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## **Patriotic and Religious Attitudes among a Select Group of Poland's Territorial Defense Force Soldiers**

### **Postawy patriotyczne i religijne wśród wybranej grupy żołnierzy Wojsk Obrony Terytorialnej w Polsce**

**Key words:** Poland, soldier, values, patriotism, religiosity.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Polska, żołnierze, wartości, patriotyzm, religijność.

#### **Abstract**

The establishment of the Territorial Defense Forces in Poland in 2017 intensified the process of supporting the Polish Army with volunteer soldiers. This formation is one of five types of troops in Poland and is intended to support operational troops, with particular emphasis on a certain territory, close to and well-known to the soldiers of specific battalions. The motivations of candidates for service are certainly of key importance in determining recruitment success in this formation as these motivations may vary significantly. The article addresses this issue from the perspective of patriotic attitudes and religiosity guided by assumptions that have deep roots in Poland's military history. The motto God-Honour-Fatherland is constantly present in this space, especially as a reference to the tradition of the Home Army during World War II. The text is based on survey research conducted on a selected group of TDF (WOT) soldiers.

#### **Streszczenie**

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Powołanie Wojsk Obrony Terytorialnej w Polsce w 2017 roku zdynamizowało proces wsparcia Wojska Polskiego przez żołnierzy-ochotników. Formacja ta jest jednym z pięciu rodzajów wojsk w Polsce. Przewidziana jest jako wsparcie wojsk operacyjnych, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem konkretnego terytorium, bliskiego i dobrze znanego żołnierzom określonych batalionów. Kluczowe znaczenie dla wskazania na sukces rekrutacyjny w tej formacji mają z pewnością motywacje jakimi kierują się kandydaci do służby. Mogą one mieć zróżnicowany charakter. W artykule podjęto to zagadnienie w perspektywie postaw patriotycznych i religijności. Kierowano się założeniami, które mają swoje głębokie zakorzenienie w historii wojskowości w Polsce. Hasło Bóg-Honor-Ojczyzna jest stale obecne w tej przestrzeni, zwłaszcza w ramach symbolicznego i faktycznego nawiązania do tradycji Armii Krajowej z okresu II wojny światowej. Tekst bazuje na badaniach ankietowych przeprowadzonych na wybranej grupie żołnierzy WOT.

## Introduction

Military service demands determination and strong motivation. This particularly concerns undertaking service in the volunteer formation. The armed forces in European nations consist principally of professional soldiers. In Poland, professional military service is synonymous with performing one's duties within the so-called service relationship. This issue is included in the Act of September 11, 2003, on the military service of professional soldiers (*Journal of Laws* of 2003, item 536) and the Act of March 11, 2022, on defending the homeland (*Journal of Laws* of 2022, item 665). However, the law does not fully explain what this service entails and does not regulate many practical problems clearly enough, including issues related to severance pay and pension rights.

In the case of volunteer formation, one's motivation is particularly interesting and worth researching and analyzing as a scientific study. A volunteer soldier serving in the Territorial Defense Forces receives a tax-exempt financial remuneration. However, it seems that service in this formation has many levels of non-financial motivation. Moreover, taking into account the traditions of Polish army, their historical

development and achievements in homeland defense, another important research area is the religious attitudes of soldiers. The hymn of Polish knights in the Middle Ages was Bogurodzica, which served as the national anthem for centuries. John III Sobieski, who defeated the Turks near Vienna, was very religious and entrusted his troops and battles fought in defense of Christian Europe to God. The Catholic faith played a crucial role during the partitions, in the regaining of independence in 1918, during World War II, and during the communist period from 1944 to 1989.

This article aims to point to selected issues related to the motivation and religiosity of Territorial Defense Forces soldiers. The interest of part of society in military service as voluntary, volunteer formations is not decreasing (Dojwa-Turczyńska, 2018; Skrzypczak, 2017). The research process is based on content and empirical data analysis. The material comes from selected literature on the subject and own research. They were based on data obtained using the Computer Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) method. The selection of the sample was intentional. An online survey was addressed to members of pro-defense formations based on institutional e-mail addresses. The study was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2023, the assumed sample included 180 respondents with the final sample size consisting of 165 people<sup>3</sup>.

The age range of the respondents varied between those aged 25-49 (63%) and another group aged 19-24 (25.5%). In the gender structure, as expected, the majority of respondents were men (80%). More than 2/3 of the respondents (69.7%) come from rural areas or small towns (up to 20,000 inhabitants). This fact is significant for the entire historical period of the functioning of the Polish army. Patriotic attitudes and the value of a free, sovereign homeland were particularly important in this group. The research attempts to answer two questions: 1. How are

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<sup>3</sup> The lack of 15 respondents could be a consequence of the involvement of a large group of soldier-respondents in current anti-crisis activities at Poland's eastern border related to illegal migration from Belarus and the war in Ukraine.

the patriotic attitudes of the surveyed group shaped? 2. What are the characteristic features of the religiosity of the studied group?

The research sample was based on TDF members in eastern Poland from the Podlaskie, Lublin and Sub-Carpathian regions. The territorial scope of the study was selected on account of the presence of contemporary threats to national security due to illegal migration from Belarus and the war in Ukraine. Both situations have a direct impact on the systematic, committed service of volunteer soldiers. They face real, demanding and dangerous activities. The article is based on several general assumptions and conclusions. For this reason, the research process based on empirical material illustrates the tendency and specificity of security perception by the selected research group, yet it is not representative. However, taking into account the results obtained in the study, it can be assumed that these indications are quite stable and can be replicated among the majority of the study population.

### **1. Values as a Subject of Research**

Poland's Armed Forces clearly define their mission. It is based on service to Poland in order to protect independence, security, and the inviolability of its borders and territory. The support provided to state institutions and society is also crucial. Such a mission requires the presence of soldiers who are prepared, determined and have clear values (Zauer, 2017).

The Polish Language Dictionary gives several meanings off the word "value." One of them contains the principles and beliefs that are the basis for the ethical norms adopted in a given community (SJP, 2024). Patriotic and religious motivations are the subject of systematic research in Poland run by public and private centers<sup>4</sup>. In many cases, Poles' responses are clear, meaning pride in one's nationality (over 90%) or patriotism (over 80%). The situation is similar with declared faith in God (approx. 80%).

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<sup>4</sup> Examples of such centers are CBOS or TNS Polska.

These two concepts should be separated: patriotism (love of the homeland with respect for other nations) and nationalism (love of one's nation with contempt for others). Various authors write about this, also in an interdisciplinary way (Smuniewski, Sporek, 2021; Spielmann, Smith Maguire, Charters, 2018; Primoratz, Pavkovic, 2008). Patriotism is the basis for actions in the national arena. It is also related to building a nation's and state's position, including during an armed struggle (Reader, 2017). Religiosity is a basic social attitude regardless of the level of secularization. It has a significant impact on the functioning of individuals and social groups, especially the nation and the state. Religiosity covers both the area of religious practices and the actual functioning of society based on a given tradition and beliefs.

In the case of Poland, both dimensions, patriotism and religiosity, occupy an important position in society, constituting a special place in research and analyses. Researchers dealing with these issues in many cases demonstrate a multidimensional approach to the analyzed phenomena. Research on patriotism is characterized by a decisive, strong emphasis on the role of education based on values, love of the homeland, and the role that patriotic attitudes play in the life of the nation, including its continuity and development (Leszczyński, 2022; Stanisławek, 2018; Wilkomirska, 2018; Skorowski, 2015; Zwoliński, 2015). Research on religiosity confirms the ongoing, progressive changes in this area. Society in Poland is affected by the process of secularization, nevertheless, social attitudes are invariably still shaped by faith and religious traditions (Baniak, 2023; Mariański, 2021; Cipriani, Prüfer 2021). In this respect, Poland is still in a slightly different situation than Western European countries.

## **2. Patriotic Attitudes**

When analyzing patriotic attitudes among respondents, the authors focused on eight issues which may, directly or indirectly, determine the level of involvement and perception of reality in the subject matter.

A soldier is a patriot. This is due to the goal of military service. Naturally, the surveyed group showed a strong attitude in this respect. It is difficult to expect that active soldiers would be able to act effectively and serve in the military without an internal belief in the importance of patriotic attitudes. Traces of indications denying the importance of patriotism were shown in the opinions of people of a younger age, perhaps the result of the lack of specific attitudes and an on-going search for their path in adult life.

Question	Responses	N=165
Do you feel that you are a patriot?	Definitely yes	73.4
	Rather yes	24.8
	Probably not	1.2
	Definitely not	0.6

Table 1. Self-declarations of Patriotism. Source: Own work.

A soldier takes the military oath, which obligates him to actively fight in defense of his homeland. A time of peace and the absence of direct threats does not raise any doubts regarding military operations. They are also based on training through simulated, situational behavior. However, in the case of a real threat and uncertainty in the global or regional security system, soldiers have first-hand experiences of service in crises, especially on the border with Belarus or Ukraine and are highly aware of the potential dangers. The opinions expressed in the survey confirm the assumptions of the study and the specificity of military service aligns with the presented beliefs (98.8%). From the perspective of national security and defense readiness, these are expected and desired values.

Question	Responses	N=165
Would you defend your homeland during a war?	Definitely yes	70.3
	Rather yes	28.5
	Probably not	1.2
	Definitely not	0

Table 2. Declaration to Undertake Homeland Defense. Source: Own work.

Patriotism is related to the love of one's homeland and to identification with the nation, its values, traditions and identity. Today, this does not necessarily mean the lack of another identification, especially in the context of lasting, stable and strengthening alliances. However, the vast majority of respondents (68.5%) indicated that their identification was strictly national. In some cases, (29.7%), national and European ideas were combined. Only the youngest respondents indicated a more global approach.

Question	Responses	N=165
Which of these statements best describes you?	I am Polish	68.5
	I am Polish and European	29.7
	I am European	1.8

Table 3. National Identity among Respondents. Source: Own work.

As indicated above, patriotism can take on various dimensions. In an attempt to define patriotism, specific, concrete or multidimensional values must be considered. The surveyed group (64.2%) linked their feelings towards patriotism with the need to defend the Homeland, regardless of the circumstances, time or type of threats. Cultivating historical memory, culture and tradition is important in strengthening one's sense of belonging to a nation (57%). This allows for maintaining state continuity, state development and national unity, especially in times of threats. Poles have experienced threats many times in their history. Soldiers also often pointed out the importance of, apart from love for their Homeland, respect for other nations (35.2%). This is particularly important for building trust in international relations, especially with neighbors. However, it seems that this attitude requires reciprocation from other countries.

Question	Responses <sup>5</sup>	N=165
Which issues best describe your attitude towards patriotism?	Patriotism means fulfilling civic duties	27.3
	Patriotism is the obligation to defend the Homeland in times of peace and war	64.2
	Patriotism is honest work for the Homeland	20
	Patriotism is remembering a nation's history, culture and traditions	57
	Patriotism is active participation in national events	3.6
	Patriotism is love for one's Homeland and respect for other nations	35.2

Table 4. Respondent Definitions of Patriotism. Source: Own work.

A soldier provides service to the Homeland and society, both in times of peace and war. Soldiers' duties are undertaken regardless of the expectations and approach of social groups, including those that do not identify with the community. However, the acceptance of selflessness on the part of the respondents is quite high (81.2%). In the case of answer operating on the principle of reciprocity (18.2%), they may include putting demands on soldiers or expecting society to take responsibility.

Question	Responses	N=165
Which of the following statements best describes your attitude toward helping other people?	It is worth helping others selflessly	81.2
	It is worth helping others based on reciprocity	18.2
	It is not worth helping others	0.6

Table 5. Respondent Expectations when Helping Others. Source: Own work.

The points made in the previous question partly correlate with feelings related to the opinion on the attitudes of the general public towards soldiers undertaking military service. The results were only partially expected. The motto of the TDF is "Always ready - Always close". Soldiers are part of local communities and carry out tasks in their territories.

<sup>5</sup> The sum of the responses exceeds 100 per cent since the respondents could choose up to two positions.



Therefore, it may be expected that the acceptance rates of soldiers by locals would be higher. Yet, only 2/3 (69.1%) of respondents have positive feelings about social acceptance. Perhaps some soldiers experienced negative feelings during their demanding service time at the Polish border, where restrictions were introduced on the population. In addition, some media presented soldiers in a negative light, especially towards the so-called illegal migrants at the border.

Question	Responses	N=165
Do you feel that your service in TDF is appreciated by society in Poland?	Definitely yes	6.7
	Rather yes	62.4
	Probably not	26.7
	Definitely not	4.2

Table 6. Feeling society's appreciation in the opinion of respondents. Source: Own work.

National security and defense require demographic resources. Hence, the constant presence of human resources on the territory of the country is also important. It is also important from an economic perspective. The soldiers' opinions are clear (92.7%), they show a strong attachment to their "*Homeland*" and are convinced that Poland is the place of their constant activity.

Question	Responses	N=165
What is your attitude towards plans to travel out of state?	I plan to leave Poland for a few years	6.7
	I intend to leave Poland permanently	0.6
	I do not intend to leave Poland except for occasional situations (e.g. travel, trips)	92.7

Table 7. Resettling in the respondents' opinions. Source: Own work.

Poles are usually described as a great and united nation during times of war. History seems to confirm this thesis. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this mainly concerned regaining independence in 1918, the fight to consolidate it until 1939, then refusing to surrender to the German occupier during World War II and to Soviet communism until 1989. All this is also confirmed by the majority of soldiers (60.6%). However, it should

be noted that there is a significant percentage (32.1%), almost 1/3 of the respondents, who show patriotism in both war- and peace-time.

Question	Responses	N=165
When do you think Poles show patriotism?	During times of peace	7.3
	During times of war	60.6
	Both in times of peace and war	32.1

Table 8. Specificity of patriotism in the context of time in respondent opinions. Source: Own work.

### 3. Religious attitudes

The analysis of religious attitudes among the respondents entailed 6 issues. This is an important and interesting part of the research undertaken, especially in the context of increasing secularization and the challenges related to the direct participation of soldiers in preventing crisis events on the eastern border. Over 3/4 of the respondents have faith in God (77%), with a quarter of the soldiers describing themselves as deeply believing. The location of the research and the settlement structure of the soldiers confirm the fact that processes of abandoning the faith are slower in the eastern and southern regions of Poland. There is still a strong connection with Catholicism in these regions.

Question	Responses	N=165
What is your attitude towards faith in God?	Deep believer	25.5
	Rather a believer	51.5
	Rather non-believer	3.3
	Definitely not a believer	9.7

Table 9. Opinion of respondents on attitudes toward faith in God. Source: Own work.

Declarations of participation in religious services among the surveyed group are quite surprising. According to the principles of faith, Catholics are obligated to attend weekly Holy Mass<sup>6</sup>. The data obtained

<sup>6</sup> The survey's research question specified religious practice as participating in Holy Mass, perhaps also devotional prayers. Respondents were thus given the types of religious practices that were deemed essential in the context of this part of the article.

shows that most soldiers declare occasional participation in prayers. Only 10.5% of respondents participate in weekly prayer services. Failure to fulfill these obligations may partly result from the nature of volunteer military service. However, it seems that the studied group does not differ in this respect from the rest of the population, where participation in religious services is not high. It should be added that a significant percentage of respondents (21.8%) do not participate in any religious services. This is a much larger group than those who declared themselves as non-believers in question 9.

Question	Responses	N=165
How often do you participate in religious practices?	Daily	1.8
	Several times per week	9.7
	Several times a month	30.9
	Several times a year	35.8
	I do not practice religion	21.8

Table 10. Respondent opinions on participation in religious practices. Source: Own work.

Opinions related to personal prayer among the respondents are of interest in comparison with the previous question. Almost 1/3 of soldiers (32.1%) indicate that they often engage in prayer to God and every fifth respondent does it every day. Within these ranges, there is, as above, the same group of respondents who do not have any personal relationship with God.

Question	Responses	N=165
How often do you pray?	Daily	21.2
	Several times per week	10.9
	Several times a month	22.4
	Several times a year	23.6
	I do not practice religion	21.8

Table 11. Respondent opinions on praying. Source: Own work.

Religious attitudes do not appear out of nowhere. They are an important element of primary socialization. This applies especially to cultural and social circles where religion not only plays a traditional role but also

constitutes a living space for an individual and group. In this light, the influence of significant people, especially parents and grandparents, must be noted. They are the closest transmitters of norms and values to the next generation. This is reflected in the study group. Parents (81.2%) and grandparents (44.2%) specifically transmit religiosity. For this reason, it is very important that a family not neglect its basic religious duties. At the same time, families must provide natural protection in support of the indicated values and stop negative outside, often very radical, influences.

Question	Responses <sup>7</sup>	N=165
Who has or had an influence on forming your religiosity?	Parents	81.2
	Grandparents	44.2
	Church institutions	20.6
	Priests	17
	Teachers	8.5
	Media	4.2

Table 12. Respondent opinions on the influence of institutions on religiosity

Human life is based on a battle between good and evil. It is important to have stable support based on foundations, a unique point of reference in the framework of these two opposing forces. The foundations are formed in the early stages of life, yet the coping process for these spheres is the result of many variables. Thus, the opinions expressed by the respondents are interesting. The majority point to an individual assessment of what is good or evil (50.9%). That is why it also seems so essential to point to the above process of socialization, meaning possessing lasting values. Almost 1/3 (31.5%) of the respondents live according to the Ten Commandments. The clear minority points to society (17.8%). This is an important signal indicating the sense of impermanence and changeability of social feelings on such important matters. It is especially

<sup>7</sup> The sum of the responses exceeds 100 percent since the respondents could choose up to two positions.

the case presently, when there are strong, very superficial and unstable external stimuli, often the result of quick, unverified media messages.

Question	Responses	N=165
Which of the following statements best describes your attitude toward good and evil?	The Decalogue tells us what is good or evil	31.5
	Society tells us what is good or evil	17.8
	What is good or evil is the result of each person's assessment	50.9

Table 13. Respondent opinions on attitudes toward good and evil. Source: Own work

The respondents also had the opportunity to state how they react to morally conflicting situations. Their responses naturally come out of their attitudes/beliefs indicated in the previous question. Here, respondents could choose a maximum of two answers. The vast majority of the surveyed group indicated that they base their moral conflict resolutions on their conscience (85.5%). Hence, the respondents' sense of being able to resolve such dilemmas is high. This seems to have been shaped by religious relationships in childhood and youth. General rules of conduct are very important for the respondents too (51.5%). This may seem like a kind of excuse for not having personal concrete foundations for moral choices. However, taking into account the socio-cultural context of upbringing, growing up and life-style, it should be noted Polish society is based on Christian culture and Catholic customs in this respect. Therefore, the rules of conduct are specific. Even if not directly related to religion, one's conduct certainly results from Christian traditions<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> The authors of the text assume that the decisions and attitudes indicated in questions 13 and 14, regardless of the level of religiosity that a person assumes in adulthood, are significantly supported by the process of religious socialization, especially in childhood, due to the care and instructions of parents and grandparents. This is clearly indicated in question 12. Both decisions based on "one's conscience" and "the individual assessment of each person" do not arise in an axiological vacuum. They are based on experiences, also and perhaps especially religious ones, formed at different levels in the process of primary socialization (with a large dose of religious socialization).

Question	Responses <sup>9</sup>	N=165
What guides you when resolving moral conflicts?	The Decalogue	17.6
	Church guidelines	5.5
	My conscience	85.5
	Family advice	5.5
	General rules of conduct	51.5
	I don't feel there are conflicts in my life	6.1

Table 14. Respondent opinions on resolving moral conflicts

#### 4. Conclusions

Patriotic and religious attitudes are important nation-building ties in Polish society. They constitute important social bonds. Even if there are significant changes in this respect, in the country the great number of components influencing both spaces remains permanent. This seems to have been confirmed by the research conducted. The fact that values are changing does not raise any doubts in the study group. However, there are many lasting indications. They are analyzed in the context of two spaces: patriotic attitudes and religious attitudes. Part of the analysis attempted to describe the relationship between both spaces. Considering the research assumptions in the work and the analysis carried out, two general conclusions can be drawn.

First, concerning patriotic attitudes, it should be emphasized that the indications in this part are very clear among the respondents. Moreover, they do not contradict the values expected in the army. The respondents have clearly defined opinions in line with military principles and rules expected for a nation to exist and develop. This is particularly important in situations that threaten the development of the nation and the state, its survival, independence and sovereignty. Here it is necessary to rely on values that indisputably build a sense of community.

<sup>9</sup> The sum of the responses exceeds 100 percent since the respondents could choose up to two positions.

Second, the area of religious attitudes seems to be slightly more diverse. This fact is certainly influenced by the transformation processes in Polish society analyzed in the research on religiosity. The respondents confirm how strongly religion influences their lives and decisions. Although it may be indirectly, it is evident that religiosity resonates in various areas of volunteer soldiers' personal and social lives. This may be related to the strong influence of religious values and attitudes transmitted, especially by loved ones and significant people (parents and grandparents), during childhood and primary socialization. Even if in adulthood a person has an unconscious attitude of diffuse religiosity (as in Cipriani's concept), it is based on the catalog of values acquired in childhood.

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