rivalry is a large and significant social conflict, arising many years ago, so it fully exhausts the historical aspect, which confirms the validity of the application of the social cleavage theory.

Religiousness is therefore a very important factor in shaping Poles' electoral preferences. The overall analysis conducted also confirms observations made in other countries (Langsæther, 2019; Norris, Inglehart, 2011; Olson, Green, 2006; Raymond, 2011) and in Polish studies of recent years (Pieniężny, 2024; Turska-Kawa, Wojtasik, 2017). This does not mean, however, that continuing to conduct this type of analysis is without justification. On the contrary - in view of the dynamic changes in the place and role of religiosity both in the state, society and in the individual lives of individuals, cyclical research on the indicated topic seems to be necessary and essential.

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