

Islamophobia and the Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Eastern Europe

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Introduction

Islamophobia is a pressing issue throughout Western culture and beyond. Put simply, Islamophobia is the fear or hatred of Muslims. Islam is a monotheistic religion based around the belief of Allah, their version of a single God. The faith is centered around peace and commitment to Allah and there are countless parallels that can be drawn between Islam and Christianity. Despite the similarities, many conservative Christians around the world have been known to view Islam as a hateful and violent religion. Terrorist attacks like the attack of September 11, 2001, have resulted in a new and more intensely negative stereotype of Muslims. Eastern Europe is no exception, and case studies reflect that Eastern Europe tends to be one of the most Islamophobic regions in the western world.

This raises the question: What is the reason for the widespread Islamophobia in Eastern Europe? The rise of Islamophobia in Eastern Europe can be attributed to the growth of right-wing populism and the use of Orthodox Christianity as a tool for rallying people against those who practice Islam.

Method

In order to answer the question of what causes the mass Islamophobia throughout Eastern Europe, I look further into the circumstances around the increase in Islamophobia in Eastern Europe by evaluating many articles from academic journals, many with information verified through case studies.



Foto, Montecruz. "Refugees resist on roof @ Berlin." *Euractiv*, Reuters, Sept 7, 2015, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/refugees-greeted-to-cheers-in-germany-as-eu-bickers-over-quotas/>



voyager2. "Hungary Budapest" *Pixabay*, 24 Dec. 2018, pixabay.com/photos/hungary-budapest-hungarian-3890989/.

Evidence

Central and Eastern Europe are the world's center for Orthodox Christianity; it is home to 76% of all Orthodox Christians in the world. Orthodox Christianity in Eastern Europe dates to the ninth century, missionaries reportedly from Constantinople spread their Christian faith deeper into Europe. The rise of right-wing populism in Eastern Europe can be considered both a cause and effect of widespread Islamophobia in the region as it becomes evident that the level of contempt a population has towards Muslims leads to an increase of the success of right-wing politicians in Eastern Europe, and the success of right-wing politicians leads to an increase in contempt of Muslims. According to studies, right-wing populist politicians greatly benefited from the refugee crisis because it extended their platform; elections reflect this benefit. In Hungary right-wing populist politicians have used the refugee crisis as a weapon against Muslims. In 2015, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán used his rejection of Muslim refugees to strengthen his platform and celebrated the "victory" after law to let refugees relocate to the country did not pass. People who vote for a right-wing populist politician are much more likely to support a Muslim ban. Right-wing populists also use their Orthodox religion to advocate against the Muslim population. This was displayed in Poland and Hungary when their leaders and the population claimed that an influx of Muslims would impede on their Christian lifestyle. Religion, most specifically Orthodox Christianity is often used in East European rhetoric and by right-wing politicians to distinguish between Europeans and "dangerous" Muslims. Religious intolerance seems to be a common theme in Eastern Europe, not limited to a single religion although it certainly impacts some, like Muslims, more than others. The religious intolerance of other religions that may not be fueled by racism can be attributed to Orthodox Christianity. Orthodox Christians in Eastern Europe have displayed attitudes which can lead to a conclusion that they tend to be less accepting of other religions.

Conclusions

Orthodox Christians are a religious majority, and their traditional values leave little room for other religions, especially those out of the Christian realm. Terrorism in the western world has left Eastern Europeans to make judgements while rarely personally experiencing the presence of Muslims in their daily lives. Right-wing populism has also contributed to the anti-Muslim narrative as countries like Poland and Hungary deny Muslim refugees' access to the countries as to not put their Orthodox Christian values at risk. This research skims the surface of why there is such a presence of Islamophobia in the region, and an issue as complex as this can be examined in many ways.



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