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State and Faith: Right-wing Populism and Nationalized
Religion in Hungary

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Abstract

Our paper explores how populist radical right-wing forces re-interpret religion, and re-frame Christianity in a non-universalistic, nationalistic way to legitimize their rule in Hungary. Populism is considered as an anti-elitist, anti-institutional political behavior that identifies with ‘the people’, and enhances their ‘direct’ participation in the political process as opposed to representative government. Populism has an ideological character but in itself does not have a particular ideological content. As a form of government it is based on popular participation with limited public contest for power. Although neither Fidesz nor Jobbik appeared before the electorate as a deeply religious political party, both of them have portrayed themselves as socially conservative, ‘Christian’ nationalists. This implied a form of institutionalized cooperation between them and the large historical Christian churches. The Orbán regime demonstrates that radical right-wing populism employs a quasi-religious ideological construction through which it attempts to mobilize a wider social spectrum: ethno-nationalism. This surrogate religion offers a nationalist and paganized understanding of Christianity and elevates the concept of ethnically defined nation to a sacred status.

Keywords: populism, radical right, religion, Christianity, nationalism, Hungary.

The relation between right-wing politics and religious world views in Central and Eastern Europe in general and in Hungary in particular has been subject of recent academic research (Enyedi, 2000 and 2003; Máthé-Tóth and Rughinis, 2011; Pirro, 2015; Minkenberg, 2015). This inquiry fits into the long-standing research interest in religious interventions into politics and the role of the church in shaping policy decisions (Koesel, 2014; Grzymala-Busse, 2015). In this paper we argue that although in Hungary the relationship between right-wing populism and religion is of secondary importance only in setting the right-wing political agenda, historical Christian churches take part in providing legitimacy for right-wing populism.¹ We agree with those who argue that Fidesz is not a moderate center-right conservative party any more due to its political radicalization driven by party president and prime minister Orbán (Mudde, 2015). The governing Fidesz party², and its far-right (semi-)opposition Jobbik³, that are both considered to be radical right-wing populist parties, in turn, make religious references to signal their traditional social values and identification with the societal mainstream. While Jobbik tends to mainstream extremism, Fidesz radicalizes the mainstream.

As Hungary has been fairly secularized, right-wing populist parties cannot afford to appear in front of the electorate as political representatives of churches or religious values. Yet, both Fidesz and Jobbik tend to refer to religious values and to seek church support as we will show. As a result, a link between right-wing populism and religion has been created in Hungarian politics in the previous 25 years, following long-standing historical patterns originating from the inter-war period. Meanwhile, liberal and left-wing parties have rather promoted secular ideologies. The divide between leftist/liberal-centrist versus anti-communist parties thus has appeared following the classic secular vs. confessional cleavage (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967).

In the following, first we will present our understanding of political populism. Secondly, we will discuss the rise of right-wing populism in Hungary and its dominance since the end of the 2000s. Thirdly, we will look at the role of religion in right-wing politics and the relation between churches and right-wing parties. Fourthly, before the conclusions, we will discuss the phenomenon of right-wing nationalism as a surrogate religion.

¹ 'Right-wing' in East Central Europe is defined in cultural rather than economic terms. It usually contains (ethnic) nationalism, social conservatism, elements of religious traditions and historical references to patriotism (Kitschelt, 1992).

² Since 2003, the full name of the party: Fidesz - Magyar Polgári Szövetség (Fidesz - Hungarian Civic Alliance). From 1989 to 1995 the party used the name Fial Demokraták Szövetsége (Alliance of Young Democrats) which was changed to Fidesz - Magyar Polgári Párt (Fidesz - Hungarian Civic Party) in 1995. As of 1995 the name Fidesz is no longer an abbreviation but a noun.

³ The full name of the party: *Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom* (Movement for a Better Hungary).

1. Populism as politics of under-institutionalization

We consider populism as an anti-elitist political ideology, sentiment, and movement which contrasts the interests of the ‘pure people’, often presented as oppressed and innocent, with the oppressive, corrupt elite and its foreign allies. Populists favor ‘the people’ over any other options (Canovan, 1981; Mudde, 2007; Kriesi and Pappas, 2015). As Edward Shils famously observed, ‘according to populism the will of the people enjoys top priority in the face of any other principle, right, and institutional standard. Populists identify the people with justice and morality’ (Shils, 1956: 97). As Shils’ definition implies, for populists, people’s justice, independently from its actual content, is regarded more important than the procedures of the rule of law.

When electorally successful, populist parties come to power and form government. As they initially represent an anti-elitist and anti-institutional stance, their administrative performance may well run into difficulties, and they often under-deliver on promises. Yet, the Fidesz administration in Hungary since 2010 has demonstrated that populist parties can be successful in power, and their administrative performance might well be sufficient to get re-elected. Fidesz managed to combine anti-elitism, nationalism and an anti-EU stance with a pragmatist approach in most policy areas, presenting a charismatic leadership, allegedly defending the national interest and those of ordinary people.

Populism does not have a particular and permanent ideological content but rather an anti-elitist approach to politics that has sought political mass-mobilization and mass-participation in the political process (Laclau, 2005). In this sense populism is truly ‘democratic’ even if it fails to live up to (or openly rejects) the constitutional norms of liberal democracy. While engaging in mass-mobilization, populist parties tend to manipulate the public discourse by using mass media outlets and advocating their own (often ideologically defined) world views. These ideological contents might be nationalistic, xenophobic, anti-gay, anti-liberal, anti-western or, anti-Semite, anti-Arab, anti-Muslim or, for that matter, even neoliberal: the only criteria is that along the particular ideological content populist political entrepreneurs must be able to perform top-down mass-mobilization. Once this requirement is attained, populism can serve various ideological purposes: it can be nationalist, socialist, semi-fascist or even neoliberal (Bozóki, 2015a). Populism might extend any of these ideas as the unifying and homogenizing idea of the nation. Therefore, populism can be described ‘as the militant use of political partisanship for the sake of overcoming pluralism in partisan views and creating a unified opinion, that is to say, by making one partisan view representative of the whole people’ (Urbinati, 2014: 109).

Populism in power can be also understood as a way of governance in which power is personalized and its execution organized along personal relations. This has to do with permanent mass-mobilization as a means of popular legitimation: as formal political and administrative institutions need to be sufficiently fluid to allow for mass participation in politics, the organizing principle of power resorts to personal authority. Populism promises broad inclusion of the society but usually end up in producing a new vertical political setting. ‘Simplification and polarization produce verticalization of political consent, which inaugurates a deeper unification of the masses under an organic narrative and a charismatic or *Caesarist* leader personating it’

(Urbinati, 2014: 131). Populism represents a certain regression towards pre-democratic politics in an era of mass-democracy when political legitimation is conditioned on the open expression of mass political will. Yet, such a popular legitimation process typically takes place under illiberal or semi-authoritarian conditions that insure the continued power of the ruling populist party of government, while curtailing the opposition's chances to raise an effective electoral challenge.

This illiberal or semi-authoritarian rule is, however, not always easy to maintain.⁴ The open expression of political will requires a degree of formal institutionalization of the political process – a condition populist governments have difficulties to cope with once they start losing popularity. In fact, the loss of popularity in case of populist governments easily turns into loss of legitimacy: i.e., the loss of the popular belief that those in government justifiably exercise power even if their policies are harmful for some part of the electorate and hence do not enjoy unanimous approval. In consequence, populist governments typically try to maintain their popularity even at very high long term economic costs. Because of the type of legitimacy populist governments enjoy, such economic policies can still make sense politically on the short run (Sachs, 1989; Dornbusch and Edwards, 1989). This was mainly a characteristic of left wing populism in Latin America that sought popular legitimation through the inclusion of under-privileged social classes. Neoliberal populism, in turn, pursued market reforms and maintained economically sustainable but politically increasingly oppressive policies (Gibson, 1997). None of these regimes led toward liberal democracy.

However, all types of populism tends to rely on charismatic, personalized rule, in contrast to the impersonalized, rational bureaucratic legitimacy characteristic of industrialized Western societies (Weber, 1978 [1922]). Traditional and charismatic legitimacy in a Weberian sense do not require any formal act of mass-approval of power. Populism, on the other hand, is based on formal approval of governance by people, and populist political regimes in this sense belong to the tradition of modernized, secular power. However, as a result of weak political institutions, bureaucratic legitimacy is typically not sufficient to preserve political stability in relatively less developed societies. Therefore, charismatic legitimacy continues to play a dominant role, along with formal mass-approval of power.⁵ Hence, populism in a Weberian context can be labeled as an attempt to rationalize, and thus justify, charismatic rule, in which political leaders themselves become institutions and power tends to be personalized.

In other words, populism is a shortcut for establishing the missing element of impersonal institutions. In the absence of sufficiently strong civil societies and political institutions, populism makes up for the missing element of bureaucratic legitimacy.⁶

⁴ For the consequences of under-institutionalization in authoritarian regimes see (Gandhi, 2008).

⁵ To be sure, charismatic and traditional legitimacy play a crucial role in mature liberal democracies as well. Identification with particular politicians, their personal characteristics and capability to represent a set of 'sacred values' in a particular society remain to be decisive elements of democratic political life (Williams, 2015; Berrett-Koehler and Hofstede, 1997).

⁶ In line with this observation, the critique of technocratic, impersonalized power in modern societies emphasizes the positive role of populism in making society once again the dominant political actor instead of professionalized technocratic elites (Laclau, 2005).

However, a political regime based on a personalized way of governance, lacking rationally organized bureaucratic institutions remains predictably unstable (Horowitz, 1992). This fits our conceptual framework: as personal authority in populism tends to substitute for institutional authority, the loss of popularity of leaders tends to create systemic crises, while the transfer of power from one leader to another is typically a great challenge for a populist government.

Populism uses a direct style of expression to address its followers. It is a politics that opposes intellectual sophistication, it displays a lack of any ambiguity, relies on passion, emotions, and religious worship. In short, populism is the ‘politics of faith’ (Canovan). Populist leaders are often tempted to rely on the infrastructure of the Church in order to substitute the missing links in the ‘infrastructural power’⁷ of the state, particularly at times of crises. By ‘outsourcing’ this infrastructural power to the Church populist leaders can maintain their power over the remnants of state institutions that perform the vital function of coercive power

Modern democratic populism in the post-WWII era can be interpreted as the substitute of totalitarian politics in a period of mass democracies (Ionescu and Gellner, 1969). Modern populism originally appeared in South America where illiberal politics was less discredited than in Western Europe. Modern populists, such as Argentina’s Juan D. Perón, managed to combine popular participation with the oppression of the political opposition (Laclau, 1987). As an observer put it, ‘populism emerged as a form of authoritarian democracy for the postwar world; one that could adapt the totalitarian version of politics to the post-war hegemony of democratic representation. While it curtailed political rights, populism expanded social rights; and at the same it put limits to the more radical emancipatory combinations of both’ (Finchelstein, 2014: 467).

Hence, populist governments are typically ‘democratic’ in the sense of seeking mass-approval of power, but they build ‘illiberal democracies’ in which governments are not constrained by the rule of law, and impose a majoritarian approach of governance, systematically exploiting political minorities, and ensuring their reelection by using public resources. They approximate Robert Dahl’s ‘inclusive hegemony’ that allows for limited participation but curtails contest for political power (Dahl, 1971). Some populists tend to use plebiscitarian mass support in order to transform established institutions into more ‘flexible’ ones. They concentrate power in the hands of the president, limit debates, strike at opponents, and tend to use state resources and state apparatus for campaigning. They seek to deconstruct democratic accountability by eliminating safeguards against arbitrary rule. Other populists favor market economy, they also push for undemocratic constitutional changes and embrace an increasingly personalist leadership style and the practice of rule by ‘emergency’ decrees. Leaders in both camps tend to dismantle checks and balances, intimidate the opposition, attacking the privately owned media, co-opting civil society organizations and trying to build new ‘civic’ organizations from the top down (Cf. Mazzuca, 2013; Weyland, 2013). Contemporary populist phenomena include

⁷For distinction between infrastructural and coercive power and a detailed analysis of dimensions of state power see Mann (1984, 1986).

‘videocratic forms of popular identification, simplified polarization of public opinion into niches of self-referential creeds, dogmatic radicalization of political ideologies, and the search for a winning leader in the age of the public’ (Urbinati, 2014: 133). Populist leaders tend to selectively disregard the norms and procedures of liberal democracy. In Europe, Viktor Orbán’s regime is a prime example of similar politics.⁸

2. The populist takeover of Hungary

Strengthening of right-wing populist and extreme nationalist movements across Europe has puzzled democratic theorists and worldwide observers alike as a trend that would seem to be incompatible in the purportedly liberal democracies in which they are taking root. In the nearly three decades since the collapse of communism in the former Soviet bloc, countries in East-Central Europe have struggled to create a democratic legacy and propel their societies towards democratic futures. In Hungary – although the Round-table Talks of 1989 led to a democratic arrangement and nonviolent transition from communism to a market economy and democracy (Bozóki, 2002) – many Hungarians have become disillusioned by their post-transition situation. A sense that democracy was ‘stolen’ from Hungarians has arisen and that a new transformation must be undertaken if Hungary is to be truly vindicated after centuries of indignity under various imperial powers and then under communism.

A 2009 Pew Research report measured public opinion of democracy and the current state of affairs in post-communist states. Tellingly, 77 per cent of Hungarian respondents indicated their frustration with the way Hungarian democracy had worked within the time period of 1991-2009, and 91 per cent of Hungarians thought that Hungary was not on the right track.⁹ Approval of democracy in Hungary immediately following the fall of communism was at 74 per cent, whereas by 2009 this figure had fallen eighteen percentage points to 56 per cent.¹⁰

In 2010, shortly after these survey results were published, Orbán’s nationalist Fidesz party won the elections with an absolute majority, which was translated, due to the disproportionate electoral rules, into a two-thirds parliamentary supermajority. Not insignificantly, Jobbik took 17 per cent of the vote in addition to Fidesz’s 53 per cent, representing a noteworthy increase in radical right wing representation in Hungarian elections.

Using its two-thirds parliamentary majority, Fidesz altered the constitutional system. Not only did they introduce a new constitution, but they also changed electoral rules and fundamental laws, governing the relationships among government bodies and between the government and the citizenry (Bozóki, 2011; Korkut, 2014).

⁸ For analyses of the Orbán regime see Bozóki (2011, 2015b, 2015c, 2016), Csillag and Szelényi (2015), Kornai (2011, 2015), Körösényi (2015), Magyar (2015, 2016), Pataki (2013), and Ungváry (2014).

⁹ For more details see ‘Two Decades after the Wall’s Fall: End of Communism Cheered but Now with More Reservations.’ (2009), *The Pew Global Attitudes Project*. Pew Research Center, November 2, <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/pdf/267.pdf> Accessed: 11-03-2016.

¹⁰ Ibid.

The authoritarian turn was carried out using the two-thirds parliamentary majority only, lacking any meaningful concession to the opposition and without a referendum or other institutionalized way of popular approval of the new Fundamental Law that replaced the Constitution of 1989. The Fundamental Law suffers a critical lack of legitimacy, and hence will be relatively easy to modify by a future liberal democratic majority (Kis, 2012). However, perhaps the most shocking aspect of the Fidesz takeover from a liberal democratic viewpoint has been the fact that even this restricted legitimacy seems to represent a larger, more extensive popular political appeal than the pre-2010 liberal democratic regime did. In this sense, the right wing populism of Fidesz that is in many ways based on exclusionary policies appear to be more successful – and for some key electoral groups more inclusive – than the left-wing populism of previous center-left coalitions had been. Whereas Fidesz exercises authoritarian rule and exerts strict state control over society and economy, center-left governments maintained liberal democratic institutions and pursued inclusive policies through providing economically unsustainability social provisions.¹¹ Whereas Fidesz built an economic clientèle, the center-left let multinational companies run the economy. By introducing a flat personal income tax, Fidesz increased the taxation of lower incomes and reduced that of higher ones. It also provided large tax allowances for high earning middle class families – and in real terms much smaller ones for low earners. Hence, it redistributed money from the relatively poor to the relatively rich, relying on the political support of the latter, but also gaining popularity among the former as a nationalist government providing law and order after the 'two chaotic decades of transition'.

Increasing economic problems after 2006 were widely associated with the failure of liberalism and the political Left. The fact that left-wing governments privatized national assets both in the 1990s and the 2000s – according to right-wing parties, allegedly benefiting former communist oligarchs – pushed the right-wing electorate to adopt simultaneously anti-communists and anti-capitalist attitudes. The visible rise in foreign direct investment reinforced their perception of liberal elitism and crony-ism between a 'comprador bourgeoisie', made up by former communists and multi-national capital. In short, the economic crisis of the 2000s alongside the insustainability of populist economic policies played a major role in the delegitimization of liberal democracy (Korkut, 2012: 60).

At the June 2009 European parliamentary elections, center-right Fidesz gained 56 per cent of popular votes whereas far-right Jobbik received 15 per cent. Next, in the spring 2010 national elections, Fidesz received 53 per cent and Jobbik got 17. Due to the disproportional electoral system, Fidesz' victory was transformed into a two-thirds parliamentary majority. Left-wing and centrist parties together gained less than 20 per cent of parliamentary seats. The takeover by the populist Right was completed politically and ideologically¹² and a new, anti-liberal regime was established. Liberal democracy has been replaced by an illiberal one, and later on, since the unfair

¹¹ For a discussion on economic policies prior to 2010 see Ádám (2015).

¹² On Hungarian populism see Bozóki (2015a) and Enyedi (2015).

elections of 2014, by a hybrid regime, a mix of democratic and autocratic practices.¹³ In a hybrid regime, formal democratic institutions exist and are viewed as the primary means of gaining power, but in which incumbents' abuse of the state brings them a significant advantage against their opponents. Even if such a regime is competitive, it is not democratic due to the uneven playing field favoring them, created by the incumbents.¹⁴

3. Radical right populism and politicized christianity

Historical Christian churches had been traditionally strongly affiliated to right-wing politics in inter-war Hungary, providing popular legitimacy for the Horthy regime¹⁵ that relied on the so called 'Christian national middle class,' and considered itself anti-liberal, anti-Semitic and strongly nationalist. 'Christian' in this context first of all meant non-Jewish: reducing the economic, social and cultural influence of the generally highly assimilated Hungarian Jewish community was a primary ambition of the regime. Hence, Hungary introduced a cap on the number of Jewish university students as early as 1920, which is considered the first anti-Jewish Act of 20th century Europe (Kovács, 2012). As a historian of the inter-war period explained:

In the Horthy era, Hungary can be described as being under an authoritarian political system, operated under a multi-party parliament and government. At the same time, the rule concerning the right to vote were far from democratic, with state institutions serving the governing conservative party. (...) [It] had an overwhelming majority in the parliament, something that made it practically impossible to transform the existing political system. (...) The regime also had its own official ideology, known as 'Christian nationalism'. The latter blamed liberal legislation during the period prior to 1918 for weakening the 'spiritual unity' of the Hungarian nation, something it claimed could only be guaranteed by Christianity. Therefore, after 1920, Church and State were indissolubly linked to the whole of the regime and took on a 'Christian character', implying a complete sharing of interests between the historical Christian Churches and the Hungarian State (Fazekas, 2015).

Fidesz and Jobbik are in many ways successors of inter-war political parties. Fidesz is the current dominant right-wing social conservative party that, in line with Dahl and Finchelstein, allows for participation but severely limits contest for power. As a governing party, it has staged 'National Consultations' along with mass advertisement campaigns, a ritual of masquerading its (often repressive) policies as the result of direct participation. Through its government-sponsored 'civil society organization', called the 'Forum of Civil Alliance', it has staged mass rallies called 'Peace Walks' as

¹³ For the empirical analyses of transformation of liberal democracy into a hybrid regime in Hungary, see Bozóki (2015b, 2016), Magyar (2016), Ungváry (2014).

¹⁴ For more detailed analyses of hybrid or mixed regimes see Levitsky and Way (2010) and Bunce and Wolchik (2011).

¹⁵ Miklós Horthy was Regent of Hungary in 1920-1944. For an historical assessment of the Horthy regime, see Ungváry (2012).

a means of mass mobilization to protect the national interest against 'external enemies' such as the IMF and the EU, and to express solidarity with the government. In a classic authoritarian fashion, Fidesz has hijacked the entire state and made it its own political and economic asset, refusing the principles of limited government and the system of constitutional checks and balances, curtailing the prerogatives of the (otherwise already diluted) Constitutional Court and undermining the institutional autonomy of the judiciary system. Finally, the new voting system has given Fidesz an even larger electoral advantage than a dominant party had enjoyed in the 1990-2010 electoral system, resembling the structural political conditions of the inter-war period at an increased level of participation.

Jobbik, in turn, represents the far-right opposition of the ruling party, following the tradition of the Arrow Cross movement that ruled Hungary in 1944-1945 during the Nazi occupation. It rejects the social and political principles of the European Union, campaigns for a strategic alliance with Russia and other eastern powers, and mobilizes against the Jewish and Roma minorities. Fidesz and Jobbik have both attempted building a mass movement around themselves: whereas Fidesz created the network of 'civic circles', Jobbik built a paramilitary group in uniform, the Hungarian Guard. Since the transformation of Jobbik from movement to party is widely documented (Mikecz, 2015; Tóth and Grajczár, 2015), in the following we focus on their position within the camp of populist radical right and their political relationship to religion.

Fidesz and Jobbik both operate outside the realm of liberal democracy. They both campaign for the extreme right vote, resulting in a strongly nationalist populism in both of their cases (Cueva, 2015; Dobszay, 2015; Krekó and Mayer, 2015; Mudde, 2015). This required Fidesz to adopt increasingly illiberal policies so that maintaining its political dominance and a parliamentary supermajority since 2010. (Fidesz kept its two-third parliamentary majority at the 2014 general elections, labeled as free and unfair, but lost it a year later as a result of a local by-election.) Consequently, the political center shifted further to the right, polarizing left and right and making it more difficult for political moderates to appeal to a mass electorate.¹⁶

One of the most intriguing questions from our point of view is whether the politicization of religion has played a significant role in this further right shift. Our answer is no: Hungarian right-wing populism, performed by Fidesz and Jobbik in an increasingly similar ideological fashion, has used limited religious references in the post-1989 era. The most important reason for this, we argue, is the limited role of churches and religion in the Hungarian society.

¹⁶ This is by no means a new phenomenon in Hungarian politics, though. Polarization had been a characteristic of Hungarian politics since about the mid-1990s (Karácsony, 2006; Körösenyi, 2013).

Table 1. Ratio of believers/non-believers in international comparison. Source: Smith (2008)

Percent of respondents who claim that 'I don't believe in God'		Percent of respondents who claim that 'I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it'	
Germany (East)	52.1	Japan	4,3
Czech Republic	39.9	Germany (East)	7.8
France	23.3	Sweden	10.2
The Netherlands	19.7	Czech Republic	11.1
Sweden	19.3	Denmark	13.0
Latvia	18.3	Norway	14.8
Great Britain	18.0	France	15.5
Denmark	17.9	Great Britain	16.8
Norway	17.4	The Netherlands	21.2
Australia	15.9	Austria	21.4
HUNGARY	15.2	Latvia	21.7
Slovenia	13.2	HUNGARY	23.5
New Zealand	12.6	Slovenia	23.6
Slovakia	11.7	Australia	24.9
Germany (West)	10.3	Switzerland	25.0
Spain	9.7	New Zealand	26.4
Switzerland	9.3	Germany (West)	26.7
Austria	9.2	Russia	30.5
Japan	8.7	Spain	38.4
Russia	6.8	Slovakia	39.2
Northern Ireland	6.6	Italy	41.0
Israel	6.0	Ireland	43.2
Italy	5.9	Northern Ireland	45.6
Portugal	5.1	Portugal	50.9
Ireland	5.0	Cyprus	59.0
Poland	3.3	United States	60.6
United States	3.0	Poland	62.0
Chile	1.9	Israel	65.5
Cyprus	1.9	Chile	79.4
The Philippines	0.7	The Philippines	83.6

Although Hungary is certainly not particularly an atheist society, a clear majority refuses to follow churches and to participate in institutionalized religious activities. Whereas a revival of churchgoing had taken place after 1989, a large part of society still distance themselves from churches and religious references. Hence, appearing to be overly devoted towards religion and churches may alienate a substantial part of the electorate from any particular party.

Although József Torgyán's Independent Smallholder's Party (FKgP)¹⁷ in the 1990s renewed the historic party slogan of 'God, Fatherland, Family', Christianity itself played a limited role even in their relatively old fashioned right-wing populism.¹⁸ As representatives of current right-wing populism, neither Fidesz nor Jobbik defines itself through a religious identity, although in party manifestos both of them claim to be 'Christian'. Yet, Christianity in this context rather signifies a degree of social conservatism and traditional nationalism than expressing any substantive religious reference.

As for Fidesz, party leader Orbán regularly participates in the festive Catholic processions, known as *Szent Jobb Körmenet* (Sacred Right March) held on the anniversary of the foundation of the Hungarian state, August 20, every year. In the meantime, he openly identifies his own political camp with 'the Nation' and takes his opponents as the ones who serve 'foreign interests'. The turn from their original anti-clericalism in the late 1980s and the early 1990s to their openly positive stance towards religion never played a highly important role in the history of Fidesz. A recent book on the history of the party – published by a semi-official publishing house of Fidesz – does not even discuss the role of religion in the formation of party ideology (Oltay, 2012).

The new Fundamental Law adopted in 2011 was the result of a unilateral governmental process, which did not reflect at all a national consensus. This Law, voted by Fidesz MPs only, refers to Hungary as a country based on Christian values (Bánkuti, Halmai and Scheppele, 2015). The text increases the role of religion, traditions and 'national values'. In contrast to the Constitution of 1989, the Fundamental Law of 2011 serves as expression of a secularized national religious belief system: a sort of paganized, particularistic understanding of the universalistic spirit of Christianity. The signing of the Fundamental Law by the President of the Republic took place on the first anniversary of the electoral victory of Fidesz that happened on Easter Monday, April 25, 2011, blasphemously claiming a bizarre parallel between the resurrection of Jesus and the adoption of the new Fidesz constitution (Bozóki, 2015b).

Fidesz uses religious symbols in an eclectic way in which references to Christianity are often mentioned together with the pre-Christian pagan traditions. By politicizing Christianity in this contradictory manner Orbán aims to reconcile conflicting cultural frames in the minds of Hungarians. This approach refers to the idea of 'two Hungaries': the Western Christian, and the Eastern pagan, tribal one.

¹⁷ The full name of the party: *Független Kisgazdapárt* (Independent Smallholder's Party)

¹⁸ József Torgyán, an old-school populist politician, served as Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development and the Development of Countryside at the first Orbán-cabinet between 1998-2001. Five years after his resignation he published a book on Christianity (Torgyán, 2006).

When Orbán talks about the reunification of the Hungarian nation, he intends to re-balance power relations between the two camps. He aims to ‘Christianize’ the pagan traditions – or rather, to paganize Christianity to accommodate it to the needs of the Hungarian nationalist right – when he brings together seemingly incompatible religious symbols. In his vocabulary, the Holy Crown of Saint Stephen, the first Hungarian king, who introduced Christianity in Hungary, can easily go together with the Turul bird, a symbol of pre-Christian, ancient Hungarians. The concept of political nation gave way to the ethnic idea of national consciousness. On inaugurating the monument of ‘National Togetherness’, Viktor Orbán voiced his conviction that the Turul bird is the ancient image into which the Hungarians are born:

From the moment of our births, our seven tribes enter into an alliance, our Saint King Stephen establishes a state, our armies suffer a defeat at the Battle of Mohács, and the Turul bird is the symbol of national identity of the living, the deceased, and the yet-to-be-born Hungarians (Orbán, 2012).

He conjectures that, like a family, the nation also has a natural home – in this case, the Carpathian Basin – where the state-organized world of work produces order and security, and one’s status in the hierarchy defines authority. The legitimacy of the government and the Fundamental Law is not only based on democratic approval, but it is approved by God, and features the spirit of Hungarians represented by the Turul. All these concepts have replaced an earlier public discourse whose central categories were liberal democracy, market economy, pluralism, inalienable human rights, republic, elected political community, and cultural diversity.

As for Jobbik, research proves that its pro-Christian stance simply indicates that the party should be interpreted as ‘non-Jewish’.¹⁹ By using this discourse, Jobbik creates an easily identifiable reference to its anti-Semitism. Founded in 2002 from a conservative university movement, Jobbik’s official ideological standpoint in their own terms is that of a

principled, conservative and radically patriotic Christian party. Its fundamental purpose is protecting Hungarian values and interests. It stands up against the ever more blatant efforts to eradicate the nation as the foundation of human community. Its strategic program takes into consideration the possibility of the crumbling of globalization as we know it in a chain reaction due to its internal weaknesses and its disconnect from the real processes of the economy. The party considers the protection, replenishment and expansion of the national resources crucial. These include the physical and mental condition of the nation, patriotic togetherness and solidarity (Jobbik, 2006).

This ideology is that of a radical right-wing party ‘whose core element is a myth of a homogeneous nation, a romantic and populist ultra-nationalism directed against the concept of liberal and pluralistic democracy and its underlying principles of

¹⁹ Political Capital Institute: Research on religion and right-wing politics. Budapest, 2011.

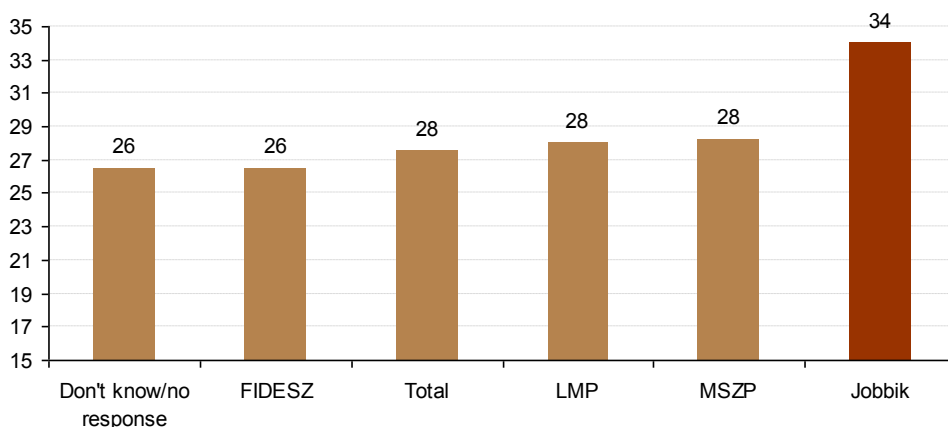
individualism and universalism' (Jobbik, 2006). In addition to this nationalist rhetoric there is an underlying economic appeal that blames globalization for Hungary's troubles.

Pirro identifies Jobbik by its clericalism, irredentism, social-nationalist economic program, and by its anti-Roma, anti-corruption, and anti-EU stance. The party believes that 'national morality can only be based on the strengthening of the teachings of Christ', and Jobbik promotes the spiritual recovery of Hungarians which has to be achieved by returning to the traditional communities, i.e., the family, the churches, and the nation (Pirro, 2015: 71). True, Jobbik was particularly militant against the Roma and against the EU (burning an EU flag and throwing out another one from the window of the Hungarian parliament). It was also vehemently pro-Christian in installing large wooden crosses at several squares of Budapest. Nonetheless, as others explain:

Scapegoating against the Jews and Roma is not what makes Jobbik exceptional in Europe today. (...) The solutions that Jobbik proposes to solve Hungary's problems not only signal an anti-liberal, anti-Semitic, anti-Roma, anti-capitalist, anti-European, and anti-globalist stance (positions that may be shared by other European right-wing parties), but also appear to be historically and culturally hostile to the West (Akcali and Korkut, 2012: 602).

Although Jobbik enjoys the support of certain members of both the Catholic and the Calvinist Churches neither church in general approves of Jobbik and most church leaders tend to distance themselves from it. Despite its manifestly Christian self-identification, Jobbik is seen by many of them as representing an essentially pagan, anti-Christian cultural tradition. This might not be accidental. In fact, despite Jobbik's self-definition as Christian party, Jobbik voters are the *least* religious in Hungary.

Percentage of atheists in party voter camps
(*"I am not religious"*)



Graph 1. Source: Political Capital Institute (2011)

Whereas the followers of churches seem to represent the highest share among Fidesz voters, their ratio is a mere 22 per cent, followed by 15 per cent among Socialist voters. Again, followers of churches represent a conspicuously low 6 per cent among Jobbik voters. At the same time, explicitly non-religious people have the highest share among Jobbik voters (41 per cent), and their share, interestingly enough, is lower among Socialist voters (21 per cent) than among the Fidesz electorate (22 per cent).

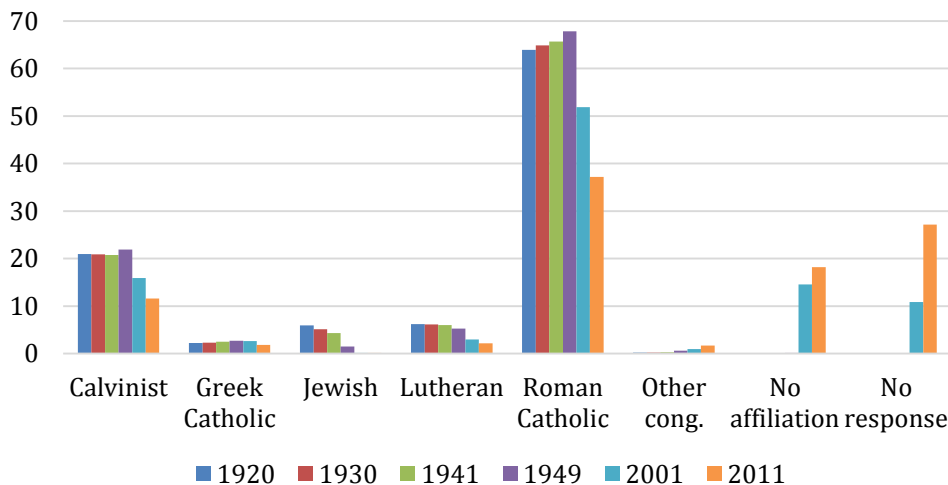
Table 2. Answers to the question 'How much religious are you?' among voters of parliamentary parties (in per cent of the particular party's total electorate). Source: Political Capital Institute (2011)

	I am religious, and I am following the guidance of the church	I am religious on my own way	I am not religious	I cannot tell whether I am religious or not	Refuse to answer	Total
Fidesz-KDNP	22	51	22	5	1	100
Jobbik	6	43	41	9	1	100
MSZP	15	57	21	7	1	100
LMP	4	51	35	9	1	100

While Fidesz has probably been the most preferred political party by Christian churches since at least the beginning of the 2000s, and Prime Minister Orbán has on numerous occasions identified himself as a Christian believer, Fidesz has established a strategic alliance with the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP), a dominantly Catholic historic party, since 2002. As part of their agreement, KDNP has been provided a sufficient number of parliamentary seats to form its own parliamentary faction and is also allocated a generous number of government positions when they are in power. In exchange, KDNP has effectively given up its separate political identity and become a Fidesz-satellite, endorsing its 'Christianity' by its sheer name.

Although certainly not disliked by the Catholic Church, Fidesz probably has closer ties to the Calvinist Church, Hungary's second largest congregation. Orbán himself is Calvinist and one of its closest political confidants, Minister of Human Resources, Zoltán Balog was a Calvinist pastor before joining professional politics. Orbán likes to attend religious ceremonies and to deliver semi-public speeches in churches. Correspondingly, Fidesz's relation to Churches is friendly but not strongly institutionalized. Yet, Christianity in general serves as a broad ideological reference, and at some politically prominent instances this reference becomes more concrete. For instance, in the new 'Memorial of the German Occupation of 1944-45' on Szabadság tér, a central square in Budapest, Hungary is represented by Archangel Gabriel, being attacked by the German imperial eagle. This is a highly controversial

new memorial that seeks to modify the public discourse on Hungary's role in WWII, depicting the country as a victim rather than a perpetrator. In this context, Hungary is represented by the Archangel, providing an obviously religious reference for national identity politics. Nevertheless, Fidesz typically refrains from directly advocating hardcore religious ideas that may alienate people. We explain this by the fact that Fidesz is a large umbrella organization, 'the party of power', and its voters typically do not nurture strong religious identities. Therefore, while using religion to justify its populist policies, Fidesz have to keep a delicate balance.



Graph 2. Share of religious congregations in Hungary (in per cent of the total population). Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office, census data

Somewhat similarly, Jobbik does not appear to be a representative of religious interests either. In contrast to other right-wing populist parties of the region, for instance Law and Justice (PiS) in Poland, it does not appear to be the protagonist of religious values. In contrast, it sometimes seems to nurture pagan affiliations, cultivating a longstanding relation of far-right or Nazi political culture to pre-Christian paganism. However, just like Fidesz, Jobbik also has its own direct links to the Calvinist Church with one of the most prominent Budapest pastors being an explicit supporter while his wife, another Calvinist pastor by profession, being an elected Jobbik MP.

The particular congregation run by this couple happens to be located on Szabadság tér in Budapest, in about 50 meters from the German Occupation Memorial. On the staircase of the church, already on private property but facing the entire square, is a bust of Admiral Horthy, a present day extreme right political icon, who in fact fought the extreme right parties of the 1930s and 40s, and incarcerated the leader of the Arrow Cross movement, Ferenc Szálasi, who subsequently replaced him as head of state in October 1944 with the assistance of the Nazis. This is the way religious ideas and (semi-) public religious spaces meet radical right politics in present day Hungary: typically they do not themselves create political identities, but both Fidesz and Jobbik use them as references to secure their positions and enhance their legitimacy as protagonists of the right-wing political cause.

4. Sacralization of the nation

Whereas neither Fidesz nor Jobbik can be considered to be the political representatives of specific churches or particular religious values, radical right-wing populism itself can be understood as a kind of surrogate religion, as for many socially conservatives and/or nationalists it provides a sacred subject to worship. Hungarian right-wing populism uses Christianity as a reference, but its political content often appears to be in contrast to Christian values. Instead, it advocates an ethno-nationalistic surrogate religion in which the nation itself becomes a sacred entity and national identification carries religious attributes. Although from a Christian perspective this represents a kind of worldly paganism, and as such should be dismissed on actual religious grounds, this kind of surrogate religion is able to draw a sizable crowd as followers in Hungary as well as in other countries. Such a surrogate, paganized Christianity has little to do with actual religious beliefs, though, even if it uses religion in general and Christianity in particular as a source of political endorsement. As Tamás Szilágyi argued:

Though radical right-wing ideology places itself in the political field, it uses a syncretistic religious narrative to legitimate its program, the central elements of which are the sacralization of the Hungarian nation, the idea of chosen people, the designation of the national territory as a sacral space, and the inclusion of religious moral elements into political rhetoric. The Hungarian radical right-wing does not only designate religious doctrines as the source of ideals and values that underpin its political actions, but the orientation towards the transcendental also appears specifically in its ideological direction. The elements of Christianity and the ancient Hungarian pagan faith are mixed in the religious narratives of the radical right-wing ideology. (...) In the Hungarian radical right-wing, the groups using Christian rhetoric seem to enjoy the most popularity, but the currently marginal paganism-oriented group plays a more and more increasing role (Szilágyi, 2011: 252).

The nation as a sacred collective entity is a crucial element of both Jobbik's and Fidesz's political ideology, and large historic Christian churches typically subscribe to this. The dominant attitude of the Roman Catholic and the Calvinist Churches – the two largest Christian congregations – approves it, and only smaller Christian churches, notably the traditionally more liberal Lutherans and some evangelical communities, tend to distance themselves from it. Christianity and the two largest Christian Churches, thus play a legitimizing role of populist right-wing politics, in line with the long-standing historical pattern in inter-war Hungary.

The role of churches is important precisely because of the lack of rationally operating social and political institutions that integrate the nation as a political community. Instead, churches provide ideological resources to support right-wing populism, essentially playing a propaganda role for the regime. In exchange for this, a growing share of publicly financed services in education and health care are being administered by the historical Christian churches. This makes institutional relations

between churches and secular authorities increasingly vital for both the churches and the state: church-run schools, hospitals and even universities are quite generously financed by the government but in exchange they need to fulfill certain administrative criteria in operation. Another way of the institutionalized participation of churches in everyday life is the incorporation of religious studies into the national curriculum of elementary schools that the Fidesz government introduced from 2013.²⁰

Religious conflicts, such as the opposition to Islam or other religions have not played a major role in political identity creation so far. Unlike their radical West European counterparts, the Hungarian populist Right has not displayed any strong anti-Islam stance, which was probably due to its traditional anti-Semitism. This attitude changed recently due to the increasing number of migrants to Hungary from the Middle East. In the summer of 2015, the Hungarian government built a wire netting fence on the border between Serbia and Hungary to prevent *any* form of migration regardless to the political or economic motifs. It also took the opportunity to raise its popularity by conducting a populist hate campaign against immigrants, which was, however, rather based on ethnicity than religion.

To demonstrate the state of mind of the Hungarian radical Right on the migration issue, it is worth referring to Péter Boross, a former prime minister of Hungary and former advisor to Viktor Orbán, who has equally been close to Fidesz and Jobbik. In an interview, Boross blames the United States for the rise of the number of refugees in Europe and the crisis in the Middle East. In his comment he criticizes the Americans for maintaining universalistic principles, like democracy and God, instead of accepting local democracies and local Gods.²¹ As influential father figure in shaping the ideas of the Hungarian right, Boross claims that each nation has a right to create its own state, its own political regime (whether it is democracy or autocracy is less relevant), and also to choose its own God. While aiming to defend Europe, he displays strong anti-EU sentiments. For him any supranational entity which bases itself on general principles beyond the nation-state (a universalistic approach to democracy, human rights, and Christianity) is wrong, because God belongs to nations not to individuals.

Recent mass migration from the Middle East to Europe is interpreted by Boross as not a cultural but a biological and a genetic problem, which cannot be solved by the classic nationalist ways of assimilation. These views, received positively by the populist radical right, embrace ethnic nationalism in its crude form: for Boross, cultural integration has not yielded anything good, neither 'in the case of the gypsies' nor with the 'hordes of Muslims crossing the green border'. Therefore, 'the European Union should not be thinking in terms of its own refugee quota system, but in forming its own armed forces' (Boross, 2015).

²⁰ Non-religious students can choose ethics instead.

²¹ As Péter Boross said: 'The thing is that the Americans enforce a ruthless approach by favoring the strong over the weak in everything. With them the strong are free to trample the weak. They named this system "absolute democracy". After putting their hands on the world, they think that from an "Arab Spring" a functioning democracy will form. (...) Rome was wise back then. They left the conquered provinces in peace and officially adopted some of their gods in Rome. Washington does the opposite. It wants to impose its own God, Democracy, on the conquered countries' (Boross, 2015).

In this militaristic approach, a provincialized ‘national Christianity’ is contrasted to the mainstream, universal form of Christianity as a religion of love. In the meantime, it is also contrasted to the Gods of the refugees which are deemed unacceptable in Europe. Hence, ethno-nationalism, embraced by the populist Right, provides a sufficient basis of political identification as a type of surrogate-religion. While Fidesz interprets Christianity within the framework of nationalism, Jobbik frames it as part of its nationalism *and* anti-Semitism. God is not presented as a symbol of universal religious identity, as it is understood in the New Testament or explained in several speeches of Pope Francis, but as ‘the God of Hungarians’ (*‘a magyarok istene’*), in its particularistic, tribal, paganized, political understanding. In this sense, Hungarian right-wing populism does not have to rely on religious affiliations and neither places a particular emphasis on mobilizing them: they are simply parts of their fundamentally nationalist world views without any substantive religious references. Although religious identities are mobilized by the Right, they are merged with nationalistic worldviews and ideologies.

Finally, one should note that Fidesz in government has insisted to approve church statuses on political grounds. In a high-profile case, the Fidesz government in 2012 introduced a restrictive regime of registering churches, making it the prerogative of parliament to recognize a religious community as a church. Yet, both the Constitutional Court (in 2013) and the European Court of Human Rights (in 2014) judged the new provisions unacceptable, forcing the parliament to repeatedly revise it.²² The new provisions obviously sought to extend government control and to differentiate between ‘accepted’ and ‘non-accepted’ churches. This way, the Fidesz government attempted to alter the relations between the state and churches and to strengthen its strategic alliance with the politically preferred large historical Christian churches.

Conclusions

Hungarian right-wing populism, represented by governing Fidesz and its (semi-) opposition Jobbik, has been dominating the Hungarian political scene since the end of the 2000s. The Hungarian populist Right has in many ways followed the historical patterns laid down in the inter-war period by the then governing conservatives and their extreme right opposition.

We considered populism as an anti-elitist, anti-institutional political behavior that identifies with ‘the people’, and enhances their ‘direct’ participation in the political process as opposed to representative government. Populism has an ideological character but in itself does not have a particular ideological content. Rather, it is a pattern of discourse and behavior that can be filled by both left- and right-wing ideologies. We also argued that in a post-totalitarian historical era, populism

²² The Constitutional Court in 2013 and the European Court of Human Rights in 2014 considered the deprivation from the status as a church and recognition by the Parliament as a violation of rights, while the existence of two kinds of statuses for religious groups was considered discriminatory. (Eötvös Károly Policy Institute, Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, and Mérték Médiaelemző Műhely, 2014).

should be seen as the political manifestation of illiberalism, especially in (semi-)peripheries such as Latin America and Eastern Europe. Such an understanding of populism can be easily reconciled with the Dahlian concept of inclusive hegemony: a form of government based on popular participation without public contest for power.

Both Fidesz and Jobbik have strong tendencies towards such a restrictive notion of democracy and they both manifestly dismiss the principles of liberal democracy. Although neither of them appeared before the electorate as a deeply religious political party, both of them portrayed themselves as socially conservative, 'Christian' nationalists. This implied a form of institutionalized cooperation between them and large historical Christian churches. Whereas the political Right gain political support and legitimacy from churches, the latter are commissioned to run educational, health and social care institutions on government-provided budgets. In addition, politically well-received churches have been given official church status with all its benefits, whereas their politically less obedient counterparts have been stripped off it.

However, in a substantially secularized country, such as Hungary, actual religious values play a limited role in policy-making. No rational political party would risk to represent a primarily religious agenda if it was to win elections. Christianity is an important political asset, but it is not enough to carry elections and gain majority political support. To maximize electoral votes and to avoid the breakdown of the state, Viktor Orbán used the infrastructural power of the Church to outsource certain functions and responsibilities of the state to the Church while maintaining his own exclusive control over the coercive power of the state. Within the realm of politics, the 'vision of "the people"' as united body implies impatience with party strife, and can encourage support for strong leadership where a charismatic individual is available to personify the interests of the nation (Canovan, 1999: 5). As a charismatic leader Orbán claimed full sovereignty over the political process and used populism as a shortcut to reach his political aims.

The Orbán regime also demonstrates that radical right-wing populism employs a quasi-religious ideological construction through which it attempts at mobilizing a wider social spectrum: ethno-nationalism. This surrogate religion offers a politicized (nationalist and paganized) understanding of Christianity and elevates the concept of ethnically defined nation to a sacred status. Thus, religion is 'nationalized', and the universalism of Christianity is transformed to a particularistic, pagan vision in which faith appears to be not an individual but a tribal issue. 'Nationalized Christianity' also provides legitimacy for the 'rationalized charismatic rule' of authoritarian leaders, who represent exceptional characteristics but are nevertheless popularly elected. This rule is illiberal and anti-democratic even though it relies on (often manipulated) elections and other forms of politically conditioned popular participation. Within the European Union, Viktor Orbán's Hungary is probably the closest approximation of this type of governance.

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