
RELIGIOSITY AND NEW POPULISM

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Abstract

Religiosity is a factor influencing political activity. Its impact may support democratic attitudes or encourage populist tendencies. Research so far has not found earlier co-occurrence of religiosity with populist attitudes in Poland. However, the social impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has made it possible to look for changes in this respect. The main social effects in the new populism dimension have involved the strengthening of existing and the emergence of new conspiracy theories. The results of our research have allowed us to positively verify the research model and confirm the conjecture that religiosity is a significant predictor of new populist attitudes, which may contribute to a change of the democratic state idea. Unlike the classical type of populism, understood as an ideology, new populism is explained in terms of worldview, helping individuals to understand the complexity of the surrounding world using functional generalisations.

Keywords: religiosity, new populism, democracy, conspiracy theories, Covid-19

1. Introduction

The importance of religiosity for political activity is investigated in two basic dimensions. In the first one, the researchers assume that religiosity has a positive influence on social competence and the ability to act within a community. Research confirms that religion is a mobilising factor, influencing social engagement [1, 2]. In this approach, religiosity plays an important role, combining faith with social values. This may also point to the socialising functions of religious institutions [3, 4]. The second dimension assumes a competitive function of religious activity for social engagement. This may happen through the reduction of the level of social openness by religious activity [5] and the competitiveness of the citizens' trust in their own religious group at the expense of the overall social capital [6]. Some researchers also see a reductive factor in religiosity for knowledge and social competence of the society at large [7]. Both research dimensions outlined above indicate that religiosity is not neutral for social activism.

An important area in the current research on religiosity addresses its potential influence on the orientation of political activity with regard to the fostering of democratic attitudes. The impact of religiosity on democratic

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attitudes is contextual and results from factors characteristic of specific states and societies [8]. The same religion, in particular national and social contexts, can determine different attitudes towards democracy [9]. Under certain circumstances, religiosity will support democratic attitudes, providing them with a foothold on which the society's political social and political competences can be built [10]. On the other hand, Paris Aslanidis points to religion as one of the factors that can relatively easily undergo the process of political mobilisation and co-occur with populist attitudes [11]. The religious context of populism results from the latter's specificity. This is particularly the case in a situation in which some contemporary populist movements make direct reference to religious values [12].

Recent studies showing the relationships between religiosity and populism in Poland prove that religiosity is not a factor in the creation of populist attitudes [13]. In the group of individuals with the highest declared religiosity, no tendency was observed for the co-occurrence of components characterising populist political attitudes. The study cited here, however, focuses on the classical dimension of populism as a particular type of ideology [14]. The aim of our research is to verify the relationship between religiosity and attitudes classified as new populism [15]. In a manner contrary to the traditional understanding of populism, its new type is understood as a worldview rather than as an ideology [16]. Within this new type, rebellion against the establishment and the need to punish those in power are more important as a mechanism of political activism than as a coherent political vision [17]. Additionally, as opposed to classical populism, the mechanisms mobilising new populist movements rely on social media, resembling techno-populist parties to some extent [18, 19]. For them, modern media provide means for the promotion of their views and mobilisation of supporters [20]. The activation of new populism movements during the Covid-19 pandemic made it possible to study the relationship between such attitudes and religiosity. The new populism attitudes were operationalized on the basis of the most popular conspiracy theories concerning the Covid-19 epidemic. The main research question put forward in the paper is the following: Does religiosity protect against new populism attitudes? In order to specify in more detail the main research problem, the following questions were put forward: (1) What is the relationship between attitudes questioning the Covid-19 pandemic and religiosity? (2) What is the relationship between attitudes opposing the 5G technology and religiosity? (3) What is the relationship between attitudes questioning the effectiveness of vaccines and religiosity?

2. Populism and new populism

Researchers interested in learning about the psychological drivers of populist attitudes have linked them to individual personality traits. Bakker, Rooduijn, and Schumacher argued that populist attitudes must be rooted in personality and determine the choices people make [21]. The theory they

referred to most often was the Big Five personality traits theory. The five-factor personality model includes Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism [22]. Rico, Guinjoan and Anduiza, studying the Spanish population, proved that anger, and not anxiety, as previously thought, correlated more strongly with populist views. They believe that this is due to the tiredness and sense of powerlessness reported by the respondents [23]. Landwehr and Steiner, on the other hand, proved that extraversion and conscientiousness would rather tend to foster anti-populist attitudes, and sought the sources of populism in neurotic traits [24]. Political aspects of populism were also analysed using the Dark Triad of personality described using the dimensions of psychopathy, narcissism and Machiavellianism [25]. Some scholars, when analysing populist attitudes in a political context, argue that authoritarianism, a dominant attitude, and cynicism are conducive to electoral success [26]. Scott Pruysers pointed to important relationships both with the classical Big Five and with the Dark Triad. He proved, in contrast to the Spanish researchers, that conscientiousness and extraversion would correlate significantly positively with populist views, while narcissism would correlate with them negatively [27]. International research by Matthias Fatke demonstrates that no specific personality traits are associated with populist attitudes - there are large differences between countries, which the scholar explained by the geopolitical and economic situation [28]. The presented complexity of the psychological mechanisms influencing populist attitudes consequently suggests that the matter requires further research and analysis.

The complexity of the causes of populist attitudes may have its source in different types of populism. Classical populism is characterised by ideological references. As Jan Werner Müller wrote, "Populism arises with the introduction of representative democracy; it is its shadow" [29]. It is also sometimes described as an ideology [30] opposed to the dominant social values [31] and as one whose premise is that politics should express the general will of the people [32]. Tim Deegan-Krause and Kevin Haughton point to six universal components of classical populism: (1) homogeneity of the people, (2) homogeneity of the elite, (3) glorification of the people, (4) denigration of the elite, (5) unmediated leadership (as befits the sovereignty of the people) and (6) rejection of cooperation or compromise (as befits the friend/enemy dichotomy) [33]. It is thus clear that populism is based on political conflict resulting from not accepting the model of democratic consensus pursued [13]. This may point to the characteristic pattern of their political mobilisation. Populist movements are mobilised not only by party leaders but also in grassroots mobilisation processes. P. Aslanidis believes that populist movements differ from other social mobilisation movements in two key aspects: "(1) they claim to represent a social whole rather than the interests of particular social strata as, for instance, with working-class movements or LGBTQ rights movements, and (2) they generally refrain from negotiating narrow policy concessions from the state, as they seek a wholesale reform of the political regime to restore the sovereignty of the people" [34]. The process of grassroots

mobilisation of populist movements begins with the dissatisfaction of a certain part of the society at large. Social discontent is an essential condition for populist social movements to emerge and thrive. At the same time, the effectiveness of grassroots mobilisation depends to a large extent on the effectiveness of the organisational actions undertaken by their leading activists.

In contrast to the ideological understanding of the classical type of populism [17], new populism is defined as a worldview helping the individual to understand the complexity of the surrounding world through functional simplifications [15]. In its general premises, it identifies political evil with an elite acting against the people [K.A. Hawkins and S. Riding, *Populist attitudes and their correlates among citizens: Survey evidence from the Americas*, ECPR Workshop, 2010]. The basic dichotomy within its framework involves the depiction of conflictual social relations, in which the axis of contention runs between the establishment willing to exploit the society for its own ends and the majority exploited in this manner in a particularistic interest. An essential prerequisite for such an idea is the need to represent and to provide protection for this excluded majority of ordinary people [16]. As Ivan Krastev points out, "But this is a strange version of populism - people revolting not to enact a clear vision of what they want to change but to exact revenge and punishment" [17]. As opposed to the ideological understanding of populism, presenting it in the context of a worldview detaches it from the classical left- and right-wing references. The sources of new populism are phenomena related to the personalisation of political competition [35] or tendencies to replace the role of traditional political institutions with new ones, responding better to the need for direct and immediate actions [36]. One of the sources of success of social movements is a deep distrust of existing political institutions [37], and those from the new populist circles are additionally based on social phenomena that enjoy popularity in the media. Focus on them is fostered by social media, where they get the highest exposure. In practice, it would be very difficult for them to make a presence in the general awareness without the social media [18].

3. Religiosity and democracy in Poland

The relationships between religiosity and democratic attitudes are important for the overall form of political processes and for numerous detailed solutions shaping social relations. The former results from the high degree of declared religiosity among Poles and from the historical and contemporary role of the Catholic Church. In terms of the declared importance of religion in one's life, Poles, with 30% of the respondents indicating this importance, rank fourth in Europe (behind Romania with 50%, Croatia with 42% and Portugal with 36%) [38]. At the same time, declared religiosity has remained at a similar level over the last 20 years. In 2018, the share of people declaring themselves as believers was 92% (fluctuating from 92% to 97% in the period discussed), and that of those declaring themselves as non-believers was 8% (fluctuating from 3% to 8% in the respective period) [39]. Prayer is also a recognised indicator of

religiosity. A study from late 2018/early 2019 shows that only Cypriots (70%) pray more often than Poles (53%). However, an analysis of the indicators of the degree of religiosity in the Polish society by specific socio-demographic characteristics shows progressive secularisation, especially among members of the younger generation. While high rates of religiosity are observed in the older part of the population, they are much lower among younger individuals. In the case of respondents aged over 65, the percentage of those who pray at least once a week is 75%, while among those under 24, the share is significantly lower and amounts to 39% [40].

The high level of declared religiosity among Poles can be attributed to two main sources. The first one is the political role of Christianity, present in the history of Poland since its very beginning. It is related not only to the history of the ties between religion and the state, spanning more than a thousand years, but also to contemporary events. After World War II, the Catholic Church, despite the communist 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 communities in other communist states was much weaker [41]. The Catholic Church openly challenged the undemocratic authorities, which had a significant impact on its social legitimation 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 religiosity of Poles can be sought in the 1978 election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła as Pope, who took the name of John Paul II. This happened during the Cold War. 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. During those demonstrations, support was expressed for national ideas, the Solidarity movement and Lech Wałęsa. 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 in regard to his support for European integration. While the pope would repeatedly support these aspirations, the fundamentalists among the faithful and among the Church hierarchs were unambiguously opposed to European integration, seeing it as a threat to both the Catholic Church and to national sovereignty. It is in these events that the potential impact of religion on the creation of populist attitudes and movements in Poland should be sought [42].

4. The Covid-19 pandemic and new populism

The political consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic include the activation of populist attitudes and movements. A large part of them are based on new or previously existing conspiracy theories. Belief in conspiracy theories is fostered by the crisis of trust in science among the general public, fuelling populist movements [43]. At this point, it is worth referring to research concerning public trust in scientists and in Science. The percentage of the population that does not trust scientists is as high as 15%, and one in ten adult Pole do not trust Science [44]. Research on the causes and consequences of belief in conspiracy theories points to their role in undermining trust in the government and in political institutions [45]. In the light of the existing research and given the unprecedented scope and spread of conspiracy theories concerning Covid-19, there are grounds to assume that they may have a negative impact on social activity [J.-M. Eberl, R.A. Huber and E. Greussing, *From Populism to the 'Plandemic': Why populists believe in COVID-19 conspiracies*, SocArXiv, 2020]. In general, conspiracy beliefs can contribute to the weakening of general support for the government [46] and reduce respect for existing provisions of the law [47]. In addition, belief in conspiracy theories may be associated with important life decisions, e.g. questioning the validity of vaccinations is associated with a lower tendency to vaccinate one's child [48], while questioning the safety of the 5G technology is associated with a general reluctance to use modern technologies [49].

In this day and age of demassified communication, conspiracy theories are commonplace and are further intensified at times of crises and of emerging uncertainty concerning the future. In the COVID-19 pandemic situation, conducive conditions were created for the activation of previously existing groups bringing together supporters of such theories, as well as for the emergence of completely new ones. New populist movements organise themselves and function especially in the virtual world, as the Internet provides individuals and groups with autonomy and is largely beyond governmental control. Additionally, one of the effects of the pandemic involves shifting a large part of people's activity online, where they seek information about what was previously unknown and unpredictable (e.g. the SARS-CoV-2 virus). Social networking sites support the process of integration of spatially dispersed supporters of particular social movements, as well as provide a platform for sharing information and mutual support. However, as emphasised in the literature, modern technologies also make it easier for such movements to proclaim their demands [20]. The Internet has not only dramatically reduced the costs of participation in neo-populist movements, but also enables flash mobilisation of their supporters, as well as coordination and organisation of collective action [50]. At the same time, the literature emphasises the fact that the dynamic development of the Internet creates new forms of group belonging. These groups are capable of self-organisation using information transmission networks, omitting or minimising the role of formal organisational leaders [51].

It can be noticed that the processes of institutionalisation of neo-populist movements have moved to a large extent online. The virtual space (e.g. in the form of websites or closed Facebook groups) provides a platform not only for the transmission of information between the supporters of such initiatives, but also for fundraising to finance their activity or to obtain legal assistance [52].

Research conducted in the period following the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak highlighted particular activity on the part of supporters of three conspiracy theories: those denying the existence of the pandemic and treating it as a global conspiracy against ordinary people, those blaming the 5G technology for causing the pandemic and those opposing universal vaccinations against the SARS-CoV-2 virus [J.-M. Eberl, R.A. Huber and E. Greussing, *From Populism to the 'Plandemic': Why populists believe in COVID-19 conspiracies*, SocArXiv, 2020; R. Heilweil, *How the 5G coronavirus conspiracy theory went from fringe to mainstream*, Vox, 24.04.2020; 53]. In the case of theories denying the existence of the pandemic or attributing its origins to deliberate actions of governments, their supporters were reinforced by the positions of influential politicians (e.g. Donald Trump) who expressed doubts about opinions presented by scientists [54]. Parallel to the movements questioning the Covid-19 pandemic as such, there are circles that see the pandemic as being caused by deliberate actions of governments or individuals, e.g. 44% of Republicans and 19% of Democrats in the US believe that Bill Gates is linked to a conspiracy whose aim is to use vaccines as a pretext to implant microchips in humans [A. Romano, *New Yahoo News/YouGov poll shows coronavirus conspiracy theories spreading on the right may hamper vaccine efforts*, Yahoo News, 2020]. In turn, 13% of Australians believe Bill Gates played a role in creating and spreading the coronavirus [55]. The conspiracy theories linking the 5G technology to the Covid-10 pandemic are an extension of pre-existing positions claiming the technology to be particularly harmful [56]. Connecting the 5G technology to the Covid-19 pandemic triggered a revival of conspiracy theories in the respective field [57] and led to attempted destruction of technological infrastructure, seen as responsible for the pandemic [J. Slotkin, *U.K. Cellphone Towers Ablaze As Conspiracy Theories Link 5G Networks To COVID-19*, npr.org, 2020]. Movements opposing vaccines against the SARS-CoV-2 virus are, on their part, an extension of anti-vaccine movements already functioning for quite a long time [58]. Work on the SARS-CoV-2 vaccine and the media attention it got stimulated increased activity of anti-vaccine movements [59].

5. Methods and data

The presented study was conducted in November-December 2020 using the CAWI method through a professional research firm. The nationwide sample consisted of 1,022 individuals, including 533 women (52.2%) and 489 men (47.8%). Among the respondents, the youngest group (aged 24 or less) consisted of N = 207 respondents (20.3%), while the oldest group (aged over 65) was the least numerous one (N = 50, 4.9%). The other groups were respectively: 25-34

(N = 252, 24.7%), 35-44 (N = 232, 22.7%), 45-54 (N = 157, 15.4%) and 55-64 (N = 124, 12.1%). In the studied group, 356 people were residents of rural areas (34.8%). The group of respondents living in urban areas was broken down as follows: residents of towns/cities with a population of up to 20,000 (N = 112, 11%), of 20-100,000 (N = 208, 20.4%), of 100-200,000 (N = 94, 9.2%), and over 200,000 (N = 252, 24.7%).

The research model includes four variables. The first one is *religiosity*. It was measured using the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (C-15) by S. Huber [60] in the Polish adaptation by B. Zarzycka [61]. The scale includes 15 items. The tool contains five subscales: (1) Interest in religious aspects, (2) Religious beliefs, (3) Prayer, (4) Religious experience and (5) Worship. The total score is the sum of the subscale scores and represents a measure of the centrality of the religious system of meanings in the individual's personality. The overall reliability of the scale measured with Cronbach's alpha was 0.93 [61]. The second variable includes anti-pandemic beliefs in terms of opinions about the Covid-19 pandemic (anti-Covid). They were measured with the respondents' taking a position on 10 statements:

1. The Covid-19 pandemic is a tool of government control over the society at large.
2. The Covid-19 pandemic allows the authorities to restrict citizens' rights more easily.
3. The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus was created to increase the profits of pharmaceutical companies.
4. The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus was created for the purpose of depopulation (reducing the Earth's population).
5. The symptoms of SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus infection result from other illnesses (e.g. ordinary flu).
6. The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus was created deliberately in China.
7. The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus was created deliberately in the US.
8. The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus was created by Bill Gates (owner of Microsoft).
9. There are effective ways of treating the symptoms of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, but they are hidden from the general public.
10. Vitamin C in very high doses effectively cures symptoms of SARS-CoV-2 virus infection.

The internal consistency of the scale structured in this manner, measured using Cronbach's alpha, was 0.91 in the presented research.

The third variable concerns beliefs in terms of opinions about the 5G network (anti-5G). They were determined by the respondents' position taken on 10 statements:

1. The 5G network is a tool for government control over citizens.
2. By introducing the 5G network, the authorities want to restrict citizens' rights.
3. By introducing the 5G network, the rich want to be able to exploit the poor.

4. The purpose of introducing the 5G network is to increase the profits of multinational telecommunications companies.
5. The 5G network is harmful to human health.
6. The authorities hide evidence of the harmful impact of the 5G network from the general public.
7. The purpose of introducing the 5G network is depopulation (reduction of the Earth's population)
8. The 5G network increases the likelihood of cancer.
9. The 5G network is responsible for causing the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic
10. The symptoms of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus are caused by the harmful radiation of the 5G network.

The internal consistency of the scale structured in this manner, measured using Cronbach's alpha, was 0.94 in the presented research.

The last variable is the scale of the respondents' anti-vaccine beliefs (anti-vaccination). They were determined by the positions taken on 10 statements:

1. The system of universal and compulsory vaccinations is an instrument of control over the society by the authorities.
2. The state should give parents the freedom to decide whether to have their children vaccinated or not.
3. The compulsory vaccination system does not provide protection against infectious diseases.
4. The compulsory vaccination system is dangerous for people.
5. The purpose of the compulsory vaccination system is to ensure high profits for multinational pharmaceutical companies.
6. Vaccines cause autism.
7. Vaccines cause Asperger's syndrome.
8. Vaccines contain harmful substances, such as mercury.
9. Vaccines cause cancer.
10. Doctors deliberately underestimate the symptoms of VAE (vaccine adverse events).

The internal consistency of the scale structured in this manner, measured using Cronbach's alpha, was 0.93 in the presented research. With regard to all 4 variables, the respondents answered using a 5-point Likert scale.

The study revealed high correlations between the beliefs of the respondents in the studied conspiracy theories (Table 1).

Table 1. Results of correlation analysis for the anti-COVID, anti-5G and anti-vaccination factors.

Conspiracy theories	anti-Covid	anti-5G	anti-vaccination
anti-Covid	1	0.705**	0.704**
anti-5G	0.705**	1	0.648**
anti-vaccination	0.704**	0.648**	1

** - Correlation significant at the level of 0.01 (two-tailed)

To verify the relationships between religiosity and belief in conspiracy theories, regression analysis was conducted separately for each of the theories (Table 2).

Table 2. Regression analysis results for the religiosity - conspiracy theories model.

Conspiracy theories	anti-Covid	anti-5G	anti-vaccination
religiosity	0.225**	0.337**	0.212**

Significance codes: ** $p < 0.01$

The study positively verified the research model. The level of religiosity is in fact a significant predictor of anti-Covid attitudes (beta = 0.225, $p < 0.001$). The model had a good fit to the data $F(1, 1020) = 54.399$, $p < 0.001$ and explained 5.1% of the variance of the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.051$). Also, the level of religiosity is a significant predictor of anti-5G attitudes (beta = 0.337, $p < 0.001$). The model had a good fit to the data $F(1, 1020) = 130.583$, $p < 0.001$ and explained 11.3% of the variance of the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.113$). In the case of anti-vaccination attitudes, religiosity also proved to be a significant predictor (beta = 0.212, $p < 0.001$). The model had a good fit to the data $F(1, 1020) = 47.813$, $p < 0.001$ and explained 4.5% of the variance of the dependent variable ($R^2 = 0.045$).

6. Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to verify the relationships between religiosity and belief in the most popular conspiracy theories being part of the new populism movements. Research questions were put forward for this purpose, specifically addressing the relationships between religiosity and the three major groups of conspiracy beliefs. These beliefs fit within the canon of populist behaviours, as a factor in the loss of trust in conventional political institutions. The results obtained made it possible to validate the research model and to confirm the authors' conjectures as to religiosity being a significant predictor of new populist attitudes that may influence the development of the idea of a democratic state. This type of social mobilisation should to be looked at from a broader perspective. This is linked to the fact that the demands of a part of the population for certain rights, expressed through populist movements, are beginning to appear in the political and media discourse. As noted by P. Aslanidis, "Populist mobilization, under circumstances, can contribute to the further democratization of a certain polity by empowering previously unrepresented social groups and forcing democratically elected governments to address overlooked social problems" [34, p. 318]. The specificity of the new populist movements consists in their weak degree of institutionalisation. Their supporters usually do not have any broader political ambitions, nor are they determined by a desire to gain power. However, they expect their demands to be met, and in this respect they are uncompromising.

The demands formulated by representatives of new populist movements are very specific and, as a matter of principle, non-negotiable. There is no room for concessions or consensus seeking in them. The fact that no compromise is sought demonstrates their strong ideologisation. The studied movements based on conspiracy theories are diverse in their nature in Poland. Just like in other countries, the anti-vaccination movement has the oldest roots. Interestingly, the rise in its popularity is not directly related to Andrew Wakefield's paper in *The Lancet*, linking children's vaccinations to subsequent disease incidence [62]. The paper was later officially retracted by the editors, as one based on falsified research. In the Polish case, the development of anti-vaccination movements is related to opposition against administrative penalties for parents of children refusing to subject the latter to compulsory vaccinations. A significant level of formalisation can be noticed in this particular movement. Its most important milieu is the STOP NOP organisation [63]. Its charter defines, among other things, the rules of admitting new members and electing the authorities of the association as well as determines its formal structure. The organisation also has field structures organising themselves through Facebook.

The anti-Covid movement in Poland is not as extensive or formalised as the anti-vaccination movement, which may be explained by the relatively short period of the pandemic. Its creation was catalysed by the opposition towards restrictions intended to prevent the spread of the virus. The restrictions had two dimensions. One was about limiting freedoms and liberties by way of protective measures (e.g. having people wear face masks) and movement restrictions (e.g. having people quarantine in isolation). The second dimension is related to restrictions on conducting business activity. Naturally, this movement gained a particularly large number of supporters among entrepreneurs. They are precisely the ones who were forced to significantly limit or temporarily shut down their businesses by the lockdown. By challenging the pandemic, they fought against the imposed restrictions with regard to running one's business, seeking to safeguard their interests in this manner. In this case, questioning the pandemic is related not so much to ideological aspects, but has a more economic dimension to it [64]. Interestingly, anti-Covid movements were actually most visible during the campaign before the 2020 presidential election. From the political point of view, they were animated to the greatest extent by politicians of the far-right Confederation party, some of whose leaders openly challenged the pandemic restrictions imposed and claimed that it was a 'plandemic' aimed at restricting civil rights and liberties [65].

The origins of the Polish anti-5G movement are slightly different. Its beginnings are linked to Russian disinformation as part of spreading fake news about the harmfulness of the new technology. Such activities are conducted both through official media, such as the Russia Today television, and through anonymous social media accounts [66]. Information about the link between the Covid-19 outbreak and the 5G technology began to emerge in early 2020 [67] and was quickly picked up by Polish anti-5G movements. They are centred around the 'Right to Life' Association for the Prevention of Electropollution and

the Institute of Civil Affairs. Both NGOs pursue an active information policy through social media, and their representatives have participated for instance in the work of parliamentary committees. Advocates of the anti-5G theory, just like in other countries, have attempted to destroy technical infrastructure used to create the 5G network, but this has not met with much interest on the part of the general public. Consequently, the nature of the Polish anti-5G movement is fundamentally different from the anti-vaccination and anti-Covid ones.

The relationships demonstrated in the study between religiosity and belief in conspiracy theories show the differences between the nature of classical populism based on ideological references and its new type. While previous research did not find co-occurrence of populist attitudes with religiosity [13], our research shows this relationship, but with new populism attitudes. This conclusion may also point to the direction further research should follow, with the potential aim of seeking an answer to the question about the differences between classical and new populism in terms of their relation to religiosity. The specificity of the conspiracy theories described in this paper may be such a determinant, since in the approach of their supporters they may be a factor subjectively explaining the complexity of the surrounding reality, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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