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Variations within the Norwegian far right: from neo-Nazism to anti-Islamism

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ABSTRACT

Since 2011, we have witnessed both the worst terror attack ever on Norwegian soil as well as an attempted act of terror. Both actions were conducted by right-wing extremists, who were radicalized by inspiration from, but not actual participation in, far right anti-Islamist groups. Even though most of the current far right groups in Norway do not openly support violence they are not innocent, as the rhetoric they propagate has directly inspired such actions. In this article, we use social movement theory to understand interviews we conducted with leaders of two anti-Islamist groups and one neo-Nazi group, specifically to analyse their mobilizing ideas and proposed solutions to the problems they imagine, as well as whether they believe they have support in the general population. Further, we analyse how the actors' views relate to broader discourses in society. As a background to our analysis, we refer to the larger landscape of far-right groups in Norway during past decades, as well as their equivalents in other European countries.

Introduction

During the past decade in Norway, we have witnessed the worst terror attack ever on Norwegian soil as well as an attempted act of terror. It was a fear of the Islamization of Europe that motivated Anders Behring Breivik on 22 July 2011 to bomb the government headquarters in Oslo (killing eight people) and thereafter go on a shooting rampage of adolescents at a Labour Party youth camp (killing 69). In addition, Philip Manshaus, who attempted to shoot Muslims in the Al-Noor Islamic Centre on 10 August 2019, was inspired by anti-Islamist ideas.

Importantly, it was anti-Islamic rhetoric rather than neo-Nazi rhetoric that inspired these terror attacks, despite the fact that existing anti-Islamic groups in Norway do not openly support violence, whereas neo-Nazi groups do. Therefore, we find it urgent to consider the worldviews and mobilizing potential of leading figures of different far-right groups. In this article, we use a multiple case design to study the Norwegian far-right movement, based on interviews with group leaders. We analyse the varying degrees of extremeness among three actors of the Norwegian far right and examine how the narrative repertoire of these actors is (or is not) related to more widespread discourses

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in society. We contextualize their standpoints in social movement theory and framing theory and pose the following questions: What are their perceived problems and proposed solutions, and what support (or lack thereof) do they believe they have within the general populations?

More specifically, we compare the worldviews of the leader figures of the groups Vigrid, Pegida and Stop the Islamization of Norway (SIAN). These groups, however, do not operate in a national vacuum, as they have equivalents in other European countries (SIAN is inspired by Stop Islamization of Europe and Pegida is inspired by Pegida in Germany).¹ Vigrid is a more curious case, though its blend of Nordic mythology and paganism on the one hand,² and neo-Nazism/anti-Semitism on the other hand,³ is a more general phenomenon with equivalents in many countries. Thus, similar to Figenschou and Ihlebæk,⁴ we argue that even though our study focuses specifically on the far right in Norway, its findings are also relevant in other national contexts, since the overarching positions and lines of arguments of these groups are transnational.

The article proceeds as follows: first, we describe the concepts of far right, anti-Islamism and neo-Nazism, and the main movement from neo-Nazism to anti-Islamism during recent decades, before describing some of the main actors in the Norwegian far right movement. Second, we describe our analytical tools of social movement and framing theory, before describing our data and methodology. Third, follows a discussion of the problem, solution to the problem and perception of support (or lack thereof) in the Norwegian population among three figures of the Norwegian far right, before we finally conclude.

From neo-Nazism to anti-Islamism

A number of different concepts are used to describe groups and individuals of the far right, including right-wing extremism, right-wing radicalism and the more specific anti-Islamism/Islamophobia and neo-Nazism or anti-Semitism. Carter, who has systematically compared many of the most influential definitions of the concept of right-wing extremism, argues that despite ‘the frequent warnings that we lack an unequivocal definition of this concept, there is actually a high degree of consensus amongst the definitions put forward by different scholars’.⁵ Her analysis concludes that a minimal definition of right-wing extremism is ‘an ideology that encompasses authoritarianism, anti-democracy and exclusionary and/or holistic nationalism’.⁶ The groups we have studied largely fit with this definition; however, we have chosen the broader concept of the ‘far right’ since it is not entirely clear that, for example, the Norwegian Pegida is anti-democratic. To be more specific, Pegida calls for direct democracy, in contrast to the power exercised by the elite (politicians, the press, media and human rights activists),⁷ and they distinguish themselves from racism and anti-Semitism.⁸

In this article, we use the concept of far right to refer to both neo-Nazis and anti-Islamists, as we see these as different positionings within the far-right movement. One of the most prominent features of the far right is *nativism*, or the view that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native groups and that non-native persons and ideas are fundamentally threatening to the nation-state’s homogeneity.⁹ The far right sees fighting against those who ‘threaten’ a change in the beliefs and values of the nation as one of its main tasks.¹⁰

The concept of neo-Nazism is normally used to describe individuals and groups with ideologies based on racism, anti-Semitism, and 'leaderless resistance'.¹¹ The new (neo) label of the ideology is primarily related to the fact that it appeared several decades after World War II, not to the fact that the content in itself is new.¹² For example, the conspiracy theories of neo-Nazism are often replications of old anti-Semitic conspiracy theories.¹³ Anti-Islamism is variously also called Islamophobia; however, we prefer to use the more general label anti-Islamism, in order to primarily refer to the ideology itself, rather than to go into a discussion of its possible psychological components.¹⁴

It is well documented that the far-right movement in Europe and the US has shifted from a predominance of neo-Nazis before the turn of the century¹⁵ to anti-Islamist groups and individuals after the turn of the century.¹⁶ Al-Qaeda's terror attack on the World Trade Centre on 11 September 2001 in the United States and the subsequent 'War on Terror' contributed to an increased stigmatization of Muslims and a generalizing and scornful anti-Muslim rhetoric – especially by far right groups.¹⁷ Ensuing Islamic terror attacks in Europe, such as the Madrid train bombing in 2004, the London bombings in 2005, the Belgium bombing in 2014 and the Paris bombing in 2015 have also fuelled this development.¹⁸

As pointed out by Back and Sinha,¹⁹ two major factors behind the European discourse on Muslims and immigration during the past two decades are the fear that too many migrants are entering the country, and the fear of terror. Anti-Islamic groups argue that Muslims do not fit into Western society, and stress that Islam as a religion preaches a fundamental hatred towards Western values and ways of life.²⁰ This same anti-Muslim rhetoric has been on the rise in Norway since the turn of the century,²¹ despite the fact that so far no Jihadist terror attack has occurred on Norwegian soil. A report on Norway from the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance states that 'the association of Muslims on the one hand, and terrorism and violence on the other, and generalisations and stereotypes concerning persons of Muslim background have been on the rise in public debate'.²²

The rise in anti-Islamic groups in different countries in Europe and the US since 2000 can, despite variations among them, be seen as forming a global anti-Islamic movement, because of their shared anti-Islamic identity and rhetoric, and their overlapping and close ties.²³ Similarly, it makes sense to label the different neo-Nazi or radical nationalist groups of the 1990s as a movement as well, because of the contact between and similarity among different groups,²⁴ including contacts and similarities across national borders.²⁵

In this article, we distinguish between two different strains of the far-right movement, namely neo-Nazis, which peaked during the 1990s, and anti-Islamists who saw growing support by the turn of the century. There are, however, some overlaps between these two strains. The reason why we distinguish between them is that they dominated in different periods, had fundamentally different political aims and different political adversaries. Common to both is that they contain a variety of groups, but with strong bonds among them. However, the neo-Nazis typically violated the boundaries of tolerance for the authorities, as they used symbols associated with treason, and carried out violent acts and thereby threatened the security of certain people. Street violence is thus far not typical of the anti-Islam movement in Norway, yet it is clear that some people with such views also commit violence, with Anders Behring Breivik's terror attack and Peter Manshaus' terror attempt as the most horrific examples.

Despite the difference in enemy images between anti-Islamic groups and neo-Nazi groups, there are actors within these two different ideological camps who cooperate, as recent joint demonstrations in Oslo between members of SIAN and the Nordic Resistance Movement illustrate.²⁶ Also, there are examples of actors in anti-Islamic groups, such as Pegida, who have openly supported Nazism, such as the founder of Pegida Germany, who was forced to resign after posting a picture of himself online emulating Hitler, and the leader of Pegida Cologne, who posted quotes from Hitler on the internet.²⁷ However, this is not to say that there are not important differences, particularly regarding the liberal turn in anti-Islamic groups.²⁸ In this article, we will go into a more detailed analysis of the similarities and differences between one neo-Nazi and two anti-Islamist actors in the far-right movement. First, however, there is a need to give a short overview of the Norwegian far right in general.

The Norwegian far right

SIAN originated in 2008, and it is one of the largest anti-Muslim membership organizations in Norway.²⁹ It is the Norwegian version of Stop Islamization of Europe (SIOE), which originated in Denmark in 2007.³⁰ SIAN previously had close ties to the Norwegian far-right non-parliamentary party, the Democrats³¹; however, the Democrats have since announced new regulations where persons who are active in SIAN are denied membership.³² On the organization's webpage, SIAN is defined as a non-party organization, and is neither left-wing nor right-wing.³³ In 2019, the leader was sentenced to a 30-day suspended jail term for a violation of the hate speech act.³⁴

Pegida is a mass mobilization initiative that emerged in Germany in 2014,³⁵ and spread to other German-speaking European countries and Scandinavia in 2015.³⁶ The organization's full name is *Patriotische Europäer Gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West). The Norwegian branch was temporarily supported by the Norwegian Defence League, and later by SIAN.³⁷

The organization Vigrid³⁸ emerged in 1998, much earlier than the two above-mentioned anti-Islamist groups.³⁹ Vigrid has shifted from being a one-man entity to a group with many young members in addition to its old leader,⁴⁰ and it clearly does not represent the primary strain within contemporary neo-Nazism. During the late 1990s, the leader organized weapons training and confirmations in the forest, and he 'distanced himself from intoxication and arbitrary street-violence' typical of the skinhead-dominated part of the neo Nazi scene.⁴¹ At one point, Vigrid ran for election, and received some hundred votes.⁴² Vigrid's leader propagates a blend of 'racist, anti-Semitic, conspiracy theorist and millenarian neo-Nazi political agenda with an Odinist religious outlook'.⁴³ In 2007, the leader was sentenced to conditional jail time for violations of the Criminal Code against hate speech following gross statements about Jews.⁴⁴

These are evidently not the only far-right groups in Norway, and our objective is not to focus on the entire scene. Other parts of the anti-Islamic movement, as pointed out by Berntzen and Sandberg, include 'several minor and politically autonomous organizations'.⁴⁵ They distinguish between the populist and radical elements of the movement, with SIAN, which is one of the organizations we study, as an example of

one of the more extreme organizations, and the alternative media website document.no as an example of a more moderate part of the movement.⁴⁶ Other radical examples of the Norwegian far right include the Nordic Resistance Movement (*Den nordiske motstandsbevegelsen*),⁴⁷ *Folkebevegelsen mot innvandring* (the People's Movement against Immigration),⁴⁸ Norwegian Defence League (which is a smaller and less important version of the English Defence League),⁴⁹ and *Soldiers of Odin*,⁵⁰ whereas other moderate examples include political parties like the right-wing populist Progress Party.⁵¹

Even though we have not included all of these organizations and groups in our analysis, our article provides an important contribution to current studies of the far right, mainly because very few studies are based on in-depth interviews with the group leaders.⁵² Yet such interviews provide thick descriptions of their world-views. Importantly, we will contextualize our analysis by reference to other studies of the Norwegian far right.

In Norway, the so-called neo-Nazi movement started with the emergence of some extreme right-wing political parties from the mid-1970s and during the 1980s, namely, *Norwegian Front* and *the National People's Party*. Members of these groups were responsible for carrying out a bomb attack (1979) and murder (1981).⁵³ Some of these activists continued their participation in the far-right movement during the 1990s. However, during that time, new groups also emerged, and there was a shift to more street violence and, especially during the first half of that decade, the prominence of the neo-Nazi skinhead subculture.⁵⁴ In general, there were a number of different far-right groups during the 1990s. Most of them were in contact with each other, and there was a lot of overlapping membership. However, their activity gradually slowed down during the late 1990s and early 2000s.⁵⁵

In 2001, a couple of members of the Oslo branch of the neo-Nazi group *Bootboys* committed the racist murder of Benjamin Hermansen, a fifteen-year-old youth with mixed Norwegian-African descent. After this tragic murder, many activists left the movement and there was neither much public interest in nor research on the movement during the following decade.⁵⁶ Still, it was at this time that the anti-Islamic branch of the far-right movement started to grow.⁵⁷

Even though most anti-Islamist groups and individuals in Norway are non-violent, it was in fact a person holding such views who conducted the most severely violent act in this country since the Second World War. On 22 July 2011, Anders Behring Breivik killed 77 people, most of them minors and young adults. The terrorist first detonated a bomb outside a Norwegian government building, before continuing to an island outside Oslo called Utøya, where he started shooting at the attendees of a camp arranged by the youth branch of the Norwegian Labour Party.

One year after the attack, the Norwegian Security Police (PST), in their annual threat assessment, announced that the attack had not resulted in a change in the level of threat by extremist groups in Norway.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, they stated, there are many people who gain inspiration from anti-Islamic groups' xenophobic rhetoric, and who sympathize with and support such attitudes. The number of individuals who encourage or threaten the use of violence through anti-Islamic rhetoric appears to be increasing, they stated. In general, however, the anti-Islamic groups that have been the most active during recent years do not openly support violence.⁵⁹ Even so, in 2019, Peter Manshaus, a 21-year-old right-wing extremist, attempted to shoot Muslims in a mosque in Bærum, the neighbour municipality of Oslo. He also shot his 17-year-old stepsister who was adopted from China. With the Breivik terror attack and the Manshaus terror-attempt in mind, it is clear

that anti-Islamist rhetoric is not without blame, and there is a need to follow the influence of such individuals and groups more closely.

In 2013, the right-wing populist Progress Party entered office for the first time in Norway, in coalition with the Conservative Party,⁶⁰ by making restrictive immigration policy its main campaign issue in the election.⁶¹ Moreover, in 2015, the so-called refugee crisis began, and 31,145 people applied for asylum (this number was three times higher than in previous years).⁶² Lucassen and Lubbers have found that the proportion of immigrants and/or asylum seekers is a relatively strong predictor of support for the far right.⁶³ However, this finding has been partly contradicted by other researchers.⁶⁴ Therefore, the electoral rise of the anti-immigrant right-wing populist Progress Party in parallel with the mainstreaming of far-right discourses on Muslims and Islam is a relationship of correlation and not necessarily causation.⁶⁵

In 2016, a state-funded Centre for Research on Extremism was established, and a multitude of new research projects on the Norwegian far right have started since then.

Social movement theory and the far right

A social movement, according to Melucci, is a form of collective action,⁶⁶ in the sense that there is a mutual recognition among actors that they are part of the same social unit. Further, their collective action is defined by their engagement in conflict, and the movement's actions violate the boundaries or limits of tolerance of a system.

Tourain restricts the use of the term social movement to conflictual actions that seek to change the social relations of power in decisive cultural areas, such as production, science, ethical values and others.⁶⁷ Even though he used the term to connote movements that are commonly understood as progressive and reform oriented, such as the environmental movement and the civil rights movement, an increasing number of scholars use the term also to refer to movements of the far right.⁶⁸

Importantly, several of the social movement theorists of the 1980s, such as Melucci, did not define nationalism or fascism as social movements.⁶⁹ Melucci restricted his thinking about violation and alteration of the system's boundaries to progressive social reformatory change. Wieviorka expanded on this limitation of the social movement concept by referring to such non-reformist movements as anti-social movements.⁷⁰ According to Wieviorka, an anti-social movement is made up of the same key elements as a social movement, but the elements are transformed. In an anti-social movement, the actor's social identity is defined by reference to an essence, nature, or a cultural category. The actor is pitted either against an enemy with whom he is implicitly at war or against an abstract, relatively indeterminate system, which is more or less mythical in nature. In contrast to the social movement, the anti-movement fails to generate a liberatory concept of society and is unwilling to accept internal tensions and debates.

This definition applies to the neo-Nazi faction of the far-right movement. Their social identity refers to nation, race, ethnicity, and other concepts used in an essentialist way. These activists often speak of the world in an essentialist way by referring to their own practice as instinctual and natural. During the 1990s, they were 'at war' with militant anti-Fascists and 'the system'.⁷¹ In most regards, they resembled Wieviorka's definition of the anti-movement.

According to Eyerman and Jamison, the cognitive praxis of a movement (like the magazines produced within it, for example) guides its actors.⁷² This does not necessarily occur consciously or explicitly, since movements seldom have a written political programme. We have previously studied the cognitive praxis of the neo-Nazis and how their production of fanzines functioned as a syllabus that defined the proper way of conceiving of the world for new recruits. Even so, there was a fluidity and variety of beliefs, which made it more suitable to describe them as a movement rather than a political organization. Furthermore, these groups, nostalgic as they were, articulated a historical project, which is another feature of social movements, according to Eyerman and Jamison.

The concept of a 'frame' has proven very influential among scholars researching social movements. Snow and Benford define a frame as consisting of interpretive schemata that simplify and condense the world.⁷³ Framing analysis enables us to focus on the process of meaning attribution that underlies conflict, as well as how activists respond to different conflicts. Just like frames attribute meaning to particular events, *collective action frames* do this in ways that are intended to 'mobilize potential adherents and constituents', 'garner bystander support', and 'demobilize antagonists'.⁷⁴ Activists involved in shaping these frames argue that a particular condition of society is intolerable or unreasonable, and stress a need for corrective action. According to Benford and Snow, collective action frames are an action-oriented sets of beliefs and meaning that inspire and legitimate activities and campaigns carried out by social movement groups.⁷⁵

Methodology

In this article, we wanted to analyse the worldviews of representatives of far-right groups that have emerged from the late 1990s and onwards. We were interested in the possible differences and similarities in worldviews between persons representing the neo-Nazi and the anti-Islamic part of the far-right movement. Qualitative interviews were useful as we wanted to collect data from people that were in a relatively specific context, and to get an understanding of the world from their perspectives and frames of reference. We accessed the group members via their websites, Facebook-profiles and/or their email addresses.⁷⁶

We had not planned a specific timeframe for the interviews – they lasted anywhere from 190 to 250 minutes. Moreover, we had defined set of topics that we wanted the participants to talk about, including questions that were essential given the fact that we used Benford and Snow's social movement theory as a point of departure. The interview guide was used in a flexible manner, in order to avoid interrupting the natural flow of the conversation.

With consent from the participants, all interviews were audio recorded. We conducted the first interview on 23 March 2017 with the leader and founder of the far-right group *Vigrid*. We met him in Notodden, about a two hours' drive from Oslo. Even though we met him in a public library, we still had the privacy necessary to conduct the interview without any interruptions or distractions, as we had a room to ourselves. The second interview was with a leader of *Pegida*, who for a period was also the leader of the Oslo branch of the far-right party *Demokratene* (currently, there is no active Oslo department of this organization). The interview with him was conducted on 7 July 2017. The third

and last interview was conducted on 10 July 2017 with the leader of SIAN. The second and third interviews were conducted over the phone.

All the informants received a consent form that they had to read and sign before the interviews. The consent form contained a description of the study and how and why we wanted them to contribute to it. Additionally, we allocated a few minutes right before the interviews to give them a description of the study (as the consent form was created at a relatively early stage of the research process) and we ensured that they had the chance to ask questions before we started. It should also be mentioned that all of the participants and their groups have voluntarily taken part in the Norwegian public debate. Thus, much of what was said during the interviews can also be found in other places.

In our analysis of the data, we used *thematic coding*, which is ‘a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data’.⁷⁷ We transcribed all interviews. Thereafter, we coded what the informants said into categories. In accordance with our use of the concept of *collective action frames*, the key topics were as follows: 1) *diagnostic framing*, or the actors’ understanding of what the problem is and who is to blame for it; 2) *prognostic framing*, or possible solutions to solve the problem identified or how to change the situation; and 3) *perceived support*, or whether or not the actors believe they have support in the population for their framing of the problem.

What is the problem?

In this first section, we discuss the participants’ *diagnostic framing*, that is, their understanding of what ‘the problem is’ and who is to blame for it. Common to social movements is that they ‘seek to remedy or alter some problematic situation or issue’; however, controversies often arise ‘regarding whom or what to blame’.⁷⁸ In general, anti-Islamic social movements share a two-sided definition of the problem, by first arguing that Islam is a totalitarian threat that undermines Western values, and second that the state and the cultural elite oppress the people.⁷⁹

Although two of our participants, the leaders of Pegida and SIAN, represent different anti-Islamic groups, they both support variations on the first part of this definition of the ‘problem’. In the following section, we explore their views, and show how they are part of a broader anti-Islamic social movement. Furthermore, we argue that while their views are part of a ‘negotiated shared meaning’,⁸⁰ the same does not hold equally true of Vigrid’s leader. For this reason, we explore his views separately.

Unsurprisingly, it became evident during the interviews that the abovementioned increasing influx of Muslims and Islam was part of the very problem shared by the leaders of both Pegida and SIAN. Therefore, we asked them what they thought characterized a Muslim. The Pegida leader answered by contrasting what he perceived as the Muslims’ way of life with the more liberal norms he thinks are typical of Norway:

A Muslim is someone from a Muslim country who doesn’t have the same views on equality between men and women as we have here in Norway. They do not accept homosexuality and they have an inherent hatred towards Jews. They are people from parts of the world who do not fit into our country because they are so different from us. They (...) refuse to integrate; they would rather develop parallel societies.

I: So what do you see as the main task for Pegida?

We are protesting against the immigration of Muslims and the totalitarian ideology of Islam.

Similarly, SIAN's leader contrasted the 'dangerous' ideology of Islam with the good virtues of Western societies:

A Muslim is someone who submits to Allah and Muhammed and is supposed to follow them. It's impossible to be a good or perfect Muslim. If you're a good Muslim it means that you're a bad person, because then you live your life like Muhammed did: misogyny, paedophilia and so on. Therefore, a good Muslim is not a good fellow human being. Our society is built on values that are completely different.

I: What do you see as the main task for SIAN?

Our main task is to reverse the Islamization of our society. We want to make people aware of what Islamization is, and how our freedom is being damaged by it. Multiculturalism is not a good thing. Multiculturalism does not work.

Both characterize the problem in the same way, which links up to the idea of Islamization. In Norway, the term 'Islamization by stealth' was initially introduced by Siv Jensen, the leader of the right-wing populist Progress Party, who in 2009 warned against the perceived threat of Muslims becoming 'too numerous' and gaining too much power in Norway.⁸¹ The term was inspired by Robert Spencer's book on 'Stealth Jihad'.⁸² The term indicates that society is slowly but surely becoming 'Islamized' unbeknownst to the population, and that the Muslims involved are hiding their true intentions. This line of thought is very much a replication of the main thesis of the Eurabia theory, a conspiracy theory that purports Muslim designs for swift world domination.⁸³ We find it interesting that this line of thought is shared both by members of the far right and by some (but not all) politicians of the right-wing populist *Progress Party*, which in the period between September 2013 and January 2019 was part of a coalition government in Norway.

Another view of both anti-Islamist leaders was that Muslims do not contribute to Norwegian society and instead incur a great economic cost for Norway. For instance, the SIAN leader stated that most immigrants are not refugees, but rather welfare tourists:

These guys do not want to contribute (...). They have a negative effect on the Norwegian economy. Most of the immigrants do not need protection; they are welfare tourists and not refugees.

Also, the Pegida leader was worried about the perceived unemployment rate among Muslims and the pressure this put on the welfare state:

It's most likely that only a third of Muslims in Norway have a job among those who should have a job. There is no doubt that if this continues, it will lead to an economic disaster for Norway.

This is part of a broader discourse about immigrants as a burden on the welfare system, which in Kymlicka's terms, can be labelled welfare chauvinism.⁸⁴ Interestingly, two different governments in Norway have tried to calculate the economic burden immigrants pose to the welfare state. Even though this indicates that this concern is shared by politicians across the political spectrum, the Progress Party has gone further than other parties in measuring the sustainability of the current level of immigration, and arguing that immigrants in general, and Muslims in particular, pose a threat to the sustainability

of the welfare state. This is evident in the 2013 report *Measures for an Economic and Culturally Sustainable Immigration*.⁸⁵

Another aspect of the problem that could be said to be part of a broader narrative, is the view shared by both the Pegida and SIAN leaders that violence is an inherent part of Islam, where Muslims are constructed as the violent ‘other’ and Muslim men in particular as dangerous and misogynistic.⁸⁶ The Pegida leader argued that Muslims are to blame for a large proportion of the violence and criminal acts carried out in Norway. By referring to the Brochmann Committee report *Integration and trust – Long-term consequences of high immigration*,⁸⁷ which was appointed by the government in order to consider the consequences of increased immigration, he legitimizes his statements:

The Brochmann committee found that six of the Muslim nationalities, Somalis, Afghans, Iraqis, Iranians, Kosovo Albanians and Moroccans, are three times more criminal than us Norwegians.

I: Does this have to do with Islam as a religion in itself?

Well I don’t look at Islam as a religion. It’s a totalitarian ideology. We can ask ourselves if it’s Islam, the Quran or Muslims that lead people to carry out these crimes. The truth is that it doesn’t matter to the victims. The problem is that the victims are being raped, robbed and subject to violence.

While Pegida’s leader did not want to elaborate why Muslims were violent (he just sees this as a fact), SIAN’s leader argued that the Quran itself encourages violence:

I have read large parts of the Quran, but I have mostly focused on the problematic verses. In the newer part of the Quran, you have 109 verses that encourage violence against us, 527 verses that show intolerance against us, and 124 verses that encourage warfare against us.

Both view Muslims as the problem and the scapegoats. In other words, they share a diagnostic framing of the problem that needs to be solved. They believe a certain situation in society is intolerable and argue that there is a need for corrective action. Further, the Pegida leader admitted in the interview that he has collaborated with members of SIAN. Therefore, there does not seem to be a substantial difference in the problem characterization of the two groups.

Whereas the problem characterization of the two anti-Islamists can be said to link up to broader discourses that are represented in more mainstream groups as well, the Vigrid leader is much more extreme in the way he defines what he sees as the problem. When asked why he formed *Vigrid*, he replied:

I saw how this country started to go to hell when we got niggers coming in from everywhere: Afghans, Somalis, Pakistanis and Turks. It’s not just based on race; you can look at this as a form of balkanization. What has happened in world history for as long as I can tell is that this kind of society can work for 300–400 years. In the end, we will suddenly end up cutting throats and killing each other. Our people are threatened with extinction.

I: Because of immigration?

Because of immigration and because of policies that have led to women and men in Norway not reproducing enough in order to keep the population number up. When you’re not able to keep the population number up, other people will move in.

Rather than focusing on Muslims in particular, he categorizes immigrants from Asia and Africa alike as ‘niggers’, and he argues against the mixing of different races. Liberal immigration policies are to be blamed for this perceived threat of extinction of the Norwegian people. When asked why he thinks people want to immigrate to Norway, he answered:

Because they will have a better future here, of course. It was the Jews that facilitated the possibility for mass immigration and for the Islamization of Europe that we are seeing today. As I see it, the Jews are to blame for all the evil in the world. It is too bad that Hitler didn’t do what he was accused of – it’s too bad he didn’t take down all of them. I don’t think we’ll have peace before the Jews are eradicated.

I: Hmm. Can you elaborate more about your views concerning Jews?

They are garbage. They are genetic throat cutters and robbers raised in the world’s biggest junction, which is the Middle East. They are traders, tough as hell, and have above average intelligence. They are more intelligent than us. (...) They have had to constantly use their heads to trick other people in order to win as a group. They have realized something that we haven’t: we have to stick together. (...) the Jews are a parasitic group of genetic cultural exploits.

We see here an explicitly biologically racist conception of Jews, and support for the argument that they should have been exterminated. This is obviously far more extreme than the perceptions of the two anti-Islamists, not only with regard to the target group in itself (Jews and black people or a mixing of races as opposed to Muslims), but also the proposed solution to his conception of the ‘problem’. Despite this obvious difference, we see a similarity in that like the two anti-Islamists, the Vigrid leader also speaks of ‘Islamization’ and liberal immigration policies as part of how he characterizes the problem.

Social movements emerge as a reaction to something in society that certain actors think is intrinsically wrong and therefore needs to be changed. Even though the leaders of Pegida, SIAN and Vigrid share a nativist conception of what needs to be changed – namely the presence of too many immigrants in Norway, and that these immigrants threaten ‘national culture’ or ‘national values’ – the three of them differ in their degrees of extremism when it comes to what needs to be done. Pegida’s leader is the least extreme in his concern about the values of Norwegian society and of human rights in general, and his argument in favour of the voluntary return of Muslim immigrants. The argument of SIAN’s leader is more extreme in that he thinks Muslims should be forced to distance themselves from Islam or be deported, which implies a clear break with the UN’s Declaration of Human Rights (the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion). Finally, Vigrid’s leader is the most extreme, in his support of terror and mass killings, and his explicitly racist, anti-Semitic and conspiratorial worldview. In this regard, there is not a huge difference in standpoints between Vigrid’s leader and other current neo-Nazis, such as the Nordic Resistance Movement⁸⁸; however, there is a significant difference between Vigrid’s leader and other neo-Nazis when it comes to Vigrid’s paganism, etc.

What is the solution to the problem?

Prognostic framing is the articulation of a proposed solution to a problem and strategies for carrying out that plan.⁸⁹ The main solution suggested by our interviewees is that those who are the source of the ‘problem’ have to leave the country. They also stress that if nothing is done there will be dramatic consequences for the nation and the Norwegian people. There are, however, important differences between them with regard to the severity of the solutions they propose. Pegida’s leader has the most moderate solution, which may be related to the fact that, at the time of the interview, he was not only an activist, but also a representative of a political party (the Democrats).⁹⁰ When asked what his political goals are, he said that if he got elected in the next parliamentary election, his first goal would be as follows:

I will suggest that there should be fewer Muslims in Norway. We can make agreements with low-cost countries and let them take over all the asylum seekers, quota refugees and family reunions. We can offer money to those that have got permanent residence for them to leave Norway and move back to their home country.

His supposed solution is more radical than the current Norwegian migration policies, which offer so-called voluntary return to failed asylum seekers,⁹¹ as he broadens this to include immigrants who have been granted permanent residence. Even so, compared to the other two, Pegida’s leader is clearly more moderate. The solution proposed by SIAN’s leader to ‘the problem of increased Islamization’ is as follows:

The longer we wait to do something the more brutal the solution will be. One day we might not have a choice anymore – we might get into an open civil conflict and then we will have to pay for not having solved these issues earlier. The solution is to force people to distance themselves from Islam, shut down the mosques and deport those that do not distance themselves from Islamism.

I: What about trying different approaches regarding integration policies?

What does integration really mean? Integration meant something different before, but today it means that we are supposed to adapt to the new culture – and they are not supposed to adapt to us. I think a lot of people look at the concept of integration in this way today.

Even though both anti-Islamists argue that a possible solution is to send Muslims out of the country, the Pegida leader’s idea of voluntary return is far more moderate than the SIAN leader’s idea of forced deportation of those who refuse to distance themselves from Islam. Also Vigrid’s leader talks about sending out immigrants; however, his rhetoric is even more aggressive:

We have to send out all the niggers and all the people that are not from European civilizations. As a mass they have to get out before they get killed. It will end up with them getting killed or us getting eradicated. (...) There is no other way out if we keep doing what we’re doing today, but I’m a racist and a right-wing extremist, so I guess there’s no point in listening to me. I don’t think it’s possible to change Merkel, Solberg, Støre or anyone else. For some people the bombs are dropping all the time. In Paris and London. Then they respond with bombing more in Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. More boots on the ground – I think it’s good. Bring it on. I get so happy every time I read about these terror attacks; I just don’t dare to write about it. I don’t dare to write about how much I’m cheering

on what happened in London. (...) They could've slaughtered London for all I care, there's not a single life left to save there.

The intricate reasoning here seems to be that Islamic terror is good, because then people have to realize the consequences of immigration. When asked what he thinks will happen in Norwegian society in the next couple of years, he answered:

There will be war. We are at war. Every single rape of white women by black men is a part of this war. Many of the rapists do this because of racial superiority to show their power. Our girls are slaves and they are starting to convert to Islam. I hope that the war comes soon enough so I get to experience it. What I mean is that there will be more war than there is today.

I: So are people with dark skin colours different from us?

Yes. (...) You have these American studies of black and white intelligence where they consistently from when they started the study found that black people are less intelligent than white people.

Here we see a major difference between the participants; Vigrid's leader supports terror and mass killings, and presents explicitly racist statements, whereas the two others argue in favour of restrictive migration policies and/or deporting of people.

Is this characterization of the problem and suggested solution supported by the population?

In addition to the differences in enemy images (or definition of the problem), and proposed solutions, one of the biggest differences between the three interviewees was whether or not they thought their ideas were shared by the broader population. Pegida's leader is again the most moderate in his view, when he expresses the very values he believes Norwegian society is built upon, as well as international human rights:

I believe that our society is based on humanism, the Christian heritage, freedom under responsibility and UN's Universal Declaration of Human rights. These four concepts are crucial for Pegida, for me, and for most of the people in Norway. It's what we wake up to every morning and what we feel that we are a part of.

When asked how many people in Norway support his views, he stated the following:

I think there's a qualified majority of the Norwegian population that do not want more Muslims in our country. In addition, I think it's important to ask if there should be a lower number of Muslims. I think that there are a lot of people in Norway today that think there should be less Muslims in our country. There even might be a majority who have this view.

Here, Pegida's leader goes from saying that a majority of the population does not want more Muslims, to saying that a lot of people or even the majority think there should be less Muslims than today. The SIAN leader's reply to the same question is more exaggerated:

I think that more than a majority of the Norwegian population share the same views as SIAN. Our views and how the media is portraying our views are two different things. We try to express views that I'm sure at least half of the Norwegian population would agree with.

(...) Rhetoric is essential. People think that SIAN is very direct in what we say, but the content of what we say is mainstream and based on facts.

At the first glance, it seems that both Pegida and SIAN are arguing along similar lines, saying that half of the population support their views. Yet, when taking a closer look, the claim by SIAN's leader takes the argument further, by saying that the majority of the population shares the same views as SIAN; without going into detail about what this means.

By contrast, Vigrid's leader, with his explicitly racist and anti-Semitic worldview, sees himself as an outsider. When asked how many members his group has, he replied:

I had great success in the early 2000s, and I had to stop counting at one point because of all the inquiries I got. I think I got around 10.000 emails, text messages and phone calls. Unfortunately, today I am Vigrid. I am the only one left. The society is vaccinated against me.

Vigrid's leader also openly supports violence and terror acts:

I see our people as one – our people can be seen as an individual. When you do that, you have the same right to defend yourself as every individual has. Based on that I see Breivik as a freedom fighter, he is a hero. AUF (Norwegian Labour Party youth division) was a gang of traitors. They worked for the decomposition of a pure Norwegian society.

I: Do you consider his actions as legitimate?

Yes, it's self-defence. I would not have chosen AUF as a target group myself, because I had one thing in common with AUF before Breivik started to clean up a bit, and that is their opposition to Israel. After all, they were champions of it. They are no longer. They don't talk about it anymore. They learned a lesson. Breivik and I are not exactly in the same position. He made a mistake in his choice of target, because people do not understand. I understand him better. He should have taken a mosque.

In such an explicit legitimization of Breivik's terror attack, he strongly departs from the two other interviewees. On the other hand, this interview excerpt clearly shows that despite his articulated anti-Semitic views, Vigrid's leader is also anti-Islam, to the same extent as the two anti-Islamists. He even supports shooting Muslims in a mosque, which is exactly what Manshaus attempted one year after this interview was conducted.

Whereas specific surveys conducted with representative samples of the population give some support to the two anti-Islamists' argument that a majority do not want more Muslims, there is no evidence that half of the population shares the views of SIAN more generally, especially when taking into account their proposed solutions to the problem, as described in the previous section. To be more specific, a representative survey shows that half of the population agrees that the values of Islam are completely or partly incompatible with the values of Norwegian society.⁹² Another survey shows the following:

48% of respondents agree with the statement "Muslims largely have themselves to blame for the increase in anti-Muslim harassment"; 42% agree with the statement "Muslims do not want to integrate into Norwegian society"; and 31% with the statement "Muslims want to take over Europe". A relatively large proportion of respondents also expressed negative feelings towards Muslims and a desire for social distance: 27.8% score high on all dimensions and can be categorised as Islamophobic.⁹³

Based on all these different results, it is fair to say that the leaders of Pegida and SIAN are wrong that half of the Norwegian population share their views on Muslims and Islam; however, it is also fair to say that almost 1/3 of the population share some of their views.

The Vigrid leader's open support of violence and terror obviously does not have any support in the general population, but what about anti-Semitism more specifically? One might assume that after the Second World War and the knowledge of the Holocaust, in addition to the fact that Norway was occupied by German Nazis, anti-Jewish sentiments would not have any hold in the population. Another factor is that Norway has had very little immigration of Jews and the total Jewish population in Norway is around 1500,⁹⁴ so it is not possible to view Jews as either a threat to national culture or to the economy of the welfare state. Indeed, anti-Jewish sentiments are far less widespread than anti-Muslim sentiments, but even so, they are not insignificant. Overall, the proportion of the Norwegian population with marked prejudices against Jews is 8.3 per cent, 13% agree with the statement 'World Jewry is working behind the scenes to promote Jewish interests', and 18% believe that 'Jews consider themselves to be better than others.' Overall, the indices show that 6.7% of respondents harbour a dislike of Jews and 5.9% of the Norwegian population would dislike having Jews as neighbours or in their circle of friends.⁹⁵

Conclusion

Our case study of three actors in the Norwegian far-right movement has revealed not only important differences but also some similarities among them regarding the perceived problem and proposed solutions, as well as perceptions of how mainstream or extreme their views are. This is important mostly because we contribute to providing nuance to the discussion of whether or not the extreme has become mainstream.⁹⁶ We see this discussion as crucial, as we think there has been a certain blindness to the danger of anti-Islamist ideas.

Nevertheless, neither the government nor the general population have problems distancing themselves from anti-Islamist groups such as SIAN.⁹⁷ It may be interesting to point out here the distinction Mondon and Winter make between illiberal anti-Islamism and liberal anti-Islamism,⁹⁸ and the fact that the mainstreaming of liberal anti-Islamism makes people ignorant of the danger posed by the illiberal version. As they noted, liberal anti-Islamism, with its discourse based on liberal rights and thereby possessing an ostensibly progressive veneer, borrows much from new racism because its critique of Islam is based on cultural essentialism, and because it legitimizes illiberal Islamophobia.

In the Norwegian case, we would argue that the most important distinction is not between liberal and illiberal anti-Islamism. Although Pegida (at least its Norwegian branch) supports more moderate solutions than SIAN, they are both liberal in the sense that they support the rights of women and homosexuals.⁹⁹ To some extent, anti-Islamist actors have a voice in mainstream political debates, enabled by their focus on how Muslim culture and values differ from those of the nation, and their disregard of the biological differences that were the focus of the far right during the 1990s.¹⁰⁰ Hence, it could be argued that the far right has reformulated and adapted its ideologies and values in order to gain support in public and political spaces.¹⁰¹

Nevertheless, there is still a difference between more mainstream anti-Islamist ideas and those of these anti-Islamist groups. Recently, SIAN's leader was sentenced for a violation of the hate speech act. Further, there are not that many supporters of SIAN and Pegida in Norway, so they cannot be seen as mass mobilization movements. Rather, the mainstreaming of these ideas is happening on the internet, where scornful comments against Muslims and Islam have become so common that moderators have a hard time dealing with this problem.¹⁰²

We have tried to substantiate the argument that even though the leaders of two of Norway's more extreme anti-Islamist groups do not support violence, their rhetoric potentially functions as a mobilizing force for more extreme and violent actors. What then about neo-Nazism? Is it not present as a threat anymore? Is the Vigrid leader only a marginal and harmless figure, despite his extreme ideas and open support of terror? Yes, we could argue that he himself does not have much more support, as he himself also agrees. However, it must be added that the neo-Nazi movement as such has not disappeared, and is still a part of the challenge posed by the far right. Furthermore, the difference between anti-Islamist actors and neo-Nazi actors is not always so distinct. In November 2018, the neo-Nazi organization *The Nordic Resistance Movement* demonstrated together with SIAN and were met with counter-attacks by anti-fascists.¹⁰³ Such clashes between activists of the far right and the far left were rare only a few years ago, whereas during the 1990s they were frequent.¹⁰⁴ We see this as an indication that the trend of far-right activism moving from the streets (the 1990s) to the internet (since the turn of the century) is not unanimously true anymore.¹⁰⁵

Importantly, despite the fact that both of the two anti-Islamist leaders strongly distanced themselves from the 22 July terror attack, while the Vigrid leader supported it, it was the ideology of anti-Islamism that motivated Breivik, and also Manshaus' recent terror attempt. Therefore, gaining more knowledge related to these issues is of utmost importance for the authorities to make efficient decisions concerning security measures.

Notes

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