

Dominant Christian narratives of solidarity during the COVID pandemic in Hungary

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Abstract

In crises, the importance of solidarity becomes crucial. Religious organizations, as members of civil society, have an essential role in promoting and participating in solidarity action. Dominant religious organizations thus can have the power to shape the image of solidarity in a crisis and, by creating a dominant narrative, to strengthen their social position. In times of crisis, hidden religious narratives could gain visibility, and religious authority could also gain more power. But in the previous migration crisis, religious actors failed to fulfill their solidarity role actively, and were unable to strengthen their public position in Hungary.

We used both quantitative and qualitative text analysis methods to understand the role of religious actors in solidarity action during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have blended these methods with network analysis techniques to present the role of different actors in this communication process.

Our results show that the appearance of religious or church-related actors does not infer a religious interpretation, per se. Many articles mentioned church-related organizations as good examples of solidarity, but this was not embedded into the religious narrative. Religious actors mentioned together with political actors were more visible in online media, but the lack of the former's own voice also shows the decreasing power of religious authority. However, we found religious narratives that called for new understanding and interpretations of the pandemic and its effect on society and the future, but those interpretations were represented mainly by Pope Francis, and echoed by only a few Hungarian actors, showing the lack of dominant and politically independent religious narratives about social issues in the media or the public sphere.

Keywords: COVID-19, religion, solidarity, authority, text-mining

1. Introduction

In 2020, the topic of the COVID-19 pandemic dominated media all around the world. The interpretation of the crisis framed its perception; meanwhile, the pandemic impacted the everyday lives of people. News related to COVID-19 covered several aspects of the crisis: health, well-being, the economic situation, and the social and psychological consequences of

the pandemic. One of the positive effects of the pandemic seems to have been the strengthening of solidarity among people (Voicu et al., 2020). This topic has intensively been studied in the last few decades from crisis to crisis (Delanty, 2008; Habermas, 2013; Verhaegen, 2018; Gerhards et al., 2019; Wallaschek, 2019; 2020). Wallaschek (2019) says that studying solidarity requires crises. But solidarity is a broad concept, and different types of solidarity narratives exist. It is an exciting research question how the COVID-19 pandemic has shaped these solidarity narratives and the dominant narratives of social actors.

In times of crisis, the call for solidarity becomes extremely loud. The voice of religious organizations is supposed to be significant or even dominant in such times, since, in religious teachings, solidarity is a basic moral principle, and religious communities are built on solidarity. Research shows that the presence of religion in the public sphere is strengthening (Casanova, 2007; 2011; Berger, 1999; Butler et al., 2011; Hjelm, 2015). However, this visibility involves a rather secular (cultural, historical, social) interpretation of religion instead of the presence of the teachings or 'unique' narratives of religious organizations. (Berger, 1999; Taylor, 2009). Thus, in times of crisis, when religious actors become more visible in the public sphere, researchers have a chance to get a clearer view of their position in society. We can map their relation to power and their embeddedness in the power structure by analyzing their publicly available discourses (Fairclough, 1989; Van Dijk, 2008; Wodak, 2012; Hjelm, 2014; McHoul et al., 2015). Previous research has already shown that, in Hungary, religious actors – churches and church-related civil actors – have a weak, but independent, and accessible voice in the online public sphere during times of crisis (Vancsó, 2020a; 2020b). Their role in fundamental caring functions is constantly growing within the country. This (at first sight contradictory) phenomenon can be explained by the growing secular role of religion, which affects a huge part of society. At the same time, faith-based religious narratives about the crisis are still hidden in a marginal part of the public sphere.

2. Previous studies

Although the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic only started in early 2020, several papers have already been published on the topic of the news representation of the pandemic. Most papers have tried to map the effect of the pandemic on everyday life (Yin et al., 2020; Gonzalez-Tortolero, 2020). Semetko (2000) and his colleagues took one step back and tried to define the mainframes of media representation in this regard. They identified five main, always present frames: conflict, human interest, economic consequence, morality, and responsibility. Ogbodo (Ogbodo et al., 2020) narrowed their research to the COVID-19 pandemic and tried to map the leading global media frames of the pandemic. Their results showed that, globally, the core frames of the crisis are the human and/or social consequences of the crisis and the emotion of fear; the frame of hope also appeared. In their paper, they also presented the role of religious interpretations within this global media framing; results showed that religious actors used morality as an additional layer.

We followed this research stream and analyzed the central narratives of solidarity discourse which appeared in both morality and responsibility frames used by religious actors in Hungary during the COVID-19 pandemic. We used the word 'narrative' since our primary aim was to capture uniquely Christian interpretations embedded in the broad framework of discourses on solidarity, which is mainly dominated by political interpretations in online media, but we also sought to refer to/look for the wide range of solidarity narratives that are part of Christian teaching. We used both quantitative and qualitative text analysis methods to

understand the role of religious actors in solidarity action and the representation of solidarity during the COVID-19 pandemic. We mixed these methods with network analysis techniques to test the role of different actors in this communication process.

Based on previous research that showed that religious discourses and narratives are reflective and firmly embedded in actual political narratives (Vidra, 2017; Vancsó, 2020a; 2020b), we assumed that we would find similar patterns during the COVID-19-related crisis. We were also interested in revealing the relationship of religious institutions to the political sphere by looking at the shared narratives of actors with a high level of authority, or the co-appearances of actors from different spheres in selected media articles in the discourse on solidarity. The lack of a unique narrative could be due to the lack of religious authority – a question we investigate more deeply by analyzing power relations between religious and political authority.

3. Solidarity and the question of religious authority in times of crisis

Solidarity is defined as a situation in which the well-being of one person or group is positively related to that of others (Koster & De Beer, 2009, p. 12); as such, it is an indispensable element of everyday life. In crises, its importance became crucial (Grajczár et al., 2019). Research on solidarity became central after 9/11 and after the economic crisis in 2008, showing that in the case of any form of existential threat, solidarity strengthens (Collins, 2004); it has gained even more significance since 2015 due to the so-called refugee crisis in Europe (Della Porta, 2018; Wallaschek, 2019; Bernát et al., 2019). The COVID-19 situation brought questions about solidarity and related activities in civil society to the fore again (Carlsen et al., 2020, Brechenmacher et al., 2020). Research shows that, since the beginning of the pandemic in Hungary, positive attitudes toward solidarity have been growing (Voicu et al., 2020), and the mobilization of people in the name of solidarity has been quite successful. Civil society had a significant role in distributing support and help in this period. However, it is also known that this sort of temporary solidarity can fade away without face-to-face interaction. (Collins, 2004) Religious organizations, as members of civil society, can have a crucial role in promoting and actively participating in solidarity action on a religious basis since most religious teachings stress the importance of solidarity as a moral principle. Solidarity derives from the feeling of belonging, or ‘feeling of membership’ (Collins, 2004, p. 49), a crucial factor in religious organizations. Solidarity can empower social movements (Draper, 2014), including religious-based action. Thus, religious organizations may be dominant representatives and actors of solidarity by setting an example in their everyday routines and communicating it.

Dominant religious organizations thus can have the power to shape the image of solidarity in a crisis and, by creating a dominant narrative, strengthen their social position. In times of crisis, hidden religious narratives could gain visibility, and religious authority could also strengthen. Religious authority derives from power over the means of salvation and is legitimated and maintained by a unique language of the supernatural (Chaves, 1994, p. 756); thus, religious actors can use an independent and unique religious narrative to designate the ‘territory’ of their authority as well. Online media gives space for new actors’ claims of religious authority (Campbell, 2007; Turner, 2007). Therefore, traditional religious actors should step into this sphere to maintain and reinforce their authority. Besides their online presence, a unique symbolic language, style, and alternative narratives can distinguish their role from that of other civil actors that actively communicate and act in solidarity. In our investigation, besides the description of the dominant religious narratives, we also seek to understand the

position of religious institutions and religious authority in the public sphere through the lens of online media.

4. Data and methods

To map the main religious narratives of solidarity during the COVID pandemic, we analyzed how religious actors¹ actively or passively communicated in the online space. We focused on Christian actors and organizations both due to their dominance in the country and their strengthening role in the public sphere. We used the Sentione² social media platform to collect our initial corpus. Sentione collects articles, posts, and comments from more than one million Hungarian websites, including Facebook groups that are not private. In the first step, we collected ‘all’ the available content from religious actors between 2020.01.01 and 2020.08.31. We searched only for Hungarian-language content. For the query, we created a list of websites and Facebook groups that included the official sites of churches (*evangelikus.hu*) and orders (*jezsuita.hu*), and also religious newspapers (*ujember.hu*). We also defined a set of keywords to collect all relevant content in which religious actors are mentioned. These keywords included the names of churches and key religious persons. Only Hungarian key persons were listed, with one exception: Pope Francis. We wanted to include him to create a frame whereby Hungarian and international discourse on solidarity could be compared. With the above-described query, we collected the content of 38,471 articles and posts. The list of sites and the list of keywords is available in the appendix.

Before applying any text-mining methods, we had to pre-process the texts (Ignatow & Mihalcea, 2016). We removed all the special characters from the texts along with the HTML tags, and transformed emojis into character strings. We used DBpedia (Lehmann et al., 2015) for Named Entity Recognition (NER) and *magyarlanc* (Zsibrita et al., 2013) for the lemmatization of the texts. After lemmatization, we searched for significant bigrams and trigrams in the texts. We tried to identify the negations in the texts and concatenate them into one token, and if we could specify the opposite meaning of the words (mainly adjectives), we also transformed the tokens into the opposite word (e.g. not nice → not_nice → ugly). Some duplications of articles and posts from the same sites occurred in our corpus – some sites have content optimized for mobile browsers. In this case, they upload the same article with different links. We only kept one version of these articles. It is also common for sites to update the same article with new information. In this case, we kept the newest version of the article. After duplication filtering and pre-processing, we had 30,211 articles and posts. In our analysis, we focus on solidarity-related action and discourse related to the Covid situation. As our initial corpus was broad, we had to narrow it down. We used keywords to map Covid- and

1 As can be seen in the list of religious actors, we focused on Christian organizations and their representatives. They were not differentiated in the data collection process, but there were slight differences concerning the dominant narrative they represented.

2 SentiOne (www.sentione.hu) is an international social listening piece of software; a content-based web analytics platform that covers and recognizes 30 languages from across Europe. It gathers, indexes and analyses public online content published anywhere on the web, starting with social media channels through blogs, forums and websites. The interactive platform is built upon user-provided keywords and key phrases and looks for specific mentions that either in themselves or within their context contain the phrases that interest the user. The system gathers data almost in real-time, yet has a historical database that goes back 3.5 years. For quantitative research, data is structured according to different focal points and research parameters and can be visualized on an interactive dashboard. This form of technology also supports deep qualitative analysis as it enables thorough analysis and categorization of all indexed web content such as articles, posts, comments, etc., one by one.

solidarity-related content. The list of keywords is available in the appendix. We only kept those articles in which any of the selected keywords appeared. After keyword filtering, 5,015 articles and posts remained in the corpus.

For the descriptive analysis of the texts, we applied Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modeling (Blei et al., 2003). LDA is a standard method of text mining for identifying the main topics within a corpus. It works like fuzzy cluster analysis, so it defines a probability for each document regarding how likely it is that document *i* contains topic *j*. There is no standard way to determine the topic numbers. We followed a complex strategy here. First, we ran two models with nine topics each, and merged the results of the models, so we had 9×9 topics in theory, but some of them were empty, and only a few contained an analyzable amount of articles. We extracted those nine topics where the minimum number of articles was 90. We checked for the most common and most often featured words in relation to these topics, and we also read some of the articles on every topic. After this qualitative step, we decided to omit some topics and merged some of them when content was quite similar. We used a fast-text-based classifier (Joulin et al., 2016) to finalize the topic classification. At the end of this process, we had 855 articles classified into four topics. This content is the core communication of the religious actors in the online media related to solidarity during the pandemic.

Using a mix of quantitative topic modeling and qualitative content analysis, we were able to identify the primary communication frames of religious actors related to solidarity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Besides mapping the main solidarity discourses, we also wanted to identify the network of religious and other actors within this online discourse. We searched for names and institutions with a minimum of five appearances in the corpus. We identified 14 institutions, 64 religion-related people, 11 politicians, and three businesspersons. In the appendix we give a short description of the actors we found. We drew the networks of these actors based on their co-occurrence within the articles. We applied a threshold of three common articles to form a tie between two actors, and drew unique networks for each topic. We used the R igraph package (Csardi & Nepusz 2006) for the network visualization.³

After an initial analysis of the final corpus, we found that some articles appeared in the same form in different outlets. This was typical in some county outlets which are under the control of the Central Media Press and Media Foundation⁴ (Hungarian abbreviation: KESMA). These outlets released the same article at the same time, without any difference. Keeping these duplicates would have increased the tie strength of those actors who appeared together in these articles, thus we decided to keep only one of the articles in such cases when we calculated the actor network.

We used quantitative topic modeling to identify the main frames of the online media content concerning the discourses on solidarity and religious organizations, but we wanted to take a further step to better understand the narratives behind those topics. With qualitative content analysis, we defined four main narratives behind the different types of solidarity: economic crisis narrative, humanitarian/social crisis narrative, responsibility narrative, and religious reformation narrative.

The economic-crisis narrative calls for solidarity due to the economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis. The tragic effect of the crisis on people's livelihoods calls for action in this

3 We extracted four topics from 855 articles. We calculated separate networks for all the topics, but we did not obtain a coherent graph for the two smaller topics, so we decided to present the networks for the two bigger topics in this paper. See details later.

4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_European_Press_and_Media_Foundation

field on a national and local level. The narrative of the economic crisis is strongly connected to the need for instrumental support.

The humanitarian/social crisis narrative is a more general and global narrative that highlights the effects of the pandemic on humanity, including all related aspects: social, economic, and even political. Due to its international context, this narrative does not call for direct action; it is instead about the ideals of solidarity.

The responsibility narrative enhances the importance of all actors – political, other institutional, and individual – in terms of shouldering responsibility for the safety of others by deciding to act based on the idea of solidarity. It also operates on a more global level, but it does not stress crisis nor their handling, but rather the prevention of a deeper crisis by showing everyone's responsibility.

The religious reformation narrative deals with the challenges religious organizations must face concerning the changing circumstances of their everyday operations and performance of religious practice. Religious community is the key to maintaining religious institutions. The lack of physical presence can severely affect religious institutions if they do not reform their activities. This narrative is quite broad, appearing on both the individual level in the form of advice to practice religion at home, and on a macro and global level in relation to discussions about the advantages and disadvantages of the changes.

Since our investigation focused on understanding the position and authority of churches, following Bawidamann's research (Bawidamann et al., 2020), we identify three types of authority: governmental, professional, and religious.

Governmental authority is represented in legislation and regulations created by the government due to the pandemic; professional authority appears in the statements and suggestions of scientific and medical professionals concerning the crisis. Religious authority is present in statements related to explaining changing religious practices and other religious interpretations of the crisis and its lessons. Authorities are firmly connected, interfere, and may clash in various situations and are interrelated with the narratives they create or are embedded in. Thus, authority can create several narratives in parallel. A narrative can belong to different actors, but the position and legitimacy of the actors define the effectiveness and public dominance of the narratives they communicate.

5. Results

5.1 Topics

Solidarity is not a one-dimensional concept; it has several forms. Solidarity can be immediate and target those in actual need, but it can also refer to more generic solidarity towards humanity. Applying topic modeling, we identified four separate ways (see Table 1) in which different interpretations of solidarity were present. The topics cover different narratives of solidarity, but some forms of solidarity appeared within multiple topics as well (Table 1).

The first two topics are organized around instrumental support – providing **monetary** support in the form of donations and providing somewhat '**tangible,**' *concrete* support in the form of food distribution, shopping, or the donation of electronic devices to children for use at home. The topic of tangible assets appeared more in religious outlets, while monetary-support-related articles were more commonly released in 'standard' media outlets. With regard to the latter topics, the number of articles released by KESMA was high, which is a mark of political presence (we will come back to this later).

Table 1. *Basic statistics about extracted topics and dominant narratives in topics*

Topic	Number of articles	Number of articles without county KESMA outlets	Percentage of articles released in religious outlets	Mean number of comments	Dominant narratives
Instrumental support - tangible	95	88	45,3%	0,36	Economic crisis
Instrumental support - money	275	209	11,3%	1,6	Economic crisis and humanitarian
Everyday religious life	100	90	37,0%	2,6	Responsibility
Global Christian perspective	385	366	32,2%	1,21	Humanitarian Religious reformation Economic crisis

The third topic was about the **changing religious life**, with a focus on the logistics and operations of religious organizations regarding adapting to the new situation. This topic was the most commented on in this corpus.

The fourth topic was quite a large one, with numerous articles covering the speeches and statements of Pope Francis who talked to the whole religious community (even though he is Catholic, he often refers to humanity in his statements), referring to Biblical examples and the social teaching of Christianity as the basis for action. Thus the topic is called the **global Catholic perspective**.

5.2 *Instrumental support*

The Hungarian Interchurch Aid asks for donations due to the economic and social effect of the COVID-19 pandemic which affects all. HIA asks that people, beside their own problems, do not forget people who are already in need, and who are even more severely affected by the consequences of the situation. (KESMA newspapers, 2020, March 18)

Instrumental support refers to action – preexisting or provisional – through which people help each other in several ways by providing some form of material support. We identified two topics related to instrumental support – monetary and tangible support – as acts of solidarity. They both used the economic crisis as the main narrative. Still, while political actors besides the church-related civil actors were influential with regard to the donation-focused topic, we did not find the same pattern in terms of tangible support. Monetary support focused on the collection and distribution of help by enhancing actors, while tangible support concerned the recipients of various forms of support, such as free meals, seeds, or technical devices for children. In the case of the first type, actors (donors) are necessary. In the second, the focus is more on the support itself and the target group.

5.2.1 *An economic and social crisis narrative*

Articles in the category of instrumental support call attention to the tragic economic consequences of the pandemic. This is the central narrative of this topic. The social crisis is approached from an economic point of view. The focus is on the financial consequences of the pandemic and not on health-related issues. It is a pragmatic narrative focused on action instead of description, which appears on a local level.

Articles contain information about fundraising activities, thus also presenting actors that are already active as good examples. These actors are mainly church-related civil organizations and are thus strongly connected to churches. But the central narrative of these statements and calls are non-religious. The number of religious references (references to religious teaching or important religious actors) is almost zero. Despite this, however, the actors are religious; yet they appear with their social activities without mentioning any religious aspects. The only signs of religion here are the organizations' names, which show their relation to a church. Religious actors passively concede the creation of this narrative. They are the representations of instrumental support that are responding to the crisis, yet they are not the ones that show off their activities or make statements by calling attention to the crisis.

5.2.2 Actors: Governmental and religious authority

The main actors in such articles are church-related civil organizations – Catholic Caritas, Hungarian Interchurch Aid, Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta, and some political actors and organizations. While civil organizations are presented without mentioning any actual names of representatives – one exception is Márton Juhász, the managing director of Református Szeretetszolgálat – political actors are strongly represented. Civil organizations are mentioned as active participants in providing support – the intermediary between donors and people in need – and as those who are calling for attention to the crisis and the urgent need for support. Political actors call attention to the importance and usefulness of religious organizations and churches at a time of crisis, but from a well-defined power perspective.

An interesting result is a clear difference between the monetary and the tangible form of support in the case of actors. Actors in articles related to tangible support are typically churches and church-related civil organizations. In contrast, content concerning tangible donations frequently mentioned governmental institutions and personnel connected to those organizations. Another difference is denominational. In the case of monetary support, the Hungarian Reformed Church and its civil organization are overrepresented. Concerning tangible support, the Hungarian Catholic Church, Catholic Caritas, and the Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference are the main actors.

The National Humanitarian Coordination Council (NHCC) was the most – and almost only – institution that was related to a political actor. The most commonly mentioned non-institutional actors are politicians; Miklós Soltész, a politician who is currently the secretary of the State Secretariat for Ecclesiastical and Ethnic Relations (SSEER); Máriusz Révész, a *government commissioner* for active leisure activities, and Herczegh Anita – wife of János Áder, the President of Hungary, who was actively involved in charitable activity.

To understand the relation of these actors in the monetary support sub-narrative, we used a network approach in which the actors were connected if they were co-mentioned in the same article. This network shows the strong interconnection between the political and the church-related civil institutional actors. We identified 29 actors in relation to the monetary support topic. The graph density was 0.19, and the average path between the actors was 1.51. The network measures also confirm the central position of institutions. The betweenness value of institutions was 17.3, and the same value for the politicians was 5.3, while for religious persons it was only 3.8. (Fig. 1.)

Meanwhile, neither the number of actors nor the strength of the relations between them was significant enough to draw a similar network concerning the tangible support narrative. In looking at the actors, the absolute lack of religious representatives is evident, which besides the narrative also supports the non-religious nature of this perspective. Comparison of the

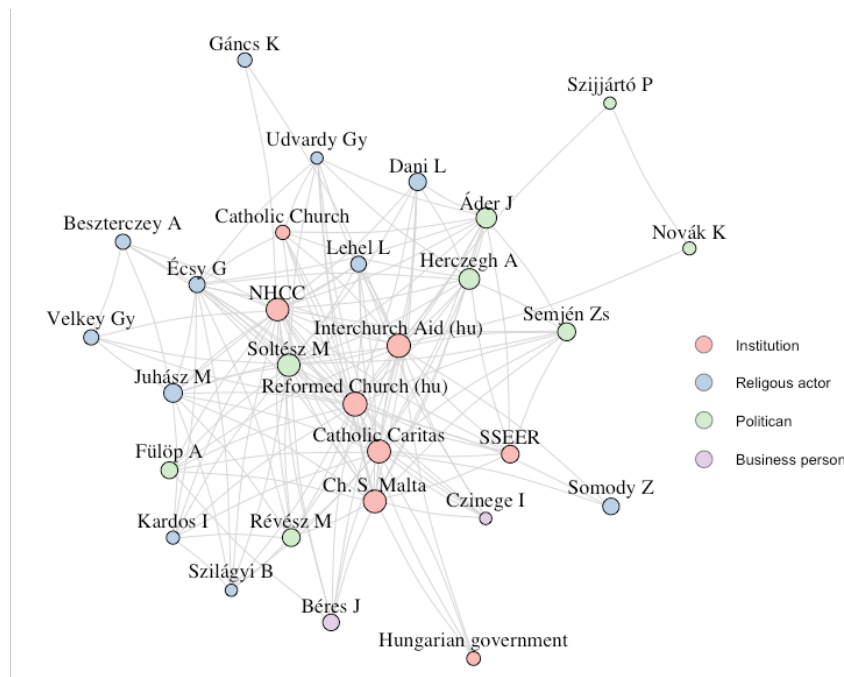


Figure 1: *Network of actors in the monetary support topic*

presence of other non-church-related civil organizations would be interesting (by focusing on the involvement of political actors as regards the interpretation of their activities). Still, we suppose that from this point of view, they are less visible.

5.3 *Everyday religious life*

Articles on this topic inform believers and active members of religious communities about the changing forms of religious practice in pandemic times. Besides the useful information, some advice is also communicated to believers about how to continue their religious activities at home or follow the online activity of the churches – including the Evangelical, the Reformed, the Catholic, and smaller churches as well.

5.3.1 *Responsibility and the religious reformation narrative*

Behind this topic we found a narrative about solidarity that referred to the responsibility the churches must shoulder to protect their communities and the responsibility of people to protect each other. This narrative became significant due to the Easter period when suggestions and practical information had to be shared with believers concerning celebrating at home, without community and religious guidance. Due to the changes in religious practice, the religious reformation narrative also appeared, although it was less significant.

5.3.2 *Actors: Religious authority*

Actors were associated with the most prominent churches in Hungary. Institutions such as the Hungarian Catholic Church and the Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference were overrepresented. The Hungarian Evangelical Church and the Hungarian Reformed Church were also relevant actors here. Regarding religious representatives, Péter Erdő and Tamás

Fabiny were the most active persons. Interestingly, representatives of the Reformed Church are rarely mentioned in any of these articles.

The question of responsibility in relation to the topic was interpreted in a religious context, since churches had to redefine religious regulations during the pandemic. Religious actors within normal circumstances define regulations about Sunday Masses or Eucharist, but these were overwritten by state regulations during the pandemic, thereby questioning the importance of religious authority. This also meant that the power that religious authority possessed based on access to Divinity was weakened as believers could not practice their usual religious rituals. Concerning the opposition between religious and governmental regulations, there was a potential clash between the two authorities. While religious events require face-to-face presence, governmental regulations forbade these events. Religious actors agreed with the state regulations, but, due to the autonomy of the Churches, they could have acted differently. The narrative of responsibility explained the decisions made by religious authorities in this matter; the safety and wellbeing of the community and human life were superior to any regulations. Interestingly, professional (medical) actors did not appear in relation to this topic. This means that, in this discourse, political authority was much more important than professional authority.

The role of responsibility and solidarity in religious teachings (mainly Biblical) and religious identity substantially impacted the acceptance of such changes among members of religious communities. At the same time, as Collins claims (Collins, 2004), a lack of presence also can transform solidarity. Interactions are essential for maintaining group solidarity. Solidarity can help with keeping to regulations, but following them for a more extended period can weaken solidarity due to the lack of belonging, which may severely negatively affect religious communities.

5.4 General religious perspective

“The early Church is depicted as “a field hospital that takes in the weakest people: the infirm.”

Most of the articles on this topic present the thoughts of Pope Francis concerning the COVID-19 pandemic. The topic does not refer to a global ‘Christian opinion’ concerning the effects of the pandemic; instead, it mainly covers the view of Pope Francis and some other Hungarian representatives of the Catholic Church and religious orders, thus addresses their opinions on the global scale. The image of Pope Francis is characterized by humanitarianism. He is the first non-European Pope, which puts him and his position in a unique context. Humanitarian characteristics are represented in his statements concerning COVID-19 as well. He not only addresses religious people, but the whole of humankind, promoting dialogue and cooperation among different religions for the sake of humanity by enhancing the social teaching of Christianity. His main message: people in need – those in poverty, the sick, the elderly – should be the focus of care. These articles are filled with Biblical parables, and references to Biblical and other Christian figures associated with the history of Christianity. The style of the articles differs from those in other topics; it is symbolic, lacking reference to the pragmatic and practical aspects of the pandemic and its effects that characterizes the other topics.

5.4.1 The humanitarian crisis and religious reformation narratives

The humanitarian narrative embeds economic and social crisis and responsibility narratives in a global and, more importantly, a theoretical and theological context.

‘This pandemic shows that there are no differences and boundaries to suffering – we are all fragile and equally valuable.’

It deals with ideas such as equality and fraternity from a religious angle, showing a different face of the pandemic and its possible short- and long-term effects, worldwide. It has a positive image of the future – when equality is strongly present, and people are valued based on their action embedded in solidarity toward each other. It is also humanitarian in the sense that it is linked with other humanitarian issues such as the effects of migration or ongoing wars. In this way, it is also connected to political decision-making processes. The previous narratives focused on immediate action in the name of solidarity concerning the crisis; this narrative brings religious (theological) reasoning and questions to the table to help understanding the situation. The humanitarian narrative is religious because it calls for action in the ‘right’ order, starting with helping the sick, the poor, and people in need.

Articles on this topic also contain narratives about the reform of religious practice by focusing on the future of the Church after the pandemic. The narrative of Pope Francis on this matter touches upon religious identity – similarly to statements concerning the migration crisis and its effect on Christianity. However, in the Hungarian context the religious reformation narrative is rather about formal changes in everyday activities and does not deal with effects, despite the statements of Gergely Kovács, a bishop whose interpretation about the changing circumstances of the pilgrimage to Csíksomlyó was highly positive concerning the redefinition of religious identity and the return to faith. The religious reformation narrative is theological, with a special focus on solidarity; it involves a positive image about the future of faith due to playing down the material aspects of life.

5.4.2 Actors: Religious and political authority

Pope Francis was so dominant with regard to this topic that he was mentioned in almost all the articles (385). Only a few Hungarian actors were involved (see Figure 2), such as Péter Erdő and Csaba Böjte, a well-known Franciscan monk and public figure in Hungary who shared Pope Francis’ opinion about the importance of a religious approach to the crisis. Another dominant actor was Gergely Kovács, the bishop of Gyulafehérvár in Transylvania, already mentioned above (Fig. 2).

The network measures also confirmed Pope Francis’ dominance of the topic. The betweenness value of Pope Francis was 64, while the second-highest value was 13.5. This graph was less dense than for the instrumental support network; the density value was 0.13 here, and the average path length was 1.6 between the actors. We identified nearly twice as many articles here than for the instrumental topic, but we identified fewer actors and fewer ties.

Pope Francis is a globally legitimate actor in terms of dealing with social, economic, and political questions from a religious point of view. His statements such as “Let’s hope for a united Europe!” or his praying for researchers and political leaders to make the right decision – but not attempting to tell them what the right decision is – shows that religious authority has the legitimacy to expound open opinions about non-religious questions without directly interfering with political authority. Legitimate religious opinions are possible, alongside political ones. Moreover, most of the statements are embedded in his preaching. Therefore, he not only touches upon global social issues, but does it in a religious context.

Meanwhile, in the Hungarian context, religious actors are not part of discussions about social issues. There is almost no religious narrative – besides that which relates to practical issues – concerning the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of dominant religious actors in the media concerning non-religious issues is – we suppose – not due to the lack of those narra-

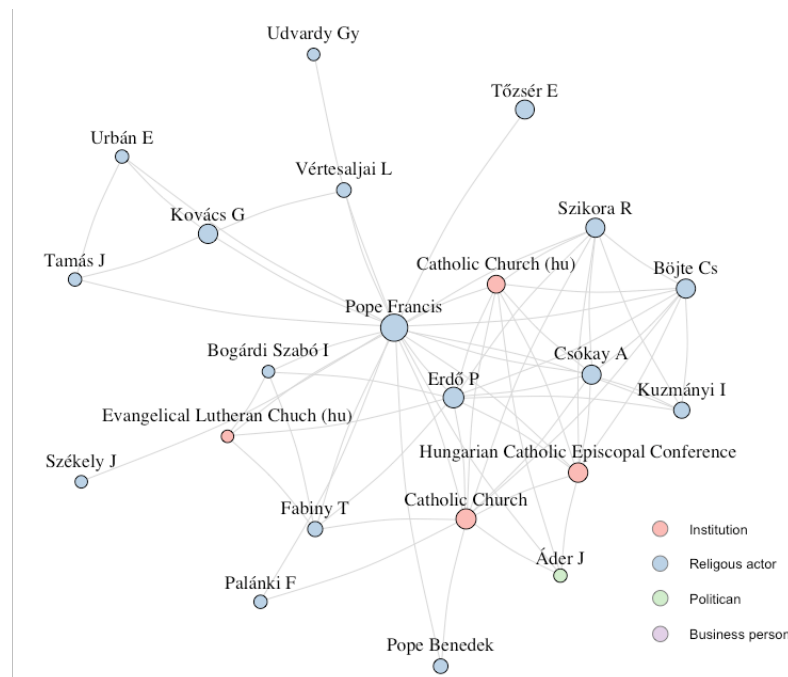


Figure 2: *Network of actors in the General religious perspective topic*

tives, but the inability or the lack of willingness to communicate such thoughts in the public sphere (Vancsó, 2020b). It also shows their lack of authority to discuss these problems in the public sphere.

6. Discussion

Our study has some limitations. First of all, we analyzed discourse in the online space based on selected articles and posts. We did not include other channels like television broadcasts, or email lists, or Facebook groups. We do not think we missed essential narratives, but the strength of selected narratives could be different on other platforms. It was also challenging to find the boundaries of the discourse. It is far from straightforward to classify which articles are about solidarity and which are not. We applied a two-step approach. First, we filtered the content using solidarity-related keywords; then we ran a topic model to identify relevant and irrelevant content. Due to this step, we kept less than 20 percent of the articles. This selection process is also linked to geographical boundaries. We decided to include articles about Pope Francis and solidarity. But we also had to deal with reports about Slovakia and Romania, where local but Hungarian-speaking actors were present in media outlets. In the topic modeling phase, we omitted much content that did not substantially affect the Hungarian situation.

Previous research (Ogbodo 2020) on the media framing of the COVID-19 crisis showed that the related negative social and economic consequences and fear of the pandemic dominated people's narratives and everyday opinions. Solidarity played a crucial role in handling the crisis. Solidarity is of vital importance in the daily operation of churches and church-related civil organizations; however, the religious roots of solidarity are barely visible in online media. Religious websites share much operational information but are less theological. Theological matters have to remain within their communities. In this situation, when physical presence

and face-to-face discussions are prohibited, the strength normally derived from community can weaken, significantly affecting solidarity.

Our actor-based research findings show that the appearance of religious or church-related actors – individuals or organizations – does not imply a religious interpretation, *per se*. Many articles focused on donations, and other material forms of solidarity included mention of church-related organizations as good examples, or as the ‘executors’ of this form of solidarity without creating a specific, religious narrative. These religious actors are instrumental elements of the organized solidarity actions, and participants in the chain of responsibilities in which governmental actors also participate and sometimes dominate. Instead of religious or church-related actors, political actors called attention to the work of such organizations.

Professional actors were missing from the religious narratives on solidarity. One of the few professional actors who was mentioned was András Csókay, a famous neurosurgeon who was mentioned in a religious context as a patron of an event (an ongoing mass at noon, organized by the editors of online Catholic websites). When religious authorities decided on keeping to the governmental regulations, references to professional narratives were not presented.

However, religious narratives called for new understanding and interpretations of the pandemic and its effect on society and the future. But these interpretations were represented mainly by Pope Francis, and reflected by only a few Hungarian actors, showing the lack of dominant and politically independent religious discourses on social issues in the media or in the public sphere. In our database, most of the articles were from religious sites, although content was hosted on non-religious sites in many cases.

This passive communication by religious actors was also observed during the migration crisis (Vancsó, 2020b). Religious actors mentioned by or together with political actors are more visible in the media and the public sphere; thus, their work is mostly seen through a political lens. The withdrawal of religious actors and religious discourses from the public sphere gives space to any public actors to ‘appropriate’ the style and symbols of the former, since no one is fighting for them. Today, religious authority has less and less legitimacy to participate in any discussion that is not directly linked to it. The causes are multiple: from the individualization of religion in society to the mass dissemination of religious narratives from the public sphere by political power, which puts religious actors – mainly on an institutional level – into a rather secular ‘social-care’ position. Religious belief is a private matter, but religious actors seem to be located between the public and private spheres. Religious actors are expected to take a stand on social issues, but to stay away from interfering in individual decisions.

This may also mean that actors in the public sphere will not be able to reach the non-religious, and in some cases, nor will people with religious belief be able to reach non-religious parts of society, even when they should have something to say.

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Appendix

List of examined sites:

- magyarkurir.hu
- ujember.hu
- 777.hu
- katolikus.hu
- szemlelek.net
- evangelikus.hu
- reformatus.hu
- vidamvasarnap.hu
- tihanyiapatsag.hu
- premontreiek.hu
- pannonhalmifoapatsag.hu
- jezsuita.hu
- <https://www.facebook.com/katolikus.ma>
- <https://www.facebook.com/katradio>
- <https://www.facebook.com/groups/466512313366461>
- <https://www.facebook.com/evangelikus>
- <https://www.facebook.com/Reformatu-sok>
- <https://www.facebook.com/Reflap>
- <https://www.facebook.com/ahitgyule-kezete>
- <https://www.facebook.com/methodista.hu>
- <https://www.facebook.com/szemlelek-blog>
- <https://www.facebook.com/magyarkurir>
- <https://www.facebook.com/ujemberheti-lap>
- <https://www.facebook.com/gorogkatoli-kus/>

Keywords according to institutions and people

- Magyar Katolikus Egyház
- Magyar Református Egyház
- Magyar Evangélikus Egyház
- Hit Gyülekezetet
- Magyarországi Evangéliumi Test-vérközösség
- Magyar Katolikus Püspöki Konferencia
- Görögkatolikus Metropólia
- Szent Egyed Közösség
- Jezsuita Szeretetszolgálat

- Katolikus Caritas
- Református Szeretetszolgálat
- Evangélikus Szeretetszolgálat
- Ferenc Pápa
- Erdő Péter
- Beer Miklós
- Kiss-Rigó
- Veres András
- Márfi Gyula
- Bőjte Csaba
- Hodász András
- Székely János
- Várszegi Asztrik
- Sajgó Szabolcs
- Pál Ferenc
- Fabiny Tamás
- Gáncs Péter
- Szemerei János
- Bogárdi szabó István
- Fekete károly
- Németh Sándor
- Iványi Gábor
- Gyurkovics Miklós
- Khalil Youssef

Keywords for mapping COVID-19-related content

- COVID
- coronavirus

Keywords for mapping solidarity-related content

- responsibility
- freedom
- cooperation
- support
- help
- aid
- solidarity
- serve

Key actors identified

- Áder János – President of the Republic
- Baán Izsák – Benedictine monk

- Balogh Zoltán – Bishop of the Reformed Church, former politician
- Bándi Imre – CEO of Caola, businessman
- Baranyai Béla – Catholic journalist
- Beer Miklós – Catholic Bishop Emeritus
- Bencze András – Lutheran pastor
- Pope Benedict – Former head of the Catholic Church
- Benkó Attila – Hospital chaplain, Catholic priest
- Béres József – CEO of Béres Pharmacy, businessman
- Bese Gerely – Catholic priest
- Beszterczey András – Head of the Diaconal Office of the Reformed Church of Hungary
- Bogárdi Szabó István – Bishop of the Reformed Church
- Böjte Csaba – Franciscan monk, founder of the Saint Francis of Deva Foundation
- Czinege Imre – CEO of Pharmacenter Hungary Kft.
- Cserháti Ferenc – Auxiliary Bishop of Esztergom and Budapest
- Csókay András – Neurologist, founder of Doing Good Is Good Foundation
- Dani Lajos – Executive Vice President of Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta
- Écsy Gábor – National Director of Caritas Hungary
- Erdő Péter – Roman Catholic Cardinal
- Magyarországi Evangélikus Egyház – Evangelical Church of Hungary
- Fabiny Tamás – Evangelical Bishop
- Fekete Károly – Bishop of Reformed Church
- Egyházi és nemzetiségi ügyekért felelős államtitkárság – State Secretariat for Church and Nationality Affairs
- Pope Francis – Head of the Catholic Church
- Fodor Réka – Missionary doctor
- Fülöp Attila – State Secretary for Social Affairs
- Gáncs Kristóf – Director of Communications of Hungarian Interchurch Aid
- Gável András – Christian musician
- Gulyás Attila – Helmer, leader of the “Győzelem Gyülekezet”
- Hatházi Róbert – Catholic priest
- Herczegh Anita – Goodwill Ambassador of Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta, wife of the president of the Republic (Áder János)
- Hit Gyülekezete – Church of faith
- Hodász András – Roman Catholic priest
- Iványi Gábor – Leader of the Evangelical Fellowship of Hungary
- Józsa Judit – Ceramics sculptor
- Juhász Márton – Leader of Hungarian Reformed Charity Service
- Kardos István – Director General of the Hungarian Red Cross
- Katolikus Karitás – Caritas Hungary
- Katolikus Egyház – Catholic Church
- Kelényi Tibor – Jesuit Priest
- Kocsis Fülöp – Greek-Catholic monk, bishop
- Kondor Péter – Evangelical Bishop
- Kovács Gergely – Catholic priest, Archbishop of Gyulafehérvár
- Kozma Imre – Roman Catholic priest, Founder of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta’s
- Kuzmányi István – Permanent deacon and editor-in-chief of the Magyar Kurír
- Lehel László – President and CEO of Hungarian Interchurch Aid
- Magyarországi Katolikus Egyház – Catholic Church of Hungary
- Magyar Kormány – Government of Hungary
- Magyar Máltai Szeretetszolgálat – Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta
- Magyarországi Református Egyház – Reformed Church of Hungary
- Magyar Szocialista Párt – Hungarian Socialist Party
- Majnek Antal – Roman Catholic Bishop
- Marton Zsolt – Roman Catholic priest, Bishop of Vác
- Mohos Gábor – Roman Catholic priest, Auxiliary Bishop of Esztergom and Budapest
- Molnár János – Roman Catholic parish priest
- Molnár Tamás – Hungarian pastor in Bratislava

Novák Katalin – Hungary’s state secretary for family and youth affairs	Szikora Róbert – Musician
Orbán Viktor – Prime minister of Hungary	Szilágyi Béla – President of Hungarian Baptist Aid
Ökumenikus Segélyszervezet – Hungarian Interchurch Aid	Takáts István – Catholic priest
Palánki Ferenc – County bishop of Debrecen-Nyíregyháza	Tamás Huba – Pastor
Püspöki Konferencia – Bishops’ Conference	Tamás József – Hungarian Catholic Bishop in Romania
Református Szeretetszolgálat – Hungarian Reformed Charity Service	Ternyák Csaba – Catholic priest, Archbishop of Eger
Révész Máriusz – MP, Government Commissioner for Active Hungary	Tóth Tamás – Secretary of Bishops’ Conference
Roos Márton – Retired county bishop of Timisoara	Tózsér Endre – Priest, journalist of Magyar Kurír
Semjén Zsolt – Deputy Prime Minister	Udvardy György – Hungarian Catholic priest, Bishop of Pécs
Simicskó István – MP, political group chairman of KDNP	Urbán Erik – Franciscan Provincial Superior
Soltész Miklós – State Secretary for Church and Nationality Relations	Vágvölgyi Gergely – Editor in Chief of Vasarnap.hu
Somody Zoltán – Hungarian Red Cross Communications Manager	Varga László – Catholic priest, Bishop of the Diocese of Kaposvár
Spányi Antal – Roman Catholic priest, bishop	Várszegi Asztrik – Benedictine monk, bishop, archabbot of Pannonhalma
Steinbach József – Bishop of the Transdanubian Reformed Diocese of the Reformed Church of Hungary	Velkey György – Director General of Bethesda Children’s Hospital
Stelbaczkzy Zsuzsanna – Chief Pharmacist	Veres András – Roman Catholic Bishop, Archbishop of the Diocese of Győr
Székely János – Bishop of the Diocese of Szombathely	Vértessaljai László – Jesuit priest, editor of the Hungarian broadcast of Vatican Radio
Szemerei János – Evangelical Bishop	Nemzeti Humanitárius Koordinációs Tanács – National Humanitarian Coordination Council
Szijjártó Péter – Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade	