

PARTY AFFILIATION AND BELIEF IN CONSPIRACY THEORIES: CASE STUDY OF SMOLENSK PLANE CRASH

Maciej MARMOLA and Agata OLSZANECKA-MARMOLA¹

On April 10, 2010, ninety-six people died in the plane crash near Smolensk, including the President of the Republic of Poland, Lech Kaczyński. To this day, many conspiracies have grown around this event regarding the alleged assassination in which Russian secret services were supposed to be involved. The aim of the article is to diagnose how social identity created based on party identification affects conspiracy thinking connected with the presidential Tu-154 plane crash. We analyse research on belief in the Smolensk attack theory conducted by Polish opinion research centres in 2010-2022. They show that the voters of the Law and Justice party believe to a much greater extent that the Smolensk catastrophe is, in fact, an assassination of President Lech Kaczyński ordered by Vladimir Putin. The conducted analysis confirms that the political dimension of social identity (conceptualized in the study as trust in Law and Justice government and party identification) determines the endorsement of the Smolensk conspiracy. This factor is more important for belief in the assassination theory than such factors as conspiracy mentality, gender, age, place of residence, and education.

Key words: conspiracy theories; conspiracy beliefs; social identity; party affiliation; Smolensk plane crash.

1 INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL IDENTITY AND GROUP IDENTIFICATION

Social identity theory is one of the main approaches explaining people's behaviours and attitudes related to group membership (Turner et al. 1987). It assumes that part of self-image (*personal identity*) results from membership in a particular type of group (*social identity*). As individuals, we are somehow predisposed to adopting a social identity. Firstly, it results from the evolution of the human species because survival depends on ethnocentrism, which consists of perceiving one's own group as better than others and preferring it over out-

¹ **Maciej MARMOLA**, Assistant Professor, Institute of Political Science, University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland. Contact: maciej.marmola@us.edu.pl **Agata OLSZANECKA-MARMOLA**, Assistant Professor, Institute of Political Science, University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland. Contact: agata.olszanecka-marmola@us.edu.pl

groups (Hartshorn, Kaznatcheev and Shultz 2013). Secondly, it helps reduce uncertainty because strong identification with a group allows people to find their way more easily in social situations, especially those unexpected and unpredictable. The stronger the feeling of uncertainty, the greater the individual's tendency to identify with the group (Choi and Hogg 2020) and the more substantial the need for populist, autocratic leaders within it (Hogg 2021).

Social identity is one of the sources of self-esteem. Maintaining a positive social identity, therefore, becomes an essential factor motivating human behaviour. The individuals reach that through a favourable comparison between their own group and out-groups. They strengthen self-esteem by emphasizing the superiority of in-groups in relation to lower-status out-groups. Importantly, when social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals should seek to leave their existing group and join another more positively evaluated one and/or to make their current group more positively distinct (Tajfel and Turner 1986).

Social identity contains four modes of in-group identification: *importance* (the degree to which an individual considers group membership to be an essential part of who he or she is), *commitment* (the likelihood to act for the group's benefit, even at the expense of one's own interests), *deference* (the degree to which an individual conforms to the group's norms, symbols, and leaders), and *superiority* (an individual's belief that my group is superior to other groups) (Roccas et al. 2008).

Group identification is a concept like social identity, and both terms are often used interchangeably (Brown 2000; Sahdra and Ross 2007). However, these concepts are not synonymous. Social identity refers to the nature or content of a particular identity (as part of the self that results from being a group member), whereas group identification indicates the psychological ties that connect an individual with a given group (Ellemers, Spears and Doosje 2002). Group identification concerns both the strength of an individual's relationship with a given group and other characteristics of this relationship, i.e., the extent to which it is based on an emotional ties with other group members, the extent to which being a member of a group and the group itself are assessed positively, and finally, whether the group's assessment is grounded or uncertain, filled with hidden doubts and dependent on situational factors (Amiot and Aubin 2013; Cameron 2004; Golec de Zavala, Cichocka and Bilewicz 2013).

Individuals can identify with the group in a secure, non-narcissistic and narcissistic way. Secure in-group identification is characterized by the fact that members of such groups have a positive but not exaggerated image of their own group, which generates positive attitudes towards members of out-groups. It increases the likelihood of perceiving fewer threats from others and diminishes belief in conspiracy theories (Cichocka et al. 2018). In turn, narcissistic in-group identification (so-called collective narcissism) causes the assignment of exaggerated, unparalleled greatness to one's own group with excessive sensitivity to criticism and a defensive reaction to violations of group norms (Golec de Zavala and Lantos 2020). The level of collective narcissism increases following negative evaluations of the in-group or when people feel temporarily insecure as members of the group (Golec de Zavala 2011). Beyond the national group, collective narcissism has been identified in relation to an ethnic group and an ideological organization, such as a political party or a religious group (Golec de Zavala et al. 2009; Golec de Zavala, Cichocka and Bilewicz 2013).

To maintain a positive in-group image, their members often resort to collective self-victimization. This process relates to the “belief that one’s own group has been intentionally and undeservingly harmed by another group” (Bar-Tal et al. 2009). Groups that permanently feel victims of various types of injustice are characterized by the mentality of a besieged fortress. Therefore, a national identity built on being a victim also fosters the construction of conspiracy theories aimed at a group treated as oppressors (Oren, Bar-Tal and David 2004). In this context, it is worth mentioning that studies on collective self-victimization conducted in Poland bring interesting results. Although the victim identity is not dominant among Poles, the Law and Justice voters present a significantly higher level of victim identity than individuals declaring support for other parties (Skarżyńska 2020).

2 HOW IN-GROUP IDENTIFICATION AFFECTS BELIEF IN CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Most conspiracy theories involve convictions about a powerful and evil outgroup that secretly tries to harm one’s own group (van Prooijen and van Lange 2014; Matuszewski, Rams-Ługowski and Pawłowski 2024). Recent studies confirm the robust association between in-group identification and believing in conspiracy theories (Douglas et al. 2019; van Prooijen 2022). This applies to specific conspiracy theories, and the strength of the relationship depends on the content of the conspiracy theories (scales or questionnaires used in the research). This is evidenced by the meta-analysis proposed in relation to collective narcissism understood as “a belief that one’s own group is exceptional but not sufficiently recognized by others” (Golec de Zavala and Lantos 2020). It confirms that the links between collective narcissism and conspiracy theories are the strongest for these conspiracy theories assigning hostile intentions to specific malevolent out-group actors threatening a given group. This relationship is demonstrated to a lesser extent in relation to vaguely defined, powerful ‘others’ and to generic conspiracy thinking (Golec de Zavala, Bierwiazzonek and Ciesielski 2022). The belief that others are conspiring against a given group is more likely to occur when the group thinks of itself as undervalued or marginalized. Thus, conspiratorial thinking becomes a mechanism for defending one’s social group and a factor strengthening in-group identification (Golec de Zavala et al. 2009). To sum up, the research on the role of social identity in conspiracy thinking confirms that the feeling of being weakened and threatened (especially in an international relations context) may facilitate the development of conspiracy theories to justify the group’s unfavourable position.

Social identity is strongly related to both conspiracy beliefs and political attitudes (Van Prooijen 2018). As Robertson notes, “political actors may use conspiracy theories to foster strong partisan identities, crafting narratives that pit malevolent elites against the common people” (Robertson et al. 2022). Moreover, research suggests that belief in conspiracy theories does not result from a lack of cognitive competence but is motivated by the defence of positive in-group or cultural identity (Kahan 2015). Conspiracy belief is closely connected with maintaining positive relationships with one’s environment (family, friends) and the values professed in this environment (Soral and Grzesiak-Feldman 2015). Thus, conspiracy theories often develop in response to threats to people’s social identities (Robertson et al. 2022). They may arise because of racial, national, religious, or political identification. In the latter case, a relationship is diagnosed according to which individuals believe in conspiracy theories that are ideologically consistent with their party identification (Uscinski, Kloststad and

Atkinson 2016). Additionally, those who vote for the party that lost the election are more likely to endorse conspiracy theories because they feel marginalized (Uscinski and Parent 2014).

Conspiracy beliefs based on social identity are aimed at various types of out-groups. Most often, such studies focus on specific national or religious identities. Moreover, scientists even construct unique scales or measures to investigate conspiracies referring to social identity, e.g., Islamophobic conspiracist beliefs (Swami et al. 2018), index of Muslim conspiracy theories and index of Jewish conspiracy theories (van Prooijen, Staman and Krouwel 2018), Republican Conspiracy Theories, Democratic Conspiracy Theories and Nonpartisan Conspiracy Theories (Enders and Smallpage 2019) or Upward and Downward Conspiracy Beliefs (Nera et al. 2021). They also create different scenarios of the same events, assigning responsibility for them to various out-groups. The conducted research proves that both the national identification of the malevolent actor and the recipients of the conspiracy influence belief in a specific conspiracy theory (Andrade 2021; J. M. Miller 2020; Radnitz 2022). Endorsement of conspiracies is also related to collective narcissism (Golec de Zavala, Bierwiazzonek and Ciesielski 2022) and religiosity (Frenken, Bilewicz and Imhoff 2023). Importantly, there is another mechanism for how social identity affects conspiracy thinking. If conspiracies are aimed at our group (primarily national), then in defence of our in-group identification, we do not believe in them (Wang et al. 2021).

An important research direction is the impact of party identification on belief in specific conspiracy theories. The research subject here usually involves events important to the electorate of a given party, e.g., the death of a political leader or mysterious, incomprehensible actions of political competitors. The strong effect of party identification (as the political dimension of social identity) on conspiracy thinking is diagnosed across the world, e.g., in the United States (Enders and Smallpage 2019; Enders and Uscinski 2021; Hollander 2018), Venezuela (Carey 2019), and Pakistan (Siddiqui 2020). Similar relationships are also confirmed in relation to political ideology (Krouwel et al. 2017; Min 2021; Jolley et al. 2022; Wardawy-Dudziak 2024), attitudes toward the establishment/elites (Stecula and Pickup 2021; Wood and Gray 2019), geopolitical preferences (Onderco and Stoeckel 2023), and even identification with a specific event important for a whole society (Chayinska and Minescu 2018; Šteger 2024).

3 PRESIDENTIAL TU-154 PLANE CRASH IN SMOLENSK AS A DRIVING FORCE OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES

On April 10, the entire Polish delegation (96 people in total), which was to go to Katyn to take part in the memorial of the 70th anniversary of the crime committed against Polish officers by the NKVD during World War II, died in a plane crash near Smolensk in western Russia. The delegation included the President of the Republic of Poland, Lech Kaczyński, and his wife, the last President of the Republic of Poland in exile, Ryszard Kaczorowski, the Chief of the General Staff of the Polish Army, commanders of all branches of the armed forces, the President of the National Bank of Poland, the President of the Institute of National Remembrance, the Commissioner for Human Rights, highest-ranking public officials, members of parliament from all political options, clergy of various denominations, social activists, and the plane crew. The scale of the disaster was enormous, not only for Poland. The plane crash deprived Poland of several authorities at various levels. The sudden and unexpected loss of such a

prominent political elite created a sense of threat, uncertainty, and instability, both in the social and political context. On the same day, the Speaker of the Sejm, Bronisław Komorowski, announced that, following the Constitution, he was temporarily taking over the duties of the head of state and declared seven days of national mourning. Crowds gathered in front of the Presidential Palace in Warsaw to commemorate the President and other victims. People sang patriotic songs, prayed, and lit thousands of candles.

At the same time, in the first hours after the disaster, conspiracy theories began appearing on the Internet. People spread rumours that the Russian special services caused lousy weather that prevented the safe landing of the presidential Tupolev. Statements such as "The Russians have mastered the art of making rain using silver iodide for several dozen years" and "The Russians have created an artificial fog for a long time, for example, in 1942 to mask the location of ships" were published on the Internet. The issue of the victims of the disaster also raised grave doubts. The uncertainty related to the fact that no one saw the victims led to the assumption that the plane did not crash in Smolensk but in some more secluded place where it would be easier to finish off the survivors. Whereas in Smolensk, another plane crashed - without passengers, previously prepared to leave a lot of pieces behind. The second theory regarding the victims indicated that the survivors were finished off at the Smolensk airport (Chaciński 2010).

A few days after the disaster, politicians also began to suggest an assassination theory. On April 12, in "Nasz Dziennik," Artur Górski (MP of Law and Justice) stated that the Russians were responsible for the plane crash and compared the disaster to what happened in Katyn 70 years earlier. Professor Zdzisław Krasnodębski, a close associate of Lech Kaczyński and later a member of the European Parliament, in the same newspaper announced that:

"If someone wants to believe in a coincidence, let him believe, but I am not able to believe. Things like this just don't happen. This death fits too well into the events of the last few weeks. A few days ago, other representatives of the Polish authorities were in Katyn and nothing happened to them" (Zychowicz 2010).

Despite the ongoing national mourning, the decision to bury the presidential couple at Wawel sparked a wave of protests and disputes about Lech Kaczyński's presidency (Bejma 2013). The catastrophe intended to end the "Polish-Polish war" led to even greater polarization of society, and the attitude to the Smolensk plane crash became a form of political identification (Dudek 2016). In the shadow of the Smolensk disaster, early presidential elections were held. The election campaign at that time was unique not only because of the unexpected elections, but primarily due to the candidates of the two largest parties - Law and Justice and the Civic Platform. They were represented by Jarosław Kaczyński (the twin brother of the late president, who was to fulfil his brother's mission) and Bronisław Komorowski (Speaker of the Sejm, acting as temporary head of state). Even before the official announcement of the election campaign, Jarosław Kaczyński delivered an online speech addressed to Russians. He began with the words: "Ladies and gentlemen, Russian friends." He thanked them for the help and kindness shown to Poles after the disaster. He also referred to the Katyn victims and argued that we should strive to discover the whole truth about their death, even if it were painful, because only the truth would allow for building stable relations between the two nations (Naszkowska 2010).

Immediately after the Smolensk plane crash, a large part of Polish society expressed hope for a "new opening" in relations with the Russian Federation. In May 2010, the percentage of people who assessed Polish-Russian relations positively increased from 8% to 29%. Only 8% indicated that relations between these countries would deteriorate after the Smolensk disaster, and 48% (including 40% of Law and Justice voters) believed they would improve. The majority of Poles also positively assessed the actions of the Russian authorities aimed at explaining the causes of the disaster (50%) and helping the victims' families (67%) (Feliksiak 2010).

The breakthrough moment that changed the approach of Poles to Russian authorities was the publication of a report by The Interstate Aviation Committee (IAC), controlled by the Russians. That committee placed the entire blame for the disaster on the Polish side, and among the causes of the catastrophe indicated: errors in the training of the crew, failure to decide to go to an alternate airport despite information about unfavourable weather conditions, approaching the landing without permission from the control tower, and the pressure exerted on the crew by General Andrzej Błasik - Commander of the Air Force (Kazmierczuk 2011). In response, the Committee for Investigation of National Aviation Accidents, which had been established by the Polish government, prepared a separate report. The commission, chaired by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Jerzy Miller, did not clearly point out the culprit for the disaster, but drew attention to the inappropriate preparation of the airport by the Russians, including errors of the flight control tower, which provided incorrect information about the glide path and divergent weather forecasts (Miller 2011). What is important, both investigations ruled out a terrorist attack, explosion or fire on board the aircraft as the cause of the crash. In August 2011, compared to surveys immediately after the disaster, the percentage of Poles claiming that the Russians wanted to explain the causes of the Smolensk plane crash dropped from 58 to 24%, and 60% (including 83% of Law and Justice voters) believed that the Russian authorities were hiding evidence and covering up the errors of flight controllers and airport staff (Pankowski 2011).

A real rash of conspiracy theories regarding the Smolensk disaster occurred during the operation of the Parliamentary Group for the Investigation of the Causes of the Tu-154M Catastrophe, established in November 2011 and consisting almost entirely of MPs and senators from the Law and Justice party. The commission, chaired by Antoni Macierewicz, legitimized the assassination theory and provided various reasons and methods for carrying it out. Importantly and characteristic of conspiracy theories, this parliamentary group did not create a coherent story. The parts of the justification story for the attempt on the President's life not only did not fit together, but often contradicted each other. The only feature connecting these conspiracy narratives was the rejection of the findings of previous investigations, which offered rational, non-conspiratory explanations for the disaster, such as: human errors, weather conditions, insufficient preparation of the airport, and pressure on the pilots. As rightly noted by commentators referring to the work of the Macierewicz's commission and the controversial theories it has built:

"It is difficult to assess how much of the conspiracy theories are political calculations and how much is a genuine need to understand a tragedy and restore the moral order violated by the senseless death of so many people from the very top of power, including the President. Finding the perpetrator and punishing him, at least symbolically, seems to believers of conspiracy theories to be a better solution than agreeing to trivial explanations that are disproportionate to the tragedy. It

doesn't matter whether it's based on personal conviction or political calculation" (Pacewicz 2016).

Regardless of whether the repetition of conspiracy theories by Law and Justice politicians resulted from the need to find an explanation for the national tragedy or from cold political calculation, this influenced the spread of the assassination theory in the public space. Among the potential causes of the presidential plane crash given at press conferences, Macierewicz's commission experts mentioned: one explosion inside the plane (Wierzchołowski and Misiak 2012) illustrated by the process of bursting a sausage during cooking (Siek 2013); linear explosive charge in the airplane wing (Koziołek 2015); multi-point explosion, derived from the analogy of a crushed soda can (Sobieniowski 2013); TNT explosion, traces of which were found on the fuselage (Gmyz 2012); thermobaric explosion after the plane landed (Jurszo 2019); artificial fog made by the Russians (Jopek 2016), activating an explosive charge with a radio signal (Pacewicz 2016), and Russian sabotage and damage to a Tupolev during aircraft renovation (Misiak and Wierzchołowski 2013). The public debate also included theories related to: spraying of helium, which reduced the lifting power of the plane (Krzymowski 2011), intentional misleading of pilots by Russian air traffic controllers (gb 2014), surviving the crash by three passengers of a presidential plane and killing them by Russian services (Pacewicz 2016), and even the theory of poisoning the passengers (Kwiatkowski 2018).

In addition, Antoni Macierewicz provided many contradictory theories related to the birch tree that the Tupolev hit. In various media statements, he claimed that the presidential plane did not encounter the birch, the birch was cut down five days before the crash, and even that the birch never existed (Pacewicz 2016). The records of the black boxes, which were allegedly manipulated by the Russian side, were also questioned. However, this did not prevent the commission's experts from referring to its records when it was part of subsequent conspiracy narratives (Pupiec 2022). All these conspiracy theories were supposed to appear credible to the public because they were proclaimed by the commission's experts - researchers with academic titles, but not specialists in plane crashes.

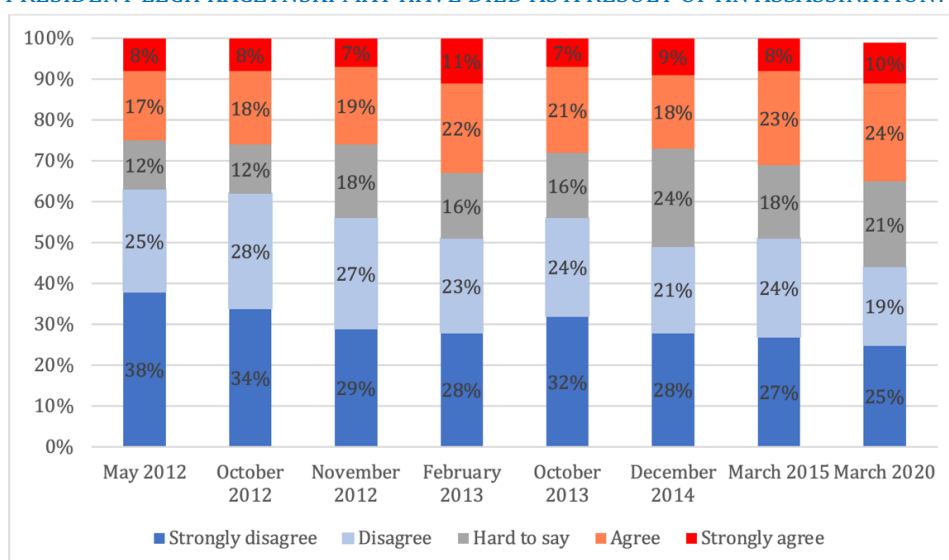
An important element of conspiracy theories is identifying the enemy responsible for the event that is the source of these theories. In the case of the Smolensk disaster, this enemy name was attributed to the Russian authorities, especially to Vladimir Putin. However, the narrative about the conspiracy between Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and Vladimir Putin quickly became popular, the details of which were discussed during the meeting of both politicians at the Sopot pier in 2009 during Putin's visit related to the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II. Right-wing media fuelled these theories, emphasizing that the Russian leader manipulated the Polish Prime Minister and that Tusk's resignation from domestic politics and becoming the President of the European Council was an escape from responsibility (Janecki 2015). Additionally, Antoni Macierewicz, in the report "28 months after Smolensk" published by the Parliamentary Group for the Investigation of the Causes of the Tu-154M Catastrophe, accused Tusk and his government of cooperating with the Russian authorities to cover up the traces (Macierewicz 2012). The statements of Jarosław Kaczyński, who drew attention to the separation of the visits of Prime Minister Tusk and President Lech Kaczyński, also fuelled the conspiracy theory about assassination planned by the Polish and Russian authorities. The Law and Justice leader emphasized in interviews that "Putin was very unfavourable towards my brother and much more positive towards Tusk. If the visits had not been separated, the tragedy would not have occurred" (Kaczmarek 2016).

All the above narratives agreed on one thing - the motives of the potential attackers. They stressed that the plane crash was prepared to eliminate President Lech Kaczyński, who posed a threat to imperialist ambitions and the economic interests of the Russian Federation (Pacewicz 2016).

The popularity of the Smolensk conspiracies affected the media space. The publishing market began to be flooded with books presenting the Smolensk disaster as the result of an attack and planned actions of the Russian secret services (Grzesiak-Feldman 2016). As researchers note, expressive and shocking media messages contribute to creating conspiracy narratives regarding a given event (Raab et al. 2013). Thus, an unprecedented national tragedy, which seemed to be the beginning of national reconciliation, was used for political purposes.

Two years after the disaster, most of the Polish society still rejected the possibility of President Lech Kaczyński's death because of an attack. Almost two-thirds (63%) did not believe in the assassination theory, including 38% who strongly rejected this explanation. One-quarter of Poles declared that they believed in such a possibility, while 12% of them had no opinion on this matter. Law and Justice voters were the most likely to believe in the assassination theory (60% of this party's electorate). This distinguished them from voters of other large parties. The possibility of an attack was accepted by 24% of Polish Peasants' Party supporters, 12% of the Democratic Left Alliance electorate, and only 5% of Civic Platform voters. The belief in assassination theory was also stronger among respondents who were worse off, lived in smaller towns, and had lower education (Pankowski 2012). Similar results were recorded in the period until the Law and Justice party came to power after the 2015 parliamentary elections. The percentage of people who believed in the assassination theory ranged from 26% (October 2012) to 33% (February 2013).

FIGURE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION “DO YOU BELIEVE THAT PRESIDENT LECH KACZYŃSKI MAY HAVE DIED AS A RESULT OF AN ASSASSINATION?”

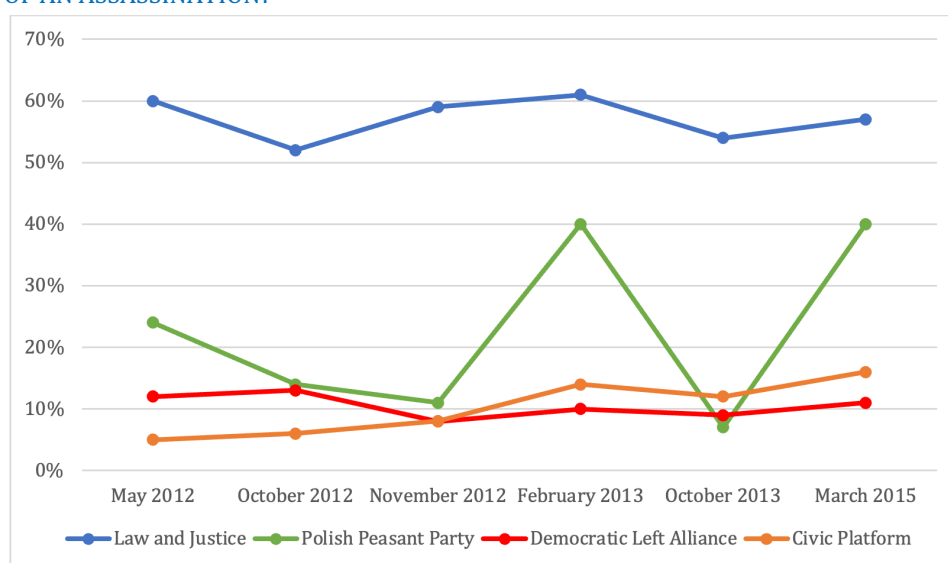


Source: own elaboration based on CBOS data (Bożewicz 2020).

The characteristics of people who believed in the Smolensk conspiracies did not change significantly. In the years 2012-2015, over half of the Law and Justice electorate confirmed that the cause of President Kaczyński's death may have been an assassination. The highest percentage of this party's voters (as much as 61%) endorsed the assassination theory in an opinion poll conducted in

February 2013. Considering political preferences, the group of supporters of the assassination theory was significantly lower, especially among the voters of the Civic Platform and the Democratic Left Alliance. The study conducted in 2015 also confirmed the essential characteristics of people who endorsed the assassination theory. These were people with right-wing views, inhabitants of villages and the smallest towns, citizens with a lower level of education and lower income, and those who more often participated in religious practices (Badora 2015).

FIGURE 2: PARTY PREFERENCES AND DISTRIBUTION OF ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION "DO YOU BELIEVE THAT PRESIDENT LECH KACZYŃSKI MAY HAVE DIED AS A RESULT OF AN ASSASSINATION?"



Source: own elaboration based on CBOS data (Pankowski 2013; Badora 2015).

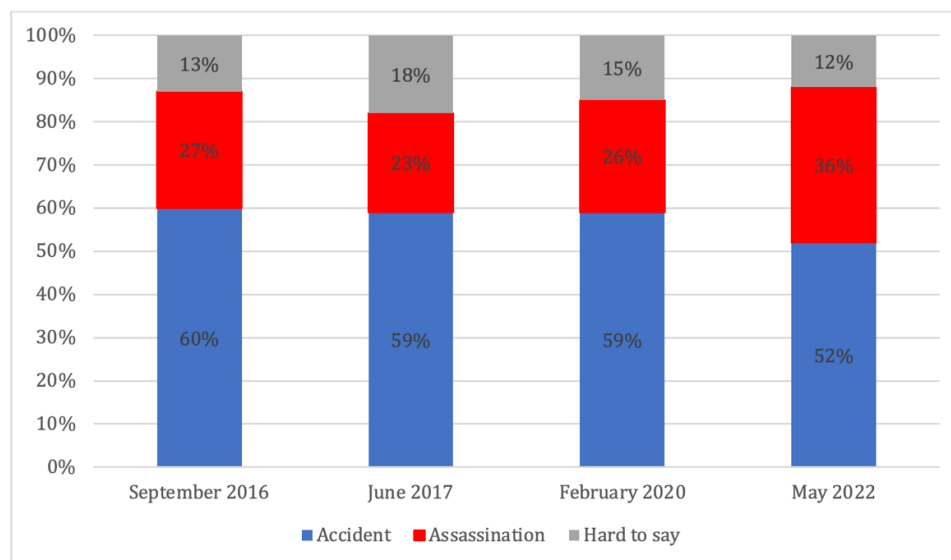
In April 2015, on the fifth anniversary of the disaster, the parliamentary group chaired by Antoni Macierewicz published the report "Who will be responsible for Smoleńsk." Once again, without any convincing proof, they clearly stated that the air disaster was caused by a series of explosions that killed most of the passengers before the plane hit the ground ("Kto Odpowie Za Smoleńsk" 2015). When the Law and Justice party took power after the 2015 parliamentary elections, the assassination theory became a political weapon aimed at the opposition Civic Platform. The essential in this context was Jarosław Kaczyński's speech during the Sejm session, in which he assigned blame for the death of his brother to the opposition. The Law and Justice leader then said, "Don't wipe your treacherous mugs with the name of my late brother. You destroyed him, you murdered him!" (Sokołowski 2017).

As the years passed, the assassination theory became the official narrative of the Law and Justice government. On the 10th anniversary of the disaster, Antoni Macierewicz again called a press conference, during which he presented a report containing theses about three explosions and attributed responsibility for the attack to the Russian authorities. Experts and political commentators savaged the report, pointing out numerous errors that have been repeated for years and correcting the manipulations contained in (Osiecki 2022). However, Macierewicz received strong support from Jarosław Kaczyński. The Law and Justice leader admitted in a public statement that his political camp "has no doubt that it was an assassination" (Główczewski 2022). Additionally, due to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, right-wing media returned to the theory about an alleged thermobaric explosion on board the presidential Tupolev in April 2010

(Wierchołowski 2022). They tried to exploit a common fear of Russia and aversion to the Russian authorities in Polish society (Feliksiak and Roguska 2022) to attribute responsibility for the Smolensk disaster to Putin. In April 2023, 13 years after the disaster, despite the lack of evidence, the Macierewicz Commission decided to take the next step - it filed a notification with the prosecutor's office on the suspicion of committing the crime of assassination of President Lech Kaczyński and the murder of the remaining 95 people traveling in the Tu-154 (Jabłoński and Mikowski 2023).

In recent years, society's attitude towards the assassination theory has also changed. In a study conducted in May 2022, shortly after the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the percentage of Poles endorsing this theory increased by 10 percentage points (from 26 to 36%).

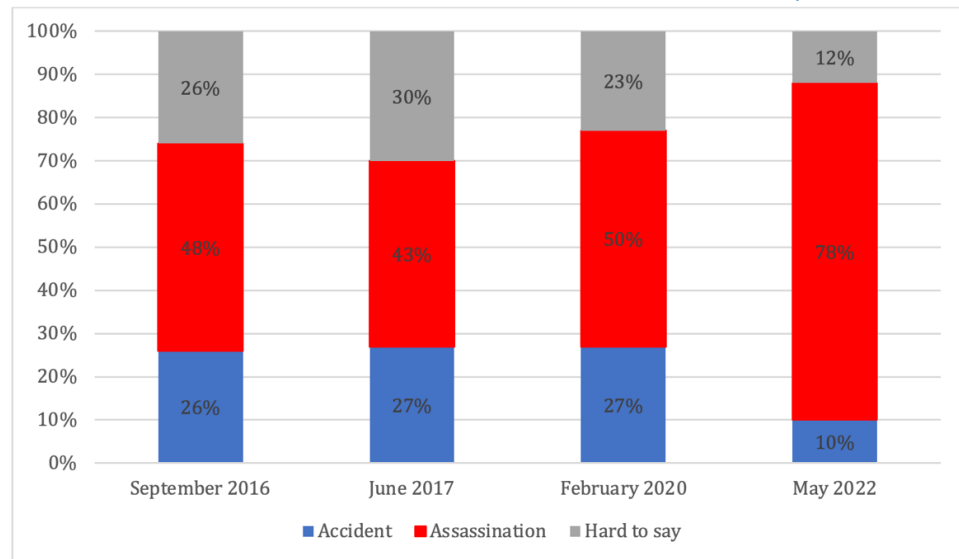
FIGURE 3: DISTRIBUTION OF ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION "IN YOUR OPINION, WAS THE PRESIDENTIAL PLANE CRASH IN SMOLENSK ON APRIL 10, 2010, AN ASSASSINATION OR AN ACCIDENT?"



Source: own elaboration based on Ipsos polls for OKO.press (Pacewicz 2022).

The belief in the Smolensk conspiracy also strengthened among supporters of Law and Justice. After Russia invaded Ukraine, this percentage in the Law and Justice electorate increased from 50% to 78%. Thus, almost four out of five voters for this party believe that the Smolensk air disaster was not an unfortunate accident, but a deliberate action. Additionally, those who believed in the assassination theory were characterized by a high frequency of participation in religious practices and a significantly lower level of education (Pacewicz 2022).

FIGURE 4: DISTRIBUTION OF ANSWERS TO THE QUESTION “IN YOUR OPINION, WAS THE PRESIDENTIAL PLANE CRASH IN SMOLENSK ON APRIL 10, 2010, AN ASSASSINATION OR AN ACCIDENT?” AMONG VOTERS OF THE LAW AND JUSTICE PARTY



Source: own elaboration based on Ipsos polls for OKO.press (Pacewicz 2022).

4 SOCIAL IDENTITY AND ENDORSEMENT OF THE SMOLENSK CONSPIRACY

4.1 Methods

To present the factors influencing belief in the Smolensk conspiracy, we conducted an analysis using data collected by Kofta and Soral (Kofta and Soral 2020a). We identified two main research questions: (1) Do political preferences determine the intensity of belief in the Smolensk assassination theory? (2) What factors have the most significant impact on conspiracy thinking about the Smolensk disaster?

We have also put forward two research hypotheses, which are an extension of the above questions and results from the state of research presented in the article:

H1: Law and Justice voters believe in the assassination theory more often than other parties' electorates.

H2: Factors related to social identity (party identification as well as trust in the Law and Justice government) have the greatest impact on conspiratorial thinking about the Smolensk disaster.

The dependent variable in our analysis was the 1-item Smolensk conspiracy mentality. (“Numerous premises indicate that the President’s airplane crash near Smolensk was a result of assassination”). It measured the intensity of belief in the assassination theory using a 7-point scale (1 – Definitely disagree, 7 – Definitely agree). The independent variables included basic sociodemographic variables, such as gender (male-female), age (measured by years from birth), place of residence (six categories: village, city up to 19,999 inhabitants, city from 20,000 to 49,999 inhabitants, city from 50,000 to 99,999 inhabitants, city from 100,000 to 500,000 inhabitants, city over 500,000 inhabitants), and education (primary, vocational, secondary, higher education).

In addition, the variables potentially affecting belief in the Smolensk conspiracy include the 4-item scale of trust in the Law and Justice government ($\alpha = .95$) developed by Kofta and Soral (Kofta and Soral 2020b). Participants rated their trust using a 7-point scale (1 – Definitely disagree, 7 – Definitely agree). The statements that made up this variable were: (1) Politicians of the current ruling party can be trusted. (2) I believe that politicians of the current ruling party care for the interests of Poles. (3) Actions of the current ruling party bring more good than bad. (4) Without a second thought I would entrust my fate to the current ruling party. Conspiracy mentality was measured with a 5-item Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire ($\alpha = .84$) (Bruder et al. 2013). The level of system justification ($\alpha = .82$) was measured with a 3-item scale (Cichočka et al. 2015). Finally, we included in the analysis a party identification measured on a 3-point scale (1 - non-Law and Justice electorate; 2 - unstable Law and Justice voters; 3 - stable Law and Justice voters).

4.2 Results

We started our empirical analysis by comparing the averages in Smolensk conspiracy mentality among parties' electorates. To check this, we conducted one-way Welch's ANOVA and Games-Howell pairwise comparisons. The analysis revealed significant differences in assassination theory beliefs in the context of political preferences [$F(8,167.456) = 34.494, p < .001$]. Law and Justice electorate ($M = 4.80, SD = 1.73$) believed in the Smolensk conspiracy significantly more than those voting for Civic Platform ($M = 1.82, SD = 1.29$), Polish Peasants' Party ($M = 1.67, SD = 1.14$), and the Democratic Left Alliance ($M = 1.70, SD = 1.48$). Thus, we confirmed hypothesis H1, stating that Law and Justice voters endorse the assassination theory more often than other parties' electorates.

TABLE 1: FACTORS PREDICTING ENDORSEMENT OF THE SMOLENSK CONSPIRACY (MULTIPLE LINEAR REGRESSION)

	B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	1.759	.582		3.023	.003
Gender	.305	.122	.079	2.508	.012
Age	-.018	.005	-.119	-3.671	<.001
Place of Residence	-.070	.033	-.067	-2.132	.033
Education	-.391	.091	-.140	-4.282	<.001
Conspiracy mentality	.184	.077	.075	2.381	.018
System justification	.134	.090	.066	1.482	.139
Trust in the Law and Justice government	.543	.053	.507	10.325	<.001
Party identification	.328	.106	.113	3.079	.002

Source: own elaboration.

To diagnose the factors affecting belief in the Smolensk conspiracy, we conducted the multiple regression analysis. The overall regression was significant [$R^2_{adj} = .44, F(8, 592) = 58.931, p < .001$]. We found that the significant predictors of belief in the Smolensk conspiracy in our model were gender, age, place of residence, education, conspiracy mentality, and party identification. Consistent with hypothesis H2, factors related to social identity most strongly determined endorsement of the Smolensk conspiracy. The most important factors for predicting belief in assassination theory were trust in the Law and Justice government ($\beta = .507, p < .001$) and party identification ($\beta = .113, p = .002$). This means that those who trusted the Law and Justice government the most and identified with this party strongly endorsed the Smolensk conspiracies. The analysis also confirms that conspiracy mentality ($\beta = .075, p = .018$) and being a

woman ($\beta = .079, p = .012$) increase belief in the assassination theory to some extent. Considering other factors, younger, less educated and inhabitants of smaller towns were more likely to endorse the Smolensk conspiracy.

5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The plane crash near Smolensk on April 10, 2010, in which the President of Poland and other important officials died, was undoubtedly an unprecedented and traumatic event for the entire Polish society. Although, as numerous studies show, societal trauma can bring a lot of good to society, e.g., the desire to help each other, in this case, it leads to deep divisions and intragroup conflict with political origin (Bilewicz et al. 2019).

The Smolensk disaster sparked a political fight, and many conspiracy theories arose around its causes. In this article, we indicate how the belief in the Smolensk conspiracies has changed over the years in Polish society in different groups of the electorate.

Since 2010, belief in conspiracy theories about this event has been the strongest among the Law and Justice voters. From the first years after the Smolensk air disaster until 2015, this party remained in the parliamentary opposition, so its electorate could feel like a marginalized group, which additionally encouraged belief in conspiracy theories. This is in line with the results of other studies, which show that people were more likely to believe in conspiracy theories when their political group was not in power (Imhoff et al. 2022). Interestingly, voters of the Law and Justice have endorsed the Smolensk conspiracy even after their party took power in 2015 and maintained it in 2019. This support results from two factors: the exploit of the Smolensk issue by Jarosław Kaczyński in internal political rivalry and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Conspiracy theories surrounding the Smolensk disaster focused de facto on two culprits - Russia and the government of Donald Tusk. Polish-Russian relations have remained tense for centuries. One of the most inflammatory issues is the unresolved mystery of the genocide of the Polish elite by the NKVD in Katyn during World War II. These and other bloody incidents in relations with Russia have created historical trauma that remains very strong even in generations that do not remember these events.

An additional driving force behind emerging conspiracy theories has become internal political polarization, which is reflected in the intense dispute between the two largest parties – Civic Platform and Law and Justice. The source of the conspiracies about the alleged involvement of Tusk's government in the Smolensk disaster was a double delegation to the celebrations related to the 70th anniversary of the Katyn massacre. In January 2010, the offices of the Prime Minister and the President independently informed the public opinion about the participation of both politicians in the celebrations. According to the arrangements, Prime Minister Donald Tusk was to meet with the then Prime Minister of Russia, Vladimir Putin, and President Lech Kaczyński with President Dmitry Medvedev. On April 7, three days before the air crash of a presidential plane, Prime Minister Donald Tusk went to Russia (Skarżyński 2016). As it turned out, this visit and meeting with Putin were later to fuel conspiracy theories.

Referring to the results presented in this article, as we assumed, party identification is influential in endorsing the Smolensk conspiracies. In Poland, a

relatively young democracy, citizens do not identify with political parties. However, as research shows, the Law and Justice voters are the electorate very strongly identified with their party (Marmola 2020; Cybulska 2016). This identification is additionally combined with religiosity and attachment to tradition (Kotras 2021). Thus, party identification takes on the characteristics of something broader and more stable - social identity. The presented research confirms that social identity (conceptualized as trust in Law and Justice government and party identification) explains the belief in Smolensk conspiracies to a greater extent than conspiracy mentality and sociodemographic factors (age, gender, education, and place of residence). It will be difficult, especially in the current geopolitical situation, to weaken faith in the assassination theory. This belief does not result only from the lack of complete information about what happened in Smolensk, but above all, it is a form of protecting the identity of Law and Justice supporters. Thus, the disaster itself has become a convenient tool in a political struggle that will continue to polarize Polish society.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research was funded by the National Science Center, Poland (grant no. 2020/39/I/HS5/00176).

REFERENCES

- Amiot, E. Catherine and Roxanne M. Aubin. 2013. "Why and How Are You Attached to Your Social Group? Investigating Different Forms of Social Identification." *British Journal of Social Psychology* 52 (3): 563–586.
- Andrade, Gabriel. 2021. "Belief in Conspiracy Theories About Covid-19 Amongst Venezuelan Students: A Pilot Study." *Revista Colombiana de Psicología* 30 (1): 79–88.
- Badora, Barbara. 2015. "Przed piątą rocznicą katastrofy smoleńskiej (Before 5th Anniversary of Smolensk Air Disaster)." 49/2015. Warszawa: CBOS.
- Bar-Tal, Daniel, Lily Chernyak-Hai, Noa Schori and Ayelet Gundar. 2009. "A Sense of Self-Perceived Collective Victimhood in Intractable Conflicts." *International Review of the Red Cross* 91 (874): 229–258.
- Bejma, Agnieszka. 2013. "Od afery Rywina do katastrofy smoleńskiej – nowe (utrwalone) podziały społeczno-polityczne w Polsce." *Studia Politologiczne* 29: 112–132.
- Bilewicz, Michał, Marta Witkowska, Myrto Pantazi, Theofilos Gkinopoulos and Olivier Klein. 2019. "Traumatic Rift: How Conspiracy Beliefs Undermine Cohesion after Societal Trauma?" *Europe's Journal of Psychology* 15 (1): 82–93.
- Bożewicz, Marta. 2020. "10 rocznica katastrofy pod Smoleńskiem (10th Anniversary of Smolensk Air Disaster)." 48/2020. Warszawa: CBOS.
- Brown, Rupert. 2000. "Social Identity Theory: Past Achievements, Current Problems and Future Challenges." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 30 (6): 745–778.
- Bruder, Martin, Peter Haffke, Nick Neave, Nina Nouripanah and Roland Imhoff. 2013. "Measuring Individual Differences in Generic Beliefs in Conspiracy Theories Across Cultures: Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire." *Frontiers in Psychology* 4: 225.
- Cameron, E. James. 2004. "A Three-Factor Model of Social Identity." *Self and Identity* 3 (3): 239–262.
- Carey, John Michael. 2019. "Who Believes in Conspiracy Theories in Venezuela?" *Latin American Research Review* 54 (2): 444–457.
- Chaciński, Bartek. 2010. "Prosimy nie wierzyć." *Polityka*, 18. Available at <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1505366,1,smolenskie-teorie-spiskowe.read>.
- Chayinska, Maria and Anca Minescu. 2018. "'They've Conspired against Us': Understanding the Role of Social Identification and Conspiracy Beliefs in Justification

- of Ingroup Collective Behavior." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 48 (7): 990–998.
- Choi, U. Eunice and Michael A. Hogg. 2020. "Self-Uncertainty and Group Identification: A Meta-Analysis." *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 23 (4): 483–501.
- Cichočka, Aleksandra, Agnieszka Golec De Zavala, Marta Marchlewska, Michał Bilewicz, Manana Jaworska and Mateusz Olechowski. 2018. "Personal Control Decreases Narcissistic but Increases Non-narcissistic In-group Positivity." *Journal of Personality* 86 (3): 465–480.
- Cichočka, Aleksandra, Mikołaj Winiewski, Michał Bilewicz, Marcin Bukowski and John T. Jost. 2015. "Complementary Stereotyping of Ethnic Minorities Predicts System Justification in Poland." *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 18 (6): 788–800.
- Douglas, M. Karen, Joseph E. Uscinski, Robbie M. Sutton, Aleksandra Cichočka, Turkey Nefes, Chee Siang Ang and Farzin Deravi. 2019. "Understanding Conspiracy Theories." *Political Psychology* 40 (S1): 3–35.
- Dudek, Antoni. 2016. *Historia Polityczna Polski 1989-2015*. Kraków: Znak.
- Ellemers, Naomi, Russell Spears and Bertjan Doosje. 2002. "Self and Social Identity." *Annual Review of Psychology* 53 (1): 161–186.
- Enders, M. Adam and Steven M. Smallpage. 2019. "Informational Cues, Partisan-Motivated Reasoning, and the Manipulation of Conspiracy Beliefs." *Political Communication* 36 (1): 83–102.
- Enders, M. Adam and Joseph E. Uscinski. 2021. "Are Misinformation, Antiscientific Claims, and Conspiracy Theories for Political Extremists?" *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 24 (4): 583–605.
- Feliksiak, Michał. 2010. "Opinie o stosunkach polsko-rosyjskich (Opinions about Polish-Russian Relations)." BS/74/2010. Warszawa: CBOS.
- Feliksiak, Michał and Beata Roguska. 2022. "Polacy wobec rosyjskiej inwazji na Ukrainę (Poles on Russian Invasion of Ukraine)." 38/2022. Warszawa: CBOS.
- Frenken, Marius, Michał Bilewicz and Roland Imhoff. 2023. "On the Relation Between Religiosity and the Endorsement of Conspiracy Theories: The Role of Political Orientation." *Political Psychology* 44 (1): 139–156.
- gb. 2014. "Pilotów Tupolewa fałszywie naprowadzano. Są zeznania świadków - Ujawnia prof. Nowaczyk." Available at <https://niezalezna.pl/polska/58647-pilotow-tupolewa-falszywie-naprowadzano-sa-zeznania-swiatek-ujawnia-prof-nowaczyk/58647>.
- Główniczewski, Aleksander. 2022. "Kaczyński: 'Nie mamy żadnej wątpliwości, że w Smoleńsku był zamach.'" Available at <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/kraj/artykuly/8392395,kaczynski-smolensk-zamach.html>.
- Gmyz, Cezary. 2012. "Trotyl na wraku Tupolewa." Available at <https://www.rp.pl/wydarzenia/art5868671-trotyl-na-wraku-tupolewa>.
- Golec de Zavala, Agnieszka. 2011. "Collective Narcissism and Intergroup Hostility: The Dark Side of 'In-Group Love': Collective Narcissism." *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 5 (6): 309–320.
- Golec de Zavala, Agnieszka, Kinga Bierwiazzonek and Paweł Ciesielski. 2022. "An Interpretation of Meta-Analytical Evidence for the Link between Collective Narcissism and Conspiracy Theories." *Current Opinion in Psychology* 47: 101360.
- Golec de Zavala, Agnieszka, Aleksandra Cichočka and Michał Bilewicz. 2013. "The Paradox of In-Group Love: Differentiating Collective Narcissism Advances Understanding of the Relationship Between In-Group and Out-Group Attitudes: The Paradox of In-Group Love." *Journal of Personality* 81 (1): 16–28.
- Golec de Zavala, Agnieszka, Aleksandra Cichočka, Roy Eidelson and Nuwan Jayawickreme. 2009. "Collective Narcissism and Its Social Consequences." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 97 (6): 1074–1096.
- Golec de Zavala, Agnieszka and Dorottya Lantos. 2020. "Collective Narcissism and Its Social Consequences: The Bad and the Ugly." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 29 (3): 273–278.
- Grzesiak-Feldman, Monika. 2016. *Psychologia myślenia spiskowego*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego.
- Hartshorn, Max, Artem Kaznatcheev and Thomas Shultz. 2013. "The Evolutionary Dominance of Ethnocentric Cooperation." *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation* 16 (3): 7.

- Hogg, A. Michael. 2021. "Uncertain Self in a Changing World: A Foundation for Radicalisation, Populism, and Autocratic Leadership." *European Review of Social Psychology* 32 (2): 235–268.
- Hollander, A. Barry. 2018. "Partisanship, Individual Differences, and News Media Exposure as Predictors of Conspiracy Beliefs." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 95 (3): 691–713.
- Imhoff, Roland, Felix Zimmer, Olivier Klein, et al. 2022. "Conspiracy Mentality and Political Orientation across 26 Countries." *Nature Human Behaviour* 6 (3): 392–403.
- Jabłoński, Marcin and Mateusz Mikowski. 2023. "Podkomisja smoleńska zawiadamia prokuraturę ws. zamachu na Prezydenta L. Kaczyńskiego." Available at <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/kraj/artykuly/8700650,podkomisja-smolenska-zawiadamia-prokurature-ws-zamachu-na-prezydenta-l-kaczynskiego.html>.
- Janecki, Stanisław. 2015. "Już miesiąc po katastrofie Tusk wiedział, jak Putin go rozegrał i wykorzystał. I zaczął się bać." Available at <https://wpolityce.pl/smolensk/240651-juz-miesiac-po-katastrofie-tusk-wiedzial-jak-putin-go-rozegral-i-wykorzystal-i-zaczal-sie-bac>.
- Jolley, Daniel, Karen M. Douglas, Marta Marchlewska, Aleksandra Cichocka and Robbie M. Sutton. 2022. "Examining the Links between Conspiracy Beliefs and the EU 'Brexit' Referendum Vote in the UK: Evidence from a Two-wave Survey." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 52 (1): 30–36.
- Jopek, Cyprian. 2016. "Wszystkie teorie Macierewicza. Sześć lat ustaleń komisji." Available at <https://tvn24.pl/polska/wszystkie-teorie-macierewicza-szesc-lat-ustalen-komisji-ra634849>.
- Jurszo, Robert. 2019. "Bomba termobaryczna, puszka i parówka, czyli kosztowne fantazje Marszałka Seniora." Available at <https://oko.press/bomba-termobaryczna-puszka-i-parowka-czyli-kosztowne-fantazje-marszalka-seniora>.
- Kaczmarek, Zbyszek. 2016. "Jarosław Kaczyński: Gdyby nie rozdzielono wizyt, do tragedii w Smoleńsku by nie doszło." Available at <https://niezalezna.pl/polska/78467-jaroslaw-kaczynski-gdyby-nie-rozdzielono-wizyt-do-tragedii-w-smolensku-by-nie-doszlo/78467>.
- Kahan, M. Dan. 2015. "Climate-Science Communication and the *Measurement Problem*." *Political Psychology* 36 (S1): 1–43.
- Kazimierzczuk, Agnieszka. 2011. "MAK ujawnia raport z katastrofy smoleńskiej." Available at <https://www.rp.pl/wydarzenia/art6861431-mak-ujawnia-raport-z-katastrofy-smolenskiej>.
- Kofta, Mirosław and Wiktor Soral. 2020a. *Supplementary Materials to 'Belief in the Round Table Conspiracy and Political Division in Poland.'* Available at <https://doi.org/10.23668/PSYCHARCHIVES.2767>.
- Kofta, Mirosław and Wiktor Soral. 2020b. "Belief in the Round Table Conspiracy and Political Division in Poland." *Social Psychological Bulletin* 14 (4): e2435.
- Kotras, Marcin. 2021. "„Tożsamościowo mocni” i „zakorzeni” – elektorat Prawa i Sprawiedliwości." *Władza Sądzenia* 21: 153–64.
- Koziółek, Karolina. 2015. "Wykład na Politechnice Poznańskiej: Za upadek Tu-154 odpowiedzialna eksplozja." Available at <https://gloswielkopolski.pl/wyklad-na-politechnice-poznanskiej-za-upadek-tu154-odpowiedzialna-eksplozja/ar/9034544>.
- Krouwel, Andre, Yordan Kutiyski, Jan-Willem Van Prooijen, Johan Martinsson and Elias Markstedt. 2017. "Does Extreme Political Ideology Predict Conspiracy Beliefs, Economic Evaluations and Political Trust? Evidence from Sweden." *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 5 (2): 435–462.
- Krzymowski, Michał. 2011. "Hel w Smoleńsku?" Available at <https://www.wprost.pl/tylko-u-nas/241683/hel-w-smolensku.html>.
- Kto Odpowie Za Smoleńsk. 2015. Warszawa: Zespół Parlamentarny ds. Zbadania Przyczyn Katastrofy Tu-154M z dnia 10 kwietnia 2010 r. Available at https://smolenskrash.eu/uploaded/Sledztwo_rzadu_Putina_OK.pdf.
- Kwiatkowski, Bartosz. 2018. "Podejście semiologiczne w badaniach nad zjawiskiem mitu politycznego na przykładzie mitu smoleńskiego." *Świat Idei i Polityki* 17 (1): 192–213.
- Macierewicz, Antoni. 2012. "28 Miesiący Po Smoleńsku." Zespół Parlamentarny ds. Zbadania Przyczyn Katastrofy Tu-154M z dnia 10 kwietnia 2010 r. Available at [https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/ZespolSmolenskMedia.nsf/EventsByLink/MJAI-97K9UE/\\$File/Raport_28_miesiecy_po_Smolensku.pdf](https://orka.sejm.gov.pl/ZespolSmolenskMedia.nsf/EventsByLink/MJAI-97K9UE/$File/Raport_28_miesiecy_po_Smolensku.pdf).

- Marmola, Maciej. 2020. "Poziom reprezentatywności partii politycznych i zapotrzebowanie na nowe ugrupowania w polskim systemie partyjnym." *Wrocławskie Studia Politologiczne* 29: 49–57.
- Matuszewski, Paweł, Michał Rams-Ługowski and Jan Pawłowski. 2024. "From Political Treason to the Metaphysical Struggle Between Good and Evil. Levels of Political Conspiracy Theories and Their Consequences for Diffusion." *Journal of Comparative Politics* 17 (1): 86–104.
- Miller, Jerzy. 2011. "Final Report from the Examination of the Aviation Accident No. 192/2010/11 Involving the Tu-154M Airplane, Tail Number 101, Which Occurred on April 10th, 2010 in the Area of the Smolensk North Airfield." Committee for Investigation of National Aviation Accidents Tu-154M (tail number 101), 10 April 2010.
- Miller, M. Joanne. 2020. "Do COVID-19 Conspiracy Theory Beliefs Form a Monological Belief System?" *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 53 (2): 319–326.
- Min, Seong Jae. 2021. "Who Believes in Conspiracy Theories? Network Diversity, Political Discussion, and Conservative Conspiracy Theories on Social Media." *American Politics Research* 49 (5): 415–427.
- Misiak, Leszek and Grzegorz Wierzchołowski. 2013. "Wstrząsający raport: remont Tu-154 pod dyktando Moskwy." Available at <https://niezalezna.pl/polska/40226-wstrzasajacy-raport-remont-tu-154-pod-dyktando-moskwy/40226>.
- Naszkowska, Krystyna. 2010. "Jarosław Kaczyński o Rosji - wczoraj i dziś." Available at <https://wyborcza.pl/7,76842,7864975,jaroslaw-kaczynski-o-rosji-wczoraj-i-dzis.html>.
- Nera, Kenzo, Pascal Wagner-Egger, Paul Bertin, Karen M. Douglas and Olivier Klein. 2021. "A Power-challenging Theory of Society, or a Conservative Mindset? Upward and Downward Conspiracy Theories as Ideologically Distinct Beliefs." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 51 (4–5): 740–57.
- Onderco, Michal and Florian Stoeckel. 2023. "Conspiratorial Thinking and Foreign Policy Views: Evidence from Central Europe." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 33 (2): 182–196.
- Oren, Neta, Daniel Bar-Tal and Ohad David. 2004. "Conflict, Identity and Ethos: The Israeli-Palestinian Case." In *Psychology of Ethnic and Cultural Conflict*, edited by Lee, Yueh-Ting, Clark McCauley, Fathali Moghaddam and Stephen Worchel, 133–154. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Osiecki, Jan. 2022. "Prezentując raport, Macierewicz nie wspominał o wielu szczegółach. Były dla niego niewygodne." Available at <https://www.newsweek.pl/polska/polityka/katastrofa-smolenska-konferencja-antoniego-macierewicza/sxn7319>.
- Pacewicz, Piotr. 2016. "Katastrofa Smoleńska. 24 Teorie Spiskowe." Available at <https://oko.press/katastrofa-smolenska-24-teorie-spiskowe>.
- Pacewicz, Piotr. 2022. "Już tylko połowa Polaków uważa, że to był wypadek. W zamach smoleński wierzy 78 proc. elektoratu PiS." Available at <https://oko.press/juz-tylko-polowa-polakow-uwaza-ze-to-byl-wypadek-w-zamach-smolenski-wierzy-78-proc-elektoratu-pis>.
- Pankowski, Krzysztof. 2011. "Polacy o raporcie komisji Millera i przyczynach katastrofy prezydenckiego samolotu pod Smoleńskiem (Public Opinion about Miller Commission Report and Causes of Smolensk Air Disaster)." BS/113/2011. Warszawa: CBOS.
- Pankowski, Krzysztof. 2012. "Katastrofa pod Smoleńskiem - Kto wierzy w teorię zamachu (Smolensk Air Disaster - Who Believes in Assassination Theory)." BS/85/2012. Warszawa: CBOS.
- Pankowski, Krzysztof. 2013. "Opinie na temat przyczyn katastrofy pod Smoleńskiem. Czy konferencja naukowa rozstrzygnęłaby wątpliwości? (Opinions about Causes of Smolensk Air Disaster. Would Expert Conference Resolve Doubts?)." BS/150/2013. Warszawa: CBOS.
- Prooijen, van Jan-Willem. 2018. "Populism as Political Mentality Underlying Conspiracy Theories." In *Belief Systems and the Perception of Reality*, eds. Rutjens, T. Bastiaan and Mark J. Brandt, 79–96. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Prooijen, van Jan-Willem. 2022. "Injustice Without Evidence: The Unique Role of Conspiracy Theories in Social Justice Research." *Social Justice Research* 35 (1): 88–106.

- Prooijen, van Jan-Willem and Paul A.M. van Lange. 2014. "The Social Dimension of Belief in Conspiracy Theories." In *Power, Politics, and Paranoia: Why People Are Suspicious of Their Leaders*, eds. Prooijen, van Jan-Willem and Paul A.M. van Lange, 237–252. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Prooijen, van Jan-Willem, Jaap Staman and André P.M. Krouwel. 2018. "Increased Conspiracy Beliefs among Ethnic and Muslim Minorities." *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 32 (5): 661–667.
- Pupiec, Tomasz. 2022. "Wszystkie teorie Macierewicza. Sześć lat ustaleń komisji." Available at <https://tvn24.pl/polska/katastrofa-smolenska-co-o-tragedii-tu-154-mowil-pis-i-prorzadowe-media-6110439>.
- Raab, H. Marius, Stefan A. Ortlieb, Nikolas Auer, Klara Guthmann and Claus-Christian Carbon. 2013. "Thirty Shades of Truth: Conspiracy Theories as Stories of Individuation, Not of Pathological Delusion." *Frontiers in Psychology* 4.
- Radnitz, Scott. 2022. "Dilemmas of Distrust: Conspiracy Beliefs, Elite Rhetoric, and Motivated Reasoning." *Political Research Quarterly* 75 (4): 1143–1157.
- Robertson, E. Claire, Clara Pretus, Steve Rathje, Elizabeth A. Harris and Jay J. van Bavel. 2022. "How Social Identity Shapes Conspiratorial Belief." *Current Opinion in Psychology* 47 (October): 101423.
- Roccas, Sonia, Lilach Sagiv, Shalom Schwartz, Nir Halevy and Roy Eidelson. 2008. "Toward a Unifying Model of Identification with Groups: Integrating Theoretical Perspectives." *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 12 (3): 280–306.
- Sahdra, Baljinder and Michael Ross. 2007. "Group Identification and Historical Memory." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 33 (3): 384–395.
- Siddiqui, Niloufer. 2020. "Who Do You Believe? Political Parties and Conspiracy Theories in Pakistan." *Party Politics* 26 (2): 107–119.
- Siek, Anna. 2013. "Zniszczone puszki, pęknięta parówka dowodami na wybuch Tupolewa. 'Czy Macierewicz naprawdę w to wierzy?'" Available at <https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,114871,14821274,zniszczone-puszki-peknieta-parowka-dowodami-na-wybuch-tupolewa.html>.
- Skarżyńska, Krystyna. 2020. *My: Portret psychologiczno-społeczny Polaków z polityką w tle*. Warszawa: Scholar.
- Skarżyński, Stanisław. 2016. "Dlaczego Tusk i Kaczyński nie polecili razem do Smoleńska." Available at <https://oko.press/dwie-wizyty>.
- Sobieniowski, Jakub. 2013. "II Konferencja Smoleńska. Zgniecione puszki i inne eksperymenty." Available at <https://tvn24.pl/polska/ii-konferencja-smolenska-zgniecione-puszki-i-inne-eksperymenty-ra364902-3448019>.
- Sokołowski, Igor. 2017. "Nie wycierajcie swoich mord zdradzieckich nazwiskiem mojego brata'. Jak doszło do wypowiedzi Kaczyńskiego." Available at <https://tvn24.pl/polska/awantura-w-sejmie-jak-doszlo-do-wypowiedzi-kaczynskiego-o-zdradzieckich-mordach-ra758159-2571601>.
- Soral, Wiktor and Monika Grzesiak-Feldman. 2015. "Socjopsychologiczne wyznaczniki wiary w spisek smoleński." In *Uprzedzenia w Polsce*, eds. Stefaniak, Anna, Michał Bilewicz and Mikołaj Winiewski, 285–304. Warszawa: Liberi Libri.
- Stecula, A. Dominik and Mark Pickup. 2021. "How Populism and Conservative Media Fuel Conspiracy Beliefs about COVID-19 and What It Means for COVID-19 Behaviors." *Research & Politics* 8 (1).
- Šteger, Tine. 2024. "The Analysis of Prevailing Conspiracy Theories in Central and Eastern Europe." *Journal of Comparative Politics* 17 (1): 69–85.
- Swami, Viren, David Barron, Laura Weis and Adrian Furnham. 2018. "To Brexit or Not to Brexit: The Roles of Islamophobia, Conspiracist Beliefs, and Integrated Threat in Voting Intentions for the United Kingdom European Union Membership Referendum." *British Journal of Psychology* 109 (1): 156–179.
- Tajfel, Henri and John C. Turner. 1986. "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior." In *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, eds. Austin, G. William and Steven Worchel, 7–24. Boston: Nelson-Hall Publishers.
- Turner, John C., Michael A. Hogg, Penelope J. Oakes, Stephen D. Reicher and Margaret S. Wetherell. 1987. *Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Umańska, Edyta. 2023. "Kobiety i polityka." 123/2023. Warszawa: CBOS.

- Uscinski, Joseph E., Casey Klofstad and Matthew D. Atkinson. 2016. "What Drives Conspiratorial Beliefs? The Role of Informational Cues and Predispositions." *Political Research Quarterly* 69 (1): 57–71.
- Uscinski, E. Joseph and Joseph M. Parent. 2014. *American Conspiracy Theories*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wang, Xue, Shi-Jiang Zuo, Hoi-Wing Chan, Connie Pui-Yee Chiu and Ying-yi Hong. 2021. "COVID-19-Related Conspiracy Theories in China: The Role of Secure versus Defensive in-Group Positivity and Responsibility Attributions." *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology* 15 (January).
- Wardawy-Dudziak, Paulina. 2024. "The Political Potential of Conspiracy Theories: The Role of Psychological and Situational Factors." *Journal of Comparative Politics* 17 (1): 51–68.
- Wierzchołowski, Grzegorz. 2022. "To był wybuch termobaryczny. Rosyjska zbrodnia w Smoleńsku: motyw, sprawcy, dowody." Available at <https://www.gazetapolska.pl/27480-to-był-wybuch-termobaryczny-rosyjska-zbrodnia-w-smolensku-motyw-sprawcy-dowody>.
- Wierzchołowski, Grzegorz and Leszek Misiak. 2012. "Eksplzja nastąpiła wewnątrz Tu-154." Available at <https://niezalezna.pl/polska/28194-eksplozja-nastapila-wewnatrz-tu-154/28194>.
- Wood, J. Michael and Debra Gray. 2019. "Right-Wing Authoritarianism as a Predictor of pro-Establishment versus Anti-Establishment Conspiracy Theories." *Personality and Individual Differences* 138 (February): 163–166.
- Zychowicz, Piotr. 2010. "Smoleńsk: wersje alternatywne i teorie spiskowe." Available at <https://www.rp.pl/wydarzenia/art16607131-smolensk-wersje-alternatywne-i-teorie-spiskowe>.



STRANKARSKA PRIPADNOST IN PREPRIČANOST V TEORIJE ZAROT: ŠTUDIJA PRIMERA LETALSKE NESREČE V SMOLENSKU

10. aprila 2010 je v letalski nesreči pri Smolensku umrlo šestindevetdeset ljudi, med njimi tudi predsednik Republike Poljske Lech Kaczyński. Do danes so se okoli tega dogodka spletle številne zarote glede domnevnega atentata, v katerega naj bi bile vpletene ruske tajne službe. Namen članka je analizirati, kako družbena identiteta, ustvarjena na podlagi strankarske identifikacije, vpliva na razmišljanje o zaroti, povezano s strmoglavljenjem predsedniškega letala Tu-154. Analiziramo raziskave o prepričanjih v teorije o napadu na letalo, ki so jih izvedli poljski centri za merjenje javnega mnenja v letih 2010–2022. Rezultati kažejo, da volivci stranke Zakon in pravičnost v veliko večji meri verjamejo, da je katastrofa v Smolensku pravzaprav atentat na predsednika Lecha Kaczyńskiego, ki ga je naročil Vladimir Putin. Izvedena analiza potrjuje, da politična razsežnost družbene identitete (konceptualizirana v študiji kot zaupanje v vlado Zakona in pravičnosti in strankarska identifikacija) bistveno vpliva na podporo zaroti atentata. Ta dejavnik je za prepričanje v teorijo atentata pomembnejši od dejavnikov, kot so mentaliteta zarote, spol, starost, kraj bivanja in izobrazba.

Ključne besede: teorije zarot; mentaliteta zarot; družbena identiteta; strankarska pripadnost; letalska nesreča; Smolensk.