



Dear Michał,

Contrary to Western Europe, religious values still seem to have strong appeal in Poland. How can this difference be explained?



It is true that religious values still play an important role in Poland. In contrast to France, where the secular state is perceived as 'progressive' and religion is relegated to the private sphere, Catholicism is very present in the Polish public debate.

Religion has an impact on elections in two different ways.

First, it is closely linked to nationalistic values. It increases support for the party that promotes them in the loudest manner, the PiS (Law and Justice), even though in their rhetoric nationalism becomes 'patriotic tradition'. The PiS has managed to achieve an ideological monopoly on the patriotic symbolic domain and to convince a large part of the society that they are the only true inheritors of 'Polishness', ready to defend it against all external dangers. In their eyes, whoever thinks differently is not a true Pole.

The appeal of this attitude and rhetoric can probably be explained in terms of cultural fear. In every society that is undergoing rapid changes the sheer pace of development becomes incomprehensible and destabilising, and people look for some reliable anchors in their lives. The national community provides such a safe-haven.

Secondly, Catholicism is just part and parcel of the 'tradition and security' conglomerate. In its effort to present itself as a safeguard of tradition, the PiS supports all postulates of the Roman-Catholic Church with regard to moral and worldview issues like abortion, in vitro fertilisation, LGBT rights, and non-heterosexual marriages. At the ideological level, the (traditional) family is presented as the centre of the universe.

In everyday life many individuals practice a purely 'ritualistic' Catholicism: the number of regular churchgoers is in systematic decline, the 'unquestionable values' of the Catholic Church are not really followed, the episcopate and ordinary priests are severely criticised in public discourse.

Take just one example: Virtually all radical football fans in Poland are 'patriotic', not to say outright chauvinists, and many of them support right-wing parties. But only few of them are religious and many of them break several principles of Roman-Catholic morality – from non-violence to drug abuse (not to mention sexual behaviour).

In conclusion, while the concrete influence of Catholic values on daily life in Polish society is very relative, the rhetoric connection between 'Polishness', nationalism and Catholicism cannot be without impact on electoral behaviour and election results

Best wishes,

Michał

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