



## Anti-Islamic PEGIDA Beyond Germany: Explaining Differences in Mobilisation

Lars Erik Berntzen & Manès Weisskircher

**To cite this article:** Lars Erik Berntzen & Manès Weisskircher (2016) Anti-Islamic PEGIDA Beyond Germany: Explaining Differences in Mobilisation, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 37:6, 556-573, DOI: [10.1080/07256868.2016.1235021](https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2016.1235021)

**To link to this article:** <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2016.1235021>



Published online: 28 Oct 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 2366



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 29 View citing articles [↗](#)

## Anti-Islamic PEGIDA Beyond Germany: Explaining Differences in Mobilisation

Lars Erik Berntzen and Manès Weisskircher

Department of Political and Social Sciences, European University Institute, San Domenico di Fiesole, Italy

### ABSTRACT

The rise of anti-Islamic PEGIDA (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*) is one of the latest sustained episodes of radical right mobilisation in Western Europe outside the electoral arena. This study provides a first comparative analysis of PEGIDA beyond Germany and its core region of Saxony. Combining protest event analysis with online data and network analysis, we identify why PEGIDA mustered low-scale support in some countries and failed in others. Focusing on Austria, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland the study reveals the pivotal importance of the organisers' agency and their relations to other radical right players. Unlike the *sui generis* case in Dresden, the PEGIDA label has become a rallying point appropriated by pre-established radical right activists using it for their own mobilisation efforts. Furthermore, the analysis reveals the significance of protest policing, in the form of state bans, for the fate of PEGIDA beyond Germany. Finally, it demonstrates the importance of online spheres as channels for dissemination of radical right world-views and the interplay of offline and online mobilisation.

### KEYWORDS

Radical right; PEGIDA; Islamophobia; anti-Islam; anti-immigrant; social movements; online activism; protest policing; social movements

### Introduction

Soon after its establishment in October 2014 in the German city of Dresden, PEGIDA (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*; Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident) grew into the biggest radical right mobilisation effort in Germany since 1945. Correspondingly, PEGIDA Dresden has been subject of several studies (for example, Daphi *et al.* 2015; Dostal 2015; Geiges *et al.* 2015; Patzelt and Eichardt 2015). PEGIDA, however, has not remained a purely Saxon or German phenomenon. At the beginning of 2015, it spread to other European states, most prominently other German-speaking countries and Scandinavia. While PEGIDA never mobilised nearly as many members as their 'progenitor' in Dresden, some spin-offs, such as in Austria and Norway, acquired a high number of followers online and, to some extent, convinced supporters to take to the streets. In both countries, PEGIDA groups also gained extensive media attention. PEGIDA activists, however, were not able to achieve a public presence in all of their targeted countries. Despite their efforts,

PEGIDA did not take off in such countries as Switzerland or Sweden. In this paper, we ask: why did PEGIDA mobilize to some extent in Austria and Norway, while failing in Sweden and Switzerland?

This article adds to the expanding literature on the non-electoral mobilisation of the radical right (see Giugni *et al.* 2005; Blee and Creasap 2010; Caiani *et al.* 2012) by providing the first comprehensive analysis of PEGIDA mobilisation in Austria, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. We contribute in three ways: first, we provide novel empirical data on street protests and online activism of PEGIDA in these countries. PEGIDA mobilised small-scale protest events in Austria and Norway in the first half of 2015, with a total of 6 and 21 protests, respectively. PEGIDA was also highly active online in both cases. In Sweden and Switzerland, however, we see a different picture. The Swedish group managed to organise five protests, yet hardly anyone showed up. In Switzerland, PEGIDA never managed to stage any protests, despite several attempts. Second, we discuss cross-national differences in mobilisation. We argue that the agency of pre-existing activist communities is pivotal in explaining the diverging mobilisation beyond Germany. In doing so, we delve into how the pre-existing radical right players in Austria, Norway and Switzerland acquired the PEGIDA label for their own purposes, trying to get wider attention for their activism. This is a major difference from the ‘original’ PEGIDA in Dresden. In addition to agency, we stress the impact of state bans, known as ‘protest policing’ (see della Porta and Reiter 1998), on PEGIDA beyond Germany. Third, throughout our analysis, the importance of the interplay between offline and online mobilisation becomes apparent. For example, the establishment of online platforms preceded street mobilisation, and state bans not only affected PEGIDA mobilisation in the streets but also, indirectly, their online activities. This highlights the need for studying the online dimension of contemporary radical right activism.

Our case selection is driven by the idea of choosing two countries from economically and culturally similar regions (German-speaking Central Europe and Scandinavia), each with variation on the ‘dependent variable’ of street mobilisation. Scholars of the radical right have emphasised that in similar European countries, small differences in external factors should not be overstated when explaining variation among radical right players. For instance, Art (2011: 13–15) points to ‘the insufficiency of demand-side explanations’ for explaining the success and failure of radical right parties, referring to factors such as unemployment, racism and the number of immigrants among European countries. In a similar vein, Helbling (2014: 9) shows that levels of Islamophobia among ‘ordinary citizens’ are quite similar in European countries. Analysing the failure to mobilise also corresponds to the call by social movement scholars who claim the field has put too much emphasis on instances of successful mobilisation, while having ignored the absence of protest (McAdam and Boudet 2012).

The article proceeds as follows. We outline our methodology and data below before providing an overview of PEGIDA beyond Germany, discussing both street and online activism. Then, we explain these different patterns of mobilisation. After ruling out the presence and absence of the radical right in parliament and the scope of counter-mobilisation by forces opposing PEGIDA as explanations for cross-country variation, we centre on the role of pre-existing radical right communities using the PEGIDA label within their own country in order to mobilise, combined with the pivotal influence of ‘protest policing’. We end with a summary of our results, highlighting the importance of the interplay

between street mobilisation and online activism for understanding the contemporary radical right.

## Methodology and Data

Our analysis relies on a triangulation of methods and sources. We began by compiling a protest event database in order to conduct an analysis of PEGIDA activism in all four countries. We followed a traditional protest event analysis (PEA) approach (see Hutter 2014a), collecting data such as the location and date of a protest, the number of participants, the amount of counter-protestors, the background of key participants, information about bans, and statements by radical right politicians. The data collection started with a systematic analysis of coverage in leading national newspapers: *Der Standard* (Austria), *Aftenposten* (Norway), *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (Switzerland) and *Dagens Nyheter* (Sweden). Articles were identified based on automated key word searches using PEGIDA with a truncation mark (\*), allowing us to get all variations and combinations containing the term PEGIDA. In addition, we systematically searched for information from other online sources, including publications by investigative journalists and activists in the respective countries who conducted valuable investigations on PEGIDA, especially on the background of protestors and on police responses. The importance of journalists as data sources, who often know specific cases particularly well, has been acknowledged in the literature on the radical right (Art 2011: 27). This approach was crucial after the first ‘hype’ around PEGIDA faded, given that small protest events are usually underrepresented in media coverage (Hutter 2014a: 350). The database, which includes detailed sources, is available on request.

As in Germany, there have been several PEGIDA groups in each country – at times cooperating and competing. The PEA includes data on all PEGIDA activity. We only include street protests occurring before the end of summer 2015, which may be described as the ‘first wave’ of PEGIDA mobilisation beyond Germany. Our other major source of information on the groups themselves as well as their relationships stems from extracting data from their Facebook groups with the web-crawler Netvizz (Rieder 2013). We collected data on the ties between the groups (in-degrees and out-degrees) as well as the number of members, activity levels over time and the subjects they discussed. This data was subsequently analysed using the network analysis software Gephi. In addition, we used an online app (Facebook Like Checker) to analyse the country background of the followers of PEGIDA Facebook groups.

## PEGIDA beyond Germany: An Empirical Overview

PEGIDA has nowhere mobilised as strongly as in their German stronghold of Dresden, where they managed to draw crowds of approximately 20,000 to several of their ‘walks’ in December 2014 and January 2015. Throughout the year, regular protests by PEGIDA and its offshoots continued to take place in Dresden, Leipzig and a number of other German cities. After a period of decline, PEGIDA resurged at the end of 2015, tied to the rising number of refugees entering Europe at that time. By then, however, the *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany) party had become the main radical right player in the country (Arzheimer 2015). Prior to this ‘second wave’ of German PEGIDA,

the label's popularity spread to other countries, with radical right activists in Western Europe taking the opportunity to use its prominence to mobilise their own support. Besides our cases, PEGIDA groups were also active in countries such as Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom in 2015.

What grievances did PEGIDA mainly articulate? They position themselves on an anti-immigrant platform, especially with regard to Muslims migrants. Position papers and statements include demands such as 'No Sharia and Islamization in Europe' and 'Stop Mass Migration to Europe' (PEGIDA Wien 2015). Activists also demanded 'rule of law, more civil rights and far-reaching democratization', 'reasonable migration policies – according to economic demand and cultural absorbability' (PEGIDA Vienna 2015), claimed to be protesting 'on a humanistic basis' (PEGIDA Norge 2015) and to be 'NOT RACIST – NOT VIOLENT – JUST NO LONGER SILENT!' (PEGIDA Norway 2015). PEGIDA activists have tried to appear less radical by formally distancing themselves from racism and accepting immigration to some extent. However, they have been unable to maintain this self-representation consistently. Their grievances mirror that of the contemporary anti-Islamic radical right movement with the external enemy being Islam and Muslims, while the internal enemy is the elite: politicians, the press, academia and human rights activists (Berntzen and Sandberg 2014). Still, calls for direct democracy and the sharp criticism of mainstream media show that PEGIDA, just like other radical right players, is not exclusively devoted to a single issue (Mudde 1999).

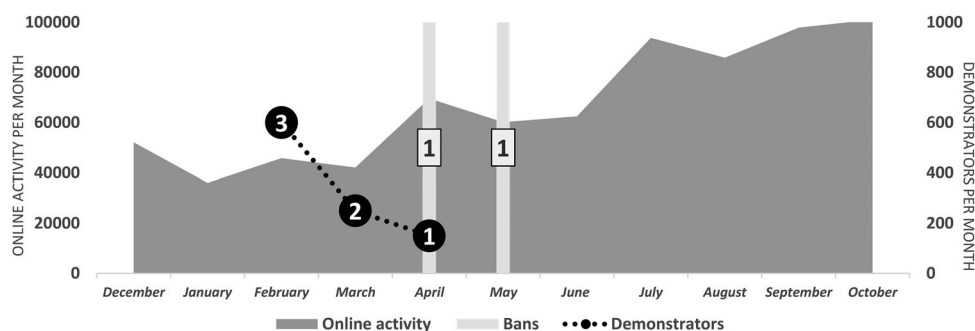
### PEGIDA Activism in Austria, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland

In all four countries, activists tried to mobilise street activism, but they only managed to do so in Austria, Norway and Sweden. PEGIDA never became a mass movement in either of the three cases, and only in Austria and Norway did they manage to attract more than a handful of supporters. This reflects the 'small-scale reality' of many radical right organisations (Caiani *et al.* 2012: 212). At the same time, there has been intensive online activism by PEGIDA in Austria, Norway and Switzerland alike. This shows how important online mobilisation has become not only for PEGIDA (Geiges *et al.* 2015: 16), but for the broader contemporary radical right (Caiani and Kröll 2015).

In line with this perspective, Figures 1–4 connect the street activism of PEGIDA to online activism in the numerous Facebook groups in each country (see the Appendix for the detailed Table 1 with an overview of the demonstrations, including dates, locations and numbers of participants). In Austria, we have data from a total of five online PEGIDA groups, followed by three in Norway and two in both Sweden and Switzerland. The thickness of the grey stream shows aggregate online activity, whereas the black circles indicate the number of protestors in a given month. The number inside the circle shows demonstrations per month. Bans on protests are marked with a grey line.

Besides succinctly summarising the chronology of PEGIDA in Austria, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, these figures reveal two things: first, how codependent the online and offline dimensions are, and second, the impact the banning of street demonstrations has had on PEGIDA.

In Austria, PEGIDA Vienna's first public protest took place on 2 February 2015. The attempted 'walk', blocked by several thousand counter-protestors, attracted strong media attention and around 350 participants. Six days later, 150 Upper Austrian

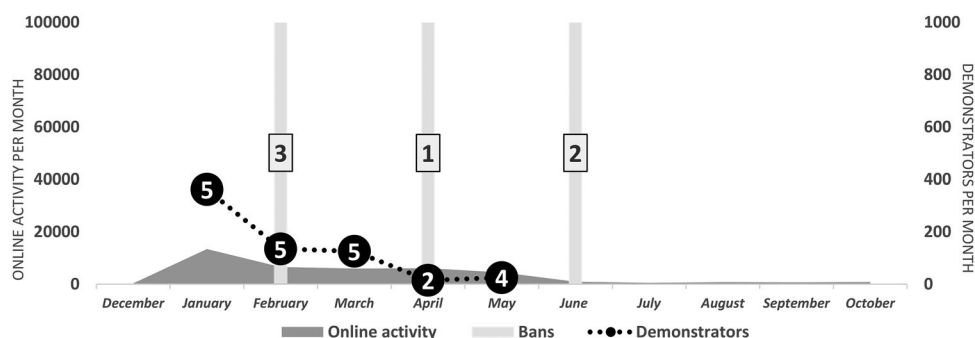


**Figure 1.** PEGIDA Austria. Massive online activity, few but strong demonstrations.

Note: the thickness of the grey stream shows aggregate online activity by all PEGIDA groups in Austria ( $N = 746,521$ ). Circles indicate the number of protestors in a given month ( $N = 1000$ ), the number inside the circle shows demonstrations per month ( $N = 6$ ). Bans on protests are marked with a grey line ( $N = 2$ ).

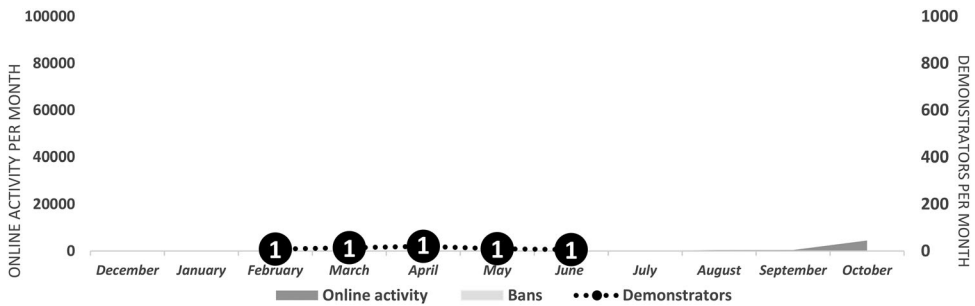
PEGIDA supporters gathered in Linz, one of the strongholds of the radical right. This was followed by another event in February. In March, two more PEGIDA events took place – one in Graz and one in Bregenz in the ‘Dreiländereck’, a tri-border region close to Germany and Switzerland. In April, the last explicitly PEGIDA event took place in Vienna. Each of these ‘walks’ attracted more than one hundred followers and broad media coverage. All PEGIDA events in Austria were met with much greater counter-mobilisation. Some PEGIDA activists were reported to the police because of engagement in National Socialist activities, such as Hitler salutes. Although PEGIDA activists wanted to continue organising ‘walks’ for May, one in Linz and one in Bregenz, the police banned these efforts.

Online, the first Austrian PEGIDA Facebook group was established on 9 December 2014, almost two months prior to their first demonstration. After that, regional groups were founded. In these, the issues of refugees and Islam were heavily discussed, as well as the PEGIDA demonstrations in the context of police behaviour and the presence of the counter-protestors. Other topics were Russia, what PEGIDA activists call ‘gender ideology’, and the European Union.



**Figure 2.** PEGIDA Norway. Initially high levels of activity, both online and offline.

Note: the thickness of the grey stream shows aggregate online activity by PEGIDA groups in Norway ( $N = 40,504$ ). Circles indicate the number of protestors in a given month ( $N = 678$ ), the number inside the circle shows demonstrations per month ( $N = 21$ ). Bans on protests are marked with a grey line ( $N = 6$ ).

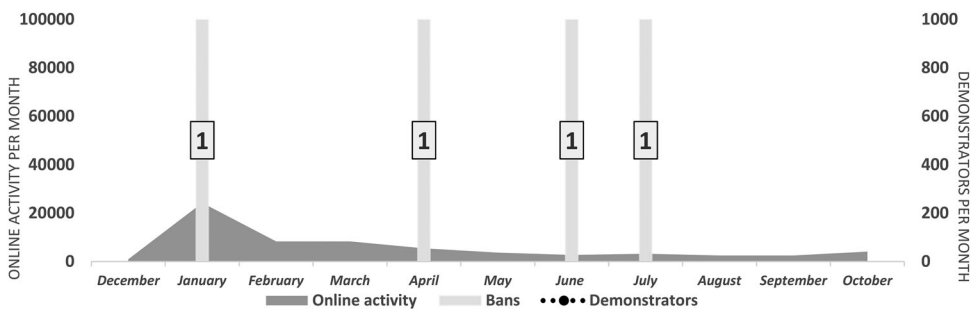


**Figure 3.** PEGIDA Sweden. Very low online activity, weak street mobilisation.

Note: the thickness of the grey stream shows aggregate online activity by PEGIDA groups in Sweden ( $N = 5871$ ). Circles indicate the number of protestors in a given month ( $N = 58$ ), the number inside the circle shows demonstrations per month ( $N = 5$ ).

In Norway, PEGIDA protests took place more frequently than in Austria. They never managed to draw the same numbers, however, with the 21 events ranging from the highest turnout of 200 to a low of only 3 participants. They were also met by large counter-demonstrations from broad swathes of society including leftist activists, church officials and parliamentary members. The first and largest march took place in Oslo on 12 January, headed by the teacher and storeowner Max Hermansen. He travelled around the country, collaborating with local initiatives; much of this activity was coordinated through Facebook. As time went on, the centre of PEGIDA street mobilisation moved from the capital of Oslo to the southern city of Kristiansand, an established hub of radical right activism. This shift occurred in the wake of an attack in Oslo on Hermansen's store and alongside a string of obstructions from local government, which barred them from marching. By February, the number of participants at PEGIDA events had already sharply declined. They mobilised continuously, but on a low scale, in several Norwegian cities for months, when PEGIDA events eventually blurred together with events by other radical right groups.

The main topics in Norwegian PEGIDA groups on Facebook were stories about asylum seekers, but also about Swedes becoming an ethnic minority in Sweden, using the Swedish situation as a rallying cry for increased activity in Norway. There were few signs present of 'classical' extreme right ideas about race or anti-Semitism.



**Figure 4.** PEGIDA Switzerland. Initially high online activity, succeeded by multiple bans and decline.

Note: the thickness of the grey stream shows aggregate online activity by PEGIDA groups in Switzerland ( $N = 65,758$ ). Bans on protests are marked with a grey line ( $N = 4$ ).



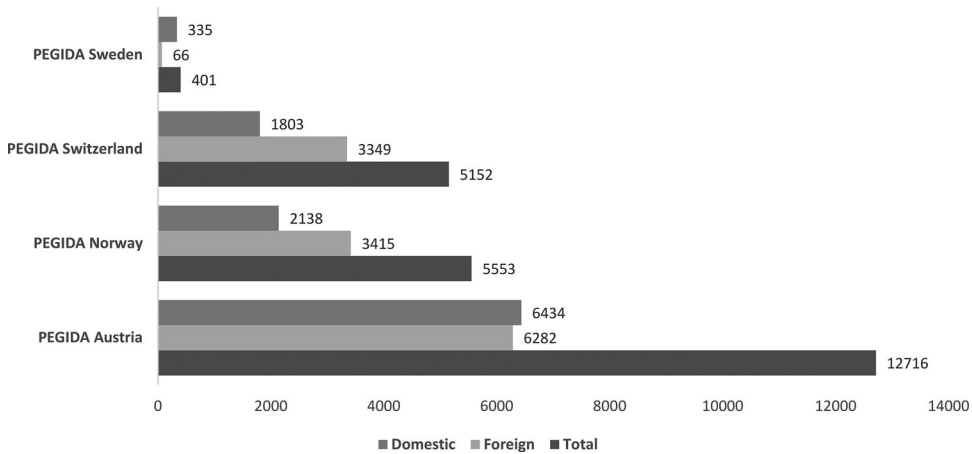
In Sweden, only five PEGIDA protests took place, and, even worse from the perspective of the organisers, hardly anyone showed up. Thus, their mobilisation efforts clearly failed. At the first demonstration, in February in Malmö, less than 10 people participated, boxed in as they were by the police in the face of close to 5000 counter-demonstrators. PEGIDA in Sweden was riven by internal conflict from the outset, with the controversial artist Dan Parks (twice sentenced for incitement to racial hatred) as the main person behind street activism together with the gallery owner Henrik Rönnquist, much to the dismay of the other activists since Parks is not taken seriously. In the next months, only a few isolated protest events followed. Online, an important discussion for followers was the competition within PEGIDA: one side claiming that the other was being run like a business in order to garner fame for Parks and Rönnquist, with no intention of creating a viable movement in Sweden.

In Switzerland, no protest event by PEGIDA took place, despite several attempts to stage them. Curiously enough though, and as evidence for how threatening and important PEGIDA was perceived, several hundred opponents voiced their rejection of PEGIDA on 28 February 2015 in Zürich. The event was organised by the youth group of the Swiss social democrats. With regard to the planned PEGIDA 'walk' on February 16, 'NoPegida Schweiz' had already announced their willingness to organise counter-demonstrations. This event was cancelled by PEGIDA activists, who had never announced a location in the first place. Other more concrete attempts to stage a protest were banned by local authorities: in Basel, Steckborn and twice in Frauenfeld. Despite these failed attempts, Swiss radical rightists did not stop engaging in PEGIDA activism. The prominent radical right figure Ignaz Bearth appeared as guest speaker in other countries too. In August, around 10 PEGIDA activists disrupted a Qur'an distribution in Basel, organised by the Islamic Central Council of Switzerland, themselves a fundamentalist organisation. As part of this, PEGIDA activists intimidated a veiled woman and her daughter with the shout 'We don't want any Salafi pigs'. This act of harassment sparked a violent confrontation with left-wing opponents.

Online, 'PEGIDA Schweiz' mainly posted information about PEGIDA protests across Europe. A TV report on the Basel event in August was simply referred to with the phrase 'lying press at work', while Bearth criticised it in more detail in a video on his Facebook account. More political, such as Islamophobic, content was prominent in groups such as 'PEGIDA Westschweiz' or 'PEGIDA Dreiländereck', the latter consisting of activists from Switzerland, Austria and Germany.

In all four countries, there have been a number of PEGIDA groups on Facebook. They were established weeks before any street protest and have spread radical right propaganda to thousands of followers ever since. Still, it is crucial to highlight that many PEGIDA Facebook groups have been followed by a substantial share of users from other countries (see [Figure 5](#)). According to Facebook Like Checker data, it seems that German radical right activists purposely inflated the prominence of foreign PEGIDA groups in other countries to strengthen their popularity in the eyes of others, as Germans regularly account for the biggest share of 'foreign' followers of non-German Facebook PEGIDA groups. A detailed look at the data for example reveals that around 50 per cent of PEGIDA Austria followers are Austrians and around one-third are from Germany. PEGIDA Switzerland has even more German followers (slightly below than 50 per cent) than Swiss ones (slightly more than one-quarter).





**Figure 5.** Online membership in total numbers by origin (June 2015, collected using Facebook Like Checker) of the four ‘national’ Facebook PEGIDA groups.

Note: these groups do not represent overall Facebook activism in the respective countries, but serve as examples to illustrate the importance of followers from other countries, especially from Germany.

Overall, PEGIDA groups mobilised on the streets of Austria and Norway, while hardly or even not at all in Sweden and Switzerland. The pattern is slightly different online, with the Swiss PEGIDA groups being highly active spreading their propaganda alongside the Austrian and Norwegian groups.

### Explaining the Differences in PEGIDA Mobilisation beyond Germany

Why was PEGIDA able to take to the streets in Austria and Norway, but draw only a handful of people in Sweden and none in Switzerland? In our argument, we highlight two factors: first, the agency of pre-established radical right activists, and second, the importance of ‘protest policing’, that is, bans by state authorities. Before doing so, we discuss the importance of some external factors put forward in the literature on social movements and the radical right.

#### *The Insufficiency of External Factors for Explaining Cross-Country Variation*

The discussion of external factors for the emergence of social movements, often referred to as ‘political opportunity structures’, has been intensive (see Kitschelt 1986; McAdam 1996; Goodwin and Jasper 2011). The strength of radical right parties in parliament and the activism of counter-protestors are often perceived to be especially relevant by researchers on the radical right. Although most certainly dampening the potential for mobilisation, these external factors do not explain the *differences* in mobilisation in the four countries of our study.

#### *The Parliamentary Strength of the Radical Right*

Previous studies on the link between the parliamentary and the protest ‘arenas’ have shown that political representation typically keeps radical right protesters away from

the street, with discontent shifting to the parliamentary arena instead: ‘the *more* salient [radical right political players] are in electoral politics, the *less* often they give rise to protest mobilisation’ (Hutter 2014b: 138). Hutter hypothesises that this is so because established politicians of the radical right do not want to be publicly associated with their most radical supporters, ‘the extreme and neo-fascist right’ (2014b: 139).

Based on this empirical pattern, one would expect that PEGIDA would be unable to mobilise in any of the four countries. Indeed, in two of the cases of failed PEGIDA street mobilisation, Sweden and Switzerland, the radical right is an established feature in parliament. Although the Sweden Democrats have been a ‘latecomer’ in comparison to other radical right parties in Europe, they gained 12.9 per cent at the general elections of 2014 and were in opposition at the time of the protest. The Swiss People’s Party (SVP) has been an important political player for a long time. During the ‘first wave’ of PEGIDA, they were the strongest political party in the country and part of the national government. Yet, radical right parties are strong in Austria and in Norway as well; both cases where PEGIDA has managed to mobilise street activism. The Freedom Party was the strongest oppositional force in Austria, with more than 20 per cent at the general election of 2013. The Norwegian Progress Party held government office as minor coalition partner of the Conservatives. The pattern that parliamentary representation inhibits street mobilisation is therefore not more visible in Sweden and Switzerland than in Austria and Norway. Still, the crucial observation remains that Germany, where PEGIDA has become a regional mass phenomenon, is one of the few Western European countries without an established radical right party in the national parliament. On the one hand, this fact underlines the importance of the relationship between the parliamentary and the protest arena (see Kriesi *et al.* 1995; Hutter 2014b). On the other hand, a look at the regional level seemingly shows its limited impact in this case as well. In August 2014, the radical right AfD was voted into the regional parliament of Saxony (Arzheimer 2015), weeks before the beginning of PEGIDA mobilisation in Dresden.

### Counter-Mobilisation by Anti-Racist Groups

Apart from the negative impact of established radical right parties on street mobilisation, the literature has also described anti-racist activism as obstructive. The response of counter-movements to emerging radical right players is one of the reasons why they fail or prosper (Art 2006). In the words of Art (2011: 48), ‘the constant battle with them has been draining’ for the radical right and interfering tactics

undoubtedly affect the calculations of potential radical right candidates and activists. [...] How many people, considering whether to express their support for the radical right beyond the private act of voting, have asked themselves, ‘Is it really worth it?’ and answered negatively?

Indeed, PEGIDA has met resistance. In general, their activists have been massively outnumbered by counter-protesters, always consisting of left-winged antifascists, sometimes of broader groups within society. For example, at the first protest of PEGIDA in Vienna in February 2015, more than 5000 opponents participated in different mobilisation efforts against the 350 PEGIDA supporters. In Sweden too, the handful of PEGIDA activists were immediately ‘welcomed’ by up to 5000 counter-protesters. In Switzerland, opponents

even mobilised despite the fact that PEGIDA were kept away from the streets. Even though it does not seem to have completely deterred mobilisation, it is possible that the massive level of resistance has curtailed PEGIDA to a certain extent by making it costlier for people to march under their banner. Nevertheless, this cannot explain cross-national variation as anti-racists mobilised strongly in all four countries, even in Switzerland, where no PEGIDA ‘walk’ took place. Overall, while the presence of the radical right in parliament and of counter-protestors on the street may have hampered PEGIDA in Austria, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, these factors do not account for the cross-country variation in mobilisation.

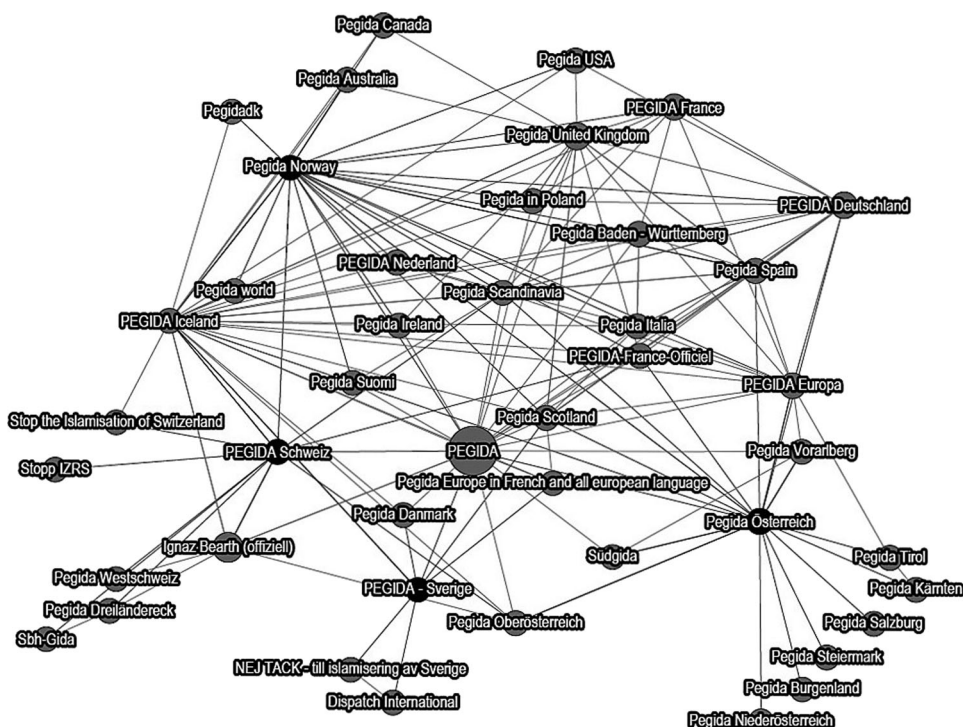
### *The Importance of Agency*

The relevance of agency has been underlined both in social movement studies (see Jasper 1997, 2006) as well as in recent works on radical right political parties (see Art 2011; Luther 2011). Agency includes various aspects, amongst the most important being ideology and tactics. In the case of PEGIDA, these dimensions have been similar: radical right and anti-Islamic attitudes in combination with a repertoire of demonstrations and marches. What has differed, however, has been the organisational embeddedness of the PEGIDA groups in the countries of our study. Where PEGIDA was used as a label by pre-established radical right groups, PEGIDA was better able to mobilise.

A look at those who went under the PEGIDA banner outside of Germany shows that pre-existing radical right players used it to take to the streets. In both Austria and Norway, they benefitted from acquiring the PEGIDA label. In Sweden, however, PEGIDA organisers lacked the connections. In Switzerland, PEGIDA activists were strongly embedded in radical right networks, underlining the important role of the repressive response by the local Swiss authorities. These factors are partially captured in the network analysis of the PEGIDA group ties on Facebook from March 2015 (see Figure 6). The ties between the groups underline their varying degree of connectedness as well as the transnationalism of PEGIDA.

The network visualisation is based on the networks of the ‘national’ Facebook groups of PEGIDA in Austria, Norway, Switzerland and Sweden, which contained 44 groups and 173 ties between them. Ties form when a group moderator ‘likes’ another group, the basic function of which is to be able to see posts made by the group or page that is ‘liked’. The four national groups are marked in black, the others in grey with lines indicating ties. See Table 2 in the Appendix for an overview of the ties (degrees). The Austrian group is the largest and most popular, with ties to 11 other PEGIDA groups. The Norwegian PEGIDA group connected to 23 others, but only two of them reciprocated – a testament to their low relevance in the wider community. The Swiss PEGIDA is embedded with other national groups, yet there are very few ties to groups outside Switzerland. Finally, the Swedish PEGIDA group connects to seven groups yet only one (PEGIDA Iceland) reciprocates. This network analysis however is only indicative and needs to be put in a broader perspective with qualitative data. The important question remains: how were PEGIDA activists embedded in their various national radical right networks?

In Austria, established radical right politicians lauded PEGIDA’s strong mobilisation in Dresden. Amongst others, Heinz-Christian Strache, the leader of the FPÖ, made positive statements about PEGIDA. Apart from supportive postings on Facebook, he referred to



**Figure 6.** PEGIDA Facebook Network in March 2015.

Note: based on the ego-networks of PEGIDA Austria, Norway, Switzerland and Sweden containing 44 groups and 173 ties between them. The four national groups are marked in black, the others in grey. The lines indicate ties. Node size varies according to number of 'likes' a group has. The more 'likes' the bigger the node size.

PEGIDA as a 'serious civil rights movements' in the media and stated that he would consider participating in one of their events if the people behind it were 'decent' and if they rejected 'extremism and violence'. Manfred Haimbuchner, the leader of the Upper Austrian FPÖ branch, also maintained that he would support protests in Austria that were similar to the original PEGIDA. Yet the support of key FPÖ figures was not unequivocally strong; for example, Strache claimed that his party was 'the true PEGIDA' and MP Susanne Winter made sceptical remarks after attending a PEGIDA event in Graz.

Still, PEGIDA activism in Austria has been closely related to some key figures within the FPÖ. The first official leader of PEGIDA Vienna was Georg Immanuel Nagel, a journalist who has published in the radical right weekly *Zur Zeit*, edited by Andreas Mölzer, a former member of the European Parliament for the Freedom Party, and Hilmar Kabas, honorary chairman of the same party. At the first protest in Vienna, the FPÖ politician Martin Graf, former Third President of the Austrian Nationalrat (the dominant parliamentary chamber), was one of the participants. On Ash Wednesday, 18 February 2015, the FPÖ celebrated an annual event in Upper Austria, which was attended by Markus Hametner, one of the leading PEGIDA activists outside of Vienna. Other publicly known activists of PEGIDA also had ties to the FPÖ, such as party membership, and members of the party's youth organisation took to the streets alongside PEGIDA.

PEGIDA activists in Austria were not only connected to the FPÖ. Football hooligans also played a role in the PEGIDA protests, similar to the Dresden example, where

Hogesa (*Hooligans gegen Salafisten*; Hooligans against Salafists) participated. Nagel and others also had strong ties to the Identitarians, an Austrian spin-off of what was initially only French groups. They have recently mobilised on their own in Austria (Bruns *et al.* 2014) and were present at PEGIDA protests. The same is true for various other radical right players, such as *Burschenschaften*, student fraternities, or neo-Nazis close to the banned VAPO (*Volkstreue Außerparlamentarische Opposition*; the Extra-Parliamentary Opposition, Loyal to the People). These radical right groups interconnect, as in the case of the *Burschenschaften* and some parts of the FPÖ. Therefore, in Austria, PEGIDA activists were embedded in a broader radical right network and were able to mobilise its 'core' for street activism.

In Norway, rhetorical support for the teacher Max Hermansen's efforts at establishing PEGIDA came from the former long-term leader of the Progress Party, Carl I. Hagen as well as Christian Tybring-Gjedde, a prominent parliamentarian and leader of the Oslo Progress Party. Both are known for their fervently anti-Islamic rhetoric. Carl I. Hagen was one of the first politicians to push this agenda when he toured the country during the 1987 elections with a fictitious letter from 'Muhammed' which said that Muslims would take over Norway and replace the cross in the flag with the star and crescent moon. Although no backing was given by the current leadership of the FrP, second tier actors of the party welcomed the PEGIDA protests.

Apart from party politics, Ronny Alte, former leader of the Norwegian Defence League (NDL), became one of the leading figures early on. After participating in the first 'walk' through the streets of Oslo, Alte formed an alternative PEGIDA group on Facebook, laying claim to the mantle of leadership by arguing that he had become officially sanctioned by PEGIDA in Germany. Internal tensions quickly subsided, however, and Alte was soon seen marching side by side with Max Hermansen.

Alte and the NDL crowd faded in significance after some time, and the pre-existing Stop Islamization of Norway (SIAN) community gradually took over. SIAN has roots in the old nationalist community in the southern city of Kristiansand and close ties to the radical right fringe party, the Democrats. This led to a shift, whereby more and more demonstrations under the PEGIDA banner were staged there. SIAN activists also travelled around the country with Hermansen. Although the demonstrations staged by the hybrid PEGIDA/SIAN community drew fewer people, they were nonetheless able to maintain activity over a long period of time. Additionally, they met with less resistance from local authorities who went to much greater lengths in their attempts at curbing PEGIDA in the capital, Oslo. Without the ability to draw on these pre-existing communities, PEGIDA Norway would have been less able to circumvent the bans in Oslo, which could have spelled the end of their activities.

PEGIDA activists in Sweden, under the helm of the artist Dan Parks and his comrades, had no substantial ties to any pre-existing radical right communities or the Sweden Democrats. Material from their online discussions does not show that they attempted at establishing any links. This picture becomes somewhat more nuanced, however, once we include their online relations, as PEGIDA Sweden did try to reach out to other online communities on Facebook, but not to any major parties or groups with a street presence. They have attempted to establish a connection with two other Swedish actors: *NEJ TACK – till islamiseringen av Sverige* (NO THANKS – to islamization of Sweden), an anti-Islamic site established in 2011 with 800 followers, and the news site *Dispatch International*,

established in 2012. The latter is headed by the prominent anti-Islamic journalist Lars Hedegaard and Ingrid Carlqvist as an 'alternative' to mainstream media and their 'multi-cultural, cultural relativist, green and anti Judeo-Christian ideologies that they want to force on the public'. Strikingly, neither reciprocated. In other words, the Swedish PEGIDA is more or less left on its own online as well, with no substantial reciprocation from other anti-Islamic or far-right actors.

In Switzerland, PEGIDA activism was related to minor players on the radical right, primarily to the DPS (*Direktdemokratische Partei Schweiz*; Direct Democratic Party of Switzerland). The DPS is to the right of the SVP and attracted merely 942 voters or 0.04 per cent in the national elections of 2015. The party's founder Ignaz Bearth was one of the initiators of PEGIDA in Switzerland. Although media reported his withdrawal as official spokesperson after only one week due to investigation after referring to the German government as 'the true Nazis in Berlin', he remained the key figure of Swiss PEGIDA mobilisation. In addition, Bearth is a former member of the SVP, and was once active in the radical right PNOS (*Partei National Orientierter Schweizer*; Party of the Nationally Orientated Swiss). Mike Spielmann, another DPS member, was one of the PEGIDA activists who caused the August incident in Basel. Another person trying to organise a PEGIDA organisation was Eric Weber, active in the VA (*Volks-Aktion gegen zu viele Ausländer und Asylanten in unserer Heimat*; People's Action against too many Foreigners and Asylum Seekers in our Homeland) and a member of the local parliament of Basel-Stadt, who failed to secure permission for a protest there.

The involvement of minor radical right players compensated for the cautious reaction by the SVP. Toni Brunner, its president, abstained from commenting on PEGIDA at the beginning of 2015. Two other members of the party highly involved in the Swiss minaret referendum in 2009, Walter Wobmann and Ulrich Schlüer, also remained cautious. Rather dismissively, Wobmann stated that PEGIDA was unnecessary because they had direct democracy.

In short, within Austria and Norway, PEGIDA's mobilization was strongly related to pre-existing radical right activist communities. On the other hand, the Swedish group lacked the ability to connect, therefore failing to stage significant protests. PEGIDA in Switzerland was similar to that of Austria and Norway, but this was insufficient when faced with early and continuous bans as we discuss below.

### **The Banning of PEGIDA Protests**

Social movement scholars have long emphasised that the policing of protest as an important variable to analyse social movement activism (see della Porta and Reiter 1998). The response of state authorities was important for the development of PEGIDA beyond Germany and the only external factor that accounts for cross-country differences between Austria, Norway and Switzerland. In the Swiss case, the state made particular use of its power to interfere and ban demonstrations. Already on 22 January 2015, the local authorities in Basel refused to grant PEGIDA Switzerland permission to organise a rally on 5 February. Further attempts were stopped in Frauenfeld (on two occasions) and in Steckborn (12 July). In all of these cases, local authorities justified their decisions



by invoking security concerns. In this way, the state kept Swiss PEGIDA activists away from the streets.

PEGIDA groups in other countries faced state interference as well. In Austria, two proposed demonstrations in May (one in Linz and one in Bregenz) were not allowed to take place. For the case of Bregenz, the police justified its decision with the expectation of criminal offences. This might have been crucial for the end of PEGIDA mobilisation in that country. In Norway, PEGIDA was affected by local authorities too. The bans were not uniform across the various cities or over time, but curbed PEGIDA activism. Without these bans, the low-scale mobilisation of PEGIDA might have been more enduring in both Norway and Austria. Only in Switzerland, however, were all attempts by PEGIDA to stage protests banned.

Overall, external factors such as the strength of radical right parties and the number of counter-protests did not account for cross-national *differences* in mobilisation of PEGIDA beyond Germany, although they probably diminished all mobilisation efforts. In Austria and Norway, pre-existing radical right players managed to stage 'walks' by making use of the PEGIDA label. In Sweden, activists without connections to the radical right scene failed to mobilise to any significant level. Finally, in Switzerland, the activists behind PEGIDA were part of the national radical right network, but state authorities continuously prevented their efforts.

## Summary and Concluding Discussion

Although the media buzz surrounding PEGIDA faded away, there has been a 'second wave' of Saxon PEGIDA mobilisation in the context of the rising number of immigrants. In Sweden too, PEGIDA was able to mobilise on a small scale at the end of 2015. Swiss activists also found a way to circumvent local authorities. While there has been no official PEGIDA protest in Switzerland, in December 'PEGIDA Dreiländereck' mobilised in the German town of Weil am Rhein, right on the Swiss border. These protests involved Bearth and other Swiss activists. At the beginning of 2016, local authorities again prevented PEGIDA from marching in Switzerland. Furthermore, activists mobilised for an international PEGIDA protest day on 6 February 2016 that also included Austria and Norway. Apart from this isolated effort, however, many radical right activists had already stopped using the label. Even though PEGIDA beyond Germany has largely collapsed by now, it was another manifestation of the growing national and transnational radical right networks in contemporary Europe.

Throughout our analysis, online activism has appeared as an important dimension. PEGIDA first spread beyond the borders of Germany through the creation of 'national' and 'local' Facebook groups. As we have shown, this step was to a significant extent driven by German supporters. Online and street activism have been interrelated – a relationship with different effects at different times. First, setting up online PEGIDA groups was an easy way to show initial presence in another country, parallel to the more difficult 'offline' organisational efforts. Through Facebook platforms, campaigners could quickly portray themselves as active and they were able to claim broad support with little effort. Still, street mobilisation was not a necessary consequence of this type of online activism, but required substantial and additional organisational work. Second, PEGIDA 'walks' affected the online arena. Protest events were important topics in their



online groups, fuelling activity. Groups often included information about PEGIDA protests in other countries as well, signifying transnational radical right solidarity. Third, when authorities banned PEGIDA street mobilisation at an early point, this had a negative effect on their corresponding online activism. This is particularly evident in Switzerland, where Facebook activities decreased sharply after activists had been repeatedly banned from staging street protests. Similarly, in Norway PEGIDA online activism declined after repeated bans in Oslo. Unlike Switzerland, the Norwegian PEGIDA managed to maintain small-scale street activity, mainly due to efforts by activists from the radical right bastion of Kristiansand. Although they were saved from a total demise, the Kristiansand activism did not create an online resurgence. Only in Austria, where it took more than two months until the first bans of PEGIDA events, online activism remained stable throughout the period. Fourth, the establishment of viable online communities as demonstrated by the Austrian case had a long-term effect: as of 2016, many of these PEGIDA groups are still active, spreading their propaganda to thousands of followers. Although radical right activists no longer rely on the PEGIDA label for street mobilisation, reports about other type of protest events, current affairs, and crime are regularly posted, sometimes multiple times a day, by group administrators. Therefore, some PEGIDA Facebook groups have survived as part of the radical right Facebook communities, providing permanent arenas for disseminating their views. These four type of links between the 'offline' and the online spheres highlight that it is insufficient to understand contemporary radical right activism mainly through its street presence. If anything, the online activism may be even more important as it is able to circumvent traditional channels of communication and control. As we have shown however, online activism is partly dependent on offline activity to create interest and emotional involvement. Attempts to mobilise and spread propaganda online by the transnational radical right are therefore vulnerable to police and state bans, especially if they are put in place at an early stage in their mobilisation efforts. This lays bare the potential for curtailing far-right activism in multiple arenas by targeting and denying them the opportunity of rallying and getting attention through street activism.

In conclusion, we have provided a systematic empirical overview of 'first wave' PEGIDA activism in Austria, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. While PEGIDA activists were able to mobilise on a low scale in Austria and Norway, this was not the case in Sweden or Switzerland. In explaining these cross-national *differences*, we emphasised the importance of pre-existing radical right players exploiting the label of PEGIDA to mobilise the core of their network in their own countries. In Sweden, where non-organised individuals tried to run PEGIDA, it failed completely. In Switzerland, where well-connected radical right activists tried to stage PEGIDA protests, bans prevented them from marching on the streets. The presence of strong radical right parties and counter-protesters, may have curtailed PEGIDA beyond Germany in general, but these factors do not account for cross-country variation. Thus, our findings have added not only to the research on PEGIDA by providing the first Europe-wide focus, but also to research that analyses the agency of radical right from a social movements perspective. In addition, we have emphasised the importance of online activism, which should be an area of focus for further studies of the contemporary radical right.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Mikael Poul Johannesen, Luigi Ceccarini, Birgit Bahtic-Kunrath, Cas Mudde, Julia Rone, Manuela Caiani and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and input on earlier versions of this paper.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Notes on contributors

**Lars Erik Berntzen** is a Ph.D. researcher in the Department of Political and Social Sciences, European University Institute. His research focuses on normative conflict and political violence, with an emphasis on the far right, extremism and anti-Islam.

**Manès Weisskircher** is a Ph.D. researcher in the Department of Political and Social Sciences, European University Institute. His research focuses on social movements and political parties, with an emphasis on animal rights, the radical left and the radical right.

## References

- Art, D., 2006. *The Politics of the Nazi Past in Germany and Austria*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Art, D., 2011. *Inside the Radical Right. The Development of Anti-Immigrant Parties in Western Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Arzheimer, K., 2015. The AfD: Finally a Successful Right-Wing Populist Eurosceptic Party for Germany? *West European Politics*, 38 (3), 535–556.
- Berntzen, L.E. and Sandberg, S., 2014. The Collective Nature of Lone Wolf Terrorism: Anders Behring Breivik and the Anti-Islamic Social Movement. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 26 (5), 759–779.
- Blee, K. and Creasap, K.A., 2010. Conservative and Right-Wing Movements. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 36, 269–286.
- Bruns, J., Glösel, K., and Strobl, N., 2014. *Die Identitären. Handbuch zur Jugendbewegung der Neuen Rechten in Europa*. Münster: Unrast.
- Caiani, M. and Kröll, P., 2015. The Transnationalization of the Extreme Right and the Use of the Internet. *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice*, 39 (4), 331–351.
- Caiani, M., della Porta, D., and Wagemann, C., 2012. *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right. Germany, Italy, and the United States*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Daphi, P., et al., 2015. Protestforschung am Limit. Eine soziologische Annäherung an PEGIDA. Available from: [www.wzb.eu/sites/default/files/u6/pegida-report\\_berlin\\_2015.pdf](http://www.wzb.eu/sites/default/files/u6/pegida-report_berlin_2015.pdf) [Accessed 1 July 2016].
- della Porta, D. and Reiter, H., 1998. *Policing Protest: The Control of Mass Demonstrations in Western Democracies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dostal, J.M., 2015. The Pegida Movement and German Political Culture: Is Right-Wing Populism Here to Stay? *The Political Quarterly*, 86 (4), 523–531.
- Facebook Like Checker. Available from: [www.ershad7.com/FacebookLikeChecker](http://www.ershad7.com/FacebookLikeChecker) [Accessed 1 July 2016].
- Geiges, L., Marg, S., and Walter, F., 2015. *Pegida. Die schmutzige Seite der Zivilgesellschaft?* Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.
- Giugni, M., et al., 2005. Institutional and Discursive Opportunities for Extreme-Right Mobilisation in Five Countries. *Mobilisation*, 10 (1), 145–162.

- Goodwin, J. and Jasper, J., 2011. *Contention in Context: Political Opportunities and the Emergence of Protest*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Helbling, M., 2014. Opposing Muslims and the Muslim Headscarf in Western Europe. *European Journal of Sociological Review*, 30 (2), 242–257.
- Hutter, S., 2014a. Protest Event Analysis and Its Offspring. In: D. della Porta, ed. *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 335–367.
- Hutter, S., 2014b. *Protesting Culture and Economics in Western Europe. New Cleavages in Left and Right Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Jasper, J., 1997. *The Art of Moral Protest. Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Jasper, J., 2006. *Getting Your Way. Strategic Dilemmas in the Real World*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Kitschelt, H.P., 1986. Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-Nuclear Movements in Four Democracies. *British Journal of Political Science*, 16, 57–85.
- Kriesi, H., et al., 1995. *New Social Movements in Western Europe. A Comparative Analysis*. Minneapolis: University Minnesota Press.
- Luther, K.R., 2011. Of Goals and Own Goals: A Case Study of Right-Wing Populist Party Strategy For and During Incumbency. *Party Politics*, 17 (4), 453–470.
- McAdam, D., 1996. Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions. In: D. McAdam, J. McCarthy, and M. Zald, eds. *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 23–40.
- McAdam, D. and Boudet, H.S., 2012. *Putting Social Movements in Their Place: Explaining Opposition to Energy Projects in the United States, 2000–2005*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mudde, C., 1999. The Single-Issue Party Thesis: Extreme Right Parties and the Immigration Issue. *West European Politics*, 22 (3), 182–197.
- Patzelt, W. and Eichardt, C., 2015. Drei Monate nach dem Knall. Was wurde aus Pegida? Available from: [tu-dresden.de/gsw/phil/powi/polsys/ressourcen/dateien/forschung/pegida/patzelt-analyse-pegida-2015-05.pdf?lang=de](http://tu-dresden.de/gsw/phil/powi/polsys/ressourcen/dateien/forschung/pegida/patzelt-analyse-pegida-2015-05.pdf?lang=de) [Accessed 16 September 2016].
- Rieder, B., 2013. Studying Facebook via Data Extraction: The Netvizz Application. *Proceedings of ACM Web Science 2013*.

## Appendix

**Table 1.** PEGIDA protests in Austria, Norway and Sweden.

Country	Date	City	Participants
Austria	2 February 2015	Vienna	350
	8 February 2015	Linz	150
	21 February 2015	Linz	100
	22 March 2015	Bregenz	100
	29 March 2015	Graz	150
Norway	19 April 2015	Vienna	150
	12 January 2015	Oslo	200
	19 January 2015	Oslo	70
	26 January 2015	Kristiansand	30
	26 January 2015	Oslo	47
	26 January 2015	Tønsberg	15
	2 February 2015	Kristiansand	20
	2 February 2015	Oslo	40
	9 February 2015	Oslo	28
	16 February 2015	Kristiansand	30
	16 February 2015	Stavanger	15
	25 February 2015	Fredrikstad	2
	2 March 2015	Kristiansand	40
	9 March 2015	Kristiansand	30
	9 March 2015	Oslo	18
	16 March 2015	Kristiansand	30
	23 March 2015	Stjørdal	8
	13 April 2015	Oslo	12
	27 April 2015	Ålesund	3
	4 May 2015	Hamar	15
	11 May 2015	Oslo	10
	23 May 2015	Skien	N/A
	29 August 2015	Oslo	N/A <sup>a</sup>
Sweden	9 February 2015	Malmö	8
	2 March 2015	Linköping	10
	18 April 2015	Gothenburg	20
	16 May 2015	Uppsala	10
	27 June 2015	Malmö	6

<sup>a</sup>PEGIDA 'human rights conference', not a standard 'walk'.

**Table 2.** In-degrees and out-degrees for the ego-networks of the four national PEGIDA groups on Facebook in March 2015.

March 2015	In-degree	Out-degree
Austria	11	11
Norway	2	23
Sweden	1	7
Switzerland	5	9

Note: PEGIDA Austria is the largest and most popular of the four national groups.