

Article

A Systematic Literature Review of Populism, Religion and Emotions

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Abstract: This paper examines the existing literature on the relationship between religion and populism, and is intended as a starting point for further examination of the relationships between populism, religion, and emotions. This paper systematically reviews the various aspects of the populist phenomenon. After a discussion on different definitions of populism, this paper looks at how the literature discusses the causes of populism, mainly socio-economic factors and emotive factors. Then it discusses how religion and populism interact and can be divided in two broad categories of *religious populism* and *identitarian populism*. While, on the surface, the two share similarities, this paper reviews populist manifestations across the world to draw the distinct features between the two forms. Lastly, while pointing out the salient features of *religious populism* and *identitarian populism*, this study points out gaps in the research on the relationship between religious populism and other phenomena such as transnational populism, the psychology of populism, the role of emotions in creating support for populism, and populism in Western and non-Western contexts for future areas of research in the field.



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1. Introduction

During the current populist era in global politics (Laclau 2005; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008; Mudde 2010; Moffitt 2016), religion has become a key component of populist discourses across the world (Marzouki et al. 2016). From India and Turkey to Indonesia and the United States, populist political actors use religious language and concepts to double down on identity politics and galvanise support. The addition of religion to right-wing populism has proven particularly potent. Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity have been commandeered by right-wing populist leaders and parties, most often in the service of a populist programme in which religion helps to define a 'virtuous community', a community that can then be mobilised against 'elites' and 'others' who are categorised as a threat to this community. Significantly, while right-wing populism is generally nationalist in orientation, the addition of religion allows populists to define the virtuous community in religion-based civilisational terms. By constructing 'the opposition between self and other not in narrowly national but in broader civilizational terms' (Brubaker 2017, p. 1191), right-wing populists have created religious populisms defined by major world religions, which they can wield against religious minorities within their own nations.

Even though populists cannot be said to be more "emotional" than liberal anti-populists, and although emotions are not more central for populism than for other political movements/ideologies, the literature on populism has examined its emotive aspect and found that populism is involved in interpretative processes that lead to intense emotions (Salmela and von Scheve 2017, 2018). Similar to many other ideologies/movements, populists too construct narratives that paint the events, in-groups and out-groups in certain

light (such as harmful vs. beneficial) that precipitate strong emotions amongst the audience (Brady et al. 2017; Graham et al. 2011). Religion is an important source of social categorisation (which dictates intergroup emotional experience) and is also involved in those interpretative processes that implicate the in-group. Religion assists in creating, tailoring and stabilising (meta-) cleavages in line with the populist ‘us’ versus ‘others’ dichotomy (Marzouki et al. 2016; McDonnell and Cabrera 2019). Populists often enter into alliance with marginalised textualist religious actors and blend existing ethno-nationalism with the identification with a particular religious identity to create exclusionary narratives (Morison 2017). At least in some contexts, populism is generated from emotional backlash against the rise of secularism, progressive ideas, including gay rights, feminism, ‘political correctness,’ and multiculturalism, rather than economic precarity (Norris and Inglehart 2019). Scholarly works have yet to explore this argument, and doing this comprehensively requires an approach that connects populism, religion, emotions and political mobilisation in an original framework.

We are not arguing that emotions are only important for populists. Rather, we argue that this is a rather underexplored avenue in populism research and also that emotions are important at the religion–populism nexus too. As this is a review article that aims to identify gaps in the literature to help with future research, we find it necessary to underline this aspect. On the other hand, we also show that populism’s civilisational dimension (Brubaker 2017) allows populists to elicit and/or exploit emotions among the general public which are associated with religious belonging. This does not negate the fact that other ideologies/movements also make use of and even exploit emotions.

This paper is therefore an attempt to begin creating an original framework with which to understand the relationship between populism, religion, and emotions. Our paper makes three contributions. First, we describe the various types of religious populism which appear across the world and in different cultural and geographical contexts, and show how it is possible to distinguish between two types of populism which draw upon religion: ‘religious populism’ and ‘identitarian populism’. Second, we show how religious and identitarian populists are able to elicit and exploit emotions in the general population by adding a civilisational aspect to the existing vertical and horizontal dimensions of populism (De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017; Taguieff 1995, pp. 32–35). Indeed, we argue that for religious and identitarian populists, the vertical and horizontal dimensions of populism are grounded in the civilisational aspect. Third, our paper describes a number of gaps in the literature on populism, chief among them the role of emotions in driving populist mobilisation and its interplay with religion.

2. Defining Populism

To understand the relationships between religion and populism, we must first describe what is meant by the term populism. Yet because populism remains a contested phenomenon, this is not a simple task. Sociologist Edward Shils set out an early and minimal definition of populism, which he argued consisted of “popular resentment against the order imposed on society by a . . . ruling class which is believed to have a monopoly on power, property, breeding, and culture” (Shils 1956, pp. 100–1). He further argued that three other ideas may be inherent to populism: first, that ‘the people’ are sovereign and above their rulers; second, that there ought to be a direct connection between ‘the people’ and their government; third, that the ‘will of the people’ is an “associate with justice and morality” (Shils 1956, p. 98). To a large degree, these notions continue to influence scholarship on populism. Yet there has been a great deal of scholarly contestation over whether these concepts could be said to form a coherent populist set of ideas, a populist ideology—albeit a ‘thin-centred’ one—or elements of populist practice (Gidron and Bonikowski 2013).

The ideational approach to populism has, according to Mudde (2017), become the “most broadly used in the field today”. While there are variants of this approach, the most significant is perhaps Mudde’s own ideological approach, which emerged as dominant

among scholars of European populism, many of whom study the large and growing number of right-wing populist parties in the region (Gidron and Bonikowski 2013). The ideological approach conceives of populism as a group of ideas that together “considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (Mudde 2004, p. 543). However, ‘lacking the sophistication of other ideologies like socialism or liberalism’, populism—according to this approach—is a thin-centred ideology and could be combined with other beliefs and ideas of politics’ (de la Torre 2019, p. 7). Populism is furthermore conceived as a binary: either a political leader or party is populist, or they are not. This may be a problem, because some politicians will inevitably use populist rhetoric at times, yet refrain from enacting a wider populist political programme. For proponents of the ideological approach, political leaders who use merely populist rhetoric cannot be easily accounted for.

Some scholars working within the ideational approach do not believe populism is an ideology at all, and prefer to describe populism as a loose set of ideas that are expressed discursively, or as part of an overall political style. All accept, however, the notion that there are a set of ideas, i.e., ‘the people’ vs. ‘the elite’ and the people’s will must be obeyed, that can be grouped together and called populism. This ideational approach may be contrasted against the organisational or ‘strategy’ approach favoured by scholars who predominantly study Latin American populism. These scholars define populism as “a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers” (Weyland 2001, p. 14). Therefore, when they attempt to measure populism in a political leader and/or movement, they make no attempt to analyse the values or beliefs expressed. Rather, the strategy approach posits that populists attempt to cultivate—through a political strategy—a direct relationship between ‘the people’ and a populist leader. This strategy is understood to be an attempt to convince ‘the people’ (however constituted) to support a particular populist leader/movement/party on that basis that (1) the leader of this movement/party understands their ‘will’, or in some way perhaps even embodies the people themselves, and (2) that no other political leader understand the people’s will, and therefore ought not be supported but, rather, be opposed. Political leaders/parties/movements that can be understood as using such a strategy are described by proponents of this approach as populist. Indeed, scholars in this group often perceive populism to be a ‘strategy’ in the hands of strongmen, which they use to revise the democratic structure and capture power (Barr 2009; Weyland 2001).

A third group of scholars define populism as a discourse. Some of these scholars, such as Hawkins (2010) work within the ideational framework, but study the manner in which populism is expressed through discourse. However, the earlier proponents of the discourse approach, in particular Laclau, defined populism as a discursive practice and political logic that brings into existence ‘the people’. (Laclau 2005, p. 154). Laclau’s complex approach is summed up well by Moffitt (2016, p. 23), who writes that Laclau argues that “when a demand is un-satisfied within any system, and then comes into contact with other unsatisfied demands, they can form an equivalential chain with one another, as they share the common antagonism/enemy of the system”. For populists, then, this would be achieved through the rhetorical division of society into two groups: ‘the people’ and ‘others.’ Further developing these notions, De Cleen and Stavrakakis argue that the discourse of populism is vertical as it is able to engage with multiple factors and thematic areas for instance it distinguishes ‘the people’ as the ‘underdog’ and the other as the ‘elite’ it also engages with the various socio-economic divides within these two basic dichotomies as well (De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017, p. 312).

The final and most recently developed manner of defining populism is the ‘style’ approach, most associated with Moffitt and Ostiguy. Moffitt defines populism as “a political style that features an appeal to ‘the people’ versus ‘the elite’; ‘bad manners’ and the performance of crisis, breakdown or threat” (Moffitt 2016, p. 45). He describes

populism as a political style consisting of “repertoires of embodied, symbolically mediated performance made to audiences that are used to create and navigate the fields of power that comprise the political, stretching from the domain of government through to everyday life” (Moffitt 2016, p. 38).

These four approaches are not entirely compatible with each other. Moreover, when using one of these approaches to measure populism in a party, leader, or movement, the definitional differences will inevitably influence—even determine—the result of the measurement. However, it is important to note that each of these conceptualisations—with the exception of the ‘style’ approach—seems to correspond to the different cases of populism in different cultural and political geographies. Furthermore, as this paper suggests, none of the existing approaches to populism are unable to incorporate an examination of the role of religion within populist movements, parties, and leaders. If populism is a thin ideology or set of ideas, it can be easily and effectively appended to the thick ideology of an organised religion. If populism is a discourse, religious rhetoric can be incorporated into populism’s anti-elite discourse in a variety of ways. And if populism is a strategy, religion can be used by populist leaders to create a political constituency based on religious identification, and to exclude groups and individuals who follow allegedly hostile faiths. Therefore, in this article, we do not argue that populism ought only to be examined through one particular approach, but rather through our survey of the extant literature we suggest that all approaches may incorporate religion into their understandings of populism. In doing this, we encourage all scholars of populism to begin to grapple with the subject according to their preferred approach. However, throughout this article we define populism according to the most widely used minimal definition: as a set of ideas which together “considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (Mudde 2004, p. 543).

Table 1 below summarizes ways of studying populism.

Table 1. Ways of Studying Populism.

Categories of Populism	Definitions	Limitation
Ideational	An ideology (or set of ideas) that divides the society into two homogenous and antagonistic groups. ‘The people’ versus ‘the elite.’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Too dichotomous in its understanding of the two groups - Based on Western and European case studies and instances - Does not account for sporadic or occasional use of populist rhetoric by a leader
Strategy	Viewed as a tool in the hands of a personalistic leader who uses populism to wield power through an unorganised voter bank.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Viewed only as a movement versus - Mostly based on Latin American cases
Discourse	A discourse that pits ‘the people’ against ‘the elite’ or ‘the oligarchy’, and which is adhered to one or multiple ideologies, e.g., neo-liberalism, religion, globalisation, and migration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does not easily discern between populists and non-populists - Ignores the populist ideologies present in a number of populist parties in Europe
Style	Focuses on style of the leader such as their ‘bad manners’ and their performance style for ‘the people’ which also confronts ‘the elite’.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ignores the ideologies of populist parties and movements. New and relatively untested

2.1. Causes of Populism

There is scholarly contention over the factors that lead to populism. Early in the study of the phenomenon, populism was sometimes described as a mass movement akin to fascism, and sharing many of the same goals. Canovan, however, argues that populism originates from a feeling among a segment of citizens that a democratic deficit exists within their nation, and moreover from a sense that ‘elites’ in government (and perhaps business

and academia) are corrupt and/or govern only in their own narrow interests, ignoring the so-called will of the people (Canovan 1999, pp. 2–16). Populism, therefore, might be understood as a product of democracy, although its presence may indicate a democratic deficit within a nominally democratic country. Yet this description of populism's ultimate cause tells us little about the kind of events that precipitate the rise of populism in a nation. After all, many democratic nations experience, at times, corrupt elite rule and a democratic deficit, yet remain unaffected by populism. In other words, the presence of corrupt elites and the alienation of the public from the elites do not by themselves engender populism. Furthermore, populism appears to contain vertical and horizontal dimensions (De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017). By this, scholars mean, first, that populist ideation and discourse either create or exploit an antagonistic vertical relationship between the people at the top of society ('elites') and the people at the bottom ('the people'). Second, scholars argue that populists create or exploit antagonistic horizontal relationship between 'the people' and 'others', by which they mean class, religious, ethnic, or political enemies within a society, or indeed outside of it (De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017). This suggests that either populists are able, through their discourse, to create antagonistic relationships which themselves produce a demand for populist solutions, or that they are very good at exploiting existing antagonistic vertical and horizontal societal relationships, and that these existing relationships themselves produce populism.

2.2. Socio-Economy Drives the Populist Demand

It is sometimes argued that the global rise of populism in the 2000s and 2010s is the result of economic decline among working-class and lower middle-class communities. The best-known example of this argument is referred to as the 'losers of globalisation thesis' (Rooduijn 2015, p. 3). The thesis suggests that the contemporary rise of right-wing populism in Western Europe and North America is caused by the forces of globalisation, which have—in a variety of ways—caused manufacturing and other traditional working-class jobs in most Western nations to become scarce (Spruyt et al. 2016, pp. 337–39). Right-wing populists, according to this thesis, exploit working-class anger by accusing Western governments of deliberately undermining working-class life by signing free trade agreements and allowing mass immigration, two factors which, they argue, increase competition for low-skilled jobs and, as a result, decrease wages while also increasing the cost of housing. Working-class and lower middle-class people negatively affected by globalisation thus turn to right-wing populists who promise to "bring back the jobs" and return the working classes to a more prosperous state. The obvious problem with this thesis is that populism exists in regions which have not suffered from the decline of manufacturing. However, the 'losers of globalisation' thesis may point to a deeper psychological and emotional cause of demand for populism among a population, which can occur as a result of a number of economic and social factors. Moreover, there may be a latent demand for populism in human beings that populist leaders are able to activate in certain circumstances.

2.3. Emotions Drive the Populist Wave

A 'cultural' (as opposed to 'economic') explanation of populism may suggest that the rise of right-wing populism in, for example, Europe and the United States is driven by an emotional backlash against the rise of progressive ideas, including gay rights, feminism, 'political correctness', and multiculturalism (Norris and Inglehart 2019). These ideas might be said to appear threatening to certain parts of the electorate, because they seem to be ending the cultural hegemony of white males—who make up the largest portion of right-wing populist voters—have enjoyed in the West for decades.

This may be so, but it does not explain why populism has succeeded in a wide variety of non-Western societies. Attempting to solve this problem, Salmela and von Scheve (2018) argue that it is the emotional response to cultural and economic change that has driven demand for populism over the past two decades. Yet this demand for populism,

they note, is not expressed uniformly. Rather, they argue, different emotional responses create demand for different types of populism. Salmela and von Scheve suggest that while ultimately neoliberal policies drive populism's rise, due to the manner in which they "humiliate" individuals, the response to this humiliation and the shame it brings is experienced differently (Salmela and von Scheve 2018, p. 434). Right-wing populists exploit the "repressed shame that transforms fear and insecurity into anger, resentment, and hatred against perceived 'enemies' of the precarious self" (Salmela and von Scheve 2018, p. 434). In contrast, left-wing populism is said to associate "more with acknowledged shame that allows individuals to self-identify as aggrieved and humiliated by neoliberal policies, and their advocates" (Salmela and von Scheve 2018, p. 434). This, they argue, gives left-wing populism an "emancipatory potential" because it allows individuals the ability to "establish bonds with others who feel the same, whereas repressors remain in their shame or seek bonds from repression-mediated defensive anger and hatred" (Salmela and von Scheve 2018, p. 434). This suggests a greater need to further investigate how changing socio-economic conditions lead to varying degrees of religious populism.

The notion that populists cultivate and exploit negative emotions among voters was explored by Yilmaz, who, in a book on the roots of populism in Turkey, reports that a senior AKP politician (XE "Mahir Ünal") confessed that his party's mobilizational strategy was 'emotional vampirism', by which he meant that the AKP "sucked and exploited all emotions in the society" (Yilmaz 2021a, p. 136). This suggests that the AKP is aware of the importance of negative emotions—fear and anger—in driving demand for populist solutions, and that the party recognizes it is adept at turning these emotions into electoral victories. According to Yilmaz, the AKP came to power by exploiting several emotions, especially fear, anger, rage, a desire to sacrifice oneself for one's homeland, and nostalgia—in this case, "a deep restorative nostalgia for the glorious and dominant Ottoman Empire" and a desire "for a similar glory and domination in the future" (Yilmaz 2021a, p. 172).

The works of Salmela and von Scheve and Yilmaz point to a new way of understanding the rise of populism: that like other political movements, populists gain electoral success by mobilising the population through the exploitation of certain emotions. These emotions—fear, anger, nostalgia, humiliation, and love for one's homeland—can be exploited, of course, by politicians of all kinds. Yet populist success may depend upon exploiting these particular emotions, and using them to perpetuate the notion that 'the people' are threatened by elites and 'others', and moreover that elite-driven politics has created a national 'crisis' which only populists can repair (Moffitt 2015). Indeed, by creating a sense of crisis, populists may elicit from the public the intense emotions populism thrives upon—anger, fear, and rage—and which are used to construct 'us vs. them' binaries.

For example, it is possible to understand support for Donald Trump among working-class white Americans as the product of the "loss of self-esteem and sense of empowerment" they have suffered due to economic and cultural losses. (Hoffman 2018, p. 266). Working-class white Americans may "attempt to deal with such traumatic experiences by utilizing maladaptive defence mechanisms, such as denial and projection, in order to protect themselves from unbearable negative emotions" (Hoffman 2018, p. 266). These negative emotions, in turn, can be exploited by populist leaders such as Donald Trump. Combined, these factors make this group especially likely to be "manipulated" by populists, who will scapegoat "other groups by projecting onto them the cause for the community's plight" (Hoffman 2018, p. 279). Moreover, when declaring that he would "make America great again", Trump was perhaps also exploiting deep feelings of nostalgia among white Americans for a time in which they held hegemonic power and possessed greater wealth.

The role of emotions such as fear, anger, and paranoia, may help explain the aftermath of Trump losing the 2020 Presidential elections, in which a number of conspiracy theorist groups joined Trump supporters in a riot in Washington DC, which some commentators have described as an 'attempted coup' (Graham 2021). This makes it clear that paranoid conspiracies have a role to play in supporting or providing legitimacy to populist beliefs. Of course, we can find examples well beyond the United States and/or populists. For

example, the January 2021 killings of Hazara people in Pakistan were deflected by the Pakistani leadership towards India, and blamed on ‘external’ forces who allegedly want to ‘destabilise’ Pakistan because it is a Muslim country (Dawn 2021). However, little is known about how fear-based populist conspiracy theories play a part in creating demand for populism, or in maintaining populist rule.

3. Religion and Populism

It is an undeniable fact that the relationship between religion and political parties and movements is extremely complex. Religion itself is not an easy term to define, but perhaps the most straightforward and readily accepted definition remains Durkheim’s (1915) notion that religion is a “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things”. Moreover, the ethical and moral views of the major religions are much more complex than the simplistic and reductionist Manichean dichotomy or binary opposition between good and evil. For instance, for many years, Christianity was linked to conservative or moderate right-wing parties, such as the Christian democrats in Europe and Latin America. However, certain forms of religious fundamentalism, especially among some Christians and Muslims, have reduced this complexity into a binary opposition and thus this fundamentalist understanding of religion plays a role in stoking the emotions that drive support for populism.

Scholarly examination of the relationship between religion and populism is relatively new. The 2016 election of Donald Trump as U.S. President and the successful Brexit referendum vastly increased scholarly attention on the phenomena of populism as a metamorphosed force undermining democratic foundation of polities. Yet if populism is the political zeitgeist of our time, it is surprising that the relationship between fundamentalist versions of religion and populism is so little explored by scholars. In *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, Mudde (2007, p. 296) called attention to the scant scholarship on “the relationship between religion and populist radical right parties”. Yet since then, most scholarship on religion and populism has focused on the instrumentalisation of religion by populist parties in Europe (Marzouki et al. 2016) but not much on the deeper nature of the relationship between the two, though there are exceptions (DeHanas and Shterin 2018; Zúquete 2017). The lack of scholarship is in some ways curious, because there are often very obvious relationships between fundamentalist manifestations of religion and populist leaders, parties, and movements even in non-Western countries. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, for example, has combined populist rhetoric with Hindu nationalism. His party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) openly uses the Hindutva narrative to form its domestic politics regarding minorities under a populist mandate, as the party enjoys strong electoral support from the Hindu majority (Iwanek 2018; Doffer et al. 2020; Gandesha 2020). Imran Khan’s Riyasat-e-Medina (the state of Medina from the times of Prophet Muhammad) is a religion-based populist approach that seeks to use the promise of a ‘sacred’ welfare state from the past to answer and address the grievances of ‘the people’ who have been previously failed by the ‘elite’ and ‘corrupt’ rulers of the past (Hassan 2020). Since coming to power, both Khan and Modi have openly either formed coalitions with fundamentalist religious groups or placed religious leaders in key positions, and have moreover made their school and university curriculums more religious, removing them from their secular heritage (Lall 2008; Shahid 2017; Ahmed 2020). Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan may also be considered a populist who uses Islamist religious rhetoric and seeks support from religious authorities to enhance his power and authority (Yavuz and Öztürk 2019; Yilmaz and Bashirov 2018).

Beyond this functional use of religion by political leaders and parties, populism itself seems to resemble fundamentalist interpretations of religion, at least insofar as it sacralises ‘the people’ and their ‘will’, and promises a believing community ‘salvation’ if they follow a particular leader. For example, populists sacralise ‘the people’ and their ‘will’, and in doing so raise them above the ‘elites’ and others who—in this Manichean scheme—are described as ‘enemies’ of the people. Indeed, there is a resemblance between populism

and fundamentalist versions of religions, first because populists appear to view the world through the prism of an antagonistic struggle between ‘the people’, who are ‘good’, and ‘elites’, who are evil (Mudde 2004, p. 543; Zúquete 2017, p. 446). Significantly, while populism itself resembles fundamentalist religion, it is not incompatible with existing fundamentalist interpretations of religions, but rather may be blended with them to form a synthesis. Christianity and Islam, for example, are perhaps not as dualistic as Manichaeism, but in certain fundamentalist forms they may contain a similar notion of absolute good and evil, and hold that the two are always in conflict. Thus, we find that Muslims and Christians who are drawn to the fundamentalist manifestations of their religions alike find themselves sometimes drawn to populism, and that their populism is not necessarily in tension with their religious beliefs and practices.

The comparisons between populism and fundamentalist religion do not end there. The non-ideological approaches to understanding populism all describe the importance of the leader and their relationship to their followers. A populist leader will, in their style, discourse, or strategy, attempt to make themselves in some way one with the people. They may adopt the dress, language, and behaviour of their followers, and use a discourse and political strategy which emphasizes the notion that the leader understands ‘the people’, represents their will, and may even in some mysterious way embody ‘the people’ (Moffitt 2016, p. 52). The leader will promise the people that if they support her/him, they will be saved from some immanent crisis and catastrophe, and that by voting for him or her, all will be made right and good. The leader may also speak in the crude language of an outsider, and in doing so not merely ingratiate themselves with ‘ordinary’ people, but demonstrate the inherent goodness in low culture and behaviour, raising it above the ‘high’ culture of ‘elites’ (Moffitt 2016, p. 56). Populism, therefore, may be understood as a form of sacralised politics; not a religion, but perhaps a substitute for religion that may fill an emotional/psychological hole left in individuals and societies in which religion has become privatised or is discarded.

Politics, then, may be sacralised in two ways—through its association with an existing religion, or by its appropriation of religious elements in a secular context. Indeed, contemporary populism appears to—as Daniel Nilsson DeHanas and Marat Shterin observe—embrace a concept of the sacred, and may thus be a form of sacralised politics and a surrogate religion (DeHanas and Shterin 2018). DeHanas and Shterin contend that populists sacralise secular concepts such as “the people” and “the nation”, and that populism is a “political style that sets ‘sacred’ people against two enemies: ‘elites’ and ‘others’ (DeHanas and Shterin 2018, p. 180). In this way, perhaps, populists re-enchant the secularised world through the illiberal yet democratic notion that the people’s will is the highest good, and must be heard and obeyed by elites. Moreover, populists may be drawing upon and in a sense replacing older religious views of the world with modern, secularised versions of them. Richard Hofstadter, for example, has described how American populists often “secularize a religiously derived view of the world, to deal with political issues in Christian imagery, and to color them with the dark symbology of a certain side of Christian tradition” (Hofstadter 2008, p. XXXV).

Moffitt, while he does not discuss religion and populism, argues that inherent in populism is a determination to force upon the electorate a belief that they are in ‘crisis’, and that catastrophe is imminent (Moffitt 2016, p. 114). Only by supporting populists—or indeed the populist leader—can this catastrophe be averted and the crisis laid to rest. Here, again, we see a kind of mimicry of religion by populists, who perhaps secularise religious notions of a final crisis and apocalypse. Equally, populists may be understood as casting a single leader into the role of prophet and saviour, as the only person who can deliver ‘the people’ from the catastrophe created for them by ‘elites’ and ‘others.’

Perhaps the most intriguing parallel between populism and religion is described by Margaret Canovan. Canovan (1999) argues that populism is a democratic phenomenon but represents part of the ‘redemptive face’ of democracy, or the side of democracy that is less rational and more emotional. Part of populism’s appeal, she writes, is that it promises to

redeem ‘the people’, to create for them a better world (Canovan 1999, pp. 8–19). There is obviously a religious tinge to this promise, which is so inherent to populism. However, the key problem with the ‘populism as sacralisation of politics’ argument is that populism does not seem especially religious when compared with other ‘political religions.’ It asks less of its adherents than Soviet Communism, Maoism, or Nazism. And while it shares with them a devotion to a single leader, and belief in redemption here on Earth rather than in heaven, the notion that it brings in a real form of the sacred into politics is perhaps impossible to prove, although it may be present in the minds of some ‘believers.’ Liberal democratic politicians may also use ‘sacred’ language at times, and use terms and phrases that recall the redemptive discourse of populists. So while populism may be a surrogate religion of a kind, because it is at best a thin-centred ideology, it must always be anchored to some stronger surrogate religion (socialism, nationalism, civilisationalism). Populism may indeed sacralise ‘the people’, but this sacralisation is not particularly special in a Western context, where many forms of politics have been sacralised. Furthermore, it may be that, as Zúquete suggests, “the separation between the sacralization of politics and the politicization of religion, in the case of some populist actors, may not be clear-cut, but involves a syncretic dimension” (Zúquete 2017, pp. 454–55). This being so, it is possible that there is both a sacralisation of politics and politicisation of religion occurring in regions where religious belief remains powerful.

Second—and in addition to this intrinsic religious aspect of populism—populists may have a functional relationship with religion. They may be religious identitarians, or they may share close links—or be members and thus representatives—of an organised religion. Thus, we may be able to differentiate between ‘religious populists’—or populist leaders/parties/movements which are closely linked to organised religion and have a religion-based political platform influenced by holy books and theology, and ‘identitarian populists’—populist leaders/parties/movements which are not influenced by theology or forms of religious spirituality, but which identify ‘the people’ and their enemies according to a religion/civilisation-based classification of peoples.

In Table 2, we summarize how populism borrows from religion.

Table 2. Populism Borrowing from Religion.

Main Aspects.	Populism	Religion
Categorisation of society	‘The people’ versus ‘the elite’	‘Good’ vs. ‘evil’
Psychosocial support for followers	Heaven on earth—promise of escape from current troubles and safeguard from catastrophe	Paradise in the afterlife, day of judgement, afterlife, nirvana
Leadership	Leaders mimic religious ideals in their actions such as body language, speech, clothing etc., to become ‘sacred’ or representatives of that divine	Sacred position given to prophets or messengers
Ideology	Identity based politics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Religious values are enshrined in the political ideology and it seeks to create a ‘heaven on Earth’ for the followers - Secularized values are sacred and above all—thus creating that ‘in’ and ‘out group’ distinction for minority or migrants 	Faith-based identity

3.1. Religious Populism

The relationship between populism and religion is complex, but it is possible to discern two major forms of populism in which religion’s fundamentalist variety is an important component: religious populism and identitarian populism. There will inevitably be some overlap and/or an ambiguous boundary between the two forms. The difference between the two, however, is significant. Religious populism encompasses both organised religion’s political and public aspects when they adopt a populist style and/or discourse, and

populist political movement/parties/leaders that adopt an explicit religious programme. Identitarian populism is superficially similar to religious populism, but it does not possess a political programme based upon religious teachings, nor does it attempt to force religion upon a society, or run a society according to the teachings of a particular religion. Instead, identitarian populism embraces a religion-based classification of peoples, often one aligned to civilisations (Western, Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, etc.) or nations. It is not, however, religious itself, but is most often wholly secular, and therefore does not call for people to return to the faiths of their ancestors, or even to believe in God. What both share, then, is civilisationalism—or a religion-based classification of world civilisations. This civilisationalism is significant, as we shall see, because it allows the horizontal and vertical dimensions of populism to be embedded in a civilisational frame, permitting populists to define ‘the people’ and their enemies according to their respective religious identities.

Religious populism is evident across all the major world religions, and is manifested in parties, leaders, and movements. For example, a populist movement in Indonesia, the National Movement to Safeguard the MUI Fatwa (GNPF-MUI) borrows from Islam’s inherent call for justice, but frames it in a populist manner—in this case, in terms of an oppressed *ummah* and an oppressive, wealthy non-Muslim Chinese elite (Hadiz 2018). Using Islamic language of justice and fairness, the (GNPF-MUI) portrays Chinese non-Muslims such as former Governor of Jakarta Ahok—who was jailed on blasphemy charges as a result of populist agitation—as outside ‘the people’ or *ummah*, and actively working against their economic and religious interests (Hadiz 2018, p. 576; Peterson 2020). In this way, the Islamic populists encourage Muslim Indonesians to despise the Chinese in two ways: first from below on the vertical axis of populism, insofar as the Chinese are defined as ‘elites’ and Muslim Indonesians as ‘the oppressed people.’ Second, on the horizontal axis of populism, insofar as Chinese are described by the populists as a non-Muslim internal threat to the *ummah*. Both the vertical and horizontal elements of Indonesian Islamic populism are thus couched in a deeper civilisational frame of reference, in which Islam defines Indonesian culture and identity, and non-Muslims are portrayed as threats to Indonesia.

The Iranian revolution may be understood as stemming from populist antagonism towards Persian elites and especially the Shah (Hadiz 2016; Alamdari 2005; Dorraj 2014). This tradition of Iranian populism may have been continued in the figure of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (Zúquete 2017). All used emotive language attacking elites (vertically) and external enemies (horizontally) within a civilisationalist frame.

Yet undoubtedly the most prominent contemporary Islamic populism is Erdoganism in Turkey (Yilmaz and Bashirov 2018). Under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s rule, the AKP has replaced Kemalist secularism with a new programme, incorporating “Islamism, nationalism, and populism” and substantially blurring the boundaries between each (Taş 2020, p. 2). This new populist programme “involved Islamist elements such as neo-Ottomanism, conservatism, and growing pious generations (Yilmaz 2018, p. 54)”. Although the AKP maintained a populist conception of society in which Erdoğan was presented as “the voice of deprived ‘real people’ and the champion of their interest against old “elites”, the party also pursued an Islamist anti-secular project involving mandatory religious education of the young, and a “post-Kemalist neo-Ottomanist outlook in identity politics” that radically altered Turkey’s sense of itself and elements of its foreign policy (Yilmaz 2018, pp. 54–55). The AKP presents itself as the voice of ‘the people’ and against the old secular Kemalist elite. The party uses emotive language to provoke fear and anger in the people towards elites, but also towards internal enemies who are portrayed as being threats to the *ummah*: secularists, Kurds, Gulenists. In this way, much as in Indonesia, the AKP couches the vertical and horizontal aspects of its populism within a deeper civilisationalist reference frame—in this case, based upon the notion that Muslim Turks are at the vanguard of the *ummah*, and are under constant attack by the Christian West and from internal non-Muslim enemies (Yilmaz 2021a, 2021b). Muslim Turks are encouraged to sacrifice their lives in this civilisational confrontation (Yilmaz and Erturk 2021).

Christians, too, have engaged in religious populism in a variety of ways. Zúquete, for example, observes how populism has been entwined with Christianity since the earliest populist movement in North America—the late 19th-century People’s Party—was founded. The party, he writes, attempted to “reignite the lost connection with America’s God-given inalienable rights, freedoms, and values that were under assault by the elites (Zúquete 2017, p. 447)”. In the contemporary United States, religious populism is evident in the Trump movement, which is supported by many evangelical Christians (Pally 2019)”. Trump’s brand of populism perhaps falls more in the ambit of identitarian populism, but his support for Christian civilisation and open aversion to Islam in his comments and policies have triggered consequences associated with religious populism (Silva et al. 2020). This manifestation may be evident in the increasing number of domestic far-right terrorism cases and the rise of the alt-right in America (Fekete 2018). Indeed, it would be foolish to deny the role of Christians in the Trump movement. For example, Christian conservative journalist Rod Dreher wrote, after watching the pro-Trump ‘Jericho’ rally held in Washington in December 2020, that there was a concerning conflation of “Trump politics and religion” apparent throughout the day (Dreher 2020). According to Dreher, the rally was held by “Christians (and sympathetic Jews) [and was] designed to mimic the Biblical story of the Israelite army ritually marching around the walled city of Jericho, blowing the shofar, and watching as God demolished the city’s defenses, so the Israelites could conquer (Dreher 2020)”. Describing the rally, Dreher writes that the speakers—most of whom he categorises as part of the “Christian Right”—believe that Donald Trump “did not lose the election” but that “it was taken from him (Dreher 2020)”. This, Dreher says, “is an article of faith, not to be doubted. If you doubt, you are a traitor, a coward, in league with the Devil (Dreher 2020)”. By suggesting that anyone who did not support Trump or believe that the election was stolen was evil, the speaker literally demonised his political opponents, and in doing so attempted to produce dangerous emotions in the crowd related to religious pieties and identity.

Little scholarly literature exists on sub-Saharan African or Latin American religious populism, but what little exists suggests that religion and religious identity is sometimes important to populists in both regions (Feltran 2020; Knoll 2019; Forster 2019). Indeed, during the previous decade in Latin America scholars admit that “the relation between religion and politics . . . manifested itself in a certain tendency towards religious populism (Berntzen and Bjune 2012, p. 15). Brazil’s authoritarian right-wing leader Jair Bolsonaro—who has been described as a populist (De Sá Guimarães and De Oliveira E. Silva 2021)—has risen to power, in part, through support from “Brazil’s conservative religious groups, such as the Neo-Pentecostal churches and Charismatic Catholics (those who pledge formal allegiance to Rome but adopt Pentecostal-style worship practices (Knoll 2019, p. 227)”. Indeed, according to Feltran ‘Bolsonarismo’ is a movement that “seeks a major shift away from modern politics”, away from “party mediation”, “law”, “pluralism” and “the constitution”, and instead towards “mass movement . . . male honour . . . identity . . . the gospel” (Feltran 2020). This suggests that greater scholarly examination of the relationship between religion and populism in Latin America and Africa might prove greatly beneficial, and produce much useful and illuminating literature.

It is not easy to identify an explicitly Buddhist populism. However, populist Buddhist groups in Myanmar supported and reasserted the narrative of Muslims as aliens who are constant threat to the pure way of Buddhist life (Gunasingham 2019), and played a role in the subsequent ethnic cleansing of Muslim peoples in the country (International Crises Group 2017). In India, however, Hindu nationalism, has had a significant presence since the 19th century (McDonnell and Cabrera 2019, pp. 488–90). Yet it was not until the election victory of the right-wing populist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the 2014 general election that the highest offices in the land were occupied by Hindu nationalists. Founded in 1980, the BJP is perhaps inseparable from its guiding ideology—*Hindutva*, a term that refers to a concept of India and Indian-ness, in which these notions are claimed to be intrinsically related to Hindusim (Jaffrelot and Tillin 2017, p. 184).

The BJP adapted the politico-religious philosophy *Hindutva* to a populist-nationalist framework, in which Hindus are identified as ‘the people’, and secular nationalists (such as the former governing party Indian National Congress) are demonised as ‘elites’ beholden to dangerous foreign ideologies (secularism) (McDonnell and Cabrera 2019, pp. 488–90). Muslims, but also at times other religious minorities, are portrayed as a threat to be feared by the BJP, and as enemies of ‘the people’ (McDonnell and Cabrera 2019, pp. 488–90). Understanding the role of Hinduism in the BJP’s matrix of nation, people, religion, and culture is complex. Curiously, while there is an enormous amount of literature on right wing populism, there is a dearth of literature on right-wing populism in India, and especially on the relationship between religion and populism in India. Yet in India, as is in religious populisms we have observed elsewhere, we find the vertical and horizontal aspects of Hindu populism are couched within a third dimension based on civilisational—and thus religious—identity.

In Israel, the populist *Shas* party has constructed a vertical dichotomy between ‘the people’ (defined as Israeli Jews) and secular ‘elites’, and a horizontal dichotomy based on ‘Israeli Jews’ vs. secularists, migrant workers, African asylum seekers, and Arabs. Filc, a leading scholar of *Shas*, observes how *Shas* creates such a chain “between three different signifiers . . . the Jewish people, Mizrahim and religious Sephardic Jews”. *Shas* rejects secularism and the separation of religion from the public sphere, but instead argues that the role of the state is to “define and build a common good” based Judaic teachings (Filc 2016, p. 173). Like other populist movements, *Shas* amplifies the voices and interests some marginalised groups, especially “the Sephardic economic lower classes by stressing a message of Jewish unity rooted in religious values”, but it also ‘others’ non-Jews, and has prevented the creation of mixed neighbourhoods (Filc 2016, p. 183). The party therefore exploits Jewish fears of the non-Jewish other, portraying mixed neighbourhoods as dangerous places. Yet though it may appear somewhat retrograde, *Shas*, as Filc (2016) observes, is a thoroughly modern phenomenon which “sees the people as the source of truth and legitimate power, against the claim that God is the ultimate source of both”.

Although these examples of religious populisms differ in terms of the religion, they attach themselves to and the political environment in which have appeared, they share important features. First, they attach themselves to a major world religion, and declare that members of this religious group are the ‘good’ or ‘pure’ people. Opposed to this virtuous religion-based community, religious populists argue, are people of other religions and elites, who are said to threaten ‘the people’ and their religion. At the same time, religious populist parties and movements base their political agenda, in part, upon religious beliefs and practices associated with an organised religion, and encourage religious practice among the citizens of their respective nations. All oppose secularism and demand a greater role for religion and/or religious authorities in government. Thus, we may term this group of movements and parties ‘religious populists’ regardless of whether they share formal ties with religious authorities i.e., churches.

3.2. Identitarian Populism

Identitarian populism is superficially similar to religious populism, but it does not possess a political programme based upon religious teachings, nor does it attempt to force religion upon a society or run a society according to the teachings of a particular religion. Instead, identitarian populism embraces a religion-based classification of peoples, often one aligned to civilisations (Western, Islamic, Hindu, etc. . . .) or nations. It is not, however, religious itself, but is most often wholly secular, and therefore does not call for people to return to the faiths of their ancestors, or even to believe in God.

There is a relatively large amount of literature concerning identitarian populism and, in particular, Christian identitarian populism in Western Europe (Vollard 2013; Marzouki and McDonnell 2016; Roy 2013, 2016; Apahideanu 2014; van Kessel 2016; Brubaker 2017; Ozzano and Bolzonar 2020). This literature, although looking at different populist cases in Western Europe, argues that apart from the prevalence of populism in the

region since the 2010s, Christianity has been so thoroughly privatised into 'individual faith' and/or secularised into 'culture', that Christian populism in the West must then take on a primarily identitarian if not ethnonationalist form. In a sense, however, all of these religious populisms are identitarian. However, what is here described as identitarian is those populisms that are absent of genuine religiosity and very close links to established religion.

Olivier Roy observed in 2013 the manner in which secular right-wing populists had increasingly been employing a discourse which defined 'the people' and 'others' in primarily religious terms. Europeans were often defined by right-wing populists as 'Christians' or 'Judeo-Christians', while Muslim immigrants were singled out as a frightening existential threat to European 'Judeo-Christian' civilisation (Roy 2013). Evidently, secular Europeans were choosing to identify as 'Christian' as a means of defending their secular culture against an alleged Muslim threat. The role of Christianity in this scheme, therefore, was not to provide a system of ethics, but to provide identitarian populism in Europe with a "sacred code word to denote a secular, liberal order distinct from Islam, reflecting the culturalization of Christian religion in Europe" (Vollard 2013, p. 94).

Indeed, traditional Christian values do not much resemble the secular liberal values increasingly defended by the populist radical right in Western Europe, particularly on issues such as abortion, homosexuality, gender equality, and sexual freedom (Vollard 2013, p. 94). Moreover, traditional Christian teachings may be more closely aligned with the Islamic values adhered to by many Muslims within Europe. Observing this, Roy surmises that "even if the identity of Europe is Christian, it is no longer a religious identity because the faith has left" (Roy 2013, p. 19). Rather, he argues, in contemporary Europe, precisely because Christianity has itself been secularised as 'culture', "staunch secularists can now defend a Christian identity". In support of Roy's observation Ozzano and Bolzonar (2020), drawing on their observation of two right-wing populist parties in Italy, argue that although they take a softer line on a range of social issues from homosexuality to abortion, at times they attack the Vatican's pro-immigration stance. This may indicate that right-wing populism in historically Catholic parts of Europe is a kind of dissent happening within conservative Catholicism and right-wing politics against the Church and its political stands, particularly on Islam and immigration (Ozzano and Bolzonar 2020, p. 56). Therefore, it is possible for Europeans' to defend "Christianity" while disavowing Christian teachings and affirming liberal secular values in their place.

Brubaker (2017) observed a distinction among North-Western European populist parties in which there is a curious sacralising of secularism and secularising of religion in some populist radical right parties. He describes this as a "Christianist secularism" appearing in Europe, and notes that Christianist political figures in Europe appear to be changing their conception of secularism and national identity in the face of Muslim immigration (Brubaker 2016). "Just as [Muslims'] religiosity emerges from the matrix of Islam", he writes, "so 'our' secularity emerges from the matrix of Christianity (or the 'Judeo-Christian tradition') (Brubaker 2016)". Furthermore, he notes how the "definition of the constitutive other in religio-civilizational terms invites a characterization of the self in the same register" (Brubaker 2016). The growth of Christianist secularism thus seems to be connected to Western European fears that Islam is stronger than secularism, and will ultimately de-secularise the region.

The literature underlines that many Western European populist parties appear, as Brubaker (2017, p. 1198) writes of the Dutch populist Party for Freedom (PVV), to "have become more concerned about the public visibility of Muslim symbols and practices, they have come to stress their secularism". Moreover, as the populist parties of Western Europe become more alert to the alleged threat posed by "'Islamization' to Jews, women, gays, and free speech, they have emphasized their own philosemitism and their commitment to gender equality, gay rights, and freedom of expression" (Brubaker 2017, p. 1198). Equally, according to Schwörer and Romero-Vidal (2020), populist radical right parties "frame Islam in a more negative way than other party groups . . . constructing religious outgroups seems to be much more important to radical right parties than creating a Christian ingroup"

(Schwörer and Romero-Vidal 2020, p. 4). The literature therefore suggests that the use of religion by populists in Western Europe is merely rhetorical, and amounts to little more than a hijacking of religion by populist parties, the purpose of which is to advance a populist programme in which ‘the people’ and ‘others’ are defined in civilisational terms. For example, Judeo-Christian identity plays a key role in the PVV’s attempts at creating a sense of impending civilisational crisis. The party’s leader, Geert Wilders, has claimed that Islam is a powerful threat to the survival of Dutch ‘Judeo-Christian and Humanist’ culture and identity (Brubaker 2017, p. 1197), and moreover that by allowing Muslims to immigrate to the Netherlands the Rutte government is permitting this threat to grow. Wilders, moreover, portrays himself as a savior of the people, who alone is capable of saving his country and ultimately Western civilisation from Islamisation (Morison 2021). It may be, then, that the PVV’s electoral success relies upon the party’s ability to create this a sense of civilisational crisis, then exploit the fear and anger it generates vertically towards elites, and horizontally towards Muslim immigrants.

Brubaker suggests that ‘Christianist secularism’ is a Northern and Western European phenomenon absent elsewhere. Yet as Slačálek and Svobodová (2018, p. 481) point out, something akin to Christianist secularism exists in the populist parties in the Czech Republic. Equally, the allegedly non-secular Christian identitarianism of Hungary’s governing populist party Fidesz and its leader Viktor Orbán, while more aligned with social conservatism than liberalism and hostile to gay rights, could hardly be described as genuinely Christian. While Orbán presents himself as pro-Christian, and describes Christianity as “Europe’s last hope”, his Christianity is not, as Ádám and Bozóki (2016, p. 146) argue the “mainstream, universal form of Christianity as a religion of love” (Ádám and Bozóki 2016, p. 146). It is a political Christianity which perceives the nation-state, and European civilisation, to be the product of Christian values and culture. Orbán’s Fidesz party, it appears, uses Christianity, which it frames in a nationalist and exclusive manner, to legitimize its rule in Hungary (Ádám and Bozóki 2016). Therefore, just as Orbán categorises European civilisation and Hungarian nationalism as intrinsically Christian, so anything that appears to threaten these things is categorised as ‘anti-Christian’. Fidesz thus encourages the Hungarian public to fear the Muslim horizontal enemy, and to despise secular, pro-European elite vertical enemy who call for Muslims to be permitted to immigrate to Hungary.

Religion appears to play a similar role in the politics of Poland’s right-wing populist Law and Justice Party (PiS), which fashions itself as a defender of Polish nationalism and Poland’s Christian culture and heritage (Stanley 2016, pp. 119–20). The party’s co-founder, Jarosław Kaczyński, has declared that Poland’s “freedom and independence” is derived from the nation’s “Christian heritage”, and opposes immigration from Muslim countries on the grounds that it might erode Polish culture and values (Cap 2018, pp. 388–89). Importantly, PiS does not protest against Muslim immigration on the grounds that Muslims are too socially conservative and religious. Rather, the party claims that non-Catholic “ethics” are nothing but “nihilism”, and that the “re-Christianization of Europe” is a priority of the government (Mazurczak 2019). At the same time, PiS cannot easily be described as a religious party because it does not demand that citizens do more than identify with Christianity and support the conservative policies of PiS, and therefore the party may potentially be placed within the identitarian populist category. However, describing populists parties such as PiS and Fidesz, Brubaker observes that the “Christianity they invoke is not a mere identity” but rather contains a “religious message . . . intended to shore up the crumbling moral foundations of social order, . . . to defend family, community, and traditional values against the corrosive effects of unbridled individualism and a hyper-permissive culture of self-expression.” (Brubaker 2017, p. 1204). Thus we may understand such parties as traditionalist Christian identitarians, who draw from religion both a basis for national and civilisational identity, but also a set of traditions which may assist governments in combating perceived negative elements of liberal democratic culture (Morison 2021, p. 175).

Many answered questions about identitarian populism remain. The Identitarian populism of the kind described here is primarily a European phenomenon, and appears to be a Western phenomenon, and a product of the triumph of secularism over religion. Yet is this approach making the false assumption that, for example, Muslims cannot practice identitarian populism because they are ‘religious’ and never secular? Moreover, is Brubaker correct in his assumption that Christianist secularism is only a North-Western European phenomenon? There is evidence it may exist in Australia, in the form of the right-wing populist One Nation Party. The Pauline Hanson led party has described Australia as “a country built on Christian values”, and yet which is secular (Morison 2016). This language is so similar to the Christianist secularism identified by Brubaker that it may be a form of it occurring far away from the Northern and Western region of Europe. At the very least, right-wing populism in Europe and Australia can be described primarily as an “Islamophobic” form of religious populism, albeit one in which identity—not faith—is emphasized (Apahideanu 2014, p. 88).

From this survey it is possible to surmise that religion has two important functions which make it useful to populists of all kinds. First, it adds a third dimension to populism (religious identity/civilisational identity) in which the vertical (‘the people vs. ‘elites’) and horizontal (‘the people vs. internal enemies i.e., fellow citizens who do belong to a different religion, or who do not support populist parties) dimensions may be couched. By this, we mean that by adding religion into the populist matrix, populists are able to construct ‘the people’ as members of a particular religious tradition or religion defined civilisation. Accordingly, populists can then construct enemies based on this same religious classification of peoples, and may do so regardless of whether they are sincere religious believers or merely adopt a religious identity. Finally, when religious and identitarian populist create a sense of civilisational crisis among their respective electorates, it allows them to elicit and exploit a deep sense of fear of the civilisational other, as well as anger towards ‘elites’ who are perceived to have betrayed their civilisational, and placed it in mortal danger.

A second function of religion relates to the manner in which it can be used to produce or exploit certain types of emotional responses from the public which themselves produce a demand for—or perpetuation of—populism.

In Table 3 below, we summarize these two major categories of populism.

Table 3. Two Major Categories of Religious Populism.

Religious Populism	Identitarian Populism
<i>Religious populism</i> encompasses both organised religion’s political and public aspects	<i>Identitarian populism</i> does not possess a political programme based upon religious teachings
Groups/individuals adopt a populist style and/or discourse	Does not attempt to force religion upon a society or run a society according to the teachings of a particular religion
Populist political movement/parties/leaders which adopt an explicit religious programme	Embraces a religion-based classification of peoples, often one aligned to civilisations (Western, Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, etc.) or nations.

4. Religion, Populism, and Emotions

Incorporating religion into a framework that takes into account the role of emotions in creating and sustaining populism may help us understand the rise of populism in the contemporary world. For example, we have already seen how certain emotions among the public—particularly fear, anger, love for homeland, and perhaps nostalgia for an imagined past—can be activated by populists through the instrumental use of religion, just as other political ideologues and movements have instrumentalised religion.

The addition of religion allows populists to exploit emotions within the public in a variety of ways. Religion can help sacralise ‘the people’ by tying them to an existing religion tradition. Religion can also be used to perpetuate an ‘us vs. them’ mentality; the

religion of ‘the people’ can be framed in a positive manner, while the religion (or lack of religion) of ‘others’ can be demonised as an existential threat to ‘us.’ To understand how this might be achieved, we must consider how populists frame an event—a terrorist attack, economic decline, demographic change, government corruption—as evidence of a wider ‘crisis’ created by elites and outgroups that threatens ‘the people’. For example, identitarian populists in Western Europe frame Muslim immigration to Europe as an existential threat to the West’s (Judeo-) Christian culture and identity. By framing Muslim immigrants as dangerous, they provoke a fear response in the public, that can easily be turned into anger against Muslims, but also towards the government elites who permit Muslims to immigrate to Europe. At the same time, populist parties such as the Dutch Party for Freedom and French National Rally exploit deep feelings of nostalgia and love for one’s country by framing themselves as national and civilisational saviours, who alone can restore their nation’s greatness (Morieson 2021).

However, there are differences in how religion is used by identitarian and religious populists. Religious populists can mobilise the public by provoking religious rage, which can be turned against religious minorities and elites. For example, Indian populists have activated righteous anger in Hindu Indians by demonising non-Hindus—especially Muslims—who eat beef. Hindu mobs have been mobilised by BJP populists on the mere accusation of members of a religious minority eating beef, resulting in several murders of people suspected of killing cows or eating beef.

Identitarian populists cannot produce religious fury or indignation. Instead, they often frame religious minorities—almost always Muslims—as existential threats to secular society. European identitarian populists provoke fear among the public by portraying Islam as a backward religion, or a totalitarian political faith, which is antithetical to the Christian and secular values of the West. Curiously, religious and identitarian populists can draw on both civilisational and nationalist feeling, sometimes simultaneously. By identifying ‘the people’ with a religion defined national culture and civilisation, both have at times portrayed elites and religious minorities as threats to their respective national cultures, and well as the larger civilisation to which their nation belongs. Populists may also exploit feelings of nostalgia for a partly imagined past, in which the ‘Judeo-Christian’ West was untroubled by the threat of Islam and progressive politics.

We can surmise, then, that religion allows populists to tap into deep and complex emotions among their respective constituencies related to religion, and religious/civilisational identity. Most often, vertical anger towards elites, who populists may charge with abandoning or attacking ‘the people’ and their religion or religious/civilisational identity. Equally, populists may produce or exploit existing fear of the religious ‘other’, or indeed positive emotions such as love for one’s religious tradition or identity, and fear that it may be taken away. In these ways, religion becomes a useful tool for populists, especially when it is used to elicit or exploit emotions among the public that in turn produce a demand for populist solutions. Indeed, given how frequent religion is use by the growing number of powerful right-wing populist movements and parties throughout the world, it is vital that scholars begin to consider the multifaceted roles religion can play in creating demand for populism, and in sustaining populist government.

5. Important Gaps in the Literature

A number of unanswered questions remain about the relationship between religious populism, emotions, and other forces which influence politics. For example, must religious populism always be religiously exclusivist? Yilmaz et al. (2017) have used Turkey’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) as a case study to explore this question where the merger between religion and liberal democratic values is used by the populist party to survive and grow in an inhospitable environment, where religion was previously not tolerated in politics. They suggest the APK’s bid to pose as ‘Muslim Democrats’ was intended to be short-lived, and discuss the political, social and economic external and internal factors that led the party to disengage with Islamist populism, only to revert back to religious

populism with greater zeal. This leaves several questions unanswered, especially which external and internal conditions have an impact on determining how religion and secular ideals are used by populist leaders and governments.

There is little question that populists require media attention (including negative attention) to succeed. What role might religion, then, play in helping populists attract media attention? The literature suggests that religious populist governments have at times controlled media through laws or power grabs. In Pakistan, the ruling Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has used the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) and cyber laws to keep the content 'in line with Islamic values' (Yilmaz and Shakil 2021a). Equally, Prime Minister Imran Khan has openly admitted that while he cannot ban Western content, he tries to promote 'Muslim' content in the country for the youth's development such as by broadcasting shows such as *Diriliş: Ertuğrul* and a number of other Islamic programs (Iwanek 2020; Yilmaz and Shakil 2021b). Yilmaz, moreover, describes how the Turkish state media helps to promote the AKP's pro-Ottomanist restorative nostalgia agenda by eliciting, through their television programming, emotional responses in the public which are advantageous to the AKP (Yilmaz 2021a). Examples such as these suggest there is a need for academic investigation of how media is used and/or censored by religious populist political parties.

A small amount of literature exists on transnational populism, but it may be that as scholarship on religious populism increases, more scholars will examine the possibility of transnational populism, on the grounds that religion provides an ideal bridge across nations upon which may be built a common populist agenda, if not a new transnational 'Christian' or 'Islamic' identity. De Cleen et al. (2020, p. 146), for example, discuss the Democracy in Europe Movement launched by Greek left-wing populist Yanis Varoufakis, which "seeks to construct a transnational left political project to 'democratise Europe'". Moffitt (2017) also shows how although transnational populism is rare, it may become more common due to the power of networked media to draw populists together across the world in common projects. In both cases, it is possible to conceive how by harnessing networked media, populists may construct a 'people' beyond the confines of the nation state by drawing on notions of shared religious beliefs, and by exploiting the emotional potential of common religious identities.

It appears that there is little relationship between left-wing populism and religion, but any link between the two has not been examined in scholarly literature, and therefore it is impossible to say whether there could be a religious populism of the left. Latin America may be home to left-wing populisms with a relationship of one kind or another with religion. Hugo Chavez, who used religious rhetoric in his political life and may have been influenced by liberation theology, might qualify as a religious populist of the radical left. As Lisa Carroll-Davis (2014) observes, "on the anniversary of Chávez's death, the current Venezuelan president declared that "Christ the Redeemer became flesh, became spirit, became truth in Chávez" and who was "the Christ of the poor, the Christ of the humble, he who came to protect those who have had nothing". Perhaps in Venezuela, then, Chavez himself has become a religious figure, to be venerated in the populist ideology of his successor's regime and within a Christian context?

Finally, we might also wonder how religion as a factor in populism manifests when interpreted through different approaches to populism. If populism is a 'discourse' and a 'style', then it may be that religious populism is very common. After all, almost all politicians, from time to time, will use populist language, and religious leaders may, in a similar way, also use populist language when making public remarks and intervening in politics. However, if populism is defined as an 'ideology', then religious populism might be rare, and restricted to a handful of ideologically populist leaders, movements, and parties. Of course, this returns us to the initial problem identified in this literature review: the contested nature of populism itself. Owing to this contested nature, the prevalence and content of religious populism remains difficult to comprehend at times, and understanding it requires far more research to be conducted.

Table 4 below gives a succinct summary of these gaps in the literature that future research can address.

Table 4. Particular Gaps in Literature.

Gender	A feminist perspective on religious and identitarian populism
Understudied religions and regions	African continent and Asia. Religions such as Buddhism and Judaism
Politics	Religious populism in liberal democracies, conflict zones, fragile and new democracies
Media	Spread or religious populist narrative, interaction and integration in the national and regional context (religious transnationalism)
Emotions	Exploring the psychology involved in the phenomenon
Identity	Studying the relationship between identity and region in a populism shaped context
Transnational Populism	Divulging this topic both in the context of identitarian and religious populism
Civilisationalism	Where does civilisationalism converge and diverge with religious populism
Religious organisations	How they either act as propagators or counters to the narrative
Left-wing populism	This faction's relationship in a populist context with religion
Education	How is education used to propagate or counter religious populism?
Populism	How does religion converge with the different frameworks used to define and measure populism?

6. Conclusions

The purpose of this article was to provide a starting point for further research on the relationship between populism, religion, and emotions. Therefore, in this article, we have surveyed the literature on populism, religion, and emotions and demonstrated several ways the three intersect. We have shown how religion and populism frequently intersect, and that it is possible to discern two ways in which this occurs: first because populism behaves like a religion insofar as it sacralises 'the people', and second through the use of populism by populists as a tool with which they can mobilise support for their movements. We have argued that populism that instrumentalises religion can be placed in two categories: religious populism and identitarian populism. Both classify civilisations and people based on their religious affiliation. However, religious populists can be discerned by their close links to organised religion and their religion influenced political platform. Identitarian populists, on the other hand, emphasise primarily religious identity—not faith or practice—and are most often found in the Western world, where they characteristically blend secularism, nation, civilisation, and religious identity into a sacred matrix.

We also found that religion plays an important role within many populist movements and parties in exploiting and/or producing emotions that drive public support for populism. Thus, we contend that appeals to religion not only shape populist ideologies but may also help mobilise people against other groups and/or the state by generating feelings of belonging, love, passion, fear, anger and hate, thus shaping the performance of populism (Morison 2017; DeHanas and Shterin 2018; Yilmaz 2018, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). We further contend that, emanating from structural (national and international) as well as affective foundations, populism has been effective in speaking to the deep emotions of the masses in a variety of locations around the world. For example, to mobilise their constituents, populist politicians appeal to the collective sense of grievances, resentment, disillusionment, anger (Graham et al. 2011; Rico et al. 2017; Nastiti and Ratri 2018; Demertzis 2019) and vindictiveness (Yilmaz 2021a). However, we do not have much knowledge about how religious ideas and emotions manifest themselves in populist political mobilisation. By approaching religion as an instrument of politics, the existing scholarship (Graham et al. 2011; Brady et al. 2017; Salmela and von Scheve 2017, 2018) has neglected this aspect, and so far, the question of what particular ways religious ideas interact with populism

and emotions to create political mobilisation and intergroup polarisation has not been systematically and comparatively investigated.

Perhaps most importantly, we have shown how religion provides populists with a third aspect of populism into which the often described horizontal and vertical dimensions (De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017) may be couched. This third aspect is provided by populists drawing on religion and religious identity, and most often manifests in what may be called civilisationalism (Brubaker 2017). Civilisationalism provides populists with the means to construct ‘the people’ as part of a religion defined civilisation, and their alleged enemies as enemies of the civilisation to which ‘the people’ belong. This civilisational aspect plays a key role in helping populists elicit or exploit emotions which produce public demand for populism.

When civilisational/religious identity defines the horizontal and vertical aspects of populism, it allows populists to elicit or exploit negative emotions in the public such as fear of the civilisational other. This fear can be used to mobilise the public against immigrants, who populists may accuse of undermining the religious traditions and identities which form the bedrock of the people’s culture, nation, and civilisation. Equally, populists can elicit or exploit the public’s anger towards elites, who populists may charge with allowing immigrants from other civilisations into their society, and permitting them to alter or even destroy the host civilisation. Equally, populists can elicit or exploit more positive emotions, such as love for homeland, by claiming that elites and others threaten this homeland. Yet populists may also claim that secularism and liberalism themselves are to be feared and hated, because they create societies without the kind of cultural bonds and boundaries that religion creates, and that therefore a return to religion is paramount is cultural and civilisational decay is to be avoided (Brubaker 2017, p. 2014).

Finally, we call for more research to be conducted on the intersection of populism, religion, and emotions. Ideally, scholars ought to create frameworks that bring emotion and religion into the study of populism. This can be achieved in a variety of ways and from each of the different approaches to defining and measuring populism. For example, through discourse analysis of texts produced by populists, in which emotive terms related to religion may be operationalised for analysis. Doing this may help us understand how religion and/or religious identity is used by populists to produce an emotional response from the public, and how this emotional response can be turned into support for populist parties. This approach appears to be compatible with the ideational, discourse, style, and strategy approaches to populism, though each will necessarily examine the phenomenon of religious populism and its relationship with emotions from a different perspective and with different elements of populism as objects of study.

Importantly, there remain many gaps in the literature which require further examination. We have identified several. Perhaps the most crucial research required is on understanding which emotions religious and identitarian populists use to mobilise support, how they do this, and how religion and emotions intersect with populism in each case. Furthermore, it is vital that scholars address the large gaps in the literature on religion and populism in Latin America, Africa, and East and South-East Asia. In each of these places, there is evidence that religion plays a key role in producing and/or exploiting emotions which drive support for populism, yet there is little research on populism and religion in these regions (where, indeed, most of the world’s population resides). Equally, our papers calls for further examination of the relationship between left-wing populism and religion, a subject little explored, perhaps because it is assumed that left-wing populists oppose religious identity politics and do not make overt emotional appeals in which religion is a key component.

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