

*With the rise of right-wing populist movements and parties in Central and Eastern Europe, religion has become a key aspect of political debates and policies. Religion on the one hand is used by the far right for their identity policy based on a diffuse identification with the Christian occident, but at the same time, the far right promotes the fear of religious plurality—especially the fear of an alleged Islamization (cf. Hidalgo, Hildmann, and Yendell 2019). The European migrant crisis and the corresponding political reactions seem to have made it socially acceptable to express not only skepticism, but also hate especially against Islam and Muslims. Furthermore, in Central as well as Eastern Europe, anti-discrimination laws, which should protect not just religious minorities, are questioned by right-wing populists and their supporters.*

*Right-wing populist movements and parties, as well as politicians like Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Czech President Miloš Zeman, express very loudly that they are against immigration (Yendell 2018). The far right Polish party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) is said to unite with right-wing extremist groups and highly ranked representatives of the Catholic Church to demonstrate against Muslims (Yendell 2018). At first glance, it seems as if a strong identification with Christianity goes along with feelings of superiority and at the same time with the derogation of other cultures and religions. But is this correlation really so clear, or do we need to differentiate between different forms of religiosity and religious identities, especially because Christian values like love of thy neighbor and mercy actually could also go along with the promotion of a welcoming culture?*

*The authors of the articles in this special issue took the relevance of the political situation as an opportunity to answer a few research questions that focus on the relation of religion and right-wing populism in Central and Eastern Europe:*

*What kind of role does religion play within the far right and the mobilization of right-wing populism in Central and Eastern Europe? In what way does the vote for right-wing populist parties in Central and Eastern Europe have something to do with the derogation of non-Christian religious communities and their members? Does religiosity in Central and Eastern Europe play a role as an immunizing factor, or does religiosity promote right-wing extremist views and the vote for a far right party?*

*Four articles by six authors give answers to these questions:*

*Oliver Hidalgo argues that the role religion plays in several Central and Eastern European democracies can be interpreted as both the result of religion's ambivalence regarding democracy and as a consequence of the liberal-illiberal paradox of democracy itself. His article introduces a general theory of democracy that enables the explanation of contemporary illiberal developments in Western countries such as France and Italy and in Central European countries such as Poland, Slovakia and Hungary.*

*David Herbert focuses on the Polish "case" against the background of the political success of PiS and an increased discrimination of minority groups. He discusses the influence and effect of right-wing populism especially on the rights and lives of religious minorities, the nonreligious and LGBT groups, and what role religion plays in the mobilization of LGBT groups.*

Gert Pickel and Cemal Öztürk are interested in the social psychological in- and outgroup effects in a perceived conflict between the “Christian occident” and an “Islamization” in Eastern Europe. They discuss the question of whether and how strongly the support for a ban of Muslims has an impact on the vote for right-wing populist parties. Their quantitative approach is especially important, as the vote for right-wing populist parties is often explained by theories of deprivation in the context of a difficult economic transformation process in former socialist countries and not so much by the xenophobic attitudes of the voters.

The last article by Stefan Huber and Alexander Yendell argues against the background of Adorno and his co-workers’ theory of the authoritarian personality (Adorno et al. 1950), different forms of religiosity and their impact on right-wing extremist views and the vote for the German right-wing populist party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD). In reference to Adorno et al. (1950), they distinguish between two forms of religiosity – church commitment which the author’s believe that it immunizes against right-wing extremist views as well as against the vote for the AfD and belief in supernatural powers which they believe correlates in a different direction.

The role of religion in the context of right-wing populism and right-wing extremism is currently not part of a broad academic and public debate. Therefore, I do hope that the very interesting findings of different theoretical and methodological approaches in this special issue will trigger and drive the academic, as well as the public, discourse on right-wing populism and extremism.

Alexander Yendell  
guest editor

Adorno, Theodor W., Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, and R. N. Sanford. 1950. *The Authoritarian Personality*, New York: Harper und Brothers.

Hidalgo, Oliver, Philipp W. Hildmann, and Alexander Yendell. (eds.) 2019. “Religion und Rechtspopulismus”. *Special Issue, Argumentation kompakt* (3): 2-6. [www.hss.de/download/publications/Argu\\_Kompakt\\_2019-3\\_Religion.pdf](http://www.hss.de/download/publications/Argu_Kompakt_2019-3_Religion.pdf). (Date of retrieval: 15 December 2019).

Yendell, Alexander. 2018. “Understanding and Explaining Islamophobia in Eastern Europe”. *Connections. A Journal for Historians and Area Specialists*: 8-11. [www.ifl-leipzig.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Sonstiges/EEGA\\_Islamophobia\\_2018-12-21.pdf](http://www.ifl-leipzig.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Sonstiges/EEGA_Islamophobia_2018-12-21.pdf). (Date of retrieval: 15 December 2019).