

Defenders of the Cross: Populist Politics and Religion in Post-Communist Poland

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The politics of religious identity was of major importance to Poland's 'populist turn' of 2005-2007 and to the reorientation of Poland's nascent party system thereafter. Populism relies not only on the identification of an antagonistic relationship between the elite and the people; it also posits a moral dichotomy between an inauthentic, illegitimate and corrupt elite, and an authentic, legitimate and honest people.¹ The success of populism depends on the ability of political entrepreneurs to appeal to voters on the basis of this dichotomy. Religions have a number of attributes that make them powerful tools of populist mobilisation. They express and communicate a clear distinction between good and evil that corresponds with the moral dichotomy at the heart of populism. They create and perpetuate communities on the basis of emotional ties and rituals. They often possess organisational structures that furnish the means and motivation for grassroots organisation.

While religion alone does not account for why populism became an important factor in Polish party politics, the appeal to an inward-looking and nation-centric brand of Catholicism was one of its leading characteristics. This chapter explains how religion and the politics of religious identity and values interacted with populism, and with what consequences. The first section briefly outlines the emergence of Polish populism in the second decade of transition. The second section focuses on the case of the League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*, LPR), a party that embodied the values and worldview of a 'closed' form of Catholicism that was in conflict not only with the forces of atheism but also a liberal, 'open' strand of Catholicism. The third section turns to the case of Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS), a party that exploited the strategic advantages of religious populism to entrench its position in the party system. Both case studies examine the ways in which these parties invoked religious values and identities to construct both sides of populism's moral dichotomy between the good people and the evil elite, and the relationships between these parties and the Catholic Church in Poland. The final section turns to an analysis of the relevance of religious populism for Polish voters.

The emergence of Polish populism after 2001

During the first decade of transition, Polish populists either led noisy but ultimately irrelevant political movements or eked out an existence on the fringes of mainstream parties. Political competition was driven by attitudes to the past rather than the present. The 'regime divide' between successors of the Communist party and successors of the opposition Solidarity movement informed patterns of voting and coalition formation, and the competitive divide between these two camps seemed set to deepen into a 'post-communist

cleavage' that linked voting behaviour with distinct social groups, partisan identities and ideological attitudes (Grabowska 2004). However, from 2001 onwards this divide was superseded by 'a new political agenda that appealed to the 'anxieties of transition'' (Millard 2006, 1007).

Table 1: Parties' vote percentage and seat share, 2001

Party	% vote	Seats	Change
SLD-UP	41.04	216	+52
PO	12.68	65	-
SO	10.20	53	-
PiS	9.50	44	-
PSL	8.93	42	+15
LPR	7.87	38	-

Source: Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza (N.d.)

Self-Defence (*Samoobrona*, SO), a party which originated in agrarian protest movements at the beginning of the 1990s, captured the souring of the public mood at the end of that decade, broadening its appeal to incorporate the interests of small-town and urban 'transition losers' on both sides of the regime divide (see Piskorski 2010, 75–89 for a detailed account of this period). SO came closer than any relevant Polish party of the post-communist era to 'pure' populism, largely subordinating programmatic consistency to the maintenance of a classically populist 'us versus them' discourse (Wojtas 2012, 169) which focused on rejection of the Round Table agreement of 1989 and the political elites that emerged in its wake. The anti-liberal economic profile of the party was more clearly articulated than its stances on matters of identity and morality, and it continued to espouse a decidedly ambiguous attitude to religion and the role of the clergy in public life. As such, it is ancillary to the present discussion.

If the rise of 'economic anger' at the politics of transition brought SO into parliament, the emergence of the clerical-nationalist League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*, LPR) was driven by the 'cultural anger' associated with the ascendancy of liberal values and their entrenchment in the 1997 Constitution. LPR combined a populist discourse similar to that deployed by SO with a radical right-wing ideology.² Given the centrality of religious values and identity both to its populist discourse and the programmatically substantive elements of its ideological appeal, it can be regarded as the most consistently 'religious populist' of the parties under discussion. However, the greatest beneficiary of religious populism was not the party that most consistently expounded its message, but the party which most adroitly employed it in the service of a broader political strategy: the conservative, statist and strongly anti-communist Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS). Initially, PiS took a rather ambiguous stance on the politics of religion, and was very critical of the disruptive tactics of the populists. SO and LPR returned the hostility in kind, portraying PiS as part of the political mainstream. However, after Poland's 'populist turn' during 2006 and 2007, when

all three aforementioned parties participated in government, PiS replaced SO as the representative of the economically disenfranchised, LPR as the representative of alienated religious traditionalists, and both parties as the most skilled practitioner of populist rhetoric.

The League of Polish Families: clerical right wing nationalism

The religious populism of LPR emerged from the attempt to revive pre-communist clerical-nationalist movements within a post-communist context of rapid elite-led modernisation, in light of the experiences of the Church under communism. The party was not bound together by anti-communist sentiments and organisational ties, but, but drew together various small parties and associations of Catholic-nationalist provenance. Its leading element was the National Party (*Stronnictwo Narodowe*, SN), which dated back to the inter-war Polish Second Republic when it served as the party-political wing of the National Democracy (*Endecja*) movement led by Roman Dmowski. Dmowski's conception of the relationship between Church, nation and state concisely expresses the ethos of the Catholic-nationalist movement in Poland.

The Polish state is a Catholic state ... because our state is a nation state, and the nation is a Catholic nation. ... [W]hile the law of the state guarantees freedom to all confessions, the dominant religion, the principles of which direct state legislation, is the Catholic religion, and the Catholic Church is the representative of the religious in the functions of state (Dmowski 2000, 26–7).

This fusion of Polish ethnic identity and statehood with Catholicism placed the 'Pole-Catholic' (*Polak-katolik*) at the top of a hierarchy of the ethnic groups that populated Poland in the inter-war years, serving in particular to emphasise the otherness of Poland's Jewish population and justify anti-Semitic policies (Zubrzycki 2006, 57–9).

After the genocide and ethnic cleansing of the Second World War and the border shifts that followed, Poland was characterised by much greater ethnic homogeneity. The *Polak-katolik* concept gained a broader character in the communist era, connoting a 'real' Polishness the authenticity and legitimacy of which contrasted with the illegitimacy of Soviet-imposed political elites. Although the Church's relationship with the regime and with opposition movements was more complex than myth suggests, the overtly religious character of Solidarity, the vocal support expressed for it by Pope John Paul II, and the brutal treatment meted out to Solidarity-sympathising pastors demonstrated to the public that the Church was on the side of the opposition.

The Church entered the post-communist era possessing substantial moral capital which it sought to parlay into political influence. Expecting the Polish state to be 'democratic in form, but Christian in content' (Gowin 1995, 73), it engaged in a number of skirmishes with liberal modernisers over sensitive areas of policy such as education, regulation of the media and abortion. This conflict came to a head during the drafting and ratification of Poland's 1997 Constitution, which

sought to accommodate Christian sentiment while retaining an essentially liberal character, but failed to placate those who sought to entrench a privileged role for Catholic values and institutions.³

However, the divide between liberal reformers and the Church was not the only politically salient distinction from a religious perspective. The swift decomposition of the opposition camp into a multitude of parties, movements and ideological tendencies exposed and intensified the differences between distinct currents of Polish Catholicism. The discourse of an authentic and morally pure popular majority opposed to an inauthentic and morally compromised elite could be adapted to incorporate a new set of villains. While economic populists concentrated on demonising the authors of liberal economic reforms, religious populists adapted the *Polak-katolik* discourse to fit an 'us versus them' divide that distinguished not only liberals and believers but also different camps of believers.

While there were numerous philosophical currents in the Polish Catholic Church, the split between 'open' and 'closed' Catholicism became the most politically significant. 'Open Catholicism' (*Katolicyzm otwarty*) was characterised by 'acceptance of the basic values of modernity, with freedom to the fore', a critical attitude to a mass-based popularisation of religion which is superficial and empty of profound belief, and opposition to those who reject Christian universality in favour of a nation-based religious experience (Gowin 1995, 242–3). This ethos was formulated through direct – and often explicit – rejection of its opposite: 'closed Catholicism' (*Katolicyzm zamknięty*), whose advocates opposed the idea that the era of democracy should lead to a flourishing of religious freedom, and tasked the Church with resisting 'the eradication of the Catholic identity of the Polish nation' by protecting it from the corrosive influence of modern Western civilisation (Gowin 1995, 250–3).

While some political parties of the early 1990s offered a platform based on the precepts of closed Catholicism, its most influential exposition emerged from a source outside of party politics: the Catholic-nationalist media empire centred around Radio Maryja and headed by the charismatic Redemptorist priest Father Tadeusz Rydzyk. It was Rydzyk's patronage that brought LPR together prior to the 2001 election, and to understand the populist and programmatic appeal of the party it is necessary to appreciate the nature of the Radio Maryja movement.

Founded in 1991, Radio Maryja lends its imprimatur to a set of institutions distinct from those of mainstream Polish society: among others a newspaper, a television station, a university and an educational foundation. The radio station and associated institutions run in large part on volunteer labour, and provide a focal point for the spontaneous, grassroots initiatives of its listeners, such as local prayer circles, protests and pilgrimages to holy sites. As Burdziej (2008, 28) observes, these organisations permit 'less privileged members of society ... to maintain social ties and create networks of social interaction outside the direct influence of the state.

Much of Radio Maryja's content is politically neutral, consisting in regular broadcasts of prayers, catechism and masses. However, it has developed a

reputation as a mouthpiece for traditionalist clericalism, national chauvinism and xenophobia. A detailed analysis of its main discussion programme, 'Unfinished Conversations' (*Rozmowy niedokończone*) finds the content of the station's 'opinion-forming' broadcasts to be broader and more nuanced than Radio Maryja's reputation suggested. Nevertheless, the station clearly articulates a worldview that binds religious belief to national identity and patriotic sentiment, makes tendentious use of historical narratives to support this worldview, and – at the very least – tolerates the expression of anti-Semitic and anti-German sentiments in the context of defending the honour of the Polish nation (Krzemiński 2009, 119, 121–2, 126–8).

These findings serve as an apt summary of the ideological profile of LPR. The party updated the ethno-nationalist concerns of the *Endecja* movement to the context of post-communist transition, basing its appeal on the need to defend the integrity of the *Polak-katolik* nation-state from the internal and external threats of imitative liberal modernisation. LPR explicitly rooted its ideological principles in 'the traditional moral order of the Nation, with a fundamental role for Christianity, its ethics and system of values' (Liga Polskich Rodzin 2006, 66). With the integrity of the nation threatened by the 'dogmas of globalisation and international integration' on which the politics of transition were founded, LPR advocated fundamental political, economic and social reforms 'rooted in the culture and tradition of Christianity and natural law' (Liga Polskich Rodzin 2006, 67). This resulted in a political programme that advocated a principled, 'hard' Euroscepticism and egoistic pursuit of national interests, an uncompromising defence of Christian sexual ethics and the promotion of traditional values and patriotic attitudes, and a concept of economic organisation based on the exclusion of foreign capital, protectionism and autarchy (Liga Polskich Rodzin 2006, 68–76).

The populist element of LPR's political appeal was informed by the worldview of closed Catholicism, which, as Gowin (1995, 250–3) observes, is dominated by the perception of a Manichaean divide between good and evil, a black and white depiction of historical events which emphasises the sufferings experienced by the Polish nation, and a penchant for characterising various purported enemies of Christianity such as communists, Masons, neo-pagans, social-liberals and Jews as 'branches of a wider, global network of connections'.

LPR's identification with the intellectual traditions of the *Endecja* linked it with a conspiratorial version of history according to which Jews, Masons and Germans were responsible for the woes of the *Polak-katolik*. Roman Giertych, who became party leader after an initial power struggle, attempted to distance LPR from the anti-Semitism of the *Endecja*, declaring that if Dmowski were alive today he would not be accepted as a member of LPR (Wroński 2006). However, the party was unable to escape the taint of anti-Semitic attitudes, particularly in light of its association with the notorious youth organisation All-Polish Youth (*Młodzież Wszechpolska*, MW). As late as 2005, this movement explicitly committed itself to 'the economic and political isolation of Jews and their restriction, as far as possible, in number' (Jędrzejczak 2006). This goal reflected the character of the original MW, a violent, nationalist and anti-Semitic youth organisation of the inter-war era. The revived MW – of which Giertych himself was the first leader –

propagated anti-Semitism and organised events with the involvement of extreme nationalists (see Pankowski 2011, 116–9 for an extensive discussion of this group's activities). Many of the most prominent young LPR politicians and activists came up through the ranks of the movement.

The attitude of LPR to the Jews tied in to a broader diagnosis of 'external' threat. Here, LPR's antipathy to the European Union was of particular relevance: its Eurosceptic stance was informed not only by negative expectations about the likely economic and cultural impact, but also by the conviction that European integration was another iteration of the recurrent foreign conspiracy to deprive the Polish nation of its sovereignty. In a Radio Maryja interview in 2002, prominent LPR deputy Zygmunt Wrzodak gave a clear articulation of the party's concerns, declaring that 'the European Union is controlled by Freemasonry' and motivated by the aim of 'empower[ing] ... a global Jewish nation and a European German nation' (cited in Pankowski 2011, 121).

If the *Polak-katolik* nation was under threat from without, it also faced threats from within. At its broadest, the domestic enemy was identified with those who advocated a 'cosmopolitan liberalism ... which undermines Christian principles for making sense of the world' (Ryba 2005, 85), or who 'systematically' sought to 'demythologise' Polish history by drawing attention to events which did not fit a positive and patriotic narrative (Polak 2005, 171). In particular, the party focused on the role allegedly played by homosexuals and feminists in destabilising the natural order upon which the nation was founded. Homosexuals were condemned not only for demanding acceptance of their 'abnormal' behaviour, but also for infecting society – and in particular the Polish family – with the bacillus of moral relativism. Feminists were responsible for propagating a 'false justification of social engineering' in the form of support for abortion, co-habitation, childlessness and irresponsible sexual relations, and thereby encouraging the demographic decline of the Polish nation (Hajdukiewicz 2005, 31).

Against this panoply of enemies, LPR's vision of 'the people' was essentially rather simple. The 'traditionally understood Polish family' constituted 'the elementary unit of the life of the nation' (Liga Polskich Rodzin 2006, 68) and served as the repository of authentic *Polak-katolik* values and identities. 'True Poles' were those who upheld the virtues of 'pro-family, pro-natal, religious and patriotic' values against the anti-Polish values advanced by Poland's enemies (Hajdukiewicz 2005, 31).

Ideologically and temperamentally LPR was straightforwardly compatible with closed Catholicism. Yet this is not to imply that it appealed only to a narrow element of the Church. The Radio Maryja movement enjoyed substantial support within the Church hierarchy, even if the controversial nature of the movement dissuaded some of the more moderate clerics from voicing their approval openly. LPR maintained close contacts with conservative members of the clergy such as Father Henryk Jankowski, a former Solidarity priest later banned from preaching sermons for making anti-Semitic remarks, yet sympathy for the party was not confined only to radical circles. For the first few years of its existence, LPR was the only party which unambiguously prioritised the interests and values of the

Catholic Church in its ideological pronouncements and its political activity. It was therefore not in the interests of the Church to take too critical a stance. Individual clerics who disapproved of the ethos of closed Catholicism, such as Archbishops Tadeusz Gocłowski and Józef Życiński, often made negative references to LPR in the media which were duly reciprocated by the party. Yet the episcopate as a whole rarely spoke out against LPR, and only then in the context of individual initiatives such as the deeply controversial lustration (decommunisation) project the party prepared in 2005 (Zajac 2005). At the same time, LPR's relationship with Radio Maryja soured as Giertych sought to assert his prerogatives as leader of the party, refusing to be steered by Rydzyk (Pankowski 2011, 124). From 2005 onwards, the Radio Maryja movement was openly critical of many of LPR's actions, with Giertych later alleging that this was motivated by Rydzyk's desire to curry favour with more powerful politicians (Giertych 2013).

Law and Justice: the strategic uses of religious populism

If LPR's religious populism emerged from an ideologically consistent current of clerical nationalism with clear historical antecedents, PiS's embrace of the politics of religion and the discourse of populism was more strategic in character. In the first few years of its existence, PiS did not espouse a strongly religious message. Indeed, party leader Jarosław Kaczyński had demonstrated a clear aversion to a surfeit of clericalism in the appeals of political parties; in the early 1990s he dubbed the Catholic-nationalist Christian-National Union 'the shortest route to the de-Christianisation of Poland' (cited in Załuska 2005). Moreover, in the first years of its existence PiS was regarded as a mainstream party. This is not to say that its turn towards populism was inexplicable in retrospect. The Centre Accord (*Porozumienie Centrum*, PC), a party of the early 1990s which was a precursor to PiS in ideology and personnel, was a vehicle for leader Jarosław Kaczyński's diagnosis of the pathologies of the post-communist transition elite. Prior to the 2001 elections, PiS gained momentum as a result of the popularity of Jarosław's twin brother Lech, whose short but uncompromising stint as Minister of Justice in 2000 reinforced the image of a party unafraid to take on the establishment. Yet amid the consternation of liberal elites at the emergence of SO and LPR, reaction to PiS's electoral success in 2001 was relatively muted.

The 2001-2005 parliamentary term was characterised by a mood of political radicalism, with the incumbent post-communist government struggling simultaneously to deal with an economic downturn, the travails of accession to the European Union, and significant allegations of corruption. It was PiS, rather than SO and LPR, which benefited most from this atmosphere. The dynamic of the dual parliamentary and presidential elections of 2005 created incentives for PiS to distinguish itself from the liberal-conservative post-Solidarity party Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*, PO) by articulating a distinctly anti-liberal electoral appeal.⁴ Exploiting popular concerns about the impact of further market reforms, PiS contrasted their 'solidaristic' economic stance with the orthodox liberalism espoused by PO. The deepening of the politics of religious identity was a logical corollary of the turn towards economic anti-liberalism.

Prior to the elections, PiS issued the document 'A Catholic Poland in a Christian Europe', which placed the party's main programme in the context of religious values and the defence of Poland's Catholic identity. It declared that Christian values 'embrace ... our activity ... in all dimensions – from the material and fiscal rights of the family to the institutional bases of moral order' (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2005, 7) and committed the party to the defence of these institutions against the 'new threats' of liberal rights and freedoms which 'attack values, structures and institutions inherited from generations past' (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość 2005, 9). Immediately prior to the election campaign, PiS's presidential candidate Lech Kaczyński banned a gay rights parade in his capacity as mayor of Warsaw. Subsequently, Kaczyński sent a letter to the rectors of churches in a number of major towns and cities which expanded on his actions as a defender of Catholic values and gave his commitment as president – and that of PiS as a governing party – to take continued action against threats to Catholic morality and religious freedoms (Wiśniewska 2005). In an interview for a Catholic weekly, Kaczyński further declared that 'there are no differences between my basic values and those of Radio Maryja' (Kucharczak and Stopka 2005).

These overtures were not lost on Father Rydzyk, whose priority was to 'sink the Platform' (*zatopić Platformę*). Disenchanted with LPR's leadership and the failure of the party to increase its support, he extended his endorsement to PiS. The subsequent course of events justified this decision. After the breakdown of PiS-PO coalition talks and a period of minority government, PiS entered into a 'stabilisation pact' and ultimately a formal coalition with SO and LPR. The formation of this 'exotic threesome' (Paradowska 2006) surprised observers of Polish politics. Although mainstream parties had failed to erect a *cordon sanitaire* to exclude these radicals from participation in political life, it was generally assumed that no party would regard them as worthy coalition partners. However, Jarosław Kaczyński was unwilling to pass up an opportunity to advance his party's reform agenda, particularly since Lech Kaczyński's victory in the presidential race removed an important veto point.

Table 2: Parties' vote percentage and seat share, 2005

Party	% vote	Seats	Change
PiS	26.99	155	111
PO	24.14	133	68
SO	11.41	56	3
SLD	11.31	55	-161
LPR	7.97	34	-4
PSL	6.96	25	-17

Source: Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza (N.d.)

In retrospect, the formation of this coalition seems logical from the perspectives of ideological coherence and the political strategy of its senior member. Each of

the coalition parties rejected the legitimacy of the institutions and political elites of Poland's post-1989 Third Republic, and contested the liberal orthodox politics of transition. SO concentrated for the most part on opposition to economic reforms, LPR railed against the impact of Westernisation on religiosity and traditional morality, and PiS focused in broader terms on the nature and consequences of the compact on which the new regime was founded. These currents came together in a coalition agreement that outlined an ambitious programme for the creation of a 'Fourth Republic'. It embraced four key topics: the reform of the state, pursuit of a more assertive foreign policy, moral and cultural renewal, and a more socially sensitive economic policy (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, Samoobrona Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, and Narodowe Koło Parlamentarne 2006).

PiS's turn towards populism began in earnest with Jarosław Kaczyński's defence of the coalition agreement to parliament. The reform programme was couched in classic populist terms as the means to remove an elite network (*układ*) from public life so that order could be restored 'in the interests of ordinary people, ordinary Poles' (Jarosław Kaczyński, cited in Sejm stenographic transcript, term 5, session 10, day 3 [12.05.2006], Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2007). The coalition's attempts to implement its policies drew it into repeated conflict with liberal-democratic institutions - in particular the Constitutional Court, which stymied key elements of the coalition's legislative programme - while the political elites of the Third Republic joined forces to discredit the government at home and abroad. Polish politics became increasingly meta-political in character, with questions about the legitimacy of political elites and the nature and conduct of politics coming to the fore. With politics increasingly conducted in an emotional and moralistic register and the junior coalition parties increasingly mutinous, the divide between PiS and other parties deepened and widened to the point of apparent insuperability.

PiS's populism grew out of the rhetorical soil prepared for them by their radical predecessors. It was not sufficient that political opponents be criticised for their incompetence or corruption; they must also be condemned for their inauthenticity and anti-Polishness. However, as a party aspiring to capture a wide range of voters from the centre ground to the Catholic-nationalist right, PiS could not rely on the blunt and rather unsophisticated yoking of ethnicity and religiosity that LPR employed. Rather, PiS's references to Catholic identity and values served a broader 'politics of history' (*polityka historyczna*); an attempt to restore national prestige by portraying Poland and Poles as 'key players of modern history' and giving due weight to their contributions and sufferings (Nijakowski 2008, 198). This narrative linked 'real Polishness' with traditions of resistance to foreign occupation and repression, focusing in particular on the moral legacies of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising and the Solidarity movement. The emphasis on proud defeat rather than cynical compromise chimed with the recurrent metaphor of Poland as 'Christ of Nations' (*Polska Chrystusem Narodów*), a conception of national identity which emphasises Poland's suffering at the hands of other countries and its redemptive rebirth.

The narrative of a Poland of heroic and incorruptible resisters versus unpatriotic collaborators was an element of Kaczyński's rhetorical repertoire that predated

his interest in the politics of religious identity. However, the majoritarian character of Polish Catholicism was compatible with this narrative. Kaczyński averred that Catholicism constituted 'the only general system of values' available to Poles (Gazeta.pl 2007b) and spoke of his suspicion of 'initiatives which are not the authentic emanations of social movements' (Janicki and Władyka 2007, 134). In so doing, he distinguished between those 'real Poles' who lived in accordance with values that had the weight of tradition behind them, and those who sought to undermine those values.

From 2005 onwards, PiS's attacks on leading figures of the Third Republic were deliberately provocative: they were a 'mendacious elite' (*łże-elita*); a group of 'pseudo-intellectuals' (*wykształciuchy*); a 'front for the defence of criminals' (*front obrony przestępców*). This rhetorical escalation of hostilities was increasingly characterised by attempts at the delegitimation of specific individuals by reference to their political genealogy, with the ideological convictions and political affiliations of fathers and forefathers an infallible guide to those of their descendants. However, in contrast to LPR the party eschewed direct references to religious belief when criticising the elite. The party leadership remained particularly sensitive to the possibility that they might be accused of perpetuating the anti-Semitic tropes associated with LPR and the Radio Maryja movement. Where LPR's religious populism was direct and explicit, PiS's was diffuse and allusive. In one of the defining speeches of his premiership, held before a crowd of pilgrims at the holy site of Jasna Góra in the presence of Father Rydzyk, Jarosław Kaczyński stated his 'full conviction and belief' that 'today, Poland is here' (*tu jest Polska*) (Mamoń 2007). This phrase, which would become a recurrent slogan of PiS rallies in the years to follow, was innocuous at face value but rich in implicit meaning. It confirmed that PiS spoke for the pious and principled *Polak-katolik* whose interests and values were legitimate and whose voice was authentic.

Although PiS appealed to religious sentiment, the party's relationship with the Church remained ambiguous. It found apt expression in Jarosław Kaczyński's declaration that 'personally, I tend to sympathise with an open Church, although that leaves open the question of what [this concept] means' (Karnowski and Zaremba 2006, 286). This ambiguity was clear in the relationship of PiS with the Radio Maryja movement, which was guided by mutual interests and mutual benefits. PiS offered Father Rydzyk a means by which his organisation could pursue and protect its expanding commercial interests, which ranged from setting up a digital television station to exploiting geothermal energy. In return, Rydzyk offered PiS congenial media outlets, with many PiS politicians invited to participate in sympathetic discussions of the party's policies and outlook. The grassroots network that emerged around Rydzyk's media empire also ensured the successful organisation of numerous well-attended PiS protests and rallies. During PiS's term in office, Radio Maryja and assorted nationalist movements staged several counter-marches against protests at the politics of the coalition government, and after the fall of the coalition engaged in protests against the new government.

Table 3: Parties' vote percentage and seat share, 2007

Party	% vote	Seats	Change
PO	41.51	209	+76
PiS	32.11	166	+11
LiD	13.15	53	-2
PSL	8.91	31	+6
SO	1.53	0	-56
LPR	1.30	0	-34

Source: Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza (N.d.)

Notes: SLD ran as the major party of the Left and Democrats (*Lewica i Demokracji*; LiD) electoral coalition. LiD figure under 'Change' refers to the statistic for SLD in 2005.

The relationship between PiS and Radio Maryja was not solely one of convenience; a substantial faction of the party was genuinely committed to the pursuit of a Catholic-nationalist legislative agenda. Aware of the dangers of alienating moderate sympathisers on the conservative centre-right, Kaczyński fought against the perception that PiS was hostage to Radio Maryja. The coalition did not always legislate in accordance with Rydzyk's preferences, with PiS often acting to rein in the more radical intentions of LPR and its own pro-clerical faction. Where the interests of Radio Maryja clashed with PiS's key priorities, they gave preference to those priorities. As president, Lech Kaczyński blocked the ingress of Archbishop Stanisław Wielgus to the archdiocese of Warsaw after revelations of Wielgus's cooperation with the communist secret services. This action was consistent with the party's uncompromising anti-communist stance, but Rydzyk took to the airwaves of Radio Maryja to declare himself 'very disappointed' with the 'Bolshevik methods' used by PiS against a respected cleric (Radiomaryja.pl 2007). Tensions were further inflamed by PiS's support for the Lisbon Treaty, and came to a head over a constitutional amendment proposed by PiS deputies that protected the right to life from the moment of conception. In spite of the origins of this motion, Jarosław Kaczyński refused to endorse it, and it failed to pass. After President Lech Kaczyński's wife Maria signed an appeal which expressed opposition to a more restrictive abortion law, Rydzyk was secretly recorded describing her as 'a witch' who should 'allow herself to be euthanised' (Gazeta.pl 2007a).

Nevertheless, these incidents did not dissuade PiS from deepening its cooperation with the Radio Maryja movement, particularly in the aftermath of the April 2010 air disaster at Smoleńsk, which claimed the lives of the presidential couple and dozens of other prominent figures. In the days after the tragedy, a wooden cross was erected outside the Presidential Palace as a focal point for mourners. When the new President Bronisław Komorowski announced its removal, a Committee for the Defence of the Cross was formed, with Radio Maryja broadcasting appeals to its listeners to resist its removal by 'bellicose leftists' (Hołub 2010). This standoff, which echoed an earlier conflict concerning the removal of crosses from the immediate vicinity of the former concentration camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau in the late 1990s⁵, escalated into a series of

confrontations between the two sides, mostly verbal but occasionally physical. Although PiS initially distanced itself from overt politicisation of the Smoleńsk tragedy it increasingly came to support and identify with the ‘defenders’. In turn, Radio Maryja lent support to PiS’s demand for a re-investigation of the causes of the disaster, and helped to disseminate a conspiracy-theory version of events.

Appealing to the people? Religious populism and attitudes to political parties

By adopting and transcending the populist discourse of their minor partners, PiS rendered SO and LPR electorally irrelevant by the time the coalition fell in late 2007. From 2007 onwards, the regime divide lapsed into a moribund state as the post-Solidarity PO formed a government with the post-communist Polish Peasant Party (*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*, PSL). PiS was the major party of opposition, a status boosted by the presidency of Lech Kaczyński. President Kaczyński’s openly intransigent and obstructive attitude to the PO-PSL government’s policy initiatives and his ambition to pursue an independent foreign policy ensured that the new line of division ran through the executive as well as the legislature, deepening the enmity between the two camps. The Smoleńsk disaster and its aftermath entrenched this divide.

Table 4: Parties’ vote percentage and seat share, 2011

Party	% vote	Seats	Change
PO	39.18	207	-2
PiS	29.89	157	-9
RP	10.02	40	40
PSL	8.36	28	-3
SLD	8.24	27	-26

Source: Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza (N.d.)

PiS’s strategic deployment of populism played a significant role in redefining patterns of elite competition, and its religious component was of particular importance in helping PiS to couch the new divide in terms of authenticity and legitimacy. However, ascertaining the demand-side impact of elite-level shifts in the party system was a more difficult task. In the case of Poland, it was additionally complicated by the fact that the most important divide lay not between believers and non-believers but between cohorts of believers who differed, not in the object of their belief, but in their attitudes towards the writ of religious authority in the private lives of citizens and in the public sphere. Statistics belied the common observation that Poland was secularising rapidly in the post-communist era. According to survey data collected between 1998 and 2009, the vast majority of Poles (around 90%) continued to identify themselves as ‘believing’ or ‘deeply believing’, with the proportion of declared atheists rarely exceeding 5% of the population (see Fig. 3, CBOS 2009, 5). Official figures collected by the Statistical Institute of the Catholic Church between 1992 and 2010 suggested a moderate decline in the proportion of parishioners attending

church on Sundays (*dominicanes*) from 47% in 1992 to 41% in 2010, and fluctuation in the proportion of parishioners taking communion (*communicantes*) (Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego 2010).

The divide between closed and open Catholicism mapped onto an emergent sociological divide between 'Poland A' and 'Poland B': a Poland of those who had benefited from transition, and a Poland of those who had – at least in a relative sense – lost out. The old, those living in small towns and villages, those of lower educational attainment, those in the lower income quartile, the unemployed, the retired, and those receiving invalidity benefit were increasingly more likely to state that post-1989 reforms had negatively affected them (Czapiński 2006, 184). While the inhabitants of Poland A were more likely to couch their faith in private and individualistic terms, inhabitants of Poland B were characterised by a collectivist and church-centric conception of their religious beliefs (CBOS 2001, 11–12).

Inhabitants of Poland B were more likely to listen regularly to Radio Maryja (CBOS 2011, 3–5). Analyses of the characteristics and voting habits of Radio Maryja listeners indicate that the notion of Father Rydzyk's followers as a 'disciplined army' was somewhat exaggerated (CBOS 2008, 2011). Radio Maryja may have influenced its followers to participate in elections: in both 2008 and 2011, they were slightly more likely than the rest of society to have participated in the preceding parliamentary and presidential elections (CBOS 2008, 6, 2011, 8). However, this participation did not translate into unanimous support for the object of Rydzyk's favours.⁶ In any case, with a large majority of the Polish population (85% in 2011) declaring that they never listened to Radio Maryja (CBOS 2011, 2), the widening difference between Radio Maryja listeners and the rest of society was not in itself evidence that religious divides were politically influential.

Analysis of religious populism's impact on party preferences is hampered by the difficulty of applying typical survey instruments in the Polish case. Two aspects of religious identity, 'belonging' (institutionalised religion) and 'believing' (spirituality) (Nicolet and Tresch 2009, 81) are usually operationalised by measures of self-assessment of spiritual beliefs and frequency of attendance at church services. Yet while very few Poles identify themselves as atheist and non-practising, figures on actual church attendance indicate that there are many Poles for whom religious observance is of little importance. On the other hand, the ranks of the particularly devout may not in fact differ all that significantly from the cohort of 'ordinary believers' with respect to the way in which their religiosity influences their political choices. Surveys rarely ask respondents to declare the extent to which their political choices are motivated by religious 'belonging' and 'believing'. They also rarely ask questions directly intended to measure populist attitudes.

While not perfect on these counts, the post-election survey conducted by the Polish General Election Study in 2011 provides some data that go beyond the standard variables on religiosity. Table 5 (see Appendix) presents the results of Poisson models that regress respondents' attitudes to all relevant political parties on four sets of variables: standard socio-demographic controls, broad

ideological dimensions, religious identities and attitudes, and attitudes redolent of populism. For reasons of space and relevance, only the full models are presented. Instead of actual voting behaviour, the dependent variable is attitudes to political parties. These variables give an impression of how cohorts of voters approach the party system as a constellation of ideologically distinct parties, independently of non-ideological factors that might influence the casting of a vote, such as party size or strategic considerations.

The results suggest that for all the importance of religious populism to the demand-side divide, it had only a limited influence on the structure of party-political preferences. On standard measures of religiosity, there were almost no statistically significant differences between the two major parties PiS and PO: it was the anti-clerical Palikot Movement (*Ruch Palikota*, RP) that attracted the sympathies of infrequent churchgoers. Where attitudes to the church were concerned, the difference was more marked. Two aspects of the relationship between the Church and the political process proved particularly controversial in the post-communist era: the involvement of the Church in the legislative process, and priests instructing their congregation how to vote. Positive attitudes toward these phenomena were associated with higher levels of support for PiS, while negative attitudes were associated with higher levels of support for PO. However, populist attitudes had very little influence. Those who discerned a clear divide between good and evil in politics had slightly more positive attitudes to PiS, but aside from that, populism played no discernible role in differentiating between preferences for one party or another. While more detailed surveys are necessary to explore the impact of religious populism on the demand side of Polish politics, there is insufficient evidence from the available data to suggest that the divide between 'open' and 'closed' Catholicism is particularly important for the Polish voter.

Conclusion

PiS's adroit exploitation of the political potential of religious identity and values – hitherto only realised in part by LPR – made a significant contribution to the reshaping of the relationships between political parties by bringing the divide between 'open' and 'closed' Catholicism into the mainstream of party politics. However, the extent to which the Polish party system has consolidated around this new line of competition remains a matter of dispute. Gwiazda (2009, 370–1) regarded it as 'quasi-institutionalized' by 2007, with political elites playing a crucial role in stabilising both parties themselves (through the more efficient enforcement of party discipline) and the relationships between them (through the politicisation of key political cleavages). However, Millard (2009, 795) took a distinctly more sceptical stance on this stability, arguing that public distrust of political parties, Polish voters' history of electoral volatility and 'the tenuous nature of the links between parties and their supporters' cast doubt on the wisdom of ruling out further realignments.

On the evidence presented here, while the politics of religious populism has been increasingly important at the supply side, the divide between political elites is not unambiguously reflected in the preferences of voters. Party-system

consolidation remains susceptible to the vicissitudes of electoral behaviour, and in the broader sweep of Polish party-system building, the turn to religious populism may yet prove an ephemeral one. While it might be tempting to interpret the emergence of the anti-clerical RP in 2011 as a deepening of the religious divide, the party's strident atheism and secularism cuts across the prevailing distinction between open and closed Catholicism, disturbing the dominant pattern of competition. With a sizeable parliamentary faction pushing for more radical social change than the advocates of open Catholicism are willing to countenance, the relationship between the liberal leadership of PO and the party's sizeable conservative faction has grown increasingly fractious, with instances of party indiscipline an augury of uncertainty for the future integrity of the party. The future of PiS also remains unclear. Although Polish party politics is leader-centric in general, Jarosław Kaczyński's transformation from back-room political strategist to charismatic tribune of the people tied the future of the party even more closely to Kaczyński himself. While religious populism played a substantial role in changing the nature of Polish party competition, its legacy remains an uncertain one.

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Appendix

Table 5: The impact of religiosity and populism on attitudes to political parties

	likeRP	likePiS	likeSLD	likePO	likePSL
2.gender	-0.176***	0.013	-0.004	0.020	-0.001
2.resid	0.019	-0.052	-0.087*	0.072*	-0.080*
3.resid	0.093	-0.119*	-0.106**	0.071*	-0.151***
2.educ	-0.121*	-0.049	-0.005	-0.013	-0.055
3.educ	0.029	-0.160*	0.096*	0.063	0.003
age	-0.019***	0.000	0.001	0.002*	0.004***
hincome	-0.009	-0.060*	-0.052*	0.054**	0.002
leftrt	-0.066***	0.072***	-0.078***	0.006	-0.005
sollib	0.023*	-0.054***	0.008	0.036***	0.008
1.relig	-0.075	-0.011	-0.032	-0.202*	0.016
2.relig	0.119	-0.148	-0.038	-0.016	-0.017
4.relig	-0.102	0.101	-0.069	-0.043	-0.017
1.partic	0.078	-0.099	-0.001	0.026	-0.235*
2.partic	0.257**	-0.110	0.050	-0.008	-0.101
3.partic	0.157**	-0.128**	0.059	0.026	0.015
5.partic	-0.768**	0.021	-0.206	-0.080	0.022
crspub	-0.238**	0.026	-0.103	-0.034	-0.041
relles	-0.287***	0.226*	-0.060	-0.010	-0.008
reloath	-0.101	0.307*	0.070	0.020	0.135*
prsttv	-0.027	0.034	-0.077*	0.031	0.004
chlegis	-0.219***	0.349***	-0.060	-0.130***	0.046
prvote	-0.070	0.197***	-0.057	-0.243***	0.022
gdevil	0.001	-0.024*	-0.005	-0.000	0.007
minopin	0.011	-0.000	-0.013	-0.008	-0.002
disfree	-0.012	-0.005	-0.020*	-0.006	-0.011
_cons	3.647***	-0.211	2.678***	1.398***	1.095***
N	1919	1919	1919	1919	1919

Source: author's own calculations on the basis of the dataset provided by Polskie Generalne Studium Wyborcze (2011).

Notes: all models are Poisson regressions with robust standard errors, using multiple imputation of missing data (m=10).

¹ Drawing on the insights of Freedman (1998), Mudde (2004, 544) and Canovan (2005, 128), this chapter employs a non-normative definition of populism as a 'thin ideology' which is ideological in that it expresses a distinct and internally coherent 'map' of the political, but 'thin' in its focus on broad normative principles and ontological matters rather than the detail of policy. See Stanley (2008, 102) for the author's full exposition of this definition.

² Wojtas (2012, 170–1) argues that LPR should not be defined as a populist party, because its profile is clearly radical right in character. However, as the majority of its practical manifestations demonstrate, populism is primarily combinatorial in character, rather than a 'standalone' ideology. LPR's ideological profile fulfils each of the criteria specified by Mudde's (2007, 22) 'maximum definition' of a populist radical right party: nativism, authoritarianism and populism.

³ See Senator Alicja Grześkowiak's remarks on the first point of order, 24.02.1997, as given by the official stenographic transcript of the Sejm (Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 1997).

⁴ See Szczerbiak (2007) for a comprehensive account of these elections and their consequences for the party system.

⁵ See Zubrzycki (2006) for a comprehensive analysis of this controversy and its social and historical context).

⁶ In 2001 – the first election at which the political influence of the movement came to wider attention – only 42% of listeners voted for LPR. After Rydzyk's switching of horses, in 2005 PiS received 40%, and in 2007 62%. However, in both 2001 and 2005 the majority of listeners voted for other parties, including the liberal enemy (8% for UW in 2001; 16% for PO in 2005), and in 2007 a full 20% voted for PO (CBOS 2008, 6–7). In the 2011 survey, 57% of Radio Maryja listeners declared they had voted for Jarosław Kaczyński (compared with only 22% of non-listeners) while 35% declared they had voted for Bronisław Komorowski (compared with 70% of non-listeners). After the 2011 parliamentary elections, 70% of listeners declared that they had voted for PiS (compared with 20% of non-listeners) while 14% declared that they had voted for PO (compared with 46% of non-listeners) (CBOS 2011, 9).