Islamophobia as a Political Tool – The Effects of Neo-Orientalist Discourse and Propaganda in French and Hungarian Populist Politics on Anti-Islam Sentiment in the Context of the 2015 Migration Crisis

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Abstract

This master's thesis investigates whether anti-Islam neo-Orientalist populist political discourse in the context of the 2015 migration crisis deepened Islamophobia in French and Hungarian society, causing lasting damage to the perception of Middle Eastern and North African immigrants and refugees, taking into consideration whether the respective country's citizens had already been exposed to a considerable population of immigrant background before the crisis. The research delves into how the political discourse of the largest and most influential right-wing to far-right political parties in France and Hungary affected and shaped public opinion, social hostility, and Islamophobia between the first considerable influx of immigrants in 2015 and the first nationwide elections held after the crisis, in 2017 in France and 2018 in Hungary. By comparing similar social and political phenomena in the two countries, the current thesis also scrutinizes crucial differences between France and Hungary's respective historical, political, social, and demographic contexts to reveal why certain political and rhetorical strategies proved successful in one country and not in the other.

1. Introduction

In 2015, the European continent experienced an unprecedented influx of asylum seekers due to several concurrent wars in the Middle East and North Africa (henceforth 'MENA region'). FRONTEX reported it as the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War,[1] marked by over 1.8 million illegal border crossings on European shores and at land borders within that year.[2] A peak in the number of arrivals was documented in October 2015, with over 200 000 people debarking on the shores of Greece only in the hope of continuing their journey toward various Western European countries.[3] This unmatched influx of refugees entering the European Union from multiple directions ranging from the Western Mediterranean to Turkey and, beyond, to Northeastern Europe, put tremendous stress on many countries' shores and land borders, as well as on the respective authorities of these states who were not sufficiently prepared to handle a migration flow of this scale.

Media coverage, including the plethora of articles, images, and videos reporting on large groups of people disembarking on European shores and gathering at border crossings, turned the migration crisis into the single most pressing issue and the center of political debate in domestic and international politics continent-wide. Meanwhile, considerable differences between the concerned countries' approaches to potential solutions yielded diplomatic fractures among several states and, most notably, within the European Union. As politicians and political parties turned towards their constituencies to validate their views and agendas, the general public became increasingly divided over the question of immigration which, in turn, encumbered rather than fostered the large-scale international cooperation necessary to overcome the crisis.

One significant aspect of these widening cleavages was the rise and increased visibility of right-wing to far-right populist parties all over the continent. The 2015 migration crisis provided an unprecedented opportunity for European right-wing populist parties to capitalize on feelings of uncertainty, concern, and fear among their respective constituencies by fostering nationalist and anti-immigration agendas. They built their narratives around the intrusive "Others" who were going to impose their own culture, religion, and "way of life" on European peoples and "steal" their jobs, thus putting no less than their livelihood and the survival of their long-standing Christian and Western values at risk. These frequent narratives effectively fostered an atmosphere of ontological insecurity and fear, which often contributed

[1] FRONTEX, 2016, p. 14
[2] FRONTEX, 2016, p. 6
[3] IOM, 2016, p. 4

to the expansion of populist parties' voter bases by making voters believe that the mere survival of their beliefs, values, and everyday habits all depended on the actions of these parties.

This research bases its analysis on the ways European neo-Orientalist populist discourse constituted the "Other" to create and propagate subjective representations of immigrants from the MENA region in order to uphold political agendas rooted in nationalism, anti-globalization, and cultural protectionism. The 2015 migration crisis brought narratives emerging from these discourses to the fore and propelled them to the center of public attention.

In the early days of the migration crisis, public opinion on MENA refugees became increasingly divided and heavily influenced by prevailing political discourse and the media. Therefore, neo-Orientalist narratives gradually embedded themselves in everyday lives, which, in turn, paved the way for the rise and spread of Islamophobia.

This research investigates how anti-Islam Neo-Orientalist populist political discourse affected and actively shaped public opinion, social hostility, and Islamophobia around the time and in the aftermath of the first considerable influx of immigrants in 2015 in two European countries: France and Hungary. These two countries were chosen as case studies of this inquiry owing to their considerable differences compared to each other concerning their respective political, social, historical, economic, and legal realities at the time of the migration crisis.

The two countries experienced considerably different levels of exposure to Islam and people of MENA origins, which forms a pivotal aspect of this research, whereby it aims to find answers as to how the presence or the lack thereof of a sizeable population of immigrant background affected the ways constituencies perceived simplified, distorted, and fabricated realities presented to them in neo-Orientalist populist political narratives in the context of the 2015 migrant crisis. Through the analysis of right-wing to far-right populist discourse in both countries, this inquiry aims to uncover a correlation between the impact of anti-Islam neo-Orientalist narratives in a given society and the fact whether or not that specific society has a considerable population of MENA immigrant backgrounds.

This research focuses on the political discourse of each country's largest and most influential right-wing to far-right populist party. In France, the inquiry directs its attention towards the RN (*Rassemblement National*, 'National Rally'), known until 2018 as the FN (*Front National*, 'National Front'). Founded in 1972, the FN has been a significant force in French nationalism since the 1980s and had established itself as a major political party by the

dawn of the 2015 migration crisis. Its views have always positioned it in the far right of the political spectrum; however, it attempted to "de-demonize" itself in the early 2010s by softening its image in the eyes of public opinion.[4]

In Hungary, this research examines the political discourse and impact of the *Fidesz*-KDNP party alliance, a political alliance established in 2005 between two political parties: *Fidesz* (*Fidesz - Magyar Polgári Szövetség*, 'Fidesz - Hungarian Civic Alliance') and the KDNP (*Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt*, 'Christian Democratic People's Party'). Since its formation in 1988, *Fidesz* has gradually shifted from a center-left liberal activist movement to a right-wing or far-right populist party. Although *Fidesz* and KDNP technically form a coalition, the autonomous influence and size of the latter are negligible, and its support is dwarfed by *Fidesz's* popularity.[5] For this reason, in most cases, the party alliance is referred to as *Fidesz*, which applies in all contexts, both domestically and internationally. Henceforward, mentions of *Fidesz* refer to the party alliance as a whole.

Given the immense scope of the research subject, that being constituencies of France and Hungary, this inquiry is based on already available primary and secondary sources, including literature on the applied theoretical framework, media content, political speeches, and press statements, as well as statistical datasets and public opinion polls.

In order to keep the 2015 migration crisis and its aftermath as its focus, this research does not analyze or discuss developments on immigration or Islamophobia in Europe beyond the 2017 presidential elections in France and the 2018 parliamentary election in Hungary.

By means of a wide range of academic literature and tangible products of political discourse and public opinion, this research investigates whether anti-Islam neo-Orientalist populist discourse in the context of the 2015 migration crisis deepened Islamophobia in French and Hungarian society to the point that it caused lasting damage to the perception of MENA immigrants and refugees, taking into account whether the respective country's citizens had already been exposed to a considerable immigrant population before the crisis. To this end, this inquiry delves into how anti-Islam neo-Orientalist populist political discourse affected and shaped public opinion, social hostility, and Islamophobia between the first considerable influx of immigrants in 2015 and the first nation-wide elections held after the crisis, in 2017 in France and in 2018 in Hungary.

[4] Gombin, 2015
[5] Ipsos, 2009

2. Theoretical Framework: Neo-Orientalism and Islamophobia

In what follows, this research lays down the essential theoretical foundations of the analysis of anti-Islam neo-Orientalist populist political discourses. The inquiry is primarily concerned with the mobilization of Islamophobia as a political tool in the context of the 2015 migration crisis, the analysis of which first necessitates the socio-political and historical contextualization of Islamophobia as a phenomenon and its place within the wider concept of neo-Orientalism.

Neo-Orientalism, similarly to classical Orientalism, is not a static concept; instead, it refers to various historical frameworks of thinking which create and propagate subjective representations of the "Other" from the Orient.[6] Despite the manifold nature of these tightly interconnected concepts, a general definition can be applied to both, respectively. These may also serve as a significant point of distinction between them. Classical Orientalism pertains to the production or acquisition of knowledge concerning the Orient as a result of a process that reflects particular interests and a Western-centric worldview, leading to a distortion of the authentic reality of said regions and their inhabitants. Meanwhile, Neo-Orientalism is the neoconservative construction of Islam and the Muslim world as a social and existential threat to what neoconservatives and right-wing actors refer to as the Western world and civilization.[7] Neo-Orientalism manifests itself in different forms within the Western social world and with regard to the perceptions of certain right-wing factions towards countries and peoples of the Arab-Muslim world or Muslim individuals and communities within Western societies.

According to Kerboua (2016), the afore-described neo-Orientalist construction of Islam and the Muslim world primarily emerged from neoconservative circles within the Western world who recaptured and heightened earlier Orientalist tropes and imaginaries in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks in the United States.[8] Albeit it has to be acknowledged that the events of 9/11 did indeed mark a significant paradigmatic shift in the ways in which Western societies and political circles think, write, and "act" about the MENA region and its peoples, neo-Orientalist thinking had already been well present in the second half of the

[6] Kerboua, 2016, p. 8
[7] Kerboua, 2016, pp. 8-9
[8] Ibid.

twentieth century, as revealed by Marwan Mohammed (2014), writing about the emerging "Muslim problem" in France in the early 1980s.[9]

The sheer existence of this so-called "Muslim problem" was already a highly politicized question entailing public controversies around a potential outside and inside threat to French culture and *laïcité*, as well as the "French way of life" more generally. Early proponents of the "Muslim problem" narrative underscored the issue of "integration," drawing attention to the continuous reproduction of a particular religiosity deemed incongruous with prevailing conceptions of citizenship and French national identity. This concern comprises the matter of "modernity," indicating Muslims' presumed incompatibility with the values of democracy, *laïcité*, and gender equality, which is ultimately rooted in centuries-old tropes of an "imaginary Islam" constructed during the prime era of—in part French—imperialism and classical Orientalism.[10]

Classical Orientalists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, as described by Edward Said (1979), were neither interested in nor capable of studying and discussing individuals. Instead, they constructed heavily essentialized artificial entities relative to Western ideas, such as "the Oriental" and "the Muslim" as opposed to "the European" and "the Christian," thus reducing hundreds of millions of people and uncountable diverse cultural communities to one or two extreme, collective abstractions.[11] Orientalism, this inchoate system of "knowledge" about the Orient and the "Oriental," was ultimately a political vision of an assumed reality from a European, self-declaredly superior point of view, promoting the difference between the *familiar* (Europe, the West, or "Us") and the *strange* (the Orient, the "Other," or "Them").[12] This dichotomization consolidated the Westerner's idealized self-image as rational, peaceful, liberal, and capable of holding actual values while framing the Oriental (the Arab, the Muslim) as none of these things.[13]

Although Western knowledge about the MENA region has expanded considerably throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, these classical Orientalist imaginaries have withstood the test of time and persisted in different contexts and new ideological frameworks, as showcased by the earlier instance of France and its "Muslim problem" in the 1980s, which this study will revert to in the upcoming chapters.

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[9] Mohammed, 2014, p. 3
[10] Ibid.
[11] Said, 1979, p. 155
[12] Said, 1979, p. 43
[13] Said, 1979, p. 49

Over time, the continued material investment of European and American scholars, alongside diverse political actors, turned Orientalism into a widely embraced framework for processing the Orient within Western consciousness. Simultaneously, this investment in Orientalism facilitated the spread of its narratives in popular culture and public opinion.[14] As the cultural and academic hegemony of the West persisted throughout the ever-changing geopolitical environment of the twentieth century, most notably in the years following the Second World War and throughout the decades of postcolonial migration, these deeply embedded conceptions of the Orient survived and often gained new or additional meanings in today's globalized world in the form of *neo-Orientalist* narratives.

Whereas early Orientalist scholarship and cultural outputs created a distinctive corpus of knowledge serving Western imperialist interests through the reduction of the Orient to a static, exotic, backward, and silent object,[15] neo-Orientalist narratives frequently take shape within the framework of a "Clash of Civilizations" paradigm,[16] whereby the very presence of Middle Eastern and North African people in Western societies and its legitimacy, are called into question, all the while continued immigration from the MENA region is presented as an existential and civilizational threat.[17] This polarizing, essentialist discourse that brings the differentiation—and even confrontation—between identities, religions, and civilizations to the fore of any intercultural thinking exacerbates the rift between the West and Islam by failing to deliver a nuanced, informed, and objective understanding of the Muslim faith and its diverse communities.[18]

The evolution of this discourse brought about the emergence of Islamophobia, a social phenomenon described by Kerboua (2016) as the most hostile manifestation of neo-Orientalism.[19] Broadly speaking, Islamophobia denotes a sense of discomfort and, to varying degrees, fear and animosity towards everything connected to Islam and individuals who identify as Muslims.[20] However, it cannot and *should not* be reducible to a mere act of rejection,[21] just as it cannot and should not be amalgamated with Western criticism of religions for the reason that this is an immensely complex phenomenon with implications well beyond the question of religiosity, touching upon geographical origin, language, race, and sex. Hence, Islamophobia is a complex phenomenon characterized by the process of

[14] Said, 1979, p. 6
[15] Kerboua, 2016, p. 9
[16] Kerboua, 2016, p. 21
[17] Mohammed, 2014, p. 2
[18] Kerboua, 2016, p. 27
[19] Kerboua, 2016, p. 8
[20] Kerboua, 2016, p. 22
[21] Kerboua, 2016, p. 24

othering which, wherein the social agency of presumed or real Muslims is reduced to an essentialized religious action, resulting in the withering or outright erasure of the plurality of identities and communities present within this population.[22] As such, Islamophobia is closely connected to the broader concept of *xenophobia*.

When dealing with anti-Islam sentiment in Europe, as Perocco (2020) suggests, it must be noted that Muslim immigrants from the MENA region and their descendants constitute the first, largest, and most deeply established non-European demographic that has migrated to and settled in contemporary Europe, primarily driven by employment opportunities.[23] These populations, although in considerably smaller numbers, have been present in various European countries for centuries as a result of colonial relations; however, the most significant turning points were perhaps the aftermath of the Second World War and the independence of many former colonial possessions in the Middle East and North Africa.[24] Post-war and post-colonial immigration—predominantly in search of employment opportunities and, by that means, a better life—accounted for an overwhelming majority of the non-native Muslim population in Europe. These immigrants took part in post-war rebuilding efforts and contributed considerably to the economic upswing of Western European countries throughout the following decades, which, in turn, gradually entailed the rise of popular anti-Islam sentiment and the appearance of anti-immigration political parties in Western Europe from the 1970s onwards.[25] The emergence and evolution of the French *Front national* is a case in point that this study reverts to in the upcoming chapters.

From the 1990s on, later also exacerbated by the events of 9/11, a set of policies, practices, and discourses hostile to Muslim immigration began to spread, eventually resulting in the birth of "an actual system of Islamophobia,"[26] as described by Perocco (2020), who argues that this "system of Islamophobia" consists of four main factors and their interactions: a set of essential themes, policies, practices, and actors. In accordance with the neo-Orientalist grand narrative of the "Clash of Civilizations," the key themes of this system include the issue of an "Islamic invasion," which is then underpinned by "the irreducible difference" between Western civilization and the Middle East. The question of this "difference," in turn, brings forth narratives of "incompatibility" and an assumed impossibility of integration.

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[22] Mohammed, 2014, p. 2
[23] Perocco, 2020, p. 27
[24] Mohammed, 2014, p. 2
[25] Paár, 2015, p. 4
[26] Perocco, 2020, p. 28

Neo-Orientalist and Islamophobic policies and practices have the capacity to influence one another on a socio-political level. However, it is crucial to recognize that policymaking remains a monopoly of the State and its various political entities, whereas Islamophobic practices can manifest themselves in different forms and intensities in both the political sphere and broader society. Ultimately, the fundamental narratives, policies, and political and social practices acquire significance within the context of various actors and their respective objectives.

These elements and their manifestations, alongside their interrelations, constitute decisive factors regarding the marginalization of individuals and communities of MENA origins and their categorization, for instance, as a disadvantaged or a malevolent, undesirable religious minority.[27] The following chapter will demonstrate how these complex interrelations among actors, objectives, and actions led to Islamophobia becoming an unavoidable socio-political phenomenon in France and Hungary with a significant impact.

[27] Perocco, 2020, p. 28

3. Historical Background

As stated in the introductory chapter, France and Hungary were chosen as case studies of this inquiry on account of their considerable differences compared to each other regarding their respective political, social, historical, economic, and legal realities at the time of the migration crisis.

France has a long history of imperial rule throughout the Middle East and North Africa—particularly the latter—which is nowadays well reflected in French society's demographic composition and the share of its population of MENA immigrant backgrounds, most of whom have French citizenship. Communities of MENA origins are predominantly concentrated in urban and suburban areas, particularly in and around Paris and Marseille. This concentration is mainly attributed to the historical availability of employment opportunities and to the French State's housing policy for temporary immigrants in the 1950s, which resulted in the spatial segregation of these communities. From the beginning, low-paid employment, the different cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds, as well as the rejection of North African immigrants by many belonging to the majority population have all been paramount factors that exacerbated segregation over time, which, in turn, led to discrimination in housing, education, and employment. Unemployment among North African immigrants and their descendants is higher than the French national average.[28]

All of the above factors are crucial to the thorough understanding of the lived experience of MENA immigrants in France, just as they are to the comprehension of changes in public sentiment towards immigration in the context of the 2015 crisis. However, these historical factors present merely one side of the coin.

Meanwhile, the situation in Hungary is starkly different. The first temporary Arab immigrants arrived in the country during the socialist era, in the late 1950s,[29] to study at various universities in the framework of intergovernmental agreements between Hungary and MENA states formally supported by the Eastern Bloc.[30] After the 1989 change of regime, Hungary experienced a small-scale economic immigration of Muslims from the MENA region, however, their numbers remained consistently low.[31]

The above-described historical differences bear great significance concerning how Islamophobia as a socio-political phenomenon was perceived and experienced by public

[28] Minority Rights Group International, 2018
[29] J. Nagy, 2017, p. 82
[30] J. Nagy, 2017, p. 85, 98, 294
[31] KSH, 2013, p. 7

opinion in France and Hungary in the context of the migration crisis. In what follows, this inquiry provides a more detailed overview of France and Hungary's respective native populations' exposure to Islam, Muslims, and neo-Orientalist populist discourse before 2015.

3.1. France

France has a long history of immigration and integration of foreigners; however, most were of European and, usually, Christian backgrounds.[32] While the country has had varying economic and diplomatic ties with multiple primarily Muslim countries and territories since the High Middle Ages,[33] Islam remained an almost exclusively external phenomenon until Napoleon's campaign in Egypt and France's consequent colonization of much of North and West Africa.[34] The scholars who participated in Napoleon's campaign and French missionaries from all corners of the world contributed to the creation of an overwhelmingly subjective, one-sided body of "knowledge" about the Orient, which effectively laid the foundations of French Orientalism.[35] The nineteenth-century colonial ambitions of France were largely fostered and justified by this since then superseded discipline. Furthermore, the colonial experience continued to feed into this same discipline until the prime of anti-colonial independence struggles during the first decades of the Cold War.[36] As a West-centric discipline based on the essentialized and largely uninformed othering and degradation of the "Oriental" as opposed to the wise, moral, and superior "Western," Orientalism played a significant role in the subjugation of indigenous populations in French colonies, and it was mobilized constantly as a political tool by colonial authorities to preserve French interests and mitigate the risk of potential uprisings among oppressed populations.[37]

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the Republic experienced a long period of remarkable economic upswing, referred to as the *Trente Glorieuses*. The post-war rebuilding of the country and the ensuing industrial growth forced France to resort to unskilled and specialized immigrant workers, initially Italians and Spaniards,[38] soon followed by Muslim—predominantly North African—workers from Algeria and other French colonies.[39]

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[32] Boyer, 1998, pp. 75-76
[33] Arkoun, 2006, p. 21 ; Boyer, 1998, pp. 38-40
[34] Arkoun, 2006, pp. 505, 725 ; Boyer, 1998, pp. 41-43
[35] Arkoun, 2006, p. 937 ; Boyer, 1998, p. 43 ; Said, 1979, pp. 219-220
[36] ʿAbbās & Lacouture, 2013, pp. 29-30 ; Abi-Mershed, 2010, p. 59 ; Ageron, 1964, p. 9 ; Arkoun, 2006, p. 505 ; Boyer, 1998, pp. 49-53 ; Daughton, 2006, p. 250 ; Evans & Phillips, 2007, p. 37 ; Karīma, 2010, p. 221 ; Laffont, 1981, pp. 78-82 ; Lorcin, 1995, pp. 79-80 ; Said, 1979, p. 45
[37] Said, 1979, p. 45
[38] Boyer, 1998, p. 62
[39] Ibid.

Despite the rapidly increasing Muslim population, the cultural and religious practices that became thus physically present in the Metropole remained largely "invisible" until the 1980s, as these immigrant workers were all granted fixed-term contracts entitling them merely to a *temporary* stay.[40] For this reason, the majority of Muslims in metropolitan France at the time were young men who were either single or had left their families behind in their respective home countries for the duration of their employment in Europe.[41]

This situation began to change drastically throughout the 1970s and '80s due to the convergence of multiple social, economic, and political factors, both domestic and global.

The country's deindustrialization and mechanization was accompanied by a shift in immigration policy, whereby instead of employing fluctuating numbers of workers on fixed-term contracts, Paris placed emphasis on family reunification and long-term—or even permanent—settlement in the Metropole.[42] This brought about an unprecedented claim among Muslim workers and their families for social, economic, legal, educational, and corporate frameworks that would allow them to practice their religion in a way that is in line with its rules and traditions.[43] For instance, an increasing claim could be observed for factories to designate in-house prayer rooms and allow employees to perform the five mandatory prayers prescribed in Islam during working hours, as well as for the restructuring of working hours during the month of Ramadan to remediate the fatigue caused by fasting and irregular daily routines.[44]

The increasing "visibility" and claims of Islam in metropolitan France contributed to the rise of the French far-right, which had been marginal and insignificant since the Second World War, predominantly owing to collective memories of the Vichy regime and, later on, the Algerian War.[45]

The most prominent player on the far right was the *Front national* ('National Front', hereafter FN), founded by Jean-Marie Le Pen in 1972.[46] The party struggled to make an impact for the first decade of its existence;[47] however, it ultimately achieved a considerable breakthrough in the 1983 municipal by-elections in Dreux, a *commune* in the Paris metropolitan area. The elections were held in a period of prolonged economic crisis and

[40] Boyer, 1998, pp. 63-64, 131-132 ; Mohammed, 2014, p. 8
[41] Boyer, 1998, p. 63
[42] Arkoun, 2006, p. 981 ; Boyer, 1998, pp. 87-90
[43] Boyer, 1998, pp. 94, 100
[44] Arkoun, 2006, p. 808 ; Boyer, 1998, pp. 100-103
[45] Amengay, 2019, pp. 13-14, 25, 33
[46] Amengay, 2019, p. 13
[47] Amengay, 2019, p. 15

widespread unemployment sparked by the 1973 oil crisis,[48] which ultimately led to the State's decision to change its immigration policy. Meanwhile, partially catalyzed by the 1979 Iranian Revolution, a growing fear of Islamist terrorism and radicalization ensued among the French citizenry,[49] contributing to the proliferation of a perception in public opinion that all Muslims were potential terrorists.[50] The 1983 FN candidate in Dreux adeptly leveraged domestic and international developments to orchestrate a successful campaign by focusing solely on immigration and people's insecurities, which resulted in the party proceeding to the second round of an election for the first time in its history.[51]

Besides the emergent Global War on Terror, the social insecurities it began to engender, and an increasing demand for the proper institutional organization of Islam in the Metropole, the State's incapacity and reluctance to become involved in the integration of Muslims also played a significant role in French society's nascent "Muslim problem" in the 1980s.[52] Beyond being a social, religious, and political issue, the State's attitude can be explained primarily by the legal obstacles presented by the 1905 Law on the Separation of the Churches and the State.[53] Although the State had been providing limited religious, cultural, and educational services to Muslims temporarily residing in the Metropole through the Grand Mosque of Paris since the 1920s,[54] this framework, complete with an ever-increasing number of independent Muslim associations around the country,[55] proved to be insufficient by the 1980s.[56] Notably, the Republic had already had to artfully bypass its own laws—which strictly prohibited the State from getting involved in religious affairs—to build the Grand Mosque of Paris by complementing it with a "Muslim Institute," a cultural and educational facility.[57]

For most of the twentieth century, the provision of religious services was entrusted to the adherents' respective countries of origin—primarily French colonial possessions at the time of inauguration—which led to diplomatic issues and national security concerns beginning in the years of decolonization.[58]

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[48] Amengay, 2019, pp. 17, 19
[49] Boyer, 1998, pp. 112-113
[50] Boyer, 1998, p. 159 ; Mohammed, 2014, p. 2
[51] Amengay, 2019, p. 17 ; Arkoun, 2006, p. 806
[52] Boyer, 1998, pp. 72, 164 ; Mohammed, 2014, p. 2
[53] Arkoun, 2006, pp. 706-708, 989 ; Boyer, 1998, pp. 49, 58, 73 ; *Loi du 9 décembre 1905 concernant la séparation des Eglises et de l'Etat*
[54] Arkoun, 2006, pp. 718, 721-724, 728-730 ; Boyer, 1998, pp. 55-56, 72
[55] Boyer, 1998, p. 56
[56] Boyer, 1998, p. 100
[57] Arkoun, 2006, pp. 724-725 ; Boyer, 1998, pp. 55, 58 ; *Loi du 9 décembre 1905 concernant la séparation des Eglises et de l'Etat*
[58] Boyer, 1998, pp. 72, 84-85, 100

Due to the absence of an adequate institutional framework, predominantly secular organizations such as Muslim labor unions, youth associations, and women's organizations assumed significance as the primary platforms for Muslims to demand better visibility and equal treatment compared to other denominations.[59] Besides better religious visibility at work, Muslims in the Metropole also went on strike to demand better housing conditions since the mass housing establishments originally built for temporary workers in the 1950s and '60s were in severe deterioration.[60] These strikes had significant media coverage; however, the portrayal of these events in the media failed to capture the complex historical, socio-economic, and political background of Muslims' demands and thus further contributed to the deterioration of the public perception of Muslims and Islam in France.[61]

Meanwhile, in contrast with emerging narratives of Islam's incompatibility with the values and culture of the Republic,[62] Muslim workers, and their families wished merely to integrate French society and labor unions while negotiating better living conditions and certain religion-specific conditions with the State to retain essential religious and cultural practices from their home countries.[63] In other words, Muslims were demanding *integration* instead of *assimilation*.

As the "Muslim problem" was making its way into the mainstream, everyday politics, and the media, French public opinion was also becoming increasingly divided on matters of Islam, immigration, and integration.[64] For instance, much of the political right, including Harkis and *pieds-noirs*, felt contempt towards Muslims—particularly Algerians—since they generally perceived them, the "Arabs," as socially inferior, lazy, and uneducated workers incapable but also unwilling to integrate French society.[65] This view was deeply rooted in colonial experiences and imaginaries as well as in long-standing Orientalist tropes.[66]

Nevertheless, the phenomenon that sparked the most heated debate about Islam and its place in French society was the question of the "Islamic veil," emerging in the late 1980s.[67] Wearing a veil, in Islam, is linked to regulations on modesty and the refusal to wear—or show off—ostentatious markers, such as jewelry.[68] The wearing of the veil became

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[59] Arkoun, 2006, p. 806 ; Boyer, 1998, pp. 101, 136, 143-148, 160
[60] Boyer, 1998, p. 101
[61] Arkoun, 2006, pp. 807-808, 964-965 ; Boyer, 1998, p. 107
[62] Boyer, 1998, p. 115 ; Mohammed, 2014, pp. 2-3 ; Perocco, 2020, p. 35
[63] Boyer, 1998, p. 104 ; Perocco, 2020, p. 27
[64] Boyer, 1998, pp. 107-110 ; Mohammed, 2020, pp. 2-3
[65] Amengay, 2019, p. 19 ; Boyer, 1998, p. 80
[66] *see Chapter 2*
[67] Arkoun, 2006, p. 990 ; Boyer, 1998, pp. 14, 132, 170-174 ; Mohammed, 2020, pp. 4-5; Perocco, 2019, p. 36
[68] Boyer, 1998, p. 164

the most contested aspect of Islam in French public opinion owing to its common association with the oppression of women, a refusal of the principles of *laïcité*, an incapability of social integration, and a fundamentalist, militant Islam.[69] These assumptions were informed not only by the Iranian Revolution and an increasing fear of terrorism but also by age-old Orientalist imaginaries and the living conditions of Muslim women in the Middle East commonly represented—without regard to differences between countries and regions—as these were in some extreme cases, such as Saudi Arabia.[70]

Meanwhile, the reputation of Muslims and Islam was further exacerbated by the difficulties faced by the "second generation," who were already born in France and acquired French citizenship under *jus soli*.[71] These youths often quit the education system without any or with insufficient qualifications, which, as a consequence of deindustrialization and mechanization processes in the 1970s and '80s, led to severe unemployment among them.[72] Numerous youth associations were founded in the late 1980s and during the 1990s, which aimed at combating social exclusion, giving second-generation immigrants a sense of purpose, and preventing drug abuse and petty crimes, with the latter being among the gravest issues of many *banlieues* ('suburbs')[73] across France.[74] By the mid-1990s, there were approximately 1500 youth associations in the country.[75] While such organizations and their members increased positive visibility for their communities, Muslims, immigrants, and Islam in general, individual cases of radicalizations also occurred.[76]

Between 1995 and 2005, a number of terrorist attacks were committed in Paris and Lyon by young French Muslims who claimed to be radical Islamists.[77] Furthermore, in the aftermath of 9/11, multiple potential terrorists who were Muslim French citizens of immigrant background, were captured by U.S. forces in Afghanistan.[78]

While a high degree of ethnic and spatial segregation remained well into the 2000s with Islamophobia becoming more and more prevalent in French society,[79] the State's

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[69] Boyer, 1998, pp. 166, 170-172
[70] Boyer, 1998, p. 124
[71] Boyer, 1998, pp. 76, 92
[72] Boyer, 1998, p. 233
[73] *banlieue* (French): literally 'suburb'; however, in relation to immigration or communities with immigrant backgrounds, the term—even without any qualifiers—can specifically refer to suburbs in large urban areas with a high concentration of immigrant population (including second and third generation) in low cost, high density social housing initially built for workers in the second half of the 20th century, often with a relatively high criminality rate relative to its surroundings.
[74] Arkoun, 2006, pp. 815-818 ; Boyer, 1998, p. 99
[75] Arkoun, 2006, p. 815
[76] Arkoun, 2006, p. 815 ; Boyer, 1998, pp. 233-234
[77] Arkoun, 2006, p. 815
[78] Arkoun, 2006, p. 820
[79] Arkoun, 2006, p. 816 ; Mohammed, 2020, pp. 4-5

inclusion policies improved considerably compared to earlier attempts. This manifested itself in an increasing inclusion of Muslims in political life and in the creation of new, more visible Muslim movements and institutions, such as the CFCM (*Conseil français du culte musulman en France*, 'French Council of the Muslim Faith'), which was a sign of the long-awaited "institutionalization and 'citizenization' of Islam" in the country, Catherine Wihtol de Wenden argues.[80]

While often perceived as mere hypocrisy by French Muslims, as the second generation reached voting age, parties across the political spectrum—including the FN—began campaigning for the hypothetical "Arab" or "Muslim vote" and adding Muslim candidates to their electoral lists.[81] Meanwhile, the State attempted to reduce spatial segregation and socio-economic inequalities, notably through the 2003 Borloo Law, primarily aimed at de-ghettoizing sensitive urban zones.[82]

At the same time, however, the political and social debates surrounding the Islamic veil continued, and by the March 2004 Law on Secularity and Conspicuous Religious Symbols in Schools, the State banned all religious symbols in public education facilities.[83] In subsequent years, this decision was followed by further highly divisive restrictive measures in regard to the wearing of religious markers, which rendered the issue a focal part of the Front national's discourse, especially during the 2015 migration crisis, as will be shown later in this research.[84]

While the *Front national* attempted to get the "Muslim vote," Muslim youths were primarily left-leaning, owing overwhelmingly to the fact that the FN's electoral campaigns were constructed primarily around social insecurities linked to immigration and to *their* detriment.[85] By 2002, the FN's voter base consisted mainly of workers, employers, and rural citizens. Thus, the party was able to ally the "bourgeois and the proletarian" with only mid and senior-level employees being underrepresented. Amengay (2019) suggests that their relatively higher level of education may account for this.[86]

In 2011, Jean-Marie Le Pen stepped down as president of the *Front national*, and, following an internal vote, her daughter, Marine Le Pen, replaced him after getting 67% of the votes cast by party members.[87] This moment set off a considerable shift in the party's

[80] Arkoun, 2006, pp. 816-818
[81] Arkoun, 2006, p. 816
[82] Arkoun, 2006, pp. 820-821
[83] Ibid.
[84] *see Chapter 6.1*
[85] Arkoun, 2006, p. 816
[86] Amengay, 2019, p. 25
[87] Amengay, 2019, p. 32

politics, as the new president's primary aim was to "de-diabolize" the party in French public opinion by distancing the FN from her father's controversial and often radical statements and ideas.[88] With that in mind, she preferred to be seen as the leader of the "popular or populist right" instead of the far right. Nevertheless, French political scientist Joël Gombin argues that this attempt at rebranding the *Front national* was merely a "semantic strategy" applied within its larger "de-diabolization" plan.[89]

Even as such, Marine Le Pen's strategy paid off, as shown by the party's results in the 2012 presidential elections: with 17.9% of votes cast, the FN achieved the best electoral result in its history.[90] Supporting Gombin's claim, Marine Le Pen's voter base did not differ significantly from his father's: it consisted overwhelmingly of "rather young" citizens with "low educational qualifications," in addition to merchants and production workers. The only difference was the disappearance of the "gender gap," owing to the underrepresentation of women in the FN's voter base under Jean-Marie Le Pen's leadership.[91]

As in the case of many populist parties in Europe following the 2008 economic crisis, Marine Le Pen's rhetoric was based on an anti-globalization narrative promoting "economic nationalism" while also consistently taking the "victim's" position in narratives portraying the FN as a constant "target of injustices" and not the *agent* of its diabolization.[92]

Following its success in 2012, the *Front national*'s popularity did not cease to increase, and the party achieved unprecedented results in the 2014 municipal and European elections. In the latter case, the FN successfully established "the most significant French delegation in the European Parliament in numerical terms, with 24 deputies."[93]

The *Front national* encountered the 2015 migration crisis in this context of growing popularity and representation, which, as will be demonstrated later in this research, presented an exceptional opportunity for the party to mobilize its anti-immigration and anti-Islam discourse.

3.2. Hungary

Middle Eastern and North African Muslims began to settle in Hungary during the second half of the twentieth century; however, Islam and the presence of Muslims were by no means new to Hungarian society.

[88] Ibid.
[89] Amengay, 2019, p. 35
[90] Amengay, 2019, p. 37
[91] Amengay, 2019, p. 38
[92] Amengay, 2019, p. 36
[93] Amengay, 2019, p. 39

The 1910 census conducted on the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary (excluding Bosnia and Herzegovina) counted 553 Muslims, both Bosniaks and Turks.[94] In 1916, the Hungarian National Assembly passed a bill formally recognizing Islam, a strategic move to strengthen the country's military alliance with the Ottoman Empire by winning over ethnic Bosniaks in Hungary and the annexed territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. After the end of the First World War, with Bosnia and Herzegovina detached from the dissolved Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the number of Muslims in Hungary decreased considerably; however, a small Bosniak Muslim community endured until the 1950s, when the country's communist leadership and its strict, general anti-religious stance brought about the gradual dissolution of the community.[95]

In the late 1950s, the presence of Islam in Hungary took on a new form that lacked any continuity with former Muslim communities in the country's history. In 1957, Hungary and Egypt signed a bilateral cultural agreement that foresaw, among other things, scholarship grants to Egyptian students to pursue tertiary education in the European country. By 1959, Hungary had hosted over two hundred Egyptian scholarship students.[96] The intergovernmental agreement also involved cultural exchange, aimed at mutually introducing the other country's cultural products to domestic audiences.[97] From the 1960s on, students from various other Arab countries were gradually included in Hungary's scholarship programs as the country was rapidly expanding its Middle Eastern and North African diplomatic, economic, cultural, and scientific relations.[98] Moreover, as ties between Hungary and the Muslim world continued to strengthen, several Hungarian students were also granted the opportunity to pursue their studies in various countries within the MENA region,[99] thereby fostering further bilateral cultural exchange and interaction.

The 1970s marked the beginning of a limited economic migration to Hungary from the MENA region. While businesspeople and professionals also figured among these economic migrants, many new arrivals were unskilled workers, which, in turn, was a novel phenomenon.[100] This situation brought about integration issues for the first time. As revealed by Abdul-Fattah (2021), social integration difficulties were largely absent or minimally observed among professional or skilled immigrants; however, these difficulties were

[94] Abdul-Fattah, 2021
[95] Ibid.
[96] J. Nagy, 2017, p. 82
[97] J. Nagy, 2017, pp. 83-84
[98] J. Nagy, 2017, p. 293
[99] Abdul-Fattah, 2021
[100] Abdul-Fattah, 2021

present—although on a small scale—among the unskilled labor force, whose social concerns stemmed from hardships in their respective countries of origin and limited command of the Hungarian language, which contributed to a certain level of segregation.[101]

While some Muslim immigrants wished to practice their faith in communities, socialist Hungary's laws did not allow the establishment of such congregations since the state's policies of limited tolerance for religion were only extended to so-called "historical religious groups." Since the religion was officially recognized only as late as 1916, Islam was not included in this category. However, individual religious practice was allowed for international students and members of diplomatic delegations.[102]

The State's cautious and strict stance changed drastically throughout the 1980s as the regime got increasingly enfeebled. In 1987, the state registered the first official Muslim organization, the Association of Muslim Students (*Iszlám Diákok Egyesülete*), whose members were students from various countries and legal schools of Islam. Moreover, merely a year later, the Hungarian State officially recognized the Hungarian Islamic Community (*Magyar Iszlám Közösség*) as a religious denomination.[103]

Following the change of regime in 1989, the number of Muslims in Hungary increased significantly due to the abolition of restrictions on entry into the country, which contributed to a rise in immigration and an increasing number of students from the MENA region. Further reasons included family reunifications and mixed marriages between immigrants and native Hungarians.[104] From the early 1990s on, partly due to an influx of Bosnian refugees during the Yugoslav Wars, the number of Muslim organizations in Hungary multiplied.[105]

Under Viktor Orbán's leadership, *Fidesz* governed Hungary from 1998 to 2002 before returning in 2010 for a longer time. This time, the party achieved a supermajority in the National Assembly by getting two-thirds of the seats, which enabled the party to draft and ratify a new constitution without negotiating other parties in the legislation. This moment marked the beginning of a swift rightward shift in the politics of *Fidesz*, formerly positioned in the center-left. Notably, the party's accession to government with a supermajority in the legislation also marked the beginning of a gradual degradation of democratic checks and balances in Hungary.[106]

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[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Abdul-Fattah, 2021
[104] Ibid.
[105] Abdul-Fattah, 2021
[106] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, p. 620

In 2011, the National Assembly passed a law that reduced the number of official religious denominations, including all three Muslim organizations then recognized. Soon after, two of them founded the Hungarian Islamic Council, which, in turn, successfully gained official recognition in 2012 following an amendment to the 2011 law.[107]

The above historical overview shows that it was not until the late 1980s that Muslims from the MENA region solidified into a community in Hungary. This was due to three factors: the small number of people of MENA origins, their predominantly temporary residency in the country, and, most notably, the government's anti-religious stance and prohibition of religious practice. The number of Muslims moderately increased from the 1990s onwards; however, the community's size remained relatively small. In 2011, the number of Muslims in Hungary was officially 3148, or around 0.03% of the entire population.[108]

Due to the statistically insignificant numbers of the Muslim population, Islamophobia was not a prevalent social phenomenon prior to the migration crisis. However, by early 2015, the gradual erosion of democracy under Orbán's leadership yielded beneficial circumstances for his party to capitalize on the emerging crisis, as will be seen as follows.

[107] Abdul-Fattah, 2021
[108] KSH, 2013, p. 7

4. *Je Suis Charlie*: Migration Discourse and Public Opinion in the Wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* Shooting

As shown in the previous chapter, France and Hungary had had essentially differing experiences with Muslims, Islam, and immigration prior to the 2015 migration crisis, which fundamentally defined the evolution of political discourse and public opinion in each of the two countries during and after the unprecedented influx of immigrants to Europe. While the *Front national*'s discourse had already been predominantly centered around immigration and various associated insecurities ever since its emergence in the French political mainstream in the early 1980s, *Fidesz* began applying neo-Orientalist anti-immigration narratives only shortly before the migration crisis reached Central and Eastern Europe, namely in the aftermath of the January 7, 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* shooting in Paris.[109]

As will be demonstrated in this chapter, the evolution and dimensions of the two political discourses were not only defined by the two countries' historical, demographic, and socio-economic realities but also by the power and financial means that the parties under examination were able to mobilize to influence public opinion.

Before the migration crisis, the FN's popularity had been on a steady rise since Marine Le Pen's takeover of the party's leadership, and it was becoming an unavoidable force in the opposition. Meanwhile, *Fidesz* had been governing Hungary since 2010 and possessed two-thirds of the seats in the National Assembly, allowing it to draft and ratify an entirely new constitution for the country without negotiating with any parties in the opposition. However, in the last three months of 2014, the party's popularity dropped by over ten percentage points,[110] exacerbated by three lost by-elections by April 2015, eventually costing Orbán's party its supermajority in the legislation.[111]

Henceforth, this chapter analyzes the development of the FN's and *Fidesz*'s respective migration discourses and their neo-Orientalist and Islamophobic elements in the first months of 2015, in the context of the *Charlie Hebdo* terrorist attack and the emerging migration crisis.

[109] Köves, 2015, p. 74
[110] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 271
[111] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 272

4.1. "*Persona Non Grata*" — Marine Le Pen and the *Front national*

The January 7, 2015 terrorist attack against the editorial office of the French satirical weekly newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*, committed by two radicalized French Muslim brothers, signified a major turning point in the evolution of European political discourse on immigration and terrorism. The event received wide-scale worldwide media coverage, as did the subsequent rallies and demonstrations in major French cities and the official memorial service held on January 11 in Paris, where many world leaders paid their respects.[112] One of them was Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who seized this opportunity to take a drastically new discursive direction.[113] Meanwhile, *Front national* leader Marine Le Pen made a strategic decision *not* to make an appearance at the "Republican march" in Paris and, instead, participated in a rally in Beaucaire (Gard), a *commune* led by her party in the South of France near Marseille.[114]

Le Pen claimed to have been "excluded" from the memorial march by the "parties of the system," a statement not supported by any evidence and refuted by then-Prime Minister Manuel Valls.[115] Moreover, referring to the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting, she stated that "if 'being Charlie' means defending our liberty of expression and defending it at all times, including for those who do not agree with us, then 'I *am* Charlie' (*Je suis Charlie*),"[116] referring to the viral slogan used worldwide in solidarity with the victims of the attack.[117] She went on to claim that "national unity was immediately broken by the parties of the system trying to make of the *Front national* a '*persona non grata*' political formation" and the parties in question "are marching today for the liberty of expression while having excluded 25% of French people", which she called a "funny concept."[118]

For the occasion of the FN leader's visit, two banners were hung on the walls of the Beaucaire city hall, reading "*Je suis Charlie*, honor to the victims of Islamist terrorism," while similar banners and signs could be observed in the crowd, reading things such as "*Je ne suis pas que Charlie* ('I am not *only* Charlie'), I am also the policemen who died while protecting us. I am all the innocent people killed by the bullets of Islamist terrorists."[119] Talking to all present journalists, Marine Le Pen herself tackled the issue of "Islamist

[112] Capron (France 24), 2015
[113] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 272 ; Index.hu, 2015
[114] Rosnoblet (Reuters), 2015
[115] TF1info, 2015
[116] Rosnoblet (Reuters), 2015
[117] Devichand (BBC News), 2016
[118] Rosnoblet (Reuters), 2015
[119] Le Grand (Le Point), 2015

terrorism" by asking—rhetorically—whether "the international policy we are pursuing is the *right* policy" and whether "all the necessary means are implemented to fight the scourge of Islamist terrorism."[120]

The January 11 Beaucaire rally showcased multiple well-tried political strategies of Marine Le Pen and the FN, all of which she frequently mobilized in the context of the terrorist attacks in 2015 and the migration crisis. First, she applied self-victimization rhetoric whereby she could legitimize her presence in a small *commune* with majoritarily FN voters, as she claimed to have been excluded from the "main" events in Paris.[121] Moreover, in her narrative, she was not the only one being excluded; it was 25% of French people, referring to her own voter base, who were *all* excluded from "national unity." Second, it is the "parties of the system" (the elites) who excluded "the people" (members and voters of the *Front national*), whose voices the former wished to silence.[122] According to Perocco (2020), this is a general characteristic of far-right populist discourses, thus not unique to the FN.[123] Third, while still showing solidarity with the victims of the Charlie Hebdo shooting, Marine Le Pen emphasized the "Islamist" nature of terrorism, which was also reflected on many of the signs held up in the crowd, reading "*Hommage à toutes les victimes du terrorisme islamiste*," ('Tribute to all the victims of Islamist terrorism') which highlighted the word '*islamiste*' compared to the rest of the text.[124]

Signs at the Front national*'s Beaucaire rally on January 11, 2015. Source: AFP*

[120] Le Grand (Le Point), 2015
[121] Amengay, 2019, p. 36
[122] Amengay, 2019, pp. 22, 36
[123] Perocco, 2020, p. 32
[124] Le Grand (Le Point), 2015

Albeit this instance and her interview with the press hint at her stark anti-immigration stance and the supposed link between Muslim immigration and terrorism, the FN leader did not state such correlations explicitly. This may be due to two factors: (I) the party leader using more moderate speech than usual due to the event being held in the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attack and on the same day as the official memorial service in Paris, and (II) in order to maintain her goal to "de-diabolize" the *Front national* in the eyes of the French public. While the carefully moderate usage of the term "Islamist terrorism" in this case reflects Marine Le Pen's wish to distance herself and her party from his father's inflammatory and demagogic rhetoric,[125] French political scientist Joël Gombin (2016) argues that the FN's political message and real stance on immigration remained largely the same as in the preceding decades, and "de-diabolization is primarily a strategic project, not an ideological one."[126] This claim is underpinned by the fact that Marine Le Pen's statements during the Beaucaire rally received considerable backlash from members of the local Muslim community, who denounced the party leader for the "provocative" use of the word "Islamist" and for thus framing all Muslims as "murderers" or terrorists.[127]

Moreover, Le Pen told her audience to "look at things with lucidity," without any specifications, to which one part of the crowd began chanting "*on est chez nous!*" ('We are at home!').[128] This chant and Marine Le Pen's statement regarding the revision of the country's international policy both miss the fact that the perpetrators of the *Charlie Hebdo* attack were not foreign citizens: they were both born in France to Algerian immigrant parents. They were orphaned at a young age and spent most of their childhood in foster care before being radicalized in a Parisian gang with links to Al-Qaeda.[129] This raises issues not only about the popular perception of recent Muslim immigrants, but also about the "second generation." Their precarious socio-economic situation, including wide-scale social exclusion and severe economic marginalization, made them highly vulnerable to radicalization.[130]

In March 2015, two months after the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting, the *Front national* gained 25.2% of the ballot—or 5.14 million votes—in the departmental elections, indicating a 0.4% increase compared to the 2014 European Parliament election in France.[131] It cannot be determined whether the improved results were a consequence of FN's engagement with

[125] Amengay, 2019, p. 32
[126] Amengay, 2019, p. 35
[127] Le Grand (Le Point), 2015
[128] Le Grand (Le Point), 2015
[129] Samuel & Sawer (The Telegraph), 2015 ; De La Baume & Higgins (The New York Times), 2015
[130] *see Chapter 3.1*
[131] Amengay, 2019, p. 37

prevalent issues of immigration and terrorism; however, it can be established that Marine Le Pen's discourse in the months preceding the departmental elections and her narratives concerning the *Charlie Hebdo* attack did not harm her political image and reputation among her existing voter base. This can be attributed to the fact that the *Front national* did not deviate from its typical discourse and overarching political strategy.

As Jean-Marie Le Pen put it in the 1980s after having unraveled the secret behind the party's newly found success, "whether it is good talk or bad talk about the FN, the important thing is that people *talk* about it."[132]

4.2. "We Want Hungary to Remain Hungary" — Viktor Orbán and *Fidesz*

In contrast with Marine Le Pen, on January 11, 2015, Viktor Orbán was present at the official memorial service in Paris for the victims of the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting. This event marked a significant turning point in his party's political discourse—one that would define Hungarian politics and public opinion for many years.

Orbán did not address the public or the local press at the rally; however, he gave an interview to the Hungarian national broadcaster, MTVA,[133] wherein he seized the opportunity to sound the alarm regarding the dangers of immigration and its potential implications for Hungarian society, as well as the broader European community.[134]

Before this interview, immigration did not feature in *Fidesz*'s discourse,[135] and Hungary had not yet been directly affected by the migration crisis. Hence, to understand Orbán's motivations for adopting a migration discourse, one must look elsewhere, namely in Hungarian domestic politics. *Fidesz* had lost over one million supporters within a period of merely four months, primarily owing to corruption scandals and a wave of anti-government protests against a proposed Internet tax. In consequence, Orbán sought a topic that could potentially reverse his party's declining popularity, and the terrorist attack in Paris alongside the emerging migration crisis in the Western Mediterranean provided him with a convenient solution.[136]

In his interview, Orbán explained that "in comparison with the situation elsewhere in Europe," Hungary was home to merely a small number of "people with cultural backgrounds different from ours," and those people wanted to work, were in possession of the necessary

[132] Amengay, 2019, p. 51
[133] Rettman (EUobserver), 2015
[134] Index.hu, 2015 ; Rettman (EUobserver), 2015
[135] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 271
[136] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 272

qualifications, and had integrated well into Hungarian society. While the latter part of this statement concerning Hungary is accurate for the most part,[137] the first part suggests that in Western European countries, non-European immigrants—depicted as an essentialized, homogeneous category—lacked any desire to actively contribute to the host country's economy or integrate into its society. While such isolated cases are proven to have occurred,[138] the vast majority of people of MENA origins in Western Europe—such as in France—were economic immigrants who specifically migrated to the continent in pursuit of employment opportunities and actively sought integration into their new societies. However, for instance, like in the case of France,[139] impediments to a smoother process of integration were encountered due to a combination of factors, namely the integration policies of the host country, deindustrialization and mechanization, and the discriminatory or exclusionary practices exercised by employers.

In the same interview, Viktor Orbán made further statements that laid the foundations of his emerging migration discourse. He stressed that the prevailing minorities in the country were not causing any issues, and their population growth had not reached a magnitude that would "cause a headache," but "*we* do not want to see significant minorities with cultural characteristics and backgrounds different from ours among us; we want Hungary to remain *Hungary*."[140]

These claims shed light on multiple significant elements of *Fidesz*'s migration discourse that later became prevalent. First, it highlights the misleadingly homogenizing nature of the narrative. Orbán claimed that Hungarian public opinion constituted one indivisible unit—*the* Hungarian nation—that *he* single-handedly represented. As will be seen later, the frequent use of "we" in his discourse is particularly frequent, and it creates a false sense of unity while demonizing, ignoring, or even silencing, opposing voices. This strategy, however, is not unique to Orbán and *Fidesz*, and is common among populist politicians and parties.[141] Fournier (2019) argues that this specific rhetoric in populist politics is applied in order to challenge the majority pillar of constitutional democracy by considering the majority of votes to be "the expression of a non-negotiable political truth," and having won the elections means that it is the nation as a whole who expressed its wish to have the populist party in power.[142] Within this homogenizing logic, thus, there is no room for distinguishing

[137] *see Chapter 3.2*
[138] *see Chapter 3.1*
[139] *see Chapter 3.1*
[140] Index.hu, 2015
[141] *see Chapter 4.1*
[142] Fournier, 2019, p. 365

features among the citizenry,[143] be that about cultural and religious difference, or simply political views and public opinion. In *Fidesz*'s strategy, this aspect of populist politics is most conspicuous in the case of the so-called "national consultation" surveys, one of which was conducted in the spring of 2015 on questions concerning immigration and terrorism.[144]

The period between the *Charlie Hebdo* terrorist attack and the distribution of the national consultation surveys in May were crucial in shaping Hungarian public opinion. In his January 11 interview in Paris, Orbán emphasized that those fleeing political persecution or war—as opposed to economic immigrants—"have to be given what is due, that is, asylum," but economic immigrants, in turn, could *not* be granted asylum in Hungary.[145] This statement may still be perceived as a humanitarian approach to immigration by the general public; however, it disregards the difference between a "*menekült"* ('refugee') and a "*bevándorló*" ('immigrant'), which constitute two entirely different legal categories in the country. The stay of *immigrants* (including economic immigrants and foreign students) in Hungary is subject to a valid residence or settlement permit; thus, they are not eligible for refugee status in any case.[146] This, in reality, renders Orbán's statement erroneous and misleading, underpinning that the content of the interview served merely propagandistic purposes.

In connection with the migration discourse, this repurposing had two considerable aspects. First, the clear-cut difference between a refugee and an immigrant—the latter referring to an economic immigrant or a foreign student—was intentionally blurred in *Fidesz*'s discourse,[147] usually by avoiding the usage of the word *refugee* in political speech and media with close ties to the government. One way to do this was referring to all arrivals as *immigrants*, collectively.

Second, the word *migráns* ('migrant' or 'immigrant') was "introduced" as a Hungarianized noun ultimately from the Latin verb *migrō* ('I migrate'). The term *migráns* was not newly coined; however, until shortly before Hungary directly experienced the effects of the migration crisis, its usage had been rare, and the other Hungarian term, *bevándorló*, had been used almost exclusively in reference to immigrants.[148] Through its increasingly frequent and controlled use in political discourse and government-friendly media, the "new" word was imbued with predominantly pejorative connotations,[149] facilitating the implantation

[143] Ibid.
[144] *see Chapter 5.1* ; Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 272
[145] Index.hu, 2015
[146] Köves, 2015, p. 74
[147] Ibid.
[148] Vajda (444), 2015
[149] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, p. 622

of often unconscious biases regarding immigrants, refugees, Arabs, and Muslims in Hungarian public opinion.[150]

The first considerable influx of MENA immigrants on the Balkan route reached the southern borders of Hungary in April 2015.[151] As shown above, by that time, Orbán and his party had created a migration discourse of a considerable extent. While *Fidesz*'s popularity did not increase between January and April, it remained relatively stable according to the majority of public opinion polls. Following a significant decrease in the last four months of 2014, the results show relative stagnation with some variation among different polls. However, even so, it can be confirmed that Orbán's emerging migration discourse ended the decline in his party's popularity.[152]

The success of *Fidesz*'s inchoate migration discourse is further demonstrated by an increased anti-Islam sentiment in Hungarian public opinion. In the polls under examination, respondents had to answer the following question: "In your opinion, should refugees be taken in?" Respondents had three options to choose from: (I) 'Yes, all refugees have to be taken in,' indicating a *xenophilic* standpoint; (II) 'Some have to be taken in, some do not,' showing a *deliberative* attitude; and (III) 'No one must be taken in,' indicating a *xenophobic* viewpoint. These same three questions were asked in 2014 and April 2015, with the second poll revealing a considerable increase in xenophobia in Hungarian society. While in 2014, 39% of the respondents stated that no refugees should be taken in, in April 2015, 46% chose the same option. On the other hand, during the same period, the number of xenophilic attitudes did not show considerable variation (10% in 2014, 9% in April 2015). Furthermore, deliberative attitudes decreased from 51 to 45%.[153]

Considering that the survey was taken before Hungary directly experienced the migration crisis, the above results reveal two phenomena. First, they indicate that the overwhelming majority of those with xenophilic attitudes remained unaffected by the government's migration discourse. Second, the changes in xenophobic and deliberative attitudes show an inverse correlation, which concludes that Hungarians with a formerly deliberative attitude vis-à-vis MENA immigration were most susceptible to taking on a more exclusionary stance towards refugees. Furthermore, it cannot be ruled out that people with an

[150] Kádár, 2018, pp. 135-136, 139, 146 ; Boldizsár & Németh & Petrovszki & Szekeres, 2017, pp. 94-130
[151] IOM, 2016, p. 14
[152] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 271
[153] Simonovits & Sík & Szeitl, 2016, pp. 83-84

already xenophobic attitude might have taken on even more radical stances as a consequence of Orbán's migration discourse in the first months of 2015.

The following months of the migration crisis, however, provide a clearer picture of Hungarian public opinion's transformation regarding Muslims and immigration which will be demonstrated in the upcoming chapter.

5. Clash of Civilizations: The Transformation of Public Opinion throughout the Migration Crisis

After early 2015, public opinion on Muslims and immigration in the two countries under examination underwent considerable changes. By means of one case in point for France and Hungary, respectively, this chapter delves into how the application of othering, essentializing, and Islamophobic narratives in the two populist parties' migration discourses contributed to the transformation of public opinion during the 2015 migration crisis.

Concerning Hungary, this research examines a so-called "national consultation" survey conducted by the *Fidesz* government from May to July 2015, focusing on matters of immigration and terrorism, as well as a billboard campaign accompanying the survey. Meanwhile, regarding France, this inquiry is concerned with the *Front national*'s discourse in the aftermath of the November 13 attacks in Paris, exploring its influence on public opinion in the context of the regional elections held in December.

5.1. "If You Come to Hungary, You Have to Respect Our Culture!" – Fidesz's National Consultation Survey and Anti-Immigration Billboard Campaign

In April 2015, Hungary started experiencing the direct impacts of the migration crisis, marked by a substantial increase in the number of refugees crossing the country's southern borders.

Meanwhile, Orbán escalated his migration discourse to a higher degree. His narratives, however, became increasingly detached from reality. His government prepared a so-called "national consultation" survey, which—within the official discourse—was aimed at inquiring about Hungarians' perceptions of various socio-economic and political concerns regarding the migration crisis.[154] Nevertheless, the survey sparked a heated debate due to its demagogic and manipulative questions reflecting *Fidesz*'s narratives that often reframed and distorted reality.[155] For this reason, many questions presented in the survey were impossible to answer adequately if the respondent opposed, or did not believe in, the accuracy of the information stated within the very question.

The outcome of the national consultation survey reflects this issue. Initially, the government extended the deadline due to "the great interest shown" by the Hungarian public.

[154] Kormany.hu, 2015
[155] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 272 ; Kováts (European Commission), 2015 ; Köves, 2015, p. 74 ; Simonovits & Sík & Szeitl, 2016, p. 84

However, contradicting this statement, merely one million surveys were completed by July out of approximately eight million copies sent out to Hungarian households three months earlier.[156] Furthermore, underlining the problematic wording and framing of the issues presented, those one million surveys showcased overwhelming support for Orbán's culturally exclusivist policies, his demonization of "Brussels," and the securitization of the refugee question, with the word *refugee* not figuring in the survey—instead, there is an emphasis on *economic* immigration, such as in the question that reads as follows: "Did you know, that economic migrants have been illegally crossing the borders of Hungary, and, recently, the number of immigrants in Hungary increased twentyfold?"[157]

Meanwhile, the conflation of *immigrants* with *terrorism* can also be observed. The results showed 60-93% support for Fidesz's stance in almost all cases, with the only exception being a question asking whether Hungary could potentially become a target of terrorist attacks in the following years, in which case 39% of the respondents claimed that there was a serious chance, 57% stated that it *might* happen, while only 4% believed it to be impossible.[158]

Fidesz's rhetorical strategy around the national consultation survey included a large-scale billboard campaign extended to the entire country, with messages such as "[if] you come to Hungary, you have to respect our culture(!)," "[if] you come to Hungary, you cannot take Hungarians' jobs(!)," and "[if] you come to Hungary, you must abide by our laws!" These messages were exclusively displayed in Hungarian, indicating that these "warnings" were not actually directed toward refugees and immigrants; instead, they were intended to foster anti-immigration and anti-Muslim sentiment within Hungarian society.[159]

Although only around one in eight surveys were submitted, the *Fidesz* government claimed the campaign to be a great success and emphasized that the overwhelming majority of those who had filled out the survey agreed with the government in that "this modern-era migration of peoples" and illegal border crossings had to be brought to an end.[160]

This conclusion to the survey and the billboard campaign led to three significant observations. First, while the conflation of refugees with economic immigrants could be considered a success in Hungarian public discourse, the narrative of illegal border crossings in the case of refugees does not stand its ground since, as underlined by Köves (2015), the

[156] Herczeg (444), 2015
[157] Kormany.hu, 2015
[158] Ibid.
[159] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 272 ; Köves, 2015, pp. 74-75
[160] Herczeg (444), 2015

Geneva Conventions explicitly prohibit penalizing people crossing an international border without proper identification and a visa as long as they seek asylum immediately.[161]

Second, the narrative of a "modern-era migration of peoples" disregards the reality of hundreds of thousands of people fleeing their homes due to war, political persecution, or other hardships. This wording, however, fits *Fidesz*'s discourse since it conflates refugees with economic immigrants. Third, leaving unanswered surveys out of consideration as if they had never existed and depicting the results based on merely one million submitted surveys as *the* opinion of the nation is consistent with the government's strategy of using the *'we'* pronoun to create a false sense of unity and with Fournier's (2019) description of the populist strategy of considering the majority of votes "the expression of a non-negotiable political truth."[162]

Nonetheless, the campaign worked out in Orbán's favor, as *Fidesz*'s popularity was on the rise again after a decrease at the end of the previous year and a long period of stagnation in the first months of 2015.[163]

Hence, in the end, the national consultation survey and the accompanying billboard campaign constituted another strategic move in the Hungarian government's inventory in increasing its popularity through the political exploitation of the migration crisis. This, in turn, was enabled by Hungarian society's lack of exposure to Muslims and Islam before 2015, which gave a considerable opportunity for Orbán to capitalize on social insecurities and associate those insecurities with the influx of the "Others." This context made the incitement of Islamophobia an influential political asset, which, as will be seen later, continued to make an impact well beyond the migration crisis.

5.2. "France Is No Longer Safe" – The *Front national*'s Migration Discourse in the Aftermath of the November 13 Paris Attacks

France had maintained a state of heightened vigilance concerning terrorism after the Charlie Hebdo shooting in January 2015. In light of the forthcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference slated for December in Paris, precautionary security measures were implemented in the preceding month, including the reinstatement of border controls one week before the November 13 attacks. One hundred and thirty people were killed in multiple interconnected attacks, which, considering the significantly increased security measures in

[161] Köves, 2015, p. 74
[162] *see Chapter 4.2*
[163] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 271

place, intensified political and public discourse on terrorism and its supposed and potential connection to immigration and to French Muslim citizens with an immigrant background. The attacks provided a significant opportunity for Marine Le Pen and the *Front national* to emphasize and justify their conflating of refugees and immigrants with terrorism,[164] particularly in light of the upcoming regional elections in December.

Before the attacks, French public opinion had already been considerably influenced by experiences with an increased influx of MENA refugees and several terrorist attacks during the peak of the migration crisis in the preceding months. In 2015, the Collective Against Islamophobia in France (*Collectif contre l'islamophobie en France*, CCIF) reported 905 cases of Islamophobic incidents country-wide, a figure unmatched during the existence of the organization between 2003 and 2020.[165] In comparison, the CCIF reported 691 Islamophobic acts in 2013 and 764 in 2014, indicating a gradual increase.[166] After 2015, a reversal of this trend can be observed, with 580 cases reported in 2016 and 446 cases in 2017.[167] However, it is worth noting that these statistics were entirely based on instances reported by victims,[168] suggesting that the real occurrence of Islamophobic acts was considerably higher.

The November 13 attacks coincided with Marine Le Pen's ongoing campaign for the regional elections, prompting a shift in her strategy towards a nearly exclusive emphasis on national matters rather than regional specificities. Similarly to previous campaigns, the primary topic of the *Front national*'s discourse remained immigration; however, with some significant changes.

Following the expulsion of his father from the party in August, Marine Le Pen considered the "de-diabolization" of the FN accomplished and proceeded to pursue a strategy of political double-speak, wherein she attenuated strong, xenophobic, anti-immigration speeches with humanist rhetoric. For instance, in the case of the Calais Jungle, Le Pen retained her prevailing narrative wherein the migration crisis was an "invasion" of outsiders while she also condemned truck drivers exploiting "their human merchandise" and called them "slavers."[169] After the November 13 attacks, Le Pen abandoned this strategy and shifted the focus of her campaign onto the securitization of immigration and questions of identity

[164] Alduy, 2015, pp. 2, 8
[165] Asal, 2020, p. 180
[166] AFP, 2014 ; Chambraud (Le Monde), 2015
[167] Asal, 2020, p. 180
[168] Ibid.
[169] Alduy, 2015, p. 5

while also applying a considerably stronger language reminiscent of her father's political discourse. Alduy (2015) refers to this sudden shift as *"uninhibited" radicalization*.[170]

Capitalizing on people's increased fear of terrorism in the aftermath of the attacks, during her election campaign tour, Marine Le Pen voiced that "France and the French [were] no longer safe." She also emphasized the urgent need for France to "regain control of its national borders once and for all" and to "ban Islamist organizations, close radical mosques and deport foreigners who preach hatred on our soil, as well illegal immigrants who have no business being here."[171] The FN leader had previously refrained from the explicit conflation of immigration and Muslims with terrorism and merely made allusions to the idea in order to succeed in "de-diabolizing" her party.[172] However, from that point on, born and raised French Muslims were equally targeted in her discourse.

This aspect of the *Front national*'s "uninhibited" radicalization is further shown in Le Pen's wish to "return to an eternal France of the French," which she underlined in her campaign speech in Ajaccio, claiming that "in order to earn French citizenship, [one] has to speak French, eat French, and *live* French."[173] While this statement, which she also shared on her official Twitter account, disregarded France's demographic diversity and dismissed all religious, linguistic, cultural and ethnic minorities living in the Metropole. Hence, she disclosed that "whether we live in Lille, Ajaccio, Strasbourg or Quimper,[174] we are all [...] members of the same big, national family of France," and this is "the *only* diversity" that she "conceives."[175] In this context, the first statement can be construed as specifically aimed at French Muslims, disregarding the reality that children of Muslim immigrants, among others, "earned" their citizenship by *jus soli* and faced inadequate state support for their social integration, further hindered by discriminatory practices in the education system and on the labor market.[176]

In the framework of her campaign for the regional elections, Marine Le Pen also recalled some of his father's narratives, which she had been avoiding since she had assumed leadership of the *Front national*. She claimed that "a multicultural society is a *multiconflict* society" and that multiculturalism is a "deep denial of who we are" and "it is the

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[170] Ibid.
[171] *Attentats de Paris : Marine Le Pen s'adresse aux Français (14 novembre 2015)*. *YouTube*. Front national, 2015 ; Faye (Le Monde), 2015
[172] *see Chapter 4.1*
[173] Alduy, 2015, p. 6
[174] All listed cities constitute significant centers of historical ethnic, linguistic, and cultural minorities in France.
[175] Alduy, 2015, p. 6
[176] *see Chapter 3.1*

manifestation of a desire to replace our customs, our lifestyle, our traditions, our local identities with a utopia."[177] This statement was an allusion to the Great Replacement theory of Renaud Camus—often referred to by Jean-Marie Le Pen during his leadership of the FN[178]—which further supports Gombin's argument in that the FN's political message and real stance on immigration remained largely the same as in the preceding decades, and "de-diabolization" was primarily a strategic project, rather than an ideological one.[179]

The messages shown above constituted the core of Marine Le Pen and the *Front national*'s campaign, which entirely disregarded economic and social issues both on a regional and a national level. Alduy (2015) argues that by abandoning these issues altogether, the FN recovered its "original trademark."[180]

Following the November 13 attacks and a reversion to well-tried, radical narratives from the 1980s and '90s, the *Front national* achieved yet another historical result in the regional elections. The party ranked first in the first round by gaining 27.1% of the ballot and went on to get 6.8 million votes in the second round while,[181] compared to prior elections, considerably improving its results in several regions. The FN's vice president claimed that "without a doubt," they were "the first party in France." While this statement was inaccurate, the December 2015 regional elections made the *Front national* a key actor in French politics with the potential to prevail in the 2017 presidential elections.[182]

The reasons behind the FN's unprecedented victory were manifold. While Islamophobia in French society was already at a peak before November 2015, the November 13 attacks yielded some significant transformations in public opinion. Support for immigration and helping refugees decreased consistently country-wide, with individuals who previously held positive attitudes towards refugees displaying decreased approval, while those who previously harbored negative views of refugees showcased an intensified disapproval towards them.[183] At the same time, French respondents to the Eurobarometer survey claimed to have become more trustful of their government following the attacks,[184] suggesting that despite Le Pen's claim of France being "no longer safe," most citizens disagreed with her. Although fear of potential terrorist attacks rose in the immediate aftermath of November 13, among the respondents, there was no direct connection between

[177] Alduy, 2015, p. 7
[178] Ibid.
[179] *see Chapter 4.1*
[180] Alduy, 2015, p. 9 ; *see Chapter 3.1*
[181] Amengay, 2019, p. 40
[182] Ibid.
[183] Steenbergen & Strebel, 2017, p. 23
[184] Steenbergen & Strebel, 2017, p. 27

personal threat perceptions and a demand for more intolerant policies regarding immigration.[185] This phenomenon is explained by Lambert, Schott and Scherer (2011), whose study found that support for more radical and illiberal policies is driven by a feeling of *anger*, rather than a feeling of fear.[186]

While personal threat perceptions increased more significantly among city dwellers due to large urban areas becoming targets of terrorists more frequently,[187] the long-term effect of the attacks was stronger in rural areas, where the strongest preference change in attitudes towards immigrants was observed despite the significantly lower likelihood of a terrorist attack.[188]

In the context of the migration crisis and the numerous terrorist attacks in France over the course of 2015, the *Front national*'s discourse gained considerable momentum by conflating immigration with terrorism. The party not only seized the opportunity to capitalize on this conflation but also managed to justify it during the campaign leading up to the regional elections. This was possible due to the revelation that two of the perpetrators involved in the November 13 attacks had entered Europe as refugees.[189] However, the impact of this discovery on public perceptions of refugees remains uncertain and cannot be affirmed conclusively.

While Steenbergen and Strebel's study (2017) does not show considerable long-term changes in public opinion, the *Front national*'s results in December 2015 indicate a growth in the party's voter base and an expansion of its demographics.[190] Alduy (2015) explains the increase in the number of voters by the reduction of the gender gap and a more positive social perception of the FN under Marine Le Pen's leadership due to her "de-diabolization" strategy.[191] However, these factors had already been applied to the explanation of the results of the departmental elections six months earlier.[192] This brings up one essential question: how was the FN's vote still able to increase despite its "uninhibited" radicalization at the end of 2015?

The *Front national* was able to maintain a steady growth in its traditional strongholds and within its traditional demographics and, as argued by Alduy (2015), the rest of the vote can be due to contextual factors—domestic politics, the migration crisis, terrorism—, which

[185] Ibid.
[186] Steenbergen & Strebel, 2017, p. 28
[187] Steenbergen & Strebel, 2017, pp. 17, 27
[188] Steenbergen & Strebel, 2017, p. 27
[189] Steenbergen & Strebel, 2017, p. 28
[190] Alduy, 2016, p. 25
[191] Alduy, 2016, pp. 26-27
[192] *see Chapter 4.1*

resonated well with the insecurities and aspirations of the party's voter base. Ultimately, Alduy (2015) concludes that the FN's increasing success cannot be merely explained by its political repositioning: it would rather be a product of a general rightward shift of French constituencies as a result of socio-economic and geopolitical realities.[193] In what follows, this claim will be further examined to potentially shed light on the real social impact of the *Front national*'s migration discourse, particularly after the end of the migration crisis.

[193] Alduy, 2016, p. 29

6. Beyond the Glass Ceiling: The Impact of Neo-Orientalist and Islamophobic Political Discourse after the Migration Crisis

After reaching its peak in the fall of 2015, the European migration crisis was largely over by early 2016, with the number of refugee arrivals dropping significantly compared to 2015 and gradually decreasing in subsequent years.[194] The prevalence of matters related to immigration and refugees in European political and public discourse decreased alongside the number of arrivals; however, *Fidesz* and the *Front national* both retained such issues as focal points of their political discourse. Moreover, immigration was central in both parties' respective electoral programs for the 2017 French presidential and the 2018 Hungarian parliamentary elections.

In what follows, this research analyzes the stances of French and Hungarian public opinion on immigration, refugees, Islam, and Muslims in the context of *Fidesz* and the FN's respective electoral campaigns preceding the elections they ran for. Based upon key events and periods of 2015 and through the analysis of the electoral campaign periods, their perceptions, and outcomes years later, this chapter aims to ascertain whether the anti-immigration and anti-Islam narratives mobilized by the two parties under examination during the migration crisis had a lasting impact on public opinion and perceptions of Muslim refugees and immigrants. Furthermore, this inquiry intends to point out significant contextual differences between France and Hungary in terms of history, demographics, and domestic politics, which may have contributed to considerable divergences in the electoral outcomes and the transformation of public opinion between the two countries.

6.1. "In the Name of the People" — Political Discourse in the Wake of the Migration Crisis

The first major, country-wide elections following the 2015 migration crisis were held in April 2017 in France and a year later in Hungary. As for the two political parties under examination, both could put down their respective electoral results as a success.

The *Front national* not only proceeded to the second round of the French presidential elections for the second time in its history, but it also secured 33.9% of the ballot, marking a

[194] UNHCR, 2021

historic triumph for the party despite Marine Le Pen losing the elections to Emmanuel Macron.[195] Before the vote, Le Pen had run a campaign mainly constructed around issues of unemployment, law and order, national sovereignty, and immigration,[196] with the latter being the element linking all the topics together, thus being the centerpiece of her discourse in a way similar to preceding years.

Meanwhile, in 2018, *Fidesz* achieved its third consecutive landslide victory in the parliamentary election and once more secured its supermajority in the National Assembly.[197] The singularity of Orbán's victory lies in the fact that his party had no electoral program and ran a campaign based entirely on the issue of immigration,[198] which had not exerted any significant impact on Hungary since 2016.[199]

Following the initial increase in the popularity of his party during the peak of the migration crisis in 2015,[200] Orbán found it beneficial and of utmost importance to keep the question of immigration relevant for as long as possible since it allowed him to reach potential new supporters from outside of his existing voter base.[201] The continuous prominence of the matter of immigration was preserved through the stressing of the issue of the so-called "migrant quotas" proposed by the European Union, a referendum held on this matter in October 2016, and the conduction of two additional national consultation surveys accompanied by corresponding billboard campaigns in 2017.[202]

Despite the considerable controversies surrounding them, these instances initially secured a modest, gradual increase and later stability in the popularity of *Fidesz* in the years leading up to the 2018 election, leaving the party well ahead of any opposition party in all opinion polls conducted.[203] Similarly to Le Pen's discourse before the 2017 presidential elections, Orbán also constructed narratives of national sovereignty and identity, as well as law and order around the matter of immigration.[204]

Both parties approached the securitization of immigration through the conflation of terrorism and migration—the latter having already been conflated with refugees—thus consolidating a narrative portraying all refugees as potential terrorists.[205] Equating these

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[195] Amengay, 2020, p. 41
[196] Sandford (Euronews), 2017
[197] Szakács & Than (Reuters), 2018 ; Bayer (POLITICO), 2018
[198] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 282 ; Bayer (POLITICO), 2018
[199] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 276
[200] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 271
[201] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 273
[202] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, pp. 621-622 ; Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 273
[203] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, p. 624 ; Hudák (Index), 2018
[204] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, pp. 273-274
[205] *see Chapters 5.1 & 5.2*

different categories in their political discourse was a crucial pillar in the construction of enemies for *Fidesz* and the *Front national*. In both cases, internal and external enemies were likewise present. Notably, the European Union and "Brussels" were presented in both discourses as the primary external enemy striving to gnaw away at the respective nation-state's sovereignty and take the country away from its native, "organic" citizens, thus threatening the survival of national identity.[206]

As for the immigrants, according to the FN, they represented an "internal evil" permeating the country as an external threat due to France's lack of complete sovereignty over its borders as a consequence of the Schengen Agreement and EU policies.[207] Meanwhile, due to the lack of a significant number of immigrants or refugees,[208] immigrants were depicted in *Fidesz*'s narratives as a constantly looming threat on Hungary's national borders,[209] thus representing an "external evil" with the potential of becoming an internal one as in a number of Western European countries—like France—, a comparison often voiced by Orbán.[210]

Furthermore, the domestic political "elites" were depicted in Le Pen's narratives as aiming to disrupt national unity, advocating for increased EU influence in France, and encouraging immigration.[211] Intending to polarize public opinion in line with her party's discourse, the party leader claimed that political divisions "no longer put the right and left in opposition, but patriots and globalists."[212] Similarly, *Fidesz* claimed that George Soros—the embodiment and "real leader" of both the Western and the domestic liberal elite in one person—, the European Union, migration-related NGOs, "the global left," and "liberals" were all striving to turn Hungary into a country of immigrants.[213] Meanwhile, in the same narrative, Orbán emerged as the defender of the nation against both invading immigrants and antagonistic Western forces.[214] One month before the parliamentary election, Viktor Orbán stated that there was "a pact between the opposition parties and George Soros aimed at putting up one pro-immigration and one anti-immigration candidate in each district" by the day of the election, the latter being the candidate representing *Fidesz*.[215]

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[206] *see Chapters 5.1 & 5.2*
[207] Amengay, 2019, pp. 91, 105-106 ; Sandford (Euronews), 2017
[208] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 276
[209] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 285
[210] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, p. 622 ; Boffey (The Guardian), 2018 ; *Orbán Viktor évértékelő beszéde ('Viktor Orbán's Annual State of the Nation Speech')*, 2018
[211] *see Chapter 4.1*
[212] Sandford (Euronews), 2017
[213] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, pp. 273-274
[214] Santora (The New York Times), 2018 ; Sarkadi (444), 2018
[215] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 274 ; Reuters, 2018

He aimed to further the polarization of political discourse and—even more so—public opinion by positioning himself, his party, and his supporters as "anti-immigration," fostering a stronger in-group cohesion among self-identified nationalist, patriotic Hungarians on the right who would stand in opposition to "pro-immigration" citizens on the left, often labeled as "Soros mercenaries" or even traitors to their country.[216]

In both the French and the Hungarian cases, according to the respective populist party's discourse, one can only be on either extreme of the citizenry. With patriotic/anti-immigration and globalist/pro-immigration being the primary labels, people—particularly supporters of the parties under examination—might have been more susceptible to taking up one view or another,[217] even if they did not necessarily have a prior opinion or knowledge on the topic of immigration, for instance. Furthermore, the extreme amalgamation and intentional grouping of personal characteristics and views—as shown above—could lead to them becoming inseparable in the eyes of public opinion, thus forcing people into adopting views they had not necessarily had beforehand or into siding with the majority depending on one's social environment and on whether there was significant social pressure in this regard.

This peer pressure could be amplified by the media and the priming of the issues presented.[218] In the French press, the topics of immigration and Islam received extremely little coverage in local newspapers during the weeks preceding the 2017 presidential elections, which can be considered peculiar since the media coverage of both of these topics had decreased since the preceding presidential election campaign in 2012, over two years before the European migration crisis.[219] This raises some crucial questions about the evolution of political discourse and public opinion in France in regard to Islamophobia, which will be investigated later in this chapter.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that neither did the *Front national* have its own press outlets, nor did any prevalent outlets openly support the party around the time of the elections and in the preceding years. There existed, however, a number of significant far-right media outlets at the time, such as the journals *Valeurs actuelles* and *Minute*, as well as the television channel *CNews*.[220] Even so, none of them figured among the most popular outlets in France in

[216] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 274 ; Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 2022 ; Reuters, 2018 ; Verseck (Deutsche Welle), 2018
[217] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, p. 624
[218] Amengay, 2019, pp. 66-67
[219] Amengay, 2019, p. 10
[220] Intégrer Sciences Po, 2023

terms of reader or viewership;[221] thus, their overall significance in shaping public opinion is negligible.

On the other hand, the Hungarian media landscape's role in shaping public opinion before the 2018 parliamentary election was vastly more significant. In February 2015, shortly after the launch of Viktor Orbán's anti-migration discourse, the *Fidesz* government gradually assumed informal control over the majority of media outlets in Hungary. This was achieved through the reallocation of radio and television frequencies, the redistribution of key positions in the national media authority and public service media organizations, and the provision of loans by state-owned banks to individuals affiliated with the government.[222]

The most significant subjects of this reorganization were the publicly owned MTVA (*Médiaszolgáltatás-támogató és Vagyonkezelő Alap*, 'Media Services and Support Trust Fund'), an umbrella organization encompassing fourteen public service radio stations and television channels as well as the national news agency, in addition to a network of 476 privately operated, local media outlets across Hungary, all under direct government influence.[223] Through this vast, country-wide network of media outlets with close ties to the government, *Fidesz* gradually achieved a near ideological hegemony in Hungary's media landscape, accounting for over 70% by the 2018 elections.[224] As a result, opposition voices were scarcely heard beyond the confines of the capital, Budapest, with merely a handful of news websites and a single private commercial television channel serving as notable exceptions.[225]

These developments allowed *Fidesz* to propagate its narratives and campaign messages across all media and advertising platforms without any significant counternarratives present,[226] which contributed to the relative success of national consultation surveys and the concurrent billboard campaigns, in particular since it became exceedingly difficult to evade the government's messages.[227]

Although the *Front national* and *Fidesz* had unequal access to media platforms, resulting in varying levels of coverage regarding the issues they had adopted, both Le Pen and Orbán ensured that their messages were powerful yet unambiguous and straightforward

[221] Ibid.
[222] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, p. 620 ; Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 273
[223] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, p. 620
[224] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, p. 621 ; Mérték Médiaelemző Műhely, 2019
[225] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, p. 621
[226] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, p. 622
[227] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, pp. 621-624

in the lead-up to their respective national elections. Hence, both politicians relied on hardened rhetoric during their campaigns.

In her electoral campaign launch speech for the 2017 presidential elections, where she also revealed her slogan "*Au nom du peuple*" ('In the name of the people'),[228] Marine Le Pen claimed that France was under the yoke of two different "totalitarianisms:" Islamic fundamentalism and economic globalization.[229] Speaking in the name of all French people—in line with her slogan and the popular populist rhetorical "we" strategy also applied by Orbán—,[230] she stated that French people did not want to "live under the rule or threat of Islamic fundamentalism," as fundamentalists would impose prayers in the streets, prayer rooms in the workplace, and "huge mosques" on them, among other things.[231]

However, this demand for Muslim religious and cultural practices in everyday life had been present since the 1980s and did not originate from fundamentalist circles. In the late twentieth century, while some religious institutions and associations maintained close ties to foreign governments and organizations that lacked the trust of the French State, the absence of effective organization of Muslim religious life in France and the State's reluctance to promote integration rather than complete assimilation played a significant role in fostering discrimination and social segregation. These factors contributed to identity crises, limited life prospects, and, in certain cases, the radicalization of second-generation Muslim youth.[232]

In light of this, Le Pen's above vision is not only a conflation of Islamic fundamentalism with Islam in general but also a denial of a visible and institutionalized religiosity to Muslim French citizens. It goes against the principles of *laïcité*, which allows for the free practice of all religions in France, even if the 1905 law does not explicitly include Islam as a recognized denomination. This, in turn, was an essential obstacle to the institutionalization of the religion in the late twentieth century, while also serving as a fundamental driving force that compelled the Muslim community to overtly manifest its claims.[233]

In September 2016, Le Pen underpinned this refusal of all Muslims in France by referring to them as "these people whose beliefs, values, and practices are not ours, who do not have a vocation to be in France."[234] This statement also equates the presence of religious

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[228] Sandford (Euronews), 2017
[229] Farand (The Independent), 2017
[230] *see Chapter 4.2*
[231] Farand (The Independent), 2017
[232] *see Chapter 3.1* ; Boyer, 1998, pp. 97-100
[233] *see Chapter 3.1*
[234] Sandford (Euronews), 2017

demands with a lack of "vocation to be in France," thus delegitimizing the presence of Islam in the Metropole,[235] a direct consequence of the country's colonial history and its call for foreign citizens and colonial subjects to contribute to post-war rebuilding efforts and the revival of the nation's economy.[236] Furthermore, during her campaign, the FN leader claimed that Islamic fundamentalism was already "attacking 'us' at home" and had implanted itself in several neighborhoods and "vulnerable minds."[237] This statement acknowledged France's "*banlieue* problem" and pointed out the segregated—or even ghettoized—nature of some Muslim communities' living conditions, while it regarded Muslims as freeloader invaders who implanted themselves in deliberately self-segregated communities in order to avoid integration. Taking into consideration that the State began to prefer long-term or permanent settlement of Muslim workers and family reunification from the early 1980s onwards, as well as that workers' unions were actively demonstrating for a better chance at integration,[238] Le Pen's statement was erroneous and banalized the responsibility of the State in the process. She explicitly blamed "mass immigration" caused by globalization for the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism in France, which—according to her narrative—resulted in French people being "dispossessed" of their own country.[239] With this statement, Marine Le Pen insinuated the existence of a reversed colonial situation in France, and, in doing so, she reinforced the narrative of Muslims in France being invaders with ulterior motives to undermine the secular French State. This, in turn, aligns with the overarching neo-Orientalist frameworks of the "Clash of Civilizations" and the "Great Replacement."[240]

Furthermore, Le Pen claimed that multiculturalism yielded by mass immigration could potentially lead to a "civil war between communities,"[241] which further promotes these grand narratives without addressing the issues of discrimination, segregation, and consequent socio-economic inequality.

The question of multiculturalism appeared similarly at the forefront of *Fidesz*'s discourse between the 2015 migration crisis and the 2018 parliamentary election. In the fall of 2017, the government conducted another national consultation survey on the so-called "Soros Plan," a conspiracy theory propagated by the party. According to *Fidesz*'s narrative, George Soros would be the puppet master instructing the European Union—or

[235] *on the delegitimization of Muslim presence in France (and Europe) and the "Muslim problem", see Chapters 2 & 3.1, and Mohammed (2014)*
[236] *see Chapter 3.1*
[237] Farand (The Independent), 2017
[238] *see Chapter 3.1* ; Boyer, 1998, pp. 97-104
[239] Farand (The Independent), 2017
[240] *see Chapters 2 & 3.1* ; Mohammed, 2014, pp. 1-8
[241] Sandford (Euronews), 2017

"Brussels"—as well as migration-relation NGOs and other "undesirable" members of civil society.[242] According to this narrative, Soros had been working on the deliberate transformation of "Europe and European societies" for years and was striving to achieve this objective by settling "masses of people with different civilizational backgrounds" on the continent, including Hungary.[243]

This homogenizing and essentializing discourse—reminiscent of Le Pen's rhetoric—also figured in an interview given by Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó shortly before the 2018 election, wherein he reacted to accusations by the United Nations, the European Union and other actors of the international community, according to whom the Hungarian government was "racist" and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was a "xenophobe" and a "bully."[244] In response to these allegations, Szijjártó contended that multiculturalism was not "a value *by itself*," and Hungary had been a "homogeneous united Hungarian Christian society" for over a thousand years, and he considered "*this* as a value."[245] Expanding on this sentiment, the Prime Minister took a stronger stance and claimed that multiculturalism was "only an illusion."[246] However, Hungary's population was not homogeneous until the years following the Second World War, although ethnic Hungarians have predominantly inhabited the territory of present-day Hungary throughout the country's thousand-year history.[247]

"We think that it is up to the given nation, it is up to the given society, to decide what is considered to be a *value*."— Szijjártó added in his interview.[248] The question of values played a pivotal role in the *Front national* and *Fidesz*'s respective electoral campaigns. Politicians from these parties commonly presented the proclaimed values as representative of the entire nation and contrasted them with the different or relative *non*-values of refugees, immigrants, and Muslims. For instance, arbitrarily marked French, Hungarian, European, Christian, or Judeo-Christian values were often contrasted with real or assumed negative characteristics of Islam, Muslims, Arabs, the Middle East, or Africa,[249] which can be considered yet another manifestation of the "Clash of Civilizations" narrative.

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[242] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, pp. 273-274
[243] Erdélyi (444), 2017
[244] Besheer (VOA), 2018
[245] Ibid.
[246] Agerholm (The Independent), 2018
[247] *see Chapter 3.2* ; Harmat, 2015
[248] Besheer (VOA), 2018
[249] Agerholm (The Independent), 2018 ; Farand (The Independent), 2017 ; *Orbán Viktor évértékelő beszéde ('Viktor Orbán's Annual State of the Nation Speech')*, 2018 ; Panyi (Index), 2016 ; Sandford (Euronews), 2017

Besides the conflation of Muslims with terrorists, women's rights—or the lack thereof—constituted another significant rhetorical battlefield for the *Front national*'s moral fight against the "invaders."[250] In Orbán's discourse, this issue was not explicitly highlighted. When it came to values, he preferred to voice the potential of the "Muslim invasion" to eradicate Hungarian and European Christianity, claiming it to be "the future that is already present" in the West[251] and thus insinuating a sense of superiority over the barbaric and different "Other." While Le Pen also referred to Christianity as a value to defend, her discourse on migration more frequently drew upon arguments and narratives aligned with the principles of French *laïcité*.[252]

In her campaign for the 2017 presidential elections, Marine Le Pen claimed that Islamic fundamentalists would also impose on French people "gender discrimination in public spaces—full body veils or not—, [...] or the submission of women, forbidden to wear skirts, have a job or go to the bar."[253] This narrative closely resembled Orbán's rejection of multiculturalism and aligned with the grand narratives of the "Clash of Civilizations" and the "Great Replacement" in that it ruled out the possibility of peaceful coexistence of people with different cultural and religious backgrounds and saw it inevitable that one "community" eventually triumph over the other by imposing its own norms, which it would be able to do thanks to its majority.[254]

In her speech, the FN leader added that "[no] French, no Republican, no woman with her freedom and dignity at heart, [could] accept it."[255] Nevertheless, as shown above, much of the neo-Orientalist and Islamophobic discourse of the parties under examination aligned with at least one or often both of the aforementioned grand narratives. These overarching narratives provided populist politicians with a productive framework to conflate and interconnect socio-economic and safety-related insecurities and political matters.

Regarding the matter of women's rights, predominant concerns revolved around the topic of the veil, depicted as a symbol of oppression, Islamic fundamentalism, and the incompatibility of Islam with the Republic and *laïcité* in the *Front national*'s discourse.[256] As demonstrated earlier, the veil had been a crucial aspect of the party's Islamophobic and

[250] Amengay, 2019, p. 102 ; Farand (The Independent), 2017
[251] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 269 ; *Orbán Viktor évértékelő beszéde ('Viktor Orbán's Annual State of the Nation Speech')*, 2018 ; Panyi (Index), 2016
[252] Amengay, 2019, p. 102
[253] Farand (The Independent), 2017
[254] *see Chapters 2 & 5.2*
[255] Farand (The Independent), 2017
[256] Asal, 2020, pp. 174-175

anti-immigration discourse since the late 1980s, when questions of integration and assimilation began to arise in France.[257]

A significant difference between the matter of the veil and other parts of the FN's discourse was the veil issue's prevalence beyond Le Pen's party and its voter base. Questions surrounding the Islamic veil remained relevant throughout the following decades as multiple restrictive laws were enacted, which aimed at banning the wearing of ostentatious religious markers in the name of social equality, personal freedom, and *laïcité*.[258] However, as claimed by French sociologist Valérie Amiraux, the gradual prohibition of these religious markers—the purpose of which would be to reduce the visibility of the body—had an inverse social effect as it increased the body's exposure and the individual's vulnerability to public and legal reprehension.[259] Mohammed (2020) calls this long-term phenomenon a "process of legal discrimination by capillarity," which refers to legal and political arguments previously mobilized in favor of the initial bans being continuously reapplied in other areas of social life to advocate for further prohibitions.[260]

Another aspect of anti-Islam sentiment is Islamophobic violence. While it is often impossible to establish a direct causal link between these acts and anti-Islam political discourse, they nonetheless indicate a growing sense of frustration toward Muslims within society. Islamophobic violence was present in the context of the 2015 migration crisis in starkly different ways in France and Hungary; however, in both countries, it often stemmed from *moral panic*, which, in turn, *is* directly indebted to the detrimental representation of refugees, immigrants, Muslims, and Islam in political and public discourse, as well as in the media.[261]

In Hungary, numerous instances of Islamophobic incidents—not exclusively violence—were recorded in the period between the migration crisis and the parliamentary election. These acts often targeted people *assumed* to be refugees or immigrants.[262] As reported by the Hungarian Islamic Community, in 2015, many members of the country's Muslim community claimed to have been victims of physical or verbal aggression, including ten to fifteen attacks against women wearing a veil.[263] While these numbers are dwarfed by similar statistics from France (905 Islamophobic acts in the same year, 70% against

[257] *see Chapter 3.1*
[258] Asal, 2020, pp. 181-184
[259] Mohammed, 2014, p. 4
[260] Ibid.
[261] Asal, 2020, pp. 180-181 ; Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, p. 624 ; Kádár, 2018, p. 130 ; Metz, 2022, pp. 44-52 ; Perocco, 2020, pp. 29-30 ; Simonovits, 2019, p. 158
[262] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, p. 624
[263] Panyi (Index), 2016

women),[264] it is worth pointing out that Islamophobia as a social phenomenon was nil or insignificant in Hungary before 2015.[265] As previously demonstrated, French statistics reveal a significant increase in anti-Muslim incidents during the peak of the migration crisis. However, it is important to note that this phenomenon was not novel and had been a longstanding source of tension within French society since the late 1980s.[266] Furthermore, the numbers in France had already been on the rise before 2015 before gradually decreasing in the years following the migration crisis.[267]

6.2. "We Are at Home!" — Public Opinion in the Years after the Migration Crisis

In light of the above accounts and the development of Islamophobia in the countries under examination, it is crucial to look at the changes in the respective voter bases of *Fidesz* and the *Front national* between 2015 and 2017 (France) or 2018 (Hungary). This analysis is aimed at revealing whether a direct link can be established between Islamophobic and neo-Orientalist populist political discourse, changes in public opinion vis-à-vis refugees and Muslims, and Islamophobic acts.

6.2.1. France

As shown earlier, the FN achieved another historic result in the 2017 presidential elections, with Marine Le Pen proceeding to the second round—an achievement the party had not been able to repeat since 2002—and getting 33.9% of the ballot.[268] While this result proves that the *Front national*'s popularity had been gradually increasing under Marine's leadership, it is overshadowed by what Gougou and Persico (2017) argue to be another proof of the party's incapability to break the "glass ceiling." They claim that this "barrier" in the way of the FN's accession to government stems from its incapability to reach beyond its traditional voter base,[269] which would be an essential quality in the second round.[270]

At the time of the 2017 elections, Le Pen's voter base still consisted overwhelmingly of relatively young working-class citizens with a low level of education, who shared the party's nationalist values and were receptive to its anti-elitist, anti-EU, and anti-immigration

[264] *see Chapter 5.2* ; Asal, 2020, p. 180
[265] *see Chapter 3.2*
[266] *see Chapter 3.1*
[267] *see Chapter 5.2* ; Asal, 2020, p. 180
[268] Amengay, 2019, p. 41
[269] Ibid.
[270] Amengay, 2019, p. 43

rhetoric.[271] Ivaldi (2018) refers to this phenomenon as the "proletarianization of the FN vote,"[272] which had been ongoing since the 1980s when the party was already campaigning with messages constructed around the issue of immigration by marking it as the primary cause of and making it a scapegoat for unemployment and other social and economic insecurities, as immigrants would "take" the jobs of "indigenous" French people, threaten their national and ethnic identity, and take advantage of the country's social benefits system while also posing a risk to public order and increasing the crime rate.[273]

The receptivity of the *Front national*'s traditional voter base to these topics can thus be explained by the voters' relatively high socio-economic insecurity driven by a potential loss of their livelihood. This correlation is supported by Amengay's (2019) findings, which indicated that the priming of Islam had no direct impact on the FN vote.[274] Moreover, Islam was present in the party's discourse almost exclusively in conflation with social and economic insecurities.[275] However, the rise of "exceptional insecurity"—referring to short-term insecurity stemming from a perceived lack of individual safety due to the occurrence of unlikely and unexpected events—as a consequence of terrorist attacks did contribute to the increase in the FN vote.[276] During the 2017 electoral campaign period, when no such attacks occurred,[277] it became crucial for Le Pen to sustain the perception of a potential threat of "Islamic terrorism" in her discourse to mobilize her voter base.

Furthermore, as shown by Amengay (2019), the priming of insecurities in the media had a notable and positive impact on the FN vote,[278] which confirms that, in essence, it is their livelihood and everyday practices that FN voters felt threatened, and these fundamental insecurities were effectively projected onto immigrants, refugees, Muslims, and Arabs as embodiments of and scapegoats for all problems and insecurities.

An exception to this is the above-described "exceptional insecurity." However, as the *Front national*'s discourse revealed, this phenomenon was also incorporated into Le Pen's rhetoric and conflation of insecurities through the securitization of immigration.[279]

This contributed to individual socio-economic insecurities (unemployment, loss of identity) becoming inalienable from neo-Orientalist grand narratives (Clash of Civilizations,

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[271] Ibid.
[272] Amengay, 2019, pp. 20, 43
[273] *see Chapter 3.1* ; Amengay, 2019, p. 93
[274] Amengay, 2019, p. 194-195
[275] Amengay, 2019, p. 195
[276] Amengay, 2019, pp. 193-194
[277] Amengay, 2019, p. 194
[278] Amengay, 2020, p. 193
[279] *see Chapters 4.1 & 5.2*

Great Replacement) and the securitization of Islam (terrorism, high criminality) through a carefully constructed, artificial line of reasoning established by the FN. This involved the conflation of various issues and the creation of artificial "enemies" who were portrayed as endorsing these issues.

Nonetheless, personal insecurities remained the fundamental starting point. This may provide a plausible explanation as to why the *Front national* was unable to reach beyond its traditional voter base: in the absence of the above-mentioned social and economic insecurities, most people remained unreceptive to the party's discourse.

Nevertheless, as seen earlier, Marine Le Pen had still been capable of getting a gradually increasing share of the vote in each election since 2012.[280] As suggested by Alduy (2016), the increasing popularity of the *Front national*, despite its incapability to reach beyond its traditional target demographic, could be explained by a general rightward shift ("*droitisation*") in French society.[281] This claim can be further underpinned by the fact that the party's popularity had already been on the rise before the 2015 migration crisis,[282] and so was Islamophobia and the number of Islamophobic incidents in France.[283]

Taking into account the above factors, this research concludes that despite the *Front national*'s increasing popularity, its migration discourse in the context of the 2015 migration crisis did not significantly influence public opinion and the general perception of Middle Eastern and North African immigrants and refugees in France for multiple reasons. First, the FN's discourse on the migration crisis was a continuation of its well-tried migration discourse launched in the early 1980s, and the crisis merely provided the party with additional "munition" for the mobilization of its pre-existing target demographic, which, in turn, was gradually expanding due to a general rightward shift in French society.

Second, a lack of certain social and economic insecurities—such as fear of unemployment, loss of identity, and a changing cultural environment—and the far right-wing values promoted by the FN made the party's migration discourse unappealing to the majority of French society, while political alternatives with different discourses were abundant and also more present in the media. Thus, much of the public opinion in France remained unaffected by the *Front national*'s narratives even during the migration crisis.

Finally, it can be ascertained that several decades of exposure to and coexistence with a significant Muslim population led to the migration crisis *not* igniting anti-Islam sentiment

[280] *see Chapters 3.1 & 4.1 & 5.2* ; Amengay, 2019, pp. 37, 41
[281] Alduy, 2016, pp. 26-29
[282] *see Chapter 3.1* ; Amengay, 2020, p. 37
[283] *see Chapter 3.1* ; Asal, 2020, pp. 178-180 ; Boyer, 1998, pp. 107-110 ; Mohammed, 2020, pp. 2-3

in the majority of French citizens. The *Front national*'s voter base predominantly resided in rural areas, while the majority of France's Muslim population lived in big cities, industrial centers, or their suburbs. This shows that a lack of considerable former exposure to refugees, immigrants, or Muslims combined with the more significant presence in rural areas of social and economic insecurities conflated by the FN with the "Others" made a segment of the French population more receptive to Le Pen's anti-immigration discourse and more prone to develop or feel increased Islamophobia in consequence of the events of the 2015 migration crisis.

6.2.2. Hungary

As shown throughout the previous chapters, the situation in Hungary was starkly different. As is true for the country's lack of experience with and exposure to significant numbers of immigrants, *Fidesz*'s position as a governing party with a supermajority, and its almost complete hegemony over the media, it is just as valid for society and public opinion.

Despite the fact that *Fidesz* had already been governing with a supermajority in the National Assembly, the party was still able to reach new citizens beyond its pre-existing voter base, as attested by the results of the 2016 migrant quota referendum.[284] Moreover, there was a considerable increase in the number of new voters: in the 2014 parliamentary election, Viktor Orbán's party received 2.1 million domestic votes, while around 3.3 million people voted in favor of the party's stance in the referendum.[285] This surge is even more significant in light of the fact that the 2016 vote was merely a referendum, which was widely labeled as a campaign strategy aimed at keeping the issue of immigration relevant rather than an *actual* referendum with real consequences.[286] Bíró-Nagy (2018) argues that the outcome of the referendum meant not only that an increasing amount of Hungarian citizens agreed with the government's position but also that the strongly radicalized migration discourse of *Fidesz* was appealing to a significant fragment of the country's population without the campaign becoming "too much" for them.[287]

This phenomenon can be better understood through the development of xenophobia in Hungary during the migration crisis. The level of xenophobia in Hungarian society varied considerably throughout the 1990s, only to become relatively stable throughout the 2000s all

[284] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 273
[285] Ibid.
[286] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 272
[287] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 273

the way until 2015.[288] However, by 2016, deliberative attitudes towards immigrants and refugees in Hungary decreased considerably, and xenophilic attitudes virtually disappeared. Meanwhile, the share of xenophobic attitudes increased significantly, as 53% of the respondents stated that no one should be let into the country.[289] As shown by the study of Sik, Simonovits, and Szeitl (2016), by 2016, immigration and terrorism became inalienable from each other in Hungarian public opinion. This was also affected by the widely mediatized November 2015 Paris attacks, which facilitated the scapegoating of all MENA refugees and immigrants,[290] as did in the case of the *Front national*.[291] Furthermore, a substantial number of respondents believed that they might lose their jobs to immigrants and that the crime rate was also increasing due to immigration.[292] These findings suggest that *Fidesz*'s neo-Orientalist anti-immigration discourse was already highly effective in its first year.

While not all reasons behind this success are irrefutable, some known factors undoubtedly contributed to the showcased rapid surge in anti-immigrant and anti-Islam sentiment in Hungary.

First, the gradually expanding pro-government media empire that effectively echoed Fidesz's narratives and political messages,[293] with virtually no or barely any alternative news sources available in most areas of the country.[294] Second, opposition parties did not provide any counternarratives that could have created a certain degree of balance in Hungarian political discourse, public opinion, and people's perceptions of reality.[295] Another notable but considerably smaller far-right force aligned with *Fidesz*'s position, while the most popular left-wing party suggested that the country "should welcome 'a couple of hundreds' of immigrants" but later abandoned the idea due to the prevailing anti-immigrant sentiments within Hungarian society.[296] Third, Orbán's campaign messages in the media were published and broadcast with the label "government information,"[297] which vested them with additional credibility and created a false sense of neutrality and infallibility.

These three factors jointly contributed to the swift spread and popularity of anti-immigration and Islamophobic narratives, which underpin the sudden increase in

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[288] *see Chapter 3.2* ; Sik & Simonovits & Szeitl, 2016, pp. 82-83
[289] Sik & Simonovits & Szeitl, 2016, pp. 83-84
[290] Sik & Simonovits & Szeitl, 2016, p. 84
[291] *see Chapter 5.2*
[292] Sik & Simonovits & Szeitl, 2016, p. 84
[293] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, pp. 620-621 ; Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 273
[294] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, pp. 620-621
[295] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, p. 622 ; Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 273
[296] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, p. 622
[297] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, pp. 622, 624

xenophobic attitudes after the first year and the peak of the migration crisis. According to the European Social Survey, xenophobic attitudes increased to 54% in 2016 from 45% in 2015, explained by the normalization of formerly relatively marginal, radical views.[298] In light of this, it can be ascertained that the exceptional surge in xenophobia in Hungarian society in the context of the migration crisis can be exclusively attributed to the rise of Islamophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment. This phenomenon can be further recognized in the emergence of Islamophobic verbal and physical violence in 2015,[299] as shown earlier in this chapter.

The abrupt emergence of Islamophobic incidents can be directly linked to *Fidesz*'s migration discourse, as evidenced by numerous occurrences in rural areas where personal experiences could not affect people's attitudes towards refugees or Muslims. This correlation is further supported by the growing fear of immigrants in Hungarian society. In 2012, three years before the migration crisis, 21% of the population expressed fear towards immigrants, and this percentage doubled by 2016.[300] The increase was most significant among citizens in rural areas despite the lack of prior personal encounters with immigrants. Bajomi-Lázár (2019) argues that this phenomenon can be attributed to *moral panic*,[301] as observed in French society.

Similarly, the European Social Survey revealed that the most substantial increase in xenophobia from 2015 to 2016 occurred in rural areas where pro-government media outlets held a hegemonic position.[302] Other demographic groups where a considerable surge was documented include people with a low level of education and elderly citizens, among whom the Internet was rarely used as a source of information, and traditional media—newspapers and broadcast media—prevailed, most of which echoed *Fidesz*'s narratives.[303]

The increase of xenophobia was much less significant in the capital, Budapest, where opposition voices were more prevalent.[304] On the other hand, opinion polls conducted during the campaign period preceding the 2018 parliamentary election attested to immigration being first among the five greatest sources of fear among inhabitants of Budapest. This, Bíró-Nagy (2018) argues, is explained by the generally higher standard of living of citizens living in the capital, which relegated other sources of fear—such as vulnerability, uncertainty, illness, and financial situation—to lower positions.[305] However, another poll showed that the inhabitants

[298] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, p. 624
[299] Ibid.
[300] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, p. 624 ; Bíró-Nagy, 2018, p. 281
[301] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, p. 624
[302] Ibid.
[303] Ibid.
[304] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, pp. 620, 624
[305] Bíró-Nagy, 2018, pp. 283-284

of Budapest and villages expressed an above-average fear regarding the "settlement of immigrants." In regard to rural areas, this is explained by the phenomena described above, while in the case of the capital, this research argues, this phenomenon is likely to be connected to memories of large groups of refugees camping in downtown Budapest for weeks during the peak of the migration crisis in September 2015, waiting to continue their journey towards Western European countries.[306] This event may have provoked what Amengay (2019) referred to as *exceptional insecurity*;[307] however, the lasting impact showcased by polls conducted in 2018 suggests otherwise.

Sik, Simonovits, and Szeitl (2016) argue that personal encounters with immigrants can shape individual perceptions in two contrasting ways. People who previously had limited or no interactions with immigrants are more prone to develop fear and harbor negative attitudes towards them, whereas those who have personal acquaintances among immigrants are considerably less likely to hold such sentiments.[308] While the latter was prevalent in urban contexts in France, where MENA communities had already had a long presence, in Budapest, it can be ascertained that the former scenario was predominant due to two factors. First, because of the relatively small number of settled MENA immigrants and refugees in the city and second, due to the majority having had only *casual* encounters with refugees during the migration crisis. Moreover, it is plausible that the government's anti-immigration discourse continued to exert a significant influence on this phenomenon, even though the majority of Budapest's residents supported various opposition parties, unlike in most other parts of the country.[309]

Bajomi-Lázár (2019) argues that it remains uncertain whether the significant growth in documented xenophobic attitudes can be attributed to a surge in xenophobia *itself* as a consequence of Fidesz's migration discourse or an increase in the *tolerance* of xenophobia.[310]

The latter case implies that people would merely more openly give voice to their pre-existing anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment due to the government's hard-line rhetoric and large-scale campaigns, which would normalize these attitudes and enable them to be expressed without social and legal repercussions.

Although it is likely that the tolerance of xenophobia also saw an increase during and following the migration crisis, it is plausible that it is rather anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, and

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[306] Connolly & Nolan (The Guardian), 2015
[307] *see Chapter 6.1*
[308] Sik & Simonovits & Szeitl, 2016, pp. 98-99
[309] Deloy, 2018, p. 1 ; Nemzeti Választási Iroda (National Election Office), 2018
[310] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, p. 624

anti-Islam attitudes that became more prevalent from 2015 on in Hungarian society as a consequence of the lack of prior exposure to sizeable MENA populations and the governing party's migration discourse. This is supported by *Fidesz*'s substantial influence over media outlets in the country, the limited presence of counternarratives from opposition parties and independent media, and the limited personal connections between Hungarian citizens and refugees during the crisis.[311]

Based on the above analysis, this research argues that *Fidesz* effectively implanted and fostered Islamophobic and anti-immigrant sentiments within Hungarian public opinion through the mobilization of neo-Orientalist populist narratives, resulting in significant electoral successes. Several factors attest that the rise of these sentiments in Hungary can be directly attributed to the government's migration discourse and extensive campaigning efforts.

First, the lack of substantial personal encounters with refugees, immigrants, and Muslims was a crucial factor prevalent among the majority of Hungary's population, particularly in rural areas. Second, the surge in negative attitudes towards MENA arrivals continued following the end of the migration crisis, despite the insignificant number of refugees in the country beyond early 2016. The latter was an outcome of *Fidesz*'s construction of narratives linking immigration, the European Union, George Soros, the "global left," liberals, and other groups considered "enemies" of the nation.

Over the course of the migration crisis, these narratives became increasingly detached from reality; however, the lack of significant counternarratives from the opposition and the near hegemony of pro-government voices in Hungarian media created an environment where an overwhelming majority of public opinion could be persuaded that what they heard, read, or saw represented an incontestable truth. The fostering of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim attitudes was further facilitated by the scarcity of MENA populations in most areas of Hungary.

In light of the above findings, this inquiry argues that the incitement of Islamophobia was an effective political tool in Viktor Orbán and *Fidesz*'s inventory, exerting a lasting impact on Hungarian public opinion well beyond the 2015 migration crisis. For this to happen, the convergence of multiple factors was crucial: *Fidesz*'s position as the governing party and its supermajority in the National Assembly, which enabled legislation without compromises with the opposition; the availability of substantial funds for extensive media

[311] Bajomi-Lázár, 2019, p. 624

campaigns and national consultation surveys, the absence of significant counternarratives, and, most significantly, the overwhelming lack of real-life personal experiences with people portrayed as the "Others," which allowed for Orbán's fabricated narratives to permeate public opinion without encountering substantial challenges from opposing political or civil forces. Thus, the key to the success of *Fidesz*'s Islamophobic anti-immigration discourse was its near-total dominance, its detachment from reality—a threat constantly lingering at the borders but never materializing—, the scale of political campaigns, the absence of substantial competition, and the lack of personal experiences.

These factors, for many Hungarians, solidified *Fidesz*'s neo-Orientalist populist discourse regarding Muslims and immigration as an incontestable truth.

7. Conclusion

This research aimed to ascertain whether anti-Islam neo-Orientalist populist discourse in the context of the 2015 migration crisis deepened Islamophobia in French and Hungarian society, causing lasting damage to the perception of MENA immigrants and refugees, considering whether the respective country's citizens had already been exposed to a considerable population of immigrant background before the crisis. The inquiry investigated how anti-Islam neo-Orientalist populist political discourse affected and shaped public opinion, social hostility, and Islamophobia between the first considerable influx of immigrants in 2015 and the first nation-wide elections held after the crisis, in 2017 in France and in 2018 in Hungary.

France and Hungary were chosen and studied on account of their considerable differences regarding their respective political, social, and historical realities at the time of the migration crisis. Such contextual differences were key to the analysis of the transformation of anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, and anti-Muslim public attitudes in the two countries. Moreover, the research provided substantial insight as to why, for instance, certain narratives or rhetorical elements were effective and influential in one country while remaining insignificant in the other.

This research scrutinized the impact of the respective migration discourses of two far-right populist parties: the *Front national* in France and *Fidesz* in Hungary. Despite their significant contextual differences, the parties under analysis ran largely similar migration discourses with significant overlaps concerning neo-Orientalist grand narratives, such as the "Clash of Civilizations" and the "Great Replacement."The two discourses were, of course, adjusted to each country's demographic and socio-economic realities as a means to appeal to potential voters. By linking the issue of immigration and the increasing number of Muslims in Europe to social and economic insecurities, these parties were able to attract significant support from specific demographics who felt their livelihood, identity, everyday practices, and safety threatened by the influx of MENA immigrants.

To understand the transformation of public opinion vis-à-vis Muslims and immigration in the context of the 2015 migration crisis, in the first chapter, the research mapped the theoretical foundations of the phenomenon under analysis. This includes the concept of neo-Orientalism, which was born in response to mass immigration to Western Europe from the MENA region due to post-World War II rebuilding efforts, the lack of sufficient domestic labor force, globalization, and decolonization. In France, neo-Orientalist

political discourse emerged in the 1980s in reference to the country's "Muslim problem," while in Hungary, it only appeared at the dawn of the 2015 migration crisis.

To clarify the reasons behind this time difference, the third chapter delved into France and Hungary's respective histories of immigration and contact with Middle Eastern and North African populations. The inquiry explored France's colonial past in the MENA region and the consequent mass immigration of Muslim workers to the Metropole after the Second World War. In the 1980s, with the possibility of permanent settlement for these workers, social and political tensions began to arise, resulting in the birth of the *Front national*'s migration discourse, which remained central to the party's identity. Furthermore, the chapter examined the history of Muslim presence in Hungary—much less significant than in France— and the rise of populism and *Fidesz* in the early 2010s, which enabled the birth of an impactful migration discourse in2015.

The fourth and fifth chapters analyzed the neo-Orientalist and Islamophobic discourses of the two parties and their impact on public opinion in the context of a number of key events that occurred during the migration crisis. Chapter 4 analyzed *Fidesz* and the FN's discourse at the dawn of the migration crisis in the context of the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting in Paris in January 2015. In Hungary, this moment marked the launch of the governing party's hard-line migration discourse, while in France—where the attack occurred—Marine Le Pen voiced her party's pre-existing anti-immigration stance and the link between migration and terrorism.

Chapter 5 examined two distinct political campaigns that illustrate the evolution of the *Front national* and *Fidesz*'s respective migration discourses at different points of the migration crisis. In Hungary, this research analyzed a "national consultation" survey on immigration conducted between April and July 2015 alongside a large-scale billboard campaign. Concerning France, this inquiry examined the FN's migration discourse and its public perception in the aftermath of the November 13 Paris attacks, which coincided with the campaign period preceding the regional elections held in December.

The sixth chapter looked at *Fidesz* and the FN's neo-Orientalist and Islamophobic discourse in the context of the first nationwide elections held after the migration crisis: the 2017 presidential elections in France and the 2018 parliamentary election in Hungary. The chapter investigated the transformation of public opinion vis-à-vis Muslims, immigrants, and refugees during the years elapsed since the peak of the crisis to ascertain whether anti-Islam neo-Orientalist populist political discourse had a lasting impact on French and Hungarian public opinion and attitudes towards people of MENA origins.

Following the analysis of multiple years of political discourse and the transformation of public opinion along with their historical contexts, this research found that in Hungary, the key to the success of *Fidesz*'s Islamophobic anti-immigration discourse was its near hegemony in political discourse and the media, the narratives' considerable detachment from reality, the great magnitude of the political campaigns, the absence of effective competition, and the population's general lack of personal experiences with individuals and communities of MENA origins. For the majority of the Hungarian public, these factors rendered *Fidesz*'s neo-Orientalist populist discourse on Muslims and immigration an incontestable truth, which allowed for the unimpeded spread of anti-refugee, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment in Hungary during and after the 2015 migration crisis.

In France, the *Front national*'s discourse on the migration crisis was a continuation of its well-tried migration discourse launched in the early 1980s, and the crisis merely provided the party with additional "munition" for the mobilization of its pre-existing target demographic, which, in turn, was gradually expanding due to a general rightward shift in French society. The lack of considerable former exposure to refugees, immigrants, or Muslims combined with the more significant presence in rural areas of social and economic insecurities conflated by the FN with the "Others" made a segment of the French population more receptive to Le Pen's anti-immigration discourse and more prone to adopt and harbor increased Islamophobia in consequence of the events of the migration crisis.

However, the lack of certain social and economic insecurities—such as fear of unemployment, loss of identity, and a changing cultural environment—and the far right-wing values promoted by the FN made the party's migration discourse unappealing to the majority of French society, including citizens of immigrant backgrounds, while political alternatives with different discourses were abundant and also more present in the media. Hence, while the events of the crisis contributed to an enhanced mobilization of the party's traditional voter base, much of the public opinion in France remained unaffected by the *Front national*'s narratives even during the migration crisis.

In both countries, the most significant driver of the surge in Islamophobia was the lack of considerable former exposure to refugees, immigrants, or Muslims combined with the more significant presence in rural areas of social and economic insecurities conflated by the parties with the "Others."

This seemingly contradictory phenomenon is explained by the significance of detachment from reality in neo-Orientalist populist narratives, which continuously fostered the existing socio-economic and safety-related insecurities of the most vulnerable of the

population by channeling these into the collective figure of the "Other," whose entry, settlement and increasing influence would further feed into these insecurities.

Exceptional insecurity linked to immigration, such as in the case of terrorist attacks in France and the camping of refugees in the city center of the capital in Hungary, was not a direct effect of the migration discourse of the parties under examination. The terrorist attacks did not have a provable or demonstrable effect on French citizens' willingness to vote for the FN, and the Hungarian capital, Budapest, remained a stronghold of the opposition despite these instances.

It is important to note that this research does not intend to imply that Islamophobia would be a phenomenon existing only among the most vulnerable of the population. However, the inquiry analyzed particularly the the influence of anti-Islam neo-Orientalist populist discourse on public opinion in the context of the 2015 migration crisis, in which case the aforementioned demographic groups were found to be the most receptive.

This study also found that in the context of the migration crisis, the effectiveness of the incitement of Islamophobia as a political tool through the scapegoating of Muslims, refugees, immigrants was largely dependent on several factors: the given party's power and media presence, its ability to reach out to citizens via political campaigns, and the presence—or the lack thereof—of significant counternarratives. Furthermore, it depended to a crucial extent on regional specificities such as the presence of, prior exposure to, and personal connections with people of MENA origins, as well as on the prevalence in a given region of insecurities conflated with immigration and Muslims. In short, the presence *only* of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim narratives in neo-Orientalist populist discourse was *not* sufficient for Islamophobia to become a powerful political tool.

In conclusion, in France, anti-Islam neo-Orientalist populist discourse in the context of the 2015 migration crisis did *not* deepen Islamophobia in public opinion. The long history of the presence of people of MENA origins in the country resulted in significant exposure and personal experience with these communities, most of whom were also French citizens.. While a notable rightward shift was observed in French public opinion, it was independent of the FN's migration discourse, and the party struggled to reach beyond its traditional voter base. The marginal presence of FN voices in the media, combined with the abundance of different political discourses and media outlets presenting varying views on immigration and Muslims, mitigated the potential effect of the far-right party's discourse regarding the whole of French public opinion.

In Hungary, anti-Islam neo-Orientalist populist discourse *created* and later *deepened* Islamophobia in public opinion. Its presence in Hungarian society before 2015 was nil or insignificant due to the small number of people of MENA origins in the country. It was constructed by *Fidesz* as a political tool to remediate the party's dropping popularity and mobilized through the conflation of Islam, Muslims, refugees, and immigrants with personal insecurities among the citizenry in a similar way to the FN's strategy in France. However, in contrast to Le Pen's party, *Fidesz* was governing the country it was active in and did so with a supermajority in the legislation. The party dominated political discourse in the country and had a near hegemony on its media landscape, which resulted in a significant share of the population perceiving Orbán's narratives to represent an incontestable truth. The continuing surge in negative attitudes after the end of the migration crisis despite the insignificant number of refugee entries in the country further attests to the success of *Fidesz*'s anti-Islam neo-Orientalist populist discourse and its considerable impact on the development of Islamophobia, anti-refugee, and anti-immigrant sentiment in Hungarian public opinion.

In conclusion, anti-Islam neo-Orientalist populist discourse in the context of the 2015 migration crisis did *not* considerably affect Islamophobia in French society; however, it *did* in Hungarian public opinion and caused lasting damage to the perception of MENA immigrants and refugees.

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