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<p align="center">**10. Religion and the Ideology of Populism**
Timothy Peace</p>

Introduction

On 24th February 2018, Matteo Salvini, the leader of Italy's populist right-wing party Lega (formerly *Lega Nord*, LN), addressed a large crowd in Milan's Piazza del Duomo. Flanked by the imposing presence of the city's immense Cathedral, he was taking part in a campaign rally for supporters ahead of the national election the following month.[1] During his speech, he suddenly brandished some rosary beads and told his adoring supporters how this memento had been gifted to him by a downtrodden woman. Citing the bible, he claimed that 'the last will be first' and then proceeded to swear on copies of both the Italian constitution and the gospels that, if elected to government, he would be 'faithful to his people'. Even in a country like Italy, where religion and politics often combine, this blatant use of Christian symbols and discourse to win an election shocked many observers. Since this moment, Salvini, one of the most prominent populist leaders in Europe, has not ceased to use Christian symbols such as the crucifix to send rather unsubtle messages to his supporters during his subsequent time both in and out of the Italian government, often provoking the ire of senior Catholic figures (Giuffrida 2018). His use of religious imagery and references to garner popular and electoral support has come to symbolise a trend among populist leaders worldwide to demonstrate that they are united with 'the people'. Indeed, the use of religion by populists is, of course, not limited to the Christian faith. It also finds very clear expression in the Hindu nationalism of the BJP in India which also deploys religious belonging to define, promote or exclude people. We can also find leaders in the Muslim world promoting an 'Islamic populism' (Hadiz 2016) such as the AKP in Turkey and the term 'Jewish populism' (Flic 2010) has equally been applied to parties in Israel including the Likud. Indeed, the leaders of India, Turkey and Israel have been characterised as using 'a common populist playbook of neoliberal economic policies, the leveraging of ethnoreligious tensions as well as attempts to denigrate independent news media, by portraying it as the "enemy of the people" (Rogenhofer and Panievsky 2020: 1394). These prominent examples of religion and populism are from societies where it is expected, rightly or wrongly, that religion forms a dominant role in social and political life. In largely secular Europe, where religion's influence has been on the wane for such a long time, the use (and abuse) of the sacred by populists is more curious and deserves closer inspection. To that end, this chapter will largely concentrate on the phenomenon of right-wing populism as it relates to Christianity in Europe, in particular its main Catholic and Protestant denominations in both Western and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).[2]

Populism and its relation to religion

In line with the growing success of populist parties and leaders around the world, populism has now become one of the most studied political phenomena. Yet, achieving consensus on what *actually* constitutes populism has been somewhat elusive as different scholars, across varied academic disciplines, have used the term in different ways according to competing definitions (or sometimes without any definition whatsoever). Gidron and Bonikowski (2013) identified three key conceptual approaches in the political science and sociology literature on the topic (1) populism as political ideology; (2) populism as political style; and (3) populism as political strategy. At the heart of many conceptual debates is the question of whether

populism does indeed constitute an ideology. Those who adhere to the 'ideational approach', which is closely associated with the preeminent scholar of populism Cas Mudde, would argue that it should be treated as a 'thin centred ideology'. Others stress that it should be viewed as a discourse or communication style that can be adopted by a range of political actors irrespective of positioning on an ideological spectrum (Moffitt and Tormey 2014). Some argue even more forcefully and consider that 'the misclassification of populism as ideology raises significant problems for the proper analysis of populist phenomena, due to the normative elements that essentialist accounts force on their study' (Aslanidis 2016: 94). While acknowledging the critiques of 'populism as ideology', Cas Mudde has defended his approach for its distinguishability, categorizability, travelability and versatility and argued that 'whether or not populism is defined as a full ideology rather than a looser set of ideas, centred around the fundamental opposition between "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite," is in most cases of secondary importance to the research question and often impossible to determine empirically. In essence, the various definitions within the ideational approach share a clear core, which both holds them together and sets them apart from other approaches to populism' (Mudde 2017: 31). This chapter will consider populism as an ideology in line with the dominant trend in the comparative politics literature and adopts the most broadly used definition as 'an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people' (Mudde 2004: 543).

Using the ideational approach allows for comparisons of different forms of populism that can be a feature of various party families, in different regional settings, and that may be found on both the left and right. A useful distinction is over whether populists can be described as either inclusionary or exclusionary depending on how they define the people, with the former often associated with Latin-American left-wing populists and the latter characterised by the European populist radical right (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013).[3] The relevance of inclusion and exclusion is particularly salient when discussing the relationship between religion and populism. Religion and the idea of the sacred naturally lends itself to be exploited by populists and in many populist movements there is 'a strong overlap between religious imagery and moral fundamentalism' (Taggart 2002: 78). Religious faith can be utilised both positively, signalling belonging to a national culture or as a moral compass for political action, and negatively, using either the religion of the 'other' or irreligious elites to denote a threat to the body politic. Populism can be conceived as a disguised political theology that elevates 'the people' to the role of a transcendent God. The language of this political theology has its roots in some versions of Marxism and is capable of mobilizing strong religious-type sentiments (Arato 2015). For Bergem and Bergem (2019), populism as a reconstructed ideal of the political represents the natural limit point of political theology in the tradition of Carl Schmitt. They find that the Schmittian theologico-political structure is explicitly avowed in the discourse of the populist *Front National* (FN, but now *Rassemblement National*) party in France. Yet one could equally argue that populism is in tension with many monotheistic and salvation-seeking religions because they 'refer to very different and incompatible sovereigns: the sovereign people and their very worldly authority in the case of populism, vs. a transcendent sovereign deity, an otherworldly lawgiver whose earthly high priests are religious figures, not politicians...from the perspective of the religious, and of churches, the near deification of the sovereign people and of their leader as the quasi-sanctified vessel and instrument (prophet), of their message (good news), is tantamount to idolatry' (Arato and Cohen 2019: 107).

However, neither sacred texts nor deities need to be invoked for populists to imbue either certain political ideals, 'the people' or even themselves with hallowed characteristics.

Populist leaders often seek to portray themselves as almost divine saviours of the people without any direct reference to established forms of religion. Following Zúquete (2017), we can divide 'religious populism' into two dimensions. The first is *overtly* religious and is shaped by a particular faith tradition as it is often tied in with traditional organized religions. This is characterised by politicians, or their supporters, claiming they are doing 'God's work' and constitutes a politicization of religion. This may or may not involve the backing of religious authorities and organisations. This politicization of religion is clearly evident in the way many US politicians, both Republican and Democrat, explicitly claim they are pursuing an agenda that glorifies their maker. The second dimension of religious populism is *covertly* religious and relates to the experience of the sacred rather than a specific spiritual tradition. This constitutes a sacralization of politics which in earlier work Zúquete (2008: 92) defined as 'missionary politics' which is a 'characteristic form of political religion that has at its centre a charismatic leader who leads a chosen people gathered into a moral community struggling against all-powerful and conspiratorial enemies, and engaged in a mission toward redemption and salvation'. This may be particularly relevant for left-wing populists and is exemplified by a leader such as former Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez who portrayed himself as a messianic figure who could save the nation with frequent references to a chosen people, a moral community as well as the steady use of myths, rituals, and symbols (Zúquete 2008). To this we might also add the celebration of historical figures by populist parties, such as the sacralization of the figure of Joan of Arc by the FN in France, celebrated more for her nationalism than her religious commitment. Indeed, this element is often secondary for populists whose use of religion is more about 'belonging' than 'belief' and revolves around the notions of restoring a native religious identity and battling both the elites and foreign 'others'. We shall now explore both dimensions of religious populism through the example of the populist radical right (PRR) in Europe.

The 'conversion' of the populist radical right in Europe

The party family that is today commonly referred to as the 'populist radical right' shares a core ideology that combines nativism, authoritarianism, and populism (Mudde 2007). Despite these similarities, the parties have diverse origins and can trace their lineage to various political currents in Europe including neo-fascism, regional secessionism, anti-tax campaigns and Euroscepticism. If we consider the PRR as it emerged in post-war Western Europe, the religious component was certainly marginal, although not completely absent. Each national context, and the form of party competition that developed from 1945 onwards, largely dictated the extent to which religion, and in particular Catholicism, became entwined with far-right ideology. Some PRR parties have strong anti-clerical roots such as the Austrian Freedom Party (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, FPÖ) which developed out of the German nationalist movement and in opposition to both Catholic Conservatism and Social Democracy. Yet most appeared largely indifferent to religion and it is important to remember that across Western Europe at this time, the defence of a Christian identity was, of course, the preserve of the mainstream Christian Democrats. Indeed, parties of the radical right only ever attracted the support of so-called 'traditionalist' or 'fundamentalist' Catholics that raged against the modernisation process of the Church instituted by the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. This turning point led to a strong reaction from illiberal Catholic forces that later 'split from the church and formed their own, politically right-wing organizations that claimed to preserve the "true teachings" of the church' (Minkenberg 2018). These fringe ultra-Catholic groups were able to find a home in various radical right milieu and constituted a sort of sub-culture within many radical right parties. They represented minor currents within both

the Italian Social Movement (*Movimento Sociale Italiano*, MSI) in Italy and the FN in France although both parties largely avoided making public references to religion. In the latter case, fundamentalist Catholics co-habited uneasily alongside neo-pagan elements that condemned Christianity for its promotion of equality and the 'cult of humility' (Shields 2007: 149). Interestingly, it was always the neo-pagan element that dominated the FN which was unable to penetrate the mainstream conservative Catholics circles in France and thus never aligned itself with the religious right (Roy 2016). The only real points of convergence were on 'moral' political issues such as opposition to abortion which never became central to the platform of PRR parties which were increasingly focused on opposing immigration. There were few incentives for religious leaders to join forces with such parties given their reputation for racism and antisemitism. The PRR parties that developed in the 1970s and 1980s were either indifferent to religion, such as the Scandinavian Progress parties, or openly critical of the established churches. Ethno-regionalist parties such as the Flemish Bloc (*Vlaams Blok* but now *Vlaams Belang*, VB) in Belgium and the emerging Leagues in Northern Italy, that would federate as the *Lega Nord* (LN) in the early 1990s, were often disparaging about the Church hierarchy. The founder and leader of LN, Umberto Bossi, famously even dabbled in pseudo-pagan rituals such as collecting water from the source of the Po river and symbolically pouring it into the sea in Venice (McDonnell 2016).

The 1990s were an important decade which saw the creation of new populist parties on the Western European right. Some were the result of schisms in existing parties such as the Danish People's Party (DF) which broke away from the Danish Progress Party (Rydgren 2004). Others were the result of mergers, such as the LN, or even rebirth such as the 'post-Fascist' *Allianza Nazionale* (AN) which replaced the MSI in 1995. These developments coincided with the decline of Christian Democratic parties in countries such as the Netherlands and, most spectacularly, in Italy. Both the LN and AN attempted to attract right-leaning Catholic voters, respectively in the north and south of the country. Religion had not yet become a rallying call, but all these parties were united in their opposition to immigration and multiculturalism which they saw as a threat to the very existence of their own (latent) Christian culture. Towards the end of the decade it became increasingly common for such parties to view Christianity as part of a wider European heritage and identity that needed to be promoted and protected against the threat of foreign invasion. The FPÖ in Austria distanced itself from anticlericalism and began to include a commitment to Christianity in its manifesto from 1997 onwards. 'This endorsement of Christianity was not meant to convey an ideological congruence with Church dogmas. Instead, the significance of Christianity in the party manifesto was confined to an understanding of religion as culture, an idea which in turn aimed at mobilising demands based on identity' (Hadj-Abdou 2016: 34). This would presage a move made by most PRR parties just a few years later.

Such a conversion to religion was not necessary for PRR parties in Central and Eastern Europe as they developed in the 1990s. Religiosity was associated with anti-communism which gave both religious actors and ideas a certain amount of political capital after the democratic transition. Religion became associated with values such as conservatism, nationalism, a Western orientation and solidarity with the lower classes (Enyedi 2000). It thus became a key value of the right-wing party family, including the populist radical right. As Minkenberg (2017) has remarked, the difference between these PRR parties in the East and West is that the East European parties addressed religion as a core element of their programme from their inception. He also observes that they are more extreme, more inherently religious and more anti-democratic than their Western counterparts. Although countries like the Czech Republic have remained resolutely secular with little scope for religious mobilisation, populist parties have been able to successfully exploit religion in countries such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. Many of these parties were

primarily proponents of ethnic nationalism that exploited religious sentiments. In Hungary, this even extended to governing parties as the first ruling coalition of the post-communist period included the Christian Democratic People's Party (*Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt*, KDNP), the Hungarian Democratic Forum (*Magyar Demokrata Fórum*, MDF) and the Independent Smallholders' Party (*Független Kisgazdapárt*, FKgP). The very rationale for this coalition was the contention that they formed a Christian-National camp with the government publicly supported by the Catholic and (to a lesser extent) the Protestant churches (Enyedi 2000). The more extreme Hungarian Justice and Life Party (*Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja*, MIÉP) also attempted to siphon off voters from the KDNP by defining itself as a Christian party. In Poland, the relationship between religion and nationalism was also a feature of party politics, in no small part due to the important role played by the Catholic Church which became a major political figure and managed to achieve a variety of policy goals (Grzymała-Busse 2015). The development of an explicit brand of religious nationalism was pioneered by the Christian National Union (*Zjednoczenie Chrześcijańsko-Narodowe*, ZChN) in the 1990s. The internal diversity and different currents in Polish Catholicism also helped to politicise the use of religion by populists. The development of a split between an 'open' and more liberal strand with a 'closed' nationalist and conservative faction of Catholicism became politically salient. The populist political parties of the 1990s clearly aligned themselves with the precepts of closed Catholicism although 'its most influential exposition emerged from a source outside party politics: the Catholic-nationalist media empire centred around Radio Maryja' (Stanley 2016: 113). In the early 2000s the marriage of religion and populism would be pushed to new heights in Poland with the formation of the conservative Law and Justice party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, PiS) and the League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin*, LPR), which espoused clerical nationalism and an even more extreme agenda.

Scapegoating the ethnic and religious 'other'

At the start of the millennium, most Western PRR parties were still largely secular in outlook while there was a clearer focus on religious themes in the post-communist East. Where both overlapped was the mutual suspicion and sometimes outright hostility to religious minorities, especially Jews and Muslims. Antisemitism was the hallmark of the most extreme parties in the West. If the heart of the populist worldview was the denunciation of the corrupt elites, the figure of the Jew was never far away. Long-time leader of the FN Jean-Marie Le Pen regularly warned 'against the "Jewish international" as a source of "anti-national sentiment" and denounced the "hidden forces and vested interests" conspiring against France' (Shields 2007: 222). Over time, these parties toned down explicit antisemitic references as part of a mainstreaming strategy, even if their members still harboured such views. This contrasts with most PRR parties in CEE which 'with the exception of those in the Czech Republic or Slovenia, espouse explicit anti-Semitism, often in terms of anti-Zionist and pan-Slavic versions' (Minkenberg 2017: 85). The LPR in Poland was notorious for its antisemitism in the early years after its foundation in 2001 and this was sometimes even expressed in theological terms. More recently, the torch of unambiguous antisemitism has been passed to the Jobbik party in Hungary which is also fiercely anti-Roma but yet professes to be 'Christian'. Jobbik politicians have 'consistently taken a pro-Arab stance against the Jews and the state of Israel, underlining the alleged similarities between the situation of the Palestinian people in Israel and of Hungarians in Europe. Antisemitism thus overrides Islamophobia within the party' (Ádám and Bozóki 2016). The opposite stance can now be found among most populist radical right parties. Antisemitism has been jettisoned in favour of apparently pro-Jewish and even pro-Israeli stances. Most notably in the Netherlands, the

Party for Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, PVV) has cultivated relations with Jewish organisations. Its leader Geert Wilders has stated that he feels an affinity with Judaism and the State of Israel and pro-Israeli sentiments can be found in their electoral manifestos (van Kessel 2016). Support for a 'Judeo-Christian' civilisation/culture juxtaposed against an Islamic threat had been pioneered in the Netherlands by Pim Fortuyn and now many populist radical right parties espouse support for such a concept. For these parties "the nation" is being re-characterized in civilizational terms and 'when religious differences are highlighted, it is not the intra-Christian confessional differences that have historically been closely aligned with national identities in Europe; it is the supra-confessional civilizational divide between (Judeo-) Christianity and Islam' (Brubaker 2017: 1211).

Hostility to Islam and Muslims has become the glue that unites the populist radical right across Europe, even if this is a newer phenomenon in the East. In the West, the tradition of PRR parties stressing negative attitudes to Islam as a dangerous religion can be found in those countries that received a significant number of migrants from Muslim majority countries in the post-war period. In the case of France, this was also tied up with the painful memory of decolonisation and the failed fight for 'French Algeria'. In the 1980s, a national debate emerged about the problems of immigration and the danger of a cultural threat posed by Islam which Jean-Marie Le Pen was adept in exploiting (Peace 2015). In a book written in 1985 he claimed that Islam 'resists assimilation and threatens our Western and Christian civilisation' and later declared in 1988 that 'France will never be an Islamic Republic' (Stora 1997: 14). This discourse accelerated in the 1990s and spread to similar populist parties in other European countries, perhaps unsurprisingly given that the FN was seen as a model to follow. Islam became a key concern for the FPÖ in Austria where Turkish migrants began to be seen as the 'Muslim other' with then leader Jörg Haider claiming in a 1995 book that 'the social order of Islam is diametrically opposed to our Christian values' (Hadj-Abdou 2016: 36). The anti-Muslim posture of the PRR was the principle reason for the turn towards the Christian religion amongst these previously secular parties. The new populist parties that emerged in this decade enthusiastically embraced this anti-Muslim discourse, none more so than the Danish People's Party (*Dansk Folkeparti*, DF). In 1998 it opposed the construction of a mosque in Aarhus by arguing that Denmark was a Christian country and its leader Pia Kjærsgaard, later claimed that immigrants with a Muslim background had 'no wish to be part of Danish society' and had the 'deepest disrespect for all that is western, Danish, Christian' (Betz and Meret 2009: 318). By the end of the decade these ideas had become mainstream in radical right-wing populist circles but had not yet became central in their discourse. This all changed after the 11th September 2001.

The events of 9/11 are crucial to understanding the pivot of European populist parties to an overtly Islamophobic discourse at the heart of their electoral appeals. Interest in but also fear of Islam and Muslims rocketed in the wake of the terrorist attacks and PRR parties found the perfect justification for their assertion that there was no difference between Islam and radical 'Islamism' (Betz and Meret 2009). Aided by various conspiracy theories, as well as the work of certain scholars such as Samuel Huntingdon and his 'clash of civilisations' thesis, the idea was propagated that there was a planned 'invasion' of Europe and that Muslims wanted to 'islamise' the continent:

> For contemporary right-wing populists in Western democracies, the main 'others' are almost always immigrants and, in particular since 9/11, Muslims. Muslims allegedly want to impose their religious values and traditions on the people as part of a surreptitious 'Islamisation' plan. Moreover, they are said to receive the support of liberal elites (who are accused of always favouring minority rights over those of 'the people'). Ideas of invasion, infiltration, contagion, conspiracy, replacement and

impending irreversible crisis represent key components of the populist imaginary, and all of these are present in the notion that a deliberate process of Islamisation is occurring under our noses in many Western democracies (Marzouki and McDonnell 2016: 5)

In the wake of 9/11, populist parties and leaders focused their efforts on restricting immigration, particularly from Muslim majority countries, and also insisting on the assimilation of existing Muslim communities to 'our values and way of life'. Although this discourse could be expected from the leaders of parties that were part of the radical right tradition, it also infused those with more liberal roots. The Dutch populist Pim Fortuyn, who back in 1997 had published a book entitled *Against The Islamisation Of Our Culture*, was emblematic of this approach which sought to juxtapose liberal European values against a 'backwards' and 'regressive' Islamic culture. In the first decade of the 21st century, populist parties appeared to try and outdo each other with increasingly more outrageous actions designed to symbolise their opposition to Islam, most commonly through opposition to the building of mosques. In Italy, the LN regularly participated in anti-Mosque campaigns and organised marches involving the desecration of land using pigs.[4] Where it held local power, it would often refuse permission for Muslims to open spaces for prayer, thus demonstrating that its populist opposition to Islam was more than just symbolic. In Austria, the FPÖ and splinter party BZÖ both made opposing mosques a key strategy of their election campaigns, trying to effectively outdo each other on this issue. BZÖ leader Jörg Haider even called for the Austrian Constitution to be amended to prohibit the construction of minarets. This prefigured the decision in Switzerland to hold a national referendum in 2009 which led to a ban on the construction of minarets. The populist Swiss People's Party (SVP) had been at the heart of this campaign from the launch of the popular initiative to extensively canvassing for a 'yes' vote in the referendum.

The Islamophobia promoted by populist leaders and their parties was increasingly being couched in terms of the need to defend Western/Christian civilisation encapsulated in the FPÖ campaign slogan from 2009 'The West in Christian hands'. In this same period, such a commitment was explicitly recorded in their party manifestos. The SVP claimed that it was 'committed to upholding Switzerland's Western Christian culture' (Mazzoleni 2016: 50), the British National Party (BNP) stressed its 'commitment to the values of traditional Western Christianity, as a benchmark for a decent and civilised society' (Peace 2016: 104) and the PVV stated that Jewish-Christian and humanist values were fundamental to the Netherlands' success (van Kessel 2016).[5] Geert Wilders became the face of this approach, travelling around Europe to show his controversial film *Fitna* and improving links with like-minded parties and their leaders. However, concerning the role of religion in his discourse, 'negative references to Islam were clearly more dominant than positive references to traditional Christian norms and values' (van Kessel 2016: 67). The same could be applied to other PRR parties whose use of Christianity remained superficial and as a simple identity marker. The FN had occasionally referred to the 'Christian roots' of France and Europe but after Marine Le Pen gained leadership of the party in 2011, the party actually began to make more references to secularism (*laïcité*) held up as a symbol of national identity. Here again, the importance of this shift was to signal opposition to Muslims and Islam and 'ownership' of issues relating to migration and integration. Thus paradoxically 'both *laïcité* and Christianity are presented as non-negotiable parts of the French identity' (Roy 2016: 91).

The critical stance of Western European PRR parties on Muslims and Islam remained throughout the second decade of the 21st century, peaking during certain critical junctures such as the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks in France. New populist parties also emerged which rode the wave of anti-Muslim feeling such as the Alternative for Germany (*Alternative*

für Deutschland, AfD) and Vox in Spain. East European populist parties also followed this path by adding Islamophobia to their religious agenda even if the actual presence of Muslims in the region is miniscule (Minkenberg 2017). Anti-Muslim discourse and narratives were able to travel easily from Western to Eastern European populists. This is again framed as a civilisational clash between the Christian Occident and Muslim Orient, but also between a culturally authentic Central and Eastern Europe which defends its heritage and a decadent and liberal Western Europe, symbolised by the EU and its supposedly pro-migrant elites. A common theme among Eastern European populists is that they must avoid the 'problems' that Western European nations have faced as a result of admitting too many Muslim migrants. In the narrative of the Eastern European populist right, they are 'waging a two-front war: they defend Christian values by fighting against the "Islamization" of Europe, and they protect the traditional values against the liberal, "post-1968" ideologies such as multiculturalism and gender equality, which currently rule the West but at same time undermine its strength and immune system' (Krekó, Hunyadi and Szicherle 2019). According to Kalmar (2018), the so-called migration or refugee 'crisis' of 2015-16 was the decisive moment in the story of the political exploitation of Islamophobia in the East of the EU when the Visegrád Four countries (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) united against an EU directive asking Member States to accept a limited number of refugees).[6] The presence of populist parties at the heart of these governments means that Islamophobic discourse cannot be dismissed as a phenomenon confined to the political fringes. The Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán, claimed in September 2015 that the EU was is in the grip of madness over immigration and refugees and argued that he was defending European Christianity against a Muslim influx (Traynor 2015). He has since repeatedly made incendiary statements characterising refugees as Muslim invaders or terrorists who want to take over the country and that Hungary represents the last bastion in the fight against the "Islamisation" of Europe. Orbán has become the figurehead of anti-Muslim populism in the region and is lauded by fellow right-wing populists across Europe for this hard-line stance. In Poland, attitudes to Muslims have also hardened in the wake of the refugee crisis, an event that contributed indirectly to the election of the right-wing populist Law and Justice (PiS) party which strongly opposed the EU migrant relocation scheme by arguing that Muslim refugees would not integrate and potentially threaten Poland's national security. Since its election to power in October 2015, the PiS government has refrained from the kind of crude Islamophobia espoused by Orbán but has resolutely refused to accept Muslim refugees from other EU countries. This policy 'corresponds with voter attitudes (while also influencing those very attitudes). The government is unlikely to moderate its position, because of the competition from the more radical right. PiS is afraid that other right-wing parties will capture those voters who are against accepting refugees in Poland' (Dudzińska and Kotnarowski 2019).

Do religious citizens vote for populists?

While it is clear that populists have resorted to religious appeals to attract voters, evidence of the efficacy of this strategy among religious voters is still lacking. The literature on religion and party choice in Europe has demonstrated that, although confessional voting has experienced a significant decline, religion still matters when voting for Christian Democratic and Conservative parties and the relationship between religiosity and voting behaviour is strongest in countries where Christian Democratic parties have been established (van der Brug, Hobolt & de Vreese 2009, Minkenberg 2010). There does not appear to be a strong correlation between identifying as religious or 'practising' and voting for the PRR, although the various studies operationalise religiosity in slightly different ways. Arzheimer and Carter

(2009), whose data come from 2002, found no overall link between religiosity and anti-immigrant attitudes although in France and Switzerland the religious were slightly more likely to vote for the radical right. Immerzeel, Jaspers and Lubbers (2013) followed this up with data from 2008 by examining both the practice and belief dimensions of religion. They show that religious involvement in general leads to lower levels of support for the PRR but what they describe as 'orthodox believers' in some countries are more likely than 'mainstream believers' to vote for these parties. Both these studies relied on data for voting in Western European countries, but more recent scholarship has tried to incorporate the East-West comparison. Montgomery and Winter (2015) expanded on Arzheimer and Carter's findings to include cases from post-communist Eastern Europe using data from 2010. They found that higher levels of Christian religiosity are weakly or negatively associated with voting for the PRR and holding populist attitudes associated with PRR party support. Interestingly though, they found significant positive correlations between Christian religiosity and nativism in Western Europe but did not find a strong relationship between religiosity and nativism in Eastern Europe. The exception to their findings was Poland where Christian religiosity was consistent with populist attitudes and church-attending Catholics share a national-conservative-authoritarian worldview and vote for PRR parties such as the PiS. These differences between East and West are also confirmed by Allen (2017) who shows that PRR voters in Western Europe are less religious than their post-communist counterparts and that mobilizing on religious ties is a more profitable strategy in the East.

The Polish case is certainly intriguing but also difficult to interpret in a country where the vast majority of citizens still declare themselves as Catholic. The situation is further complicated by the way surveys are designed as they rarely ask respondents to declare the extent to which their political choices are motivated by religious 'belonging' and 'believing' but also rarely ask questions directly intended to measure populist attitudes (Stanley 2016). Most studies consider the populist electorate, and support for parties like LPF and PiS, to be tied to the 'closed' Catholicism type although this too can mask other sociological divides. For instance, it is common to refer to 'Poland A' associated with the more prosperous west of the country and the major cities and 'Poland B' in the East and rural areas where support for PiS dominates. In her analysis of religiosity and voting behaviour in Poland since 1989, Grabowska (2017) finds that church attendance has certainly influenced electoral behaviour. Participation in religious practices heightened the likelihood of participation in elections and church attendance helped to shape party preferences. Concerning the period 2005-2015, she found that 'in choosing PiS in all the parliamentary elections, as well as in voting for that party's candidates in the presidential elections—Lech Kaczyński in 2005, Jarosław Kaczyński in 2010, and Andrzej Duda in 2015—church attendance did have a definite influence. In other words, participation in religious practices raised the likelihood of voting for PiS and its candidates for president' (Grabowska 2017: 272). Church attending Catholics in Poland may be particularly attracted to PiS as a party that is not only ideologically conservative, promoting the traditional values most cherished by 'Poland B', but one that is also actively supported by the Catholic Church. In 2015, when it won an overall parliamentary majority, the Church 'refrained from overt campaigning, but its support played a major if indirect role in the PiS victory. The Church helped to keep core PiS voters on board even as the party tacked rhetorically to the centre' (Fomina and Kucharczyk 2016: 61). To this we can also add the support given to the party from the radio station Radio Maryja and religious TV channel *Telewizja Trwam*.

Responding to the use of religion by populists

In terms of support, albeit implicit, from Church authorities for a populist party, Poland again appears as the outlier in both Western and Eastern Europe. The use of religion by populists in their appeals to voters has, more often than not, been routinely condemned across various denominations. In particular, the xenophobic anti-immigration attitudes of PRR parties are difficult to square with the Christian ideal of 'love thy neighbour' and 'given that Church leaders can be considered part of society's elites and that they usually advocate charity and acceptance of immigrants, there are many obvious reasons why right-wing populists could come into conflict with Christian Churches' (Marzouki and McDonnell 2016: 7). Opposition to populists may be expressed by local level religious groups and leaders as well as national representatives and senior clergy. In the UK, senior figures from the Anglican, Catholic and Methodist churches have condemned the BNP and in 2009 the Archbishops of Canterbury and York released a statement urging people not to vote for the party (Peace 2016). In the same year, the Ecumenical Church Council in Austria that represents fourteen Christian Churches, responded to the FPÖ's 'The West in Christian hands' slogan by declaring that 'it was opposed to any exploitation of the Christian faith during electoral campaigns' (Hadj-Abdou 2016: 42). Likewise, in the Netherlands Geert Wilders has come in for criticism from the ecumenical Council of Churches, as well as individual leaders in both the Protestant and Catholic churches (Kessel 2016). As a response to such criticisms, populist parties often accuse church authorities of being far from the people, not looking after their 'true interests' and being influenced by the 'politically correct' left. The SVP has found itself on numerous occasions at odds with both Protestant and Roman Catholic churches in Switzerland and has even made pronouncements on what the role of these churches should be. In one manifesto the party claimed to be opposed to 'biased pronouncements by Church functionaries based on left-wing ideology…[and] egalitarian, socialist interpretations of the Christian message' (cited in Mazzoleni 2016: 52). Similarly, in Italy the Lega and its leader Salvini uses classic populist ideas about contrasting out of touch elites with the 'real people' by differentiating between the 'bad elites of the Church hierarchy and the 'good' local northern priests' (McDonnell 2016: 27).

The 'refugee crisis' and its aftermath has brought conflicts between religious figures and populist parties in Europe to the fore. Churches and Christian charities/NGOs have been on the frontline in terms of welcoming and integrating asylum seekers and refugees. This has angered populist politicians who have argued that the church should be prioritising helping its 'own people' first and that such charitable actions merely encourage further migration. Another common accusation is that religious groups are only getting involved in refugee work in order to enrichen themselves. In 2016 Petr Bystron, the head of the AfD in Bavaria, alleged that German churches were earning "billions of euros per year" from the arrival of refugees in Europe and singled out the Catholic charity Caritas and the Lutheran *Diakonische Werk* (Diaconical Mission) for particular criticism (DW 2016). In a similar vein, Matteo Salvini has constantly suggested that NGOs who help migrants, including those with links to the Catholic Church, are simply motivated by the money that can be made by using state funds for refugee integration. During his time as Minister of the Interior (2018-2019), he regularly came into conflict with Church officials and accused them of being too generous with migrants:

> I have been attacked by some leaders in Caritas and by some priests and Bishops because we [Italian government] reduced the daily allowance for migrants from 35 to 21 euros per day...if you're so generous, you can take care of them with less money, or were you welcoming them in order to *make* money? (Cernuzio 2019)

Since the refugee crisis, Salvini has been increasingly critical of the Catholic Church and its leadership while at the same time professing a public commitment to faith. The numerous pronouncements of Pope Francis on the importance of welcoming migrants have been derided and the legitimacy of the Pontiff questioned - something that even just a few years previously would have been considered a step too far in a country like Italy. Salvini is seeking to exploit the ideological divide in the Italian Catholic Church, and even within the Vatican itself, which pits liberals who focus on Catholic social teaching and conservatives who represent the 'Salvinization of the faith' (Ferraresi 2019). The Pope has replied to this challenge in kind by warning in several interviews of the dangers of the rise in populism, a clear reference to Salvini, and such comments have drawn scorn from other populist leaders such as Marine Le Pen (Le Figaro 2019). The power of populists in government has not just undermined the Pope's authority in Italy, as the Polish Catholic Church is also reluctant to welcome migrants and the Hungarian Catholic Church also 'went against the statements of Pope Francis, and acted as a national organisation loyal to the government before the Vatican' (Ádám and Bozóki 2016: 144).

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how populists in Europe engage in both the overt and covert dimensions of religious populism. The key driver for this phenomenon is Islamophobia and the desire to promote a civilisational clash between the 'West' and 'Islam'. The traditional xenophobia and nativism of the PPR that focused on 'immigrants' and 'foreigners' without denoting particular religious characteristics, now invariably perceives and racialises them as 'Muslims'. As has been highlighted by the contributions to the most recent edited collections on the topic (Marzouki, McDonnell and Roy 2016, De Hanas and Shterin 2019), religion has been 'hijacked' or 'co-opted' by populist forces rather than what we might define as a genuine spiritual conversion. Religion functions as a relevant context factor and frame for political mobilization (Minkenberg 2018) but the PRR cannot be classified as 'religious parties'. The recent resurgence of the use of religion by populists in the mostly secularised societies of Europe has very little to do with genuine Christian faith and religious adherence as commonly understood. It is not a substantive Christianity but a secularized notion of Christianity-as-culture, a civilizational and identitarian "Christianism" (Brubaker 2017). What is being mobilised is not religion at all, but merely culture. Olivier Roy (2019) also notes that in Europe populists often appropriate Christian symbols for political ends while discarding the religion's core values. What they are pushing is a form of 'Cultural Christianity' which functions as an identity marker rather than a value system. Until recently, studies that addressed the relationship between religion and populism were still thin on the ground. There is now a surge of interest in this topic (Arato and Cohen 2019, Molle 2019, Ozzano 2019, Palaver 2019, Wagenvoorde 2019, Schwörer and Romero-Vidal 2020). What is needed now are comparisons between the use of religious populism in the West and other parts of the World. For example, the BJP in India offers 'an enlightening comparison with Western cases, both in terms of the construction of "the other" and how the party reconciles the complexities of caste within its conception of the Hindu "people". This may have points of contact with how some Western right-wing populists subsume long-standing Catholic-Protestant differences within the frame of a Christian people under siege from the Muslim "other"' (McDonnell and Cabrera 2019: 496). A further area for study would be on how the religious react to their faith being 'hijacked' and what practical steps churches and faith-based organisations are taking to resist the populist wave.

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[1] The video can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWo9OtXSU-8

[2] A truly global account of the phenomenon is not possible within the constraints of this chapter but the cases of populists harnessing religion in other parts of the world are covered in other chapters in this volume. I have also deliberately avoided discussing the situation of Orthodox Christianity despite the fact that there is often a close relationship between populist nationalism, Orthodox national churches and their adherents.

[3] Inclusionary populists are now a significant feature of Southern European party systems too (Font, Graziano and Tsakatika 2021).

[4] This tactic started in 2000 when pig urine was poured on land set aside for the construction of a mosque in Lodi and in 2007 prominent LN politician Roberto Calderoli even called for a "pig-day against Islam" (Betz and Meret 2009).

[5] We can also note at this same time the emergence of the so-called 'counter-jihad' movement, based on the belief that Islam and the West are at war, that inspired the emergence of Islamophobic street movements such as the English Defence League (EDL). This movement also influenced the discourse of the most extreme parties such as the BNP, PVV and the Sweden Democrats.

[6] It should be noted that at the EU summit on September 15, 2015, the Polish minister originally voted in support of the EU relocation plan, a decision for which the polish government was roundly criticised by other leaders of the Visegrad Group. The PiS government was voted into power one month later.