
POLITICAL SOURCES OF SECULARISATION PROCESSES IN POLAND

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Abstract

The aim of the presented research is to analyse the political sources of secularisation processes in Poland. In specific circumstances, the sphere of politics may be a predictor of secularisation processes. This can be fostered by a strong link between state structures and religious institutions. In the course of the research procedure, two potential political sources of secularisation processes were identified: institutional and social ones. The institutional one involves the acquisition of political relevance by new party movements with secularisation-oriented programme assumptions. This is considered in particular in terms of their non-adherence to the traditional shape of the left-right dyad. The social source of secularisation processes may involve the emergence of populist attitudes among the general public. Political populism can be a factor in reducing individuals' motivation to follow traditional rules. It may also weaken the ties to traditional political parties. The analysis has shown that in Poland, political factors are a weak source of secularisation processes. This is due both to the poor institutionalisation of new political parties in the Polish party system and to the generally negligible presence of populist attitudes in the Polish society.

Keywords: secularisation, new political parties, populism, religiousness

1. Introduction

One of the most characteristic social traits of Poles is their religiousness. In research conducted since the end of the 20th century, the percentage of people declaring themselves as believers has never dropped below 90%. Importantly, the group of believers is very homogeneous in terms of the religion they follow, as over 90% of them declare themselves to be members of Catholic Church community. The high level of religiousness of Poles has left its mark on the political sphere. This is due to the fact that electoral participation in Poland is most strongly correlated with religiousness. The comparison of religious involvement and electoral behaviour shows interesting results, as a clear positive correlation between electoral activity and the level (intensity) of religious practice is observable; more likely to participate in elections where those who

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have declared a strong commitment to religion (64.9% vs. 48.9%). Sporadic religious involvement was more often declared by respondents inactive in elections (45.2% vs. 32.5%) [1]. As a result, the Polish parliament and the government are composed of parties which are either openly favourably inclined towards the Catholic Church or at least neutral.

This translates into a special institutional status for the Catholic Church (and to a smaller extent also for other religious denominations). The preamble to the Polish Constitution contains a reference to God, and relations with the Vatican were defined by means of a concordat, which is a special kind of international agreement. The Catholic Church also benefits from special treatment in economic terms. It is exempt from many taxes, or pays them to a minimum extent compared to other entities. Clergymen employed in schools to conduct religion education are paid from the state budget just like the other teachers. Many state institutions (e.g. the military, police, health care and tax police) have chaplains paid from their budgets. Under the concordat, the state maintains several Catholic universities and many others have faculties of Theology, operating under special principles and run by local bishops. The Media Law obligates the media to respect Christian principles. All this shows the symbiosis of the society, the state and the Catholic Church, bonded together by the above-average religiosity Poles compared to many other European societies.

In 2018, the Pew Research Centre (PRC) published a report entitled *The Age Gap in Religion Around the World*, which investigated changes in religiousness in 108 countries. According to its findings, Poland is one of the countries with the fastest rate of decline in religiousness among younger people. The PRC's methodology was based on comparing declarations of religiousness among younger people (aged 18-39) and older people (aged 40+). In two of the dimensions of religiousness that were examined, Poles turned out to be the global leaders in terms of generational religiosity decline. In the first dimension, which compared weekly attendance at mass, the older group had 29 percentage points (pp) more indications than the younger ones (55% vs. 26%). The second dimension compared the percentage of declarations of respondents who described religion as very important in their lives. The difference between the declarations was slightly smaller than in the first case (23 pp, 40% vs. 16%), but still the highest among the countries analysed [2].

The aforementioned study provides context not only for a diagnosis of Poles' religiousness in the younger and older group, but also for comparison with other nations. In terms of the declared importance of religion in one's life, Poles ranked fourth in Europe, with 30% of the respondents indicating this importance, (just behind Romania with 50%, Croatia with 42% and Portugal with 36%). The specific nature of Polish religiousness can also be seen in the comparison of declarations of religious practices. In both groups, as opposed to most European countries, the percentage of indications of participation in religious services is significantly higher compared to daily prayer declarations (26% vs. 14% in the 18-39 group and 55% vs. 39% in the older group) [2]. The

data quoted above may therefore indicate the superficial motivations of religiousness. It may be more folk religiosity, more ritualistic than transcendental in its nature.

The analysis of the PRC's report in relation to Polish religiousness inspired an investigation of the impact of one of the potential sources of secularisation in Poland, understood as the fading of religious beliefs, convictions, and practices in modern societies. In fact, the authors of the report assume that, apart from the classic patterns of secularisation of European societies, one of the reasons for the decline in religiosity among younger Poles involves political determinants, connected with the cessation of political stimulation of pro-religious attitudes, displayed by the older people. Socialisation of the older generation including in the political sense, took place when the Catholic Church in Poland was openly opposing the communist ideology and its emanation in the form of the socialist state structure. This experience drove the ossification of religiousness in the lives of the generations socialised in the period before the democratic change of 1989. The younger group is deprived of the experience of witnessing the Catholic Church participating in the overthrow of communism. Instead, they can perceive it as an entity taking a side current political disputes, which can undoubtedly make religious involvement less attractive for Poles.

Therefore, since the engagement of the Catholic Church in the fight against communism was a factor in the clericalisation of social attitudes of people socialised at that time, mechanisms can be assumed to exist that influence secularisation of attitudes among the younger generation. Apart from the already classic interpretations of such a process, referring to the individualisation theory [3, 4] or to the theory of religious economy [5; M. Opfinger, *Religious Market Theory vs. Secularization: The Role of Religious Diversity Revisited*, Diskussionsbeitrag, Working Paper 475, 2011], one possible explanation is that political determinants are involved. Therefore, the research question put forward in the paper is as follows: Is politics a source of secularisation in contemporary Poland? Two areas, the institutional and the social one, were analysed as potential areas of impact of politics on the secularisation process. The first one explored the secularisation potential of the party system in terms of creating new political movements. In the social area, potential sources of secularisation were sought in the possible links between religiousness and political populism among the general public.

2. Secularisation processes in Poland

In contemporary scientific research, secularisation is a concept that involves an attempt of providing a model description of several phenomena: (1) the formal and functional separation of the sacred and profane in political systems, often understood as a general contemporary historical trend and a normative condition for liberal democracies to be able to function; (2) the shift of religion from the public to the private sphere, understood as 'emancipation'

from religious norms and institutions; and (3) the fading of religious beliefs, convictions, and practices in modern societies, often postulated as a universal process of development of humanity [6]. It is specifically the third approach, which sees in secularisation a tendency to move away from traditional patterns of social behaviour, which provides the context for the research presented in this paper. In fact, since the findings of the PRC research cited in the Introduction prove that religiousness of Poles has been changing, the political factors that may influence the observed transformations of religious attitudes constitute a natural field for scientific explorations.

Secularisation, understood in the context of fading religious beliefs, models, convictions and practices, may begin to affect Poland several decades later compared to Western European countries. This would be the case despite the fact that in the late 20th/early 21st century, some researchers saw religion and churches in Central and Eastern European countries as the biggest winners of the system transformation process [7]. Perhaps the reintroduction of the sacred sphere back into the public space, which was a consequence of the collapse of the socialist bloc, gave rise to such claims, but above all on the institutional level. Churches and religion, treated by the communist authorities as hostile institutions, could once again operate freely as part of the democratisation processes. In-depth comparative research on the transformation of religiousness in the area discussed here did not provide evidence of any homogeneous patterns of secularisation or religious revitalisation. As far as the intensification of secularisation tendencies is concerned, the differences revealed in the individual countries were explained, on the one hand, with the earlier religious structure and the highly repressive approach of the communist authorities towards religion and churches (e.g. in Czechia and East Germany), and in the case of stagnation of religiosity, with the processes of economic and social modernisation (Slovenia and Estonia). On the other hand, in countries resisting secularisation (e.g. Poland, Lithuania, Croatia), the causes maintaining religiosity were sought in the homogeneous nature of the national and religious structure, or the conflict-ridden nature of the system transformations after 1989 (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina) [8].

Apart from the aforementioned drivers of the high level of declared religiousness in the first two decades after the democratic breakthrough, the reasons for the stability of religious formation among Poles can be sought in two more sources. The first one is the role of Christianity, connected not only with the 1,000 years of ties between state and religion (in 966 AD, Polish Duke Mieszko I officially accepted Christianity as the country's dominant religion, and there have never been any religious wars), but also with contemporary events. After World War II, the Catholic Church, despite various repressions, was a means for conveying the ideas of political freedom and opposition against totalitarianism. This was a particular situation, as the role of institutional religious ties in other communist states was much weaker [9]. The reasons for this difference can be sought, for instance, in the multi-religious nature of some states (the presence of many denominations, without any of them prevailing) or

in the religious dimension of the social structure in which the majority of people self-identifying as atheists (e.g. Czechia). In addition, unlike the undemocratic countries in Western Europe in the second half of the 20th century (such as Spain and Portugal), the Catholic Church openly challenged the undemocratic authorities, which had a significant impact on the social legitimization of such governments after the democratic breakthrough. This is all the more so since the peaceful transition from communism to democracy was possible also thanks to the attitude of the Catholic Church, which supported the democratic opposition circles and was an active mediator when the successive stages and course of democratisation processes were determined.

Another reason for the initial weakness of the secularisation movements can be seen in the election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła as Pope, who took the name of John Paul II. This took place in 1978, during the so-called Cold War between East and West. The Polish Catholic Church was definitely strengthened, also in domestic relations with the uncompromising communist activists, by the fact that its member became the supreme pontiff for all of the world's Catholics. The pope's official visits to Poland became an opportunity for large-scale demonstrations against the communist authorities (until 1989, John Paul II had not been accepted by any other communist country). During those demonstrations, support was expressed for national ideas, the Solidarity movement and Lech Wałęsa. Already after the overthrow of communism, divisions appeared within the Polish Catholic Church and among the faithful in terms of the interpretation of John Paul II's teachings, especially with regard to his support for European integration. While the pope would repeatedly support these aspirations, the fundamentalists among the faithful and among the hierarchs were unambiguously opposed to European integration, seeing it as a threat to both the Catholic Church and to national sovereignty [10]. The origin of secularisation processes in Poland should perhaps be seen here, in the objection against the anti-modernisation attitude of the Catholic Church.

The PRC's aforementioned report captured a new phenomenon in Poland referred to as the *Age Gap in Religion*, not identified in research on religiousness conducted cyclically for over 20 years. In a report from the same year as the one by the PRC, entitled *Religiousness of Poles and Evaluation of the Situation of the Catholic Church*, containing findings from a survey carried out by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS), declared religiousness remained at a similar level as over the previous 20 years. The number of people declaring themselves as believers was 92% (with fluctuations from 92% to 97% in the respective period), with 8% declaring themselves as non-believers (with fluctuations from 3% to 8% in the respective period) [11]. On the other hand, statistics of the Catholic Church reveal a decrease in the percentage of believers attending Sunday mass (*dominicanos*) 41.5% vs. 36.9% and stagnation in the percentage of those receiving communion (*communicantes*) 16.9% in the years 2009-2019 [12]. The described inconsistency between the results of the studies quoted above provides the basis for searching for sources of a potential secularisation process that would be specific to Poland. Focus is placed on analyses of the

diversity of political attitudes among Polish Catholics. The findings show that this is not a homogenous group in terms of political declarations. Three different types of attitudes can be distinguished within it: a fundamentalist, an inclusive and a protesting one. Fundamentalists are the most uncompromising Catholics of all the groups identified. Their views on the world are formed on the basis of religious principles and norms. Inclusionists would like to expand the community of fellow worshippers, but using positive incentives. Their behaviour is based on religious principles, but they also have high tolerance for people following canons other than religion. Protesters seek a new institutional sphere for the Catholic Church. They do not deny the canons of religion, but are of the opinion that some of its rules have lost their *raison d'être* due to the progress of civilization, and should be adapted to the new socio-political contexts. This last group may have the most significant potential in terms of driving secularisation attitudes that might explain the results of the PRC's study. Given the specific nature of the protesters' group, the sources of their attitudes can be sought in the political sphere. They demand a change in the institutional formula of operation of the Catholic Church by reducing its ties to state structures [13]. They can therefore, on the one hand, search for supporters for their attitude in political populism, due to the latter's nature, as its basic dimension involves demanding a change of the existing status quo. On the other hand, they can seek support in the institutional dimension of politics, whose most creative element is the party system. This involves in particular new political parties.

3. New political parties

One of the most important determinants shaping the Polish party system is the religiousness of Polish voters. Its consequence is that most relevant political parties refer, in their axiology, directly and positively to the social teachings of the Catholic Church. One of the indicators of the internal dynamics of party systems is the emergence of new political parties. This is why the emergence of a relevant party with a pro-secularisation programme appeal would be an important indicator of potential secularisation processes. This would be the case in particular if it continued to be represented in parliament for more than one term.

Three main models of their formation can be indicated [14]. The first one involves the possibility of indicating genuinely new parties. The second model refers to a split within an existing party or secession of some politicians from it to create a new grouping. The third model is to some extent the inverse of the second one, and consists in a re-split, i.e. two or more parties merging into a single grouping [15]. For the purpose of further analyses, new parties are defined as ones which are not successors of earlier parliamentary parties, have a new name and structure, and their main leaders do not include any main figures active so far in politics (presidents, prime ministers or prominent ministers) [16].

The mechanism of creating new parties determines the factors conducive to their emergence. The first factor enabling the creation of new groupings is a significant event that changes the existing logic of the party system's functioning. The second line of research into the creation of separate new parties involves an analysis of organisational processes. This distinction is made from the point of view of the normative and functional procedure of creation of new groupings. Finally, the third factor driving their emergence involves the new socio-political cleavages that define socially and politically relevant issues. They can create ideological and programmatic niches, filled by the new party entities [17]. In functional terms, the new socio-political cleavages do not mean ones that have just emerged. They can also include ones that already functioned in the public consciousness, but were politically inactive. Their basis did not constitute an important plane of political discourse.

Given the dynamics of the changes taken place in the Polish party system after 1989, it is precisely the role of socio-political cleavages as a mechanism driving the creation of new political parties that seems to have the greatest secularisation potential. The classic state-church division is one of the foundations structuring the left-right dyad. It divides the space of political competition into the secular and secularisation-oriented left, on the one hand, and the conservative right referring to religious values, on the other hand [18]. Therefore, a factor indicating possible secularisation processes would be the appearance in the party system of a relevant political party with an unambiguously pro-secularisation profile. The criterion of political relevance in the context described above should consist in having parliamentary representation. This will prove the ability to generate politically significant electoral support around the ideas the party promotes.

For further analyses, it is important to assume 1989 as the year of divide in terms of the nature of the Polish party system. It is no random turning point, as it results from the modification of the party system functioning in the late 20th century. This makes it possible to distinguish clearly the parties functioning before and after that year. As far as Poland and the Central European countries are concerned, the differentiating event in this respect was the fall of communism and its consequences for the emergence of the two separate groups of parties. The first group consisted of Old Regime Parties, originating either institutionally or through their political leaders from grouping operating within the framework of real socialism. The second one was represented by groupings in opposition to the post-communist parties, stemming either organisationally or personally from anti-communist forces and referred to as New Regime Parties [19]. The proposed modification consists in including in the group of Old Regime Parties all those orienting themselves on the basis of the post-communist division (both the post-communist and the post-Solidarity ones). New Regime Parties, on the other hand, would include those not referring to this division either historically or personally.

Since the 2001 parliamentary elections, when the first New Regime Parties passed the threshold of political relevance, only five genuinely new parties have gained representation in the Polish Sejm. However, the sources of their success have been different, just like the systems of political reference in the respective periods of their functioning. What is particularly interesting, none of the new parties successful before 2019 have been able to sustainably institutionalise their parliamentary existence. After one or two terms of office, they would sink into political oblivion. This may indicate a certain characteristic of the Polish party system – the tendency to negatively verify new parliamentary parties. This would happen regardless of whether the new parties actually participated in the government: Liga Polskich Rodzin [League of Polish Families] (LPR) and Samoobrona [Self-Defence] (S), or were in opposition: Ruch Palikota [Palikot's Movement] (RP), Kukiz'15 (K'15), Nowoczesna [Modern] (N) and Konfederacja [Confederation] (K). All six groupings mentioned above had significant programmatic determinants (Euroscepticism: LPR and S, anticlericalism: RP, liberalism: N, and conservatism: K'15 and K), they were anti-establishment, and had charismatic leaders. However, only RP had an unambiguously anticlerical programme message.

The sources of RP's electoral success in 2011 can also be sought on the social plane. The party could in this case express attitudes and views not represented among the existing groupings, but important for a part of the general public. When one looks for the link between RP's success and the socio-political cleavages, attention is instantly drawn to the anticlerical orientation, referring to the division of Church and state, one of the more primitive and universal axes of conflict in democratic societies. This cannot be described as a new socio-political cleavage, but until 2011, despite attempts made by various political forces to refer to it, it was not a strong political differentiator for the general public. The reasons for the absence of significant impact in its case can be sought for instance in the homogeneous social structure in Poland, with the vast majority of Poles declaring themselves to be Catholic believers. Only RP saw the right moment to tap the political potential of anticlericalism. This happened in the wake of the events after the plane crash in which President Lech Kaczyński died. One of the political consequences was the conflict over the placement of a cross in front of the Presidential Palace. It was a symbolic emanation of the division of into a Catholic and a secular Poland. The polarisation of social attitudes around this issue led to a fiercer socio-political conflict between state and church, and consequently to greater social attention being paid to such issues concerning the Catholic Church. These included the economic privileges of the Church, state funding of religious instruction in schools, the lack of state influence on the core curriculum of religious instruction, or the issue of paedophilia among the clergy. All this provided RP with the basis for promoting the idea of a modern, secular state, which could appeal to some voters, defining the space of political competition with the concepts of modernisation and traditionalism. In fact, the inclinations of its voters revealed in opinion polls proved that they were expecting political

innovation. For more than a fifth of RP voters, the party's anticlerical demands turned out to be decisive in terms of their potential willingness to vote for it, and for almost another fifth, it was about representing a modern and modernisation-oriented vision of Poland, which can also be indirectly linked to the demands for a stronger separation between the Catholic Church and the state, as RP's voters were characterised by their secularism and a sceptical attitude towards the Catholic Church and religion. RP voters were also significantly younger than the supporters of other parties, which coincided with a lower level of religiousness [20].

The analysis presented indicates that a certain potential for creating secularization processes has been noticed in the party system. It involves the acquisition of features of political relevance by genuinely new political parties. Of five such cases in the 21st century, one referred directly to the idea of social modernisation by reducing the role of religion in the public sphere. However, it should be noted that after achieving electoral success (10.02% of votes in the 2011 elections), RP started losing support quickly, and was forced to run in a coalition with other left-wing groupings in the subsequent election (under the new name of *Twój Ruch* [Your Move(ment)]). Despite this tactical move, their lists still failed to obtain the support they needed to pass the electoral threshold and participate in the distribution of seats. Secondly, the pro-secularisation programme appeal of RP was primarily campaign-related. Once the party entered the parliament, it did practically nothing, apart from empty political gestures, to implement the secular state project outlined in the campaign.

4. Political populism

Political populism is a phenomenon that may reduce individuals' motivation to follow traditional rules. It may also weaken the ties to traditional political parties, causing electoral volatility indicators to rise [21]. The ossification of the party system around matters embedded in Christian values should therefore be a factor limiting the possibility of populist attitudes emerging in Poland. This is particularly the case in view of the elections taking place in the 21st century, in which the winners forming the government since 2005 have been parties of an unambiguously Christian Democratic nature. Political populism is an attitude that opposes the dominant social values [22]. Its main premise is that politics should express the general will of the people [23]. Some researchers also point to its quasi-religious connotations, defining "populism as a political style that sets 'sacred' people against two enemies: 'elites' and 'others'" [24]. The religious context of populism is determined by its specific nature, especially when some populist movements make direct reference to religious values [25]. This reference makes it possible to distinguish between what is "ours and good", and what is "foreign and bad" [26]. In addition, some religious institutions are capable of mobilising the potential of populist movements [27]. Sometimes they will even organise such activities themselves. An example of this relationship in Poland is the social movement centred around

Redemptorist Father Tadeusz Rydzyk. He runs a foundation which owns for instance some nationwide media: a television (Trwam), a radio (Maryja) and a daily newspaper (Nasz Dziennik) [28].

Compared to the classic patterns of political populism in consolidated democracies, this phenomenon has its specificities in Poland and in Central Europe [29]. The 30 years of Polish history after the democratic breakthrough were characterised by low activity of the part of populist parties and movements, especially in terms of their political significance. The sources of the lack of political relevance or of the low level thereof can be sought in the genetic ossification of the sphere of party politics after 1989. It was built on the model of binary schematisation of the party competition arena. The main forces in the Polish Parliament were groupings with post-communist origins: Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej [Democratic Left Alliance] (SLD), Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe [Polish People's Party] (PSL), or ones stemming from the anti-regime opposition: Unia Wolności [Freedom Union] (UW), Platforma Obywatelska [Civic Platform] (PO), and Prawo i Sprawiedliwość [Law and Justice] (PiS). Such a system of relations blocked to some extent the possibility of classic populist parties gaining parliamentary relevance. In practice, only two of them: Samoobrona [Self-Defence] (S), and Konfederacja [Confederation] (K) can be included in this circle without hesitation.

The relationship between religiousness and populist attitudes in Poland can be presented using the results of research by Agnieszka Turska-Kawa and Waldemar Wojtasik, published in 2020 [30]. In the course of the research procedure, three groups of individuals with different (but internally homogeneous) relations between the variables were identified. They were named by making reference to the dominant level of religiousness and populism. The religious respondents were characterised by an above-average level of religiosity, with moderate levels of populism. The moderate ones displayed average values of each of the highlighted variables. The populists displayed above-average levels of populism and average religiousness. The research proves, therefore, that religiosity is not a driver of populist attitudes in Poland. In the group of individuals with the highest declared religiousness, no tendency was observed for the co-occurrence of components characterising populist political attitudes. The analysis referred to above will support the position that religiousness is associated with pro-social attitudes, behaviour focused on other people's well-being, and values and emotions that support such behaviours.

A mechanism that may constitute a barrier to populist attitudes may be the folk nature of Polish religiousness. The folk religiousness model assumes two zones: a central and a subsidiary one. The former includes religious traditions, symbols, values, and beliefs. The subsidiary zone is associated with popular religiosity. It consists of beliefs people use to give their lives meaning [31]. The folk nature of religiousness assumes inclusive participation through participation in collective practices. They are a manifestation of faith and generate a sense of community with other people. By referring to similar values, people can acquire a sense of meaning not only of their own existence, but also explain their

individual meaning through the prism of the group interest of their fellow believers [32]. The religious involvement mechanism described may provide protection against displays of extremism and radicalism. This is particularly the case if they are based on demands that contradict the rules of the religion followed. Folk religiousness provides a simplified cognitive background for the individual. It makes it possible to combine religious beliefs with the current sphere of politics. Populism, which in its essence defies traditional rules and developed values, will consequently fail to appeal to religious people. Therefore, the fact that Christianity is strongly rooted in the Polish society and has an impact on the sphere of political attitudes of believers may explain the protective function of religiousness in relation to populism [30].

When searching for the political sources of the secularisation process, no political potential for populism was revealed in this area. It was not possible to identify any politically significant movements whose social power could lead to the creation of the political potential of populism with a secularisation-oriented programme appeal. It is difficult to find any relevant groupings demanding secularisation among populist political parties. If S, K'15 and K are classified as populist groupings, it is impossible to attribute any features supporting secularisation to their programme demands. On the contrary, these parties make direct and open reference to the social teachings of the Catholic Church. The case of RP remains separate in this area, as this party's demands, although secularisation-oriented, provided a platform for political competition against the Christian Democratic parties in power since 2005. The party used them as an instrument of political marketing to generate electoral support. After a moderate success in the election, it abandoned them in the parliamentary debate.

5. Conclusions

In the course of the research procedure, the main question put forward concerned the potential impact of the sphere of politics on secularisation processes in Poland. Its legitimacy results from the particular symbiosis between the Catholic Church and the main political parties. This is especially the case in view of the high level of declared religiousness of Poles. The answers to the main research question were sought in the institutional and social areas of the party system. The motivation for this choice was twofold. Firstly, it was due to the measurability of the changes taking place in the institutional area. Each successive election may lead to new political movements gaining relevance. It was important to determine in this respect whether they generated public support as a result of mobilising voters with a pro-secularisation orientation. The second research motivation concerned the possibility of revealing new ideas in the political discourse accompanying election campaigns. Aspects other than those voters used to focus on, in opposition to the mainstream so far, can turn out to have social appeal. At the same time, an analysis of new ideas appearing in the public space suggests that a significant part of them are populist in their nature [33].

The PRC's report, which inspired the in-depth study, was the first major research to signal the possibility of secularisation processes in Poland accelerating. However, even if the conclusions from the American research are considered likely, the analysis of the sources suggests that the sphere of politics is not an important driver of secular attitudes in the Polish society. Consequently, it does not have a significant impact on secularisation processes. This concerns in particular the possibility of a synergy effect appearing in the public discourse sphere between the demands for secularisation and their political institutionalisation, in the form of a relevant political movement. If the political sphere developed an interest in them, their secularising impact could be multiplied as they become the subject of violent political disputes.

The research and findings presented here are exploratory in their nature. They concern a relatively poorly identified phenomenon, namely the influence of the sphere of politics on secularisation processes. They are therefore complementary with regard to classic studies of secularisation processes, whose basic contexts are provided by social modernisation and privatisation of religious belief. The conclusions prove that in specific circumstances, political factors can become a catalyst for secularisation processes. This can be fostered by the wide range of institutional links between state bodies and church structures. At the same time, the research presented here may encourage further explorations in the field of politics and secularisation. The potential fields that can be indicated include the possible influence of the law made by politicians on the creation of secular attitudes in the society, the relations between so-called new populist movements (e.g. anti-vaccine and anti-5G movements, or ones questioning the COVID-19 pandemic) and religiousness, or the search for the sources of the Age Gap in Religion in countries where this phenomenon occurs.

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