



PATRIOTISCHE
EUROPÄER
GEGEN
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DES
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Pegida

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Introduction

In 2016, intelligence services estimated that there were just over 23,000 right-wing extremists in Germany. A myriad of groups networking covertly, utilizing social media to extreme effect, was sowing major social discord. Germany has in modern times been regarded by the rest as immune to the reach of the far-right, partly out of collective shame for Nazism. The country had seen where hate led and would not saunter down that path again.

But today, the country exists as a hotbed of far-right extremism. The proliferation of populist, racist movements has caught many within its political class off guard. One such group is Pegida. The movement caught on fire in late 2014 through to early 2015, whipping up mass anger around immigration. The organisation threatened Germany's long held social cohesion, fracturing it in the backwaters of east Germany where anti-immigration attitudes had been rapidly bubbling for a while. Pegida's aim was to force into the national conversation the concept of a national cultural identity being threatened by refugees and asylum seekers. It was dangerous, but for a while, it was effective. The group came to influence the political system, and particularly, the part Alternative for Germany (AfD). This report will look into their tumultuous history, their peak moments, setbacks, controversies and structural reasons for why they were as popular as they were.

Who are Pegida?

Pegida stands for Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident and is a far-right German nationalist movement that began in Dresden in 2014, founded by Lutz Bachmann. Pegida defines itself in opposition to Islam and believes that the German people and culture are being undermined and threatened by climbing levels of Muslims and the extremist threat of Islamism. The organisation believes that immigration must be curbed and seek a harsher clampdown on it, believing policymakers are not doing enough to restrict the influx of immigrants.¹

Pegida have been known for galvanising large crowds of protesters; at their peak they have amassed 25,000 demonstrators.² This has inevitably been met with counter-demonstrators too. There is concern that this group has tapped into and exploited a groundswell of xenophobic concerns regarding immigrants, refugees and Muslims, translating into large rallies seeking to push policymakers into tougher legislations on immigration. The group is regularly mangled by controversy and far-right nationalism, posing a significant threat to the social fabrics of Germany, having sparked divisions and psychological anxiety amongst immigrants.

¹ Connolly, Kate "'Like a poison': how anti-immigrant Pegida is dividing Dresden" *Guardian*, 2015

² Brady, Kate "Record turnout at Dresden PEGIDA rally sees more than 25,000 march" *DW*, 2015

Their founder, Lutz Bachmann, was born in Dresden to a working-class family. He had briefly played for professional football clubs and worked as both a chef and a graphic designer. Bachmann has a criminal record, having been convicted for multiple burglaries, selling cocaine and assault. However, instead of facing these charges, he fled in 1998 to Cape Town, South Africa, where he opened a nightclub that catered to black people. Bachmann claimed he had been heavily criticised by local whites for this.³

Eventually he was deported back to Germany where he would then spend two years in prison before being released on parole. Bachmann was arrested again in 2008, this time being caught dealing cocaine and subsequently serving three years for it. He now runs a public relations and advertising firm.⁴

In 2018, he was denied entry into the UK for fears of stoking social tensions.⁵

An offshoot of Pegida began in the UK, founded by Tommy Robinson who is the former leader of the far-right, English Defence League.

As of February 2019, the main branch of Pegida have 62,000 followers and over 57,000 likes on Facebook.

They have a nineteen-point manifesto outlining their aims and beliefs.⁶

Pegida manifesto:

1. PEGIDA is for the acceptance of war refugees and politically-or religiously-persecuted people. This is a humanitarian responsibility.
2. PEGIDA is for the acceptance of the duty and right of integration into the Federal Republic of Germany's Basic Constitutional Law.
3. PEGIDA is for the dispersed location of war refugees and persecuted people, instead of their accommodation in inhuman conditions.
4. PEGIDA is for a pan-European allocation system for refugees and an appropriate allocation on the shoulders of all EU member-states (a central registration authority to allocate to all EU member-states, similar to the internal German Königsteiner Schlüssel).
5. PEGIDA is for lowering the ratio of refugees per welfare-carer (current refugees per social worker c.200:1, there is no welfare-care for partly-traumatized people).
6. PEGIDA is for an asylum-application procedure per the Netherlands or Switzerland model, and, until the implementation of it, FOR the BAMF to shorten massively the duration between application request and processing, to make rapid integration possible.

³ Shuster, Simon "Meet the German activist leading the movement against "Islamisation"" *Time*, 2015

⁴ "PEGIDA: Who is behind Germany's growing anti-Islam campaign?" *CBC News*, 2015

⁵ Rawlinson, Kevin "Founder of German far-right group Pegida denied entry into the UK" *Guardian*, 2018

⁶ Pegida Position Paper <http://ukrants.co.uk/pdf/Pegida-Position-Paper-English-Translation.pdf>

7. PEGIDA is for increasing resources for the Police and against a reduction in their numbers.
8. PEGIDA is for the utilisation and implementation of the already-available laws concerning asylum and deportation.
9. PEGIDA is for a zero-tolerance policy towards refugees or migrants convicted of offences.
10. PEGIDA is for resistance to misogynistic, violent, political ideologies, but NOT to Muslims living here and voluntarily self-integrating.
11. PEGIDA is for immigration, per the models of Switzerland, Australia, Canada and South Africa.
12. PEGIDA is for sexual self-determination!
13. PEGIDA is for the preservation and protection of the Judeo-Christian characteristics of the culture of the West.
14. PEGIDA is for the implementation of Citizens' Referendums, per the model of Switzerland.
15. PEGIDA is against the delivery of arms/weapons to anti-or un-constitutional organisations, e.g. the PKK.
16. PEGIDA is against the toleration of parallel societies, courts & laws in our midst, such as Sharia Law, Sharia-enforcement & judges, etc.
17. PEGIDA is against the crazy "gender-mainstreaming" or, often, "genderising", politically-correct neutering of our language.
18. PEGIDA is against radicalism, equally whether religiously-or politically-motivated.
19. PEGIDA is against hate preachers, equally, whichever religion they belong to.

History

Pegida as a movement began in late 2014 after Bachmann was motivated by a rally held by supporters of the Kurdistan's Workers Party (PKK) against the siege of Kobani by the Islamic State.⁷ It's believed prior to this incident, Bachmann had been riled with anger by Salafists attacking PKK supporters in a public space on the same day as Yazidis and Muslim Chechens had brutally skirmished with each other in Celle. These things came to gravely concern and anger Bachmann, and he would later recall these incidents to garner support.

Pegida launched a series of protests which gained relative success with each rally growing in numbers.⁸ Although this might have been regarded as a failure by some, due to the relatively low attendance figure, it succeeded in generating attention to Pegida and their cause. Dresden became the hotbed of media interest on how social tensions were boiling to the surface, particularly in the context of Angela Merkel's compassionate stance towards refugees.⁹

⁷ "Kurden Demo Dresden" *YouTube*,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6aFr9GVE2c>

⁸ Smale, Alison "In German City rich with history and tragedy, tide rises against immigration" *New York Times*, 2014

⁹ "Anti-Muslim movement rattles Germany" *Spiegel*, 2014

A wave of further protests coalesced, and they reached up to 15,000 demonstrators. The central theme of the protests was an opposition to what the protesters regarded as an unfiltered and untrammelled influx of Islamic extremism into Germany, threatening the local demographics and the national culture.¹⁰

The movement accelerated following the Charlie Hebdo shooting in 2015, in what became seen as an Islamist assault on western values of liberty. There were fears that Pegida would exploit this, leading to thousands of anti-Pegida protesters gathering to mourn the victims of the shooting.

Following this, Pegida staged another demonstration, again drawing thousands, in which their founder Bachmann laid out six objectives that he felt needed to be achieved by German politicians: "1. Creation of an Immigration Act. 2. Right and duty to integration. 3. Expulsion of Islamists and religious extremists. 4. Federal referendums 5. An end to warmongering. 6. More means for internal security."¹¹

During this rally, Bachmann claimed that the shootings in Paris were a "testament to the existence of Pegida" and called for a minute's silence remembering not just the victims of the Charlie Hebdo shooting but all victims of religious extremism. This march was fiercely criticised by politicians who believed they had appropriated the tragedy for their own ends, but Pegida pressed on.

Shortly after this a young migrant called Khaled Idris Bahray was found murdered in his apartment in Dresden, leading many media commentators to cite the social hostilities stoked by Pegida in Dresden.¹² The case was treated with sheer disdain by many Pegida supporters.

Pegida suffered setbacks during 2015 (which we will shortly investigate), but during autumn once again whipped up a crowd of around twenty thousand as the European migrant crisis flared. Dresden was at the epicentre of a raging cultural battle in Germany between many opposed to migration and Islam and those believing that Pegida had eroded the values of tolerance and pluralism that Germany had been trying to build.¹³

What was immediately noticeable about this protest was the acute radicalisation at its centre, with the infiltration of far-right groups, corresponding it seemed with the rising number of refugees. Frank Richter of the State Agency for Civic Education observed that this was a process which had been in place since spring of 2015 and said there was a possibility that "these more radicalized groups will merge with other groups in the country," he said. It's believed this was in reference then to the National

¹⁰ "Anti-Islamization protests expand in Germany" *DW*, 2014

¹¹ Brady, Katy "Record turnout at Dresden PEGIDA rally sees more than 25,000 march" *DW*, 2015

¹² Connolly, Kate "Killing of Eritrean refugee in Dresden exposes racial tensions in Germany" *Guardian*, 2015

¹³ Delcker, Janosch "German anti-immigrant protests revive – and radicalise" *POLITICO*, 2015

Democrats, a far-right, anti-immigrant party with several seats in state assemblies and local councils.

This particular rally saw Pegida call for civil obedience according to journalists at the event. It's also believed that the protests broadened their targets to include asylum seekers as well as politicians and journalists, who they believed were the "betrayers of the people". According to the local journalists reporting on Pegida, they had been threatened with hate-mail and death threats while two reporters at a Pegida rally had been violently assaulted to the cheers of the crowd.

Uta Deckow, head of political coverage in the state of Saxony for MDR, said one of her reporters covering a Pegida event had a sticker pinned to her back with *Lügenpresse* on it, and bystanders just took photographs.

"The level of aggression has increased," Deckow said, "and the stickers with 'lying press' are definitely a new dimension."

On 6th February 2016, a day after a teenage Islamist hurled Molotov cocktails at the entrance of a shopping mall in Hanover, Pegida launched another rally across multiple cities in Europe protesting migration to Germany.¹⁴ It marked a march of something of a resurgence for the group that had experienced dwindling support in 2015, with the protest used to object to the acceptance of asylum seekers, believing that Muslim refugees would change the cultural dynamics of Germany. It is unclear whether this march was directly influenced by the terrorist attack in Hanover, but what is abundantly clear is that the far-right have used influx of refugee migration to broadcast their racism. According to the Interior Minister in Germany in 2016, there were 208 far-right rallies in Germany in the last quarter of 2015, up from 95 in 2014.

Controversy

During this period Pegida were forced to cancel demonstrations after a death threat had been made against one of their leaders, calling them an "enemy of Islam".¹⁵ It's likely that this simply inflamed support for their cause and further reinforced the messages of Pegida.

Almost immediately after this, on the 21st January 2015, Bachmann's Facebook profile came under intense scrutiny for a series of hate speech remarks where he severely denigrated immigrants as 'animals', 'scumbags' and 'trash'.

¹⁴ Copley, Caroline "Anti-Islam movement PEGIDA stages protests across Europe" *Reuters*, 2016

¹⁵ Sommers, Jack "Pegida cancel latest Dresden demonstration after threats" *Huffington Post*, 2015

Bachmann reluctantly resigned after further revelations emerged indicating he had posed as Adolf Hitler and posted a picture of a man in a KKK outfit captioned with "three Ks a day keeps the minorities away".¹⁶

It's believed that a phone conversation had taken place between Pegida's media spokesperson Kathrin Oertel and AfD's Frauke Petry in the wake of this. The conclusion of this was that it was later announced by Oertel that Bachmann had resigned, highlighting Pegida's wish not to be associated with the far-right but be some sort of respectable platform for mainstream right-wing grievances.

Following this, Oertel and other leaders of Pegida resigned on the 28th January citing abuse and threats as their reasons for doing so.¹⁷

In February, Bachmann was reinstated after Pegida claimed the Hitler photo had been doctored.¹⁸

Pegida held an anniversary event on the 19th October that became marred with controversy. The keynote speaker, Akif Pirincci named Muslim refugees as invaders and described Germany as becoming a "Muslim garbage dump".¹⁹ Chillingly, during this speech, Pirincci lamented the inability to use concentration camps. This statement was greeted by applause and laughter, highlighting the severity of the disdain many Pegida supporters had and have for Muslims and refugees.

Furthermore, the event became embroiled in violence when hooligans blazed through on a rampage that resulted in the vandalism of shops owned by migrants.

In 2018, Germany plummeted into a conversation on a national moral crisis when fourteen-year-old Keira Gross was found murdered. Amidst speculation as to the perpetrator, Lutz Bachmann claimed that a migrant boy had committed the murder, describing him as a "beast from the Caucasus".²⁰ Chechnyan Muslims had traditionally been a strong immigrant presence in Germany. Bachmann posted a picture of the boy, with his full name and Facebook profile, and it had been circulated widely. It was, however, untrue. The boy, unsettled by the deluge of abuse, privatised his social media and German police had to take the unusual step of stepping forward and denouncing it as fake news.

A similar controversy erupted when a German carpenter was fatally stabbed, and his killers were suspected to be Arab.²¹ This unleashed a violently hostile reaction as for

¹⁶ Chambers, Madeline "German PEGIDA leader investigated after Hitler post" *Reuters*, 2015

¹⁷ "German Pegida: Leader Kathrin Oertel quits protest group" *BBC*, 2015

¹⁸ Knight, Ben "Pegida head Lutz Bachmann reinstated after furore over Hitler moustache photo" *Guardian*, 2015

¹⁹ Huggler, Justin "Warnings over resurgence of German far-right movement Pegida sparked by refugee crisis" *Telegraph*, 2015

²⁰ Adeane, Ant "How the far-right hijacked a teenager's murder" *BBC*, 2019

²¹ Hill, Jenny "Chemnitz protests: Far-right on march in east Germany" *BBC*, 2018

two nights protesters took to the streets, completely catching the police out by surprise.

Groups related to Pegida

Popular Party for Freedom and Direct Democracy (FDDV)

Lutz Bachmann founded a political party called the Popular Party for Freedom and Direct Democracy (FDDV) that intended to join forces with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).²²

"We will support the AfD in the next elections and we will have direct candidates in only a few constituencies," Lutz Bachmann said. It's believed that Bachmann had for a while had designs of creating a "parliamentary arm" for the Pegida movement. The party is linked to regional AfD associations across the country, except for that led by the AfD head Frauke Petry in Sachsen. "Other regional associations have understood that it can only work if we are together."²³

It is quite evident that AfD are institutionally, and certainly individually in many local situations, supportive of Pegida's aims, underlined by how the latter consulted them in wake of Bachmann's social media controversy, and that they both held rallies in Dresden at the same time in the same location.^{24,25}

Direct Democracy for Europe (DDfE)

Following the backlash that erupted over Bachmann's Facebook posts, Oertel launched a new campaign group called Direct Democracy for Europe (DDfE). The campaign was seen as a deliberate divergence from Pegida's far-right rhetoric, aiming for a more respectable and mainstream rhetoric on similar issues.²⁶

One of its main objectives was to increase democratic participation by seeking a general vote on major political decisions. The current model of politics in Germany is one of representative democracy due to its Nazi history, deriving from a concern that extremists will use politics as a vehicle of their bigoted nationalism.

Oertel's main agenda was not wholly dissimilar to that of Pegida on issues around immigration and security. But unlike Pegida, the DDfE moved beyond criticisms of

²² Goulard, Hortense "Germany's anti-Islam Pegida movement launches political party" *Politico*, 2016

²³ Goulard, Hortense "Germany's anti-Islam Pegida movement launches political party" *Politico*, 2016

²⁴ "AfD and anti-Islam Pegida hold side by side rallies for first time" *The Local*, 2017

²⁵ Chambers, Madeline "Germany's far-right AfD set to embrace anti-Pegida Islam" *Reuters*, 2018

²⁶ Connolly, Kate "Former Pegida head starts 'less radical' splinter group" *Guardian*, 2015

Islam to applying vigorous scrutiny on policymakers, calling on them to become more reflective and accept a direct brand of democracy over key decisions.

On 6th February, DDfE released a paper on Facebook documenting their positions and main demands:

- National direct democracy with greater use of referendums
- The right to freedom of speech and freedom of information
- Introduction of domestic security measures not reliant on the finances of the state of government with greater numbers of staff and resources allocated to emergency services
- The advocacy of volunteering in most emergency services is essentially a call for vigilante groups
- Changing the immigration law and reforming the asylum laws
- Reforming pensions and changing family policies to tackle pensioner poverty
- Improve relations with Russia by ending the economic sanctions
- A fairer global economy that includes rejecting the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership

DDfE's attempt to be seen separately to Pegida is clear in the ideas and policies they are pursuing. Although keen to discuss extremism and security, they do this under the framework of improved democratic participation which they believe would force politicians to listen to citizens on concerns around immigration and security.

DDfE organised a public rally on 8th February in Dresden but endured a disappointing turnout compared to Pegida.

Though DDfE have not held a rally of significance comparable to Pegida there are reasons to be concerned with how they seek to connect with the democratic spirit of the country, fused with a set of populist demands across the economy and security.

Pegida UK

An offshoot affiliated to the parent branch in Germany was born in the UK, created in conjunction by Tommy Robinson, founder of the English Defence League, Paul Weston and Ann Marie Waters.²⁷ The group was initially proposed during the summer of 2015, but the launch took place early the next year. Robinson became its adviser, with Weston taking leadership.²⁸

The inaugural rally saw a silent march through Birmingham where Pegida UK supporters did not engage in hostilities but were holding placards making their views all too apparent.²⁹

²⁷ Goldberg, Adrian "Tommy Robinson: the man behind the British version of Pegida" *BBC*, 2016

²⁸ Parris-Long, Adam "Tommy Robinson hands over UK Pegida leadership to former Luton South candidate Paul Weston" *The Luton News Herald & Post*, 2016

²⁹ Halliday, Josh "Pegida UK supporters stage anti-Islam silent march in Birmingham" *Guardian*, 2016

The aim of Pegida UK was to be distinguishable from the EDL and its association with the English football hooligan culture of street brawls, racism and angry mobs. By Tommy Robinson's admission, they were "taking the whole football culture, which was embedded in the EDL, out of it"; Robinson explained that this disassociation was prompted by the shame he felt visiting Pegida's demonstrations in Germany which he felt were more disciplined and unified without the alienating aggression. This change, in theory, was to make them more presentable to middle-class sympathisers by removing the violent elements associated with the traditional English far-right, whilst still wedded fiercely to the pursuit of anti-Islam ideas and policies.³⁰

Pegida UK have not laid out a manifesto of aims but the theme of their protests has been predictably centred around Islam, particularly on immigration and shutting down Islamic activities they deem suspicious. Weston called for a ban on all Muslims holding positions in public office.³¹ "I don't want Muslims in areas of political power because they put Islam as their primary allegiance," he said. "Deliberately importing people without checking what their backgrounds are, who are in their own religious and political terms sworn enemies of the West, what on earth is the West doing inviting any of them in at all? In World War II, did we fight the Nazis, or did we fight the Germans? We had to fight the Germans. We could not differentiate between the good ones and the bad."

Tommy Robinson:

Tommy Robinson (real name Stephen Yaxley-Lennon) is an English far-right activist. He is also the founder of the far-right movement English Defence League (EDL) and was briefly a member of the British National Party (BNP). Tommy Robinson was a regular contributor at Rebel Media, a news platform that shares alt-right and far-right views.

In 2013, the British soldier Lee Rigby was hacked to death on the streets of Woolwich by a pair of violent Islamist fanatics. Robinson fuelled the social tensions that arose in the aftermath of this terrorist attack, declaring that "They're chopping our soldiers' heads off. This is Islam. That's what we've seen today."³²

Footage emerged showing Tommy Robinson directly blaming every Muslim in the UK for the 7/7 bombings and saying they had gotten away with it.³³ Similarly, he filmed himself outside a row of houses claiming the areas were full of Muslims who were "enemy combatants" and in another video said militias would be formed to "clean out this Islamic problem".³⁴

³⁰ Wright, Paul "Pegida UK leader: Cologne sex attacks help raise awareness for our anti-Islam cause" *IB Times*, 2016

³¹ Clavane, Anthony "Fright Club: The march of Pegida UK" *The New European*, 2017

³² "Rise in anti-Muslim attacks after Woolwich soldier killing" *Tell MAMA*, 2013

³³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=8j7IX_5a_9M

³⁴ Wickham, Alex "Tommy Robinson called British Muslims "enemy combatants"" *Guido Fawkes*, 2017

Robinson claimed that grooming gangs were a Muslim problem, claiming the “racist press” were tarring Hindus and Sikhs by association.³⁵ A report by Kings' College London found that Tommy Robinson and his organisation were heavily exploiting the fears over the grooming gangs to whip up suspicion towards Muslims and immigrants.³⁶

In 2018, Robinson was arrested for charges of contempt of court after live broadcasting court proceedings regarding a rape trial. Robinson's team on his verified Twitter account (now banned) said he was arrested for 'attempted journalism', while Robinson said it was for trying to “video the Muslim paedophiles”.³⁷

Tommy Robinson is now a political adviser to the leader of UKIP, Gerard Batten.³⁸

Ann Marie Waters:

Ann Marie Waters is recognised as a far-right politician who founded the anti-Islam party, For Britain, and is also the director of Sharia Watch UK.

Born in Ireland, she studied journalism at Nottingham Trent University in England after living briefly in the Netherlands. Having graduated in 2003 she also acquired a law degree while working in the NHS and subsequently worked for a pressure group that opposed the spread of Sharia courts. She is in a civil partnership, describes herself as a feminist and is proudly British.

Waters unsuccessfully stood for the Labour Party in the 2010 Lambeth London Borough Council election for Streatham Hill ward. She made unsuccessful attempts to stand as a Labour parliamentary candidate and then joined UKIP. She again contested the seat in Lambeth, for the Clapham Common ward in 2014, but finished last.

The following year, she contested Lewisham East but came third with 9.1% of the vote. Her manifesto was characterised by draconian measures towards Muslims, including mass deportations, mosque closures and ending immigration from countries with majorities of Muslims (this policy was emulated by Donald Trump).³⁹

In early January 2016, she helped create Pegida UK along with Tommy Robinson. This led to her being deselected by UKIP having initially been fielded as their candidate for the 2016 London Assembly Election. She was removed as the candidate for

³⁵ Robinson, Tommy “Muslim, not Asian” *Rebel Media*, 2017

³⁶ Smith, Mark “English Defence League exploiting sex-grooming fears, says report” *Guardian*, 2013

³⁷ Grafton-Green, Patrick “Former EDL leader Tommy Robinson arrested after 'trying to film Muslims' outside court” *Independent*, 2017

³⁸ “UKIP AM calls for new leadership election over Tommy Robinson role” *BBC News*, 2018

³⁹ Wright, Paul “Who is Ann Marie Waters? Ukip leadership hopeful accused of stoking up anti-Muslim hatred” *IB Times*, 2017

Lewisham East in the 2017 general election by the party leader Paul Nuttall, who deemed her to be too extreme for the party.⁴⁰

In the aftermath of Nuttall's resignation as party leader, Waters saw an opportunity and announced her intention to run in the 2017 UKIP leadership election. Controversy sparked when she planned to launch her campaign in Rotherham, which was seen by its local branch members there, in the wake of the grooming gangs scandal, as naked political opportunism. Rotherham football club cancelled her plans to use their stadium for her rally, leading to her instead launching at a parish hall.⁴¹

UKIP became increasingly concerned by the nature of her campaign launch, which led to their Rotherham branch, backed by their MEP Jane Collins, calling for her campaign to be boycotted.⁴² Furthermore, in early July, reportedly over a thousand new members had joined the party leading to the concerns that a far-right infiltration in support of Waters was taking place.⁴³

On 29th September 2017, Henry Bolton was elected as leader; Waters came second with 2,755 votes, which was 21.3% of the vote share. Following this, she left to establish the far-right party For Britain and stood as a candidate in the Lewisham East by-election, finishing in seventh place with just 1.2% of the vote.

Paul Weston:

Paul Weston is a far-right politician who joined UKIP in 2010 and stood as a parliamentary candidate. In 2011, he joined the British Freedom Party (now defunct) along with members from the EDL and BNP, before becoming chairman of Liberty GB. The party dissolved in 2017, but their members were recommended by Weston to join Waters' For Britain party.

Paul Weston identifies as a conservative and has described immigration as the "ethnic cleansing of the English."⁴⁴ This viewpoint, however, has not prevented him from marrying a Romanian woman. He has stated that he is against Muslims being able to hold a public office in the United Kingdom.⁴⁵

In 2014, Weston was arrested outside Winchester Guildhall for failing to comply with a dispersal notice issued under section 27 of the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006.⁴⁶ This

⁴⁰ Proctor, Kate "Ukip leader Paul Nuttall to investigate anti-Islam election candidate for Lewisham" *Evening Standard*, 2017

⁴¹ "UKIP leadership bid launched in Dalton" *Rotherham Advertiser*, 2017

⁴² Wheeler, Brian "Anti-Islam campaigner Anne Marie Waters launches UKIP bid" *BBC*, 2017

⁴³ Walker, Peter "Large influx of new UKIP members prompts fears of far-right takeover" *Guardian*, 2017

⁴⁴ Kim, Marina "Interview: Paul Weston" *Politics.co.uk*, 2010

⁴⁵ Dearden, Lizzie "Former Ukip and Pegida UK leader says 'Muslims should not hold political power' and claims Syrian refugees do not exist" *Independent*, 2016

⁴⁶ Evans, Martin "Election candidate arrested over Churchill speech" *Daily Telegraph*, 2014

was because he was reciting a passage from Winston Churchill's 1899 *The River War* that was critical of Islam. At the police station he was rearrested for a racially aggravated offence.

Weston contested the seat for Cities of London and Westminster as a UKIP candidate in the 2010 UK general election and finished fifth with just 1.8% of the vote share. Following this he left UKIP and became the chairman of the British Freedom Party in 2011. During this time, he had attended numerous far-right gatherings and rallies, including for groups such as Bloc Identitaire, Die Freiheit and an international conference of counter-jihadists.

Why have Pegida created so much support?

Pegida's consistent ability to whip up crowds of many thousands shows an effectiveness at both mobilisation of its existing supporters and communication of its message to create support amongst communities with pre-existing suspicions of immigration.⁴⁷ Pegida have created undeniable ripples of social discontent in Dresden, with many regarding their large numbers as evidence of a concerning groundswell of far-right populism lurking in a country thought to have banished this permanently to history. In late 2016, a man was arrested in Dresden for setting up two bombs with one of them aimed at a mosque.⁴⁸ This underlines the social tensions in Dresden that Pegida ruthlessly exploited.

Political commentary reveals an uncertainty as to whether or not Pegida will maintain a sustained presence in Germany; their protests have not always maintained the high numbers of their early days and there is a pattern of far-right groups becoming either subsumed by other groups or defeated by either internal wrangling or terrible public support.

Yet it is also clear that in a time of cultural and socioeconomic crisis of confidence in globalisation, a worldwide refugee crisis erupting from various conflicts, and the pressures of everyday capitalism weighing down heavily on families, the ground is constantly fertile for far-right movements.⁴⁹ Pegida have inspired other far-right activists, including the high-profile Tommy Robinson, while one could also argue they have successfully influenced far-right German parties like the AfD in addressing social conservative voters.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Connolly, Kate "Pegida: what does the German far-right movement actually stand for?" *Guardian*, 2015

⁴⁸ *Zeit Online*, 2018 <https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2018-02/dresden-anschlag-moschee-icc-gestaendnis-angeklagter>

⁴⁹ Dostal, Michael "The Pegida movement and German political culture: is right-wing populism here to stay?" *SSOAR*, 2015

⁵⁰ Chambers, Madeline "Germany's far-right AfD set to embrace anti-Pegida Islam" *Reuters*, 2018

So, what are some of the factors behind Pegida's high levels of popularity, and what can be done about them?

Pegida is at its core a street-based movement:

Pegida are a movement anchored in mobilising on the street and presenting themselves as reflective of the local consensus. Due to this it's arguable that Lutz Bachmann's backstory as a convicted criminal of ordinary working-class roots has not alienated ordinary Germans, but rather made them see him as an ordinary but flawed person who can relate to their everyday struggles.

Similarly, in the UK, a large reason that Tommy Robinson has garnered so much support, despite having a history of numerous criminal offences is that many identify him as an everyday man speaking to the issues they feel passionately about. This also corresponds to growing distrust of the political elite, a common behaviour amongst voters in many Western liberal democracies.⁵¹

Amidst this, a form of monoethnic populism wrapped around exclusionary working-class identity has given rise to individuals, like Bachmann and Robinson, who attack institutions like the media and government and portray those who are liberal-minded as part of an unrepresentative elite.⁵²

By focusing on its street mobilisation and targeting pro-liberal politicians as enemies of the people, Pegida have framed their issues through a prism of the German people against the politicians in service of global elitist institutions and dangerous foreigners.⁵³ This allows them to tap into people's grievances and anxieties that the politicians are not on their side.⁵⁴

This is not to say that Pegida have eschewed the benefits from establishing a political organisation to compete in democratic elections; Bachmann made clear of the opposite by setting up a party of his own. But at its heart, the power of Pegida stems from its self-depiction as the manifestation of white working-class anger towards politicians at the betrayal of German culture and society.

Likewise, individuals such as Bachmann and Robinson apply the same sort of critique to the media, arguing that it is in service of the powerful whose interests are pitted against the ordinary worker. That the far-right ignore the often rich ethnic diversity of the working-class by focusing on a very narrow subset of them is difficult for media, certainly in Britain, to address due to its own glaring absence of working-class voices.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Goodwin, Matthew "National populism is unstoppable – and the left still doesn't understand it" *Guardian*, 2018

⁵² Fieschi, Catherine and Heywood, Paul "Trust, Cynicism and Populist anti-Politics" *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 2004

⁵³ Jacobson, Gavin "The complex roots of populism" *New Statesman*, 2018

⁵⁴ Cremer, Tobias "Defenders of the faith: why right-wing populists are embracing religion" *New Statesman*, 2018

⁵⁵ Pidd, Helen "Media 'sideline Europe's white working class', study finds" *Guardian*, 2014

This makes a rebuttal to the far-right more difficult and casts groups like Pegida as authentic representations of the working-class, rather than an exclusionary brand of far-right populism.⁵⁶

The growth in support of these far-right movements looking for a working-class base should not be seen in separation from the common assertion that there is a lack of working-class faces and voices in political corridors and newsrooms. Pegida have been able to exploit this and frame their opponents as being part of an elite fighting the interests of the people.

This environment has significantly assisted individuals such as Tommy Robinson and Lutz Bachmann in acting as the arbiters of working-class identity. Addressing the class stratification existing in society is an important step in deflating the power of the far-right movements courting working-class support.⁵⁷

Anxiety with globalisation:

A strong factor behind the rise in support for Pegida was their ability to capitalise on the clear anxiety expressed by citizens towards globalisation, both on a socioeconomic and cultural level.⁵⁸ Across many Western societies, and particularly in Europe, there has been a clear decline in confidence in political institutions; this has also aligned with anxiety over the economic future and the changing cultural dynamics of society.⁵⁹

Concerns over wages, jobs, housing and the perceived sense of loss of cultural identity, have contributed to creating an environment permeated with insecurity, anger and anxiety. Competing narratives on tackling the problems of the day have also emerged but it's quite clear, as in the case of Pegida, that the far-right have reached more effectively the hearts and minds of the people.

The anti-globalisation anxiety manifests itself primarily across two issues: the first is a subjective perception of the economy not working in their interests. Western societies have experienced economic hardship in the wake of the financial crash in 2008, but with the recurring theme of the rich enjoying the fruits of the economic recovery while poorer households have been left behind.⁶⁰ A report in 2016 found that inequality in Germany was rising rapidly.⁶¹ The country had witnessed a rise in the number of millionaires from 12,424 in 2009 to 16,495. At the same time, 6% of the national

⁵⁶ Martinson, Jane "Pale, male and posh: the media is still in a class of its own" *Guardian*, 2018

⁵⁷ Garland, Emma "We need to break the 'class ceiling' in UK politics" *Vice*, 2018

⁵⁸ Ghatak, Maitreesh "Globalisation inevitably creates winners and losers. The answer lies in Fixit, not Brexit" *LSE Blog*, 2016

⁵⁹ Goodwin, Matthew "Why national populism is here to stay" *New Statesman*, 2018

⁶⁰ Wagstyl, Stefan "Germany: The hidden divide in Europe's richest country" *Financial Times*, 2017

⁶¹ Chase, Jefferson "Latest figures show poverty increase in Germany" *DW*, 2016

population were heavily in debt and the low-wage sector kept many trapped in economic insecurity.

The national economy had grown by 22% between 1991 and 2014, leading to an income growth of 12%. However, this had been distributed unevenly according to the German Institute for Economic Research.⁶² The richest 10% of households saw their real incomes grow by 27% during this time and middle-class incomes climb by 9% across the same period. Yet low-wage households experienced an income drop of 8%. Workers' wages increased by 5% between 2000 and 2016. Meanwhile, income from investments and business activities soared by 30%. The number of homeless people went from 223,000 in 2008 to 335,000 in 2014. 5.6% of the population are now officially classified as poor, and around a fifth are threatened by poverty. According to the Cologne Institute for Economic Research, in Bremen, one in every four adults and one in every three children are considered poor.⁶³

Markus Grabka, an economist from the German Institute for Economic Research, believed that inequality had been facilitated by weakening labour unions and tax reforms that greatly benefited the wealthy.⁶⁴ Furthermore, outsourcing and automation have further hindered the labour market and contributed to the growth in inequality. This ballooning income gap had manifested itself visibly in a wealth gap too. According to Germany's central bank, while the richest 10% of the population owned 60% of assets, the bottom 40% have almost nothing. Grabka indicated that inequality had risen despite record-low levels of unemployment, suggesting that the recent creation of jobs had not been a good wealth generator. Almost seven million Germans are working in part-time precarious jobs that pay only up to €450 a month, forcing them to rely on welfare payments.

A similar story of in-work poverty, rising inequality and clear job insecurity exists in Britain.⁶⁵

The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) produced a commission on economic justice that ranked Britain as the fifth most unequal country in Europe.⁶⁶ According to the IPPR, more than 20% of British society live on incomes below the poverty line after accounting for housing costs, with nearly one in three children languishing in poverty. This is despite most of these households being in work (a consistent problem with recent British poverty). There has been an explosion in food banks over the years and

⁶² Kottasova, Ivana "Rich Germany has an inequality problem. The numbers prove it" *CNN*, 2017

⁶³ Haase, Nina and Somaskanda, Sumi "Rich vs poor: how fair and equal is Germany?" *DW*, 2017

⁶⁴ Kottasova, Ivana "German inequality may have fuelled the far-right surge" *CNN*, 2017

⁶⁵ Ishkanian, Armine "The Brexit vote was driven by the losers of globalisation, but that's hardly the whole story" *LSE Blog*, 2018

⁶⁶ Partington, Richard "How unequal is Britain and are the poor getting poorer?" *Guardian*, 2018

homelessness has been rising consistently in England since 2010, with a 15% rise between 2016 and 2017.⁶⁷

The wealth gap casts a grim story on Britain's inequality, with 44% of the wealth owned by just 10% of the population, five times the amount of wealth held by the poorest half of the country. The driving issues have been failures to accommodate for cuts in benefits through higher wages and lack of social housing leading to high rents in the private sector. This has driven many towards precarious conditions.

In this climate, the need for answers have often been found at the doorstep of the migrant.⁶⁸ Groups such as Pegida have capitalised on an environment of suspicion towards groups deemed to be outsiders, regarding them as drains on the welfare system and public services, and responsible for the shortage of houses. Far-right groups have consistently portrayed immigration a threat to public order and the common good, and demonised EU immigration through a terrible language of dehumanisation.

It is arguable that this was at the crux of the EU referendum in 2016, where many believed that money was being needlessly wasted due to immigration. Indeed, in the wake of the referendum, hate crime towards minorities spiked and many bigots felt as though they had reclaimed their country.⁶⁹ It is within this space that groups such as Pegida UK have found opportunities to promote ideas many would deem to be hateful and insulated.

Both Germany and the UK have been portraits of societies at unease with its economic direction. Wealth is being generated but is unevenly shared, breeding resentment which is increasingly directed towards those who look or sound different to what is regarded as the national group. Part of staving off the far-right pressures of groups like Pegida is to recognise that there is an appetite for a different economic settlement, one that prioritises fair wages, workers' rights, strong public services and affordable homes to ensure that each citizen feels as though he or she is a stakeholder in their own society. Otherwise, social fabrics become frayed and those who feel they are economically marginalised find their solutions in the dangerous ideas of the far-right.

The second anxiety with globalisation is a clear cultural angst with the perceived changes of a society. Cultural concerns with immigration have been widely felt across Europe and the UK, which have been manifest in different ways, but most poignantly, have been ruthlessly tapped into by far-right movements. Globalisation has brought with it fears over the value of national identity, culture and values. Those of socially conservative leanings regard multiculturalism as a threat against established national institutions. In Germany, this has been a strong focal point of Pegida, who have

⁶⁷ "Rough sleeping rises in England for seventh year" *BBC*, 2018

⁶⁸ Chakraborty, Aditya "Immigration has been good for Britain. It's time to bust the myths" *Guardian*, 2018

⁶⁹ "Rise in hate crime in England and Wales" *BBC*, 2017

portrayed immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers as threats to their German national culture.

Some believe it is not a coincidence that Pegida's roots have flourished in Dresden due to its communist past. Werner Patzelt, a politics professor at Dresden's Technical University, commented that "in the past 25 years, East German society underwent a huge process of transformation. People now feel that things are halfway back in order: the new system works; our towns look O.K. and we have jobs — and now there comes a whole new change and no one asked us."⁷⁰ Essentially, before its unification, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, while the rest of Germany was absorbing an influx of immigrants for many decades, the East had not experienced much interaction with foreigners. This meant that when the German state was reunified, the citizens of former East Germany were simply not prepared culturally for absorbing immigrant populations into their communities.

This conservatism towards cultural identification is common in Europe, and particularly England, where it's believed that English nationalism fuelled Brexit.⁷¹ The far-right in the UK have consistently drummed warnings about freedom of movement and immigration from Muslim countries threatening the local cultures and traditions of English, Welsh and Scottish peoples.⁷² Feeling that they are being ignored by politicians, an increasing number of people have turned to far-right groups and found their grievances being met with proposed 'solutions'.

Challenging the narratives laid out by Pegida around immigration begins at an understanding of who can be a German or an Englishman. For example, the 2018 World Cup fostered a rare sense of strong solidarity amongst different ethnic groups in England, who bonded over a flag that was previously regarded as the staple of the far-right.⁷³ It's imperative that policymakers, activists and writers make the argument that to be a German or to be British is not about ancestry and heritage or place of birth, but rather attachment to the land and shared values. For Britain, possibly a post-Brexit one at the time of writing, a new narrative of immigration is desperately needed to challenge the far-right.

The existence of the far-right is partly conditioned by the perceived nonchalance of politicians towards the utter fragmentation of local communities, brought about through a mixture of things; these include poverty, unemployment, deindustrialisation and proliferation of insecure tenancies and jobs. The inability to forge roots and feel a sense of communal fraternity has led to immigrants being wrongly blamed for the destruction of communities, and by extension, blamed for the economy. A strong

⁷⁰ Smale, Alison "In German City rich with history and tragedy, tide rises against immigration" *New York Times*, 2014

⁷¹ Eichhorn, Jan "Identification with Englishness is the best clue to understanding support for Brexit" *LSE Blog*, 2018

⁷² Jones, Owen "The far-right will try to exploit any Brexit outcome. We can't let that happen" *Guardian*, 2018

⁷³ Conn, David "In toxic times, England's exit must not bring an end to this sense of unity" *Guardian*, 2018

communitarian message that includes a positive language towards migrants and minorities can be crucial in giving no breathing space to the far-right who have positioned themselves, often successfully, as the last defenders of their society and its ways of life. Integral to this is universalising values of equality and liberty rather than the “nationalisation of liberal values that exhibits clear affinities with nationalism” as Sune Laegaard described.⁷⁴ Groups such as Pegida have regularly portrayed liberal values as inherent to certain national traditions and definitively absent in others, ignoring that all cultures exist in a realm of constant evolution through contact with each other, technology and the growth of formal education.

Suspicion of Muslims:

An undeniably key factor in the growth of far-right movements today is their ability to exploit concerns about Islam.⁷⁵ In a time of well-documented attacks by violent Islamist extremists, there have been growing fears in different Western societies as to whether Islam is compatible with the values of Western civilisation.

There are, broadly speaking, two clear fears regarding Islam. The first is one of security, prompted by terrorist atrocities such as 9/11 and others, leaving many to think that Muslims are an innate threat against the West. Countries have undergone somewhat of a transformation since 9/11, and with the presence of ISIS for a few years, alarm over Islamic extremist and the likelihood of terrorist attacks have been high. A succession of attacks on European soil in the last few years have compounded anxieties and left many feeling that hard, aggressive action is required to deal with the threat.

The view of Islam as incompatible and alien to the West has created the opinion that Muslims are destroying local culture. In Germany, the rise of Pegida has fuelled this opinion, manifesting itself strongly in the AfD. However, even the more mainstream politicians have argued that Islam is incompatible with German culture. The Interior Minister Horst Seehofer said Islam “doesn’t belong to Germany” and unveiled a raft of tougher immigration policies in an interview.⁷⁶ Although he would later roll back this comment, it highlighted how deeply penetrative the edifice of anti-Muslim opinion had gotten.

A YouGov poll commissioned by the Muslim Council of Elders of a thousand people in Germany found that 47% believed their national values were in direct conflict with that of Islam’s, while nearly half would have an issue with someone they know

⁷⁴ Lægaard, Sune “Liberal nationalism and the nationalization of liberal values. Nations and Nationalism”, 37-55, 2007

⁷⁵ Pieters, Janene “Anti-Islam Pegida to roast pigs in front of mosques during Ramadan” *NL Times*, 2018

⁷⁶ Wrobel, Aleksandra “Islam is ‘part of Germany,’ says German president” *Politico*, 2018

marrying a Muslim.⁷⁷ Only 17% in the poll believed there was such cultural compatibility. The poll showed that 72% of the polled Germans were either fairly or very concerned by the rise in Islamic extremism (this is unsurprising given the rise of ISIS and the spate of terrorist attacks in Europe inspired by it). However, according to the Daily Express, the YouGov poll also showed that only 7% of Germans were familiar with the teachings of Islam.⁷⁸ This shows that misconceptions about Islam can be significantly behind the underlying fears of cultural tensions and extremism regarding Islam.

Far-right groups have stoked these fears by portraying Muslims as innate dangers to Western civilisation, something echoed regularly by the Islamists themselves. In the UK, Tommy Robinson has been seen labelling Muslims as a threat to society and describing homes of ordinary British Muslims as occupied by “enemy combatants”.⁷⁹ This language has succeeded in fracturing society between Muslim and non-Muslim and creating a sense of division that is increasingly difficult to bridge.⁸⁰ Muslims have been portrayed as the ‘Other’ by far-right groups and individuals like Mr Robinson, regarded as morally inferior to the West, thus providing the intellectual justification for racist aggression towards Muslims. This is a classic orientalist trait, in which Muslims are positioned as the moral and cultural antithesis to the West. This attitude manifests itself in which Pegida regards Muslims as a negative cultural element, threatening and invasive. Paradoxically, this desire for maintaining separation over a belief in a difference of cultural essence is different to previous examples of Orientalism where beliefs in the Western self against the Muslim East justified the colonial conquests of non-white regions. The far-right require Muslims to exist as the ‘Other’ to conceptualise themselves as morally different, something to identify their collective sense of self against.⁸¹

Furthermore, the far-right have been known to capitalise on events elsewhere to reinforce the fears around Islam and further fuel the demand for some sort of action. Pegida in this regard are no different. Certainly, if one was to analyse the history of terrorism in Germany prior to Pegida’s inception in late 2014, Islamist terrorism is virtually absent.⁸²⁸³ Therefore an argument can be made that fears over Islamic extremism

⁷⁷ De Waal, Joel Rogers “Western/MENA attitudes to religion portray a lack of faith in common values” YouGov, 2019 <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/international/articles-reports/2019/02/03/westernmena-attitudes-religion-portray-lack-faith->

⁷⁸ Perring, Rebecca “Nearly half of France and Germany believe Islam clashes with society values – shock poll” *Daily Express*, 2019

⁷⁹ Lusher, Adam “Finsbury Park attack: EDL founder Tommy Robinson not being investigated despite ‘hate preaching’ about ‘enemy combatants’ at mosques” *Independent*, 2017

⁸⁰ Knight, Ben “Attacks on German Muslims ‘becoming more violent’” *DW*, 2017

⁸¹ Aydin, Cemil “What is the Muslim world?” *Aeon*, 2018

⁸² Global Terrorism Database

<https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?search=germany&sa.x=0&sa.y=0>

⁸³ Alcantara, Chris “46 years of terrorist attacks in Europe, visualized” *Washington Post*, 2017

based on terrorist atrocities abroad have been exploited locally by Pegida and other far-right groups.

This narrative against Muslims has often been poorly challenged by politicians and journalists, and worse, enabled at times for political opportunism. People supportive of Pegida's rhetoric were likely to see this and compare it to Angela Merkel who initially adopted a compassionate policy towards refugees, majority being Muslim, and have considered their security better protected with far-right voices.⁸⁴ Little is made of how majority of Western Muslims are not extreme, but locally integrated and happy citizens who are as much at risk from Islamic extremism as anyone else.

The second fear around Islam is that of a perceived takeover, which is tied heavily to immigration and baseless theories of the 'white genocide'.⁸⁵ Pegida have frequently cited their objection to what they regard as the 'Islamisation' of Germany. Far-right groups are successful in convincing people that the growth of Muslim immigrants into a country is a threat to their country both physically through terrorism, and culturally, through refusing to assimilate and instead demanding special privileges.

For example, they will find ordinary stories of Muslim antagonists and warp them into instruments to demonstrate an epidemic brought on by the local Muslim population that the mainstream are refusing to talk about.⁸⁶ This idea of a takeover increases hostilities towards Islamic institutions such as mosques or community centres, which become regarded as hotbeds for radicalisation and some sort of enemy stronghold; these areas thus experience vicious levels of hate crimes.⁸⁷

In addition, reports that investigate the future demographics of a country often find that, naturally, it is likely to change dramatically.⁸⁸ For example, Pew Research Centre found in 2017 that Germany's Muslim population rose from 4.1% to 6.1% between 2010 and 2016, and was likely to grow because German Muslim families tended to have more babies. Reports such as this are regularly picked up by the far-right as evidence of a systematically planned white genocide to enable an Islamist takeover. This is often used to fuel support for immigration curbs, and particularly, restricting the religious freedoms of Muslims.

Groups such as Pegida focus on exploiting suspicion towards Muslims.⁸⁹ Pegida have been successful in capitalising on the anxieties and grievances by giving a platform

⁸⁴ "75 percent of Germans support Merkel's European approach to refugee crisis" *The Local*, 2018

⁸⁵ Karnitschnig, Matthew "German far-right fuels Muslim 'takeover' fears" *Politico*, 2018

⁸⁶ Berta, Zoltan and Shalal, Andrea "Far-right mobilized by 'fake news' after stabbing" *Reuters*, 2018

⁸⁷ Chambers, Madeline and Martin, Michelle "Germany boosts security for Muslim centres in Dresden after mosque bombing" *Reuters*, 2016

⁸⁸ "The growth of Germany's Muslim population" *Pew Research Centre*, 2017

⁸⁹ Bond, David and Chazan, Guy "Rightwing terror in Europe draws fuel from populism and xenophobia" *Financial Times*, 2018

to fear and hate.⁹⁰ The far-right movement regularly used their rallies to amplify fears of Muslims and insist that their manifesto of actions would solve the problem.⁹¹ Though Pegida might insist that their ideas are aimed at Islamic extremism, stories of their members planning to roast pigs outside mosques during Ramadan or frequently abusing migrants show a sinister populism permeating the movement.

Challenging the far-right narrative on Islam has been extremely difficult for leftist and liberal politicians.⁹² Crucial to defeating the narrative of Pegida is exposing the clearly racist underbelly of its movement. Germany retains a deliberate and distinct collective consciousness surrounding its Nazi history, and it must be noted that where Pegida have marched, antifascists opposing them have marched too. There is a liberal presence in Germany and a middle ground caught between anxieties over Islam and a contempt for racism.

Politicians must find a way to prevent these grievances from turning into resentment and open discrimination against immigrants and refugees. Important to this is positive stories of contributions made by refugees and immigrants to their local towns and cities, to construct the understanding that they too are Germans. It is also imperative that anti-Muslim tropes of an Islamic takeover, rooted in Western thought and literature for many centuries, is firmly resisted and recognised as bigoted malice. This has become more important in the wake of the Christchurch mosque shooting in New Zealand by a far-right terrorist that left 50 people dead.

Furthermore, religious education should be regarded as an important tool against prejudice and discrimination, as well as fostering a sense of solidarity, mutualism, tolerance and inclusivity.⁹³ Misunderstandings about the beliefs of Islam is common and breeds an environment in which is seen as inherently incompatible. Islam is a giant tree with many branches, and while it is claimed by the likes of Osama bin Laden and other extremists, it is practised peacefully by millions of others.

It is also the religion of Imam al-Ghazali, al-Farabi, Ibn Khaldun, Avicenna and other great philosophers whose contributions to science, literature, ethics, law and philosophy cannot be emphasised enough. It is also the religion whose greatest names help lay the foundations for modern society. Teaching children from a young age about what Islam is and what it isn't inoculates them against the lure of the far-right than warnings from politicians and newspapers.

⁹⁰ "Attitudes to Islam in Europe are hardening" *Economist*, 2017

⁹¹ Timothy Garton Ash "Germany's anti-Islamic movement Pegida is a vampire we must slay" *Guardian*, 2015

⁹² Bittner, Jochen "The wrong way for Germany to debate Islam" *New York Times*, 2018

⁹³ Beck, Luisa "German schools teach Islam to students to give them a sense of belonging" *Independent*, 2018

What Next?

Statistics would show that Pegida, like many other far-right movements, have guttered out after peaking between late 2014 and early 2015; they have not maintained over the years what they had during their early years. The attempted British offshoot led by Tommy Robinson and Ann Marie Waters largely failed to get off the ground.

However, given Lutz Bachmann's clear political ambitions with the formation of a political party, Pegida's relatively quiet profile of late should not be taken as a given. They are political opportunists who seize upon stories to stir fanatical hate of Muslims.

It is possible that as the unresolved refugee crisis worsens and threats of Islamic extremism thicken, Pegida will, most likely through collaboration with others, continue to push forward virulently anti-Islamic messages. Pegida whipped up around 25,000 protesters at the height of its popularity and they have not disappeared overnight. The group was able to draw many middle-class supporters to its cause, lending it the hue of a family-friendly movement that is often lacking in other far-right groups.

The state should lever every resource at its disposal to foster a deeper social integration and togetherness. A society that focuses on the ideas of solidarity, mutualism and tolerance is also one that does not allow itself to become frayed by extremist groups lurking on the margins. Angela Merkel had been initially admirably principled in her support for refugees, but it is also clear that Germany have faced infrastructural issues in its rural areas in the accommodation of refugees. Refugees require practical ideas that can support a safe integration but the cultural and social stigma against them has undermined this greatly.

There are still reasons to be optimistic, namely that Pegida's support has also been met by a noticeable antifascist resistance. Furthermore, when Tatjana Festerling, a Pegida-backed candidate, ran in the 2015 Dresden mayoral elections she only received 10% of the vote share from a lowly turnout of just 51% (not to say this isn't still a troubling result).

Challenging the stereotypes is a long and exhausting fight for the liberals and progressives of Germany, but it is a worthwhile one.



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