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The “Storm Troops” of Populism: Illiberal Civil Society in Law and Justice’s Poland

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Abstract

In accounting for populism, the literature is split between demand-side explanations, which focus on cultural backlash against rising globalization and inequality, and those from the supply-side, which demonstrate the failure of traditional political parties to address these changing cleavages. Connecting the research agenda of populism with that on civil society, I argue that a subset of right-wing, illiberal civil society links these canonical explanations of populist success. Using an original dataset and qualitative evidence, I evaluate the rise and institutionalization of Polish illiberal civil society in the period 2000–2020 alongside that of the populist right-wing Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS). Using a case study of one such civil society organization, the Gazeta Polska clubs, this paper shows how illiberal civil society can mediate public preferences and provide mobilizational footing for populist elites. This paper also identifies the perceived benefits of illiberal civil society to populist elites in areas of campaigning, reaching swing voters, and advancing the party's platform.

The “Storm Troops” of Populism: Illiberal Civil Society in Law and Justice’s Poland¹

The streets of Warsaw were crowded while European Union (EU) flags burned as 50,000 marchers participated in the city’s annual Independence March (*Marsz Niepodległości*) on November 11, 2019. Their banners read phrases like “the white warriors, the Catholic nationalists are coming.”² The messages on display were not unique to the march, with many of the slogans recalling the statements of the national-conservative populist Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) that won control of both Poland’s presidency and parliament in 2015. What accounts for the success of right-wing populism in Poland, an EU country widely lauded for the success of its democratic transition?

The literature about the rise of populism is split in its answers to this question, either viewing populist success through the lens of popular attitudes on the demand side or through elite discourse on the supply side.³ Connecting the research agenda of populism with that on civil society, I argue that while both canonical demand- and supply-side explanations offer insight into populist success, neither alone are sufficient. I argue that a pillar of right-wing, illiberal civil society links grassroots sentiment and elite politics in a manner necessary for both answers to have full explanatory power.

This illiberal civil society, defined by ethnonationalist identities, religious values, and a distrust of liberal democratic institutions, is not unique to the Polish case. Reminiscent echoes of the Warsaw Independence March are witnessed in the example of the January 6th United States Capitol riot or the wave of 2018 anti-immigrant protests in Chemnitz, Germany, after an Iraqi and Syrian asylum seeker were announced as suspects in a knife attack.⁴ The Polish case offers a

¹ For their excellent comments and advice on this project, I thank Grzegorz Ekiert, Alexandra Vacroux, Sarah Hummel, Bernadette Stadler, Jan Jucha, panelists at the 2021 Northeast Slavic, Eastern Europe, and Eurasian Studies conference, and anonymous reviewers. I gratefully acknowledge support for this work from the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University.

² “In Pictures: Nationalists Flock to Polish Independence March,” *Balkan Insight* (blog), 12 November 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/11/12/in-pictures-nationalists-flock-to-polish-independence-march/>.

³ I adhere to Cas Mudde’s definition of populism as a “moralistic” ideology distinguishing between the values of the “people” and those of the “elite.” Noting “even the concept of ‘the elite’ takes its identity from [the people] (being its opposite, its nemesis),” Mudde holds that populism’s ideological core is thin but can be easily affixed to other ideologies, such as nationalism or communism, to “thicken” its values. In the Polish case, PiS forged a “thickened” populism refracted through a deep-seated religious history in which a “true Pole” was defined by his joint Catholicism and Polishness. Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (2004), p. 544.

⁴ Stella Cooper et al., “Tracking the Oath Keepers Who Attacked the Capitol,” *The New York Times*, January 29, 2021, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/01/29/us/oath-keepers-capitol-riot.html>; Katrin

unique example for testing my argument, however, with Polish illiberal civil society consolidating in the 1990s and thus taking root prior to the founding of PiS in 2001. Evaluating the rise and consolidation of Polish illiberal civil society in the period 2000–2020, I detail how, on the demand side, this civil society converted public preference into political action and, on the supply side, provided mobilizational footing and framing strategies for political elites. Through programming, rallies, and newsletters, among other outlets, illiberal civil society proved a bridge between populist leaders and a grassroots base.

I. Locating Civil Society within Populist Theory

How does illiberal civil society reconcile existing explanations of populist success? On the demand side, right-wing populist success is broadly attributed to cultural backlash against changing cultural norms, distrust of experts and political institutions, and economic inequality.⁵ These first two explanations align with the Polish case, with data from the Polish Center for Public Opinion Research (CBOS) showing only 33 percent of Poles in a March 2020 public opinion poll reported that they trusted the Sejm and Senat (Poland’s parliamentary chambers). Likewise, CBOS data found that 70 percent of Poles did not know anyone belonging to a national or ethnic minority in 2005, a number that dropped by only two percentage points to 68 percent by 2015.⁶ The economic grievance argument holds less explanatory power in the Polish context, however, as Poland was the only EU economy to avoid recession in the 2008 financial crisis. In the period following the crisis Poland’s economy doubled the growth pace of the EU economy at large.⁷ Thus the

Bennhold, “Chemnitz Protests Show New Strength of Germany’s Far Right,” *The New York Times*, August 31, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/30/world/europe/germany-neo-nazi-protests-chemnitz.html>.

⁵ See Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, “Trump and the Populist Authoritarian Parties: *The Silent Revolution* in Reverse,” *Perspectives on Politics* Vol. 15, No. 2 (June 2017); J. Eric Oliver and Wendy M. Rahn, “Rise of the Trumpenvolk: Populism in the 2016 Election,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Vol. 667, No. 1 (1 September 2016); Noam Gidron and Peter A. Hall, “The Politics of Social Status: Economic and Cultural Roots of the Populist Right,” *The British Journal of Sociology* Vol. 68, No. S1 (2017).

⁶ Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej (CBOS), “Zaufanie Społecznie,” March 2020; Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej (CBOS), “Tożsamość Narodowa i Postrzeganie Praw Mniejszości Narodowych i Etnicznych” (CBOS Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej, 2015), pp. 4, 12.

⁷ Marcin Piatkowski, “Four Ways Poland’s State Bank Helped It Avoid Recession,” *Brookings* (blog), June 12, 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2015/06/12/four-ways-polands-state-bank-helped-it-avoid-recession/>; Delia Velculescu IMF European Department, “IMF Survey: Poland: Bright Spot in Recession-Hit Europe,” IMF, accessed October 10, 2021, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2015/09/28/04/53/socar081309a>.

explanatory power of this common demand-side explanation of populist success is weakened in the Polish case.

Supply-side arguments commonly attribute the success of right-wing populism to the failure of traditional center-left parties to provide an inspiring social and economic vision. Supporters felt abandoned by center-left elites, who simultaneously embraced contemporary globalization, environmentalism, and gay rights while putting forward an uninspiring neoliberal economic vision.⁸ In turn, aspiring populist leaders leveraged their programmatic flexibility to harness this newfound anti-elite sentiment for political gain.⁹ In the Polish case the staleness of the center-left Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*, PO) provided a venue for the populist right-wing PiS to emerge as a viable political alternative. Avoiding any clear ideological stance, PO's uncharismatic, elitist reputation reinforced PiS's narrative that pursuing stronger European ties would be destructive and leave "Poland in ruins."¹⁰ Claiming a position as protecting the "authentic" white and religious definition of Polishness against the multiculturalism of Western Europe's shifting values, PiS painted Poland as the last bastion of Christian Europe values, and itself the main guardsmen.¹¹

Still, the onset of populism in the East-Central European case was delayed in comparison to the rise of a demand-side cultural backlash, with many of these divisions around multiculturalism and Polish-Catholic identity emerging in the 1990s during the post-communist transition. Populists were not prepared with adequate party apparatuses to act on public disaffection and seize power in the 1990s. Instead, their movements and parties slowly built out a mobilizational capacity over the coming decades.¹² By this chronology, the demand for populism emerged before parties like PiS took shape, though it remains unclear how the demand side transformed public preference into political power.

⁸ Sheri Berman and Maria Snegovaya, "Populism and the Decline of Social Democracy," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (July 2019), pp. 5–19;

⁹ Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, "Cleavage Theory Meets Europe's Crises: Lipset, Rokkan, and the Transnational Cleavage," *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (2 January 2018), pp. 109–11, 121–24.

¹⁰ For more on the collapse of PO, see Joanna Fomina and Jacek Kucharczyk, "Populism and Protest in Poland," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (2016), pp. 58–60.

¹¹ For more on the inversion of what it means to be "European" in the post-communist context, see Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes, "Explaining Eastern Europe: Imitation and Its Discontents," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (2018), pp. 121, 128.

¹² Jan Kubik, "FATIGUE and POPREBEL: What Are They All About? A Programmatic Statement," MARIE SKŁODOWSKA-CURIE ACTIONS Innovative Training Networks, 18 October 2019, p. 3.

It is within this void that I reintroduce civil society to the conversation on populist success, arguing that that civil society provides an essential link between existing supply- and demand-side explanations of right-wing populism in East-Central Europe. On the demand side, civil society aggregated preferences, providing a venue for likeminded members of the public to mobilize around shared values. Through this, civil society built the organizational capacity and a captive audience for aspiring populist leaders and parties to spread their message. In turn, illiberal civil society earned a broader base, political influence, and financial benefit for the eventual PiS government. This symbiotic relationship was explicitly recognized by PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński in 2010, when he applauded one such illiberal civil society organization, the *Gazeta Polska* clubs (*Kluby Gazety Polskiej*, KGP), for their work. Deeming illiberal civil society “a movement of courageous people,” Kaczyński urged that these groups played a central role in “the construction of Polish democracy [and] its defense” against Western, pro-European forces.¹³

The ability for civil society to provide a ready-made mobilizational network to supply side actors was highlighted in the Hungarian case by Béla Greskovits, who depicts the methodical construction of the populist Fidesz party’s adjacent Civic Circles movement as a key to that party’s eventual success. A series of grassroots networks that harnessed civic activism to push a cultural and political agenda, the Circles offered a localized venue for Fidesz to embed itself into daily Hungarian life, reinforce socio-political cleavages, and consolidate its electorate. Citing instances in which Viktor Orbán attributed Fidesz’s 2010 victory to the Civic Circles, Greskovits holds that the “lasting cohesion of the illiberal camp” is importantly rooted in the successful entrenchment of illiberal civil society.¹⁴

Building on Greskovits, I maintain that illiberal civil society had a grassroots presence long before parties such as Fidesz and PiS effectively mobilized and thus provided a crucial bridge between grassroots cultural backlash and party politics. Offering the first venues through which public disaffection could be aired, mediated, and channeled into action, illiberal civil society’s gradual institutionalization proved central to PiS’s success. As PiS gained strength, this subset of civil society became a central meeting ground between the party’s politicians and base. Mobilizing support for Law and Justice, illiberal civil society leveraged its authority after PiS’s 2015 victory

¹³ “Święto Klubów ‘Gazety Polskiej,’” May 30, 2010, http://www.klubygp.pl/archiwum/arch/zjazd/2010_05_30_1.html.

¹⁴ Béla Greskovits, “Rebuilding the Hungarian Right through Conquering Civil Society: The Civic Circles Movement,” *East European Politics* Vol. 36, No. 2 (April 2, 2020), pp. 248–49.

to advocate for their preferred policies. Soliciting government funding and support at the expense of other, more “traditional” civil society organizations, illiberal civil society converted its political clout into material gains.

This paper proceeds as follows: I first define illiberal civil society within the literature on civil society and detail how it connects top-down and bottom-up explanations of populism. I then delineate the groups and interests that comprise this illiberal pillar. From these subsets I select one such organization, the Gazeta Polska clubs, as a case to examine this mechanism. Using club documents, reports, and an original dataset of club meetings, I review the development of the Gazeta Polska clubs alongside that of PiS to identify the form and content of gatherings most associated with party participation. In doing so, I define the structures by which illiberal civil society facilitates connections between populist elites and grassroots politics.

II. Defining Illiberal Civil Society

The centrality of civil society to right-wing populist success may seem like a surprise, as civil society is broadly viewed as a beneficial addition to democratic societies. The literature following the fall of communism and the Western social movements of the 1960s to 1970s demonstrated the power of associational life vis-à-vis the state, reviving the premise that a vibrant civil society offers a robust protection of liberty, tolerance, and other liberal democratic norms.¹⁵ Capable of defending individual autonomy against governmental overstep, civil society earned a positive connotation. Scholars such as Larry Diamond echoed Alexis de Tocqueville’s contention that, if built correctly, civil society could serve as “large free schools” for democracy, asserting that civil society offered alternative avenues for political participation outside of the party system.¹⁶ In addition to breeding greater tolerance and political engagement, Robert Putnam also made the case

¹⁵ John Keane, *Civil Society and the State: New European Perspectives* (London; New York: Verso, 1988); Hanspeter Kriesi et al., *New Social Movements in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (University of Minnesota Press, 1995); A thorough literature review of these trends is found in Grzegorz Ekiert, “Civil Society as a Threat to Democracy: Organizational Bases of Populist Counter-Revolution in Poland” (Harvard Center for European Studies Open Forum Series, 2020), <https://ces.fas.harvard.edu/uploads/files/Open-Forum-Papers/Ekiert-Working-Paper-2020-Final.pdf>.

¹⁶ Larry Jay Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 228; Larry Diamond, “Rethinking Civil Society: Toward Democratic Consolidation,” *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1994), pp. 4–17.

that regions with historically dense social ties experienced not just political benefits, but also greater economic success.¹⁷

Writing in the wake of these neo-Tocquevillian thinkers, another group of scholars reminded of the challenges posed by a strong civil society to poorly institutionalized democracies. My argument falls in the tradition of these scholars. As Nancy Bermeo and Philip Nord remind, civil society does “not of necessity feed into a politics of toleration and inclusion but may just as well be drawn on for repressive ends,” pointing to the ripe case of the twentieth century as an example of civil society’s democratic pitfalls.¹⁸ With the example of Weimar Germany, Sheri Berman argues that a strong civil society in the presence of a weak state can lead civil society to become “an alternative to politics,” allowing associational life to “undermine political stability.”¹⁹ Work by Dylan Riley illustrates how Northern Italy’s dense associational networks provided ideological and organizational footing for Mussolini’s rise in the 1920s.²⁰ Emphasizing the role of polarization, these authors demonstrate how illiberal ideologies paired with a robust civil society can fuel polarization and bolster anti-democratic agendas.

This polarization can exacerbate existing political cleavages, radicalize viewpoints, and spur backlash toward non-aligned movements when partnered with pillarization in the associational sphere. Pillarization, as defined by Philippe Schmitter, is the vertical segmentation of civil society along religious, political, ethnic, or other bounds in a manner that yields little interaction across communities.²¹ Slicing associational life into isolated spheres, pillarization allows for robust and radicalized civil societies to form without any of the information-spreading and conversation-producing benefits espoused by the neo-Tocquevillians. As Grzegorz Ekiert argues, a dually pillarized-polarized civil society is an especially lethal tool for governments with

¹⁷ Robert D. Putnam, Robert Leonardi, and Raffaella Nanetti, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 121–48, 158–162.

¹⁸ Nancy Bermeo and Philip Nord, *Civil Society Before Democracy: Lessons from Nineteenth-Century Europe* (US: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2000), p. xxxi.

¹⁹ Sherri Berman, “Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic,” *World Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 3 (1997), p. 11.

²⁰ Dylan Riley, *The Civic Foundations of Fascism in Europe: Italy, Spain, and Romania, 1870–1945* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), pp. 53–61.

²¹ Philippe C. Schmitter, “Civil Society East and West,” in *Consolidating the Third Wave Democracies: Themes and Perspectives*, ed. Larry Diamond et al. (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 248.

authoritarian ambitions who can restrict non-ideologically aligned organizations' access to resources and regulate speech to shape civil society to preference-aligned pillars.²²

Scholars use a variety of terms including “bad,” “uncivil,” and “conservative” civil society to refer to this illiberal pillar of civil society, questioning both *who* comprises this pillar and *what* its consequences are.²³ My definition is in keeping with a 2018 Carnegie Foundation report, in which Richard Youngs offers an encompassing definition of this conservative pillar as including organizations marked by a combination of their “religious values, strong national identities, exclusionary ethnic identities, traditional or customary identities and institutional forms, illiberal political ideology, or a curtailment of liberal personal rights.”²⁴ Though wide ranging, Youngs' definition aligns with those suggested by others.²⁵ In the Polish context, in particular, this doubly pillarized and polarized civil society is defined by a cohort of religious, nationalistic, and conservative civil society actors whose support assisted, vindicated, and, in some cases, shaped PiS's anti-liberal, nationalistic and religious agenda.

How does illiberal civil society mediate between popular preference and elite strategy? On the demand side, these organizations host “big tent” gatherings from religious pilgrimages to the annual Independence March, as well as regularized grassroots gatherings, which provide a clearinghouse for preference mediation. Members of the public can feel “heard” by sharing anti-elite sentiment or fears surrounding multiculturalism at meetings and can identify which of these feelings are most pressing by selecting the lineup of speakers to present at future gatherings. Similarly, in preparing for marches and meetups these members use online message boards and

²² Grzegorz Ekiert, “Civil Society as a Threat to Democracy: Organizational Bases of Populist Counter-Revolution in Poland” (Harvard Center for European Studies Open Forum Series, 2020); and Grzegorz Ekiert, “The Dark Side of Civil Society,” *Concilium Civitas* (blog), accessed February 23, 2020, <http://conciliumcivitas.pl/the-dark-side-of-civil-society/>.

²³ Simone Chambers and Jeffrey Kopstein, “Bad Civil Society,” *Political Theory*, Vol. 29, No. 6 (1 December 2001), p. 854.; Petr Kopecký and Cas Mudde, *Uncivil Society?: Contentious Politics in Post-Communist Europe*, Routledge Studies in Extremism and Democracy. Routledge Research in Extremism and Democracy (London, UK, New York: Routledge, 2003).

²⁴ Richard Youngs, “The Mobilization of Conservative Civil Society” (Carnegie Europe, October 4, 2018), <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2018/10/04/mobilization-of-conservative-civil-society-pub-77366>.

²⁵ For more definitions of illiberal (or “right-wing”) civil society, see: Michael Minkenberg, “The European Radical Right and Xenophobia in West and East: Trends, Patterns and Challenges,” in *Right-Wing Extremism in Europe: Country Analyses, Counter-Strategies and Labor-Market Oriented Exit Strategies*, ed. Sebastian Serafin et al., FES-Projekt Gegen Rechtsextremismus (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Forum Berlin, 2013), pp. 9–11; Daniel Płatek and Piotr Płucienniczak, “Mobilizing on the Extreme Right in Poland: Marginalization, Institutionalization, and Radicalization,” in *Civil Society Revisited: Lessons from Poland*, ed. Kerstin Jacobsson and Elżbieta Korolczuk, Studies on Civil Society Vol. 9 (New York, NY: Berghahn, 2017), p. 289.

offline associational networks to workshop the symbols on display and chants shouted on the streets, thereby leveraging the organizational capacity of civil society to narrow the framework of what it means to be a “nationalist” or “Pole.”

On the supply side, illiberal civil society provides a non-governmental partner to a populist’s agenda. The pillar offers additional organizational infrastructure for aligned politicians, as witnessed in the PiS government’s financing of the right-wing Catholic meeting organization and radio station Radio Maryja to the tune of over \$50 million USD between 2016–2018. PiS’s government funds supported a variety of projects at Radio Maryja, ranging from nationalistic memorials to Catholic-nationalist TV programs.²⁶ While political elites may simply fund illiberal civil society groups working on mutual interesting issues, politicians can also vote with their feet by supporting these organizations at both their national- and local-level gatherings.

III. Case Selection and Subsets of Illiberal Civil Society

To select a case for examining this mechanism, I ask what groups, more broadly, comprise Polish illiberal civil society? This pillar can be divided into four subsets: (1) clerical Catholic organizations; (2) radical political movements; (3) media and think tanks; and (4) traditional (often local) civil society groups.

The first of these groupings, clerical Catholic organizations, gain their authority from the common historic understanding that “Pole=Catholic.” This ahistorical understanding of Polishness still brandishes political and historical weight, despite the fact that Poland was multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-denominational dating back to the tenth century. The narrative of the *Polak-Katolik* itself likely emerged following Poland’s partitions, when “Poland lost its statehood, but the church protected expressions of Polish national identity, such as language and literature, and allowed a nation without a state to survive.”²⁷ Throughout the communist era the Church gained increased moral authority as a perceived ally of the nation in and against the government. In the

²⁶ A journalistic account of the spending and links to the government documents with these receipts is found at: “214.158.441 Złotych z Publicznych Pieniędzy Na ‘Dziela’ o. Rydzyka [WYLICZENIE OKO.PRESS],” accessed May 6, 2020, <https://oko.press/214-238-441-zl-na-dziela-o-rydzyka/>.

²⁷ Anna Maria Grzymała-Busse, *Nations Under God: How Churches Use Moral Authority to Influence Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 148–49.

post-communist era, the Church leveraged this power, utilizing its following, legitimacy, and institutional access to earn policy concessions from secular leaders.²⁸

While the Church itself is the centerpiece of the Catholic clerical sub-group, another powerful member is Radio Maryja and its subset of “Family” organizations (*Rodzina Radia Maryja*). Declaring itself “a Catholic voice in your home,” the station was founded in Toruń, Poland in 1991 by Father Tadeusz Rydzyk. The Radio Maryja Family organizations quickly spread across the country, launching annual pilgrimages to the holy Black Madonna of Częstochowa shrine that amassed over 100,000 participants annually. Rydzyk also runs the affiliated Lux Veritatis Foundation, which houses organizations ranging from the Higher School for Social and Media Culture in Toruń (*Wyższa Szkoła Kultury Społecznej i Medialnej*, WSKSiM) to the geothermal heating project Geotermia Toruń. The breadth of these endeavors reflects Rydzyk and his associates’ considerable influence over this Catholic subset of illiberal civil society, demonstrating the importance of Radio Maryja to defining “Catholic Polishness” despite the distinction between the official Church apparatus and the station itself.

The second subset, radical political movements, include a cohort of organizations ranging from far-right hooligans, such as soccer fans, to the borderline fascist All-Polish Youth (*Młodzież Wszechpolska*, MW) and National-Radical Camp (*Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny*, ONR). Both the ONR and MW arose from pre-communist national radical traditions, which imitated Italian and German models of fascism. Drawing on its Catholic nationalist identity, the ONR existed as a Polish political party in the 1930s. A revived movement sharing its forerunner’s name was founded after the collapse of communism in 1993. The All-Polish Youth, launched in its current iteration in 1989, also shares a name with its parallel pre-war organization.

The iterations of both the MW and ONR emerging in the post-communist era continue in the tradition of extreme exclusionary rhetoric and values. Their activities range from “white power” music concerts to publishing articles and books honoring the legacies of violence of pre-war white nationalists. These two groups self-identify as skinheads, as witnessed in early 2005 when the search engine optimization keywords for the MW Podlasie region included the phrases “hooligans, skinheads polska, swastika, [...] sieg heil, 88, 14.”²⁹ Together, soccer hooligans,

²⁸ Grzymała-Busse, p. 187.

²⁹ As Pankowski notes, “14” is an “easily recognized international racist code for ‘14 words,’ a motto conceived by David Lane, a member of the U.S. Nazi-terrorist group The Order: ‘We must secure the existence of our people and

skinheads, the ONR, and MW form founding members of the annual November 11 Independence March, which has come to earn attendance in the tens of thousands annually, demonstrating the strength of this illiberal civil society subset.

The third group, including media, think tanks, foundations, and other conservative professional organizations, span a wide range of groups that form a more secular and less extreme subset of illiberal civil society. Operating on the underlying charge that democratization marginalized civil society groups that did not align with Western liberal democratic norms, this third sector uses more institutionalized pathways than the radical political movements to advance their message. Illiberal civil society in the think tank, media, and professional sector frames itself as marginalized by those civil society organizations founded during the democratization era, which are perceived as being “naturally animated by organizations mobilizing for progressive causes.”³⁰

This perceived historic wrong was rectified in 2017 when the PiS government created a new Center for Development of Civil Society intended to increase “equal access to public funds” for civil society organizations.³¹ PiS uses the center to redistribute funds in support of national organizations that share its own ideology, such as the Three Dots Association, which promotes a nationalist interpretation of Polish history, and Ordo Iuris, a legal think tank that gained notoriety for its 2016 Stop Abortion campaign.³² To conservative civil society groups like the Three Dots and Ordo Iuris, the Center for Development of Civil Society is a formal mechanism to correct the supposed marginalization of conservative-leaning organizations in Poland’s immediate post-communist era.

The *Gazeta Polska* clubs are also included within the professional, media, and think tank sector of illiberal civil society. Founded as a set of meeting groups for readers of the conservative newspaper *Gazeta Polska* in 1993, the clubs were revitalized in 2005. By 2015 the clubs boasted 380 organizations across Poland and abroad. The clubs also enjoy a close relationship with PiS, with national party representatives regularly attending the organization’s meetings. Together, members of this third sector of illiberal civil society avoid the extreme language and tactics of the

a future for white children’,” while 88 is a neo-Nazi “code meaning ‘Heil Hitler’ (8 stands for the eighth letter of the alphabet). Rafał Pankowski, *The Populist Radical Right in Poland: The Patriots*, pp. 32, 116–118.

³⁰ Youngs, “The Mobilization of Conservative Civil Society” p. 7.

³¹ Paweł Marczewski, “Freedom to Exclude: Conservative CSOs in Law and Justice Poland - The Mobilization of Conservative Civil Society,” *Carnegie Europe*, accessed October 8, 2019, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2018/10/04/freedom-to-exclude-conservative-csos-in-law-and-justice-poland-pub-77377>.

³² Marczewski, “Freedom to Exclude: Conservative CSOs in Law and Justice Poland.”

radical political movement subset, instead bearing the trappings of think tanks and NGOs common to “mainstream” post-communist civil society.

The fourth subset of illiberal civil society includes long-established conservative civil society organizations. With deep historical traditions these groups are part of the illiberal pillar in so far as they reflect a historically conservative civic tradition. A key example within this traditionalist subset is the Circle of Rural Housewives (*Koło Gospodyń Wiejskich*), a mutual aid network offering educational resources, entrepreneurship of home goods, and other supports for rural life. While 2020 CBOS data shows only 5 percent of Poles participate in these circles, the circles date to 1877 and play a prominent role in providing local mutual aid and cultural services.³³

Similarly, the Volunteer Fire Brigades (*Ochotnicze Straże Pożarne*, OSP) boast over 690,000 participants and 16,000 registered offices across Poland (as measured in 2016). Defining its chief role as “rescuing, saving, and defense,” the OSP also provides activities such as support of education, tourism, and environmental protection.³⁴ Despite its traditional roots, the OSP is also politically active today. The OSP partnered with the Polish government in the June 2020 presidential elections to buy a fire truck for the town in each province that earned the highest percent voter turnout.³⁵

From these four subsets I select the sample case of the *Gazeta Polska* clubs to examine the mechanism of illiberal civil society. In selecting a case, I sought an organization operating at both a local and national level, making it plausible that this organization could effectively connect grassroots sentiment and elite political activity. Further, I limit my choices to organizations founded after 1989, as to examine a subset of illiberal civil society that emerged squarely in the politics of Poland’s democratization and European accession. Founded in 1993, the *Gazeta Polska* clubs also pre-date PiS, which was officially founded in 2001. Leveraging an original dataset of *Gazeta Polska* meetings in the period 2013–2020, I use geographic and statistical analysis to test my theory of illiberal civil society. Probing the benefits afforded to supply-side leaders by illiberal

³³ Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej (CBOS), “Aktywność Polaków w Organizacjach Obywatelskich,” p. 2.

³⁴ “Ochotnicze Straże Pożarne – lokalne centra kultury. Raport z badań 2016,” Kłon-Jawor Association, pp. 10–12, accessed November 12, 2020, <https://fakty.ngo.pl/raporty/ochotnicze-straze-pozarne-lokalne-centra-kultury-raport-z-badan-2016>.

³⁵ “Bitwa o wozy. Pieniądze na wóz strażacki dostanie gmina, która nie ma OSP,” gazetapl, accessed November 8, 2020, <http://wroclaw.wyborcza.pl/wroclaw/7,35771,26127447,bitwa-o-wozy-pieniadze-na-woz-strazacki-dostanie-gmina-ktora.html>; For more information on the Volunteer Fire Brigades see the following report from the Kłon/Jawor Association: “Ochotnicze Straże Pożarne – lokalne centra kultury. Raport z badań 2016.”

civil society, I identify the scenarios in which national-level PiS officials attend club events and engage with illiberal civil society.

IV. The Mechanism of Illiberal Civil Society in the Case of the Gazeta Polska Clubs

The Gazeta Polska clubs offer an example of an organization so closely tied to Law and Justice's platform and leadership that the organization, in many instances, acts as an extension of PiS's party apparatus. Offering weekly meetings across Poland, the clubs are an offshoot of the right-wing magazine *Gazeta Polska*. In 2015 the clubs were heralded by PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński as the "storm troops" that mobilized PiS's return to power, equating the clubs to the Nazi German paramilitary unit that assisted in Hitler's rise.³⁶ Reiterating the degree of mobilizational capacity and perceived unity between Law and Justice and illiberal civil society, Kaczyński's comments are also reinforced by his party's actions. The party and clubs are uniquely linked, with PiS politicians attending 332 club events in Poland between 2013 and 2020 (16.8 percent of all events held in this time).³⁷ Club members also play a political role for the party, with ten members winning seats in the Sejm on the PiS ticket during Poland's 2019 parliamentary elections.

This relationship was on full display in January 2016 when the clubs opened a new Kraków headquarters in the same location of President Andrzej Duda's former parliamentary home office. The event itself featured a speech from the Deputy Speaker of the Sejm Ryszard Terlecki, a letter with remarks from President Duda, and comments from *Gazeta Polska* Editor in Chief Tomasz Sakiewicz. In his speech, Sakiewicz applauded the role of the clubs in "building civil society," urging further that "we [Gazeta Polska and PiS] have a common sense of mission (...) we sweat together."³⁸ This alignment in mission and action, symbolized in the clubs' physical assumption of Duda's former offices, places the Gazeta Polska clubs as one of the chief civil society organizations in support of the PiS government.

How did the Gazeta Polska clubs forge this intimate relationship with PiS, and what benefit, if any, does PiS get in return? I illustrate how the Gazeta Polska clubs offer PiS direct

³⁶ "Oddziały szturmowe „Gazety Polskiej” (wideo) – cały artykuł,” *Kluby Gazety Polskiej* (blog), accessed August 31, 2020, <http://www.klubygp.pl/oddzialy-szturmowe-gazety-polskiej-wideo/>.

³⁷ The *Kluby Gazety Polskiej* website did not provide weekly event updates on their website prior to March 2013.

³⁸ "[Tydzień w Klubach „GP”] Otwarcie biura Klubów „Gazety Polskiej”,” *Kluby Gazety Polskiej* (blog), 5 January 2016, accessed August 31, 2020, <http://www.klubygp.pl/tydzien-w-klubach-gp-otwarcie-biura-klubow-gazety-polskiej/>.

access to a mobilized population of ideologically aligned Poles, through which the party could further engage with constituents and rally support. Through inquiring into when and how PiS chose to leverage the clubs to its benefit, I glean insight into the perceived benefits supply-side actors identify in illiberal civil society.

Beginning their meetings in earnest during PiS's first government in 2005, the *Gazeta Polska* clubs only established 43 clubs in its first two years. In the period 2007–2015, in which PiS was out of government, the clubs increased from 43 to 380 organizations, both in Poland and across hubs of the Polish diaspora such as New York, Chicago, and Paris. Canvassing and campaigning for PiS politicians as the organization grew, the clubs provided part of the mobilization framework that returned PiS to power. This support was reciprocated, with the PiS-controlled Senate earmarking over 1.37 million PLN, or \$372,000 USD, for the clubs' international outreach activity alone in the period 2017–2019.³⁹ Leveraging the party's stated platform alongside its attendance at club events to measure what aspects of illiberal civil society were perceived by PiS to be particularly valuable, I demonstrate the ways in which the *Gazeta Polska* clubs offered organizational footing at times in which PiS required mobilizational resources.

This case study proceeds in three main sections. First, I overview the clubs' founding and as time trends in the organization's development. I next consider the clubs' activity and growth alongside that of PiS in the period 2000–2010, drawing on club records, press releases, news sources, and an original dataset of all documented club events since 2013. To further explore what benefits PiS receives from illiberal civil society I use a logistic regression to identify the scenarios in which national-level PiS officials attend club events. Here I use attendance as a proxy for a political figure's demonstrated interest in illiberal civil society. This model finds that there is a higher probability associated with PiS officials appearing at events operating on a national scale, during an election season, and focusing on topics related to regional politics or matters of historical memory. I also find that there is a higher probability associated with PiS attending events co-hosted by the *Gazeta Polska* clubs and Radio Maryja Family, demonstrating the integration across various branches of illiberal civil society and the populist parties they work with.

³⁹ "PO: 1,37 mln zł dla Klubów „Gazety Polskiej” z funduszu Senatu dla Polonii,” accessed August 18, 2020, <https://www.wirtualnemedial.pl/artykul/po-1-37-mln-zl-dla-klubow-gazety-polskiej-z-funduszu-senatu-dla-polonii>.

a. Geographic and Attendance Trends

The *Gazeta Polska* clubs are an offshoot of the weekly right-wing magazine *Gazeta Polska*. Having published in some capacity since 1993, the paper also operates an internet news portal (*Niezalezna.pl*) and daily publication (*Gazeta Polska Codziennie*). The paper is also closely tied to the news station *Telewizja Republika*.⁴⁰ A previous version of the clubs existed in the period February 1994 to mid-1997 and boasted over 100 organizations at its peak, but the current iteration was not founded until 2005 when Tomasz Sakiewicz assumed the position of *Gazeta Polska* Editor-in-Chief.⁴¹ As of October 2020, there are 470 clubs across Poland and abroad, with club growth since 2005 (when there were three total clubs) visualized in Figure 1.⁴²

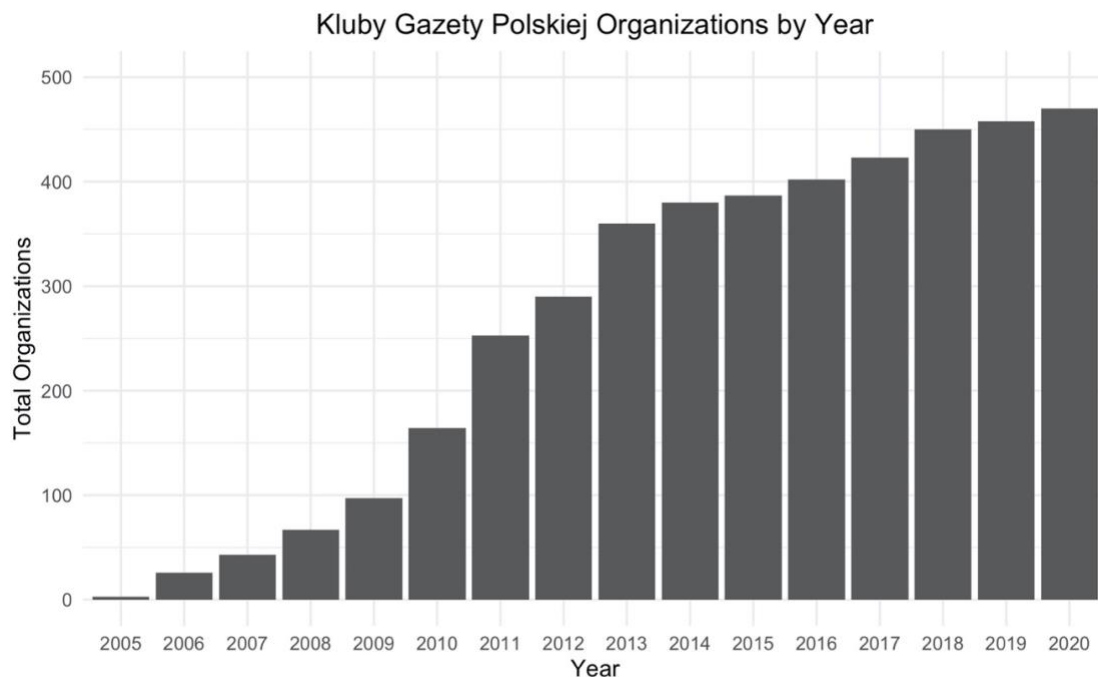


Figure 1– Growth of *Gazeta Polska* clubs 2005–2020

As described by Sakiewicz in his 2013 memoir, the clubs are “independent units,” to which the *Gazeta Polska* editorial office lends the “right to use the logo of *Gazeta Polska*,” but they

⁴⁰ “KOMUNIKAT ZARZĄDU TV REPUBLIKA!,” May 8, 2017, <https://telewizjarepublika.pl/komunikat-zarzadu-tv-republika,48226.html>.

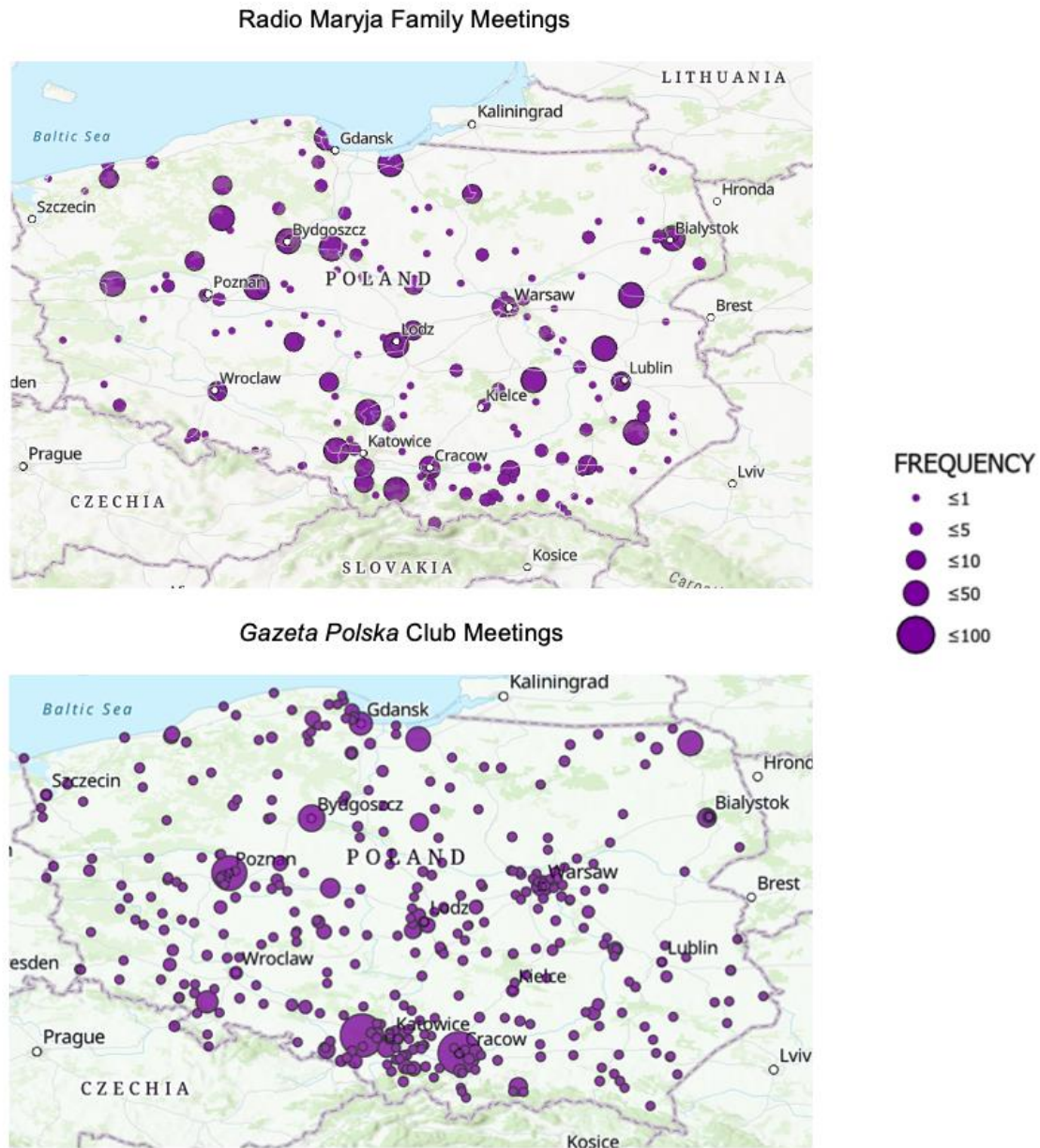
⁴¹ Marcin Ślarzyński, “Rola Klubów „Gazety Polskiej” w Sukcesie Politycznym Prawa i Sprawiedliwości w 2015 Roku. Aktorzy Lokalni Czy Aktor Ogólnokrajowej Sfery Publicznej III RP?,” *Przegląd Socjologiczny* LXVII (67), No. 2 (2018), p. 144.

⁴² “Kluby GP Powstałe Kluby GP,” 2014, <https://docplayer.pl/24751188-Kluby-gp-powstale-kluby-gp.html>, accessed July 28, 2020.

otherwise exist separate from the newspaper.⁴³ Despite Sakiewicz's assertion, *Gazeta Polska* staff member Ryszard Kapuściński serves as the official go-between between the organizations and journal, sending weekly updates to all clubs regarding recent meetings, upcoming elections, and other ongoings. Sakiewicz himself attended 63 club meetings in the period 2013–2020, demonstrating a continued connection between the club and newspaper leadership teams. As such, the clubs should be considered a full appendage of the *Gazeta Polska* magazine.

Scattered across Poland, the clubs averaged 265 meetings a year since 2013 (with a standard deviation of 73). The geographic dispersion of these meetings is visualized in Figure 2, where it is clear that, while the clubs' meeting spread is dispersed across Poland, including in many small towns, the meetings are geographically centered around major cities, with Warsaw, Łódź, Katowice, and Kraków appearing as event hubs. The focus of the clubs' meetings in large cities is a contrast to the geographic scatter of other illiberal civil society groups. For example, the Radio Maryja Family concentrates their meetings in smaller towns, largely in the east of Poland, in the same regions that typically deliver high vote shares for PiS. The national spread and city-centric focus of the *Gazeta Polska* clubs' meeting pattern is a notable contrast.

⁴³ Tomasz Sakiewicz, *Partyzant wolnego słowa* (Wydawnictwo M, 2013), pp. 83–85.



*Figure 2 – Gatherings of Radio Maryja Family (top), Gazeta Polska clubs (bottom).
Larger cities have name tags denoting their location.*

This suggests that the Gazeta Polska clubs employ a hub-and-spoke organizational structure, in which they hold events in larger regional cities that members from the surrounding area can attend, as opposed to the highly localized model of rural church gatherings in tiny towns used by other illiberal civil society groups. A comparison of Radio Maryja Family and Gazeta Polska club meeting patterns is found in Figure 2.

Though meeting frequency and location is useful in gauging an organization's scope, the number of meetings cannot be considered a perfect proxy for club penetration across society without an understanding of how heavily attended club events are. For events in which attendance is reported, the club averaged 300 attendees a meeting in the period 2013–2020. Here, the smallest recorded meeting had 30 attendees, while the largest had 4,000. All but two events were attended by 1,000 or fewer people. These data only include events in which the club was the lead organizer, and as such does not include large protests and gatherings where the club may have participated but was not the sole organizing party, such as the national Independence March, which can attract up to 200,000 participants.

b. Historic Relationship between the Clubs and PiS 2005–2020

The relationship between the clubs and PiS can be traced to the first issue of *Gazeta Polska* in 1993, which featured an interview with PiS Chairman Jarosław Kaczyński. When the clubs began to meet in earnest in 2005, they met with both the more moderate Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*, PO) and PiS politicians. Soon after in 2007 the clubs stopped meeting with PO leaders, citing the increased estrangement between the two parties.⁴⁴ This relationship with PiS was quickly defined as one of mutual commitment: PiS leaders participated in club gatherings and, in turn, members aired their grievances on issues ranging from press freedom to lustration. For example, in 2006 Jarosław Kaczyński presented at the annual *Gazeta Polska* congress, where he assured the crowd that he was a “faithful” reader of the paper. To thank him for his time, the clubs gifted Kaczyński an original Salvador Dali print and promised to continue the “work on our country in the name of conservative ideals.”⁴⁵

Here the clubs assumed a position squarely in defense of the PiS government, mobilizing when they felt that PiS was under attack. For example, in 2006 the clubs launched a march under the slogan “Defense of the IV Republic.” A key slogan from PiS’s 2005 parliamentary campaign, the term “IV Republic” (*IV Rzeczpospolita*, RP), was a direct reference to the perceived failures of the III RP (the official title of the post-communist Polish republic). Per the 2005 PiS party constitution, the III RP “did not bring to life neither a solidarity state of social justice, nor a

⁴⁴ Ślarzyński, “Rola Klubów „Gazety Polskiej” w Sukcesie Politycznym Prawa i Sprawiedliwości w 2015 Roku. Aktorzy Lokalni Czy Aktor Ogólnokrajowej Sfery Publicznej III RP?,” p. 143.

⁴⁵ Tomasz Kowalczyk, “III Zjazd Klubów ‘Gazety Polskiej,’” May 2006, http://www.klubygp.pl/archiwum/arch/zjazd/05_06_zjazd.html.

Catholic country of the Polish nation” or even a “democratic state of law.” The IV RP intended to establish a new, truly Polish government, one that promoted Catholic values and the “family as the basic institution of social life.” Pushing back at the post-communist international order, which existed “at the expense of the good of the Republic of Poland,” the IV RP was PiS’s effort to start afresh with a family-centric, Catholic-nationalist Poland.⁴⁶ In invoking PiS’s symbology in their protest language, the reignited *Gazeta Polska* clubs demonstrated a shared vision for who constituted the Polish nation and what the future of this nation held.

In December 2007 this shared PiS-*Gazeta Polska* club identity was again called to the fore when the Warsaw-Śródmieście District Court brought in Sakiewicz under libel charges. Here, Jarosław Kaczyński proposed the abolition of Article 212 in the Sejm, the article at which Sakiewicz was held at fault. Noting that PiS “wanted the fight for media pluralism to strengthen (...) not to return to the 1990s, where this pluralism in the media did not exist,” Kaczyński argued that fringe journalists were unfairly targeted under the current libel law.⁴⁷ In supporting Sakiewicz, Kaczyński validated *Gazeta Polska*’s sometimes inflammatory right-wing commentary. This support was reciprocated by the clubs, with the clubs hosting marches “in defense of free media” throughout the period 2007–2010 whenever they perceived PiS to be misaligned in the press. *Gazeta Polska* itself also published commentaries that the “mainstream” media was committing “terrorism in the media” by hiring journalists who critiqued PiS’s actions.⁴⁸

The clubs also provide members with a hub for local social and political activity, a function Sakiewicz heralded as “freeing social energy and changing it to capital.”⁴⁹ Ranging from book talks to historical celebrations, as well as masses and charity drives, a large part of the clubs’ activity centers on cultural and religious activity. In this way, the *Gazeta Polska* clubs offer the benefits of networked civic virtue first espoused by Robert Putnam in his definition of social capital. Falling into the “bonding” subset of this social capital, the clubs bring together their communities over shared values and serve as conduits for important information and services. The clubs offer opportunities to pursue shared goals (such as establishing local memorials to honor the

⁴⁶ Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, “Konstytucja IV Rzeczypospolitej,” 19 March 2005, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070716132651/http://www.pis.org.pl/doc.php?d=unit&id=7>.

⁴⁷ “Platforma Popiera PiS,” *TVN24*, accessed September 1, 2020, <https://tvn24.pl/polska/platforma-popiera-pis-ra43648-3689805>.

⁴⁸ Ślarzyński, “Rola Klubów „Gazety Polskiej” w Sukcesie Politycznym Prawa i Sprawiedliwości w 2015 Roku. Aktorzy Lokalni Czy Aktor Ogólnokrajowej Sfery Publicznej III RP?,” p. 144.

⁴⁹ Sakiewicz, *Partyzant wolnego słowa*, pp. 83–85.

victims of the 2010 Smolensk plane crash, which killed President Lech Kaczyński) or to resolve collective problems (such as club-operated food drives that emerged in the first weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic).⁵⁰

Despite these less political, community-oriented activities, however, the *Gazeta Polska* clubs also provided a fertile ground for furthering nationalistic and right-wing politics. The clubs' tightly organized and geographically dispersed associational sphere offers dense social connections, which PiS has leveraged to its benefit. This process mimics that of the Nazi Party leveraging dense civil society in Weimar Germany described by Sheri Berman.⁵¹ In the German case, as Berman recounts, the Nazis capitalized on the peasantry's sense of abandonment by the mainstream parties by partnering with key agrarian civil society organizations to spread their message. In the case of the *Gazeta Polska* clubs, PiS took advantage of the clubs' dense network, sending party leaders to meetings across Poland. 163 of the 168 meetings PiS leaders attended since 2013 were in small towns. Through this activity, PiS leverages the clubs' network to yield party supporters.

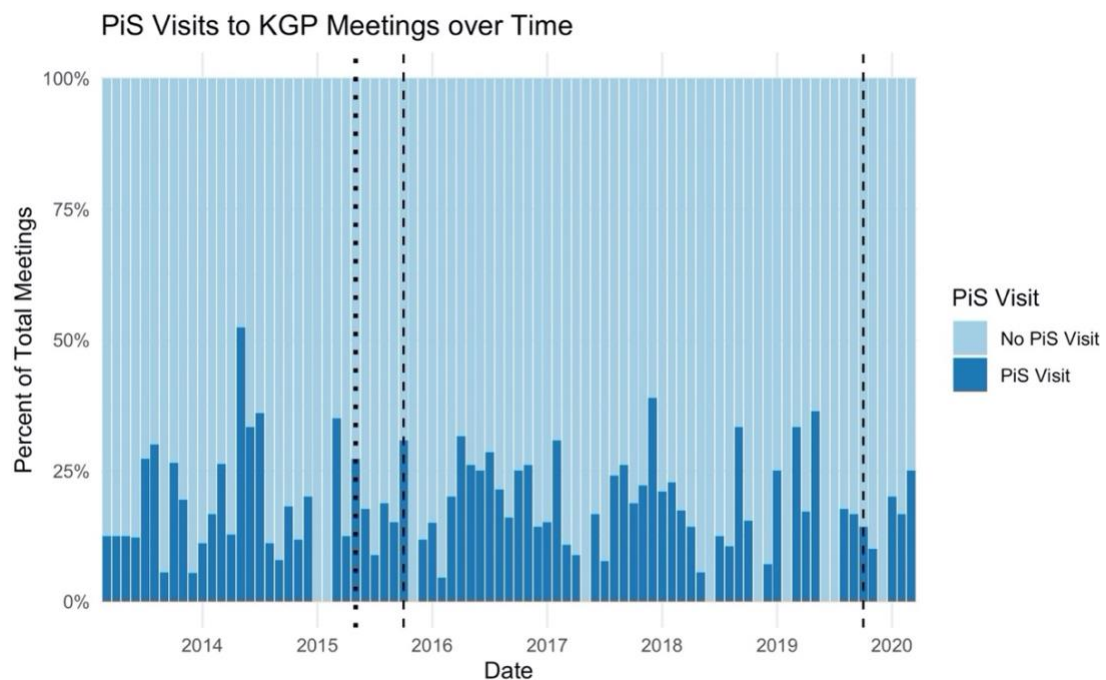


Figure 3—PiS Visits to *Gazeta Polska* Club Events 2013–2020
In this figure, the dotted line reflects the 2015 presidential election, whereas the dashed lines reflect the 2015 and 2020 parliamentary elections. Each bar represents a single month, beginning in January 2013.

⁵⁰ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), pp. 22–23, 288–89.

⁵¹ Berman, “Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic,” pp. 419–21.

A breakdown of PiS attendance at club events throughout the 2010s is found in Figure 3, where it is apparent that PiS attendance remains consistent past 2015, when the party returned to power. The continuance of this relationship after 2015 suggests that the clubs, for PiS, were not simply a tool for electoral mobilization, but rather shared a deeper connection with the party. This relationship is probed further in my statistical analysis in the next section.

This relationship between PiS and the clubs extends beyond PiS's attendance at events to a direct overlap between party and club leaders themselves. An example of this mechanism at work in the pre-2015 era is catalogued by Polish sociologist Marcin Ślarzyński's work examining the number of club chairmen who also ran for political office at the local and national level in the period 2005–2015. Ślarzyński found that of the 484 people who were club chairmen in the period 2005 to 2015, 64 ran for office at the national level (Sejm or Senat). Seven of these officials were successful in the Sejm, and one in the Senat.⁵² The growth in club involvement at the local level is even more apparent, with club chair PiS candidates jumping from 58 total candidates (29 successful) in 2006 to 104 total (43 successful) in 2010. By 2014, 163 club chairs ran for local office on the PiS ticket, with 59 winning their races. The almost threefold increase in number of club chairs running as PiS candidates between 2006 and 2014 reflects a confluence of PiS- and club- aligned actors, providing the basis for a continued partnership once PiS re-entered government.

c. Research Design and Hypotheses

What benefits does PiS find in its partnership with the Gazeta Polska clubs? I deploy a logistic regression to analyze under what circumstances national-level PiS officials are more likely to be associated with attending Gazeta Polska club meetings. This model extracts the most salient issues for PiS in their relationship with illiberal civil society. Here, I test eight hypotheses as to evaluate when high-level PiS officials attend Gazeta Polska club meetings. I divide these hypotheses into two subsets: those that are instrumental, in the sense that PiS attends when they perceive that they will earn something in return, and those that are regarding ideological alignment, in which the substance of the meetings and that of PiS's stated priorities align.

⁵² Ślarzyński, "Rola Klubów „Gazety Polskiej” w Sukcesie Politycznym Prawa i Sprawiedliwości w 2015 Roku. Aktorzy Lokalni Czy Aktor Ogólnokrajowej Sfery Publicznej III RP?," p. 150.

1. Instrumental Hypotheses

Within this first group, I hypothesize that PiS leaders are more likely to attend events when the relative mobilizational benefits are greater than the cost. As such, I first hypothesize that PiS will be more likely to attend national events than local events, as these events will draw larger crowds and attention. In keeping with literature arguing that it is more advantageous for parties to allocate resources toward leaders who have the capacity to mobilize and coordinate core groups within the party, as opposed to attempting to mobilize “swing” groups,” I derive three hypotheses.⁵³ First, I hypothesize that PiS leaders are more likely to attend events in regions in which PiS received a high percentage of the vote, as these regions represent a stronger core voter bloc. Next, I hypothesize that PiS leaders will be more likely to attend club events during an election season as the club meetings offer localized campaign opportunities with an already mobilized and sympathetic crowd. Finally, I hypothesize that events co-sponsored by Radio Maryja, and thereby offering contact with the members of two potentially supportive civil society organizations at the same time, and thus two mobilized potential electoral blocs, will be more likely to attract PiS leaders.

2. Ideological Alignment Hypotheses

I put forth four hypotheses related to the alignment of an event, intending to capture the degree to which PiS attends events that aids the party in advancing its message. This use of civil society in cases of a party’s ideological advancement is witnessed in the analogous Civic Circles movement in Hungary. Here, Béla Greskovits argues that the Civic Circles provided an ideological hub for Fidesz throughout the 2000s that, in the words of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, “laid the groundwork for the present situation.” From Orbán’s perspective, illiberal civil society provided a reminder that “the Christian, national and civic right is much more robust than that of our rivals.”⁵⁴ Along the lines of the Hungarian case, I test if this common ideological commitment and desire to advance these messages is the driving force behind PiS’s engagement with illiberal civil society.

⁵³ Gary W. Cox, “Swing voters, core voters, and distributive politics,” in Ian Shapiro et al., *Political Representation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 342–57.

⁵⁴ Greskovits, “Rebuilding the Hungarian Right through Conquering Civil Society,” p. 262.

To this end, I derive my four alignment hypotheses from key points established in PiS's 2014 party platform.⁵⁵ The Party defines their namesake of "justice" in direct relation to the Catholic Church, referencing Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis in the platform's opening values statement. As Anna Grzymała-Busse argues, churches exercise political strength via their moral authority or the perception that the Church represents not just a theological interest, but a national interest as well.⁵⁶ In the Polish context, the Church negotiated the immediate post-communist era with this authority intact, thereby granting it institutional access over policy decisions. With the Church at the core of the Party's professed identity, and around 90 percent of Poles identifying as Catholic, I consider if PiS appeals to the Church's moral authority for its own benefit. Here, I hypothesize that PiS leaders will be more likely to attend religious events.

The Party also prioritizes a definition of Polish history and the Polish nation as "inseparable from Christianity."⁵⁷ There is a longstanding interpretation of Polish history as a religiously just fight in defense of Poland's freedom from supposedly immoral enemies. This interpretation can be spotted in nineteenth century Polish national poet Adam Mickiewicz's frame of Poland as the "Christ of Nations," who wrote that "Poland's destiny, its fall, and upcoming liberation (...) as a social-historical reflection (or even fulfillment) of the biography of Jesus."⁵⁸ Given the salience of this religiously reinforced understanding of Polish history, I hypothesize that PiS leaders will more likely attend events focused on topics related to historical memory.

PiS's platform also focuses on "Poland in Europe and the world," postulating that European integration and geopolitical rivalries have led to a "loss, through the fault of [Poland's] rulers, of the tools for independent realization of national interests."⁵⁹ This Euroscepticism is a hallmark of PiS's policy and is even witnessed in the party's reaction to Poland's EU accession process. While the Kaczyński brothers could not outright campaign against joining the EU after Pope John Paul II offered explicit support for accession, due to the sanctity and widespread popularity of the Polish-born Pope. Instead, the brothers took a stance that the EU should be "more like an alliance

⁵⁵ I use the 2014 platform, as this is the platform in use by PiS leaders in the period 2015–2019. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, "Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwości 2014," 2014, <http://pis.org.pl/dokumenty?page=2>.

⁵⁶ Grzymała-Busse, *Nations Under God*, p. 8.

⁵⁷ Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, "Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwości 2014," p. 9

⁵⁸ Marysia Galbraith assesses Polish self-identity and this national mythology from an anthropological perspective, delving into the origins of Polish romanticism and rise of the "Christ of Nations" myth. For more information, see: Marysia H. Galbraith, *Being and Becoming European in Poland: European Integration and Self-Identity* (London, UK ; New York, NY: Anthem Press, 2014), 196.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

of independent states,” instead of a political union.⁶⁰ Since joining the EU, PiS has retained an antagonistic understanding of the Union, framing Brussels as a colonial power out to impose its will on Poland. Per the salience of this viewpoint to PiS’s party identity, I hypothesize that PiS leaders will be more likely to attend events focused on European regional politics.

Finally, the 2014 PiS platform emphasized the need for a full investigation into the origins of the 2010 Smolensk plane crash, which killed 96 passengers including PiS co-founder and Polish President Lech Kaczyński. The late President was the twin brother of PiS chair Jarosław Kaczyński, making this topic especially salient to the party’s history. The event, which occurred while the late President was on his way to honor the victims of the Katyń Forest Massacre (a 1940 massacre in which the NKVD killed an estimated 22,000 Polish military officers), sparked a series of conspiracies of a potential assassination attempt and demands, such as those in PiS’s platform, to get to the “truth” behind the crash. As such, I hypothesize that PiS leaders are more likely to attend events regarding the Smolensk crash.

d. Data Collection

My dataset was created using a webscrape of weekly newsletters from the Gazeta Polska clubs’ website, in which club President Ryszard Kapuściński offers a summary of each meeting that occurred in the past week in both Poland and abroad. As such, this dataset only includes meetings mentioned in the newsletter and is subject to any omissions accordingly. My period of examination is from 2013, the first year in which Gazeta Polska clubs began to publish weekly reports of club activity, to March 2020. I end the dataset here, as the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Poland on March 4, 2020, and, at this point in time, the clubs’ activity came to a halt. The final dataset includes 2466 meetings, organized by date and location. I limit my analysis to all meetings held within Poland (N = 1974). My main dependent variable, *PiS*, is a dummy variable coded as a “1” when a national-level PiS leader (defined as a PiS-affiliated Sejm or Senate member, member of the Presidential cabinet, or nationally affiliated party figure) attended a meeting, and as a “0” otherwise. I also included the dummy variables *Duda*, *Kaczyński*, *Macierewicz*, *Morawiecki*, and *Szydło* for examining the attendance of these five key PiS officials.

⁶⁰ Brian Porter Szucs, *Poland in the Modern World: Beyond Martyrdom*, New History of Modern Europe (Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), p. 356.

For coding variables beyond the meeting's logistics and politician attendance, I rely on the information provided in Kapuściński's meeting summaries. I create dummy variables for four key topics that appeared regularly within the meeting sets. First, *historical memory*, is defined as a 1 for events honoring moments in Polish history, and a 0 otherwise. Such events include gatherings in memorial of the Katyń massacre or lectures from historians and journalists on the legacy of communist Poland.

Second, I code the variable *regional politics* as a 1 for events regarding European or Eurasian politics, and a 0 otherwise. These ranged from protests in response to Russia's 2014 invasion of Crimea to a lecture warning that French President Emmanuel Macron, under the influence of the left, urged to create a "United States of Europe."

The variable *church* is coded as a 1 for events that included religious activity whether via a mass, prayer, or visit from a priest, and 0 otherwise. An example of these would be a series of celebrations in May 2015 in honor of the second anniversary of the Beatification of John Paul II or an auction in February 2018 to raise funds for a Benedictine Abbey about twelve miles east of Kraków.

Finally, the variable *Smolensk* was coded as a 1 for all events honoring the 2010 plane crash that killed PiS President Lech Kaczyński, and a 0 otherwise. These include the annual April 10 memorial gatherings, a series of film screenings for a documentary film honoring the president's life, and even an August 2018 meeting in which the Elbląg club made the late president an honorary *Gazeta Polska* member.

Figure 4 includes a breakdown of events falling under each of these topics throughout the period of study, with the red lines reflecting parliamentary elections and dotted lines delineating Presidential elections. It is notable here that events adjacent to the Church or related to historical memory are the most common, with both retaining their dominance across my period of study. Regional politics events, likewise, are the smallest in number. The spike in 2014 represents a series of gatherings in opposition to Russia's invasion of Crimea. Many events (N = 735) are not captured by any of these categories. Some examples of these gatherings include book clubs, visits to a local folk concert or opera, charity-related food or clothes drives, and even a chess tournament.

As to see whether an event was held on a national scale, and whether this came to influence PiS's attendance, I defined the variables *National* for events that were operated nationally. To examine the relationship between the clubs and other members of illiberal civil society, I defined

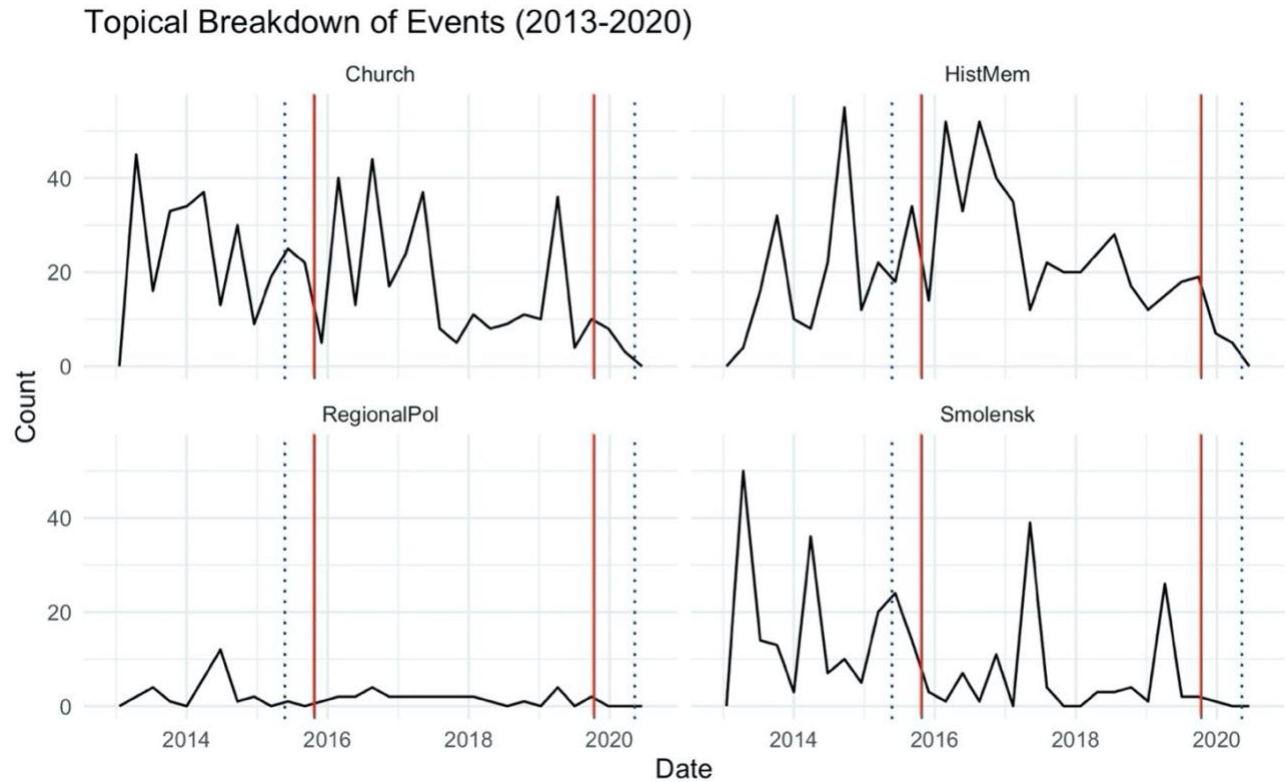


Figure 4—Gazeta Polska Club meetings by topic in the period 2013–2020. Here, the red line denotes parliamentary elections, and the blue dotted line denotes presidential elections.

the binary variable *Radio Maryja* for meetings held in conjunction with the Catholic radio conglomerate. These included events such as a joint celebration of November 11, Poland’s Independence Day, hosted in collaboration between the Radio Maryja and Radomsko *Gazeta Polska* club in which then-Law and Justice deputy and eventual Minister of Defense Antoni Macierewicz visited.

The variable *Election* was coded as a “1” if an event fell within three months of a European or national-level election. The variable *Contentious* was coded as “1” for protest events that stood in opposition to the national or local government, and a “0” otherwise. For example, protests in support of pro-life policies at the European Court of Justice or protests at the Russian Embassy in solidarity with Ukraine following the invasion of Crimea are both considered “contentious.” Figure 5 shows the composition of contentious events over time, demonstrating how contentious events fall from about 5.5 percent of total events to nearly 0 percent of all events once PiS takes power. This suggests that the Gazeta Polska clubs only operated as a contentious organization in the face of a government that they did not support.

To examine whether a locality’s support for PiS influenced PiS’s decision to attend events, I included the variable *PiSVote*, which includes the percent vote share for PiS at the district level. Finally, the variable *Era* is a binary variable, coded “0” prior to PiS’s October 2015 parliamentary election and “1” for events after this election.

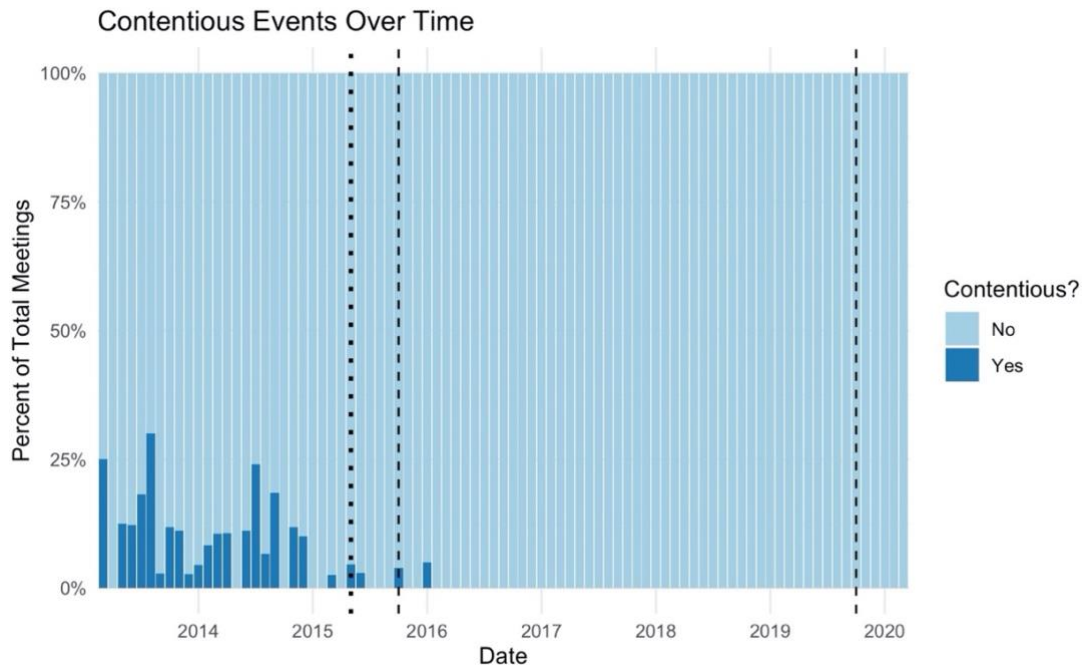


Figure 5—Gazeta Polska Club Contentious Events 2013–2020
In this figure, the dotted line reflects the 2015 presidential election, whereas the dashed lines reflect the 2015 and 2020 parliamentary elections. Each bar represents a single month.

e. Analysis

To understand under what circumstances PiS attends club events, I define a logit model examining the related issues discussed at the Gazeta Polska club meetings and the vote percent toward PiS from a club’s district in the 2015 elections, as well as whether the meeting was contentious, on a national scale, and co-hosted by Radio Maryja. I define three versions of this model, examining in what instances PiS leaders generally, party chair Jarosław Kaczyński, and President Andrzej Duda attend events. I also ran versions of each model in which I interacted vote share and election, as to test if attendance at events in regions with high PiS vote shares was influenced by an election season. The interaction models largely did not change the substantive results, nor did they have a higher log-likelihood, except in the case of the full model. As such, I only present the interaction model for the full PiS attendance model. The results of these models are reported as log-odds in Table 1 and are found as predicted probabilities in Figure 6.

Table 1: Logistic Regression Results

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	PiS		Kaczynski	Duda
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Contentious	0.134 (0.335)	0.134 (0.335)	−2.908** (1.464)	−16.683 (1,009.666)
National	2.099*** (0.461)	2.100*** (0.461)	5.842*** (0.880)	3.350*** (0.832)
Smolensk	0.403** (0.191)	0.403** (0.191)	0.810 (0.865)	−0.145 (0.903)
HistMem	0.396*** (0.144)	0.396*** (0.144)	−0.336 (0.867)	1.496** (0.612)
RegionalPol	2.291*** (0.296)	2.288*** (0.296)	1.595 (1.091)	2.254*** (0.853)
Election	0.526*** (0.147)	0.323 (0.666)	−0.417 (0.834)	1.385*** (0.517)
Church	−0.100 (0.149)	−0.099 (0.150)	−0.379 (0.867)	−0.093 (0.587)
RM	1.057** (0.458)	1.055** (0.458)	2.485* (1.280)	−14.486 (1,947.574)
PiSVote	0.005 (0.008)	0.004 (0.009)	−0.070 (0.062)	−0.031 (0.035)
Era	−0.003 (0.136)	−0.004 (0.136)	0.592 (0.775)	−0.697 (0.592)
Election:PiSVote		0.006 (0.018)		
Constant	−2.228*** (0.313)	−2.177*** (0.353)	−3.838* (2.105)	−4.859*** (1.370)
Observations	1,878	1,878	1,878	1,878
Log Likelihood	−810.085	−810.036	−46.456	−81.184
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,642.170	1,644.073	114.913	184.368
Pseudo R2.	.10	.10	.48	.17

Note: 1 *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 1—Logistic regression results, coefficients provided as log-odds

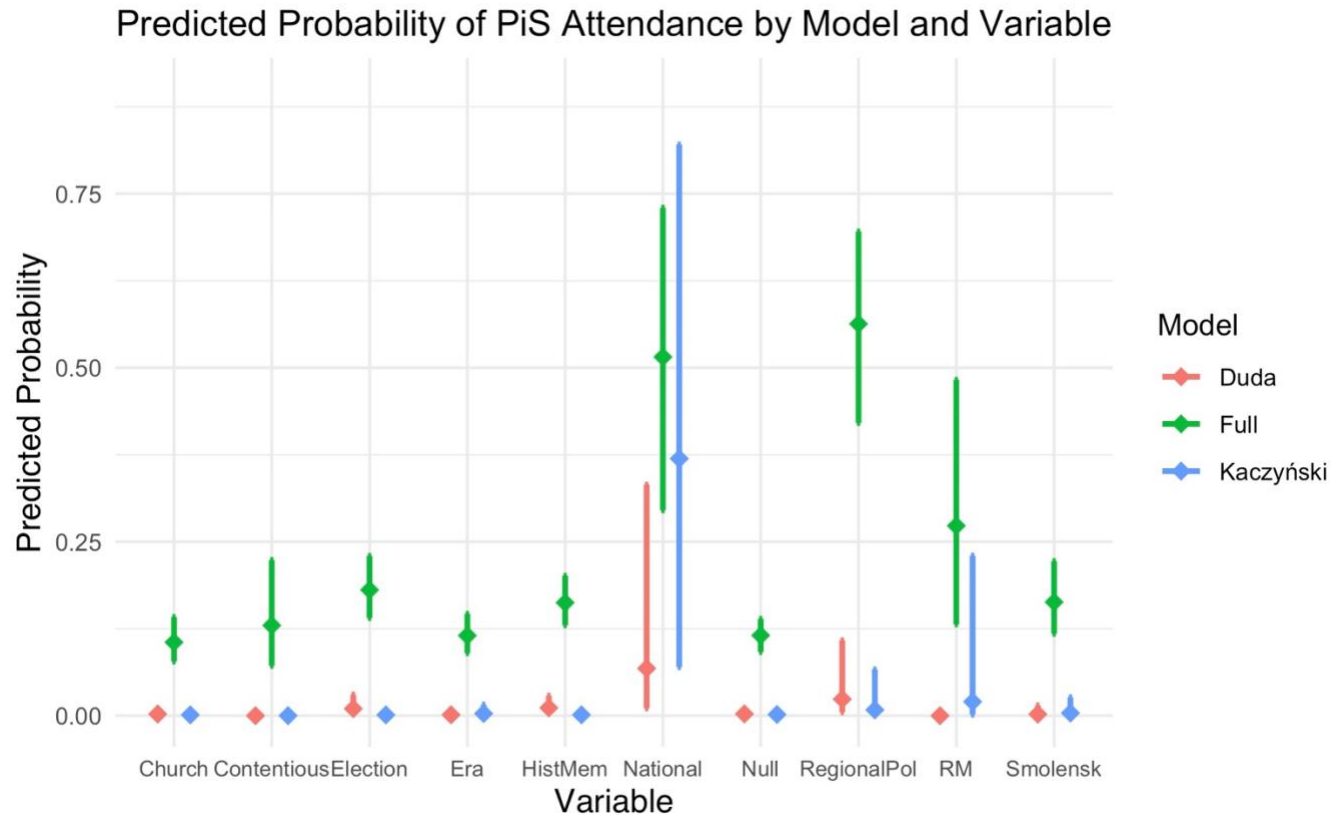


Figure 6— Predicted probability of PiS attendance at Gazeta Polska Club meetings 2013–2020. Holding all categorical variables at 0 and PiSVote at its mean. Missing error bars are due to the standard error extending to 1 and, as such, the error bar was omitted for a cleaner visualization.

I ran a series of tests to confirm the robustness of my models. First, I ran robust standard errors, which converge with the classical standard error for almost all cases of each variable, demonstrating a lack of model dependence in my results.⁶¹ In addition, I checked Cook’s Distance, a common measure of influence, as to confirm whether there are any influential outliers exerting high leverage over my model. For the full national leader and interaction models, the Cook’s D remained well below the conventional threshold of 1 (the maximum was .03). While in the Kaczyński and Duda models the maximum Cook’s D for a single observation were .45 and .1, respectively, these fall well below the conventional influence threshold level of $D > 1$. This confirms a lack of an influential outlier driving my results. Together, these tests further underscore the robustness of my results.

⁶¹ Gary King and Margaret E. Roberts, “How Robust Standard Errors Expose Methodological Problems They Do Not Fix, and What to Do About It,” *Political Analysis* Vol. 23, No. 2 (2015), pp. 159–79.

1. Instrumental Results

In keeping with the structure of my hypotheses, I first discuss the results of my instrumental hypotheses, in which PiS utilizes the clubs to its electoral benefit, followed by a discussion of the alignment hypotheses, in which PiS partners with the clubs on topics in which the two organizations share similar values.

For the instrumental hypotheses, it is of note that the intercept of the full PiS, non-interaction model shows that, in a “null” case with all categorical variables held at 0 and with PiS regional vote share held at its mean, there is still a 11.15 percent predicted probability of PiS attending an event. This value for one standard deviation above PiS’s mean vote share is 11.98 percent; one standard-deviation below PiS’s mean vote share is 11.1 percent. By this measure, a locale’s vote share does not influence national-level PiS politician attendance. Notably, this predicted probability of PiS attending an event increases to 60.7 percent once the event shifts to being held on a national scale. Whether an event was held at the local or national level serves as a useful predictor across all four models. This confirms the first hypothesis that PiS is more likely to attend national events, due to the higher potential payoffs of a larger prospective audience.

The predicted probability of Kaczyński’s attendance increases from an under 1 percent predicted probability to 36.7 percent solely by the club hosting the event on a national scale. This demonstrates the importance of national rallies to the PiS–Gazeta Polska club relationship, with PiS leaders attending 68 percent of all national-level events (and Kaczyński himself attending 44 percent of such events) in the 2013–2020 era. In considering this trend, it is important to note that PiS has attended the clubs’ national conference annually since 2006, with Kaczyński offering a message to the conference every year in the period 2008–2020, except for 2009. This trend mirrors PiS’s participation at national gatherings for the Radio Maryja Family, where the party has sent a senior delegate to speak annually since 2010. National civil society events provide access to a cohort of Poles who, while perhaps not necessarily PiS supporters, are gathering under appeals of a Catholic-nationalist identity and upholding the historical tenets of the “Polish nation.” In attending the annual conferences, PiS enjoys a unique access to a nationally distributed population of sympathetic Poles who, through their club activity, have proven their mobilizational capacity.

My interpretation of this finding does not suggest that PiS solely seeks national authority, at the expense of a grassroots presence, but rather that the national club gatherings offer access to a larger, dispersed associational network. This finding dovetails with the existing overlap between

Gazeta Polska club members on PiS party tickets, where PiS sources national candidates from these civil society organizations.⁶² Here the clubs offer a well-resourced network of individuals and opportunities for the national party to seek support, and national gatherings offer the simplest venue for leveraging these networks.

Noticeably, even within these national gatherings, President Duda retains a far lower predicted probability of attendance than any PiS leader or Kaczyński. This aligns with the common perception of Duda as a “długopis” or “pen” to the administration: simply there to approve the party’s policies, while the administration’s work is directed by Kaczyński. Thus, Duda’s relative absence at club events is less intriguing than the attendance of the more powerful Kaczyński. Kaczyński’s relatively high predicted probability of attending club events is striking considering his prominent and surely time-consuming role as the propelling force behind PiS. While Duda’s presence may suggest a cursory commitment to the clubs, Kaczyński’s presence demonstrates that not only does PiS support the clubs but that the clubs are a priority to the party. It also means that it is Kaczyński himself interacting with the content of club meetings and hearing directly from members, providing a direct line from participants in these clubs to the top of the party. This allows club members to directly share their beliefs and contribute to PiS’s policy and dialogue, through a direct line to party chair Kaczyński, in a manner that participation from other national PiS leaders (and even Duda) would not allow.

The contentious nature of an event is neither significant for the full PiS model nor for the Duda model. Still, contentiousness was a highly significant predictor for Kaczyński’s attendance, with the odds of Kaczyński’s attendance lowering by factor of .05, to an under .01 percent predicted probability of attendance, when the organizations host a contentious gathering. As discussed, however club did not have any events coded as contentious events after PiS’s 2015 parliamentary election. This means that it was during the pre-election mobilizational phase in which Kaczyński shied away from contentious club events. As these contentious events typically consisted of protests against the Civic Platform government or EU laws, Kaczyński’s avoidance reflects a pre-2015 relationship with the clubs that was one of encouraging the mobilization of its base, but not when this base targeted opposing parties.

⁶² Ślarzyński, “Rola Klubów „Gazety Polskiej” w Sukcesie Politycznym Prawa i Sprawiedliwości w 2015 Roku. Aktorzy Lokalni Czy Aktor Ogólnokrajowej Sfery Publicznej III RP?”

The relationship between PiS attendance at club events and elections challenges my hypothesis that PiS would preference “core” voters over swing voters. Here, across all four models the percent of vote share in an event’s district that went to PiS is not a significant predictor as to whether PiS will attend an event in a particular location. This held true in the interaction model, in which the election term even loses its significance. This trend is visualized in the map in Figure 7, which presents the geographic spread of events in comparison to district-level PiS vote from the 2015 parliamentary elections. Here, the lack of a geographic trend between regions in which PiS received a high percentage of the vote and the locations of Gazeta Polska club meetings is particularly noticeable. This demonstrates that PiS’s support for the Gazeta Polska clubs is not dependent on a region’s demonstrated electoral potential.

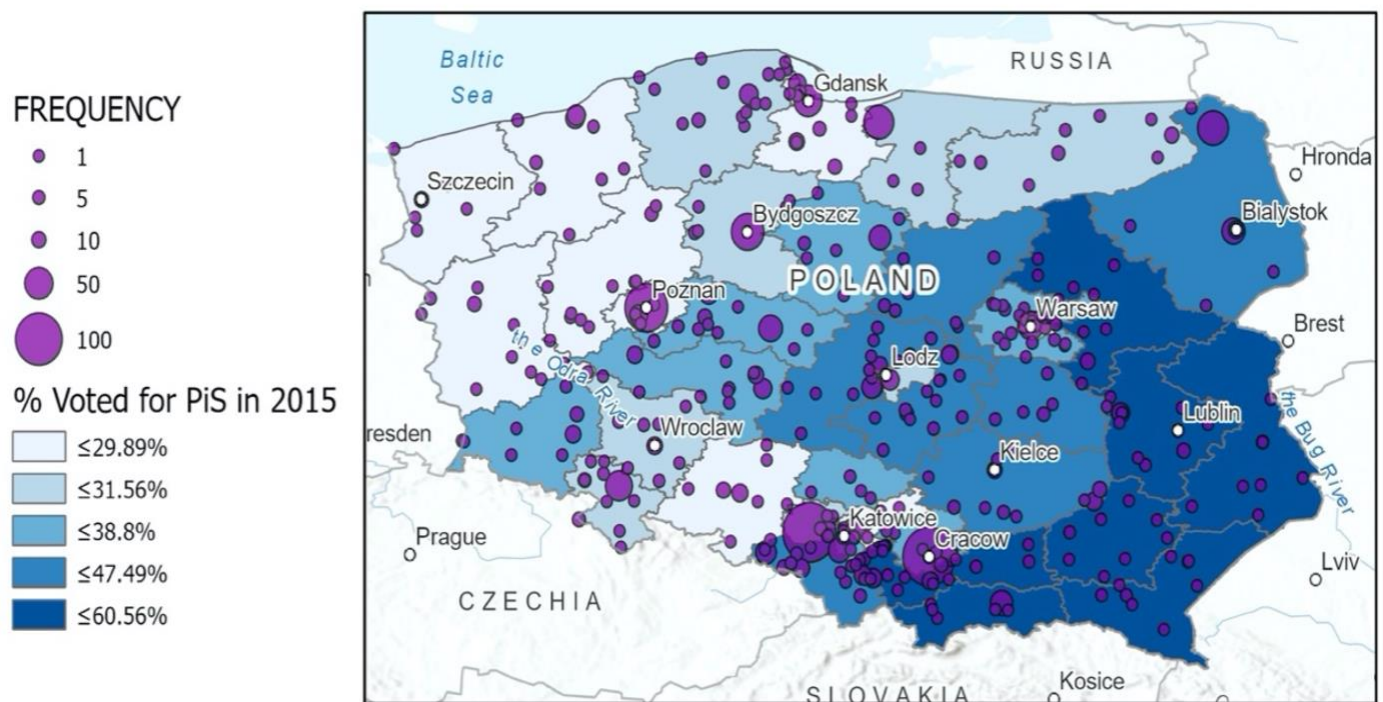


Figure 7– Geographic spread of Gazeta Polska club meetings against 2015 PiS vote share. Dots represent frequency of meetings in a location. The color coding reflects percent of district vote share to PiS, with darker blues corresponding with higher vote shares.

In marked contrast, in the full model events held within three months of a national election significantly increase the odds of PiS attending an event by a factor of 1.76, to a roughly 22.8 percent predicted probability of PiS attendance. Likewise, these pre-election events increase the odds of Duda attending a club gathering by a factor of four. As such, while PiS does not increase its support for the clubs based on the electoral geography of the event, it does increase its support

during an election season. This confirms my hypothesis that the clubs, on a national level, constitute part of PiS's electoral mobilizational agenda, regardless of region. This is reflected in the clubs' accounts of their activity, with clubs President Ryszard Kapuściński noting that in the weekend prior to the October 2019 parliamentary elections club members distributed two million pamphlets in support of PiS. The electoral overlap between the club's rosters and PiS membership was further evident here, with 33 club members running for the Sejm on the 2019 PiS ticket and ten such members winning their elections.⁶³ Together, this reinforces the clubs' electoral mobilizational capacity in support of PiS.

2. Ideological Alignment Results

Regarding the alignment hypotheses, it is notable that only events regarding Smolensk, historical memory, or regional politics significantly increased the probability of PiS attending. Further, none of these predictors proved significant for Kaczyński's attendance, suggesting that the scale of the event alone (national or local), in many instances, provided the greatest boost to the odds of Kaczyński attending. This is particularly striking, as the conversation regarding the Smolensk crash was intimately tied to Kaczyński (with his brother having died in the crash). Though there are examples of Kaczyński attending club events related to the crash, such as a club-sponsored Smolensk memorial in April 2014, the gatherings are not a statistically significant predictor of the odds of his attendance. Nevertheless, the predicted probability of a PiS politician attending an event focused on the Smolensk crash is 21.5 percent, proving the salience of the topic to PiS's relationship with the clubs.

Events regarding topics of historical memory increased the odds of PiS attendance by a factor of 1.59, yielding a predicted probability of around 20 percent of PiS attendance in the full model. Ranging from gatherings commemorating the 1920 Polish-Soviet war to the Warsaw Uprising, these events constituted 34.6 percent of all club events in the 2013–2020 era. With less than 1 percent of these historical memory events held on a national stage, these oft-local gatherings reflect one of the key local arenas in which PiS engaged with the *Gazeta Polska* clubs. This reinforces the salience of this historical memory argument to PiS's vision for Poland. Often defined

⁶³ "[Tydzień w Klubach „GP”] Rozdaliśmy 2 miliony dodatku „Gazeta Polska przed wyborami”," *Kluby Gazety Polskiej* (blog), accessed September 8, 2020, <http://www.klubygp.pl/tydzien-w-klubach-gp-rozdalismy-2-miliony-dodatku-gazeta-polska-przed-wyborami/>.

by their heroic sacrifice, these movements bring to the fore an image of Poland valiantly defending herself against sometimes impossible enemies. Such historical events are salient in Polish twentieth century historical memory, and, as in the case of the Katyn Massacre, were considered taboo prior to the Solidarity movement.⁶⁴ As such, the relatively high probability of PiS attendance at these events suggests that the clubs offer PiS a venue to perpetuate their interpretation of Polish history and urge club members to vigilantly defend Poland, lest history repeat itself.

Strikingly, religious events are not significant across any of the four models. Over 30 percent of club events featured the Catholic Church in some capacity, whether through the celebration of Mass or with a priest there to offer prayer at a memorial event. The inability to distinguish whether the Church's presence increased the odds of PiS attendance is unusual, especially considering the role of Catholic nationalism in PiS's platform.

While there was not a measurable effect of a Church event on PiS attendance, for both the all-PiS and Kaczyński models the co-hosting of an event by Radio Maryja positively and significantly increased the odds of PiS attendance. For the full model the predicted probability of PiS attendance at a joint Radio Maryja-club event was 15 percent. For Kaczyński, Radio Maryja's joint presence increased these odds by a factor of 12.24, from a .3 percent predicted probability of attendance to a 2 percent chance. These odds are underscored by the fact that nearly 41.6 percent of the events jointly co-hosted by the clubs and Radio Maryja Family earned PiS's presence. This further reinforces the instrumental hypothesis that national PiS officials attend events in which the benefits for attending outweigh the cost, with the presence of two hosting organizations allowing for a potentially larger, more publicized gathering and thereby a broader reach.

Another interpretation of the joint Radio Maryja events is that, irrespective of mobilizational purposes, these events foster the notion of an independent Poland as a "Christ of Nations." This phrase carries geopolitical weight, with Adam Mickiewicz coining it during the Russian-partition of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Religious events, by this interpretation, would be useful to PiS not for their religious meaning but for their projection of Polish national strength. This aligns with the party's support for events related to historical memory, the Smolensk crash, and regional politics, as these events also demonstrate a commitment to cultivating Polish exceptionalism and demonstrating historical and contemporary geopolitical

⁶⁴ For more on Katyn's symbolic import, see: Kubik, *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland*, p. 222.

power. While regional politics and historical memory tie to Poland's place within Europe, and vis-à-vis Russia, the Church alone may not necessarily carry the same import. Instead, the joint Gazeta Polska-Radio Maryja events marshal Catholic nationalism with more potent political salience.

The null effect for the Church, considering the Radio Maryja finding, points to a broader divide within the Polish Church. Radio Maryja remains a polarizing topic within the Polish episcopate.⁶⁵ As such, PiS's preference to attend club events co-supported by the Radio Maryja Family over those in partnership with the Church reflects the shrewdness with which PiS approaches its relationship with Church-adjacent civil society. Providing a venue to exercise religious motifs without the explicit oversight of the full Polish episcopate, the Radio Maryja-Gazeta Polska jointly held meetings demonstrate the capacity of this illiberal civil society to circumvent the Church in assuming a position of moral authority. This has stark implications. As Anna Grzymała-Busse reminds, the Church's moral authority can devolve once the Church is seen as partisan, thereby weakening the Church's policy influence from broader institutional access to a narrower political sect of allied parties.⁶⁶ In preferencing this partisan religious faction, PiS encourages existing political tensions between the Church and its more partisan wing, potentially calling into question the continued moral authority of the Church.

Finally, events focusing on regional politics exerted the strongest influence over the odds of both a PiS leader or Duda attendance out of any of the ideological alignment hypotheses. For such regionally-focused events, there is a 64 percent predicted probability of PiS attendance—a 10.4-times increase of the initial odds of PiS attendance. These regionally oriented events typically focused on topics related to EU-level policy, such as the refugee crisis, or events in the former Soviet bloc, such as the 2014 invasion of Crimea.

The internationally oriented nature of PiS participation also aligns with a broader trend of PiS support for international branches of the Gazeta Polska clubs. Omitted from this model (which only examined events within Poland), the clubs also host numerous events abroad annually. In the period 2013–2020 the clubs hosted 492 international events, with PiS officials attending 16 percent of these gatherings. Often hosted at the local Polish embassy or consulate, these events ranged from private meetings with club members and President Duda in Sydney, Australia (September

⁶⁵ Grzymała-Busse, *Nations Under God*, p. 176.

⁶⁶ Anna Grzymała-Busse, "Weapons of the Meek: How Churches Influence Public Policy," *World Politics*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (January 2016), pp. 13–14.

2018) to a tour of North American clubs held in anticipation of the 2015 elections by later-Minister of National Defense Antoni Macierewicz. Visiting with two clubs in Toronto as well as the Chicago club, Macierewicz brought PiS candidates with him as he encouraged club members to vote. The event in Chicago was reported as hosting over 500 attendees.⁶⁷

In keeping with the Macierewicz example, one potential interpretation of this close tie between the clubs, the broader Polish expatriate community, and PiS is the role of international voters in national elections. A study by Magdalena Lesińska at the University of Warsaw found 72 percent of votes from Poles abroad in the 2015 Parliamentary elections went to PiS, while 80 percent of international votes in the 2015 Presidential elections supported Duda. Though international votes historically constitute about 1 percent of all ballots cast, with close electoral margins these international votes can exert influence over the ultimate electoral result.⁶⁸ Offering an existent, highly mobilized group of international Polish citizens, the international chapters of the *Gazeta Polska* clubs provide a unique access to Poles living abroad.

The capacity of a united illiberal civil society, featuring such partnerships between the *Gazeta Polska* clubs, Radio Maryja Family, and PiS was witnessed in 2016, when President Andrzej Duda and then-newly elected U.S. President Donald Trump jointly attributed President Trump's victory, in part, to "Poles abroad." Here, the *Gazeta Polska* clubs were quick to seize credit, with Kapuściński heralding "the success of Polish patriots in the USA" in securing the Polish-American vote for Trump. Noting that this victory was in large part due to the joint efforts of the *Gazeta Polska* clubs alongside the Radio Maryja Families in the US, Kapuściński reiterated the mobilizational capacity of these clubs to their favored causes.⁶⁹

This mobilizational capacity was praised by Kapuściński earlier in 2013 as creating "bottom-up action, pure in its genesis, spontaneous, just like it was at the beginning of Solidarity. It is building of a civil society."⁷⁰ Providing a venue for public discourse on topics that are ideologically aligned with PiS, such as historical memory and international politics, as well as a

⁶⁷ "[Tydzień w Klubach „GP”] Rozdaliśmy 2 miliony dodatku „Gazeta Polska przed wyborami”."

⁶⁸ Magdalena Lesińska, "Participation and Voting Behavior of Poles Abroad in Home Country Elections. The Case of Poles in the US and Canada in Comparative Perspective," *Studia Migracyjne – Przegląd Polonijny* 2018 (XLIV), No. 4 (170) (20 December 2018), pp. 104, 109.

⁶⁹ "[Tydzień w Klubach „GP”] Sukces polskich patriotów w USA," *Kluby Gazety Polskiej* (blog), accessed September 8, 2020, <http://www.klubygp.pl/tydzien-w-klubach-gp-sukces-polskich-patriotow-w-usa/>.

⁷⁰ "Pracowity rok Klubów Gazety Polskiej – 31.12.2013 r.," *Kluby Gazety Polskiej* (blog), accessed September 8, 2020, <http://www.klubygp.pl/pracowity-rok-klubow-gazety-polskiej-31-12-2013-r/>.

relatively low-cost mechanism to mobilize a portion of the electorate, the clubs offer a model example of the political potential that illiberal civil society poses for supply-side actors. Closely intertwined with PiS, the clubs demonstrate how illiberal civil society can work alongside supply-side actors to further a populist party's agenda and reach.

V. Conclusion

The structural role of civil society in connecting supply- and demand- side populist actors is particularly visible in the Polish case, as witnessed in the example of the *Gazeta Polska* clubs. These organizations provided a safe harbor for illiberal values throughout the 1990s, at a time when populists lacked sufficient capacity to translate ethnonationalist values into political power. Developing grassroots networks for aggregating public opinion long before PiS's 2005 elections, illiberal civil society proved an essential gatekeeper to right-wing populists and a platform for those members of the public interested in illiberal politics.

Siphoning a sector of public life away from the rest of society and legitimizing the extreme and exclusionary beliefs of its participants, a doubly polarized and pillarized civil society remains lethal to liberal democratic vitality. In the Polish case illiberal civil society constituted a well-organized breeding ground for Catholic nationalist values. Between chess tournaments, pilgrimages, film screenings, and rallies, illiberal civil society proved fundamental to the electoral success of PiS. Informing elite framing strategies of demand-side preferences, illiberal civil society offered platforms and capacity for radical opinions at both the grassroots and elite levels to organize in support of ethno-populist values.

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