

Article

Right-Wing Populism and Religion in Europe and the USA [†]

Jeffrey Haynes 

School of Social Sciences, London Metropolitan University, London N7 8DB, UK; tsjhayn1@londonmet.ac.uk

[†] This paper draws on and updates material in several chapters of Haynes 2019c.

Received: 17 August 2020; Accepted: 25 September 2020; Published: 27 September 2020



Abstract: The aim of this paper is to examine comparatively the growth and political effectiveness of right-wing populism in Western Europe, Central Europe, and the USA since 9/11. The focus is on such politicians' vilification of Islam as a faith and Muslims as a people. The paper examines the following research question: how and why do right-wing populists in the USA and Europe use an ideological form of "Christianity", known variously as "Christianism" or "Christian civilizationism", to vilify Muslims and Islam? The political purpose seems obvious: to influence public perceptions and to win votes by questioning the desirability of Muslims in both the USA and Europe, claiming that Muslims' religious and cultural attributes make them unacceptable as neighbors. As Muslims are not capable, so the argument goes, of assimilating to European or American norms, values, and behavior, then they must be excluded or strongly controlled for the benefit of nativist communities. Right-wing populists in both the USA and Europe pursue this strategy because they see it as chiming well with public opinion at a time of great uncertainty, instability, and insecurity.

Keywords: right-wing populism; Europe; USA; Christianity; Christian civilizationism; Muslims; Islam

1. Introduction

Damaging events characterized as the results of "Islamist terrorism" have taken place in many European countries in recent years (Kaya and Tecmen 2019). As a result, it is now fashionable to "talk of a 'clash of civilizations' between the West and Islam" (Waeber 2006). For many, this suggests that the West is engaged in an "intercivilizational" conflict with Islamist violent extremists and terrorists. The conflict, which may have begun with the Iranian revolution of 1979, was exacerbated by the egregious events of 11 September 2001 (hereafter, 9/11), and since then, it has gathered pace. Waeber (2006) argues that, as a result, "the world" is "standing on the brink of a long conflict, perhaps a new 'cold war' that features small-scale, but spectacular violence", involving the "West" and "Islam".

Concern with escalating intercivilizational conflict encouraged electoral support for right-wing populists in both Europe and the USA (Brubaker 2017a, 2017b; Joppke 2018; Haynes 2019a).¹ A key characteristic of right-wing populism is that representative politicians and supportive voices in the media highlight what they see as the cultural, political, and societal dangers of "uncontrolled" Muslim

¹ As (Ekström et al. 2018, p. 2) note, populism can be either "left-wing" or "right-wing". This paper is concerned with the latter in the USA and Europe. The term "right-wing" is analytically difficult. Many of the parties mentioned or noted in the article prefer a social democratic-style welfare-state compared to one where "market forces" take precedence. Where the designation "right-wing" comes in is that such a state is primarily meant for those judged on ethnicity rather than citizenship. This paper looks explicitly at what the author refers to as "right-wing" rather than "left-wing" populism. Several parties in Europe, such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain, as well as Bernie Sanders in the USA would fall into the category of "left-wing" populism. Another difference between "left" and "right-wing" populism is that the former are not generally associated with anti-Muslim discourse/Islamophobia.

immigration, leading to intercivilizational conflict. Beyond political exploitation of fears of large-scale immigration, right-wing populist parties also have two further traits. First, they seek to win political power via “personalistic leadership that feeds on quasi-direct links to a loosely organized mass of heterogeneous followers” (Weyland 2013, p. 20). Second, their political appeals are based on a “thin” ideology that “considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’” (Mudde 2007, p. 23).

Right-wing populist politicians have recently enjoyed electoral success not only in the USA but also in several European countries. Strategies and electoral platforms are not however identical, as what occurs in individual countries is affected by “nationally specific factors such as political history, system and culture” (Greven 2016). Having said that, right-wing populists do have generic ideological similarities, which inform their political messages, platforms, and programs. First, the main target of populism, both left-wing and right-wing varieties, is a (supposedly corrupt) elite political class from which the mass of the ordinary people needs defending, and the populist politician depicts him or herself as a “genuine” popular voice in opposition to the corrupt power holders. Second, right-wing populists claim to champion the rights and legitimacy of the indigenous “ordinary people” against the “immigrant-loving”, self-serving elites in politics and business. The latter in particular are said to be keen to see mass immigration for their own economic reasons: to flood the jobs market with myriads of people from different cultures able and willing to work for relatively low wages and thus undercut indigenous workers’ wage levels. According to Huntington (2004, p. 268): “these transnationals have little need for national loyalty, view national boundaries as obstacles that thankfully are vanishing, and see national governments as residues from the past whose only function now is to facilitate the elite’s global operations”. Third, right-wing populists in the USA and Europe routinely vilify Islam as a faith and Muslims as a community, in ways reminiscent of the lack of support for Jewish refugees in the late 1930s and early 1940s in the USA and many European countries (Friedman 1973; García 2018).² Fourth, right-wing populists typically seek to identify Islam as a faith and Muslims as a group as a fundamental “civilizational” threat to historically and culturally defined “Christian” or “post-Christian” nations of the USA and Europe, which challenges them culturally, religiously, civilizationally, socially, and politically. Finally, right-wing, anti-immigration, populist politicians have achieved enhanced electoral support in many European countries by exploiting real or imagined societal fears of a “Muslim invasion”, a concern stimulated by the Arab Uprisings of 2011 and the continuing Syrian civil war (Brubaker 2017a; Haynes 2016; Kaya and Tecmen 2019; Kratochvíl 2019; Ozzano 2019).

Right-wing, anti-immigration, populist politicians have recently either won power or a significantly increased share of the vote, albeit without achieving power, in the USA and several European countries, including the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, and Sweden (Brubaker 2017a, 2017b; Haynes 2019a; Joppke 2018; Kaya and Tecmen 2019). In the USA, a turn to right-wing populism was emphatically demonstrated by Donald Trump’s unexpected election as president in November 2016. During the campaign and on achieving power, Trump expressed frequent anti-Muslim feelings, suggesting policies to prevent Muslims from certain countries entering the USA because of the threat they supposedly posed (Mandaville 2017; Subtirelu 2017). Trump and several other Republican candidates openly questioned the loyalties of the three million or more American Muslims (Mandaville 2017). In addition, Trump targeted illegal immigration into the USA from Mexico and central America in his nativist appeals. The issue centered on whether ethnically or religiously different people—that is, Mexicans and Muslims—can be fully trusted in

² Islam is sometimes portrayed as something else than a faith, for example, a “fascist” political ideology, whereby some Muslims are said to be radicalized. The *taqqiya* trope is regularly referred to in this context: an extremist Islamist is said to deceive society by concealing his or her radicalization. The wider point is that both Islam and Muslims may be articulated in various ways, not only related to “faith”. (I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this point).

America by nativist Americans.³ Do they demonstrate “sufficient” and “acceptable” levels of loyalty, commitment, and identity to the USA, a country scarred by—and scared of—terrorism, especially since 9/11? (Crandall et al. 2018). Trump made much political capital by stressing that, as president, he would stop migration from Mexico into the USA, by building a “big, beautiful” wall on America’s southern border and compel the government of Mexico to pay for it. The aim was to curtail dramatically illegal emigration from Mexico (Haynes 2016, 2019b).

Before proceeding, a few words about methodology. Research for this article draws on relevant interviews, policy speeches, statements, remarks, and press conferences. In addition, where appropriate, it draws on primary source data, including policy documents and legislation. The research was informed by scholarly and journalistic critiques of and commentary on such right-wing populists’ rhetoric and policy in relation to Islam and Muslims. The overall methodological aim is to employ appropriate sources in order to present a range of views regarding the rhetoric and policies of right-wing populists in the USA and Europe vis-à-vis Islam and Muslims.

The paper is in four sections: (1) Christian Civilizationism in the USA and Europe: Provenance and Practice, which identifies and explains the issue to be looked at in the paper, (2) Right-Wing Populism and Christian Civilizationism in the USA, (3) Right-Wing Populism and Christian Civilizationism in Western Europe, and (4) Right-Wing Populism and Christian Civilizationism in Central Europe. Each section identifies and examines an aspect of the research question. The first looks at the theoretical and analytical underpinnings of Christian civilizationism. The following case study sections examine how and why Christian civilizationism is employed by right-wing populists in the USA, Western, and Central Europe. We identify what they have in common and where they differ and explain that both international and domestic factors are significant in identifying the rhetoric and claims of right-wing populists.

2. Christian Civilizationism in the USA and Europe: Provenance and Practice

“Christianism” (or “Christian civilizationism”) is an ideology which trumpets the perceived superiority of “Christian values”; it is an essential building-block of right-wing populists’ political rhetoric and appeal in both Europe and the USA. A blogger, Sullivan (2013), is widely credited with coining the term in 2003. Sullivan defines “Christianism” as a “partisan ideology wrapped in a veneer of Christianity”. Sullivan explained that it is adopted in the USA by “those on the fringes of the religious right who have used the Gospels to perpetuate their own aspirations for power, control and oppression”. Sullivan averred that Christianists were “as anathema to true Christians as the Islamists are to true Islam”. Another blogger, Jethani (2016), commented that what Sullivan identified as a fringe minority nearly two decades ago now seems to “be rapidly expanding to the point of becoming tolerated as mainstream”. Jethani recognized this in the 2016 election of Donald Trump, a massively popular choice for president of most right-wing Christian evangelicals.⁴ This was hardly likely to be because Trump’s “character, story, agenda, or candidacy . . . finds alignment with Scripture, the cross, the gospel, or personal/social transformation (Bebbington’s evangelical markers in simple terms). However, his ‘Make America Great Again’ slogan, along with his maligning of women, immigrants, and all ‘losers’ while triumphantly holding up a Bible, fits Christianity perfectly” (Jethani 2016).⁵ More generally, recent years have seen right-wing populist politicians in both the USA and Europe take “Christianity” as a defining feature of national purity. However, as “with the idea of Islamism this has little, if any, theological depth to it, but it is the application of Christianity to a political ideology, one that establishes the pure people against outsiders” (Ryan 2018).

³ In this context, a nativist American is a white Protestant whose forebears entered the USA from the UK, Germany, or Scandinavia (Young 2017).

⁴ Christian evangelicals are Protestant, often Pentecostals.

⁵ <https://hellochristian.com/1326-trump-and-the-heresy-of-christianism>.

In the USA, Christian civilizationism draws inspiration from and has foundations in what are purported to be “Judeo-Christian” values (Haynes 2017). That is, the ideology of Christian civilizationism is rooted in a belief that, culturally, socially, and politically, US principles and achievements stem from the country’s claimed Judeo-Christian values.⁶ This view has been politically weaponized in recent years, with several cultural groups, especially “Mexicans” and “Muslims” being vilified for not apparently having such values. For example, Republican congressman Steve King called immigrants “dogs” and “dirt”; and Donald Trump “infamously declared that most immigrants crossing the southern border were “rapists and criminals” and pledged to ban all Muslims from entering the US” (Siddiqui 2019).

Trump’s electoral appeal was in part based upon his claim that not only “Mexicans” but also “Islam” and “Muslims” pose an existential threat to America and its civilization. For figures such as Trump and King, Islam is a cultural, ideational, and emerging existential challenge to the US that must be defeated in order to ensure the purity of American culture. It requires policies both to limit the numbers of Muslims in the USA and to prevent the spread of *sharia* law, allegedly spearheaded by American representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood (Beydoun 2018, pp. 105–9).

In Western Europe, the political ideology of Christian civilizationism draws extensively on a claimed contrast between “liberal” and “illiberal” values. The former is exemplified by, for example, French civilizational values. France’s president, Emmanuel Macron, suggested in July 2017 that Africa’s problems are civilizational, a mix of security, social, and political issues. Macron claimed that Africa’s “problems . . . are completely different” to those of Europe, as they are “civilizational” and include: “[f]ailed states, complex democratic transitions and extremely difficult demographic transitions . . . Islamist terrorism, drugs and weapons trafficking” (Dearden 2017). Macron’s depiction of Africa highlights what he sees as the region’s lack of “European-ness”, that is, insufficient modernization. According to Huntington (1996, p. 68), “[m]odernization involves industrialization, urbanization, increasing levels of literacy, education, wealth, and social mobilization, and more complex and diversified occupational structures. . . . *The qualities that make a society Western, in contrast, are special: the classical legacy, Christianity, the separation of church and state, the rule of law, civil society*” (emphasis added).

For Huntington, being “modern” and being “Western” are different. That is, “modernity” has generic qualities—including, industrialization, urbanization, and higher levels of literacy, education and wealth. Being “Western”, on the other hand, implies adherence to a particularist civilization (“the classical legacy”) and religion (“Christianity”), with foundations in ubiquitous political and social institutions (that is, church–state separation, “the rule of law”, and independent civil societies). According to Macron, some non-Western civilizations, such as those in Africa, lack these attributes. Instead, the region is replete with “failed states”, a lack of democracy, widespread Islamist terrorism, and extensive criminality. Macron sees these as the inescapable cultural and civilizational differences characterizing the West and Africa, respectively, which explains the relative political, economic, and social stability and security of the former compared to the latter. The notion of irreducible cultural differences between the West and non-West is a key claim of Christian civilizationism in both Europe and the USA, facilitating the targeting Muslims and other non-Christians, such as Jews, as the undesirable other.

In Central Europe, Christian civilizationists seek to “culturalize” religion and citizenship, again to the detriment of Muslims and non-Christians, including Jews (Author’s interviews with #2 and #3). “Culturalization” refers to the necessary adaptation to or imposition of the culture of “Christian” indigenes on the other. According to Brubaker (2016), “the culturalization of religion is doubly convenient from a nationalist-populist point of view”. This is for two main reasons. First, “it allows Christianity to be privileged *as culture* in a way that it cannot be privileged *as religion*, given the liberal

⁶ See Matthew Bowman at <https://religionnews.com/2018/04/19/donald-trump-is-not-a-christian-but-he-knows-what-the-religious-right-needs-to-hear-says-historian/>.

state's commitment to neutrality in religious matters. On the other hand, it allows minority religious practices, redefined as cultural, to be *restricted* in a way that would not otherwise be possible, given the liberal state's commitment to religious freedom".

3. Right-Wing Populism and Christian Civilizationism in the USA

This section examines the employment of Christian civilizationism by President Trump. Many Americans view Islam and Muslims as undifferentiatedly linked to the violent events of 9/11 (Kamali 2015). Trump was able to exploit fears of "Islamic terrorism" to push both for a "Muslim ban" and to highlight the alleged superiority of "Judeo-Christian" beliefs and values. Use of Christian civilizationism by Trump during his presidential campaign and his presidency highlights that to him Islam and Muslims were a key source of America's recent travails, exemplified by 9/11. Overall, Trump's Christian civilizationism sought to underline what he claimed needed to be done to "Make America Great Again": build on the foundations of America as a "Christian nation" by excluding those of different religious and cultural persuasions.

Quoting the Austrian author Kurt Seinitz, Kamali (2015, p. 204) notes that for all the talk of globalization bringing increased diversity, many Westerners, including Americans, continue to demonstrate a widespread lack of basic knowledge about Islam. That deficiency is compounded in the USA, as elsewhere in the West, by social secularization and accompanying the death of religious taboos, which serves to decrease interest in and empathy with non-Western religions. This helps explain how right-wing populist politicians in the USA and other Western countries are successful electorally by pointing to a perceived or imagined existential threat from "Islam" and Muslims, especially "radical Islamic terrorism", to justify draconian, anti-Muslim policies in the interests of "security". Examples of such a policy include President Trump's Executive Order 13780, upheld by the Supreme Court in June 2018, which barred from entry into the USA people from five mainly Muslim countries from which no one has been convicted of terrorism in America (Adida et al. 2016).⁷

Brubaker (2017a) argues that right-wing populists in both the USA and Europe have a "Christian civilizationist" worldview. This views "Islam" as the main threat to the indigenous society's "civilizational integrity". The proposed remedy is to counter the perceived threat to national integrity by use of a novel ideology: "Christianism", a self-conscious counterpoint to "Islamism". Christianity is characterized by overt, often extreme, anti-Islamism. It can include apparently liberal views on issues of gender and sexuality. They are used to seek to distinguish "enlightened", secularized European civilization from allegedly regressive and repressive Islamic culture. This approach was adopted successfully by several prominent Dutch politicians, including the assassinated Pim Fortuyn, his ideological successor, Gert Wilders, and France's former president Nicholas Sarkozy. According to DeHanas and Shterin (2018, p. 178), the "same dynamics of Christian civilizationism are mirrored in many cases throughout Europe and in the U.S."

The recent political salience of Christianity is both manifested and exemplified by President Trump's words and deeds. The Trump presidency both stimulates and encourages Trump "wannabes" around the world, not only in Europe, such as Viktor Orbán in Hungary, but also elsewhere in the world, including: Narendra Modi in India, Brazil's president, Jair Bolsonaro, and the prime minister of the UK, Boris Johnson (Whitehead et al. 2018). Ideological links between such leaders encourage "Christianist internationalism". It brings together a group of like-minded, values-based, nationalist politicians, united by shared dislikes: of Islam, liberalism, globalism, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitanism (Haynes 2020, pp. 61–62). Trump's ideas about immigration and the necessity of keeping Muslims out of the USA has struck a chord with many such people. For example, Sebastian Kurz, Austria's chancellor, has thought out loud about a "Berlin-Rome-Vienna" axis to fight illegal

⁷ The five mainly Muslim countries are: Iran, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Somalia; as well as two, mainly non-Muslim states: North Korea and Venezuela.

immigration, and Richard Grenell, US ambassador to Germany between 2018–2020, sought to encourage Trump-style populist nationalists in Germany and other European countries (Stewart 2020).

Donald Trump was elected president in November 2016 in the context of rising anti-immigration and “anti-Muslim” sentiment. Trump is sometimes identified as a “nativist” (Bergmann 2020). A nativist believes that the rights of indigenous people are much greater than those of immigrants. For the US-based, Dutch political scientist, Cas Mudde, nativism is “xenophobic nationalism . . . an ideology that wants congruence of state and nation—the political and the cultural unit. It wants one state for every nation and one nation for every state. It perceives all non-natives . . . as threatening. But the non-native is not only people. It can also be ideas.” (Mudde quoted in Friedman 2017).

Nativism is said to be most appealing during periods when people feel the harmony between state and nation is disappearing. This is not to claim that Trump is necessarily a nativist because of belief rather than opportunism. According to Mudde, Trump quickly learned during the presidential campaign that “nativism was *popular*”. Mudde notes that “Trump’s campaign speeches were initially quite boring, often with copious allusions to his ‘always successful’ real estate deals, but he noticed that crowds were very pleased when he spoke [about] ‘building a border wall with Mexico or barring radical Islamic terrorists from the country’” (emphasis in original; Mudde quoted in Friedman 2017). DiMaggio (2019, p. 118) contends that Trump’s “support for a ban on immigration from Muslim-majority countries, and his plan to build a separation wall between the U.S. and Mexico both demonstrated his support for racist, xenophobic policy positions”.

Many Americans’ popular response to Trump’s allusion to twin dangers posed by Mexicans and radical Islam reflected fears among many voters at the outcome of growing economic insecurity following the global financial crisis of 2008. It is not the case that a resort to nativism is a uniquely Trumpian tactic to acquire votes. García notes that such sentiments have long been a feature of US politics. For example, initial naturalization laws in the US allowed only white European immigrants to be eligible for naturalization. In the mid-nineteenth century, nativists, known as the “Know-Nothings”, opposed the entry into the USA of German and Irish immigrants. Later, in 1882, Congress voted to bar Chinese immigration to America. In the early twentieth century, the anti-immigrant targets sought to enter the USA from Eastern and Southern Europe, including Russia, Poland, Italy, and Greece. In the early 1920s, immigration was severely limited from these parts of Europe under a quota system. From the 1930s, the nativists’ main fear was unacceptable levels of immigration from Mexico; many blamed Mexicans for the economic woes of the Great Depression, as they were believed to be “stealing” Americans’ jobs. The 1970s saw the invention of a new term, “illegal alien”, which criminalized those attempting to enter the USA illegally. In 1994, California passed “Proposition 187” “that denied the undocumented, including their children, access to public services, including education” (García 2018). Finally, as Belew (2018) explains, the development of “white power” crystallized fears among some Americans about what they saw as whites losing their historical supremacy in a fast-changing country.

Clearly, there is nothing novel about Trump’s anti-immigration rhetoric and policies; such ideas have been a feature of US politics for more than a century. As García (2018) puts it, “nativist and racist sentiments unfortunately continue under Trump. He is part of a long line of white Americans who fear “losing” what they perceive to be “their country” and not be “infested”, as Trump puts it, with immigrants and refugees of color”. During the 2016 presidential campaign, it was clear that many Americans were concerned about the impact and effects of illegal migration from Mexico, as well as the threat from “radical Islamic terrorism”. The issue, on the one hand, was about illegal immigration into the USA from Mexico and elsewhere in Central America, and on the other, it focused on the position of hundreds of thousands of Muslims already living legally in America and the policy to be adopted with regard to others who also wanted to immigrate to the USA. Some among them, Trump claimed, were actively engaged in terrorist activities (Milton 2017).

From the time of his 2016 presidential election campaign, Trump surrounded himself with white nationalists, including: Stephen Miller, Stephen K. Bannon, and Sebastian Gorka. Each was a short-term (Bannon, Gorka) or long-term member of his administration (Miller). These men share

an understanding that the USA is engaged in a culture war between nativists and globalists. Miller is Trump's chief speechwriter and is credited with authoring the president's "American carnage" inaugural address. He has been a key adviser since the early days of Trump's presidency and was a chief architect of Trump's executive order restricting immigration from several Middle Eastern countries. Few on the hard-right thought he needed to offer any clarification or qualification for this policy.⁸ Guerrero (2020) describes Miller as the architect of Trump's border and immigration policies, helping Trump, "conjure an invasion of animals to come steal American jobs and spill American blood".

Stephen Bannon is a former White House Chief Strategist, past Breitbart chief,⁹ and leader of a far-right populist international movement, "The Movement". "Bannon helped get Stephen Miller into the Trump administration, and Bannon was another one of Stephen Miller's mentors" (Guerrero 2020). Bannon is an influential figure on the far-right both in the USA and internationally. He regards himself as an ideologue and proponent of the America First agenda. Bannon believes that America's foundational values are rooted in nativist ethics and principles (Tondo 2018). Bannon was a key adviser during the first nine months of the presidency of Donald Trump. He was ousted from this role in September 2017, following infighting in the White House, involving Trump's son-in-law and senior advisor, Jared Kushner.

Bannon is both an economic nationalist and nativist, an admirer of several right-wing French ideologues and novelists, including, Renaud Camus, who coined the phrase "The Great Replacement" and Jean Raspail, author of a 1973 novel, *The Camp of the Saints*. Camus refers to what he understands as a "plot" to replace ethnic French people with Muslim migrants. In his 2012 book, *The Great Replacement*, which echoes the concerns of Raspail's earlier book, Camus writes of the conspiracy theory that native Catholic French people, and Christian Europeans more generally, will eventually be completely sidelined and substituted by waves of immigrants from North Africa, the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa. This theory found a ready home among some right-wing nationalists in the USA, such as Richard Spencer (Malice 2018). Raspail's ideas are at the root of the "identitarian" doctrine, which claims that globalization will create an undesirable homogeneous culture, with disappearing distinct national and/or cultural identities. An alternative, "true pluralism" or "ethnopluralism" would imply separation of races. These ideas are said to have influenced both "Steve Bannon at Breitbart and the American white supremacist leader Richard Spencer" (Jones 2018).

The Trump administration has closely linked populist nationalism with conservative Christian values and beliefs. Trump is electorally dependent on the combined political support of (secular) right-wing nationalists and conservative Christians—that is, the "Christian Right". Trump's electoral slogan—"Make America Great Again" (MAGA)—found favor with both Christian and secular supporters. MAGA brought together both strands of Trump's support in a yearning for the perceived halcyon days of a White conservative Christian America. The desire was to "return" to a time when the "American dream" seemed eminently realizable, buoyed by strong and persistent economic growth, continually rising prosperity and the triumph of get-up-and-go dynamism. MAGA also implied an extended fight against the allegedly corrupt administrative/bureaucratic system, that is, the "deep state" A.K.A. "the swamp". For the Christian Right, MAGA included a strong social and political influence for their preferred brand of Christianity: conservative, Protestant, and evangelical. In this worldview, women know their place both in the workplace and at home; ethnic, religious, and racial minorities know their place in the social, political, and economic order and should not try "too hard" to improve their existential positions via "affirmative action"; and the USA is safe from both internal and external attack, including the baleful influence of "foreign" ideas, especially Islamism and globalism.

⁸ The Southern Poverty Law Center reported in February 2017, soon after Trump assumed the presidency, that the numbers of "anti-Muslim hate groups" in the USA had tripled between 2015 and 2017, increasing three-fold: from 34 to 101 (<https://www.splcenter.org>).

⁹ Breitbart is a right-wing website.

4. Right-Wing Populism and Christian Civilizationism in Western Europe

As in the USA, Christian civilizationism is a significant feature of current expressions of right-wing populism in Western Europe. Right-wing populists are widespread in the region; some are politically significant; all seek to exploit some people's increasing sense of insecurity. As in America, European right-wing populists portray "Islam", Islamism, and Muslims as major threats to indigenous "Christian" Europeans' "civilizational integrity" (Brubaker 2017a, 2017b; Joppke 2018; Haynes 2019b, 2019c). Although Christian civilizationism is generically characterized by anti-Islamism, it is expressed somewhat differently dependent on context, reflecting the specificity of political narratives according to local concerns. Generally, in Western Europe, Christianity and religion merge with nationhood and secularism, although the relationship varies from country to country. For example, *Le Rassemblement National* in France underplays Christianity and highlights secularism, in line with French republican values (DeHanas and Shterin 2018). Compared to the USA, the use of Christian civilizationism by right-wing populists in Western Europe reflects the latter region's more advanced secularism. Put another way, while most Americans believe that the USA is a "Christian nation", many Western Europeans believe that they inhabit a "post-Christian" or secular environment. Christianity retains a cultural significance but is much less important politically compared to the USA, where the influence of the Christian Right is highly significant politically (Young 2017; Whitehead et al. 2018).

In Western Europe, the ideology of Christian civilizationism stems from a claim that there is little or no common cultural ground linking Muslims and Christians because of supposedly different cultural characteristics. For Christian civilizationists, the Muslim presence in Europe is destabilizing and leads to increased societal insecurity. European right-wing populist parties employ Christian civilizationist ideology reflecting one of two perspectives. Brubaker (2017a, p. 1203) observes that such parties tend to fluctuate between two opposing views. First, there is a "traditional", patriarchal vision of society focused on Christianity's conservative interpretation. Such "traditional" Christian values express socially and politically conservative ideas regarding gender issues, sexual morality, and personal rights. Examples include Marine Le Pen, leader of France's *Le Rassemblement National*, who expresses support for conservative "family values" (Joppke 2018). Second, Dutch right-wing populists have long been at the forefront of the right-wing populist liberal approach to Islam's claimed illiberalism, augmented by "philosemitism, gender equality, and support for gay rights". These are regarded by such right-wing populists as "common European values", along with respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality, and the rule of law. Such right-wing populists express "putatively liberal views on issues of gender and sexuality as a way of distinguishing a 'Christian civilization' from allegedly regressive and repressive Islamic cultures" (DeHanas and Shterin 2018, p. 177). This approach was adopted by both the assassinated Dutch populist, Pim Fortuyn, and his ideological successor, Geert Wilders, leader of the Party for Freedom.

While in a broader European perspective, the contours of Dutch right-wing populist, anti-immigrant politics are atypical, especially with respect to the centrality of the themes of sexual liberation and gay rights, more right-wing populists are now instrumentally adopting such a view. Anti-immigrant/anti-Muslim, right-wing populist parties not only in France, but also in Norway, Denmark, and elsewhere, place emphasis on gender equality, human rights, freedom of speech, individualism, and gay rights. They do this as they seek to increase their votes and thus acquire more mainstream legitimacy, repositioning themselves as defenders of liberal values, grounded in a secularized Judeo-Christian culture, against the "threat" of "illiberal" Islam (Herbert 2020).

DeHanas and Shterin (2018, p. 178) observe that, despite such differences, the "same dynamics of Christian civilizationism are mirrored in many cases throughout Europe and in the U.S." Brubaker (2017a, 2017b), Joppke (2018), Kalmar (2018), and Lloyd (2017) identify Christian civilizationism as a key driver of right-wing populist ideas informing a sense of "pan-European civilizational identity", which is said to be threatened by and ready to threaten another civilizational identity—Islam. Lloyd (2017) claims that Christian civilizationism "poses grave dangers to liberal democracy". This is because Christian civilizationism is by definition highly socially divisive, pitting groups of people—that is,

practicing or cultural Christians—against another: practicing and cultural Muslims.¹⁰ This emphasizes that the appeal of “civilizationism” is the claimed primacy of one group’s cultural and religious bonds compared to others because of allegedly “irreducible cultural differences” (Marchetti 2016, p. 123). As ever, timing is everything in politics: “The fact that the Christian references were made just when the opposition to Muslim immigrants became central to these parties (which it had not always been) suggests that its adoption is not religiously but culturally, even instrumentally, motivated: Christianity in the hands of extreme right parties is simply a club to beat Islam” (Joppke 2018, p. 238).

In Western Europe, Huysmans (2000, p. 751) notes, “migration has developed into a security issue [and] the European integration process is implicated in it”. Farny (2016) observes that, in recent years, “many [Western] countries have seen a rise in immigration, coupled with an increasing fear of “terrorists”, “illegal migrants” and other threats to internal safety”. According to Davies (2018), the rise of right-wing populist politicians in Western Europe is explicable both “as the expression of cultural anxieties surrounding identity and immigration” and “in largely economic terms—as a revolt among those ‘left behind’ by inequality and globalization” (Author’s interviews with #3, #4, #5).

Brubaker (2016) notes that in Western Europe prior to 9/11, there was “growing civilizational preoccupation with Islam . . . responding to the increasing global visibility of political Islam in the post-Cold War environment. But of course, 9/11 and subsequent attacks in Europe gave it an enormous boost”. The 2015 refugee crisis was another “enormous boost” to the emergence and profile of Christian civilizationism, a catalyst for greatly increased political and media attention on desperate people fleeing conflicts in Syria and elsewhere, and some politicians and media chose to highlight that the great majority were Muslims. It coincided with the run up to the UK’s June 2016 “Brexit” referendum during which right-wing populist politicians, such as the then leader of the UK Independence party (UKIP), Nigel Farage, chose to produce a highly misleading electoral advertising poster advertisement purporting to illustrate almost unlimited demand from “Muslims” and other non-Europeans to enter the UK. The poster suggested that such people were not Europeans and could not be expected to adhere to European values and cultural norms. However, Farage’s was not an isolated voice; as Sharify-Funk (2013) notes in the title of a recent article: in Western Europe, there is a “pervasive anxiety about Islam”.

Right-wing populist discourse in Western Europe is typically Islamophobic, and Farage’s stance is not unusual. Unlike in Central Europe (see below), where right-wing populist governments of the Visegrád group base their popular appeal on preventing mass Muslim immigration, several Western European countries have relatively large percentages of Muslims, between 3–8%.¹¹ In several regional countries, such as, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany, right-wing populists identify Muslims as the “enemy within”, which threatens European civilization. Both George (2016) and Polakow-Suransky (2017) argue that real or instrumental right-wing outrage against “radical Islamic terrorism”, *sharia* law, and the alleged misogyny of many Muslim men, is a key component of a political project whose aim is to increase popular support and the political profile of European right-wing populist politicians. While they may profess no dislike for or aversion to individual Muslims, they do proclaim strong antipathy to the politicization of Islam in the form of Islamism and associated attempts to “impose” unwelcome “Muslim values” on “Christian Europe”. The electoral appeal of right-wing populist politicians is to their fellow citizens that share their concerns by focusing on the “competing” civilizational norms and values, which coalesce around individualistic, liberal values on the one hand, and collective, conservative values, on the other. In addition, there is the widespread popular fear of

¹⁰ A cultural Muslim is religiously unobservant, secular, or irreligious. Yet, such people continue to identify with Islamic or Muslim culture as a result of personal and/or social factors, including family background, personal experiences, or the social and cultural environment where they grew up. A cultural Christian has the same traits from a Christian perspective.

¹¹ See <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/29/europes-growing-muslim-population/> for relevant percentages. In Western Europe, highest percentages are in: France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany. The average in the region is 4.9%.

Islamist extremism and terrorism. Nigel Farage, then leader of the UK Independence Party, stated in March 2015:

I think perhaps one of the reasons the polls show an increasing level of concern is because people do see a fifth column living within our country, who hate us and want to kill us. So don't be surprised if there isn't a slight increase in people's worries and concerns. You know, when you've got British, when you've got people, born and bred in Cardiff, with British passports, going out to fight for Isis, don't be surprised if there isn't an uptick in concern. There has been an uptick in concern, but does it make us a prejudiced people? No. (Mason 2015)

Farage's comments can be understood in the context of successive UK governments' attempts to encourage a multicultural society in Britain. According to Zemni, "multiculturalism has taken shape as a legitimizing paradigm of the Western democracies, and of the European Union itself. It has developed into a cultural-political cornerstone of societies *simultaneously in full transition towards economic globalization on the one hand, and potentially prey to the advent/resurgence of far-right and/or fascist political organizations on the other hand*" (emphasis added; Zemni 2002, p. 158).

Writing nearly two decades ago, Zemni saw multiculturalism as a "legitimising paradigm" and "cultural-political cornerstone" of both the European Union and Western democracies in general. It would be difficult to make the same claim with assurance today. This is because many Western countries, including several in Western Europe, have experienced a diminution of the perceived desirability of multiculturalism and a parallel increase in the political salience of right-wing populism with civilizationist characteristics, seeking to pit practicing and cultural Christians against Muslim emigrants. This section has demonstrated that the recent use of Christian civilizationism by right-wing populists in Western Europe is not a reassertion of religious differences or a generic "return of religion" to the public realm. Rather, it is a focused employment of culturalized political language exploiting both the fear of sustained mass Muslim immigration, as well as the real or perceived malign socio-economic impacts of globalization. This has led to significant job losses in certain industries, augmented by cultural anxieties surrounding identity and immigration. Like in the USA, however, the focus on Islam and Muslims highlights the perceived difficulties of how to incorporate different people and their beliefs into environments historically dominated by Christian norms and values.

5. Right-Wing Populism and Christian Civilizationism in Central Europe

This section focuses on Central Europe, specifically the four Visegrád group countries: Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia.¹² All became members of the European Union on 1 March 2004. Later, in 2018, the "Visegrád four" (V4) countries entered into talks with Italy and Austria to agree on a common, highly restrictive, policy in relation to Muslim immigration. Like several of the V4 countries, Austria and Italy have also recently elected right-wing populist politicians to power. According to Than, the "V4 + 2 countries form an 'illiberal' bloc to challenge the EU's 'liberal' policy on immigration, coordinated by their right-wing populist governments" (Than 2018). Regarding the use of Christian civilizationism by right-wing populist politicians, those in the V4 differ from their counterparts in both the USA and Western Europe. Whereas in the former, Christian civilizationism explicitly draws on "Judeo-Christian" ideas, and in the latter, it draws on cultural perceptions of the "Other" in a post-Christian, secular environment, Central Europe is a different historical, religious, and cultural context. The V4 countries are post-communist nations, strongly influenced by Russia during the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and contemporaneous downfall of satellite communist regimes led to the V4 countries seeking new ideological and cultural expressions. Initially, liberal democracy *à la* Western Europe fulfilled this aspiration. As a result, membership

¹² Visegrád is a city in Hungary. The four countries are: Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland.

of the European Union was sought and won. However, over time, it became clear that political, cultural, and social values in the V4 countries were significantly different from those of Western Europe (Brubaker 2016, 2017a, 2017b; Haynes 2019c). While many Western European countries experienced relatively high levels of Muslim immigration, the V4 countries have very few Muslims. As a result, unlike in the USA and Western Europe, right-wing populists were unable to point to what they said was an existential cultural, social, and political Muslim threat. Instead, they claimed that the “liberal” immigration policies of the European Union would compel them to accept high numbers of Muslim immigrants, and this would not sit well with existing Christian values and beliefs of nativist citizens.

On the other hand, political advances by right-wing populist politicians and parties in the four Visegrád countries is partly traceable to the events and developments that encouraged right-wing populists and, in some cases, delivered electoral success, in Western Europe and the USA. They include the socially destabilizing effects and aftermath of the global economic crisis of 9 November 2008, the subsequent “Global War on Terror”, the effects of the 2011 Arab Uprisings, and the 2015 refugee and migrant crisis, involving mainly Muslim refugees fleeing from Syria’s civil war. The latter in particular fueled popular concerns about Muslims fleeing the conflicts to enter Europe as a safe haven. Right-wing populists in the Visegrád four portray themselves as “Christian ‘bulwarks’ against Islam” (Brubaker 2017a), working to prevent their countries being “swamped” by Muslim immigrants. Recall that a bulwark is a defensive wall and use of this metaphor could encourage the idea that the V4 countries—portrayed by right-wing populists as on the frontline of Muslim efforts to reach the European “promised land”—must work assiduously to stem the Muslim “tide”. If not, their civilizationally distinctive countries’ cultures, with their Christian foundations and values, would be fatally undermined. These concerns encourage widespread feelings of insecurity, manifested politically in recent years in declining support for traditional mainstream political parties and growing backing for right-wing populist ones in the V4.

Overall, right-wing “[p]opulists are strongest in [Central and] Eastern Europe. They routinely out-compete the political mainstream and have already taken power” not only in the V4 but also in Bosnia, Bulgaria, and Serbia. In addition, right-wing “populist parties are junior coalition partners in two additional Eastern European countries, and dominate the opposition in three more” (Eiermann et al. 2017, p. 2). The rhetoric and political appeal of right-wing populists in the Visegrád group does not merely represent a generic right-wing populism, a one-size-fits-all approach to political and economic challenges. As Greven (2016, p. 1) notes, “[r]ight-wing populism across Europe and the United States takes different forms depending on nationally specific factors such as political history, system and culture, but there are similarities”. Similarities include right-wing populists’ allusions to a corrupt transnational “political class”, “elite”, or “establishment”, whose *raison d’être* is allegedly to try to dupe hard-working “ordinary people”. Consequently, the “people” need the right-wing populists to defend them against the depredations of the liberal, transnational elite, whose only concern is their own well-being. A second similarity is that in the Visegrád countries, “[r]ight-wing populism adds a second antagonism of ‘us versus them’”. Right-wing populists understand the “people” to be “culturally homogenous” and “attempts are made to juxtapose [their] identity and [supposed] common interests, [which] are considered to be based on common sense, with the identity and interests of ‘others’, usually minorities such as migrants, which are supposedly favored by the (corrupt) elites” (Greven 2016, p. 1). This issue was of major significance in the context of the May 2019 European parliamentary elections, and prior to these elections, a transnational “anti-immigrant” group of parties sought to coordinate their activities to try to maximize their political appeal.

The geography of populism is key to an understanding of current political transformations in Europe, which encourage right-wing populists’ political gains. In this respect, trends in Central Europe differ from those in Western Europe. An attempt to look at European averages, or only at individual countries, would mask some of the most consequential trends. However, there is also a second dimension along which it is important to disentangle populist movements: ideology (Eiermann et al. 2017). The nature of the message projected by right-wing populist politicians is partially dependent on the

location where the ideas are expressed. For Brubaker, there is a “particularity of the populist discourse in Western Europe, differentiating it from the American and Eastern European populist movements”: the right-wing populist parties and politicians in Western Europe are characterized, Brubaker claims, by “a civilizational aspect” (Conférence du 6 March 2017: Rogers Brubaker 2017, p. 1). This is made apparent in the foci of right-wing populists, such as Gert Wilders and Jens Spahn in the Netherlands and Germany, respectively, who portray Islam and its associated values as a threat to their countries’ liberal, secular tenets, for example, in relation to gender equality. In the V4 countries, on the other hand, Islamophobes, such as Hungary’s prime minister, Viktor Orbán, utilize Christian civilizationist arguments to portray Islam as a threat to what Orbán claims are Hungary’s national and Christian cultural foundations and values.

Despite cultural, social, political, and economic differences between the USA and Western Europe, Brubaker contends that “populist movements in North Atlantic societies share a kind of ‘civilizationism’ in which they see Islam as a threat to their civilizational integrity. These tend to respond to this threat with a political ideology known as “Christianism””. To the USA and Western Europe, we can add the V4 countries of Central Europe. Like the USA, right-wing populist leaders in the V4 claim that their countries are under siege from millions of Muslims who want to enter their countries. Unlike the USA, with the memory of 9/11 still recent, the V4 countries have no record of terrorist or extremist incidents involving Muslims. Both the V4 countries and the USA highlight their foundational “Christian values” and their feared undermining by the “alien” tenets of Islam. For right-wing populists, this is primarily what distinguishes the “civilized” Western societies from “barbaric” Muslims. Among the right-wing populists of Europe and the USA, the role of Christianity is “almost entirely identitarian”; that is, it relates to and is supportive of indigenous white people’s political interests. DeHanas and Shterin (2018, p. 178) explain that “[p]opulist politicians evoke a reinvented Christian past to warn about the existential threat of its loss in the face of invading Muslims robbing it from the present. . . . It is clear . . . that populist politicians borrow liberally from each other”.

The Visegrád Four: Christian Civilizationism and Right-Wing Populism

The Visegrád Group (also known as the “Visegrád Four” or simply “V4”) reflects the efforts of the countries of the Central European region to work together in a number of fields of common interest within the all-European integration. *The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia have always been part of a single civilization sharing cultural and intellectual values and common roots in diverse religious traditions, which they wish to preserve and further strengthen.* (Emphasis added; About the Visegrád Group 2019 <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/about>)

The Visegrád grouping was founded in 1991, as those countries’ Communist systems, which developed after World War II as result of Soviet control, collapsed. The claimed *raison d’être* of the V4 is a shared civilizational and culture emanating from a common religious adhesion to the Roman Catholic church. However, like all other European countries, those of the V4 were socially and politically affected by secularization during the Communist era and continue to face secularization today.

The quotation at the start of the section refers to the V4 countries as being “part of a single civilization sharing cultural and intellectual values and common roots in diverse religious traditions”. Each of the four member countries has an important Roman Catholic Church and a tiny Muslim minority (Author’s interviews with #3, #4, #5). The allusion to a shared “single civilization” in the quotation highlights right-wing populists’ claim that Islam is an alien culture and religion. This claim is not only based on recent events, such as 9/11 and subsequent Islamist terrorism and extremism in Western Europe. There is also a pronounced historical dimension. For example, Hungary’s prime minister, Viktor Orbán, frequently refers to historic events in his anti-Islamic rhetoric, notably Hungary’s ancient conflict with putative and actual Muslim invaders, by highlighting an unsuccessful attempt by a Muslim army to invade Vienna in 1683 (Mandhai 2017).

A second dimension of a historically based foundation of the fear of Islamic expansion is reflected in the origins of the Visegrád Group, formed, as the Soviet empire fell apart, on 15th February 1991 at

Visegrád, Hungary. The then President of the Czechoslovak Republic, Václav Havel, the then President of the Republic of Poland, Lech Wałęsa, and the then Prime Minister of the Republic of Hungary, József Antall, agreed to create “an imaginary historical arch linking the idea of this meeting to the idea of a similar meeting, which took place there in 1335”. The fourteenth century meeting was “attended by John of Luxembourg, King of Bohemia, Charles I of Anjou (Charles Robert), King of Hungary, and Casimir III, King of Poland. The central motif of the two meetings was the desire to intensify mutual cooperation and friendship among the three Central European states” ([History of the Visegrád Group 2019](#)). In 1993, two years after the founding of the modern iteration of the Visegrád group, Czechoslovakia divided into two separate countries: the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

An important purpose of the 1335 meeting was to highlight the shared civilizational and cultural values of the then rulers of Bohemia, Hungary, and Poland. In 1991, the common enemy of the modern states of Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia was Soviet Communism and their shared goal was to establish liberal democratic political systems, following encouragement from the USA and the European Union. Today, the priorities of the V4 have changed: liberal democracy is challenged by what Orbán refers to as “illiberal democracy”. There is great concern at the influence of the European Union as, it is alleged, it seeks to encourage Muslim emigration, apparently illustrated during and after the 2015 refugee crisis. Consequently, V4 governments began “to politicize migration and started to promote a ‘clash of civilizations’ narrative” identifying “migrants/refugees” as threats to indigenous cultures and a danger to local workers “whose jobs they were supposedly taking, and later as potential terrorists threatening Europe” ([Majtenyi et al. 2019](#), p. 179). The V4 governments’ strident anti-immigration policies were necessary, they claimed, to protect their countries from being “overrun” by Muslim “hordes”, who would threaten the economic livelihood of indigenous people, while also posing a security threat due to terrorism ([Haynes 2019c](#), p. 188).

The four Visegrád group countries—the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia—have a combined population of circa 63.5 million people.¹³ This represents a sizeable proportion of people who inhabit Central Europe. Collectively, they see themselves as having common civilizational and cultural attributes, including a shared Christian civilization. [Brubaker \(2017a\)](#) claims that their governments’ strongly anti-Muslim stance is ideologically different than that of right-wing populists in Western Europe, including those in Germany, Italy, France, and the UK. A key difference between right-wing populists in Western compared to Central Europe, including the V4 grouping, is that in Western Europe they focus on the “enemy within”, that is, the millions of Muslims that currently live there. Many Western European countries were particularly concerned by the cultural and social effects of impact of the hundreds of thousands of mainly Muslim refugees and migrants who entered Germany in particular in 2015. Governments in the Visegrád group, on the other hand, exploit the fear of what might happen if their countries were “flooded” by Muslim refugees/migrants, fearing the effects on their cultures and civilizations.

Each of the V4 countries has a background of Communism, which they now condemn. In addition, V4 right-wing populists decry Muslims and Islamism as a totalitarian ideology aiming to destroy indigenous Christian cultures and civilizational values. The right-wing populists pose two key questions: Is Islam compatible with Western democracy and liberal conceptions of human rights? If not, is it capable of reform? ([Delingpole 2016](#)).

Each of the Visegrád countries has seen recent significant growth in support for anti-Muslim, right-wing populist parties. In Hungary, the Fidesz party won a landslide majority in parliamentary elections in April 2018. The Organization for European Cooperation and Development, which was monitoring the election, however, found that the poll was marred by “intimidating and xenophobic rhetoric, media bias and opaque campaign financing” ([Walker and Boffey 2018](#)). In Poland, the PiS party achieved 37.6% of the vote in the 2015 parliamentary elections, providing the party with 235 of

¹³ Hungary 9.8 million, Poland, 38 million, The Czech Republic, 10.5 million, and Slovakia, 5.5 million (2017 figures).

460 seats (51 percent), an overall majority of four (BBC News 2015). The Czech Republic's most recent parliamentary elections took place in October 2017. The right-wing populist party, ANO 2011, won 78 of 200 seats, an increase of 31 seats compared to the previous election in 2013 (Císař and Štětka 2017). The rise of ANO 2011 was mirrored by the decline of the traditionally dominant, Czech Social Democrat Party, which lost 35 seats in 2017 compared to 2013. Finally, in Slovakia, the 2016 elections were overall a good result for assorted right-wing populists. Two such parties, the Slovak National Party and Kotleba/People's Party Our Slovakia, respectively gained 15 and 14 seats in the 150-seat parliament. In addition, another right-wing populist party—a new one, called We Are Family—gained 11 seats. However, in mid-2019, there was no dominant party in the parliament, a position once filled by Robert Fico's Direction–Social Democracy Party. Following the 2016 elections and reflecting a corruption scandal, Fico's party had 49 seats, down from 83 in the previous parliament (Rossi 2019).

6. Conclusions

What stands out, in both the USA and Europe, is the willingness of right-wing populists and their supporters to highlight what they regard as key civilizational differences between themselves and their supporters and Muslims. In the USA, figures such as Stephen Bannon lionize the virtues and values of Christian individualism, capitalism, and their perceived links to "Judeo-Christian values" (Haynes 2017). In Europe, the focus is on—often increasingly secular—"European values", which are nevertheless said by right-wing populists to emanate from Christian foundations, different from those to which Muslims are supposed to adhere. Electorally successful right-wing populists, such as Hungary's Viktor Orbán, put themselves forward as defenders of Hungary/Europe's "Christian" civilization, which they claim authorizes draconian anti-immigration policies to prevent Hungary/Europe from being "overrun" by Muslim "hordes".

In the Visegrád 4, electoral support for right-wing populists stems in part from popular dissatisfaction with mainstream, established parties, which in some regional countries, have been in power for long periods following the fall of Communism nearly three decades ago. Such right-wing populists employ ideologies of "Christian civilizationism", which interact with nationalist tropes. This seeks to characterize the nation as stemming from, and being civilizational dependent on, a Christianized culture. Islam is said to be a culturally inappropriate faith, with different, less culturally acceptable values.

In highly secular Western Europe, there is less opportunity to highlight Christian values. Instead, right-wing populist politicians such as Gert Wilders in the Netherlands attack Islam because of its allegedly unenlightened and anti-progressive values and highlight post-Christian "enlightened" and "socially progressive" approaches to social issues, including women's rights and gay marriage. Figures like Wilders contrast their "liberal" views with those of supposedly "illiberal" Muslims.

Muslim immigration and fears of Islamist terrorism are common factors in securitization of Islam in the USA and Europe. Coupled with this is a general, dramatic, and palpable decline in "toleration" especially in relation to Muslim immigrants who, many believe, are civilizational—that is, culturally and religiously—distinct from the USA and Europe's host communities. These divisions undermine the chances of democracy working for everyone, while making relationships between civilizations of great interest to students of democratization and society (Kaya and Tecmen 2019).

The ideology of "Christian civilizationism" encourages some right-wing politicians and commentators in the USA and Europe to characterize Muslims uniformly in a malign way. This approach makes no distinction between, on the one hand, the mass of "moderate", "ordinary" Muslims and, on the other hand, the tiny minority of Islamist extremists and even smaller fraction of violent extremists and terrorists among Muslims. This encourages Islamophobia in both Europe and the USA, primarily characterized by a perception of "all-Muslims-as-threat", whether via violent extremism and terrorism, by the specter of (extremist) *sharia* law, or by (the fear of) Muslim mass immigration. Whatever the cause of the concern, however, the outcome is said to be the same: irrevocably to change host cultures for the worst. This leads to the conclusion that the so-called "clash of civilizations" between Islam and

the West has two interactive, although conceptually separate, dimensions: Islam as a security issue and Islam as a civilizational issue, focusing on culture and values.

The article has explained that the ideology of Christian civilizationism has been widely exploited by right-wing populists in the USA, Western, and Central Europe since 9/11. Its world-changing impact encouraged such politicians openly to vilify Islam and Muslims and to exhort voters to regard them as an existential threat. However, as the memory of 9/11 fades, the threat of “Islamic terrorism” seems to have diminished, consequential to the demise of the Islamic State and the downsizing of Al Qaeda. Right-wing populists turned to the threat of mass Muslim immigration in Europe. In the USA the alleged invasion of unwanted foreigners—especially “Mexicans” necessitating, according to President Trump, the building of a “great big beautiful wall”—also included Muslims from a number of countries (“the Muslim ban”). This was because of Muslims’ alleged propensity towards terrorism and the supposed cultural threat they posed to America’s “Judeo-Christian” values. Future research might usefully extend the analysis to examine how the foci of right-wing populists differs in countries beyond the USA and Western and Central Europe. For example, the comparative focus could be extended to include countries such as India and Israel. Both have right-wing populists in power who vilify Muslims for political gain, identifying them as security and cultural threats. How their political appeals differ from those of their counterparts in the USA and Western and Central Europe would help identify the comparative impact of global and domestic factors on right-wing populists and their policies and programs.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Interviews

Personal interview via Skype with senior official of European Union, 21 September 2017.

Personal interview with former senior Pakistan diplomat, Washington DC, 25 April 2018.

Personal interview with former senior official (2008–2012) of the Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union (COMECE), Warsaw, 1 December 2017.

Personal interview with academic expert on international migration, Maria Grzegorzewska University, Warsaw, Poland, in Berlin, 19 June 2018.

Personal interview with senior official of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation’s Muslim Minorities Division, London, 20 June 2018.

References

- About the Visegrád Group. 2019. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/> (accessed on 18 February 2019).
- Adida, Claire D., David L. Laitin, and Marie-Claire Valfort. 2016. Don’t Fear Muslim Immigrants. They Aren’t the Real Problem. *Foreign Affairs*. Available online: http://marieannevalfort.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ForeignAffairs2016_VALFORT.pdf (accessed on 13 May 2019).
- Belew, Kathleen. 2018. *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bergmann, Eirikur. 2020. *Neo-Nationalism. The Rise of Nativist Populism*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Beydoun, Khaled A. 2018. *American Islamophobia. Understanding the Roots and Rise of Fear*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Brubaker, Rogers. 2016. A New ‘Christianist’ Secularism in Europe. *The Immanent Frame* (Website). Available online: <https://tif.ssrc.org/2016/10/11/a-new-christianist-secularism-in-europe/> (accessed on 1 February 2019).
- Brubaker, Rogers. 2017a. Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 8: 1191–226. [CrossRef]
- Brubaker, Rogers. 2017b. Why Populism? *Theory and Society* 5: 357–85. [CrossRef]
- Čisáň, Ondřej, and Václav Štětka. 2017. Czech Republic: The rise of populism from the fringes to the mainstream. In *Populist Political Communication in Europe*. Edited by Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, Carsten Reinemann, Jesper Strömbäck and Claes H. de Vreese. New York: Routledge, pp. 285–98.

- Conférence du 6 March 2017: Rogers Brubaker. 2017. Report of Rogers Brubaker's Contributions to Discussions About "The Nationalist Populist Moment in Europe". It Took Place during the Seminar "Religion, Politics and Populism in Europe" Organized by the IEE Pôle Jean Monnet, The CEVIPOL and Arc En Valeur. Available online: <http://cevipol.ulb.ac.be/sites/default/files/conference-rogers-brubaker-c.r.etudiants.13-3-17.pdf> (accessed on 5 October 2018).
- Crandall, Christian, Jason Miller, and Mark White. 2018. Changing Norms Following the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election: The Trump Effect on Prejudice. *Social Psychology and Personality Science* 2: 186–92. [CrossRef]
- Davies, William. 2018. Why We Stopped Trusting Elites. *The Guardian*, November 29. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/nov/29/why-we-stopped-trusting-elites-the-new-populism> (accessed on 14 February 2019).
- Dearden, Lizzie. 2017. Emmanuel Macron Claims Africa Held Back By "Civilisational" Problems and Women Having "Seven Or Eight Children". *The Independent*, July 11. Available online: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/emmanuel-macron-africa-development-civilisation-problems-women-seven-eight-children-colonialism-a7835586.html> (accessed on 13 February 2019).
- DeHanas, Daniel Nilsson, and Marat Shterin. 2018. Religion and the Rise of Populism. *Religion, State and Society* 3: 177–85. [CrossRef]
- Delingpole, James. 2016. Czech Politician: West Will Have to "Crush" Islam. *Breitbart*, May 21. Available online: <https://www.breitbart.com/europe/2016/05/21/czech-politician-islam-is-incompatible-with-western-civilization/> (accessed on 18 February 2019).
- DiMaggio, Anthony R. 2019. *Political Power in America. Class Conflict and the Subversion of Democracy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Eiermann, Martin, Yascha Mounck, and Limor Gultchin. 2017. *European Populism: Trends, Threats and Future Prospects*. Report. London: Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, December 29.
- Ekström, Mats, Marianna Patrona, and Joanna Thornborrow. 2018. Right-Wing Populism and The Dynamics of Style: A Discourse-Analytic Perspective on Mediated Political Performances. *Palgrave Communications* 83: 1–11. [CrossRef]
- Farny, Elisabeth. 2016. Implications of the Securitisation of Migration. *E-International Relations*, January 29. Available online: <http://www.e-ir.info/2016/01/29/implications-of-the-securitisation-of-migration/> (accessed on 29 August 2016).
- Friedman, Saul S. 1973. *No Haven for the Oppressed. United States Policy Towards Jewish Refugees, 1938–1945*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Friedman, Uri. 2017. What Is a Nativist? And Is Donald Trump One? *The Atlantic*. April 11. Available online: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/04/what-is-nativist-trump/521355/> (accessed on 14 February 2019).
- García, Mario. 2018. Nativist, Anti-Immigrant Sentiment in the US Has A Long History. *National Catholic Reporter*. June 27. Available online: <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/ncr-today/nativist-anti-immigrant-sentiment-us-has-long-history> (accessed on 14 February 2019).
- George, Cherian. 2016. *Hate Spin. The Manufacture of Religious Offense and Its Threat to Democracy*. Cambridge and London: MIT Press.
- Greven, Thomas. 2016. *The Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Europe and The United States. A Comparative Perspective*. Perspective. Washington, DC: Friedrich Ebert Foundation, May 16.
- Guerrero, Jean. 2020. *Hatemonger: Stephen Miller, Donald Trump, and the White Nationalist Agenda*. New York: William Morrow.
- Haynes, Jeffrey. 2016. *Expert Comment: National Sovereignty, Globalisation and Securitisation of International Migration*. Berlin: Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute, September 29. Available online: <https://doc-research.org/en/report2/national-sovereignty-globalisation-securitisation-international-migration/> (accessed on 7 July 2020).
- Haynes, Jeffrey. 2017. Donald Trump, "Judeo-Christian Values," and the "Clash of Civilizations". *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 15: 66–75.
- Haynes, Jeffrey. 2019a. Introduction: The "Clash of Civilizations" and Relations between the West and the Muslim World. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 17: 1–10.
- Haynes, Jeffrey. 2019b. From Huntington to Trump: Twenty-Five years of the "Clash of Civilizations". *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 17: 11–23.

- Haynes, Jeffrey. 2019c. *From Huntington to Trump: Thirty Years of the Clash of Civilizations*. New York: Lexington Books.
- Haynes, Jeffrey. 2020. Trump and the Politics of International Religious Freedom. *Religions* 11: 385. [CrossRef]
- Herbert, David. 2020. Religion and Society. In *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Political Parties*. Edited by Jeffrey Haynes. London: Routledge, pp. 31–43.
- History of the Visegrád Group. 2019. Available online: <http://www.visegradgroup.eu/history/history-of-the-visegrad> (accessed on 18 February 2019).
- Huntington, Samuel. 1996. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Normanton: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Huntington, Samuel. 2004. *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Huysmans, Jeff. 2000. The European Union and the Securitization of Migration. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 5: 751–77. [CrossRef]
- Jethani, Skye. 2016. Christianity Leads to Atheism. Available online: <https://skyejethani.com/trump-and-the-heresy-of-christianism/> (accessed on 13 February 2019).
- Jones, Tobias. 2018. The Fascist Movement That Has Brought Mussolini Back to The Mainstream. *The Guardian*, February 22. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/feb/22/casapound-italy-mussolini-fascism-mainstream> (accessed on 14 February 2019).
- Joppke, Christian. 2018. Culturalizing Religion in Western Europe: Patterns and Puzzles. *Social Compass* 2: 234–46. [CrossRef]
- Kalmar, Ivan. 2018. Islamophobia in the East of the European Union: An Introduction. *Patterns of Prejudice* 5: 389–405. [CrossRef]
- Kamali, Mohammad Kashim. 2015. *The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kaya, Ayhan, and Ayşe Tecmen. 2019. Europe versus Islam? Right-Wing Populist Discourse and the Construction of a Civilizational Identity. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 1: 49–64.
- Kratochvíl, Petr. 2019. Religion as a Weapon: Invoking Religion in Secularized Societies. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 1: 78–88.
- Lloyd, John. 2017. Commentary: Now, a Different Clash of Civilizations. *Reuters: Commentary*, December 15. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lloyd-civilizations-commentary/commentary-now-a-different-clash-of-civilizations-idUSKBN1E923J> (accessed on 14 February 2019).
- Majtenyi, Balazs, Akos Koer, and Pal Susanszky. 2019. Constitutional othering, Ambiguity and Subjective Risks of Mobilization in Hungary: Examples from the Migration Crisis. *Democratization* 2: 173–89. [CrossRef]
- Malice, Michael. 2018. Alt-Right Bible “Camp of The Saints” Proves Everyone’s Still Insane”. *The Observer*, May 2. Available online: <https://observer.com/2018/05/the-insanity-of-alt-right-bannon-aved-the-camp-of-the-saints/> (accessed on 14 February 2019).
- Mandaville, Peter. 2017. Designating Muslims: Islam in the Western Policy Imagination. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 3: 54–65.
- Mandhai, Shafik. 2017. How Big an Issue Is Islamophobia in Poland? *Al Jazeera*, November 14. Available online: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/big-issue-islamophobia-poland-171113064903344.html> (accessed on 5 October 2018).
- Marchetti, Raffaele. 2016. *Global Strategic Engagement*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Mason, Rowena. 2015. Nigel Farage: British Muslim “Fifth Column” Fuels Fear of Immigration. *The Guardian*, March 12. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/mar/12/nigel-farage-british-muslim-fifth-column-fuels-immigration-fear-ukip> (accessed on 14 February 2019).
- Milton, Daniel. 2017. Does the Cure Address the Problem? Examining the Trump Administration’s Executive Order on Immigration from Muslim-majority Countries Using Publicly Available Data on Terrorism. *Perspectives on Terrorism*. Available online: <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/625> (accessed on 13 May 2019).
- Mudde, Cas. 2007. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ozzano, Luca. 2019. Religion, Cleavages and Right-Wing Populist Parties: The Italian Case’. *The Review of Faith and International Affairs* 1: 65–77. [CrossRef]
- Polakow-Suransky, Sasha. 2017. *Go Back to Where You Came From: The Backlash against Immigration and the Fate of Western Democracy*. New York: Nation Books.

- Rossi, Michael. 2019. Slovakia's 'Progressive Turn' is a Rejection of Corruption—Not a Stand against Populism. Evidence-Based Analysis and Commentary on European Politics, London School of Economics. June 14. Available online: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2019/06/14/slovakias-progressive-turn-is-a-rejection-of-corruption-not-a-stand-against-populism/> (accessed on 2 July 2019).
- Ryan, Ben. 2018. Christianity: A Crude Political Ideology and the Triumph of Empty Symbolism. Religion and Global Society. Available online: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2018/11/christianism-a-crude-political-ideology-and-the-triumph-of-empty-symbolism/> (accessed on 13 February 2019).
- Sharify-Funk, Meena. 2013. Pervasive Anxiety about Islam: A Critical Reading of Contemporary "Clash" Literature. *Religions* 4: 443–68. [CrossRef]
- Siddiqui, Sabrina. 2019. Steve King, White Supremacy and the Problem with Donald Trump. *The Guardian*, January 20. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jan/20/steve-king-is-representative-of-the-problem-with-donald-trump> (accessed on 13 February 2019).
- Stewart, Katherine. 2020. *The Power Worshipers. Inside the Dangerous rise of Religious Nationalism*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Subtirelu, Nicholas. 2017. Donald Trump Supporters and the Denial of Racism: An Analysis of Online Discourse in a Pro-Trump Community. *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict* 2: 323–46. [CrossRef]
- Sullivan, Andrew. 2013. The Decline and Fall of Christianity. *The Dish*, October 23. Available online: <http://dish.andrewsullivan.com/2013/10/23/the-decline-and-fall-of-christianism/> (accessed on 13 February 2019).
- Than, Krisztina. 2018. Hungary Seeks Broader Anti-Migrant Alliance after Austria, Italy Elections. *Reuters*, March 12. Available online: <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-europe-migrants-hungary-minister/hungary-seeks-broader-anti-migrant-alliance-after-austria-italy-elections-idUKKCN1GO25A> (accessed on 18 February 2019).
- Tondo, Lorenzo. 2018. Italy's Matteo Salvini Joins Bannon's European Populist Group. *The Guardian*, September 8. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/08/italy-matteo-salvini-joins-steve-bannon-european-populist-group-movement> (accessed on 5 October 2018).
- Waeber, Ole. 2006. Fear and Faith: Religion as an International Security Issue. Lecture at the Mershon Center, Ohio State University. May 17. Available online: <https://kb.osu.edu/bitstream/handle/1811/30197/Ole%20W%20c3%a6ver%205-17-06.pdf?sequence=4> (accessed on 13 February 2019).
- Walker, Shaun, and Daniel Boffey. 2018. Hungary Election: OSCE Monitors Deliver Damning Verdict. *The Guardian*, April 9. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/09/hungary-election-osce-monitors-deliver-damning-verdict> (accessed on 18 February 2018).
- Weyland, Kurt. 2013. Latin America's Authoritarian Drift: The Threat from The Populist Left. *Journal of Democracy* 3: 18–32. [CrossRef]
- Whitehead, Andrew, Samuel Perry, and Joseph O. Baker. 2018. Make America Christian Again: Christian Nationalism and Voting for Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election. *Sociology of Religion* 2: 147–71. [CrossRef]
- Young, Julia G. 2017. Making America 1920 Again? Nativism and US Immigration, Past and Present. *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 1: 217–35. [CrossRef]
- Zemni, Sami. 2002. Islam, European Identity and the Limits of Multiculturalism. In *Religious Freedom and the Neutrality of the State: The Position of the European Union*. Edited by Wasif Shadid and Pieter S. van Koningsveld. Leuven: Peeters, pp. 146–61.

