

Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna
Archivio istituzionale della ricerca

"I Am a Woman, I Am a Mother, I Am Italian, I Am Christian": Religious Polarization in the Discourses of Contemporary Far-Right Politics

This is the final peer-reviewed author's accepted manuscript (postprint) of the following publication:

Published Version:

Evolvi, G. (2025). "I Am a Woman, I Am a Mother, I Am Italian, I Am Christian": Religious Polarization in the Discourses of Contemporary Far-Right Politics. Berlin : Springer [10.1007/978-3-031-83815-6_16].

Availability:

This version is available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11585/1017786> since: 2025-12-10

Published:

DOI: http://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-83815-6_16

Terms of use:

Some rights reserved. The terms and conditions for the reuse of this version of the manuscript are specified in the publishing policy. For all terms of use and more information see the publisher's website.

This item was downloaded from IRIS Università di Bologna (<https://cris.unibo.it/>).
When citing, please refer to the published version.

(Article begins on next page)

Chapter 15

“I am a woman, I am a mother, I am Italian, I am Christian”: religious polarization in the discourses of contemporary far-right politics

Giulia Evolvi

Department of Political, Social, and International Sciences, University of Bologna, ORCID: 0000-0001-6928-5903,
giuliaevolvi@gmail.com

Abstract European politics is witnessing a growth in populist and far-right leadership. For example, in September 2022, Italy elected Giorgia Meloni as Prime Minister, leader of the far-right party Brothers of Italy. The progressive extremization of politics results in polarized debates on topics such as abortion, reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights. In this context, religion has often a central topic: hence, far-right leaders tend to employ Christianity—and Catholicism in particular—to narratively construct a type of national identity based on religious affiliation. Meloni, for instance, reiterated her Christian identity throughout her electoral campaign, and employs it to justify her political decisions in favor of traditional and heteronormative families. By discussing the use of religion—often in implicit and culturalized forms—by far-right political leaders, this chapter analyzes how religious polarization functions in post-secular societies. The chapter starts by critically assessing the term “secular” and “post-secular”, arguing that the discursive use of religion has never fully disappeared from certain political debates. Second, it discusses political polarization and political antagonism, explaining how the term “secular” may become, for some political actors, a buzzword that indicates a negative set of values. Third, it describes how social media and new technologies contribute to religious polarization by offering new venues for emotional discussions. In conclusion, the chapter analyzes the challenges of religious polarization and its impact on religious diversity.

Keyword: Far-right; Christian secularism; Online media; Internet; Gender; Islam.

15.1 Introduction

I am Giorgia, I am a woman, I am a mother, I am Italian, I am Christian. They cannot take this away from me
(Corriere della Sera 2021)

Giorgia Meloni, elected Italian Prime Minister in 2022, has repeated these words to the point of making them her political mantra. This sentence comes from a speech in Spanish that Meloni gave at a meeting of the far-right party Vox in Madrid, but it can also be easily found in videos published on her social networks, such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. Meloni's words are not only a political slogan, but unveil some important trends in contemporary politics regarding the use of religious narratives and religious imaginaries. First, the words "woman" and "mother" are used to support a certain idea of traditional family that is against LGBTQ+ rights. Second, the words "Italian" and "Christian" serve the purpose of perpetuating an anti-migration and Islamophobic agenda, delineating the boundaries of national (and European) identity as exclusionary with "non-Christian" people. Furthermore, the use of her first name only ("Giorgia") shows that Meloni's speech style lends itself to Internet circulation because she is informal and colloquial.

In this chapter, I will argue that Meloni's ideologies and speech style are no exception in Europe. While far-right parties are not the only political forces using religion in their narratives, one of their core rhetorical strategies is to explicitly frame Christianity in positive ways and Islam in negative ways (Schwörer and Romero-Vidal 2020). In this respect, the research of Rita Marchetti et al. (2020), which analyses the online use of religious symbols by far-right politician Matteo Salvini, shows not only that religion is a fundamental tool for extreme right politicians, but also that social media are the arena enabling certain religious-related populist discourses. However, academic works exploring the connections between political populism and religion are scarce (Norocel and Giorgi 2022; DeHanas and Shterin 2018). Understanding how far-right populist actors employ religion in mediated discourses allows for reflecting on the role of religion in contemporary society; it is an urgent area of research because these discourses can lead to the marginalization of religious minorities and a loss of diversity and pluralism. Hence, this chapter addresses the following questions: how can studying far-right religious-related narratives shape the debate on secularism and post-secularism? How are such narratives contributing to religious and political polarization? What is the role of digital media in sustaining such narratives?

These questions will be explored through a critical analysis of academic scholarship on the topics of (post)secularism, religion, and far-right parties, as well as some empirical examples. I employ the terms "far-right parties" or "extreme right parties" following the definition of Mudde (2007), who considers them as holding some common characteristics, such as nativism and populism, which will be explored in the following sections. The first part of the chapter contains a review of works on secular and post-secular feelings in Europe, and proposes the framework of "Christian secularism" to understand the current use of religion in far-right political discourses. The second part discusses how far-right politicians use Christianity to exclude certain subjects from the construction of national and European identities, with emphasis on Islam and gender. Then, the third part of the chapter analyzes how far-right actors use the Internet to spread populist discourses about religion, using the characteristics of social media to create anti-elite narratives. In conclusion, I will offer some reflections on the impact of the use of religion in far-right narratives on diversity and pluralism in Europe.

15.2 Secularism, Post-Secularism, and Christian Secularism

I will do everything that is possible, with the help of God and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, to give to Italians work, serenity, and security, to give to families hope and future, to give to young people certainties and rights (Matteo Salvini [@matteosalvinimi] 2019)

With this tweet, originally in Italian, politician Matteo Salvini promises to improve the working and living situation of Italian citizens by invoking the help of divine powers. Leader of the far-right party *Lega Nord* (Northern League, also allied with Giorgia Meloni's *Fratelli d'Italia*), Salvini is portrayed while kissing a rosary in the picture accompanying the tweet. This public religious gesture and the emphasis on Catholicism is interesting if considered that the party *Lega Nord* initially invoked neo-Pagan and Celtic-inspired religious imaginaries. Then, under Salvini's leadership, the party shifted its focus to an anti-migration agenda, embracing the protection of the so-called "Judeo-Christian roots" of Italy and Europe as one of its core populist strategies (Molle 2019).

Salvini's invocation of "God and the Immaculate Heart of Mary", as well as his media performances of praying and kissing rosaries, shows that there is a growing use and visibility of religion in European political venues. The role of religion within populist political narratives seems to disprove the expectations of scholars who, in the 1970s and 1980s, advanced the idea that secularism was inevitable because religion was disappearing from the public sphere (Smith 2003). The publicization of religion, in political as well as social arenas, led Jürgen Habermas (2008) to theorize the notion of "post-secular". After having discussed the public sphere as a rational—and, therefore, secular—place in the book "Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere" (1962), Habermas rethought several aspects of his initial theory. Specifically, Habermas came to consider secularization theory as an inadequate framework to account for the influence of religion in the national public sphere, which can be understood as being post-secular (2008). Hence, this approach posits that secularism is not a prerequisite for modernity, and that the increasing individualization and differentiation of religion does not imply a loss of influence in civic and political life. While the notion of post-secular does account for several aspects of contemporary religion, it might not completely explain the use of religion in political discourses.

Current data on religion in Europe suggest, indeed, a nuanced role of religion in the public sphere that cannot only be explained in terms of religious resurgence and religious influence. Surveys do confirm that the number of religiously unaffiliated adults in Western Europe is growing and church attendance is declining, but they also show that the majority of the population still identifies as Christians and connects Christianity to nationalism (Sahgal 2018). From these data, it can be argued that politicians such as Salvini contribute to greater visibility of religion in the public sphere not because they necessarily wish to form alliances with religious authorities or undermine secular institutions, but to create a strategy to mobilize Christian identities for nationalistic purposes. This partially confirms that certain forms of religiosity—especially connected to institutionalized religion—are declining, but also suggests that some political actors are carving a new type of public role for Christianity that the theories of secularism or post-secularism cannot fully analyze.

In this respect, Tobias Cremer (2022) explains that religious people tend to deny support for right-wing populist parties, and religious institutions usually condemn the actions of extreme right leaders. Yet, right-wing populists continue to use Christian symbols, but they do so in a secularized way, as identity markers that separate the "pure" (Christian) people from the "others" (non-Christian migrants). From this perspective, religion is used in the context of identity politics to give a sense of belonging based on cultural, ethnic, and racial traits, rather than actual religious beliefs and practices. Moreover, the entanglement of religion and politics is seldom directly connected to religious institutions and authorities (such as the Vatican) which, in European countries, rarely openly support far-right parties.

Therefore, I would not define religious-related narratives and performances from far-right parties as post-secular, because they imply an instrumental use of religion, as well as a superiority of one religion (Christianity) over the others. In this respect, an alternative model has been proposed by Sebastián Rudas (2020), who defines the Western European tendency for secular institutions to accord privileges to a specific religion as "minimal secularism" or "minimal post-secularism". Similarly, Tariq Modood (2021) uses the paradigm "moderate secularism" to describe the Western European model where the state recognizes religion as a public good and, despite not allowing religious institutions to exercise any political power, funds certain religious activities such as private faith schools. This model, writes Modood, can be applied also to minority religions and lead to a multicultural society. However, In responding to Modood's claims, Ernst van den Hemel (2021) notices that far-right political narratives often aim at the opposite outcome, which is the legitimation of Christianity, as majoritarian religion, within the secular order at the expense of non-Christians. This suggests that countries with a majority religion tend to deny minority religions power in the public sphere.

Inspired by such debates, I propose to use the term "Christian secularism", instead of "(post)secularism" or "moderate secularism", to describe how Christian values are not only considered compatible with secularism, but also as shaping and supporting European historical, cultural, and political values. This definition comes from the notion of "Catholic model of secularism", which Annalisa Frisina (2011) uses to describe how Catholicism is employed as the cultural basis of Italian identity. An example of Christian secularism is the decisions of national and European juridical courts of banning religious symbols, such as the Muslim hijabs, from public places, while at the same time considering the public display of the Christian crucifix as compatible with secularism (Oliphant 2012; Evolvi and Gatti 2021). This shows how Christianity can be used politically to marginalize other religions and to establish a cultural hegemony of a part of the population, something that fits well with the use of religion from far-right parties. In elaborating on this definition, I choose the term "Christian" instead of "Catholic" because the political use of religion, while strong in predominantly Catholic countries such as Italy and Spain, characterizes also countries that are not (only) Catholic, such as Germany, Greece, or the UK. It can also be argued that the construction of European identity relies on "Judeo-Christian" cultural roots, rather than

Christianity alone; however, given the historical anti-Semitism of certain radical-right European parties and their ambiguous attitude towards Jews (Kahmann 2017), the emphasis of their narratives often lies on Christianity alone. Furthermore, I propose the term “secularism” rather than “post-secularism” because extreme right politicians often do not wish to change or criticize the existence of secular institutions, but rather want them to be permeated by Christian values. In other words, the use of religion in political narratives does not necessarily indicate a resurgence of religion, but rather suggests that Christian identities remain a core element of certain political discourses.

In conclusion, the term “Christian secularism” can indicate a specific worldview, common in the narratives of the European far-right, that uses religion instrumentally in connection to national and European identities. This cannot be explained in terms of “secularism” or “post-secularism” alone, and it does not only interest the decline or resurgence of religious affiliations and practices; rather, Christian secularism implies a qualitative change in the use of religion, an ideological approach that considers Christianity as deeply entangled with secularism. From this perspective, religion is not used as a neutral identity mark, but it is imbued with political ideologies, often aimed at marking a social “otherness”, as will be explained in the next section.

15.3 Populism, Islam, and Gender

Islam does not belong to Germany. No to Sharia and to an Islamic parallel society. No financing of Mosques through Islamic States. Ban full-face veils in public. Get your country back! (“Alternative für Deutschland op Instagram” 2017) These words, translated from German, are on the Instagram page of the extreme-right German group *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany, AfD). They are part of a video featuring an image of some Muslim men praying, accompanied by dramatic music. The statement is to be understood in the context of AfD’s racist, Islamophobic and anti-semitic politics, prominent in the party despite its efforts to dissociate from open support to Nazism (Kahn 2022). Like the AfD, several far-right parties push the idea that Islam does not belong to Europe, and call for banning Sharia, veils, and mosques. Similarly, the idea of “getting the country back” (from Muslim migrants) echoes other extreme right populist slogans, such as Trump’s “Make America Great Again” and the British National Party’s “Britain First” (Allen 2014). This opposition to Islam shows how religion is used in narratives leading to polarization, which traces the boundaries between the “native” people and the foreign “others”, and threatens diversity within society.

In the previous section, I argued that “Christian secularism” is a model that can explain how far-right politicians use religion instrumentally by asserting that Christianity is compatible with secular institutions, while other religions, especially Islam, are allegedly not. Extreme right parties’ opposition to Islam can be inscribed in a larger tendency of considering Muslims as at odds with European secular democracies, as argued by Talal Asad (2003). In discussing how religion can be used as an identity mark and in exclusionary terms, Asad distinguishes between the idea of “secular” as an epistemic category, and “secularism” as a political doctrine. In borrowing from Asad the term “secularism”, I argue that Christian secularism is a political doctrine that far-right parties assume to narratively create a division between “us”—people supporting Christian and secular values simultaneously—and “them”—Muslims, or any person who does not appear to be Christian.

Islamophobia, which is the hate and fear of Muslims that underlies this attitude, is one of the core principles of the nativist rhetoric of extreme right parties. Islamophobic attitudes are often based on essentialization that considers Islam as monolithic and overlooks the existence of non-Muslim migrants; these attitudes often challenge multiculturalism, diversity, and pluralism as potential threats to national identities (Ekman 2015). According to Aurelien Mondon and Aaron Winter (2017), Islamophobia is a form of cultural racism that can be either illiberal or liberal. Illiberal Islamophobia is a type of discrimination that openly belittles Islam, and it is not usually accepted within liberal and democratic societies since it openly threatens pluralism. On the contrary, liberal Islamophobia is hate speech disguised as a defense of free speech and legitimate criticism of Islam in name of liberal values. An example of this attitude is the banning of female head coverings (as proposed also in the aforementioned AfD video), in an attempt to forcefully “liberate” Muslim women from their own religion (Chakraborti and Zempi 2012). Mondon and Winter (2017) suggest that liberal Islamophobia is prevalent among far-right parties, which reclaim their right of criticizing Islam because it is allegedly incompatible with secular institutions. As a result, liberal Islamophobia indirectly undermines diversity and normalizes the marginalization of Muslims in European politics (Houtum and Lacy 2017).

The tendency to normalize the exclusionary narratives of far-right parties is analyzed in the work of Ruth Wodak (2020). Far-right parties, writes Wodak, often have populist tendencies, meaning that they discursively distinguish between an ingroup, constituted by “the true people”, and several outgroups, such as “the corrupted elites”. While populism does not exclusively pertain to the political right, it is often far-right parties that employ populist rhetoric to counterpose a native ingroup to a “foreign others” outgroup, used as a scapegoat for social problems and to propagate fear. Therefore, extreme right populist parties criticize pluralism and multiculturalism as attempting to destroy a nation’s identity, and present themselves as “saviors” of native cultures. In elaborating this framework, Wodak (2020) also asserts that far-right populist parties have contradictory attitudes regarding gender politics, as they may hold on to traditional family values, but also advocate for the “liberation” of Muslim women from an allegedly oppressive religion, as previously mentioned.

Hence, depending on the national context, extreme right parties may view issues connected to gender and sexuality differently: on the one hand, they wish to “protect” women and LGBTQ+ people from Islam, and, on the other hand, they might advocate for traditional Christian family values through anti-feminist and homophobic stances (Norocel and Giorgi 2022). Regarding the example at the beginning of this section, Nicole Doerr (2021) notes that the AfD describes Muslim men as a threat to white women, as well as the LGBTQ+ community. This is consistent with the findings of Caterina Froio (2018), who explains how the French far-right considers Islam as a threat to tolerance, with emphasis on animal rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and women’s rights. This perspective describes Muslim men as hypersexualized predators who attempt to the safety of native white women (Leidig 2021).

However, some extreme right parties also advance anti-feminist and homophobic stances as a criticism to secularism. This is the case of the allegiance between extreme right populist parties and the so-called anti-gender movements (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017). Across Europe, several groups propagate fear of “gender ideology”, which is an alleged conspiracy from left-wing and secular forces to defend an LGBTQ+ friendly agenda (Graff 2016). Often, anti-gender groups promote traditional heteronormative values inspired by conservative Christianity, and protest against same sex-unions, abortion, surrogate pregnancy, and feminist politics (Kováts 2018). While anti-gender groups are usually not explicitly political and reluctant to associate with religion, they frequently flourish in Catholic countries due to their allegiance to the conservative wing of the Vatican, and benefit from the open support of far-right actors, including the aforementioned Giorgia Meloni and Matteo Salvini (Evolvi, 2023). Indeed, Meloni’s speech referring to herself as a woman, a mother, and a Christian, specifically points to strict gender roles and the protection of traditional and heteronormative Christian families.

Therefore, far-right parties’ narratives about Islam, as well as gender and sexuality, show a polarized and contradictory nature of Christian secularism. While extreme right parties tend to always blame Islam as being incompatible with both Christianity and secular institutions, their attitude towards women and LGBTQ+ people is more complex. Even if women and LGBTQ+ people are seen as in need of protection from Muslims in name of liberal secularism, several extreme right parties oppose laws in favor of same-sex unions and reproductive rights because they allegedly go against Christian principles. In describing anti-gender groups, Anna Lavizzari and Massimo Prearo (2018) argue that they are symptomatic of a post-secular society, because they bring Catholicism into the public and political arena. However, I would state that the framework of Christian secularism, better than post-secularism, explains the allegiance of far-right parties to Islamophobic and anti-gender groups. Indeed, secularism is used as a political ideology that needs to be defended against a foreign “other”, while at the same time in need of Christian values. In the rhetoric of far-right parties, secular ideas are protected against Islam exactly because they are seen as being permeated by Christian values. When it is no longer entangled with Christian values—especially those connected to heteronormative and patriarchal ideas of the family—extreme right parties then criticize secularism. As a result, these parties might discursively protect white women and LGBTQ+ people as long as they do not demand rights, such as same-sex unions and abortion, that go against conservative Christian principles. The far-right use of Christian secularism contributes to religious polarization also because of the narrative strategies and online media circulation of extreme right parties, which will be analyzed in the next section.

15.4 Mediatization and online polarization

Why do the establishment and our media not want to talk about Islamic terrorism against the LGBTQ+ community?
(Nigel Farage [@Nigel_Farage] 2022)

The tweet by UK Independence Party (UKIP) former leader Nigel Farage introduces a video by BGNews UK. In the video, Farage laments that British newspapers barely discuss an Islamic terrorist attack against an LGBTQ+ venue in Oslo. The tweet and the video content not only show Farage's hostility against Islam, but also his open criticism of media. Farage's opinions can be understood in light of UKIP's strong opposition to Islam and migration, used also to support the Brexit campaign (Evolvi 2018). In the previous two sections, I have discussed how far-right populist parties in Europe employ the notion of Christian secularism to marginalize non-Christian subjects, and, in so doing, they show a controversial attitude on gender and sexuality. In this case, Farage assumes a liberal Islamophobic approach that allows him to criticize Islam to allegedly protect secular norms and LGBTQ+ people. What is interesting in the tweet, is that Farage accuses the media and the establishment to cover up information about Islam, employing the previously discussed populist trope that "the elites" do not act in the best interest of "the people". This suggests that far-right parties tend to criticize mainstream media as part of the establishment and, as a consequence, they use social media as an alternative venue to spread their ideologies. Being the internet a fertile terrain to spread Islamophobia and hate speech (Awan 2014), social media can create an ideal venue for religious polarization.

The online use of religious narratives by far-right parties can be understood through the perspective of religious publicization, or "re-publicization". These terms are introduced by David Herbert (2011), who criticizes the theory of secularization by arguing that religion in Europe is becoming increasingly more public, especially through media. Hence, Herbert proposes to use the theory of mediatization, which investigates how society is increasingly dependent on media logic (Hjarvard 2013), to understand contemporary religious changes. Thus, the development of media technologies lead to some consequences for religion, notably that people tend to gather information about religion primarily through media, that media provide a sense of community that was previously given by religious institutions, and that religious symbols and imaginaries are embedded in popular culture (Lövheim 2014).

Drawing from this theoretical perspective, I would argue that religion does not only undergo "re-publicization" in news media or pop culture, but also in mediatized political discourses and performances. This happens because the "us" versus "them" rhetoric allowed by religious narratives—characterized by anti-Islam claims such as the one by Farage—fits the logic of media. Ruth Wodak (2020) explains that far-right leaders are often well-trained and charismatic media personalities, who present themselves as champions of free speech and criticize the notion of "politically correctness". This allows them to speak to their voters directly and colloquially. Furthermore, they use potentially controversial topics, such as religious pluralism, to be inclusive of certain subjects and exclude others. These communication strategies are evident in the aforementioned speech of Meloni, where she presents herself in a friendly and informal way by using her first name "Giorgia", and creates a sense of commonalities among people who are Christian and Italian and value traditional gender roles. Even if, with this kind of narrative, far-right leaders frequently provoke media scandals, mainstream media often report them in an accommodating manner, gradually pushing the boundaries of what is deemed acceptable and contributing to the normalization of extreme right politics (de Jonge and Gauffman 2022).

Despite this relatively favorable media coverage, far-right personalities, such as Farage, often attack media and journalism as tools in the hands of "the elites" that need to be distrusted (Krzyżanowski and Ekström 2022). As a consequence, far-right politicians tend to heavily use social media which, according to Paolo Gerbaudo (2018), have an "elective affinity" with populism. Social media can, indeed, be presented as tools that give voices to the people and unify them against what is perceived as elitist mainstream media. As a result, far-right politicians are often prolific users of platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to spread core elements of populism, including the criticism of media elites and multiculturalism, and the ostracism of ethnic and religious minorities (Engesser et al. 2017).

The affinity between populism and social media can be found in some characteristics of mediatized digital discourses, such as the use of emotions, which also helps diffuse religious-related narratives. Hence, far-right leaders use social media to convey both positive and negative emotions, like hope and anger (Doroshenko and Tu 2022). For example, Salvini's Instagram page shows pictures of food to emotionally create a sense of comfort and tradition, while at the same time excluding those who allegedly do not belong to the Italian food culture (García Santamaría 2020). Similarly, online conflicts between different religious groups, such as Christians, atheists, and Muslims, are often charged with anger or fear because people want to protect their beliefs against those of others (Abdel-Fadil 2019). Emotions are also employed to spread post-truth narratives: for instance, the French anti-gender movement *La Manif Pour Tous* (Demo for All), connected to both right-wing populism and conservative Catholicism, employs fake news to create anti-elite and nostalgic discourses on Facebook, while also criticizing traditional media (Harsin 2018). Because emotional, hateful, and controversial discourses tend to circulate more easily online, the use of negativity and emotionality in far-right populist posts has been found to attract more interactions than posts from non-populist parties (Schwartz, Nelimarkka, and Larsson 2022).

Therefore, the framework of Christian secularism implies that religion not only continues to be publicly relevant in political discourses, but it is also increasingly mediatized. Being religion an important identity mark for the articulation of national identity, it can often provoke emotionally intense responses when it is used in public narratives. As a result, religion is employed as an ideology to promote a political agenda in narratives about pluralism, and it also triggers emotions in online narratives that further increases polarization and exacerbate the distance between the Christian ingroup and the non-Christian outgroup.

15.5 Conclusion

This chapter explained how contemporary far-right parties in Europe tend to use religion in an instrumental way to discriminate against certain subjects, specifically Muslims and migrants but also LGBTQ+ people and women, and how these narratives are often mediatized through digital media. Specifically, I have argued that this phenomenon can be understood within the framework of Christian secularism, the idea that secular institutions should be protected as long as they are entangled with a culturized form of Christianity. This perspective posits that religion is used as an identity mark to create a populist “us” vs “them” dynamic, and to oppose the idea of social diversity and plurality in name of a nativist idea of national identities. The religious and social polarization that derives from this use of Christian secularism contributes to the visibility of religion, as it can easily trigger mediatized emotional responses on social media.

The framework of Christian secularism does not necessarily imply that a post-secular perspective fails to describe contemporary European society. Certainly, it can be argued that the increased plurality that characterizes post-secular societies can trigger the antagonism of certain groups, like far-right parties, that fear multiculturalism and social change. While post-secularism can be useful to assess certain aspects of religious resurgence and visibility, I argue that far-right narratives can be better analyzed by understanding secularism as a political doctrine that refuses diversity to protect a conservative type of Christian identity. I propose that this perspective can help address the increasing political polarization of contemporary society, where religion is used as an ideology rather than a set of beliefs, which has detrimental consequences for minorities. Not only, indeed, this posits that non-Christian religions (especially Islam) are incompatible with Christian and secular values, but it also undermines the very idea of cultural and religious plurality by excluding non-Christians from the understanding of national and European identities.

In this chapter, I offered some theoretical perspectives on Christian secularism and the mediatized narratives of far-right parties, but more empirical studies are needed on the subject. Furthermore, there are some limitations to be taken into consideration. First, I have described some common characteristics of the European far-right, but there are differences among parties and national contexts. For example, some parties protect LGBTQ+ rights while others attack them, a topic that can be explored through cross-country comparative research. Second, a feminist or post-colonial theoretical lens can help better understand topics such as gender and migration, in connection with religion and far-right parties. Third, the emotional character of far-right discourses can be expressed differently depending on the media platform; therefore, it would be useful to take a theoretical and methodological approach that looks at extreme-right narratives across social media platforms and their connections with other media venues. Because of its detrimental effects on pluralism, theoretical and empirical studies on the far-right use of religion are vital to better understand the current state of religious minorities, as well as to protect and support multiculturalism and diversity.

References

- Abdel-Fadil, Mona. 2019. The Politics of Affect: The Glue of Religious and Identity Conflicts in Social Media. *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 8(1): 11–34. <https://doi.org/10.1163/21659214-00801002>.
- Allen, Chris. 2014. Britain First: The ‘Frontline Resistance’ to the Islamification of Britain. *The Political Quarterly* 85(3): 354–61. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12118>.
- Alternative für Deutschland op Instagram. 2017. Instagram. September 23. https://www.instagram.com/p/BZY88-Clf_a/.
- Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. 1 edition. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- Awan, Imran. 2014. Islamophobia and Twitter: A Typology of Online Hate Against Muslims on Social Media. *Policy & Internet* 6(2): 133–50. <https://doi.org/10.1002/1944-2866.POI364>.
- Chakraborti, Neil, and Irene Zempi. 2012. The Veil under Attack: Gendered Dimensions of Islamophobic Victimization. *International Review of Victimology* 18(3): 269–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0269758012446983>.
- Corriere della Sera, dir. 2021. Meloni a Madrid: "Yo Soy Georgia, Soy Una Mujer". Così Ha Tradotto Il Suo Tormontone. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQmleDTUJU>.
- Cremer, Tobias. 2022. Defenders of the Faith? How Shifting Social Cleavages and the Rise of Identity Politics Are Reshaping Right-Wing Populists’ Attitudes towards Religion in the West. *Religion, State and Society* 50(5): 532–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2022.2104097>.
- DeHanas, Daniel Nilsson, and Marat Shterin. 2018. Religion and the Rise of Populism. *Religion, State and Society* 46(3): 177–85. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2018.1502911>.
- Doerr, Nicole. 2021. The Visual Politics of the Alternative for Germany (AfD): Anti-Islam, Ethno-Nationalism, and Gendered Images. *Social Sciences* 10(1): 20. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10010020>.
- Doroshenko, Larissa, and Fangjing Tu. 2022. Like, Share, Comment, and Repeat: Far-Right Messages, Emotions, and Amplification in Social Media. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 0(0): 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2022.2097358>.
- Ekman, Mattias. 2015. Online Islamophobia and the Politics of Fear: Manufacturing the Green Scare. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38(11): 1986–2002. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1021264>.
- Engesser, Sven, Nicole Ernst, Frank Esser, and Florin Büchel. 2017. Populism and Social Media: How Politicians Spread a Fragmented Ideology. *Information, Communication & Society* 20(8): 1109–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1207697>.
- Evolvi, Giulia. 2018. Hate in a Tweet: Exploring Internet-Based Islamophobic Discourses. *Religions* 9(10): 307. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9100307>.
- . 202. The World Congress of Families: Anti-Gender Christianity and Digital Far-Right Populism. *International Journal of Communication* 17: 1–18. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/13522>
- Evolvi, Giulia, and Mauro Gatti. 2021. Proselytism and Ostentation: A Critical Discourse Analysis of the European Court of Human Rights’ Case Law on Religious Symbols. *Journal of Religion in Europe* 14(1–2): 162–88. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18748929-20211524>.
- Frisina, Annalisa. 2011. The Making of Religious Pluralism in Italy: Discussing Religious Education from a New Generational Perspective. *Social Compass* 58(2): 271–84. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768611402611>.
- Froio, Caterina. 2018. Race, Religion, or Culture? Framing Islam between Racism and Neo-Racism in the Online Network of the French Far Right. *Perspectives on Politics* 16 (3): 696–709. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592718001573>.
- García Santamaría, Sara. 2020. The Italian ‘Taste’: The Far-Right and the Performance of Exclusionary Populism During the European Elections. *Tripodos* 49 (December): 129–49. <https://doi.org/10.51698/tripodos.2020.49p129-149>.
- Gerbaudo, Paolo. 2018. Social Media and Populism: An Elective Affinity?. *Media, Culture & Society* 40 (5): 745–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443718772192>.
- Graff, Agnieszka. 2016. ‘Gender Ideology’: Weak Concepts, Powerful Politics. *Religion and Gender* 6(2): 268–72. <https://doi.org/10.18352/rg.10177>.
- Habermas, Jürgen. 1962. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press.
- . 2008. “Notes on Post-Secular Society”. *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25(4): 17–29. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5842.2008.01017.x>.
- Harsin, Jayson. 2018. Post-Truth Populism: The French Anti-Gender Theory Movement and Cross-Cultural Similarities. *Communication, Culture and Critique* 11(1): 35–52. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcx017>.
- Hemel, Ernst van den. 2021. Distributing Thickness of Skin: Of Calloused Minorities and Fragile Majorities. *Patterns of Prejudice* 55(2): 125–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2020.1866877>.
- Herbert, David E. J. 2011. Theorizing Religion and Media in Contemporary Societies: An Account of Religious ‘Publicization’. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 14(6): 626–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549411419981>.
- Hjarvard, Stig. 2013. *The Mediatization of Culture and Society*. New York: Routledge.
- Houtum, Henk van, and Rodrigo Bueno Lacy. 2017. The Political Extreme as the New Normal: The Cases of Brexit, the French State of Emergency and Dutch Islamophobia. *Fennia - International Journal of Geography* 195(1): 85–101. <https://doi.org/10.11143/fennia.64568>.

- Jonge, Léonie de, and Elizaveta Gaufman. 2022. The Normalisation of the Far Right in the Dutch Media in the Run-up to the 2021 General Elections. *Discourse & Society* 33(6): 773–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09579265221095418>.
- Kahmann, Bodo. 2017. 'The Most Ardent pro-Israel Party': Pro-Israel Attitudes and Anti-Antisemitism among Populist Radical-Right Parties in Europe. *Patterns of Prejudice* 51(5): 396–411. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2017.1394663>.
- Kahn, Michelle Lynn. 2022. Antisemitism, Holocaust Denial, and Germany's Far Right: How the AfD Tiptoes around Nazism. *The Journal of Holocaust Research* 36(2–3): 164–85. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25785648.2022.2069337>.
- Kováts, Eszter. 2018. Questioning Consensuses: Right-Wing Populism, Anti-Populism, and the Threat of 'Gender Ideology'. *Sociological Research Online* 23(2): 528–38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1360780418764735>.
- Krzyżanowski, Michał, and Mats Ekström. 2022. The Normalization of Far-Right Populism and Nativist Authoritarianism: Discursive Practices in Media, Journalism and the Wider Public Sphere/s. *Discourse & Society* 33(6): 719–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09579265221095406>.
- Kuhar, Roman, and David Paternotte, eds. 2017. *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*. London ; New York: Rowman & Littlefield International.
- Lavizzari, Anna, and Massimo Prearo. 2018. The Anti-Gender Movement in Italy: Catholic Participation between Electoral and Protest Politics. *European Societies* 0(0): 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2018.1536801>.
- Leidig, Eviane. 2021. From Love Jihad to Grooming Gangs: Tracing Flows of the Hypersexual Muslim Male through Far-Right Female Influencers. *Religions* 12(12): 1083. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12121083>.
- Lövheim, Mia. 2014. Mediatization and Religion. In *Mediatization of Communication*, ed. Knut Lundby, 547–70. Handbooks of Communication Science 21. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Marchetti, Rita, Susanna Pagiotti, Nicola Righetti, and Anna Stanziano. 2020. Political Instrumentalization of Religion: The Debate on Salvini's Use of Religious Symbols on Facebook and Twitter. <https://ecpr.eu/Events/Event/PaperDetails/54789>.
- Matteo Salvini [@matteosalvinimi]. 2019. Farò tutto quello che è umanamente possibile, con l'aiuto di Dio e del Cuore Immacolato di Maria, per restituire agli Italiani lavoro, serenità e sicurezza, alle famiglie speranza e futuro, ai giovani certezze e diritti (1/2) <https://t.co/IQTwdGZr7i>". Tweet. *Twitter*. <https://mobile.twitter.com/matteosalvinimi/status/1212100342382501893/photo/1>.
- Modood, Tariq. 2021. Rethinking Political Secularism: The Multiculturalist Challenge. *Patterns of Prejudice* 55(2): 115–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2020.1866873>.
- Molle, Andrea. 2019. Religion and Right-Wing Populism in Italy: Using 'Judeo-Christian Roots' to Kill the European Union. *Religion, State and Society* 47(1): 151–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2018.1532266>.
- Mondon, Aurelien, and Aaron Winter. 2017. Articulations of Islamophobia: From the Extreme to the Mainstream?. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40(13): 2151–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2017.1312008>.
- Mudde, Cas. 2007. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. 1 edition. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Nigel Farage [@Nigel_Farage]. 2022. Why Do the Establishment and Our Media Not Want to Talk about Islamic Terrorism against the LGBTQ+ Community? <https://t.co/OJGBmLmG0L>". Tweet. *Twitter*. https://twitter.com/Nigel_Farage/status/1541523876923981824.
- Norocel, Ov Cristian, and Alberta Giorgi. 2022. Disentangling Radical Right Populism, Gender, and Religion: An Introduction. *Identities* 29(4): 417–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2022.2079307>.
- Oliphant, Elayne. 2012. The Crucifix as a Symbol of Secular Europe: The Surprising Semiotics of the European Court of Human Rights (Respond to This Article at [Http://www.Therai.Org.Uk/at/Debate](http://www.Therai.Org.Uk/at/Debate)). *Anthropology Today* 28(2): 10–12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8322.2012.00860.x>.
- Rudas, Sebastián. 2020. Lack of Pluralism and Post-Secularism in Catholic Countries. *Constellations* 27(2): 258–72. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12461>.
- Sahgal, Neha. 2018. 10 Key Findings about Religion in Western Europe. *Pew Research Center* (blog). <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/29/10-key-findings-about-religion-in-western-europe/>.
- Schwartz, Sander Andreas, Matti Nelimarkka, and Anders Olof Larsson. 2022. Populist Platform Strategies: A Comparative Study of Social Media Campaigning by Nordic Right-Wing Populist Parties. *Information, Communication & Society* 0 (0): 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2022.2147397>.
- Schwörer, Jakob, and Xavier Romero-Vidal. 2020. Radical Right Populism and Religion: Mapping Parties' Religious Communication in Western Europe. *Religion, State and Society* 48(1): 4–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2019.1704611>.
- Smith, Christian, ed. 2003. *The Secular Revolution: Power, Interests, and Conflict in the Secularization of American Public Life*. First Printing edition. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wodak, Ruth. 2020. *The Politics of Fear: The Shameless Normalization of Far-Right Discourse*. Second edition. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications Ltd.