POPREBEL

A Culture War Over the Shape of Public Sphere in Poland

Panel "Poland: Cultural Mechanisms of (Right-wing) Political Upheaval", ASEEES Convention, San Francisco, November 25, 2019

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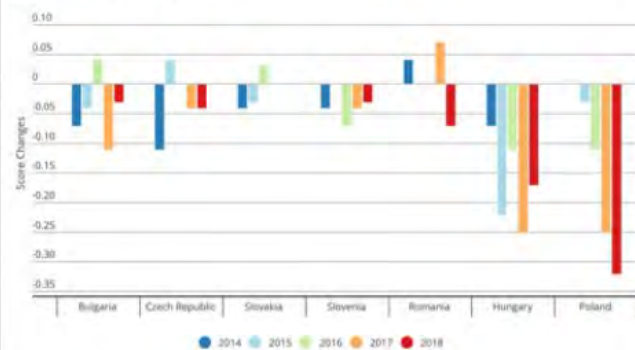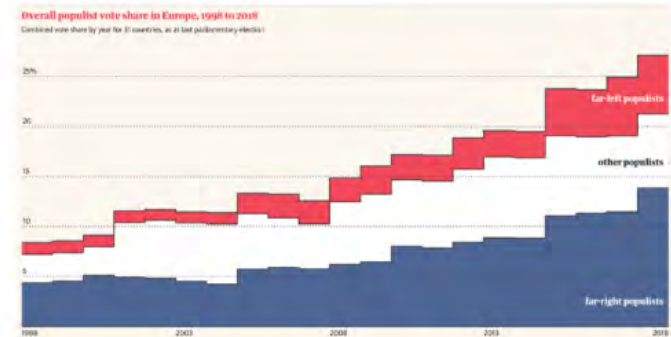# LGBTQ rights sacrificed on the altar of extreme nationalism

Two ominous Bs: backsliding and backlash

Democracy Score Changes in Central and Eastern Europe 2014-2018

Figure 2: populist vote share in Europe. Source: *The Guardian*:
https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2018/nov/20/revealed-one-in-four-europeans-vote-populist

Democracy Score Changes in Central and Eastern Europe 2014-2018

Score Changes

	0.10	0.05	0	-0.05	-0.10	-0.15	-0.20	-0.25	-0.30	-0.35

Bulgaria   Czech Republic   Slovakia   Slovenia   Romania   Hungary   Poland

● 2014   ● 2015   ● 2016   ● 2017   ● 2018

Figure 2: populist vote share in Europe. Source: *The Guardian*:
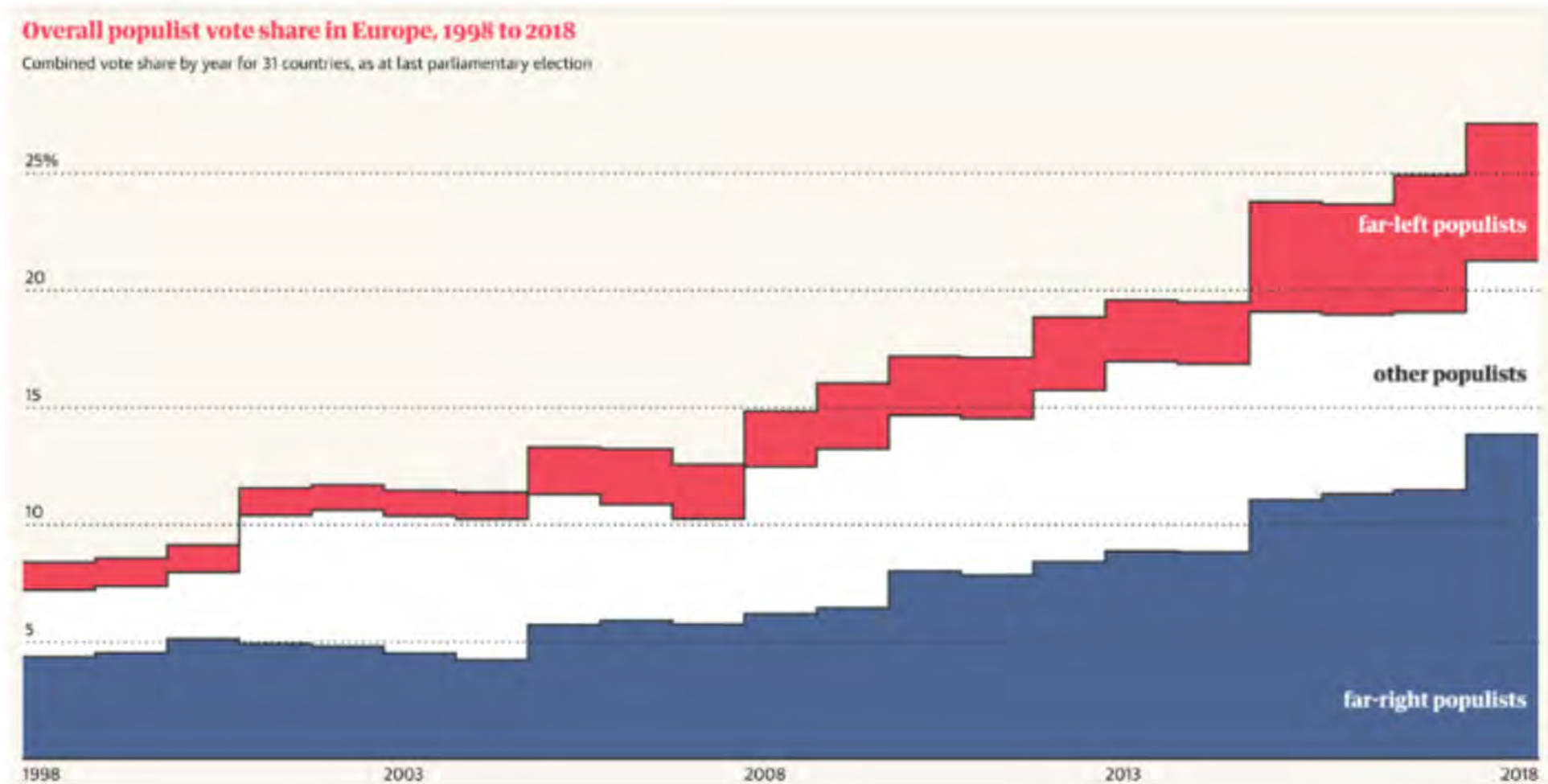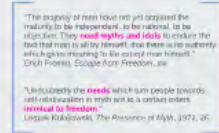https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2018/nov/20/revealed-one-in-four-europeans-vote-populist

Overall populist vote share in Europe, 1998 to 2018

Combined vote share by year for 31 countries, as at last parliamentary election

Points of departure and hypotheses

How to explain the rising popularity of right-wing populism (RWP) - seemingly the main cause of the culture war - in East Central Europe, particularly Poland?

- Are the dominant causes proximate or more distant?
  - Is the emergence of RWP the result of long-term processes or a relatively recent set of circumstances?

- Are the demand (structure) or supply (agency) factors more important?

- Are the main causes economic or cultural?

Rosary to the Borders (7.10.2017)

"The majority of men have not yet acquired the maturity to be independent, to be rational, to be objective. They **need myths and idols** to endure the fact that man is all by himself, that there is no authority which gives meaning to life except man himself."
Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, xix.

"Unfortunately the **needs** which turn people towards self-reevaluation in myth are is a certain extent **inimical to freedom**."
Leszek Kolakowski, *The Presence of Myth*, 1972, 26.

"Eliminationist anti-Semitism" is not necessarily "deep, primordial and hardwired" but rather a product of "the **extraordinary amount of energy** that was required to turn many German nationals into instruments of the Final Solution." Aryei Aguilera, *Fear of Small Numbers*, Duke University Press, 2006, 143.

Vulnerability of liberal democracy

- it aspires to be rational, empirical, pragmatic, technocratic, etc. Its political culture is **indifferent** if not inimical to the realization of the **mytho-poetic need**
- it is particularly vulnerable when its opponents **mobilize** under the banner of responding to this need

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Incongruence of the demand and supply sides of liberal-democratic politics

Demand (need): myth (firm grounding of individual existence in a transcendental foundation).

Supply 1: Liberal democrats supply **freedom** but tend to be indifferent or inefficient when it comes to supplying myth.

Supply 2: Conservatives, right-wing parties, including right-wing populists, mobilize to supply **myth** but tend to disregard freedom.

Result: a Gramscian war of positions (culture war) in which one side focuses more on protecting **freedom**, while the other promises **self-realization in a myth** and thus some form of redemption.

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DEMAND SIDE: What do people want? What drives them?

- ",,, the populist set of ideas is relatively widespread in society and, under certain circumstances, can be activated to **mobilize** voters who are angry about the current state of affairs" (Taggart and Kaltwasser 2016:360).

- Silent counter-revolution --> loud counter-revolution
  - Backlash against modernity: neo-traditionalism (reactive).
  - Anger and/or anxiety over the loss of status
  - Neo-authoritarianism (Gdula)

- **A need of the firm grounding of individual existence in a transcendental (mythical) foundation How pervasive is it?**
  - Tsvetan Todorov identifies three "inner" enemies of democracy: populism, ultra-liberalism and **messianism**.
  - Maciej Gdula: For at least some members of the middle class, "PiS's rule looks like the restoration of **moral order**, and supporting this party is an ennobling act.".

Rosary to the borders (7.10.2017)

Poland as an ethno-religious fortress

Archbishop Marek Jędraszewski of Kraków: the massive prayer was a message "to other European nations so that they understand that it's necessary to return to Christian roots so that Europe may remain Europe," as it represents the only way to "**save its culture**."

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Fronts of culture war

Politics and civil society	The state
	Political parties
	Secular civil society
Civic and constituitonal rights	Women's rights
	Civic, constitutional rights
	LGBTQ rights
Collective memory	Rituals, commemorations
	Schools
	Museums
Organized religion	The Catholic Church
	Catholic media
	Catholic civil society
The arts	Theater
	Cinema
	Visiual arts

Argument

What needs to be done?
- inductively reconstruct the mechanisms of interaction between
  - (1) past and present
  - (2) structure and agency
  - (3) culture and economy. How to do this?

- Focus more on the supply side and develop a more sophisticated analysis of the interaction between demand and supply.

- Study **cultural supply** not just political supply
- Show how it interacts with cultural demand

How to study cultural supply?

Study actions of non-political actors:
- they create DOS for political actors
- they come from both "left" and "right"
- THUS: it is a contentious interactions in the culture war (push and pull, conflict, etc.)

How to study these interactions?
- **Proper scale**
- **Proper actors**

Need to focus on:
- Localities where the reproduction of cultural understandings transpires (thing: fronts)
- Institutions. social movements and civil society organizations, whose cultural work underpins eventual political successes of parties and individuals

Reproduction "rightist persistence"

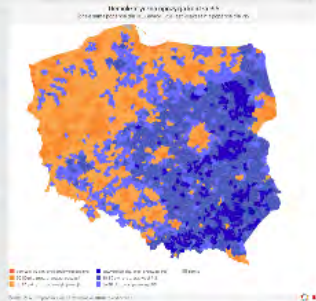Where is the mytho-poetic need grounded, how is it reproduced?

Jason Wittenberg. 2006. *The Crucibles of Political Loyalty. Church Institutions and Electoral Continuity in Hungary*.

- long-ish duree of **reproduction** of "rightist sub-cultures"
- the significance of religion:
  - repository of traditionalism
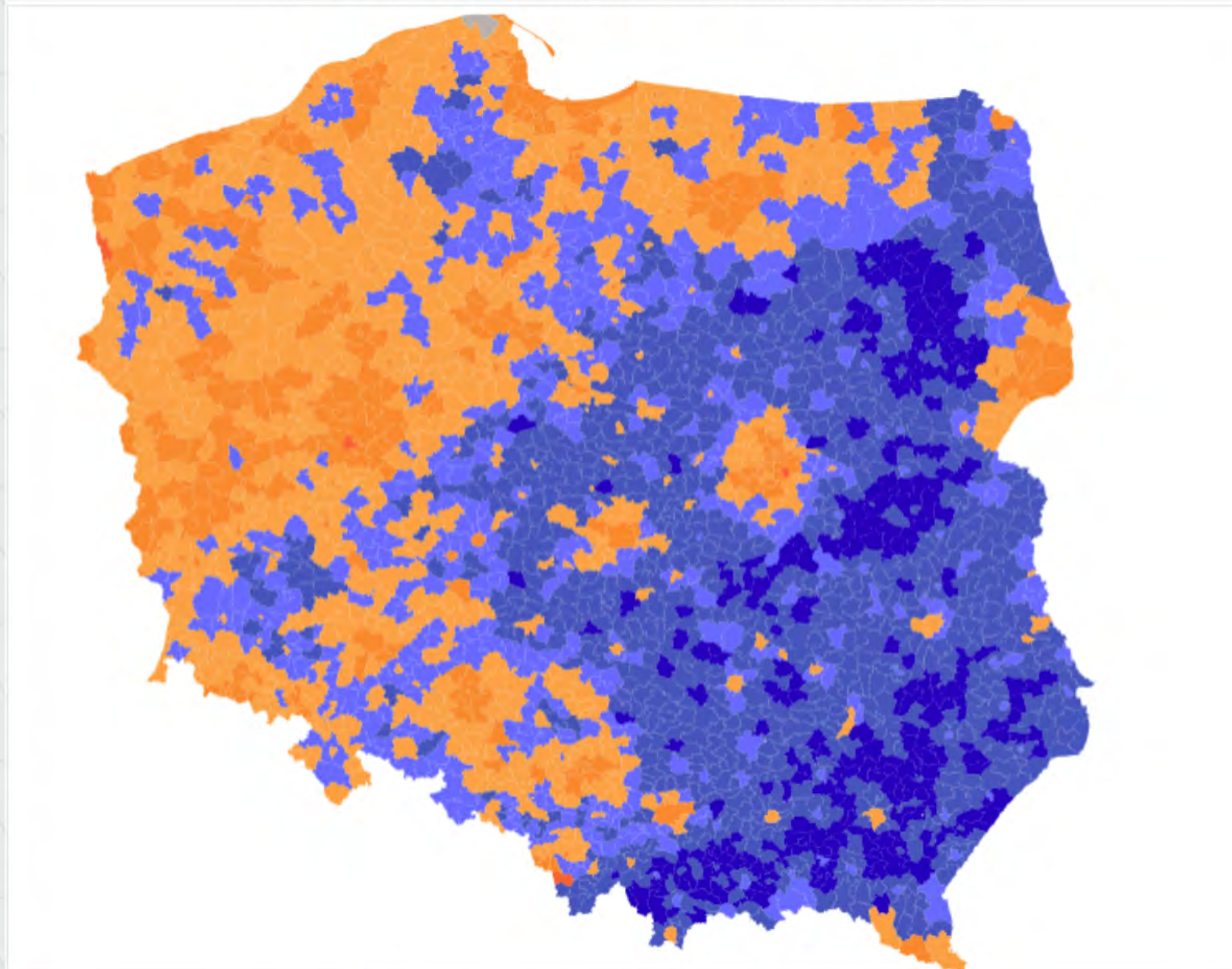 - institutions of cultural reproduction

Locus of cultural and political mobilization/reproduction: regions and communities

- liberal transition culture is out of sync **with many, but not all** subcultures
- these subcultures are often reproduced at local and regional levels (micro patterns of cultural reproduction)

Demokratyczna opozycja kontra PiS
gdzie suma poparcia dla KO, Lewicy i PSL jest większa niż poparcie dla PiS

- powyżej 50 pkt. proc. przewagi opozycji
- 20-50 pkt. proc. przewagi opozycji
- do 20 pkt. proc. przewagi opozycji
- powyżej 50 pkt. proc. przewagi PiS
- 20-50 pkt. proc. przewagi PiS
- do 20 pkt. proc. przewagi PiS
- remis

Wisła: predominantly
Lutheran. PiS: 18.3%

Istebna: predominantly
Catholic. PiS: 68.9%

Independence March 2017
Who is behind this event and what is the model of collective identity they promote?

The March of Independence Association:
- National-Radical Camp (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny – ONR)
- All-Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska – MW

Synthetic narrative of the March:
a young generation is rising to reclaim Poland.
They:

...are true patriots and heirs to a heroic and victorious military tradition ("Death to the Fatherland's enemies!")

...white ("Europe will be white or uninhabited")

...adamantly anti-communist ("Away with communism", "With sickle and hammer we will smash the red rabble")

...heteronormative and socially conservative ("A boy and a girl – a normal family"; "Abortion = murder")

...intend to create Poland for Poles, who are to be militantly Catholic, inspired by the Crusades ("Deus Vult")

...committed to defending Europe against serious internal and external enemies, particularly Muslims ("Europe wake up")

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