

Article

How Does the Catholic Clergy Influence What Poles in the UK Know and Think about Brexit?

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Abstract: Religion can determine how people perceive socio-political reality, especially in a cultural context in which religious affiliation is an important part of national identity. This has a special significance in the Polish cultural context, in which Catholicism is considered the national religion, and its institutional dimension plays an important role in the Polish socio-political domain. The purpose of this study is to analyse how religion affects the socio-political attitudes of Poles abroad. This analysis focuses directly on evaluating the influence of the spiritual leaders of Polish community organisations in the UK on the knowledge and opinions of Brexit among Polish post-accession emigrants to the UK. The study was conducted on a sample of 620 Poles living in the UK (62.6% male) using a group-administered questionnaire. The study found that the Polish Catholic clergy did not play an important role in opinion-forming, i.e., in shaping what Polish emigrants to the UK know and think about Brexit. What proved to be the most powerful factor in terms of opinion-making was the British mass media. The influence of the Catholic clergy on the knowledge of—and opinions on—Brexit among Polish emigrants was only evident among elderly people who did not know English very well, and who regularly participated in religious activities.

Keywords: Polish migrants; Polish clergy; Polish parishes; Brexit



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1. Introduction

Religion seems to be an important determinant of how people perceive socio-political reality. This is especially true for the Polish society, where Catholicism can be considered a national religion (Stetkiewicz 2013) and an important element of national identity (Mariani 2011; Marody and Mandes 2005).

Polish migrants in the UK make up a large social group that can influence the way in which the whole society functions. In addition, their lives were affected by events and political decisions related to Brexit. As Majella Kilkey and Louise Ryan argue, Brexit can be considered as one of the “unsettling events” (Kilkey and Ryan 2021). The mass labour migration of Poles lasted for several years, and many migrants have now managed to stabilise their lives (Ryan 2018) and take root in Great Britain (Trąbka and Pustulka 2020). Significant events in the UK may cause unpredictable behaviour among migrants (Eade et al. 2006), which is why, from a research perspective, it seems essential to further explore the impact of Brexit in a broader context (Kettell and Kerr 2021). Therefore, it is interesting that the clergy’s influence on people’s political opinions and decisions, despite the existence of modern societies subject to change (Gover 2021), remains strong in some groups (Ganiel 2021), particularly among those declaring attachment to religion.

Religious affiliation is, for Poles, an important element of their social identity, including while living abroad. Participation in religious practices has an empowering effect, as people can become involved with a social group, and refer to their religion for a system that provides meaning and supports immigrants in their new environment (Grzymała-Moszczyńska 2015). Some people believe that religious communities become “a surrogate

family” for new immigrants (Cao 2005). Therefore, the understanding of a religious community can be rather specific, or even contrary to the community understanding of the Church, where the parish community becomes an element that connects communities with various characteristics and activities (Borowski 2014). Over the last few years, the Polish immigrant Church in the UK has been organically linked with the behaviour of the leaders of religious organisations, and its impact (or lack thereof) on the Poles living in the United Kingdom. The goal behind this study is to analyse the importance of religion and its role in the search for knowledge and in forming opinions about Brexit among Polish post-accession emigrants to the UK. The purpose of this study is to analyse the specific religious factor that is the influence of the clergy on the knowledge and opinions of the Polish diaspora in the UK with regard to Brexit.

2. Discussion

A. Worldly functions of religion

While capable of adjustment and relatively robust in its many social forms, religion is experiencing transformations that raise some important concerns in terms of its continued ability to influence social and political attitudes. In Western societies, religion has been observed to be losing its grip over social life (Utraiainen 2020). In Europe, even though, from the 1960s, religion has gradually become less a matter of tradition, and more one of individual choice and personal needs (Klaver et al. 2017), “the interface of religion with power and order in the subsocietal, societal, and international arenas constitutes one very important item on the sociological research agenda” (McGuire 2008, p. 325). As far back as thirty years ago, Edward Ciupak, a Polish doyen of the sociology of religion, observed that the organisation of community life is among the functional roles of religion. Wherever there is organised religious life, it either directly or indirectly affects other areas of life (Ciupak 1982).

The role of religion in social life has been conceptualised using different approaches. Religion can be perceived as indispensable for society to function normally, with its elimination being considered a threat to social life (Luckmann 1967). Religion can constitute the source of standards governing human behaviour (Parsons 1957), or it can serve stabilising and organising functions (Luckmann 1977), or supply models of behaviour based on ideological or moral values (Ciupak 1965), or legitimise some social order or contribute to the integration of national and local communities while not providing any local solutions (Bellah 1964). The claim that religion has a special status that embraces various social actions, covering many spheres of social life, is aptly reflected in the term “the sacred canopy”, coined by Peter Berger. The term means that religion was not only intended to give meaning and importance to social reality, but also to regulate, in line with its doctrine, all social life (Berger 1968).

Jose Casanova has argued that the Islamic revolution in Iran, the emergence of the “Solidarity” movement in Poland, the role of Catholicism in the political conflicts in Latin America, and the re-emergence of Protestant fundamentalism as the power behind policy in the USA all aptly illustrate the impact of religion on societies. (Casanova 2012).

Religion can shape beliefs regardless of the number of believers in a church or religious organisation. Religious groups can influence attitudes and political values even among people who do not identify themselves with any religious tradition (Tilley 2015). In such cases, we deal with what is known as a vicarious religion, in which even the majority, who are not very active, or completely inactive, support and accept the actions of the religiously involved minority (Davie 2013). While formal indicators of religious practices, such as attendance, are dropping, new aspects of religious identity might emerge and continue to affect broader social and political beliefs among individuals (Davie 2015). In the literature on the subject, the implications of a sociological religious approach to secular stances on religion are also emphasised. In research on religious feminist attitudes, Line Nyhagen emphasises that individuals do not simply copy institutional religious

prescriptions; instead, they have an active and reflexive role in shaping, negotiating, and changing their own beliefs and practices (Nyhagen 2017).

Over the last few decades, the public role of religion and the clergy as religious leaders has enjoyed growing interest, and it has become relevant to consider the impact of religion on political attitudes and preferences, and on individual choices and decisions. (Wierzbicki 2018). In his study on the influence of the Catholic clergy on the faithful in the USA, G. Smith concluded that the political messages emanating from parish priests, to which Catholics are exposed, differ depend on the particular church one attends. “Parishioners who belonged to parishes with liberal pastors were shown to be much more politically liberal in their opinions with regard to a number of political issues than were parishioners in parishes with moderate or conservative pastors” (Smith 2008, p. 169). The influence religion has on socio-political attitudes can be evaluated by, e.g., analysing local circumstances, the role of religious communities or religious leaders in motivating political involvement among the members of that religious group (Manza and Wright 2003). The last element seems particularly relevant to Polish emigrants to the UK, as many Poles who come to the UK stop identifying themselves with the Catholic Church. At the same time, the official, and often the only, socio-political discourse continues to take place in local parishes, the bastions of Polishness (Krotofil 2013).

B. A shift in the functioning of the institutional Church abroad—the Polish parishes

Mass post-accession migration, Brexit, and the pandemic, have coincided with the technological revolution in communication. This seems to have resulted in a slow decline in traditional activities representative of Polish communities (Fel et al. 2020; Andrejuk and Winiarska 2020). As that decline is taking place, a new landscape of Polish immigrant organisations is emerging, leading to the influence of Polish community leaders on their subordinate populations being either diminished or increased (Dunin-Wąsowicz 2020).

The Polish parishes managed by Catholic clergymen have become an important part of the structure of Polish organisations in the UK. Over the last two decades, Polish parishes, as some of the largest Polish community organisations in the UK, have recorded a significant increase in their number of parishioners (Krotofil 2013).

In 2006, a debate began regarding the role religious organisations play in contemporary society, showing that much of religious life takes place outside of those institutional locales (Ammerman 2006). However, parishes formed due to migration abroad, and the communities that emerge around them—which often have a relatively loose composition—serve roles that go far beyond their original religious functions, constituting, for many migrant members, unique platforms for contact and information sharing (Isański 2018). The Polish parishes, and their parish priests, who organise life in the parish—in its worldly sense—have become, for many Polish migrants, “points of reference” in matters of knowledge and opinion (Fiń et al. 2019; Szczepaniak-Kroll 2017).

As the United Kingdom has left the EU, British society as a whole, including the Polish diaspora in the UK, is being subjected to major changes and transformations. Polish migrants, including the leaders of religious organisations, brought with them various forms of social life to support them as they adapted to the new reality. With Brexit becoming a fact, and remigration an immediate prospect, it seems relevant to ask how the clergy, being the hosts of parishes—religious institutions that bring Poles together—and hence leaders of Polish community organisations abroad, influence the knowledge of and opinions about the current socio-political developments in the UK.

C. Background

Trust is used as a vehicle to influence what other people think and believe. In a slightly more abstract sense, certain interactions are based on specific social roles, professions, positions, or offices, regardless of who is currently holding these positions. Each person who is serving a role that has public trust associated with it, e.g., a doctor, a lawyer, or a clergyman, enjoys a certain level of social confidence, irrespective of their personal qualities (Sztompka 2002). From a sociological point of view, the influence of the Church on people can, therefore, be explored across many dimensions—as the influence over people who

identify themselves as members of the Church (trust within the Church), or as the influence of Church institutions and churchmen (the Pope, bishops, parish priests or vicars) and the Church as a whole (trust in the Church) (Mariański 2012).

Since the first decade of the 21st century, public opinion scholars have recorded a slow decrease in social trust in the Church (Mariański 2018). A CBOS survey conducted over the last decade shows that the majority of adult Poles have a positive opinion about the Catholic Church in Poland, but the level of trust is visibly decreasing (2002—76.0%; 2020—64.0%) (Omyła-Rudzka 2020). This marked decrease in trust in the Church in Poland is also confirmed by other studies (Pańków and Rak 2014; Feliksiak 2017; Szauer 2020, p. 136; Dąbrowska 2020; Krzyżak 2020), which show that the Catholic Church recorded a remarkable decrease in social trust in the last two decades.

Similar declines in confidence in the Catholic Church have also been recorded in Great Britain over the years. The British Social Attitudes report, published in 2019, showed that, over the last two decades, trust in religious institutions among the British dropped from 72.0% in 1998 to 54.0% in 2008, further decreasing to only 46.0% ten years later (Clery et al. 2019). That report also addressed the question regarding the extent of the power that churches and religious organisations have in British society. One in three respondents (35.0%) said that religious institutions had too much power, while one in eleven (9%) answered that they had “Way too much power.” Only 5.0% of respondents said religious institutions had insufficient power over British society (Clery et al. 2019). In a study conducted in the UK in October 2020 by Ipsos Mori on adult British people (N = 916), the question “Do you trust what clergymen say?” was answered in the affirmative by 53.0% of the respondents. Compared to 1983, this was a drop of twenty-three percentage points (Ipsos Mori 2020).

Sociological theories concerning the role played by reference groups identify the concept of the informal opinion leader, who can become important to people, to whom people can become emotionally attached, and with whom people can even identify themselves (Włodarczyk 2003).

Such opinion-forming leaders can include prominent figures, people with authority, the governing elite, the intellectual elite, etc. By communicating and sharing opinions with one another, individuals and their leader create a common system of meanings (Kulbat 2004). “Of course, the strongest positive socialising impact is exerted by the groups of which we are members and with which we identify ourselves—a healthy, well-functioning family, or a group of friends, a cohesive neighbourly or local community, a well-integrated team at work, or a popular school. But we can also be affected in a similar, if sometimes exaggerated, way by groups of which we are not members but which we only aspire to join” (Sztompka 2002, p. 164).

After 2004, Catholic bishops in the United Kingdom realised that the ministry among the Polish migrants should be managed by Polish clergymen. As a result, some of the bishops started to look for priests in Poland. The way in which the clergy recruited them led to them being described as “EasyJet priests”, meaning priests who flew to the United Kingdom in response to the emerging pastoral needs (Trzebiatowska 2010).

This situation raises some relevant questions about the influence of Polish Catholic priests on the opinions of individuals, especially abroad, where Polish parishes constitute physical points of reference for Polishness (Trzebiatowska 2021).

A questionnaire-based survey carried out by Marta Trzebiatowska in 2018, which focused on the experience of “non-religion” in a seemingly religious cultural context, revealed some interesting characteristics of Polish Catholics. The power of Catholicism extends to all Poles. While the non-religious openly reject this, they have a lot in common with the average Polish Catholic. The neutral and the non-religious seem to have a cold attitude towards Catholicism, in the sense that they comply socially with the requirements of faith, while, at the same time, being critical of the Church, but do not deprecate Catholicism itself (Trzebiatowska 2021).

3. Materials and Methods

Classical split theories emphasise the diminishing importance of religion and the growing secularisation of politics, especially in Europe, due to the separation between Church and state, and the growing liberalisation of social attitudes. Contemporary empirical data show that any claims about the demise of religion are premature, as religious affiliation continues to significantly influence attitudes among today's populations. While religious practices, faith, and membership of the Church are indeed in decline, and, consequently, confidence in the institutional dimension of the Church weakens, it seems that religion continues to have a significant impact on socio-political attitudes and behaviour (Kolpinskaya and Fox 2019b).

In order to examine how religion influences the attitudes of Poles towards Brexit, we conducted a study on a group of 620 Poles living in the United Kingdom. The sample was 35.2% female and 62.6% male. One in eight respondents (12.6%) was below the age of thirty at the time of the sociological study. The study group was dominated by those in their thirties—30–39 years of age (46.5%), and forties—40–49 years of age (26.1%). One in ten respondents (9.8%) was aged fifty or more during the study. Four out of ten respondents declared that they were educated to primary or secondary level, and 56.8% declared that they were educated to higher education level. A significant majority of respondents said they had very good or good knowledge of the English language (36.5% and 34.0%, respectively), one in five (21.6%) spoke conversational English, and 6.3% considered their English language skills poor or very poor. As many as 36.9% of respondents went to Church regularly (every Sunday), 26.3% did so almost every Sunday, and 30.8% occasionally. Usually, respondents described their financial situation as good (42.9%), while one in three described it as bad (34.0%), and 14.2% as very good. In the study group, most people (47.1%) had lived in the UK for 10–15 years, one in three respondents (35.6%) had lived there for less than ten years, and 13.7% had lived in the UK for more than fifteen years. Six in ten respondents (59.0%) described themselves as religious, and one in four (26.3%) as deeply religious, while one in eight (12.6%) described themselves as non-religious.

The study was conducted using a group-administered questionnaire across major Polish centres, including community houses, Polish Saturday schools, and Polish Catholic parishes in London, Oxford, and Swindon, in September and October 2019. The purpose of the study was to address to what degree Brexit has changed the personal plans of Poles living in the United Kingdom and what factors could have contributed to this. The study was carried out as part of a larger project, so the findings presented in this paper are limited only to the issues related to the influence of the clergy on the knowledge and opinions of the respondents about Brexit. The questionnaire included questions concerning how priests, politicians, friends, British and Polish media, and social media, influence what people know and think about Brexit. The empirical data were statistically analysed at the Social and Economic Analysis Centre, Department Social Sciences, Catholic University of Lublin (KUL).

4. Results

Figure 1 shows the percentage distribution of respondents' answers to a question about the influence of the Catholic clergy on their knowledge and opinions about Brexit. Respondents assessed how the Catholic clergy influenced their knowledge and opinions about Brexit using a six-point scale from 1 (no influence) to 6 (great influence). In total, 51.8% of respondents answered that the clergy had no or little influence on their knowledge of Brexit. Even more respondents (54.5%) said the clergy had no or little influence on their opinions about the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

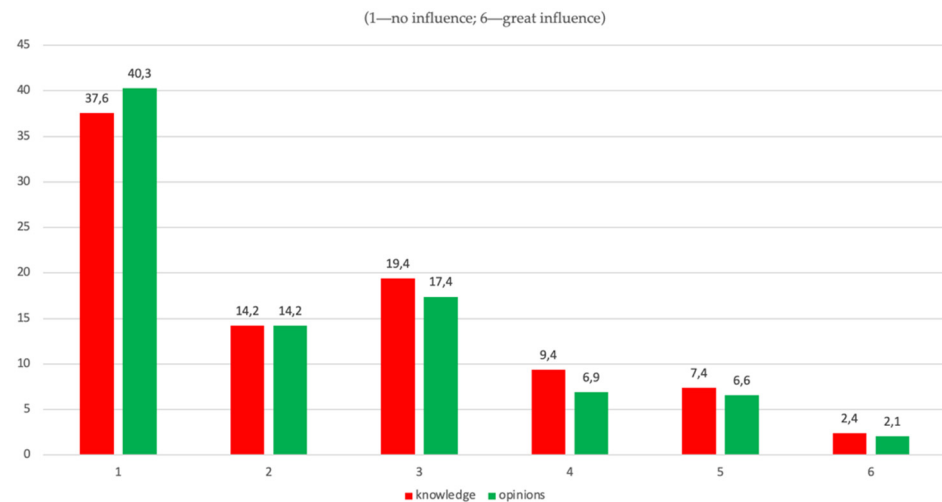


Figure 1. The influence of priests on respondents' knowledge and opinions about Brexit.

The next step in the study was to compare the influence of the Polish Catholic clergy on respondents' knowledge and opinions about Brexit to that of other institutions and groups, such as the media, social media, family, and politicians. Respondents were asked to assess this influence using a six-point scale from 1 (no influence) to 6 (great influence). The means for the sources of influence are presented in Figure 2.

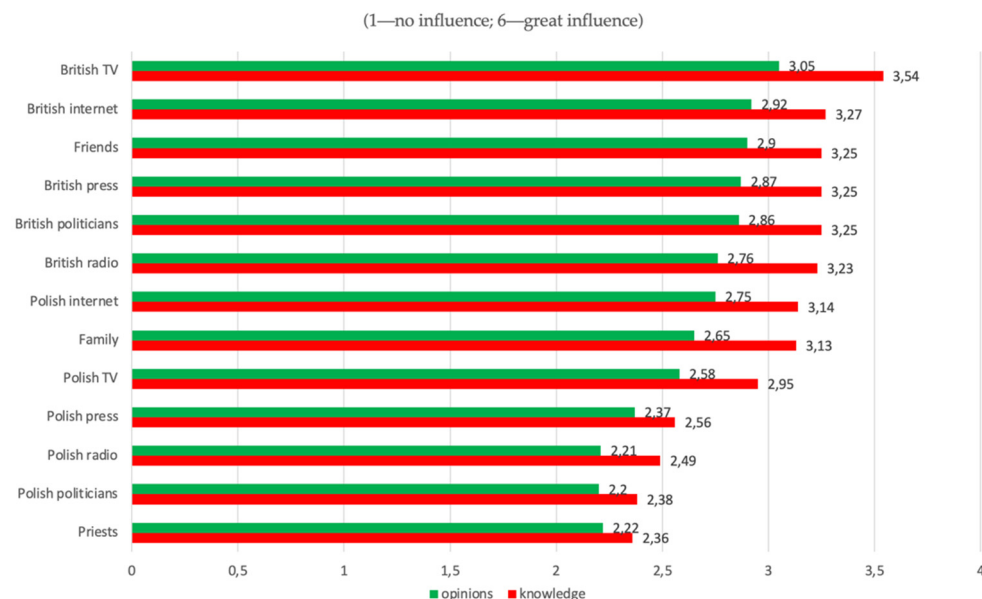


Figure 2. The influence of other institutions and groups on respondents' knowledge and opinions about Brexit.

In our subsequent statistical comparisons, we relied on an analysis of variance (ANOVA). As suggested by Figure 2, all of the analysed sources of influence had a greater impact on respondents' knowledge than on their opinions. Interestingly, the priests proved to be the weakest source of influence in relation to both knowledge and opinions. The sources having the strongest influence were the British media (TV, Internet, press and radio), friends, and politicians. For the Polish sources of information, the greatest role was played by online sources and families. The group having the weakest influence over respondents' knowledge and opinions about Brexit was the clergy. This could suggest a clear shift in Polish society, manifesting itself in a decline in the power of the "protective umbrella" that the Catholic Church has held over Polish society, and which used to play a significant

public role in Poland during the systemic transformation of Eastern Europe (Puzynina and Zdunkiewicz 1992). Nevertheless, it can be useful to take a closer look at the influence the clergy has had over what respondents know and believe, especially given that religious scholars have suggested that, in Polish society, a priest is still perceived as someone special, and the relationship between society and the clergy, where the latter are considered as guides, teachers, and confidants, has—for nearly thirty years—remained rather fixed in the common awareness of Polish society (Karwatowska and Morawska 2021).

Next, we examined whether (and if so, which) demographic variables produced differences between the respondents in relation to their assessment of how the Catholic clergy influenced their knowledge and opinions about Brexit. We considered age (four age groups), knowledge of English (recoded into four levels to choose from), frequency of religious practices, and overall attitude towards faith (with three levels to choose from). For this, we used a one-way ANOVA.

The first stage in the analysis was to assess the influence of the Catholic clergy on what respondents knew about Brexit. The respondents were asked to assess, on a scale of 1 to 6, how the selected sources of information influenced their knowledge of Brexit. We analysed the mean results. The analysis showed that age produced differences between respondents in terms of how they viewed the influence of the Catholic clergy on their knowledge. Significant differences were observed between respondents aged 50+, among whom this influence was the strongest ($M = 2.89$), and those aged 40+ ($M = 2.22$) (value = 2.839; $p = 0.037$; effect size = 0.02). Another important determinant was the respondents' knowledge of English. The strongest influence of the clergy on what people knew about Brexit was observed among those with poor knowledge of English ($M = 3.00$), while the weakest influence was found for those who declared that they spoke conversational English ($M = 2.19$) (value = 2.737; $p = 0.043$; effect size = 0.02). Respondents' religious practices (value = 5.869; $p = 0.003$; effect size = 0.02) and their overall attitude towards faith (value = 7.457; $p < 0.001$; effect size = 0.03) also produced significant differences in their assessments of the clergy's influence on what they knew about Brexit. Individuals who regularly (every Sunday) participated in religious activities, or did so almost every Sunday ($M = 2.58$ and $M = 2.41$, respectively), considered clergymen's influence on their knowledge of Brexit to be greater, compared to those who rarely (a few times a year) participated in any religious activities ($M = 2.08$). How respondents described their faith proved to produce statistical differences in influence assessments between deeply religious and non-religious ($M = 2.60$ and $M = 1.83$, respectively), and between religious ($M = 2.37$) and non-religious ($M = 1.83$) individuals.

The perceived influence of the clergy on the respondents' opinions about what was taking place between London and Brussels was also determined by their knowledge of English (value = 3.221; $p = 0.022$; effect size = 0.02), religious practices (value = 3.870; $p < 0.021$; effect size = 0.02) and overall attitude towards faith (value = 5.622; $p = 0.004$; effect size = 0.02). Respondents who declared that they spoke English fluently were significantly less likely to consider the Catholic clergy's influence on their opinions about Brexit as significant than those who spoke English poorly ($M = 2.34$ and $M = 2.32$, respectively). Similarly, people who had trouble communicating in the official language of their host country believed the influence of the clergy on their opinions about Brexit to be greater, compared to those who spoke English well ($M = 2.32$ and $M = 2.15$, respectively). A comparison between the respondents in terms of their frequency of participation in religious activities showed that priests were much more influential among respondents who declared being regularly involved in religious practices, compared to those who attended Sunday Mass irregularly ($M = 2.41$ and $M = 2.19$, respectively). In relation to the independent variable involving the description of religiosity, the influence of the clergy on opinions about Brexit was stronger among the deeply religious ($M = 2.34$) than among the non-religious ($M = 1.71$) respondents. Statistically significant differences were also found between the religious and non-religious groups ($M = 2.27$ and $M = 1.71$, respectively).

To form their opinions, individuals learn from their immediate environment, including friends, priests, and the media. In any case, information is the medium of knowledge. As contemporary societies are becoming more modern, the importance of religion, and, by extension, the influence of religious leaders, including the clergy, is declining, and societies are becoming indifferent to what they have to say. As a result, institutionalised religion has little influence on people's political decisions or opinions (Norris and Inglehart 2011).

5. Conclusions

Our social milieu, especially our micro- and macro-environments, influence our moral compass, including our opinions. For the Polish migrants caught up in the Brexit scenario, the strongest opinion-forming medium proved to be the British media, followed by the Polish media and migrants' families. At this stage, it is difficult to clearly identify the processes behind those preferences. For instance, do those processes result from opinion-forming optimisation in the individual consciousness, or from perceiving specific information sources as credible, or from confidence in institutions (including religious institutions) that could influence the opinions of the individual about Brexit? This also raises questions about cultural vs. individual determinants of opinion. Do individuals' opinions about Brexit have a cultural background, meaning they are by-products of their environment (including their family)? If so, to what extent? Or are they, instead, more personal, meaning they stem from personal reflection, or do those opinions perhaps have a socio-political background, i.e., they follow on from individuals' affiliations with specific socio-political groups, and their identification with their ideologies. A more in-depth study of this issue could provide more accurate data to identify the determinants of individual opinions about socio-political developments such as Brexit.

In the sociological sciences, it has been argued that religion has a distinct social dimension, in which social means cognitive and intuitive, symbolic and relational, ethical and organisational. The cognitive and intuitive dimension includes beliefs, doctrines, ideas, and what is sacred, and relates these to the ultimate contexts of human life, such as birth and death. The symbolic and relational dimension is manifested in ritual forms, such as religious practices. The ethical dimension corresponds to the individual's relationship with society, and the organisational dimension emphasises the regularity and lasting character of religious phenomena within social groups to show and legitimise their hierarchical structure and the separation of roles ((Marzec 2010, p. 227). Consequently, religion can lend stability and transparency of participation to the specific rules of communal life (Wójtowicz 2004, p. 228). Esmer and Pettersson (2007) divide the present-day sociological studies on the influence of religion on socio-political life into two groups. The first includes the comparative literature on the decisions made by voters representing different religions and denominations. The second comprises the literature that attempts to associate specific determinants of religiosity (including perceived religious status and religious practices) with voting behaviour (Esmer and Pettersson 2007, p. 74).

Identification with a specific religious group can be based on shared values and socio-cultural experiences, moral rules, and codes of behaviour related to that religion (Beckford 2003, pp. 56–58). This shared religious identity can have a significant influence on political attitudes and behaviour (Gutmann 2003, pp. 151–55). Indeed, religion is often connected with specific cultural values (McAndrew 2020, p. 870). Nonconformity is frequently associated with hierarchically organised religion (Lipset 1990, p. 2) in situations where religion supports social order (Misztal 1996) and, in the UK, it was observed that religion can influence British political culture (Evans et al. 1996, pp. 108–9).

In this context, we put forward the argument that people's knowledge and opinions about Brexit could be shaped by the institutional aspect of religion in the form of the direct or indirect influence of the clergy on what people know and think about current political developments. The primary conclusion of this study with regard to the attitudes of Poles in the UK towards Brexit is essentially that the Polish Catholic clergy did not play an important role in opinion-forming, i.e., they had no significant influence on knowledge

or opinions about Brexit among Polish immigrants to the UK. However, there are a few variables that produce differences between respondents in relation to their receptivity to the clergy's influence on their knowledge and opinions about Brexit. These include knowledge of English, religious practices, overall attitude towards faith, and age (the latter only in relation to knowledge). The influence of the Catholic clergy on Polish migrants' knowledge of and opinions on Brexit is evident among those who do not know English very well, regularly participate in religious activities, and describe themselves as religious. In addition, their influence on what people know about Brexit can be observed particularly among older people, i.e., those aged over 50.

These findings are not supported by the study conducted by [Kolpinskaya and Fox \(2019b\)](#), which examined the influence of religion—and, more specifically, that of religious affiliation—on respondents' socio-political attitudes. Those authors used the 2016 British Election Study Referendum Panel, carried out before and after the referendum on the UK's membership of the EU. They presented the results of their study into the influence of religious affiliation on the attitudes expressed in the UK's 2016 referendum. The study showed that Protestants were more likely to oppose remaining in the EU than other Christians, non-Christians, or non-religious people. Further analyses demonstrated that there were significant differences between Protestant groups, with Anglican and Presbyterian respondents being the most Eurosceptic. Moreover, the study revealed that non-religious people were more likely than religious respondents to support the UK's membership of the EU. Therefore, the relationship between religious affiliation and a lack of support for integration with the EU seems to have its roots in the historical relations between religion and the state, as a result of which Anglicanism is associated with national identity. The authors showed that, in that context, religion was only one among a wide array of factors that influenced voters' decisions about Brexit. Even though the levels of religious practice or religious affiliation can decrease in a religious group, this does not mean that the influence of one's perceived religious status or religious affiliation on one's socio-political attitudes or behaviour decreases or is negligible, as shown in the UK ([Kolpinskaya and Fox 2019a](#)). Similar findings were also reported by [Trzebiatowska \(2021\)](#), who demonstrated that religion could influence attitudes not only among religious people, but also societies as a whole, including both religious and non-religious individuals. However, it is important to note that the above-mentioned study did not consider the influence of religion and that of the clergy separately. Moreover, it seems important to differentiate between the two, especially in the context of the current processes of growing religious relativism and selective approaches to different elements of religion ([Bartczuk et al. 2013](#)).

Empirical data also supports the differentiation between individual elements within the wide range of variables related to religion. [McAndrew \(2020\)](#) observed that what is known as "the Anglican Effect", which favours pro-Brexit attitudes, is associated with a preference for authoritarian values, anti-emigrant attitudes, and ethnic identity.

Moreover, for Anglicans, regular religious practices were correlated with less support for Brexit. Based on a regression analysis, McAndrew developed a seven-level scale of attitudes towards Brexit, where one means pro-European, and seven means pro-Brexit. He took into consideration such variables as denomination, activity/involvement with the church, and dogmatic orthodoxy level. His analysis showed that the most Eurosceptic people are non-practising, low-involvement, and highest-orthodoxy (4.8) Anglicans. An identical result was observed for other Christians, who were also characterised by a lack of practice and a low level of participation in the activities of religious organisations, while also ranking the highest for orthodoxy (4.8). On the other hand, Euroenthusiasts were Catholics who went to church every Sunday, were involved with the Church, and ranked high for orthodoxy (2.2) ([McAndrew 2020](#), pp. 882–83). Those authors emphasised that the level of religiosity better explains the differences in election behaviour than religious affiliation alone. This suggests that it is not so much religious affiliation itself that is a strong quantifier of political attitudes as other indicators of religiosity, such as religious practices expressed as participation in religious ceremonies, which, in relation to religiosity,

are often treated as explanatory variables for election behaviour (Esmer and Pettersson 2007, p. 89).

Our findings concerning the attitudes of Poles towards Brexit support the above-cited empirical studies. Religious practices and descriptions of one's religious status do influence an individual's decisions regarding their sources of knowledge and opinions. Those who practice more often and describe themselves as religious or deeply religious are also more likely to believe that the clergy has an influence on their own political behaviour. In this group, the argument regarding the influence of religion and religiosity or, in this case, the influence of religious leaders, including priests, on people's knowledge and opinions about political developments, seems to be a valid one. However, this article does not address this matter in an exhaustive fashion. The aspects that are discussed here should be considered as the basis for further research on the influence of the clergy or, in broader terms, the role of institutionalised religion, on people's knowledge and opinions about political developments.

One should also pay particular attention to an interesting typology proposed by Campbell (2020), who distinguishes the concepts and phenomena of secularism on the one hand, and of non-religion on the other. It seems that, in Campbell's view, a person's secularism may have a much stronger influence on their political attitudes than their religion or non-religion. "Secularism affects politics—and politics affect secularism. The secular surge results, at least in part, from an allergic reaction to politicized religion" (Campbell 2020, p. 225). The typology selected by D. Campbell boils down to showing the conceptual distinctiveness of secularism and non-religion, in which religionists are characterised by high rates of religiosity with low rates of secularisation; non-religionists associate high rates of irreligion with low rates of secularism; secularists are characterised by high rates of both personal irreligion and personal secularism; and religious secularists score low for personal irreligion (high for religiosity), but high for personal secularism (Campbell 2020). This typology allows us to refer back to our own research in which, among practicing Catholics (religionists and secularists), the clergy influenced their views, while, among secular and non-practicing Catholics (non-religionists and secularists), the clergy's influence was minimal.

Undoubtedly, more work is needed in order to continue to improve our understanding of clergymen as political leaders. A salient contribution to this study would be a parallel qualitative study with a sample of UK Polish migrants. However, building on the research design and drawing on the findings presented here should allow scholars to pursue this understanding and, in so doing, to obtain a clearer picture of the workings of the Polish Catholic diaspora.

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