Explaining PEGIDA’s ‘strange survival’: an ethnographic approach to far-right protest rituals

Sabine Volk

Chair of Political Science with a Focus on Comparative Government, University of Passau, Passau, Germany;
Doctoral researcher at the Hub for Emotions, Populism and Polarization, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

ABSTRACT
This article explores the link between the ritualization of public protest and movement persistence in the context of contemporary far-right politics. Drawing from interpretive approaches in political science, social movement studies, and anthropology, it introduces the under-researched analytical category of protest ritual to scholarship on far-right social movements. It argues for a strong link between ritualistic protest and far-right movement persistence, conceptualized as symbolic continuity, and suggests the use of ethnographic methods to gain insights into the concrete processes of ritualization. Empirically, the article provides a case study on one of Europe’s most sustained instances of far-right protest: the German ‘Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident’ (PEGIDA). Based on an original ‘patchwork’ ethnographic dataset generated in both conventional and virtual ethnographic fieldwork in 2019–21, the analysis redefines PEGIDA as a symbolic performance expressing dense meanings of ‘democratic resistance’ and highlights the constitutive role of the ‘PEGIDA ritual’ both on the streets and online as a novel explanation for PEGIDA’s continuity beyond its peak in 2014–15. Overall, this study contributes to an emerging body of research focusing on local and extra-parliamentary far-right actors, particularly taking an emic perspective on the meaning-making processes in far-right activism.

Introduction

The current ‘fourth wave’ of far-right politics in postwar Europe is characterized by the diversification of its organizational forms, now including not only traditional party structures but also street movements, sub-cultures, and ‘alternative’ media (Mudde 2019; on the umbrella concept of ‘far right’, see Pirro 2022). Crucially, the rise of far-right parties has been accompanied by nativist protests against increased state efforts at accommodating immigrants from the Middle East and Africa throughout Europe in the 2010s...
Comparative scholarship expects nativist protests to decline when far-right parties consolidate their power in the electoral arena (Hutter and Borbáth 2019; Hutter and Kriesi 2013) or when the public salience of the issue of immigration decreases (Dennison and Geddes 2019; Wilde et al. 2019). However, some far-right groups, such as the transnational Identitarian Movement and the Italian Casa-Pound, have continuously mobilized despite the presence of strong far-right parties and low public salience of immigration as an issue during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Aiming to shed new light on contemporary far-right social movement organizations in Europe, this article addresses the issue of the curious persistence of nativist protest after its peak. In line with an interpretive lens on political science and agency-focused approaches in social movement studies (Jasper 2004; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012), I shift the focus from external factors that explain far-right mobilization to one of the key internal dimensions of activism (Goodwin 2006; Pilkington 2021). Based on political anthropology and interpretive ethnography (Aronoff and Kubik 2013; Casquete 2006a; Rucht 2003), I introduce the notion of ‘protest ritual’ as an analytical category to existing scholarship on far-right social movements, arguing for a strong link between protest rituals and far-right movement continuity. Even though protest rituals, that is ‘all the regularly occurring symbolic performances staged by social movements in the public sphere’ (Casquete 2006a, 47), count among activists’ contentious repertoires throughout the world (Zuev and Virchow 2014), their link to movement persistence is yet under-researched.

The argument draws on my ethnographic analysis of a single case of far-right protest, namely the German Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident (Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes, PEGIDA), using original data from 2019–21. Since PEGIDA’s peak in the city of Dresden in 2014–15, the case has attracted the attention of international scholarship (Coury 2016; Dostal 2015; Druxes and Simpson 2016; Richardson-Little and Merrill 2020; Virchow 2016), not least because the group mobilized beyond its original stronghold from the very beginning, fashioning itself as a ‘European’ rather than national or local player (Berntzen and Weisskircher 2016; Caiani and Weisskircher 2021; Nissen 2022; Volk 2019). PEGIDA’s long-term continuity on the streets and online, even during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic and ‘lockdown’ (Volk 2021), was not only rather unexpected for certain academic and media observers (Dostal 2015; Krüger, Schneider, and Springer 2019; Reuband 2017), but also stands in sharp contrast with some of the expectations of social movement theory (see, amongst others, Kitschelt 1986; McCarthy and Zald 1977). Conceptualized as a ‘critical’ case (Snow 2013) of continuous far-right protest, empirical research on the ritualization of PEGIDA promises new insights into far-right activism in Germany and beyond.

This article adds to a growing body of scholarship on extra-parliamentary and local far-right actors (Caiani, Della Porta, and Wagemann 2012; Castelli Gattinara, Froio, and Pirro 2022; Chou, Moffitt, and Busbridge 2022; Fitzgerald 2018). Specifically, it relates to the ‘cultural turn’ in both social movement studies and research on the far right. Highlighting the internal and symbolic dimensions of activism (Baumgarten, Daphi, and Ullrich 2014), such scholarship shows how activists’ (collective) identities, mobilizing narratives, and collective action frames, as well as meaningful contentious performances, shape mobilization (Daphi 2017; Jasper 1997; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Zamponi 2018). Based on interviews, participant observation, and other qualitative methods, scholars have
highlighted the role of far-right activists’ worldviews, identities, and action repertoires (Fangen 2020; Pilkington 2016; Virchow 2007). Against this backdrop, my analysis makes the following contributions: from a conceptual standpoint, beyond linking ritualization and persistence, I introduce the notion of ‘virtual protest ritual’, underscoring the powerful role of protest rituals for movements in challenging times, such as the pandemic. From an empirical standpoint, this article’s focus on the far right makes it possible to draw conclusions beyond the dominant cases of ritualistic demonstrations, like May Day (Mach 1992; Peterson et al. 2012; Rucht 2003) and secessionist protests (Casquete 2006a, 2006b).

The structure of the article is as follows. First, I discuss the link between protest rituals and movement persistence. Then, I elaborate on my selection of PEGIDA as a case study and my ethnographic approach to far-right protest rituals, connecting them to recent contributions in existing scholarship on far-right activism. I continue by providing an overview of PEGIDA and existing explanations for its mobilization. In the fifth and main analytical section, I then discuss the results of my own ethnographic analysis of PEGIDA as a protest ritual, also building on two ethnographic vignettes. Finally, I reflect on the value and opportunities of such ethnographic methods for explaining protest rituals and movement persistence and point to possible avenues for future research.

**Linking far-right protest rituals and movement persistence**

Among the various contentious repertoires available to social movement organizations, scholars qualify certain protest performances as ‘ritualistic’, mostly when they take place repeatedly, such as annual May Day demonstrations (Klandermans 2012). For some observers, repetitive protest – like the case of PEGIDA in Dresden – are merely uneventful gatherings with little innovative potential (Krüger, Schneider, and Springer 2019). In contrast, interpretivism is a specific logic of inquiry that puts the ‘situated meanings and meaning-making practices of actors in a given context’ (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 1) centre stage, making it possible to focus on the phenomenon in its own right. Drawing from anthropological theory (Geertz 1973; Kertzer 1988; Korff 1991), interpretive scholarship defines protest rituals as ‘all the regularly occurring symbolic performances staged by social movements in the public sphere’ (Casquete 2006a, 47). They typically follow standardized procedures that function as a ‘political liturgy’ (Casquete 2006b) and are meaningful for the participants (Aronoff and Kubik 2013, 86–109): ‘Rituals’, as Dieter Rucht puts it, ‘have meaning despite and because of their repetition’ (2003, 13, transl. authors).

Anthropological theory emphasizes the constitutive role of political rituals writ large for both ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ societies. Indeed, regular symbolic performances like presidential inaugurations help (re-)create political collectives and consolidate power structures (Handelman 1998; Kertzer 1988). In a similar vein, cultural approaches to social movement studies show that protest rituals play a constitutive role for non-state actors. In the spatially and temporally bound context of public protest, groups (re-)create themselves independent of external factors, notably via the construction of collective emotions, identities, and lasting memories (Daphi 2017; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Virchow 2007). Repetitive demonstrations, for instance, serve as ‘extended periods of intensive political socialization’ (Eyerman 2006, 206). Crucially, empirical research shows
that the constitution of social groups can be a primary function of protest: in many cases, ‘the creation of inner cohesion may be a by-product of the protest ritual or, rather, its main purpose’ (Casquete 2006b, 287).

The concept of the protest ritual is particularly important in the context of oppositional and extremist mobilization, hence also far-right protest. While protest rituals have similar group-integrative functions for activists from across the political spectrum, scholarship shows that they often constitute the principal cultural resource for ‘uncivil communities’ (Casquete 2006b). Marginalized from mainstream politics and the public sphere, extremist groups typically lack other types of resources, such as a broad supporter base, financial backing, or elite allies (Corte and Edwards 2008). Therefore, they rely even more strongly on repetitive protest performances to ensure consistent mobilization. Casquete (2006b) demonstrates this connection in his analysis of the long protest tradition by marginal nationalist-secessionist actors in the Basque country. Similarly, regular demonstrations are at the core of the contentious repertoires of pariah extreme-right activists in Germany (Virchow 2011).

Even though the emphasis on the group-integrative dimension of repetitive protest performances hints at a link between protest rituals and movement persistence, social movement scholars have not yet specified this relationship in detail. In fact, much social movement theory instead emphasizes the unlikelihood of movement continuity over extended periods of time: while structuralist approaches predict movement decline related to ‘closing’ political opportunities (Kitschelt 1986), materialist lenses stress the difficulty of lasting resource mobilization (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Overall, it seems that social movement organizations, even if they manage to survive beyond an initial peak, merely persist in a ‘holding pattern’ of ‘abeyance’, that is, without major mobilization successes (Taylor and Crossley 2013). In line with an agency-focused perspective that highlights activists’ strategic choices and interactions (Jasper 2004; Jasper and Duyvendak 2015), this article’s approach thus underlines the outstanding role of factors internal to mobilization, such as activist ideas about protest as well as specific local conditions for the continuity of social movement organizations.

Emphasizing qualitative rather than quantitative aspects of public protest, an interpretive lens offers an understanding of movement persistence as symbolic continuity. In this context, the link between protest rituals and movement persistence is not mechanistic: Repetitive protest does not automatically lead to movement continuity. The relationship is better captured based on the concept of ‘constitutive causality’, which sees explanatory potential in ‘how humans conceive of their worlds, the language they use to describe them, and other elements constituting that social world, which make possible or impossible the interactions they pursue’ (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 52). Underscoring the power of ideas, the concept captures how frames of reference consciously invoked by concrete actors may be transformed into relatively stable social facts over time (Lebow 2009, 218). This mechanism likely applies to symbolic performances such as ritualistic protest as well: even though initially devised by strategic political actors, in the long term the ritualization of protest may have an impact on its continuity. Essentially, protest must be meaningful from the participants’ point of view for it to shape the dynamics of mobilization. For scholars seeking to explain the persistence of protest, the task is therefore to trace the meanings and meaning-making processes in the protest events themselves.
Case selection and methodological approach

In adopting the logic of inquiry of agency-focused approaches in social movement studies (Jasper et al. 2022), this article applies the research strategy of a single case study, that of the German far-right social movement organization PEGIDA, to show how meaningful protest relates to the persistence of far-right mobilization. I conceive of PEGIDA as a ‘critical’ case (Snow 2013) of persistent far-right protest, a case for which the role of the protest ritual in movement persistence can be traced particularly well. By focusing on a local actor rather than a national movement, my case selection responds to the claim for a ‘localist’ turn in the study of right-wing populism (Chou, Moffitt, and Busbridge 2022). Indeed, much recent scholarship underscores the crucial role of the sub-national dimension in far-right politics (Albertazzi and Zulianello 2021; Paxton 2020). By selecting a case from structurally disadvantaged post-communist eastern Germany (Mau 2019; Ther 2019), my study specifically adds to debates on the rise of far-right actors in peripheral, economically depressed, and culturally left-behind areas in Germany and beyond (Vees-Gulani 2021; Weisskircher 2020; 2022; Yoder 2020; see also Brooks 2020; Cramer 2016).

In line with my interpretive approach to mobilization, I employ a core anthropological method, participant observation (Aronoff and Kubik 2013, 35–40), to shed new light on the link between protest rituals and far-right movement persistence. Focusing on the meanings that researched subjects ascribe to the world, ethnographic methods explore social phenomena from the ‘native’s point of view’ (Geertz 1973) based on the bodily experience of participant observation to access ‘local knowledge’ (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012; Yanow 2000). They serve as a useful methodological tool for tracing causes and effects in long-term processes; indeed, ‘[t]o the extent that politics actually consists not of big structures and prescribed roles but of dynamic, contingent interaction among persons, households, and small groups’, argues social movement scholar Charles Tilly, ‘political ethnography provides privileged access to its processes, causes, and effects’ (Tilly 2007, 248).

While ethnography has long been equated with the notion of ‘full immersion’ within ‘foreign’ social groups, implying extended periods of fieldwork ‘abroad’, more recent and critical perspectives emphasize the notion of ethnographic ‘sensitivity’ towards the field participants and ‘reflexivity’ in the process of knowledge production (Eggeling 2021; Wilkinson 2013). Based on the latter strand of thought, I conduct an innovative ‘patchwork ethnography’ (Günel, Varma, and Watanabe 2020) of PEGIDA’s activism (see also Volk, 2022a). By adapting the method of participant observation to the various constraints of fully immersing oneself in a field ‘abroad’, mostly but not only in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the concept of patchwork ethnography here relates to the ‘ethnographic processes and protocols designed around short-term field visits, using fragmentary yet rigorous data, and other innovations that resist the fixity, holism, and certainty demanded in the publication process’ (Günel, Varma, and Watanabe 2020). Rather than seeking to replace traditional fieldwork, patchwork ethnography maintains ‘the long-term commitments, language proficiency, contextual knowledge, and slow thinking […]’, while fully attending to how changing living and working conditions are profoundly and irrevocably changing knowledge production’ (Günel, Varma, and Watanabe 2020). This flexible approach leaves openings for conducting parts of the research process online, appreciating the internet not only as a source of data but also as a
‘field’ in which meaningful social interaction takes place (Góralska 2020; Hine 2017; Mosca 2014).

My patchwork ethnography of PEGIDA includes overlapping phases of physical and digital fieldwork as well as short-term physical field visits. I conducted participant observation of demonstrations as part of a more conventional fieldwork phase in Dresden in fall and winter of 2019–20, a virtual observation phase of both virtual and street events during the pandemic in 2020–21, and a few short-term trips to Dresden in 2020 and 2021, for instance to observe PEGIDA’s anniversary celebrations in October. In addition, throughout this period I systematically archived contents on PEGIDA’s website and social media pages. Both on the streets of Dresden and on YouTube, I assumed the role of a participant observer, either joining the participants in front of the stage and marching in the city or accessing leader Lutz Bachmann’s YouTube channel to experience live streams of protest events as they were happening. Like most field participants, I did not engage in long, in-depth conversations during the events, neither on the square nor in YouTube’s chatroom. In both the physical and virtual variants of participant observation, I partially standardized my observations and archiving practices, paying attention to such formal elements as the number, frequency, and length of events, such structural elements as place, social settings, and movement, such behavioural elements as social interactions and communication, and such cultural elements as aesthetics, design, and symbols. Relying on both immediate and mediated techniques of recording, such as jotting, photographing, filming, and taking screen shots, I thus generated a corpus that includes detailed field notes, photos, videos, flyers, demonstration memorabilia, and social media posts.

My ethnographic approach ties in with recent contributions in social movement studies and international scholarship on far-right activism (Fangen 2020; Plows 2008). Participant observation of demonstrations serves movement scholars seeking to analyze the on-site production of meaning, the symbolic dimensions of protest, the multifacetedness and multivocality of movements, and possible gaps between ideology and practices (Baligeser and Lambelet 2014, 147–151). In empirical studies of the far right, scholars use ethnography to explore the ideologies, identities, and action repertoires of activists (Blee 1996; Froio and Gattinara 2015; Pilkington 2016). While traditionally a rather marginal method in political science, scholars are currently making a strong case for taking an ‘emic’ approach. Such methods often generate innovative results since they ‘allow to see different things and they allow to see things differently’ (Brodkin 2017, 131–132). Ethnographic observations add nuance to protest survey results and generate more reliable data in cases where it is difficult to gain access to research participants (Bayard de Volo and Schatz 2004). Crucially, in a pandemic context in which some of the most important methods in social movement studies, for instance protest event analysis, would have yielded zero data due to the interruption of street protests, the flexible patchwork ethnographic approach allowed me to continue to generate data by swiftly shifting my observations from the public space of Dresden to YouTube.

The lack of explanations for PEGIDA’s persistence

In October 2014, still before the European ‘refugee crisis’, the self-styled Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident emerged as a somewhat unprecedented
protest phenomenon in Dresden, the capital of the east German region of Saxony. Organized by twelve friends and acquaintances who had previously not or barely been involved in politics or activism, ‘PEGIDA strolls [Spaziergänge]’ against a multicultural society and the German political leadership took place weekly, peaking at around 20,000 participants in Dresden in early 2015 (Vorländer, Herold, and Schäller 2018). Simultaneously, across Germany and Europe far-right activists picked up the name and organized similar demonstrations (Bernnten and Weisskircher 2016). While some observers expected the phenomenon to rapidly disappear after infighting broke out among the organizers in Dresden, as well as due to public backlash and a large-scale halt to media reporting on it in early 2015 (Dostal 2015), PEGIDA ‘strangely’ survived for more than seven years. By the end of 2021, nearly 240 protest events labelled ‘PEGIDA’, including street demonstrations, static rallies, and a few ‘virtual marches’, had taken place in Dresden, even during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic (Volk 2021).

PEGIDA’s emergence and initial success surprised both domestic and international observers. Due to the historical legacy of national socialism, the Second World War, and the Holocaust, postwar political science scholarship had considered Germany largely ‘immune’ to strong far-right movements (Art 2005). For instance, until 2017 no far-right party had established itself at the national level (Decker 2000). PEGIDA, the first successful case of far-right street mobilization, has thus been at the core of much empirical analysis in both German and international scholarship (Bernnten and Weisskircher 2016; Coury 2016; Druxes and Simpson 2016; Kocyba 2018; Patzelt 2015; Richardson-Little and Merrill 2020; Rucht et al. 2015; Virchow 2016; Vorländer, Herold, and Schäller 2018).

Mixed-methods analyses show that both internal and external factors played a role in the onset of protests in Dresden. On the external side, the rise of the so-called Islamic State in Syria and threat of Islamist terrorism in Europe (Reuband 2020; Vorländer, Herold, and Schäller 2018, 3–4), the specific conservative political culture in Dresden and the region of Saxony (Druxes and Simpson 2016; Virchow 2016; Vorländer, Herold, and Schäller 2018, 170–77), and the alleged lack of representation of conservative positions in German mainstream politics (Patzelt 2015; see also Biebricher 2018) opened political and discursive opportunity structures for far-right protest and Islamophobic discourse. Additionally, internal factors facilitating the rise of PEGIDA included the successful mobilization of resources by leading activists, who made effective use of previously established non-political networks and wider friendship circles in Dresden and on social media to gather participants for their ideologically diffuse, and therefore relatively inclusive, public protest (Vorländer, Herold, and Schäller 2018, 1–30).

While scholarship has shed much light on PEGIDA’s emergence in Dresden in 2014, existing explanations are not able to account for the persistence of protest for more than seven years, including the various periods of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–21. Indeed, protests continued to take place, only on a much smaller scale than in 2014–15, counting several hundred rather than tens of thousands of participants. Theoretically, numerous external and internal constraints, such as political structures offering less opportunity for participation and decreasing resources, would predict the organizational death of PEGIDA – at least after the ‘refugee crisis’ in 2015–16, during which time the high public salience of the issue of immigration temporarily contributed to the support for far-right agitation (Dennison and Geddes 2019).
Likewise on the external side, political and discursive opportunity structures already became more restricted after PEGIDA’s peak in early 2015. All ‘mainstream’ parties distanced themselves from PEGIDA, and both national and local media largely stopped reporting on the demonstrations. Even the rise of the far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD), a possible ally, arguably constituted more of a constraining than an enabling factor. Generally, the establishment of far-right parties within a political system tends to curb far-right activism (Hutter and Borbáth 2019; Hutter and Kriesi 2013). So too in Germany, AfD became ‘Germany’s far-right main event’ after entering the national parliament in 2017 as the first far-right party since the Second World War and the foundation of the Federal Republic (Weisskircher, Hutter, and Borbáth 2022, 17), pushing PEGIDA into an at least secondary position. After several initial instances of cooperation, AfD leaders soon opposed collaborating with PEGIDA in the attempt to appear more ‘moderate’ (Weisskircher and Berntzen 2019). Finally, in 2020–21 the COVID-19 pandemic posed an exceptional challenge to PEGIDA: not only had public health concerns barely registered on far-right agendas before the pandemic (Falkenbach and Greer 2018), PEGIDA could also not take to the streets for extended periods of time (Volk 2021), thus being rather blindsided by a new rival, the ‘anti-lockdown’ protestors of the Lateral Thinkers (Querdenken) movement (Frei, Schäfer, and Nachtwey 2021).

PEGIDA experienced various internal constraints as well, namely a rapid decrease in resources. Already in early 2015, the leadership split over the radicalization of the group’s ideology, and participation numbers dropped quickly (Vorländer, Herold, and Schäller 2018). Only a handful of activists organized the demonstrations in subsequent years, and at times only a few hundred participants joined them. Crucially, the social networking platform Facebook, which had temporarily constituted an important networking tool (Scharf and Pleul 2016; Volk, 2022a), repeatedly shut down the community pages of PEGIDA and personal pages of the organizers due to violations of the regulations regarding hate speech and rabble rousing. All in all, it seems that PEGIDA confronted more challenges than opportunities, raising the question of what explains its ‘strange survival’ for more than seven years.

**Explaining PEGIDA’s ‘strange survival’**

In accounting for PEGIDA’s persistence beyond its peak year, some scholarship already hinted at the ‘ritualistic character’ of the rallies, ‘in which social ties are strengthened and collective and social identities are conjured’ (Reuband 2017, 127, transl. authors; see also Vorländer, Herold, and Schäller 2018, 199). My analysis expands on this strand of thought, focusing on the protest events themselves as sites where meaning is produced. Based on a series of patchwork ethnographic observations in 2019–21, I contend, first, that the phenomenon of ‘PEGIDA’ had become a protest ritual, and second, that the ritualization of protest shaped PEGIDA’s persistence for more than seven years, to the end of 2021 and possibly beyond. The following analysis thus suggests a novel ontological take on PEGIDA: as a symbolic performance staged in the public space, PEGIDA came into being only at a point in time when protestors chose to perform standardized collective practices of protest in public, including both the symbolic urban landscape of Dresden and the digital space.
PEGIDA and/as protest ritual

In line with the minimal definition, demonstrations are considered ritualistic when they are repetitive (Klandermans 2012). There is no doubt that PEGIDA’s protest had been repetitive since 2014: according to its website, 239 PEGIDA events had taken place between 2014 and the movement’s seven-year anniversary in October 2021. Forty-nine out of the events, namely events no. 191–239, fall into the period of active data generation, from September 2019 to October 2021. Overall, PEGIDA thus took to the streets quite often in the years 2019–21, that is, every two to three weeks. Table 1 gives a concise overview of PEGIDA’s repetitive protests in 2019–21, including the date, day of the week, start time, location, format (street demonstration, static rally, virtual march, hybrid, or open-microphone event), and type (regular/irregular or special) of event.

As predicted by protest ritual theory (Casquete 2006a; Kertzer 1988), PEGIDA’s repetitive protests were highly standardized. Table 1 illustrates that PEGIDA had devised two standard types of events before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The regular type of event included bi-monthly street demonstrations, with about 1,000 participants, which took place on Monday evenings at different squares in the city centre of Dresden, most commonly at Neumarkt or Wiener Platz next to the central station. Most of the events that I witnessed during my physical fieldwork period, from September 2019 to February 2020, were such regular demonstrations. Second, a special type of event refers to static rallies with up to 3,000 participants, which took place on Sunday afternoons, typically devised to celebrate the anniversary of the founding of the movement in October. During the pandemic, though, PEGIDA devised new formats that corresponded to the previously practiced standardized type of event. In April and May 2020, when the pandemic regulations impeded street demonstrations, PEGIDA continued to organize regular events on Monday evenings, however using the format of ‘virtual marches’ livestreamed via YouTube and attended by up to 2,000 internet users while they were happening. Later in 2020 and then in 2021, when certain restrictions still applied, PEGIDA moved the regular Monday events back to the centre of Dresden, but this time using the format of the (legal) static rally. Throughout my fieldwork period, only two of the forty-nine events were clearly irregular and took an entirely different format, namely the two ‘open-microphone’ sessions in October 2021, which had been spontaneously organized to compensate for the cancelled six-year anniversary celebration.

To shed light on some of the qualitative characteristics of the repetitive and standardized ‘PEGIDA ritual’, Ethnographic vignette no. 1 reports on a demonstration in Dresden that took place in January 2020. Spotlighting a single event, the vignette illustrates the appearance of many, possibly most, such events had since 2014. Though, when studied from some other theoretical vantage point, the evening might have appeared as nothing more than a rather uneventful gathering of a few hundred persons engaging in well-rehearsed practices in public, the interpretive lens offers a different understanding of the phenomenon: by focusing on the semiotic qualities of the demonstrations, it suggests that the ‘PEGIDA’ phenomenon constituted a protest ritual charged with historical symbolism related to non-violent resistance and associated with a deeper sense of producing political change.

Ethnographic vignette no. 1
Table 1. Overview of PEGIDA events no. 191-239, September 2019-October 2021. (source: own data collection)

| No. | Date       | Day of the week | Time     | Location        | Format          | Status                        |
|-----|------------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| 191 | 02.09.2019 | Monday          | 18:30    | Central Station | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
| 192 | 07.10.2019 | Monday          | 17:30    | Neumarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
| 193 | 20.10.2019 | Sunday          | 14:00    | Neumarkt       | Static rally    | Special: Anniversary           |
| 194 | 04.11.2019 | Monday          | 18:30    | Neumarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
| 195 | 18.11.2019 | Monday          | 18:30    | Central Station | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
| 196 | 02.12.2019 | Monday          | 18:30    | Central Station | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
| 197 | 15.12.2019 | Sunday          | 14:00    | Theaterplatz   | Static rally    | Special: Christmas             |
| 198 | 20.01.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | Neumarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
| 199 | 03.02.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | Neumarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
| 200 | 17.02.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | Neumarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
| 201 | 02.03.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | Neumarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
| 202 | 06.04.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | YouTube        | Virtual march   | Regular                       |
| 203 | 13.04.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | YouTube        | Virtual march   | Regular                       |
| 204 | 20.04.2020 | Monday          | 17:45    | Neumarkt & YouTube | Hybrid event   | Regular                       |
|     | 205 | 27.04.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | YouTube        | Virtual march   | Regular                       |
|     | 206 | 04.05.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | YouTube        | Virtual march   | Regular                       |
|     | 207 | 13.05.2020 | Wednesday      | 18:30    | YouTube        | Virtual march   | Regular                       |
|     | 208 | 18.05.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | Neumarkt       | Static rally    | Regular                       |
|     | 209 | 01.06.2020 | Monday          | 15:30    | Altmarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
|     | 210 | 15.06.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | Altmarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
|     | 211 | 29.06.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | Neumarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
|     | 212 | 06.07.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | Neumarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
|     | 213 | 20.07.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | Neumarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
|     | 214 | 03.08.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | Neumarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
|     | 215 | 17.08.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | Neumarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
|     | 216 | 31.08.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | Neumarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
|     | 217 | 14.09.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | Altmarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
|     | 218 | 28.09.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | Neumarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
|     | 219 | 12.10.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | Neumarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
|     | 220 | 26.10.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | Altmarkt       | Static rally    | Regular & special: Replacing anniversary |
|     | 221 | 27.10.2020 | Tuesday         | 17:00    | Central Station | Open-microphone event   | Irregular: Compensating anniversary |
|     | 222 | 28.10.2020 | Wednesday       | 15:00    | Shopping street | Open-microphone event   | Irregular: Compensating anniversary |
|     | 223 | 09.11.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | Altmarkt       | Static rally    | Regular                       |
|     | 224 | 23.11.2020 | Monday          | 18:30    | Theaterplatz   | Static rally    | Regular                       |
|     | 225 | 01.02.2021 | Monday          | 18:30    | Neumarkt       | Static rally    | Regular                       |
|     | 226 | 22.02.2021 | Monday          | 19:15    | Altmarkt       | Static rally    | Regular                       |
|     | 227 | 08.03.2021 | Monday          | 19:15    | Altmarkt       | Static rally    | Regular                       |
|     | 228 | 22.03.2021 | Monday          | 19:15    | Altmarkt       | Static rally    | Regular                       |
|     | 229 | 12.04.2021 | Monday          | 19:15    | Altmarkt       | Static rally    | Regular                       |
|     | 230 | 03.05.2021 | Monday          | 19:15    | Altmarkt       | Static rally    | Regular                       |
|     | 231 | 17.05.2021 | Monday          | 19:15    | Altmarkt       | Static rally    | Regular                       |
|     | 232 | 31.05.2021 | Monday          | 19:15    | Altmarkt       | Static rally    | Regular                       |
|     | 233 | 14.06.2021 | Monday          | 19:15    | Altmarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
|     | 234 | 28.06.2021 | Monday          | 19:15    | Altmarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
|     | 235 | 09.08.2021 | Monday          | 19:15    | Altmarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
|     | 236 | 30.08.2021 | Monday          | 19:15    | Altmarkt       | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
|     | 237 | 13.09.2021 | Monday          | 19:15    | Central Station | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
|     | 238 | 27.09.2021 | Monday          | 19:15    | Central Station | Demonstration   | Regular                       |
|     | 239 | 17.10.2021 | Sunday          | 14:00    | Altmarkt       | Static rally    | Special: Anniversary           

On a chilly Monday evening in January 2020, around one thousand people crowded Dresden’s Neumarkt square, which constitutes the heart of the city’s historically reconstructed center. Most of them stood facing a small truck parked in front of the pseudo-Baroque Frauenkirche, close to a larger-than-life statue of Martin Luther, one of the key figures
associated with the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation of the Roman Catholic Church in that part of Europe. One of the side panels had been removed for the truck to serve as a small stage, featuring a speaker's desk equipped with a microphone and a desk version of the German national flag, a sound system apparatus, and in the back a large banner reading 'Stop the Islamization of Europe!' [Stoppt die Islamisierung Europas!]. Ever more people rather quietly arrived at the square, while a handful conducted a sound check inside the truck. When an instrumental piece of music reminiscent of a football anthem began playing on the loudspeakers, the crowd immediately started to wave banners, placards, and flags. After about five minutes, the music faded into a recorded chorus of male voices chanting ‘Dresden shows how it’s done!’ [Dresden zeigt, wie’s geht!], while on stage a middle-aged man in a winter coat and scarf greeted the crowd: ‘It is Monday, January 20, 2020, and we welcome all patriots to Dresden, the capital of resistance!’ As such, he marked the beginning of the PEGIDA ritual.

Over the following one and a half hours, the people gathered on the square listened to familiar speakers, namely the long-term protest organizers, occasionally responding to the speeches with chants such as ‘Resistance!’ [Widerstand!]. Coordinated by the protest organizers, at some point they collectively set off for a roughly thirty-minute leisurely walk past some of Dresden’s major historical landmarks. The noise level increased when protestors passed a small gathering of counterdemonstrators, visibly and audibly associated with organized antifascism (‘Antifa’) and pro-migrant groups, prompting some men to shout ‘Lazy vermin!’ [Faules Pack!] at them. After returning to Neumarkt, the marchers gathered again in front of the truck to listen to a final speech, which ended with the proclamation that ‘PEGIDA came to stay; we stay until we win; and we will win!’ The protestors then sealed the event by jointly singing the official version of the German national anthem. After one of the organizers formally finalized the ritual by declaring the demonstration to be over, the crowd quickly dispersed, leaving barely any traces of the event.

_Ethnographic vignette no. 1_ illustrates some of the elements of the particular ‘political liturgy’ (Casquete 2006b) that structures the PEGIDA ritual. The standardized procedures and well-rehearsed scripts constituting this liturgy allowed participants to constantly (re-)perform the same actions within the two points in time that were clearly demarcated as the beginning and end of the demonstrations. The events always began with introductory elements, such as the recording of the ‘PEGIDA anthem’, the solemn announcement of its beginning, the present date, and the number of the protest event, followed by a reading of the ‘demonstration rules’: Each time, activist Wolfgang Taufkirch, the formal host, greeted the crowd with the words ‘It is Monday, the [date], and we welcome all patriots to Dresden, the capital of resistance!’ The Monday events then featured one or two speeches by the organizers, a half-hour march through the city centre, and another round of speeches once the crowd had returned to the square. Without exception, the demonstrations finished with the announcement of the next event(s), the joint singing of the official version of the German national anthem, and the host’s declaration of closure. Subsequently, the participants quickly rushed away; within a few minutes, only the small truck serving as a stage and around two dozen people remained on the square.

My observations moreover confirm the prominent role of dense symbolism and salient meanings in PEGIDA’s protests, which is one of the key characteristics of protest rituals (Casquete 2006a; Kubik 1994). Historical symbolism has played a predominate role at PEGIDA’s protest events (Volk 2020; for an analysis of PEGIDA’s references to the past on social media, see Richardson-Little and Merrill 2020). References to the past, such as the 1989 East German ‘Peaceful Revolution’ and the anti-Nazi resistance, conjured the
idea of the PEGIDA ritual being an act of non-violent resistance against an allegedly leftist, ‘neo-communist’ or ‘neo-fascist dictatorship’ in Germany (Volk 2022b). To this aim, the regular type of event, street demonstrations, took place on Mondays, evoking the Monday Demonstrations that contributed to the demise of the communist German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1989–90 and that have since become a strong symbol in the German protest arena (Druxes 2016; Patton 2017). In 2019–21, demonstrators moreover carried historical flags and placards of symbolic value, for instance the ‘Wirmer flag’ associated with the anti-Nazi resistance group gathered around Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg, and the peace symbols of the white dove as well as the slogan ‘Swords into ploughshares.’

Crucially, ‘local knowledge’, that is, the knowledge, beliefs, and convictions held by participants in the field (Yanow 2000), confirms my analysis of PEGIDA as a ritual: Over the years, PEGIDA had also become a symbolic performance for the people engaging in it. Participants understood PEGIDA as a collective practice, that is to say, as a practice synchronically enacted by a group of people. For instance, demonstrators and online activists referred to PEGIDA as something that they ‘did’, stating that ‘We are doing a PEGIDA’ [Wir machen eine PEGIDA]. The protest ritual was meaningful for participants beyond the mere voicing of disagreement with mainstream German politics. According to my observations, ‘doing a PEGIDA’ signified the idea of ‘standing up’ for ‘our country, our culture, and values’ as well as for ‘our civil rights, democracy, and the Basic Law.’ Drawing from (mystified) notions of democratic resistance in the past, demonstrators identified as resistance fighters against an allegedly totalitarian political system in the present. The core slogan ‘Dresden stands’ [Dresden steht], which activists proclaimed on the square, underlined the importance of being physically present and ‘standing’ on the square when ‘doing’ a PEGIDA.

**The PEGIDA ritual and movement persistence**

Whereas PEGIDA clearly matches the definition of protest ritual based on categories drawn from the extant literature, the link between the ritualization and persistence of protest remains obscure. Why do several hundred people ‘do a PEGIDA’ so regularly and over such an extended time period? Or more concretely, why did they do one on that coldish, dark evening of January 20, 2020, as reported in Ethnographic vignette no. 1? External factors can hardly account for the demonstration that evening. In fact, the local, regional, national, and even European political context did not seem to incite far-right mobilization at that time. Beyond the extended decrease in the public salience of the issue of immigration in Germany, the 2019 Saxon regional elections had already occurred more than four months prior, and nearly three months had passed since the city council’s controversial adoption of a motion on a so-called ‘Nazi emergency’, which had enraged far-right demonstrators. Not least, the left-wing counter-mobilization against PEGIDA – also a factor that might encourage participation in far-right protests via polarizing movement-countermovement dynamics (Vüllers and Hellmeier 2022) – had remained rather limited during the previous weeks, with the exception of the anniversary celebration in October 2019. In turn, one could hardly have predicted the nature and scope of the multiple crises that occurred in the year 2020. Largely unexpected was the government crisis in the state of Thuringia, Saxony’s direct neighbor, which
shocked German national politics in early February. Even more so, the vast consequences affecting basically all aspects of social and political life as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic were still beyond imagination. At the same time, January 20, 2020, did not mark an important date in the internal ‘event calendar’ either. Rather, activists had organized large-scale Sunday afternoon events to celebrate the five-year anniversary of the movement in October 2019 and Christmas in December 2019, and they were preparing for the notable demonstration no. 200 scheduled in February 2020.

Assuming a lack of external triggers, this article’s interpretive approach and specifically the ethnographic lens suggest that it was mainly the previous ritualization of protest that accounts for the demonstration that evening – as well as for long-term mobilization writ large. The meaning of protest and the practice of protesting are linked in the sense of constitutive causality (Lebow 2009; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012, 52). For organizers and participants alike, the PEGIDA events had acquired broader, multi-layered meanings of non-violent and democratic resistance, relating to powerful ideas of political change, which over time became the key incentive to take to the streets. In addition to an understanding of the demonstrations as grassroots performances of democratic resistance, my observations in 2019–21, especially of several anniversary events, suggest that by 2021 it was even the persistence of PEGIDA and repetitiveness of protest itself that had become most important to participants. Over the years, the leading activists came to understand themselves as resilient protest organizers and public protest as a core element of ‘local political culture.’ Hence, anniversary events, which were the most important gatherings in PEGIDA’s self-referential ritual calendar, chiefly served as a means for leading activists, participants, and guest speakers from the German and European far-right scene to congratulate each other for their long-term ‘commitment’ and ‘effort.’ In October 2021, invited guests exalted PEGIDA as a ‘monument’ and Dresden as the ‘capital of resistance.’ They proclaimed yet again that ‘PEGIDA came to stay; we stay until we win; and we will win!’; they then proceeded to ridicule the media and academic commentators for predicting that PEGIDA would only have a short lifespan.

The evolution of PEGIDA during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic underscores the constitutive role of the ritual (Volk, 2022a). Suddenly confronted with a large-scale ban on demonstrations, PEGIDA did not slip into abeyance (Taylor and Crossley 2013), losing presence in the German protest arena. Rather, activists continued to organize (legal) protests, adapting the protest ritual to the new conditions by translating its ‘political liturgy’ into the virtual realm. As Table 1 shows, six such virtual protest events took place during the first lockdown period in April and May 2020. All these repetitive events were organized (or planned) for Monday evenings, following largely the same standardized structure as the previous street demonstrations, and they featured the same key symbolic elements – including a ‘virtual march.’ Reporting from PEGIDA’s first virtual event in April 2020, Ethnographic vignette no. 2 illustrates some of the many parallels between PEGIDA’s virtual and street rituals.

Ethnographic vignette no. 2

Now, about three months later, on a Monday evening in the beginning of April 2020, around 1,000 internet users have accessed the channel ‘LUTZiges Lutz Bachmann’ on the online video sharing platform YouTube. They are ‘waiting’, as YouTube puts it, for the beginning of a livestream. The screen still shows a static image, namely a digital collage reading ‘For our
country, our culture, and our values! Dresden’s first virtual evening stroll’ in front of the colors of the German flag: black, red, and gold. There is quite a lot of activity in the chatroom: Logged-in users write greetings to each other and exchange information about protest events across Germany. Then, a video begins, showing a handcrafted toy truck, with three figurines bearing PEGIDA stickers on their chests sitting in it, and a couple of paper flags arranged around a tiny speaker’s desk. The video is accompanied by the usual football-like instrumental music. After about four minutes, host Wolfgang Taufkirch appears on the screen, behind him a German flag of crumpled fabric. He declares: ‘It is Monday, April 6, 2020, and we welcome all patriots here in the livestream, the platform of resistance!’ With these words, the first virtual PEGIDA ritual took off.

Over the following hour, YouTube users located potentially anywhere in Germany and the world could witness something falling between a friend group’s video call and an online ‘conference’: Leading activists took turns delivering pre-written speeches live, while familiar guests from the German-speaking far-right scene appeared in pre-recorded audio and video recordings from what seemed to be their homes. After about half an hour – 1,700 users had accessed the page by then – moderator Lutz Bachmann announced the beginning of the ‘virtual march’, and the screen then showed a high-speed video of the march in Dresden on February 17, 2020. In response, the chat board erupted with heart emoticons in black, red, and gold. After two more speeches, the moderator announced the end of the event, but not before sharing some of the plans for further virtual marches in the following weeks. In the chat, viewers responded enthusiastically by hitting the ‘Like’ button. After sealing the ritual with the usual recording of the German national anthem, the organizers waved goodbye to the viewers, and shortly thereafter the livestream ended.

In calling attention to some of the conscious practices of digitizing the ‘political liturgy’ of the PEGIDA ritual, Ethnographic vignette no. 2 again highlights the role of the leading activists and local knowledge in the ritualization of PEGIDA. Protest leaders clearly have a sense of the group-constitutive function of the protest ritual: since suspending the protests or significantly altering them would have caused PEGIDA to temporarily disappear from the spotlight, leaders adapted the ritual to ensure the (symbolic) continuity of protest also during the lockdown. By advertising further virtual events and promising a quick return to the public space of Dresden, Lutz Bachmann sought to ensure movement persistence beyond the pandemic.

Not least, Ethnographic vignette no. 2 aids researchers in appreciating the ritualistic qualities of far-right online activism. Similar to the urban symbolic landscape of Dresden, social media may constitute a backdrop for symbolic performances expressing powerful ideas associated with protest rituals. In this case, the YouTube platform offered a (digital) space for activists to gather and exchange ideas in real time, thus continuing to create collective experiences and memories. The activities in the chatroom indicate, at least to some extent, the generation of collective positive emotions towards the protest event itself and (imagined) communities of protestors.

Concluding remarks

This article set out with the claim that interpretive and specifically ethnographic approaches to politics ‘allow to see different things and they allow to see things differently’ (Brodkin 2017, 131–32). Regarding my case study of the far-right social movement organization PEGIDA, this lens indeed allows researchers to see different things, notably the constitutive role of ritualized protest both on the streets and
online as a novel explanation for PEGIDA’s persistence in Dresden well beyond its peak in 2014–15. Also, it allows researchers to see things differently, namely redefining PEGIDA as a symbolic performance conveying dense, multi-layered meanings of ‘democratic resistance’. From a conceptual standpoint, the key contribution thus relates to making the analytical category of protest ritual fruitful for the analysis of contemporary far-right activism, including in digital contexts. Based on an emic perspective that includes some of the processes of on-site meaning-making, it refines existing theory and demonstrates a link between the ritualization of protest and movement persistence. Drawing from the interpretive concept of constitutive causality, it argues that ritualistic protest may shape the internal dynamics of mobilization if it represents a powerful idea to participants.

My analysis and findings tie in with current debates within the broader academic literature on far-right social movements. The focus on a locally tied far-right social movement organization confirms that place matters in politics writ large, on the (far) right of the political spectrum in particular (Heinisch, Massetti, and Mazzoleni 2020). Crucially, my case study adds new insights that extend beyond the well-documented urban-rural cleavage in far-right voting, with far-right parties performing better in rural areas (Brooks 2020; Cramer 2016; Fitzgerald 2018). The example of PEGIDA highlights that far-right politics, especially in the protest arena, also flourish in urban settings. Additionally, my study shows that localism is not only a top-down strategy by institutionalized political parties and charismatic leaders (Paxton 2020; Weisskircher 2022), but can be adopted also by grassroots actors.

Not least, by highlighting some of the opportunities of ethnographic methods in particular in this field of study, my analysis adds to emic approaches to the far right (Fangen 2020; Pilkington 2016; Virchow 2007). Arguably, it was my experience of having acted as a participant observer of PEGIDA’s public protest over an extended period of time that allows me to ‘see things differently.’ By repeatedly participating in the PEGIDA ritual, that is, standing in the middle of the crowd, listening to speeches, and marching in the city, I generated a unique dataset that offers insights into qualitative aspects of activism beyond the mere frequency of protest and participation numbers. One of the principal advantages of my patchwork ethnography was its flexibility in adapting to the radical change in fieldwork research during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since it deals with an as yet under-researched concept, my analysis opens up avenues for further research on the far right and social movements more broadly. Future work should examine further cases in which ritualization shapes the dynamics of mobilization, exploring both positive and negative links between protest rituals and movement persistence. From a methodological standpoint, such research would benefit from comparative research designs as well as a broader array of methods within the interpretive paradigm, for instance in-depth interviews with demonstrators. Additionally, future studies should account for other internal factors as well – such as the leadership, organization, and ideology – that shape the dynamics of mobilization and how they are interrelated with the ritualization of protest.
Note

1. While I could not independently verify PEGIDA’s entire event calendar, the total number of events is rather credible. First, it matches estimations, knowing that PEGIDA initially organized weekly and later bi-monthly demonstrations in Dresden. Second, PEGIDA’s own counting matched my independent research (also relying on media sources) during the two years that my corpus covers, indicating the overall trustworthiness of the group’s own declaration.

Acknowledgements

This research received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 765224 [FATIGUE] in 2018–2021 and from the Finnish Kone Foundation under grant agreement No. 201904639 [NTUS] in 2021–2022.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by H2020 European Research Council: [Grant Number 765224]; Koneen Säätiö: [Grant Number 201904639].

Data Availability Statement

Data only available upon request due to privacy/ethical restrictions.

Ethics

As part of a project that has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, this research meets the ethical guidelines as outlined by the European Commission. It received ethical approval at Jagiellonian University in Kraków in 2019 by Prof. dr. hab. Zdzislaw Mach, Faculty of International and Political Studies, and in 2020–21 by the then-established Ethics in Research Commission of the Institute for European Studies.

ORCID

Sabine Volk http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0675-516X

Bibliography

Albertazzi, D., and M. Zulianello. 2021. “Populist Electoral Competition in Italy: The Impact of Sub-National Contextual Factors.” Contemporary Italian Politics 13 (1): 4–30.
Aronoff, M. J., and J. Kubik. 2013. Anthropology and Political Science: A Convergent Approach. New York: Berghahn Books.
Art, D. 2005. The Politics of the Nazi Past in Germany and Austria. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Balsiger, P., and A. Lambelet. 2014. “Participant Observation.” In Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research, edited by D. della Porta, 144–172. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Baumgarten, B., P. Daphi, and P. Ullrich, eds. 2014. Conceptualizing Culture in Social Movement Research. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bayard de Volo, L., and E. Schatz. 2004. “From the Inside Out: Ethnographic Methods in Political Research.” PS: Political Science & Politics 37 (2): 267–271.

Berntzen, L. E., and M. Weisskircher. 2016. “Anti-Islamic PEGIDA Beyond Germany: Explaining Differences in Mobilisation.” Journal of Intercultural Studies 37 (6): 556–573.

Biebricher, T. 2018. Geistig-moralische Wende. Die Erschöpfung des deutschen Konservatismus [Spiritual-moral turn. The exhaustion of German conservatism]. Berlin: Matthes & Seitz.

Blee, K. M. 1996. “Becoming a Racist: Women in Contemporary Ku Klux Klan and Neo-Nazi Groups.” Gender & Society 10 (6): 680–702.

Brodkin, E. Z. 2017. “The Ethnographic Turn in Political Science: Reflections on the State of the Art.” PS: Political Science & Politics 50 (1): 131–134.

Brooks, S. 2020. “Brexit and the Politics of the Rural.” Sociologia Ruralis 60 (4): 790–809.

Caiani, M., D. della Porta, and C. Wagemann. 2012. Mobilizing on the Extreme Right: Germany, Italy, and the United States. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Caiani, M., and M. Weisskircher. 2021. “Anti-Nationalist Europeans and Pro-European Nativists on the Streets: Visions of Europe from the Left to the Far Right.” Social Movement Studies 21 (1–2): 216–233.

Casquete, J. 2006a. “The Power of Demonstrations.” Social Movement Studies 5 (1): 45–60.

Casquete, J. 2006b. “Protest Rituals and Uncivil Communities.” Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions 7 (3): 283–301.

Castelli Gattinara, P., C. Froio, and A. L. P. Pirro. 2022. “Far-Right Protest Mobilisation in Europe: Grievances, Opportunities and Resources.” European Journal of Political Research 61 (4): 1019–1041.

Castelli Gattinara, P., and A. L. P. Pirro. 2019. “The Far Right as Social Movement.” European Societies 21 (4): 447–462.

Chou, M., B. Moffitt, and R. Busbridge. 2022. “The Localist Turn in Populism Studies.” Swiss Political Science Review 28 (1): 129–141.

Corte, U., and B. Edwards. 2008. “White Power Music and the Mobilization of Racist Social Movements.” Music and Arts in Action 1 (1): 3–20.

Couri, D. N. 2016. “A Clash of Civilizations? Pegida and the Rise of Cultural Nationalism.” German Politics and Society 34 (4): 54–67.

Cramer, K. J. 2016. The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Daphi, P. 2017. Becoming a Movement: Identity, Narrative and Memory in the European Global Justice Movement. London: Rowman & Littlefield.

Decker, F. 2000. “Über das Scheitern des neuen Rechtspopulismus in Deutschland: Republikaner, Statt- Partei und der Bund Freier Bürger.” Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft 29 (2): 237–256.

Dennison, J., and A. Geddes. 2019. “A Rising Tide? The Salience of Immigration and the Rise of Anti-Immigration Political Parties in Western Europe.” The Political Quarterly 90 (1): 107–116.

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.

Druxes, H. 2016. “Montag ist wieder Pegida-Tag! Pegida’s Community Building and Discursive Strategies.” German Politics and Society 34 (4): 17–33.

Druxes, H., and P. A. Simpson. 2016. “Introduction: Pegida as a European Far-Right Populist Movement.” German Politics and Society 34 (4): 1–16.

Eggeling, K. A. 2021. “At Work with Practice Theory, ‘Failed’ Fieldwork, or How to See International Politics in an Empty Chair.” Millennium: Journal of International Studies 50 (1): 149–173.

Eyerman, R. 2006. “Performing Opposition or, How Social Movements Move.” In Social Performance. Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual, edited by J. C. Alexander, B. Giesen, and J. L. Mast, 193–217. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Falkenbach, M., and S. L. Greer. 2018. “Political Parties Matter: The Impact of the Populist Radical Right on Health.” European Journal of Public Health 28 (3): 15–18.

Fangen, K. 2020. “An Observational Study of the Norwegian Far Right: Some Reflections.” In Researching the Far Right: Theory, Method and Practice, edited by S. D. Ashe, J. Busher, G. Macklin, and A. Winter, 241–253. London and New York: Routledge.

Fitzgerald, J. 2018. Close to Home: Local Ties and Voting Radical Right in Europe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Frei, N., R. Schäfer, and O. Nachtwey. 2021. “Die Proteste gegen die Corona-Maßnahmen: Eine soziologische Annäherung.” Forschungsjournal Soziale Bewegungen 34 (2): 249–258.

Froio, C., and P. C. Gattinara. 2015. “Neo-Fascist Mobilization in Contemporary Italy. Ideology and Repertoire of Action of CasaPound Italia.” Journal for Deradicalization (2): 86–118.

Geertz, C. 1973. The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays. New York: Basic Books.

Goodwin, M. J. 2006. “The Rise and Faults of the Internalist Perspective in Extreme Right Studies.” Representation 42 (4): 347–364.

Góralska, M. 2020. “Anthropology from Home: Advice on Digital Ethnography for the Pandemic Times.” Anthropology in Action 27 (1): 46–52.

Günel, G., S. Varma, and C. Watanabe. 2020. “A Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography.” Fieldsights (blog). September 6, 2020. https://culanth.org/fieldsights/a-manifesto-for-patchwork-ethnography.

Handelman, D. 1998. Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events. 2nd ed. New York: Berghahn Books.

Heinisch, R., E. Massetti, and O. Mazzoleni, eds. 2020. The People and the Nation: Populism and Ethnopolitical Territorial Politics in Europe. New York: Routledge.

Hine, C. 2017. “Virtual Ethnography: Modes, Varieties, Affordances.” In The SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods, edited by N. G. Fielding, R. M. Lee, and Blank, Grant, 2nd ed. 401–415. London: SAGE.

Hutter, S., and H. Kriesi. 2013. “Movements of the Left, Movements of the Right Reconsidered.” In He Future of Social Movement Research: Dynamics, Mechanisms, and Processes, edited by J. V. Stekelenburg, C. Roggeband, and B. Klandermans, 281–298. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Jasper, J. M. 1997. The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Jasper, J. M. 2004. “A Strategic Approach to Collective Action: Looking for Agency in Social-Movement Choices.” Mobilization: An International Quarterly 9 (1): 1–16.

Jasper, J. M., and J. W. Duyvendak, eds. 2015. Players and Arenas: The Interactive Dynamics of Protest. Amsterdam: Amsterdum University Press.

Jasper, J. M., L. Elliott-Negri, I. Jabol-Carolus, M. Kagan, J. Mahlbacher, M. Weisskircher, and A. Zheinina. 2022. Gains and Losses: How Protestors Win and Lose. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kertzer, D. I. 1988. The People and the Nation: Populism and Ethnoconcerned Citizens’? Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics 4 (4): 72–88.

Kröger, D., A. Schneider, and C. Springer. 2019. “Ist Pegida am Ende?” Sächsische Zeitung, October 20, 2019. https://www.sächsische.de/pegida-dresden-5-jahre-demo-altmarkt-herz-statt-hetzebachmann-5130917.html.

Kubik, J. 1994. The Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
Lebow, R. N. 2009. “Constitutive Causality: Imagined Spaces and Political Practices.” Millennium: Journal of International Studies 38 (2): 211–239.

Mach, Z. 1992. “Continuity and Change in Political Ritual: May Day in Poland.” In Revitalizing European Rituals, edited by J. Boissevain, 43–61. London: Routledge.

Mau, S. 2019. Lütten Klein. Berlin: Suhrkamp.

McCarthy, J. D., and M. N. Zald. 1977. “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory.” American Journal of Sociology 82 (6): 1212–1241.

Mosca, L. 2014. “Methodological Practices in Social Movement Online Research.” In Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research, edited by D. della Porta, 397–417. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mudde, C. 2019. The Far Right Today. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Nissen, A. 2022. Europeanisation of the Contemporary Far Right: Generation Identity and Fortress Europe. New York: Routledge.

Patton, D. F. 2017. “Monday, Monday: Eastern Protest Movements and German Party Politics Since 1989.” German Politics 26 (4): 480–497.

Patzelt, W. 2015. “Repräsentationslücken im politischen System Deutschlands? Der Fall PEGIDA.” Zeitschrift für Staats- und Europawissenschaften / Journal for Comparative Government and European Policy 13 (1): 99–126.

Paxton, F. 2020. “Towards a Populist Local Democracy? The Consequences of Populist Radical Right Local Government Leadership in Western Europe.” Representation 56 (3): 411–430.

Peterson, A., M. Wahlström, M. Wennerhag, C. Christiano, and J.-M. Sabucedo. 2012. “May Day Demonstrations in Five European Countries.” Mobilization: An International Quarterly 17 (3): 281–300.

Pilkington, H. 2016. Loud and Proud: Passion and Politics in the English Defence League. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Pilkington, H. 2021. “Why should We Care What Extremists Think? The Contribution of Emic Perspectives to Understanding the ‘Right-Wing Extremist’ Mind-Set.” Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 51 (3): 318–346.

Pirro, A. L. P. 2022. “Far Right: The Significance of an Umbrella Concept.” Nations and Nationalism 10.1111/nana.12860.

Plows, A. 2008. “Social Movements and Ethnographic Methodologies: An Analysis Using Case Study Examples.” Sociology Compass 2 (5): 1523–1538.

Polletta, F., and J. M. Jasper. 2001. “Collective Identity and Social Movements.” Annual Review of Sociology 27: 283–305.

Reuband, K.-H. 2017. “Die Dynamik des Pegida Protests. Der Einfluss von Ereignissen und bewegungsspezifischer Mobilisierung auf Teilnehmerzahlen und Teilnehmerzusammensetzung.” Mitteilungen des Instituts für Deutsches und Internationales Parteienrecht und Parteienforschung 23: 112–130.

Reuband, K.-H. 2020. “Rechtspopulistischer Protest – eine Folge lokaler politischer Kultur? Dresden als Entstehungs- und Veranstaltungsort der PEGIDA-Kundgebungen.” MIP Zeitschrift für Parteienforschung 26 (2): 132–157.

Richardson-Little, N., and S. Merrill. 2020. “Who is the Volk? PEGIDA and the Contested Memory of 1989 on Social Media.” In Social Movements, Cultural Memory and Digital Media: Mobilising Mediated Remembrance, edited by S. Merrill, E. Keightley, and P. Daphi, 59–84. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Rucht, D. 2003. “Einleitung: Vom Sinn eines Protestrituals.” In Berlin, 1. Mai 2002: Politische Demonstrationsrituale, edited by D. Rucht, 9–20. Wiesbaden: Springer.

Rucht, D., P. Daphi, P. Kocyba, M. Neuber, J. Roose, F. Scholl, M. Sommer, W. Stuppert, and S. Zajak. 2015. “Protestforschung am Limit. Eine Soziologische Annäherung an Pegida.” Ipb Working Paper. Berlin: Verein für Protest- und Bewegungsforschung. https://protestinstitut.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/protestforschung-am-limit_ipb-working-paper_web.pdf.

Scharf, S., and C. Pleul. 2016. “Im Netz ist jeden Tag Montag.” In PEGIDA: Rechtspopulismus zwischen Fremdenangst und "Wende"-Enttäuschung? Analysen im Überblick, edited by K.-S. Rehberg, F. Kunz, and T. Schlinzig, 83–98. Bielefeld: Transcript.
Schwartz-Shea, P., and D. Yanow. 2012. Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes. New York: Routledge.

Snow, D. A. 2013. “Case Studies and Social Movements.” In The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements, edited by D. A. Snow, D. della Porta, B. Klandermans, and D. McAdam, 1–4. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell.

Taylor, V., and A. D. Crossley. 2013. “Abeyance.” In The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements, edited by D. A. Snow, D. della Porta, B. Klandermans, and D. McAdam, 1–2. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell.

Ther, P. 2019. Das andere Ende der Geschichte. Über die Große Transformation. Berlin: Suhrkamp.

Tilly, C. 2007. “Afterword: Political Ethnography as Art and Science.” In New Perspectives in Political Ethnography, edited by L. Joseph, M. Mahler, and J. Auyero, 247–250. New York: Springer.

Vees-Gulani, S. 2021. “Symbol of Reconciliation and Far-Right Stronghold? PEGIDA, AfD, and Memory Culture in Dresden.” German Politics and Society 39 (1): 56–78.

Virchow, F. 2007. “Performance, Emotion, and Ideology: On the Creation of ‘Collectives of Emotion’ and Viewpoint in the Contemporary German Far Right.” Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 36 (2): 147–164.

Virchow, F. 2011. “Die ‘Demonstrationspolitik’ der extremen Rechten im Bundesgebiet und im Land Brandenburg.” In Die Grenzen der Toleranz: Rechtsextremes Milieu und demokratische Gesellschaft in Brandenburg. Bilanz und Perspektiven, edited by C. Kopke, 109–128. Potsdam: Universitätsverlag Potsdam.

Virchow, F. 2016. “PEGIDA: Understanding the Emergence and Essence of Nativist Protest in Dresden.” Journal of Intercultural Studies 37 (6): 541–555.

Volk, S. 2019. “Speaking for ‘the European People? How the Transnational Alliance Fortress Europe Constructs a Populist Counter-Narrative to European Integration.” Politique Européenne 66: 120–149.

Volk, S. 2020. “Wir Sind Das Volk!” Representative Claim-Making and Populist Style in the PEGIDA Movement’s Discourse.” German Politics 29 (4): 599–616.

Volk, S. 2021. “Die rechtspopulistische PEGIDA in der COVID-19 Pandemie: Virtueller Protest ‘für unsere Bürgerrechte.” Forschungsjournal Soziale Bewegungen 34 (2): 235–248.

Volk, S. 2022a. “Far-Right Digital Activism During and Beyond Pandemic: A ‘Patchwork’ Ethnographic Approach.” Ethnologia Polona 43.

Volk, S. 2022b. “Resisting ‘Leftist Dictatorship’? Memory Politics and Collective Action Framing in Far-Right Populist Street Protest.” European Politics and Society. 10.1080/23745118.2022.2058756.

Vorländer, H., M. Herold, and S. Schäller. 2018. PEGIDA and New Right-Wing Populism in Germany. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Vüllers, J., and S. Hellmeier. 2022. “Does Counter-Mobilization Contain Right-Wing Populist Movements? Evidence from Germany.” European Journal of Political Research 61 (1): 21–45.

Weisskircher, M. 2020. “The Strength of Far-Right AfD in Eastern Germany: The East-West Divide and the Multiple Causes Behind ‘Populism’.“ The Political Quarterly 91 (3): 614–622.

Weisskircher, M. 2022. “The Importance of Being Eastern German: The Multiple Heartlands of Germany’s Far Right.” In State of the Region Report 2021: Identity and the Far Right in the Baltic Sea Region and Eastern Europe Today, 91–99. Stockholm: Centre for Baltic and East European Studies, Södertörn University.

Weisskircher, M., and L. E. Berntzen. 2019. “Remaining on the Streets. Anti-Islamic PEGIDA Mobilization and its Relationship to Far-Right Party Politics.” In Radical Right “Movement Parties” in Europe, edited by M. Caiani, and O. Cisař, 114–130. London: Routledge.

Weisskircher, M., S. Hutter, and E. Borbáth. 2022. “Protest and Electoral Breakthrough: Challenger Party-Movement Interactions in Germany.” German Politics. doi:10.1080/09644008.2022.2044473.

Wilde, P. D., R. Koopmans, W. Merkel, O. Strijbis, and M. Zürn. 2019. The Struggle Over Borders. Cosmopolitanism and Communitarianism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wilkinson, C. 2013. “Not Just Finding What You (Thought You) Were Looking for: Reflections on Fieldwork Data and Theory.” In Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn, edited by D. Yanow, and P. Schwartz-Shea, 2nd ed. 387–405. London: M.E. Sharpe.
Yanow, D. 2000. *Conducting Interpretive Policy Analysis*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Yoder, J. A. 2020. “‘Revenge of the East’? The AfD’s Appeal in Eastern Germany and Mainstream Parties’ Responses.” *German Politics and Society* 38 (2): 35–58.

Zamponi, L. 2018. *Social Movements, Memory and Media: Narrative in Action in the Italian and Spanish Student Movements*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Zuev, D., and F. Virchow. 2014. “Performing National-Identity: The Many Logics of Producing National Belongings in Public Rituals and Events.” *Nations and Nationalism* 20 (2): 191–199.