



Societal
Security
Network

VIRTUAL CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR RESEARCH SUPPORT AND COORDINATION ON SOCIETAL SECURITY

D3.7 ANNUAL SOCIETAL SECURITY REPORT 4

This project has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement no 313288.



Societal
Security
Network

01.01.2014
31.12.2018

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PRIO



www.societalsecurity.net

I Index

I.1 Document Control

Contractual delivery date:	31/12/17 (M48)
Actual delivery date:	20/12/18 (M39)
Version:	1
Total Number of pages:	124
Author:	Reinhard Kreissl (VICESSE)
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Reviewers:	N/N
Dissemination level:	PU

I.2 Version Log

Table 1. Version log

Issue Date	Rev. No.	Author	Change
	0.1	RK, NL	Deliverable structure, Case study template
	0.2	RK, MS	Country report input
	0.3	RK	Country report review
	0.4	RK	Revised country report input
	0.5	RK, NL	Introduction
	0.6	NL	Network analysis input
	0.7	RK, NL	Consolidation, final editing

I.3 Legal Notice

Deliverable submitted 31.12.2016 (M36) in fulfilment of requirements of the FP7 project, SOURCE – Virtual Centre of excellence for research support and coordination on societal security (SEC-2014.7.4-2: Networking of researchers for a high level multi-organisational and cross-border collaboration). © Copyright 2014 the SOURCE Consortium (PRIO, FOI, CIES, FhG, TNO, CEPS, VUB, VICESSE, KCL, EOS, TEC, Sciences Po). All rights reserved. This document may change without notice.



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1 Introduction

The SOURCE Annual Societal Security Report (ASSR) 2016 was investigating reactions to the so-called refugee crisis of the year 2015 across Europe. In this report, focussing on the interplay of national and European policy reactions we set out to demonstrate the strategic exploitation of the political situation created by the uncontrolled influx of asylum seekers from the Global South by nationalist populist parties, who were putting the blame for the course of the events as they developed in the summer of 2015 on the European Union. While several initiatives to manage the influx of asylum seekers were launched at the European level, a significant number of Member states refused to adopt this joint policy approach designed to distribute the incoming refugees evenly across Europe. This non-compliance created a kind of prisoners' dilemma among collective actors: had all (national) players co-operated a win-win scenario might have emerged, but since some national governments defected, the "crisis" produced negative outcomes, not only for the asylum seekers, but also for European institutions and many of the Member States.

During the research for the ASSR 2016 we identified citizen groups who took controversial positions on the treatment of refugees in their countries. Some NGOs were active in supporting asylum seekers together with civil society organisations acting as first responders. A significant "welcome culture" emerged across Europe in almost all Member States.

But we also found a substantial number of outspoken anti-migration groups, who fiercely opposed any support for refugees and who were waging anti-migration campaigns. Often, these groups were loosely linked to nationalist-populist parties in their countries. Anti-migration protests sometimes turned into open hostility and led to acts of physical violence. Asylum seekers were attacked and refugee camps burnt down.

While mainstream policy and media discourses since 2015 have been focussing on presumed security threats from Islamist terrorists infiltrating Europe as refugees applying for asylum, the violent and vigilant anti-migrant actions went comparatively unnoticed and were downplayed as isolated, individual or local eruptions and actions of single frustrated citizens.

In some countries, however, law enforcement agencies began to link the dots and identified a growing network of protest groups advocating a right-wing nationalist agenda beyond the refugee and asylum debate, engaging in new forms of sometimes criminal protest. Intelligence reports on these groups were released in Austria and Germany and some national law enforcement agencies began to see them as a new security threat emerging from the far-right end of the political spectrum, some of them acting as self-declared militant arm of a neo-populist movement, adhering to a white supremacist, nationalist ideology.

We suggest to take these groups and their vigilant anti-asylum actions as *the tip of a hitherto unexplored iceberg of what we call "heterodox politicisation"*. Recent anti-migration protest in Europe went beyond the well-rehearsed narrative of right-wing nationalism, calling for ethnically homogeneous nation states. Protesters also were addressing in a more general sense the limited capabilities of the state and public policy, questioning the legitimacy of the existing political-



institutional order. Migration policy (or the failure thereof) is but one area, where new forms and narratives of political protest and activity develop.¹

The events of 2015 shed light on a more complex syndrome of political discontent. Some of this discontent is absorbed within the institutional arrangement of the modern democratic state and channelled into votes for right-wing, neo-populist parties, exploiting xenophobic sentiments and fears of the electorate. Recent national elections have seen these parties on the rise in most European countries.

The events of 2015 boosted grass-root protest groups critical of the states' capabilities to handle emerging problems (and to provide security in a situation of perceived threat!) but not all of the groups fuelled by a growing political discontent can be labelled as outspoken right-wing extremist or xenophobic. Declining trust in the institutional set-up of the modern state² and a feeling and/or experience of general disenfranchisement can support very different narratives and activities outside the established arena of civic political involvement cutting across established dichotomies of left/right or authoritarian/democratic used to categorise civic political protest. A closer look at the subterranean discourses emerging below the radar of established approaches of political analysis reveals strange mixtures linking tropes of radical critique of globalisation and political economy with a metaphysics of Nature, spiced with a wide variety of conspiracy theories, populating the blogosphere and virtual space.

The groups developing around these narratives, their activities and the lessons to be learnt for societal security are the main topic of this report. Since very little has been written about these groups and research so far has mainly focussed on the international growth of networks in the right-wing extremist segment of the spectrum³ we move into uncharted territory with this analysis. We collected data from different sources to develop a first, exemplary account of this hitherto unexplored phenomenon.

¹ The German populist protest movement PEGIDA made international headlines as one of the dominant actors on the political scene, criticising the federal government for its presumed failure to manage the refugee crisis and to "protect" mainland Europe from the influx of Islam. Fuelled by xenophobic sentiments PEGIDA launched a full-blown attack against, what they saw as a non-responsive, elitist, and incompetent government.

² See European Commission (2017), *Trust at Risk: Implications for EU Policies and Institutions. Report of the Expert Group*, Brussels

³ see for the Russian connections of Austrian extremists, Györi L. (2017) *Russian Connections of the Austrian Far-Right*. Political Capital, Budapest; for Hungary Szabados K. (ed.) (2017), *The Truth Today is what Putin says it is*. Political Capital, Budapest



2 Heterodox Politicization

2.1 Emerging trends of anti-statist social resistance in Europe

While the new populist, nationalist and separatist political parties, pursuing mostly right-wing, anti-migration, anti-European political agendas and gaining increasingly support at the ballot across all European Member States have attracted the attention of political and social scientists in recent years, several other new groups escaped critical investigation.⁴ The rise of political parties with nationalist, populist and anti-migration agendas seems to reflect a growing critical attitude not only towards the European political project. They also reflect a popular discontent with the capabilities of national political elites to handle problems scoring high on the political agenda in public discourse, such as migration, the financial and fiscal crises, environmental degradation, cutbacks in social spending, unemployment and other detrimental effects of an unrestrained global economy. Rallying for a strengthening of national, regional and local policies and a re-establishment of a self-contained polity based on an ethnically homogenous nation state with territorial sovereignty, neo-populist parties across Europe won the votes of an electorate feeling increasingly disenfranchised.⁵ The vague promise of populism to involve “the people” more into the political process resonates with this feeling of being disenfranchised.

The constellation of anti-establishment political parties entering national parliaments, pursuing an agenda that often runs counter to many of the core achievements and value orientations of democratic culture reveals a central predicament of Western democratic states. Societal processes, originating in the globalised and neo-liberalised sphere of the economy have exposed the political systems of these states to a number of problems without immediate political solutions that could be easily implemented at national level. Citizens, suffering from the negative effects of these global processes are seduced by neo-nationalist and populist political rhetoric to falsely blame their government for individual grievances experienced in their daily lives as tenants, members of the work force or recipients of welfare benefits. This in turn plays into the hands of ideologues who put the blame on Big Government while simultaneously supporting the very neo-liberal policies weakening democratic governance and control that created the problems and side-effects of unrestrained globalisation in the first place.⁶

⁴ The political strategies of these nationalist parties were in the focus of last year’s ASSR 2016, investigating European reactions to the so-called “refugee crisis”. See also Fennema, W. V. D. B. (2003). Protest or mainstream? How the European anti-immigrant parties developed into two separate groups by 1999. *European Journal of Political Research*, 42(1), 55-76. Liang, C. S. (Ed.). (2016). *Europe for the Europeans: The foreign and security policy of the populist radical right*. Routledge. Morlino, L., & Raniolo, F. (2017). What Innovative Destruction? Changes in Parties and Party Systems. In *The Impact of the Economic Crisis on South European Democracies* (pp. 25-47). Springer International Publishing.

⁵ Rydgren, J. (2005). Is extreme right-wing populism contagious? Explaining the emergence of a new party family. *European journal of political research*, 44(3), 413-437.

⁶ The political rhetoric of the American president Donald Trump provides a textbook example for this political strategy. Opting out of international treaties and dismantling national legislation designed to curb the negative side-effects of economic globalization the Trump administration unleashes the forces responsible for the current crisis situation. See also Becker, J., & Weissenbacher, R. (2016) *Heterodoxy from the Right: Economic*



The spread of anti-government, anti-establishment, and anti-elite attitudes provides a fertile political and cultural ground for the emergence of a patchwork of very heterogeneous groups operating outside the established channels of political participation. We label these groups as representatives of “heterodox politicization.”

These groups, still marginal and scattered across Europe, share the general anti-establishment attitude of neo-populist political parties. But they reach beyond this standard populist rhetoric refusing the very idea of the modern democratic state as it developed in Europe. Whereas populist parties call for an unfiltered, direct involvement of citizens into the political process, the heterodox political groups reject the existing political institutions in total. Their critique of the contemporary modern state lumps together different ideologies in surprising ways. Backward conservative ideas of sunken empires (and of course: the nostalgic idea of a nation state) are combined with models of a new avant-garde economic order based on virtual currencies. A critique of the global financial system and/or of industrial capitalism destroying human lives and natural environment is introduced to support dystopian scenarios of emerging global catastrophes. In the face of such dystopias fuelled by different conspiracy theories some groups are searching for spiritual salvation in quasi-religious belief-systems.⁷

Occasionally some of the more outspoken of these groups attract the attention of public media and journalists, who find this topic highly news-worthy. However, media reports tend to ignore the wider ideological-political networks and contexts sustaining this form of political activity. The European edition of *The Economist* ran an article in its print version of Nov 10, 2016 under the heading “The Reich lives on”. This article addresses the so-called *Reichsbürger*, or “imperial citizens” who refuse to accept the authority of the German State. Below is the text of this brief article that highlights some of the more bizarre features of these groups.

The so-called Reichsbürger are convinced that the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) does not exist. In its place, the old German Empire endures, which in their telling was never properly abolished and persists in the borders of either 1871 or 1937. There are nearly as many lines of pseudo-legal reasoning as adherents. One rests on the fact that the Allies never signed a peace treaty with Germany after the second world war. Another cites selectively from a decision by Germany’s supreme court in 1973 regarding an agreement between West and East Germany. The upshot, say Reichsbürger, is that the Federal Republic is really a limited-liability company based in Frankfurt and controlled by a Jewish world government based in America.

To the Reichsbürger the FRG’s police, judges, laws and tax agencies thus have no authority, and its documents carry no weight. At a traffic stop, say, a Reichsbürger will overwhelm the (usually puzzled) police with references to phony legal paragraphs and treaties while

Policy Concepts of the Nationalist Right in Europe. Euromemorandum.eu. For a thoughtful analysis of the cultural, social and political divide supporting this political strategy see Hochschild, A.R. (2016), *Strangers in their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*, New York.

⁷ This new spiritualism in all its different forms reflects a global trend towards post-secular societies, see e.g. Nynas, P., Lassander, M., & Utriainen, T. (Eds.). (2012). *Post-secular society*. Transaction Publishers. Habermas, J. (2008). Notes on post-secular society. *New perspectives quarterly*, 25(4), 17-29.



producing a driver's licence or other identification issued by the Empire. The insignia vary because it is not clear even to the Reichsbürger who the true imperial government-in-waiting is. There are about 30 rival imperial chancellors, several princes and at least one king. One of the chancellors, a man named Norbert Schittke, also claims the English throne.

Though they draw ridicule even from neo-Nazis, the Reichsbürger are considered part of the extreme right. Many (though not all) are racist and anti-immigrant. Most are male and live in rural areas. Of the four regions that monitor their numbers, Brandenburg and Thuringia, both in eastern Germany, have the most, with several hundred identified in each. Worried about a rise in incidents, a think-tank in Brandenburg recently published a handbook for bureaucrats dealing with Reichsbürger.

The best approach, it advises, is to avoid responding at all. Typically, a Reichsbürger will only deluge a bureaucracy with verbose letters studded with obscure citations. Others get aggressive. Some 20 interrupted a trial this year and tried to "arrest" the judge. The first case of armed violence occurred in October. Wolfgang P., a hunter in Bavaria, had outed himself as a Reichsbürger in the course of disobeying local authorities. When officers approached his house to confiscate his rifles, he opened fire from the upper floor, injuring several and killing one. Locals told the press that the 49-year-old was a loner raised by his grandmother, whose death had apparently unhinged him.

Putting groups like the *Reichsbürger* in the specific German historical context of a Nazi past seems fair, but ignores their wider political context.⁸ Similar activities are underway in countries like Slovakia, Greece, the UK, Austria, France, or Norway. The groups we identified in these countries as examples for heterodox politicisation not only draw on ideas of sunken empires, ethnic purity and national sovereignty. They link with contemporary movements like the "Occupy London" group, a citizen's movement established in 2011 rallying for social justice and democracy.⁹ There have been attempts to set up alternative banks, and to support the spread of virtual currencies.¹⁰

Reichsbürger, Freemen or Sovereign Citizens have received considerable media attention in some European countries with reports about their strategy of waging a war of paper terrorism against public authorities.¹¹ Such activities may be classified as a nuisance or a burden for public servants drowning in a stream of legally irrelevant written requests submitted by members of *Reichsbürger* and similar groups. However, this paper terrorism on several occasions has spilled over into acts of physical violence. This has put these groups on the radar of the law enforcement authorities.

Reichsbürger, Freemen and Sovereign Citizens represent one type of heterodox political groups. They operate with pseudo-legal frameworks, using ideas that originated in Canada and the US in the

⁸ International media have been focusing on the rise of a new radical right-wing political movement in countries like Germany over the recent past. However, the simple framing as right-wing misses the point. See e.g. New York Times March 20, 2017, "How a Sleepy German Suburb Explains Europe's Rising Far-Right Movements" by A. Taub.

⁹ See <http://occupylondon.org.uk/about/statements/initial-statement/>

¹⁰ More details about these activities can be found in the country reports below.

¹¹ The term paper terrorism refers to a strategy of flooding public authorities with written complaints and requests, using a pseudo-legal jargon and references to self-styled heterodox natural law doctrines justifying the status of free citizen outside the authority of the state. See Fleishman, D. (2004). Paper terrorism: The impact of the 'sovereign citizen' on local government. *The Public Law Journal*, 27(2).



1970ies and a strange interpretation of legal and constitutional theories to wage a pseudo-legal war against the state. *One People's Public Trust* (OPPT), an US-based movement is considered as one of the main ideological umbrella organisations of these groups.¹² The state in their view is nothing more than a private company that has no right to interfere in their existence (and e.g. collect taxes). What makes groups like the *Reichsbürger* stand out from other conservative or right-wing movements is the complete and total rejection of the existing political order. They do not compete with other groups or parties to win elections or get a share of democratic power, but simply deny the legitimacy of the very foundation of the existing polity. From this radical position, any attempt to enforce legal measures (e.g. collect fines or taxes) by state authorities can trigger violent resistance.

Other groups look more like adherents of the ecological green paradigm, putting a focus on alternative life styles inspired by ecological and communitarian ideas. Some operate as self-contained communes, establishing and sustaining their small niche in remote rural areas. Some are more outspoken, actively recruiting followers and pursuing a more expansionist strategy, setting up chapters across Europe.

These groups can be considered to varying degrees as communities of belief and communities of practice, some self-contained, others more evangelistic. Some put the idea of a peaceful life in harmony with nature at the centre, some adhere to a hard-core conservative ideal of authoritarian family clans, some are organised more like militias with a political agenda.¹³ They justify their militancy with the need to prepare for a final breakdown of "the system", which they see to happen soon.

A third type of groups operates against the state attacking representatives of the political system upfront with public mass action. These groups bear some resemblance with classical social movements. They oppose the state in its existing form on the basis of the presumed criminal and illegal behaviour of its representatives. Their radical critique, however, still operates within the framework of a state-based order, since it targets the representatives and elites as not fulfilling their constitutional duties. Nonetheless, what qualifies these groups as a form of heterodox politicisation is their claim to reconstruct a new public and political order in a way that is incompatible with legal and procedural means foreseen by the existing constitution.

While the individual groups we analyse as cases of heterodox politicisation may only have a limited number of active supporters or followers, they seem to have spread out across Europe, forming a patchwork of "heterodox dots" of sects, cults, communes, networks of activists or local groups. The emergence and growth of this patchwork of heterodox political groups is reinforced by a weakening of traditional social bonds and a decline of social capital.¹⁴ They can be understood as a reaction to

¹² For a brief critical description of the OPPT see https://rationalwiki.org/wiki/One_People%27s_Public_Trust

¹³ There is a tradition of counter-cultural initiatives inspired by ecological critique. The new wave of heterodox politicized groups, however, adds a more radical and at the same time dystopian element to this retreatist sub-cultural programme of alternative life styles. See Halfacree, K. (2006). From dropping out to leading on? British counter-cultural back-to-the-land in a changing rurality. *Progress in Human Geography*, 30(3), 309-336. Wilbur, A. (2013). Growing a radical ruralism: Back-to-the-land as practice and ideal. *Geography Compass*, 7(2), 149-160.

¹⁴ This idea was first introduced by Hillary Putnam, see Putnam, R. D. (1995). Bowling alone: America's declining social capital. *Journal of democracy*, 6(1), 65-78.



the subjectively perceived negative effects of globalisation and the ensuing weakness of the nation state as political actor.¹⁵

¹⁵ Castells, M. (2008). The new public sphere: Global civil society, communication networks, and global governance. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 78-93.

2.2 Some common features of heterodox political groups

There are several reasons for bringing such highly heterogeneous groups together under the heading of “heterodox politicization”.

First, there is evidence, that the constituencies of these groups show a substantial overlap. Supporters of the *Reichsbürger* may be regular followers of other (e.g. ecological) groups and vice versa.¹⁶ As we will demonstrate below based on an analysis of Facebook accounts, using Austria as a test case, the online activities of these groups spread out towards traditional right- and left-wing groups, and there are also links to groups of green activists, creating a network of different and highly heterogeneous communities.

Second, a closer look at the patchwork of ideological narratives circulating in the realm of heterodox discourses reveals a kind of family resemblance and one can find a number of *common themes* across our sample of groups that seem to have very little in common at first glance. All share a fundamental mistrust of the existing institutional set-up of the modern democratic state. This includes mistrust of the mainstream public media, the representatives of mainstream political parties and the information provided by public authorities. However, this mistrust rarely translates into a call for standard practices of political action since the default assumption among their followers is, that no change is possible “within the system” and hence any form of mainstream political activity is doomed to fail. All of these groups are prone to more or less absurd conspiracy theories, to justify their disloyalty with the political status quo. These “theories” are resistant to refutation, i.e. they cannot be refuted with alternative evidence, since it is assumed that any counter evidence consists of false information (“fake news”) manufactured by some powerful elites to conceal the real state of affairs in the world.¹⁷

Third, many of these groups are built around dystopian scenarios, to justify collective preparatory action for a fantasised “day after”. Sharing such dystopian scenarios, they claim access to privileged knowledge and this fosters an almost eschatological group spirit of the “selected few”, preparing to survive a dark Armageddon.¹⁸

Fourth, the ideological frames, linking together the basic themes draw on a pool of very heterogeneous discourses and narratives ranging from left-wing anti-capitalism to right-wing radical

¹⁶ The term „follower“ refers to activities in the sphere of new social media. While the emergence of this new form of politicisation would not have been possible without new social media, it represents more than just an ephemeral random product of flourishing bubbles in virtual space. The changing relations of political communication, lowering the threshold for collective debate and forming virtual communities has seen a myriad of new groups of individuals, who as users or prosumers congregate in chatrooms to explore conspiracy theories and develop bizarre interpretations of world events. However new social media only play an enabling or facilitating role, they do not *cause* this development. See e.g. Garrett, R. K. (2006). Protest in an Information Society: A Review of Literature on Social Movements and New ICTs. *Information, Communication and Society*, 9(2), 202-224

¹⁷ Puschmann, C., Ausserhofer, J., Maan, N., & Hametner, M. (2016, April). Information Laundering and Counter-Publics: The News Sources of Islamophobic Groups on Twitter. In *SMN@ ICWSM*.

¹⁸ Paraphrasing Jean-Francois Lyotard’s concept of *grand narratives*, these dystopian scenarios could be termed small or locally productive narratives, providing the cultural glue keeping the groups together. See Lyotard, J. F. (1984). *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge*. U of Minnesota Press.



antisemitism, from materialist economic analysis to transcendental spiritualism. This reflects the heterogeneity of their constituencies and creates innovative anti-statist narratives that combine left-wing and right-wing arguments in varying combinations.

Finally, all of these groups aspire to alternative (or heterodox) practices of self-empowerment beyond or outside the existing institutional (political and economic) structures. This can take on the form of creating new independent “states” by declaration, claiming independent and sovereign territories, developing forms of self-sustained, rural communal living in remote areas or simply expressing discontent with the existing political system through robust and innovative forms of collective action (like not paying taxes and fines).



2.3 Putting heterodox political groups into context

We use the term *heterodox politicization* to describe these different groups since we assume that this emerging new grass-roots political activism is different from and cuts across orthodox civic political engagement, political protest, new social movements or even so-called anti-politics. All these orthodox forms are operating, albeit to different degrees on the basis of the existing institutional political order. They develop ideological frameworks that accept or connect to fundamental conceptual pillars of the political orthodoxy of democratic societies, such as e.g. the majority rule, the division of powers, the force of rational argument and evidence-based propositions in public discourse. While they may position themselves in stark opposition to the powers that be, and even advocate robust resistance and civil disobedience, they nonetheless adhere to the idea of a shared, collectively binding system of political deliberation and decision-making, involving all members of society and reconciling individual freedom with political governance.

The basic model of democratic self-governance operating within the institutional set-up of modern democratic states is designed to channel individual citizens' claims through intermediary civil society organisations and political parties, forming elected governments based on majority rules, rule of law and division of power. Deliberating contested issues in parliamentary processes will lead to collectively binding decisions, laid down in general abstract laws, executed by the administrative branch under the control of an independent judiciary.

Political protest typically stays within the realm of this institutional framework. Addressing new grievances, it reflects changing value orientations or shifts in the economic structure of societies.¹⁹ Political protest movements in most cases can be considered as a form of orthodox political activity, sometimes giving rise to new political parties, as e.g. the Green Party in Germany²⁰ in the 1970ies or the right-wing populist AfD in recent years.²¹ While political protest may have recourse to illegal means of civil disobedience and reject the organisational constraints of mainstream politics, it rarely or for a longer time puts into question the basic legitimacy and constitutional principles of democratic governance. As the history of the so-called new social movements demonstrates, they gradually adapt, albeit not without major internal conflicts, to the rules of the game and develop formal institutional structures connecting them to the established channels of political power in democratic societies.

The heterodox groups on the other hand reject basic principles of democratic governance. They either subscribe to an elitist model, defining their body politic as comprised of the few enlightened individuals, excluding all others or they strive for a completely new state order, emulating a full

¹⁹ Kriesi, H., Grande, E., Lachat, R., Dolezal, M., Bornschieer, S., & Frey, T. (2006). Globalization and the transformation of the national political space: Six European countries compared. *European Journal of Political Research*, 45(6), 921-956.

²⁰ See Offe, C. (1989). Reflections on the institutional self-transformation of movement politics: A tentative stage model. *Hitotsubashi journal of social studies*, 21(1), 179-195.

²¹ Grimm, R. (2015). The rise of the German Eurosceptic party Alternative für Deutschland, between ordoliberal critique and popular anxiety. *International Political Science Review*, 36(3), 264-278.

blown blue print of the existing institutional set-up, though with new heterodox metaphysics.²² The prototypical case for the latter would be the *Reichsbürger* and *Sovereign Citizens*.

These groups in varying degrees share features of sects, cults, social movements and civil society organisations acting at local, regional and national levels. Some have one or more central founding figures acting as charismatic leaders (or in the more militant groups: commanders). Often the leading figures are the authors of manifestos, detailing the purpose, strategies and goals defining the group. They spread the gospel in public lectures, YouTube videos and via other media channels. As leaders of self-declared micro-states, they declare themselves as “Emperor” or “King”. As a meanwhile convicted criminal a German *Reichsbürger* established the “Kingdom Germany” and issued passports for his followers. Other groups set up a new “German Reich” and submitted legal requests to German authorities.



The logo of “Kingdom Germany”



The webpage of a new German Empire

²² See e.g. Baldacchino, G. (1993). Bursting the bubble: the pseudo-development strategies of microstates. *Development and change*, 24(1), 29-52.



2.4 The constituency of heterodox political groups

Very little is known about the members of the different heterodox groups. Academic research has been focussing mainly on these groups as representatives of a new right-wing populist movement.²³ The federal German intelligence report estimates a membership of *Reichsbürger* and other similar groups in 2016 of approximately 10.000 Individuals.²⁴ A number of reports by official authorities in Austria and Germany addressed their activities²⁵ and internal policy papers for Austrian law enforcement officers, based on forensic evidence provide some insight into this area.²⁶

Similar information campaigns were launched by German municipalities to advise their employees about the adequate strategies and reactions when confronted with members of such groups. Below is a snapshot of a leaflet released by the municipality of Berlin detailing adequate responses for public servants should they be involved in conflict situations with members of the *Reichsbürger*.

²³ Wodak, R., Mral, B., & KhosraviNik, M. (Eds.). (2013). *Right-wing populism in Europe: politics and discourse*. A&C Black.

²⁴ Bundesministerium des Inneren (2016) Verfassungsschutzbericht 2016. (Federal Ministry of Interior, Annual Intelligence Report 2016)

²⁵ The annual reports of the Austrian Bundesstelle für Sektenfragen (Federal Office for the Study of Sects and Cults) in 2014 and 2015 had the OPPT and the "Freemen movement" as main topics. (www.bundesstelle-sektenfragen.at). For Germany see Wilking, D. (Ed.). (2015). " *Reichsbürger*": ein Handbuch. Demos-Brandenburgisches Institut für Gemeinwesenberatung.

²⁶ The Austrian Intelligence Service (BVT) released an internal paper on Sovereign Citizen Movement and Reichsbürgerbewegung to inform their staff about the ideologies, strategies and activities of these groups. (KURZINFO und HANDLUNGSEMPFEHLUNGEN für den Umgang mit Akteuren/Akteurinnen der SOVEREIGN CITIZENS MOVEMENT, REICHSBÜRGERBEWEGUNG und sonstigen sogen. „SelbstverwalterInnen“ Vienna n.d.)



Grundlagen des Reichsbürger-Denkens

Der Szene der „Reichsbürger und Selbstverwalter“ liegt keine in sich geschlossene Ideologie zugrunde. Auch beruft sich keinesfalls jeder Angehörige der Szene bei seinen Aktivitäten auf das „Deutsche Reich“ oder sieht sich selbst als „Reichsbürger“. Allerdings existiert eine Art kleinster gemeinsamer Nenner, den alle Anhänger dieser Szene teilen:

„Reichsbürger und Selbstverwalter“ wollen keine Angehörigen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland sein!

Sie sprechen dem Staat, seinen Gesetzen und insbesondere seinen Vertretern jegliche Legitimation ab, „treten aus der BRD-GmbH aus“ oder gründen mitunter eigene Fantasie-Reiche, als deren Repräsentanten sie dann als „Minister“, „Präsident“ oder „Kanzler“ auftreten.

In ihren pseudo-juristischen Argumentationen versuchen „Reichsbürger und Selbstverwalter“ die von ihnen behauptete Illegitimität der Bundesrepublik Deutschland damit zu begründen, dass ein „Deutsches Reich“ fortbestehen würde. Die dafür herangezogenen Begründungen basieren auf der willkürlichen Interpretation von Artikeln des Grundgesetzes, von internationalen Verträgen oder auch Aussagen des Bundesverfassungsgerichtes. Sie münden dann in Behauptungen, nach denen Deutschland nach dem Ende des 2. Weltkrieges keinen wirksamen Friedensvertrag geschlossen habe, dass die BRD lediglich ein Konstrukt der Alliierten“ sei, die Deutsch-



licher Repräsentanten, aus der sich die von Reichsbürgern ausgehende Gefahr speist.

„Reichsbürger und Selbstverwalter“ sehen sich selbst in einer Auseinandersetzung mit einem von ihnen als illegitim empfundenen System, das es mit allen Mitteln zu bekämpfen gilt. Jede noch so kleine behördliche Entscheidung kann sich für „Reichsbürger und Selbstverwalter“ zu einem grundsätzlichen Kampf entwickeln, in dem sie sich unter Umständen mit Gewalt zur Wehr setzen zu müssen glauben.



Viele „Reichsbürger und Selbstverwalter“ leben in einer Blase von aus dem Internet zusammengesuchten Verschwörungstheorien. Oft fehlt es ihnen an anderweitigen sozialen Kontakten, was zu einer Verfestigung ihrer eigenen „Realität“ führen kann. Die damit einhergehende Irrationalität ihrer Aussagen und ihres Verhaltens erschwert es enorm, mit „Reichsbürgern und Selbstverwaltern“ in einen sachlichen Dialog zu treten. Ihr grundsätzlich konfrontatives Auftreten verschärft zudem Konflikte und führt regelmäßig zu deren Eskalation.

Der Umgang mit Reichsbürgern

Von zentraler Bedeutung beim Umgang mit „Reichsbürgern und Selbstverwaltern“ ist die Erkenntnis, dass Dialoge bzw. Auseinandersetzungen von Reichsbürgern nie auf eine konsensuale Lösung ausgerichtet sind. Die Dialoge an sich - bei denen es sich nicht selten um Monologe der Reichsbürger handelt - sind der Erfolg, nicht deren

land zudem immer noch besetzen würden und diese Besetzung zudem dazu führe, dass nicht das „ungültige“ Grundgesetz, sondern „Reichsverfassungen“ oder etwa die Haager Landkriegsordnung anzuwenden seien.

Aus dieser ideologischen Gemengelage speist sich die Mehrheit der von der Szene entfaltenen Aktivitäten. In den meisten Fällen zielt das Handeln von „Reichsbürgern und Selbstverwaltern“ darauf ab, bei Behörden größtmögliche Verwirrung zu stiften und staatliche Stellen vom rechtlich gebotenen Handeln abzuhalten. Nahziel ist nicht selten die Vermeidung von Steuer- oder Bußgeldzahlungen. Verzögerungen bei der Durchsetzung staatlichen Handelns bestärken „Reichsbürger und Selbstverwalter“ in ihrer Auffassung im Recht zu sein, und sind ein nicht zu unterschätzendes Argument bei der Suche nach neuen Anhängern.

Die heterogene Szene der Reichsbürger

Als mindestens ebenso unübersichtlich wie die ideologischen Grundlagen des Reichsbürger-Denkens stellen sich die Anhänger dieser Bewegung dar. Neben einer Vielzahl von Einzelakteuren, die nicht in übergeordnete Strukturen eingebunden sind, existieren diverse Kleingruppen, virtuelle Netzwerke, aber auch überregional aktive Personenzusammenschlüsse. Zu letzteren gehören u. a. die auch in Berlin aktiven „Freistaat Preußen“, „Amt für Menschenrechte“, „Die Exilregierung Deutsches Reich“ und „Staatenlos.info“.

Viele Anhänger der Szene agieren allerdings ohne organisatorischen Anschluss und verfolgen vor allem das Ziel, sich vom Staat „losszusagen“ und sich ihr komplettes Leben „selbst zu verwalten“. Ihr Denken und Handeln ähnelt dabei einem in den USA schon länger unter dem Begriff der „sovereign citizens“ bekannten Phänomen.

Die Vielschichtigkeit der Reichsbürger- und Selbstverwalterszene entspringt auch den unterschiedlichen Motiven, aus denen heraus sich Menschen dieser Bewegung anschließen. Hier findet sich neben finanziellen Interes-

sen, Geltungssucht, psychischen Auffälligkeiten, auch ein Gefühl des wirtschaftlich und sozial Abgehängt-Seins. Darüber hinaus sind aber auch gefestigte Rechtsextremisten, deren Kampf gegen den Staat einer neonazistischen und insbesondere antisemitischen Gesinnung entspringt, Teil der Reichsbürgerszene.

Rechtsextremismus - Ursprung der Reichsbürgerideologie



„Reichsbürger“ in rechtsextremistischen Kreisen sind dem Verfassungsschutz bereits länger bekannt. Revisionistische und antisemitische Ansichten bilden dabei den Nährboden für die Idee von der „Illegitimität“ der Bundesrepublik, die das zentrale Element der Reichsbürgerideologie darstellt. In der Vorstellung rechtsextremistischer Reichsbürger spielen vor allem die Forderung nach der Wiederherstellung des „Deutschen Reiches“ in nationalsozialistischem Verständnis („Gebietsrevisionismus“) und der Kampf gegen ein nahezu allmächtig und global agierendes „Weltjudentum“ besondere Rollen. Einer der ersten und prominentesten Vertreter der rechtsextremistischen Reichsbürger war Horst Mahler.

Gefährlichkeit der Reichsbürger-Szene

Neben ideologischen und teilweise auch personellen Schnittmengen mit der rechtsextremistischen Szene ist es vor allem die grundsätzliche und rigorose Ablehnung der freiheitlichen demokratischen Grundordnung und all

Ergebnisse „Reichsbürger und Selbstverwalter“ nehmen die gesellschaftliche Realität komplett anders wahr als ihre Gegenüber und sie - und NUR sie - kennen die Wahrheit und haben Gewissheit darüber.

Vor diesem Hintergrund gilt für den Umgang mit „Reichsbürgern und Selbstverwaltern“:

- Führen Sie keine inhaltlichen Diskussionen.
- Unterbrechen Sie die Einlassungen der „Reichsbürger und Selbstverwalter“ und wiederholen Sie erforderlichenfalls mehrfach Ihren aktuellen Handlungsauftrag.
- Behandeln Sie „Reichsbürger und Selbstverwalter“ nicht anders als andere Menschen / Bürger / Kunden (Vorzugsbehandlung oder die Verweisung an Vorgesetzte bestärken „Reichsbürger und Selbstverwalter“ nur).
- Lassen Sie sich vom Auftreten der „Reichsbürger und Selbstverwalter“ nicht einschüchtern (ihre „Argumente“ sind haltlos); drohen Sie Konsequenzen an und setzen Sie diese auch um.
- Zeigen Sie Straftaten durch „Reichsbürger und Selbstverwalter“ konsequent an. Leiten Sie Ihnen bekannt gewordene Informationen über „Reichsbürger“ und „Selbstverwalter“ an die Verfassungsschutzbehörde weiter.



Reichsbürger und Selbstverwalter

Verfassungsfeinde im Kampf mit der Demokratie



As these activities demonstrate, heterodox political groups in some countries are seen as a serious problem to be addressed by public authorities at different levels, from national intelligence services and police to other administrative agencies.

For many of the outspoken followers, the central message of the respective group serves as a justification for their individual mishap. The anti-statist ideological framework of groups like the Freemen, who deny public authorities the right to collect taxes, issue fines or intervene in any other way into the lives of “truly free individuals” provides a suitable ideological narrative for a person who has been declared bankrupt because s/he recurrently failed to pay taxes.



This then may lead to a situation where a representative of the public authority (like a bailiff) is confronted with robust physical resistance from self-declared “heterodox police officers” protecting the Freeman or Sovereign Citizen from “illegitimate” state intervention. There have been reports of escalating confrontations leading to subsequent arrests of the involved members who were brought to court and sentenced for obstructing a police officer in the course of his duty. The public court hearings then provided a stage for other group members to voice their protest, declaring that, as independent Freemen, none of them was any longer subject to the laws of the state.²⁷

From a security and law enforcement perspective, such episodes are obviously a threat to the institutional arrangement of the modern state and state-based forms of sovereignty and governance. Questioning the legitimacy of the existing institutional political order in pamphlets, claiming the status of free individuals living “outside” the state as symbolic political act of civil disobedience is one thing; but ignoring legally binding court orders, refusing to pay taxes or fines and creating heterodox institutions (like courts and “sovereign” territories), documents (like passports) and symbols (like flags or licence plate numbers) is going beyond the threshold of legally acceptable behaviour.

However, the constituency of these groups is not only comprised of marginalized individuals looking for a pretext to avoid paying taxes. Many of the followers have a middle-class background. Economically successful professionals, teachers, lawyers, doctors, and even public servants are found among the adherents. Some of the leading figures managed to make a business case of heterodox politicisation, collecting fees from members for selling fake documents such as passports or licence plates issued by their self-declared states.



A fake passport, issued by the government in exile of the German Reich²⁸

While no reliable studies about the demographic composition of these groups exist, surveys of communities of *Reichsbürger* by law enforcement agencies based on police files of several hundred individuals in different parts of Germany show a bias towards male membership (approx. 80 % male, 20% female) with an average age of around 50 years. Also, membership seems to run in families,

²⁷ A member of the German Reichsbürger, who shot a police officer during a house search was sentenced recently to a life-long prison sentence.

²⁸ Hüllen, M. et al. Reichsbürger zwischen zielgerichtetem Rechtsextremismus und Staatsverdrossenheit, in Wilking (2015), p.14



among the members a significant number of couples or fathers and sons can be found. The majority of the *Reichsbürger* though has no prior criminal records.²⁹

Members of the intelligence community have labelled the *Reichsbürger* in Germany and Austria as a new type of “geronto-radicalism”³⁰ that falls outside the standard classification of radical or extremist protest movements and hence it is difficult to create a profile of a typical activist. They escape the standard classification of religious, right- or left-wing extremism.

Law enforcement experts also find it difficult to assess the actual size of these heterodox groups in their national jurisdiction. While it may be comparatively easy to identify single individuals displaying fake documents in a stop-and-search situation, the number of supporters or sympathisers who can be activated for particular public protest actions is unknown. Recent events and confrontations with representatives of these groups produced a local turnout of over hundred activists, confronting law enforcement officers who wanted to make an arrest of a suspect.

²⁹ See the data collected in Speit, A. (Ed.). (2017). *Reichsbürger: Die unterschätzte Gefahr*. Ch. Links Verlag.

³⁰ Private communication, workshop on heterodox political groups, Vienna 2017



2.5 Heterodox political groups and societal security

Why should a patchwork of highly heterogeneous groups with obviously outlandish ideologies be considered a topic to investigate problems of societal security? It is hard to imagine how such a patchwork can pose a threat to the existing institutional and political status quo of contemporary European societies. The numbers of explicitly identified followers are insignificant, their activities local and marginal. Lacking an overall shared ideological framework and organisational infrastructure the field of heterodox political groups remains an abstract category, an object of theoretical reflection reconstructed from the perspective of the outside observer.

Although heterodox politicisation presently is far from developing into a mass movement, the field displays a number of highly relevant features that shed light on problems affecting different aspects of societal security.

First the radical disjunction between orthodox and heterodox forms of political discourse indicates an erosion of what could be called the non-contractual elements of the social contract, to borrow a phrase from sociological theory. Lacking common ground and a shared understanding of basic properties of the social world makes it difficult to sustain exchange and coordination across different social groups, setting the heterodox groups apart from political discourse. Many of the heterodox belief systems entail a reflexive component designed to protect entrenched elements of these systems from critique, scrutiny and refutation. These core elements are employed by true believers or followers to set themselves apart from the rest of society. This gives them a status resembling a religious cult based on a priori assumptions. Contemporary societies over the centuries have developed a secular culture where religion has been expelled from political debate and is considered as part of the realm of an individual's private sphere. Notions like Holy Trinity or transubstantiation can claim contextual validity within the privatised realm of religion. A true believer would subscribe to them on the basis of the principle of *credo quia absurdum*. However, in the secular public sphere of political deliberation such notions will have to be bracketed in order to interact with others as citizens. If such a priori assumptions however extend into the world of political discourse, they can destroy the very basis for such a discourse. Recently this problem has been widely discussed with regard to Islamic religious norms and how they relate to normative principles of a secular political order.³¹ Heterodox political belief systems reproduce this confrontation in a nutshell. Involving someone who subscribes to any of these belief systems in a democratic deliberation is difficult if not impossible, since s/he would deny the foundation of such a process and denounce any critical argument as irrelevant, fabricated or fake news. Support for the apodictic heterodox mind-set in many cases is provided by a virtual community of peers, collectively entertaining ideas that run counter to basic everyday assumptions sustaining social interaction.

Secondly, due to the heterogeneous nature of the patchwork created by the different heterodox groups a unified targeted political approach of reconciliation seems difficult if not impossible. Public

³¹ See e.g. Soroush, A. (2002). *Reason, freedom, and democracy in Islam: Essential writings of Abdolkarim Soroush*. Oxford University Press. Boroumand, L., & Boroumand, R. (2002). Terror, Islam, and democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2), 5-20.



and media discourse primarily follow a strategy of either demonizing or ridiculing these groups, denying them the status of legitimate members in the public forum. Taking a closer look at the practices and beliefs of many heterodox political groups, this might look as an adequate response. While a critical confrontation taking up political challenges emerging from a more or less unified and intellectually grounded system of beliefs can fuel a rational debate, identifying incompatibilities and defining areas of common ground, the exposure to a myriad of incoherent local metaphysics makes such a confrontation impossible. A powerful narrative fuelling alternative political views and promoting scenarios for a different or “better” society may help to sharpen mainstream political discourse and change fields of societal practice as the history of social movements from the 18th century onwards and the codification of their claims in modern legal systems demonstrates.³² The decomposition of unifying and/or competing political narratives into multiple and arbitrary, unconnected fragments can bring this dialectic to a halt.³³

Thirdly, the rise of heterodox political groups can be taken as an indicator for fundamental societal changes (and problems). It reflects a desire for an interpretation of the social world along the lines of clear, unambiguous and comprehensible causes and effects and, at the same time, satisfies the need for suitable scapegoats who can be blamed for one’s own (perceived) misery. Simplified political narratives operating with a clear-cut and value-laden distinction between “Us” and “Them” appear attractive under conditions of perceived economic, social and cultural insecurity. Hence, the rise of heterodox political groups also reflects a rising level of societal insecurity. The reasons for this insecurity can be as manifold as its effects.³⁴

The use-value of an investigation of heterodox politicisation for a better understanding of societal security can be seen in an in-depth, micro-level insight into processes of ideological fragmentation and the rise of new small communities, sealed off from mainstream political discourse, mirroring either gradual processes of social disintegration or highlighting new heterodox forms of political self-empowerment. The available exemplary evidence can be read either way – as a sign of decline of European civic culture or as an early sign of an emerging new form of politics.

³² See the analysis of legal evolution in Habermas, J., (1985). *The theory of communicative action* (Vol. 2). Beacon press.

³³ The current (postmodern) shift from interest to identity politics reflects this fragmentation at the level of mainstream theoretical discourse, and one might see the growth of heterodox politicisation as a trivialised version of this seminal trend. On social and political mobilisation along the lines of common interests and shared identities see Rowley, T. I., & Moldoveanu, M. (2003). When will stakeholder groups act? An interest- and identity-based model of stakeholder group mobilization. *Academy of management review*, 28(2), 204-219.

³⁴ For a comprehensive account based on a country study of the Netherlands see Buruma, I. (2014). *Murder in Amsterdam*. Atlantic Books Ltd.

3 Data sources used for the analysis

Given the limited resources available for the Annual Societal Security reports this analysis remains at the level of exemplary cases and plausible interpretation backed by theoretical arguments. Empirical evidence for this report was collected from different sources.

We collected European survey data on a number of indicators for those countries we included in our study: Austria, France, Germany, Greece, France, Norway, Slovakia and United Kingdom. We added Turkey to this group as a contrasting case, with a distinct political history and culture. The figures from EUROSTAT and the European Social Survey, covering the period from 2002 to 2016 (ESS) and 1990 to 2016 (EUROSTAT) provide contextual and background information about the development of trust in the national legal systems, in European institutions, voter turnout in national elections, interest in politics etc. The figures reveal general trends and country specific developments.

For the nine countries included in our analysis we developed a template to guide data collection about the rise of heterodox political groups at the national level. The country reports were designed to identify national movements, networks or groups, to be qualified as heterodox. As an entry point for all countries an Internet search was conducted, using keywords like *One People's Public Trust* (OPPT), *Freemen*, and *Sovereign Citizens* (or relevant translations thereof into national languages). Some groups were identified through other country-specific searches. The websites of the identified groups were analysed to estimate the number of followers/visitors. A media analysis to identify public debates about heterodox political groups and the topics they address, was performed. For each country, the reaction of law enforcement authorities and relevant legal regulations about political protest movements were documented. Where national survey data about political alignment, voting behaviour, etc. were accessible, these data were also included in the country reports. The country reports should provide answers to the following main questions: what are the most significant (i.e. receiving most public attention) political movements active in the national context covering the ideological spectrum from left/right/religious/ecological ideological framing? Are heterodox political activists/groups linked to these other movements? For each country, a map of the national political counter culture was drafted, detailing the relevant heterodox actors and groups and putting them into the overall context of the national political situation.

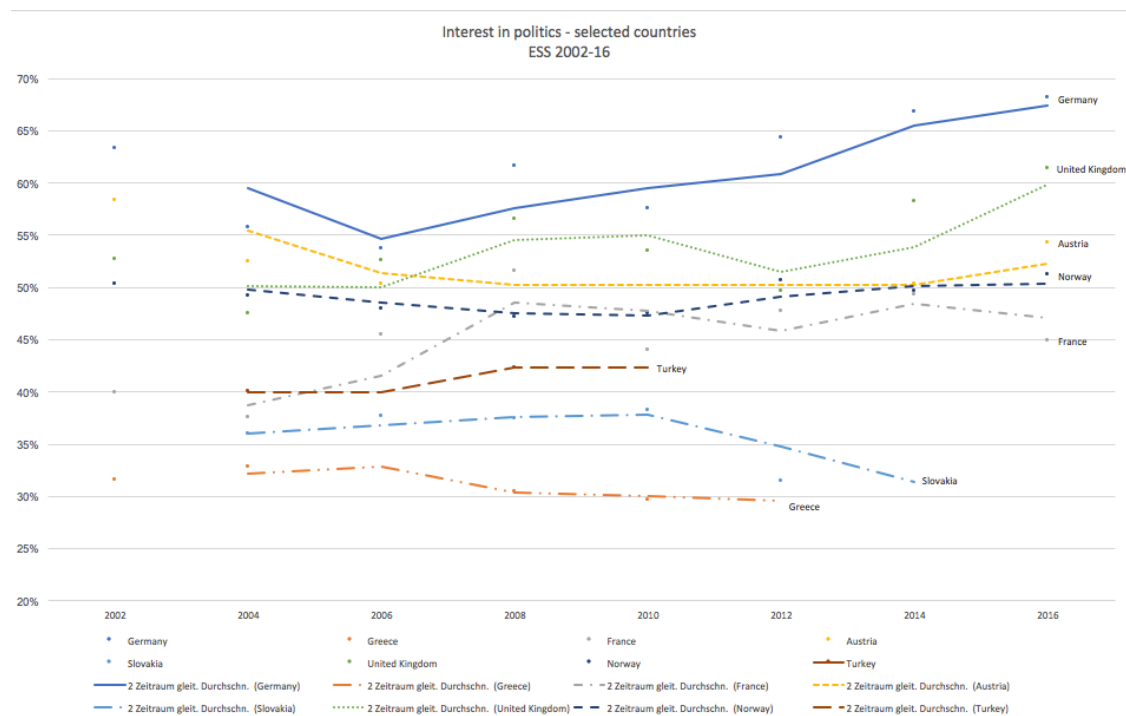
To test our assumption about the hybrid ideological nature of the new heterodox political groups we ran an analysis of publicly accessible Facebook data, investigating the overlap of shared contacts ("Likes", "share", "comment") between the Facebook accounts of left-wing and right-wing and heterodox groups, taking Austria as a test case.³⁵

³⁵ The software and methodology for this analysis have been developed by us, but due to limited resources we could run the analysis in Austria.

4 Selected contextual data on political behaviour and attitudes in Europe

Heterodox political groups are an offspring of a more general trend towards populism in political culture. Across Europe populist parties – with different political orientations – have been on the rise in national elections over the last years. Nonetheless, a closer look reveals different trajectories in individual European societies. Before we present in more detail the results from our country studies on heterodox political groups we will briefly present some general data from European surveys detailing the development of relevant indicators over the last decade.³⁶

Looking at the figures for interest in politics and how they developed in the countries we included in our case study sample we can see, that except for Slovakia and Greece, where scores remain on a comparatively low level and showing a downward tendency in both countries, interest in politics either remains stable or goes even significantly up as in Germany and the United Kingdom.

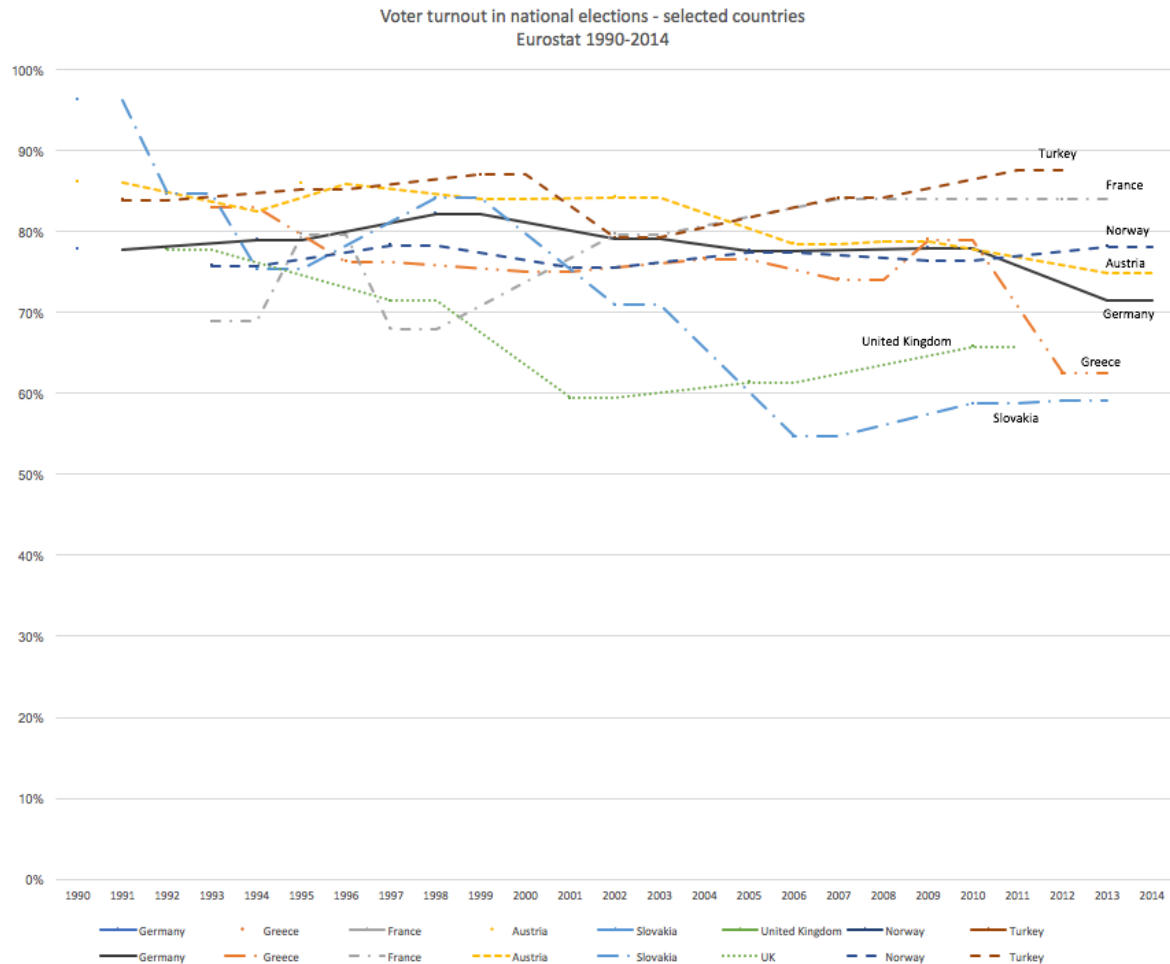


Some of these trends are also reflected in the figures for voter turnout in national elections over the last decades in the eight countries considered here. When looking at the chart for voter turnout below it has to be taken into account that in some countries, like Turkey, voting is compulsory for citizens by law. This may partly explain the high score and rising figure for this country. Slovakia and Greece, scoring low on general interest in politics also show a significant decline in voter turnout, reflecting the low interest in politics. France and the United Kingdom, two of the big players and political heavy weights in the European Union have seen a decrease of voter turnout over the years

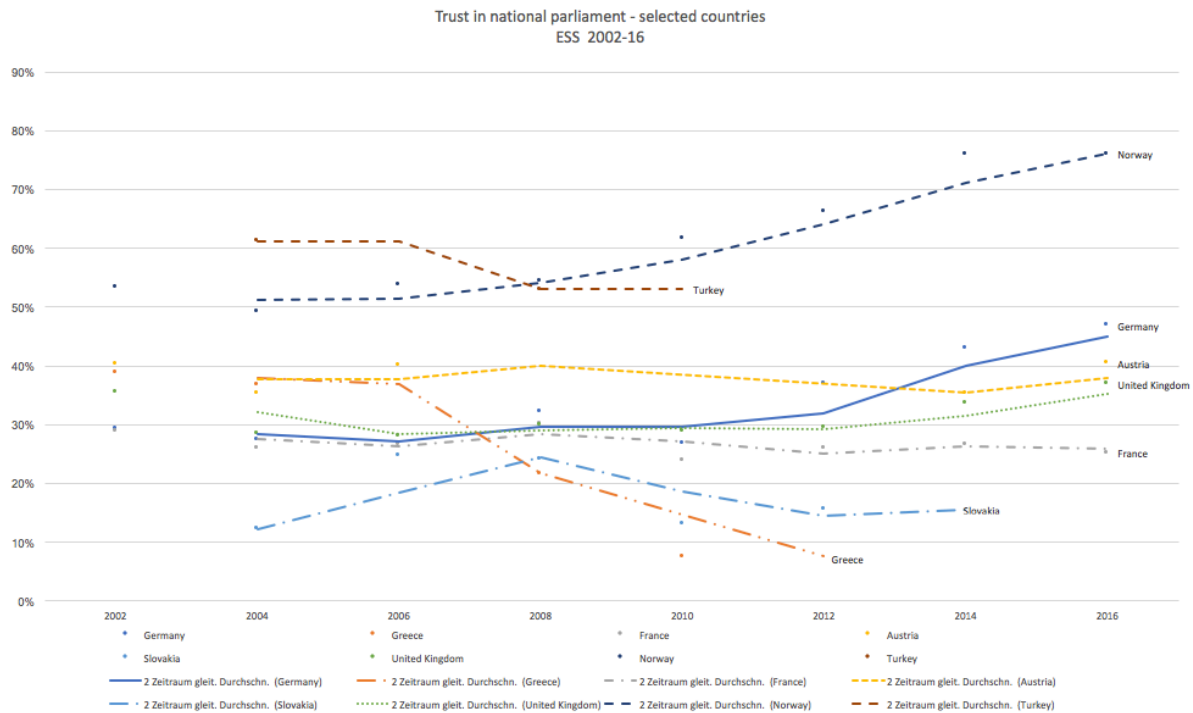
³⁶ We used data from Eurostat for the period of 1990 -2014 and from the European Social Survey from its beginning in 2002.



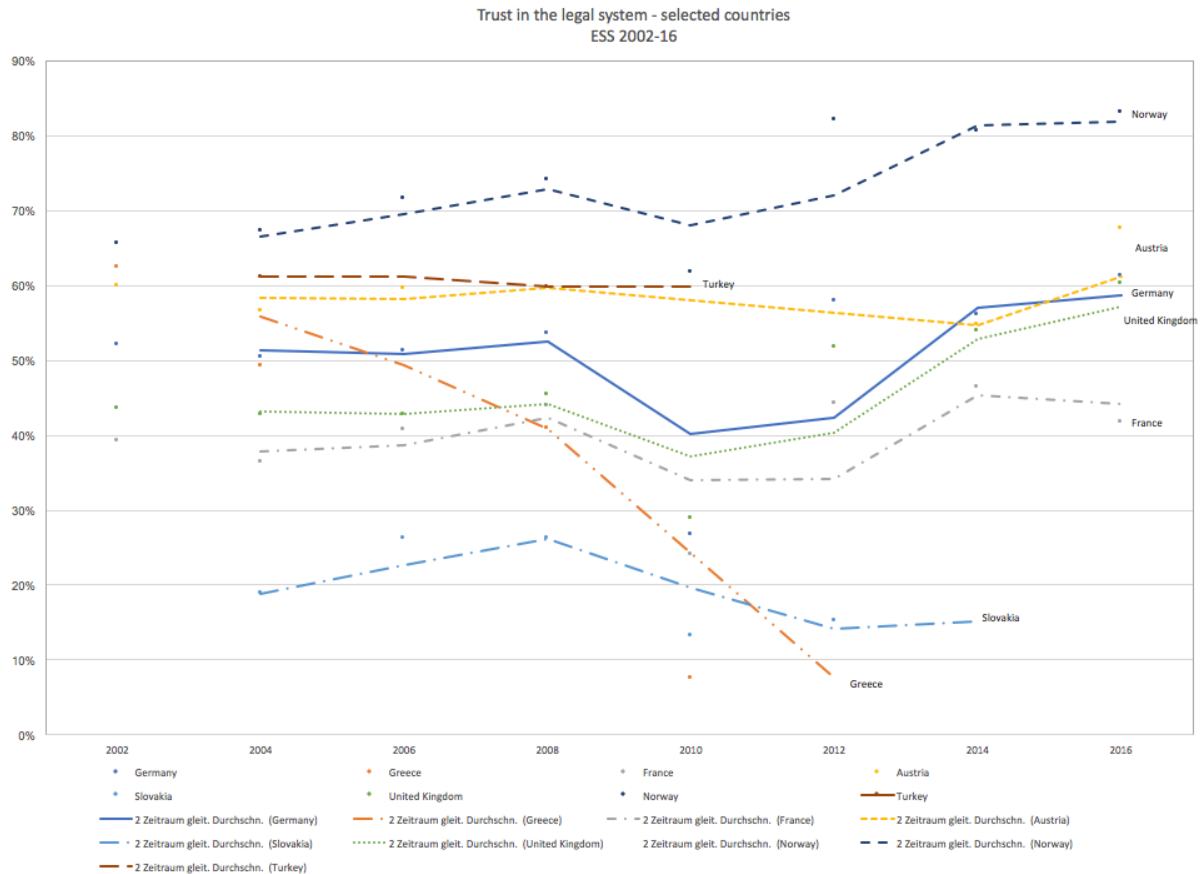
since the 1990ies. The same is true for Austria whereas turnout in France has going up and down. Norway has remained stable over the whole timespan. With five out of eight countries showing a decrease of turnout at the ballot, the general European tendency seems to be more towards lower turnout rates. While interest in politics remains high, standard political activities like voting in national elections is overall decreasing.



When looking at the development of citizens' trust in their national parliaments, the figures confirm the general trend for the two countries Greece and Slovakia, where trust is rather low and decreasing over time in the last decade. For all other countries, we see a general stable trend, with slightly upward moving scores for the United Kingdom and Germany. Norway here stands out as the political and democratic model student of Europe, as a country where trust in Parliament has been continuously on the rise to the European top level of almost 80 % of its citizens trusting their national parliament.

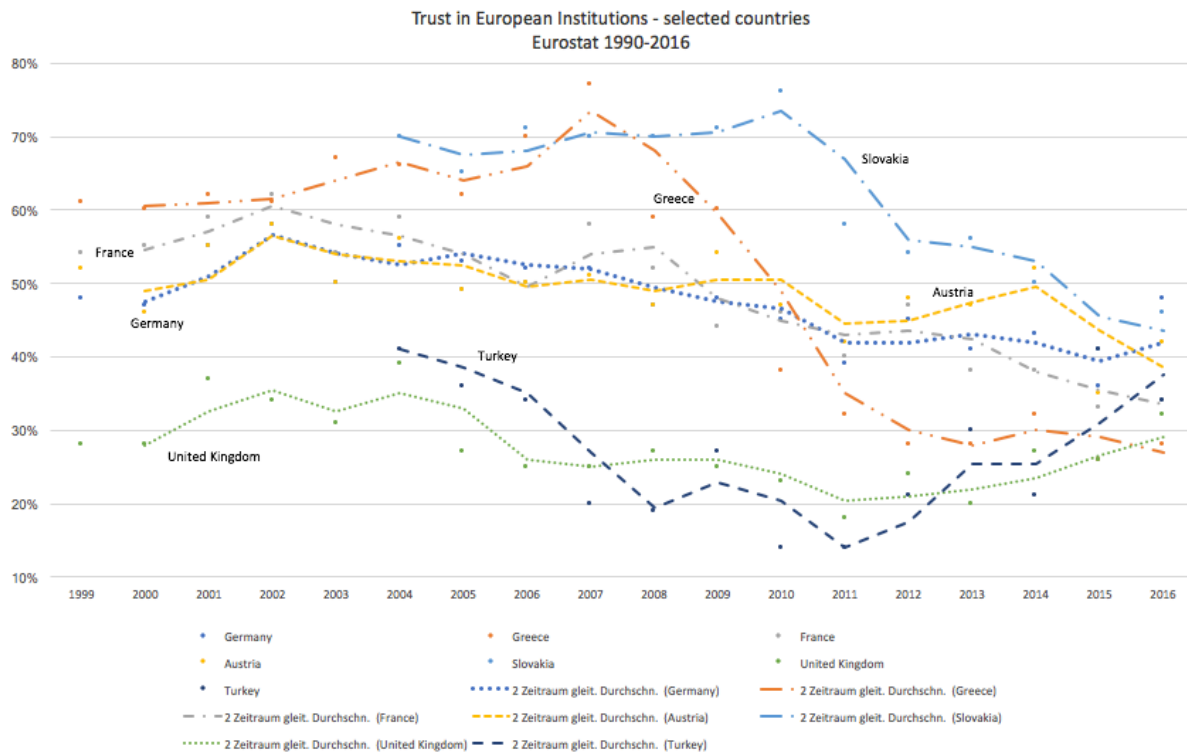


Looking at trust in the legal system the eight countries show the same tendencies as in all other areas we looked at so far. Norway, a country with a stable economy, a functioning welfare system and significant national wealth, based on its oil resources, again produces the highest scores. Greece on the other hand, a country at the brink of state bankruptcy and an economy that has shown no signs of recovery over the last decade displays the lowest score, with less than 10 % percent of the respondents trusting the legal system of their country, showing a continuous downward trend since 2002. The parallel curves for France, the United Kingdom and Germany, all going down after the year 2008, may be shaped by the financial crisis of 2007 and 2008, that affected all European countries. Even in Norway a slight dip in the overall trend line occurs around the year 2008. Austria, France and Slovakia on the other hand seem not to be affected by the global financial crisis, at least with regard to their citizens' trust in the national legal system.



When citizens were asked about their trust in European institutions the development of the responses reveal interesting changes in the individual countries.³⁷ We can see Greece and Slovakia displaying high trust levels at the beginning (Slovakia became a member of the European Union in May 2004) and significantly degrading scores over time. In all other countries citizens over the years lost trust in European Union Institutions with the exception of Turkey. The overall declining trust in European institutions at national level plays into the hands of populist parties advertising their neo-nationalist agendas. It also reflects a predicament of all Member States, where governments are caught between the demands of a joint European policy approach to European and global problems and a growing potential of nationalist political parties, engaging in populist Euro-bashing.

³⁷ Norway, not being a member of the European Union is missing in this survey. Turkey on the other hand has been included into the Eurostat survey.



While general interest in politics, trust in parliaments and the legal systems seems to remain relatively high in our sample, voter turnout and trust in European institutions seems to decline. Differences between individual countries can be identified and accounted for in terms of economic differences between these countries. Greece and Slovakia, two countries confronted with a number of complex economic problems stand out from the other countries with regard to trust and political engagement of their citizen. Country specific differences will be addressed in the respective country reports. This brief sketch of some relevant indicators should serve as a background for the analyses of the individual situation in the eight countries we included in our sample.

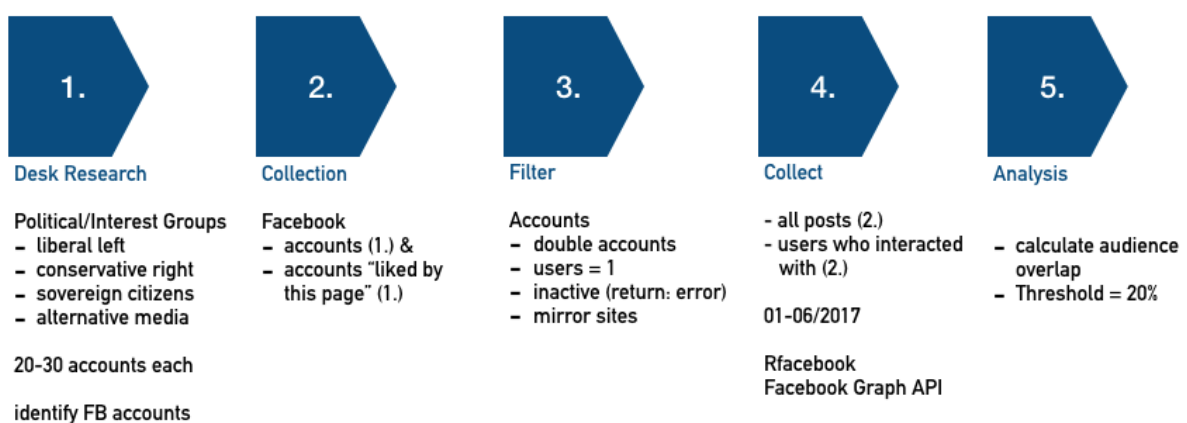
5 Sovereign citizen social media networks

5.1 Explorative network analysis: Overlap of Facebook audiences among Austrian political and sovereign citizen accounts

In this chapter, we investigate the activity of sovereign citizen groups and actors on social media networks. While their online presence via websites and blogs is featured in their descriptions in the respective country reports, here we track their social media activity on their Facebook accounts, that often mirror the content of their generic websites. This allows to map their links to other initiatives and groups as well as analyse their audience overlap with other political and interest groups.

The motivation for this network exploration is to investigate the degree and quality of links between audiences in respect to the reception of and interaction with sovereign citizen accounts. The range of concerns they raise links them to both, traditionally libertarian and “left” as well as “right” modes of critique and politics. In addition to sovereign citizen groups, online media, we described as “alternative media” referenced on their websites are included in this investigation. Alternative media sites are often linked to specific heterodox political groups, expanding on their ideology and voicing critique (and often conspiracy theories). These accounts have, in reverse, been featured by posts of traditional parties selectively as they fit into their political ideology. To explore this interlock of political ideologies with sovereign citizen accounts a network analysis of Facebook accounts seemed as an appropriate way to illustrate this.

5.2 Methodology



Overview

1. Identification of public Facebook accounts of political and sovereign citizen groups in Austria



In a first step, we identified Facebook accounts clustered into (1) sovereign citizen groups, (2) liberal-left political and interest groups, (3) conservative and far right political and interest groups, (4) alternative media accounts active in Austria.

Sovereign citizen and alternative media accounts were identified by desk research for the respective country report. Political groups for left and right ideologies started with parties and party associated organisations, regional accounts of federal organisations, activist groups, and groups listed in the annual report of the Austrian intelligence service (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und Terrorismusbekämpfung), which lists radical and extremists' groups within the traditional left-right spectrum.

Frequency of start groups

Start groups	Frequency
Alternative media accounts	32
Liberal/left accounts	26
Conservative/Right accounts	24
Sovereign citizen accounts	34
Total	116

2. Collection of these Facebook accounts using Facebook API and Rfacebook and collection of "Pages liked by this page" section (pages that have been actively liked by the account holder/administrator) in order to intensify the manual identification.

For these so-called "start groups" (1.) organised by desk research, respective Facebook accounts were identified and assigned. Groups without Facebook accounts were excluded from analysis. If more Facebook accounts (e.g. regional fractions) were identified, all accounts available were included into the analysis. Eventually, a total of 116 Facebook accounts across the four categories were included into the analysis.

In a second step, all accounts identified in the "liked by this page" section of every "start group" account was added to the analysis. This Facebook section links pages, that were actively liked by one of our start groups. In order to condense desk research, these linked accounts were added to the start groups. Adding "Pages liked by this page" accounts to the original start group, resulted in a total of 5012 Facebook accounts.



Example: “Liked by this page” section

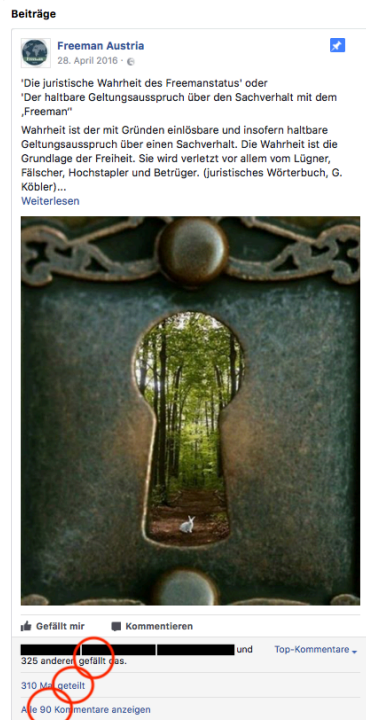
3. Consolidation/Filtering of groups

Consolidating this expanded group list, double entries were filtered, if accounts were liked by two independent start accounts, the unique variable thereby being the Facebook ID. It does occur for two nodes to display the same name, if distinct Facebook IDs are linked to them.

Filtered were also Facebook accounts, that only had a following of one user; accounts, that were inactive and returned with in error (in collecting them); and certain types of Facebook sites, which do not allow for interacting with them, but feature mirrors of traditional websites (such as Wikipedia pages or Event pages). After consolidation, 3630 unique Facebook accounts could be included in the analysis.

4. Collecting posts/users

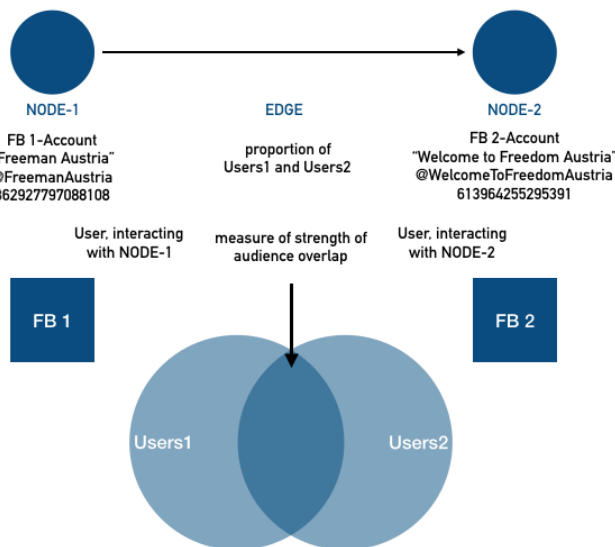
For this consolidated group list, all posts between January 1 and June 30, 2017 were collected. In addition, all user accounts who interacted with any of the posts were collected for this time period. As “interactions” we defined any Facebook feature to “post” on the accounts site, “comment” on posts, as well as “like” or “share” any post. If an individual user only visited or read a Facebook feed of one of our accounts, it could not be included in the analysis.



Modes of interaction on Facebook

5. Analysis

These individual user IDs (audience) were compared against each other and computed as overlap between the accounts identified. A threshold of 20% overlap was imposed for the analysis.



Node/Edge-Calculation

5.3 Results

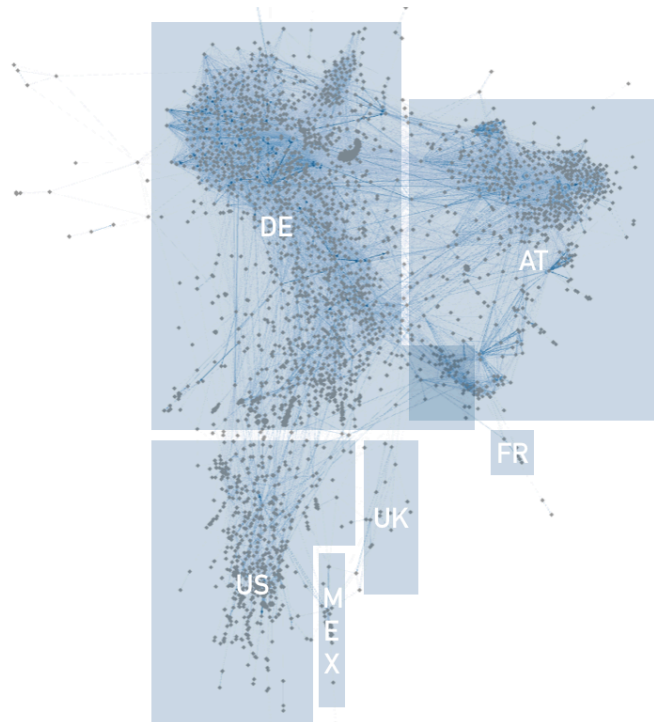
The following edge/node list output was computed in R and was visualised with Gephi. It features 3630 nodes and 26 954 edges.

Network overview



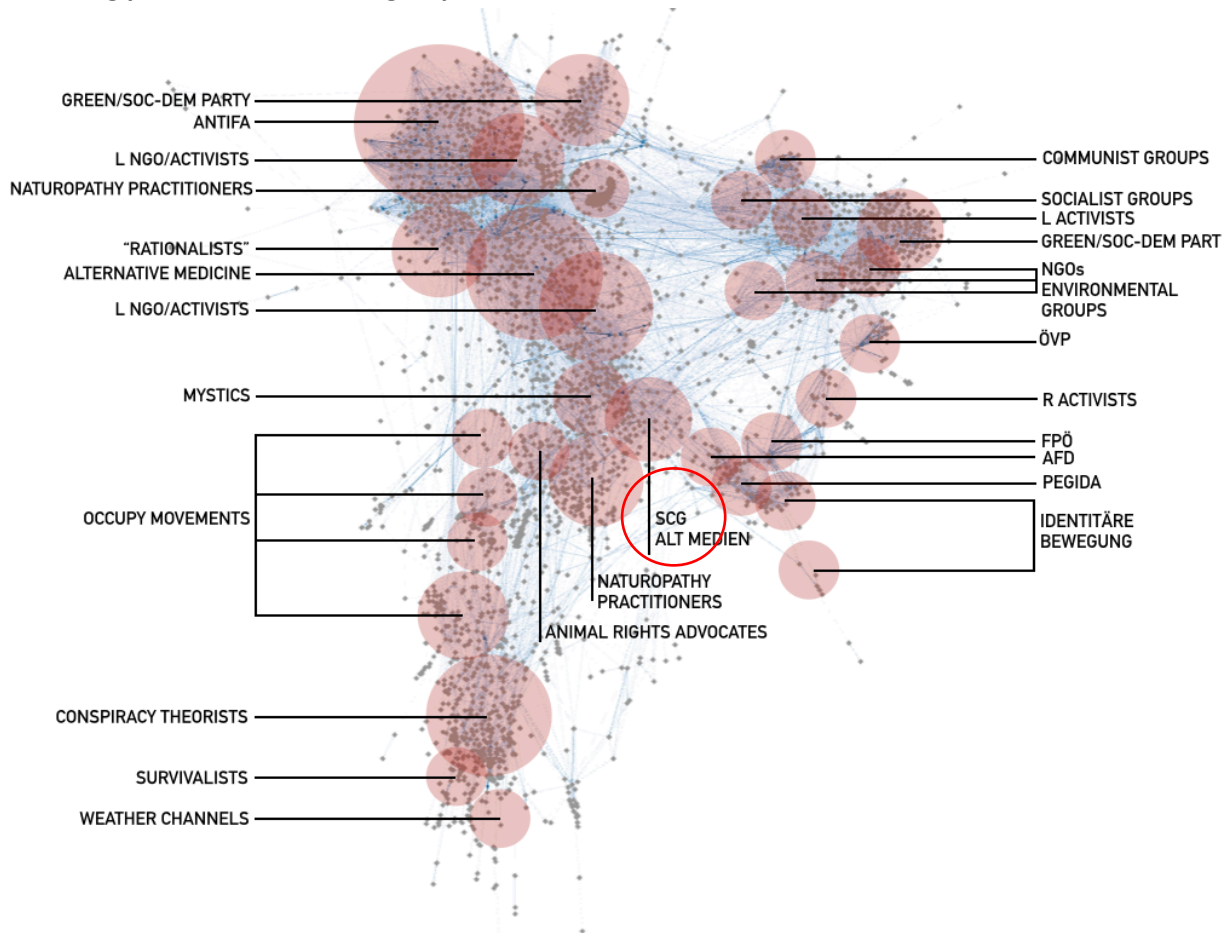
The visualisation indicates the strength of overlap with edge thickness, and optimises relative distance of nodes to each other.

National/Language Clusters



While the start group only featured accounts of Austrian groups, the majority of accounts are German Facebook accounts. Several English-speaking activist groups and blogs were “liked by” the initial start group and a minority of French accounts (solely linked to the European far right “Identity Movement”).

Clustering political and interest groups



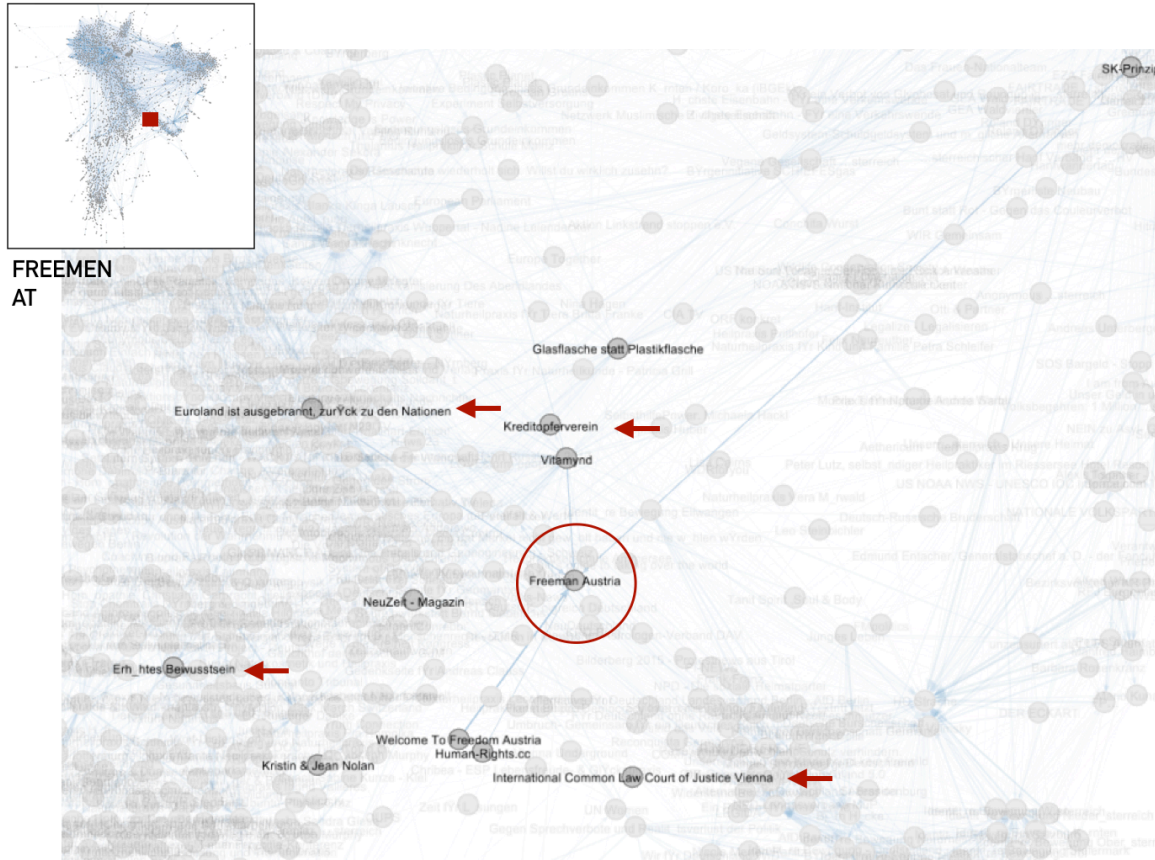
The clustering above was ascribed qualitatively by assigning labels to closely linked Facebook accounts based on their user names. This allow for high-level mapping of the whole ecology of the network.

Not only national and language clusters become visible, but types of actors such as parties and activists form distinct clusters, while they establish links in audience overlaps. It is important to highlight, that links between Facebook accounts are not determined by the activity of the account holders, but the audience they share and address.

For Germany as well as Austria, the number of “liberal/left” interest groups and party associated groups outweighs the number of their “conservative/right” counterparts. While this may indicate a different social media presence across political ideologies – a higher frequency of left interest groups (such as the left *Antifa*) as well as higher degree of distinction of interests -, conclusions need to be restricted to observing different social media behaviour: liberal/left political and interest groups

show a higher likelihood to actively “like” each other on Facebook, as conservative or right groups exhibit.

Tracing links: Freeman Austria



To exemplify how sovereign citizen groups are situated within this network, and how links to political and interest groups are established, the account „Freeman Austria“ is discussed more closely.

“Freemen” in Austria constitute a loose network organised around some key figures, such as Joe Kreissl, who is based in Upper Austria where he set up his self-proclaimed empire under the name of “Erlösterreich” (a play of words using “Erlösung”, the German word for salvation). Joe Kreissl promises his followers “salvation” from the “illegal” contracts binding them to the “illegal” state of Austria.³⁸

Among the variety of Facebook accounts included in the analysis, sovereign citizen groups play a relative small role quantitatively. In addition, court proceedings against several groups and changes to the criminal code outlawing some of their tactics has led to a decrease in online activity in Austria.

Facebook accounts Freeman Austria shares audiences with, are:

³⁸ A detailed description of “Freeman Austria” and sovereign citizen groups in Austria can be found in the respective country report.



- Glasflasche statt Plastikflasche (Glass instead of plastic bottles): a single-issue environmental interest group, focused on promoting the use of glass instead of plastic.
- Kreditopferverband (organization of debt victims)
- Erlöstes Bewusstsein (Salvaged consciousness): an alternative media outlet, featuring esoteric-mystic contents and conspiracy theories
- Euroland ist ausgebrannt, zurück zu den Nationen (Euro land is burnt, back to the nation state)
- Freeman Austria subsidiaries: Welcome to Freedom (Joe Kreissl's personal blog), Human-Rights.cc (Freeman Austria's redefinition of human rights), International Common Law Court of Justice Vienna (the only legal institution recognized by Freeman Austria's through which they organize their "exit" from the state)
- SK-Prinzip: a coaching method focused on conflict resolution in organizations

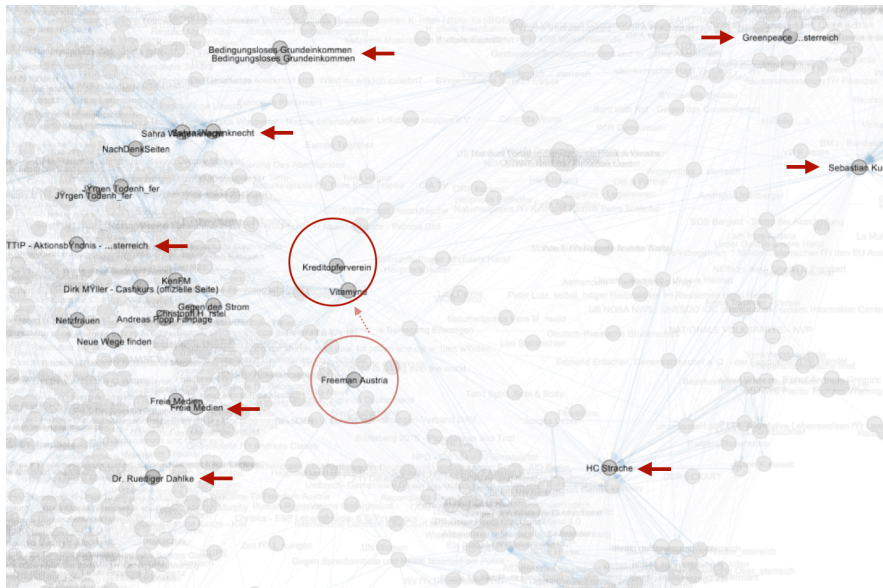
While a small sample, the accounts illustrate a certain range of interests and indicate potential ideologies linked to them, which usually are not aligned. While the overlap with its own subsidiaries is less surprising, the link to a self-organized group of individuals in debt is rather indicative. Financial bankruptcy is a recurring theme of biographies of sovereign citizen actors and has been identified as recruiting strategy (in the US as well as Austria) addressing people in financial troubles. Also, the theme of "salvation" through "regaining consciousness" is featured in an esoteric outlet (Erlöstes Bewusstsein) while sharing, an affinity with more mundane techniques of self-help/-optimization (SK-Prinzip).

In addition, we observe an environmental protection group, concerned with health hazards of plastic, which dabbles in conspiracy-leaning themes of being "poisoned" by "them" (be that states or companies), as well as a Euro-sceptic movement featuring far right ideologies. Environmental movements traditionally have had far right counterparts and tendencies, featuring notions of "purity" or "regionalism" that have been taken up in conservative and far right discourses.

Tracing different routes (indicative examples):

In the following we trace three accounts immediately linked to "Freemen Austria" in one more iteration. The examples highlight the range of interest groups and links to a variety of political ideologies, audiences are shared with. Interest groups contextualize certain aspects of political leanings, which are prominently featured and reoccur in the self-published outlets of sovereign citizen groups. It furthermore reinforces the range shown among the "intermediaries" above.

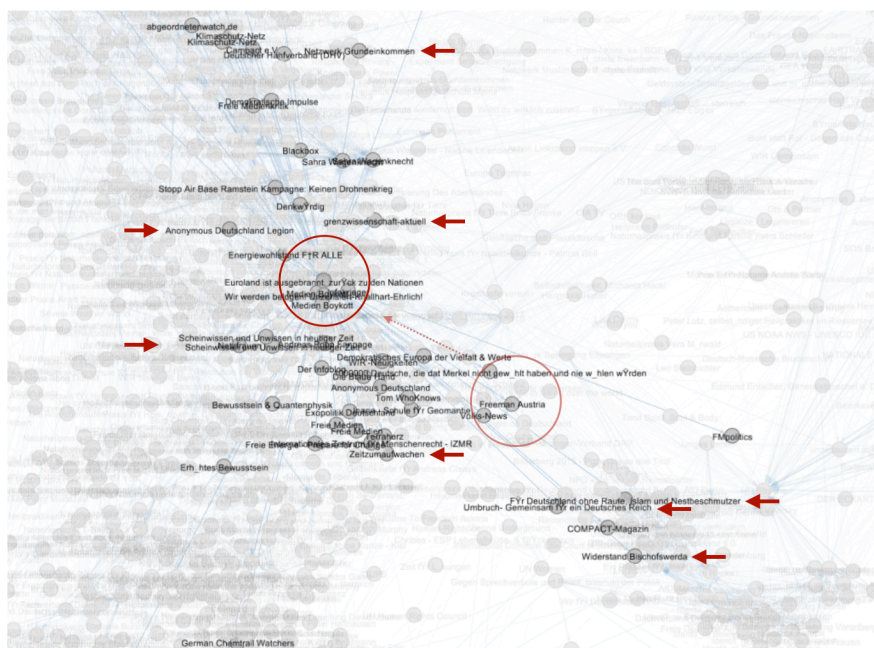
Route 1: Kreditopferverein



Audience overlap:

- Bedingungsloses Grundeinkommen: (unconditional) basic income
- Greenpeace Austria: environmental organisation
- Sebastian Kurz: head of Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP)
- HC Strache: head of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ)
- Sarah Wagenknecht: head of Die Linke (Germany)
- TTIP – Aktionsbündnis Österreich: activist organisation against TTIP

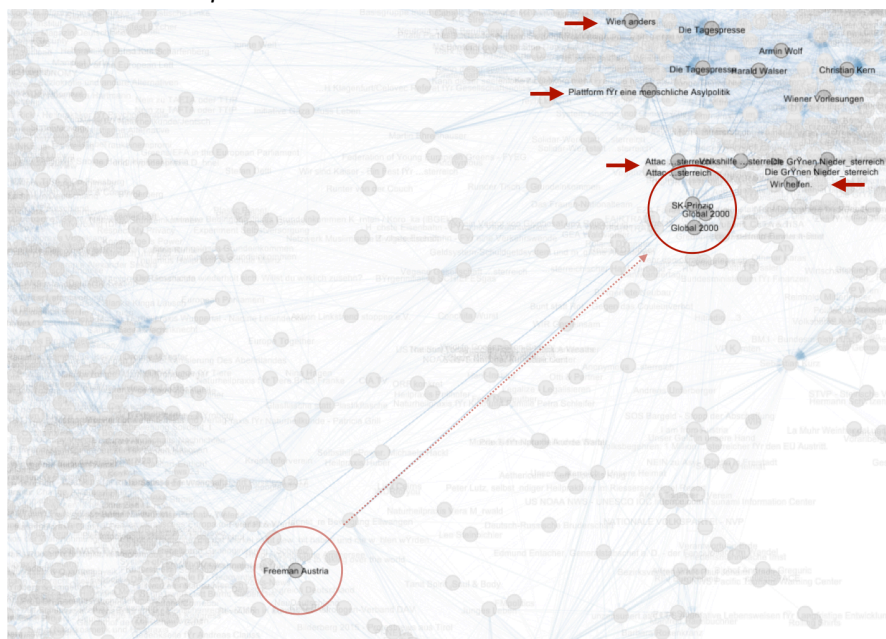
Route 2: Euroland ist ausgebrannt, zurück zu den Nationen



Audience overlap:

- Netzwerk Grundeinkommen: Network basic income
- Grenzwissenschaft-aktuell: fringe science
- Anonymous Deutschland Legion: libertarian Internet activists
- Scheinwissen und Unwissen in der heutigen Zeit: alternative media (conspiracy, mystic blog)
- Zeitzumaufwachen: alternative media (conspiracy, mystic blog)
- German Chemtrail Watchers: conspiracy theorists
- Für ein Deutschland ohne Raute, Islam und Nestbeschmutzer: German Neo-Nazi account
- Umbruch – Gemeinsam für ein Deutsches Reich: „Reichsbürger“ sovereign citizen account
- Widerstand Bischofswerda: German Neo-Nazi account

Route 3: SK-Prinzip



Audience overlap:

- Wien anders: progressiv, left political movement
- Plattform für eine menschliche Asylpolitik: Platform for human asylum policies
- Attac Österreich: NGO promoting socio-economic justice
- Global 2000: NGO focused on environmental protection
- Christian Kern: head of the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ)

This kind of analysis can help to situate and map the heterodox groups within their larger ideological-political networks. Using publicly available data the analysis honours all legal restrictions with regard to data protection and privacy. Methodologically it follows a non-reactive approach, adding to the ecological validity of the results. The technical procedure for a screening of overlapping audiences has been developed and could be easily applied to other countries across Europe. Since much effort, however, is required to determine the starting sample, we restricted the investigation to Austria, making it an exemplary proof of concept.

6 Country Reports

The following country reports were compiled by externally contracted national experts and members of VICESSE. They are based on a template (see Appendix to this report) developed by VICESSE. This template was used as a general guidance for the national reports, providing for comparable structures. Since the situation, however, is different across Europe the reports show variations in their analytical focus. Also, we included Turkey in our selection, assuming that this could make an interesting contrast case. Given the limited resources available for primary research in this task, the country reports are limited to secondary analysis of national data sources. Nonetheless, they demonstrate the wide variety of heterodox political groups across Europe as well as the specific national contexts from which these activities emerge. Heterodox political movements against the historical background of the French revolution of 1789 look different compared to similar initiatives emerging in a society like Slovakia, where political discourse about “national identity” rehearses themes of a pan-Slavonic heritage and the position of the Slovak people within this symbolic realm.

6.1 Austria

6.1.1 Introduction

„Heterodox politicisation” in Austria is currently represented by a number of different, but in many respects similar, sovereign citizen movements, featuring a couple of single actors, who act as front figures. Although heterodox groups in Austria are not a homogenous movement they nonetheless share a set of common ideas: all of them reject the state and its institutions, refusing any form of cooperation with public authorities. However, each of these groups develops their own line of anti-statist reasoning and argumentation, ranging from right-wing to left-wing positions sometimes mixed with idiosyncratic, esoteric and dystopian elements. Austrian movements like the so-called “Staatenbündler”, OPPT or Freeman-of-the-land connect with other European groups such as Survivalists³⁹ and the German “Reichsbürger. The OPPT groups and the Freeman-of-the-land have their origins in the USA and Canada but their original ideologies have been adopted and moulded to fit in a European context.

In this chapter, we will describe different groups and actors, active in Austria, presenting their historical background, their key beliefs and main arguments developed to justify a rejection of the state’s power and the legitimacy of its institutions. We will describe goals and strategies used to

³⁹ For instance, so called „Preppers“, an acronym for survivalist movements whose members strive „to be prepared“ for a fantasised doomsday expected in the near future. In Austria, an online prepper shop caters for this community. Survivalists could be classified as another twist of sovereign citizens, but have not got any attention so far in Austria, neither from the media, nor from police. Therefore, they are not considered in this report. However, in the German context preppers are more prominent and a closer look will be taken at this movement in the German country report.



achieve the ultimate goal to “escape” from the state. The local media discourse about these groups will be briefly sketched and reactions of law enforcement discussed. A final section will put the heterodox groups in Austria in a broader context, looking at implications for today’s democratic societies.

The groups discussed here should not be seen as stable entities, which can be easily traced within their national context. Often, they change their names, main actors disappear (because e.g. they are sentenced to prison) and re-appear at later times under a new heading. However, it is exactly this fluid and volatile character that makes these new emerging grass-roots movements an interesting object of study. The heterodox political groups in their varying forms are kept alive last not least as a reaction to a deep-seated mistrust in the legitimacy of modern democracies and their political-institutional order.

6.1.2 Heterodox Movements in Austria

“Staatenbund Österreich” or “Staatenbündler”

Members of the “Staatenbund Austria” refuse to accept the very existence of the Republic of Austria and consider the Austrian state and all its institutions (public authorities, such as tax offices, the police etc.) as branches of a private commercial company – the state. In their opinion, the legal basis of the Austrian state is private commercial law, and thus public authorities cannot claim any sovereign rights on their own as representing a political authority. As a result, the adherents of the Staatenbund Austria decided to establish and constitute their own autonomous state. Austria in their opinion is only a simulation of a state governed by eight international banks. Since a private company has no right to impose any penalties or collect taxes, they refuse to pay fines or tax. Officially the “Staatenbund Österreich” was proclaimed and constituted on 11th November 2015⁴⁰ This entity began to create “legal” documents, such as letters of admission, and distribute license plates (for which a member fee was collected). An Austrian citizen in possession of such documents no longer belonged to the Austrian state, according to the members of this group. The legal and constitutional state, so the claim, would lose all legal force over the members of the Staatenbund.

One major activity of this group is to attack existing authorities and intervene when e.g. a police officer shows up to make an arrest. This resulted in numerous court proceedings against the activists. Taking a closer look at the narratives and accounts provided by the Staatenbund group to justify such actions reveals a mix of esoteric ideas with pseudo-legal language and irrational arguments. The main thrust of the rhetoric is to attack the “elites” and fight against the unfair and unjust “system”, aligned with and governed by commercial principles and ignoring the principles of natural and international human law.⁴¹

⁴⁰ <http://www.nachrichten.at/nachrichten/chronik/26-Staatsverweigerer-festgenommen;art58,2545206> (accessed on 20th September 2017).

⁴¹ This reference to a natural or common law seems a main argumentation pattern, relevant for all of the sovereign citizen movements as will be seen later on in this report.



A prominent figure of this group, acting as self-proclaimed president of the “Staatenbund Austria” is Monika Unger.⁴² She founded the “legal” entity “Staat Steiermark” (that is one of the nine federal states in Austria), after creating and constituting the “Staatenbund Österreich” – both entities are purely fictional and illegal by law.

“Freeman Austria”

The movement „Freeman-on-the-land“ originated in the 1970s and 1980s in the US and Canada. It began as a peaceful movement, combining ecological and esoteric elements in an ideological frame for a community advocating rural self-contained living. Nowadays, in the US, this same movement is classified as a threat, proclaiming terrorism. Their ideology that relies heavily on a number of conspiracy theories, also has been adopted by European and Austrian followers.

“Freemen” in Austria constitute a loose network organised around some key figures, such as Joe Kreissl, who is based in Upper Austria where he set up his self-proclaimed empire under the name of “Erlösterreich” (a play of words using “Erlösung”, the German word for salvation). Joe Kreissl promises his followers “salvation” from the “illegal” contracts binding them to the “illegal” state of Austria. His main line is, that none of the Austrian citizens ever in person and deliberately signed a (social?) contract with the legal entity, called Austria. The group around Joe Kreissl lacks any clear organisational structure and no formal membership seems to exist.⁴³ Another smaller group operates out of the Austrian province Tyrol. Their Facebook Account⁴⁴ lists 125 members.

Despite the seemingly irrational and incoherent narratives offered by the Austrian Freeman community over the last two years, the support for their ideology has been constantly high, and followers were recruited via Internet through sectarian messages or through public lectures, events, and presentations. This successful development put the movement on the radar of the Austrian federal office for sect-related issues.

Similar to the “Staatenbündler”, “Freemen” also strive to set up parallel structures, replacing public authorities, such as courts. (In the US Freeman groups established their own autonomous police units.) For individuals who subscribe to the ideology of the Freeman movement public laws are only voluntary agreements, which must be explicitly and actively approved by each citizen to be considered as valid. A “Freeman” believes that s/he can simply opt out of the state and its laws respectively because the existing legal order is based on a contract he did not sign. To inform the public authorities of their opting out, Freeman send documents and formal declarations, such as affidavits to relevant public authorities informing “the state” about their intention to opt out of the republic Austria.⁴⁵

⁴² (see for instance, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uumuZLD9iWE>; or the personal Facebook account of Monika Unger, <https://www.facebook.com/monika.unger.77>)

⁴³ see for instance, the “official” Website of Joe Kreissl, <http://schlosswalchen.wixsite.com/wunderwelt-walchen>; or the FB account of Freeman Austria run by Kreissl: <https://www.facebook.com/FreemanAustria/>, which lists 9610 registered members.

⁴⁴ https://www.facebook.com/pg/Tiroler_Freeman-190807164333625/community/?ref=page_internal

⁴⁵ The affidavit of Joe Kreissl can be read on the Freeman Austria Blog: <https://freemanaustria.wordpress.com>.



The intended effect of this opting out procedure is to avoid payment of taxes, mortgages, debts etc. However, with regard to the topic of taxes different opinions seem to exist within the Freeman movement. Hence, not all supporters of the Freeman movement refuse to pay taxes or to comply with legal duties.⁴⁶

One of the primary strategies applied by Freeman is to send constantly bizarre declarations, false liens, or start frivolous lawsuits against governmental authorities with the aim to unsettle them. Also, they approach individual public employees claiming payments based on some sort of Freeman law. Flooding public authorities with fake declarations or letters can be a successful method of harassment. This practice is quite common among the different heterodox groups in Austria and Germany and is known under the label “*paper terrorism*”, Freeman have a reputation of hard-core paper terrorists and in pursuing this strategy they sometime create substantial jurisdictional and financial problems for themselves.

“OPPT-One People’s Public Trust”

OPPT was founded by three lawyers in 2012 in the US, who were originally members of the US-Freeman-on-the-land movement. Allegedly, they proclaimed in December 2012 that all nation states, their governments and banks accordingly all over the world had been impounded und promised their members 10 billion dollar in form of gold and silver. Two main rationales can be identified in the case of the OPPT movement: characteristically, OPPT members are arguing along a philosophical rationale towards a priority of natural law, as being above positive law. Secondly, after registering themselves as official “trust” in the UCC (Uniform Commercial Code) they started sending a series of “declarations”, comparable with those of Freeman declarations, and foreclosures to all sorts of listed legal public entities. Supposedly, those foreclosures had been carried out because their paperwork was ignored by those entities, and therefore they declared success, in proper pseudo-legal fashion

In Austria OPPT took off in 2014⁴⁷ and Austrian media covered this movement quite extensively⁴⁸. Austria seems to be one of the few countries where this specific ideology has been adopted.⁴⁹

Currently, the movement records a continuous rise in members, meanwhile also in other European countries.

According to OPPT’s logic, the state of Austria has been dissolved, as well as other states in the world through a neglected appeal against a supposed foreclosure (UCC financial statement). This kind of pseudo-legal argumentation is one specificity of the OPPT movement in general. In their line of ideological reasoning OPPT resembles the German movement of the “Reichsbürger”.

⁴⁶ See: Tätigkeitsbericht der Bundesstelle für Sektenfragen an das Bundesministerium für Familien und Jugend (2015) (pp. 60-69). https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/III/III_00377/imfname_627384.pdf (accessed on 25th September 2017).

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ see for instance, http://diepresse.com/home/panorama/oesterreich/3847732/OPPT_Wie-die-Verschwoerung-nach-Hollenbach-kam

⁴⁹ see: https://www.facebook.com/pg/OPPT-Austria-225792220894216/community/?ref=page_internal, the account has 704 members.



Short excursion: The Austrian case – a kind of heterodox “trial”⁵⁰

In 2014 in the rural community “Waidhofen an der Thaya”, in the region of Hollenbach a bunch of activists organized a heterodox court trial, following the principles of natural law. A self-appointed court “International Common Law Court of Justice, Vienna” (ICCJV)⁵¹ convened to handle a case against a local lawyer who had been assigned as the legal guardian of an OPPT member, who had been admitted to a psychiatric hospital (see: https://www.facebook.com/pg/ICCJVInt/about/?ref=page_internal). According to the court convening on the premises, natural law is higher than civil and criminal law in the legal hierarchy since the latter developed from the first one. Thus, a court can be established due to the higher position of natural law in the legal hierarchy. The activists themselves drafted arrest warrants and they also sent out their own “Sheriffs”. The whole action was followed and finally ended by a police raid and some members of the group were arrested.⁵²

The proponents of OPPT are strictly rejecting any state power. Largely, their main argument, similar to the two other movements mentioned above, is to conceive of states as companies, but in a more radical manner than these other movements. In general, they argue that the state, its economic and political system is disintegrating because it is bankrupt. According to their understanding, public authorities and civil servants are merely employees of a company called “state”. In a strict legal (i.e. natural law) sense, the state is not existent, or had been established on an unacknowledged basis. Therefore, the existing social, legal and political order has to be changed fundamentally in the eyes of the OPPT.

6.1.3 Media Discourse

Between 2014 and 2017 sovereign citizen movements – OPPT, Freeman, and the “Staatenbündler” - received broad media attention in Austria. Newspaper reports covered a series of different court cases, arrests, or reported about a newly draft federal law targeting so-called “*Staatsfeindliche Bewegungen*” (subversive movements). A number of opinion pieces discussed these groups, defining them as new sects or cults.

Two particular cases received particularly intense media attraction and made headlines in all relevant nation-wide daily newspapers and online magazines.⁵³ The first of these prominent cases involved the aforementioned self-appointed “court” initiated by the Austrian OPPT movement

⁵⁰ See: Tätigkeitsbericht der Bundesstelle für Sektenfragen an das Bundesministerium für Familien und Jugend (2014) (pp. 69-97).

https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/III/III_00207/index.shtml (accessed on 26th September 2017).

⁵¹ The German self-designation titles: „Internationales Gericht für Naturrecht, Völkerrecht und Allgemeingültige Rechtsprechung in Wien“ (see: Tätigkeitsbericht der Bundesstelle für Sektenfragen an das Bundesministerium für Familien und Jugend 2014: 69).

⁵² See: Tätigkeitsbericht der Bundesstelle für Sektenfragen an das Bundesministerium für Familien und Jugend (2014) (pp. 69-97). More details on this specific case and its respective media attraction following soon.

⁵³ Daily newspapers, such as “Die Presse”, “Der Kurier”, “Der Standard”, “Salzburger Nachrichten”, the German weekly newspaper “Die Zeit” and the online magazine “Vice” reported about these cases.



putting the local solicitor on trial. The second case developed around a key figure among the heterodox groups, Joe Kreissl, who is considered as the “Guru” of the Austrian Freeman movement.

First case – an alternative “court trial” in Lower Austria/“Hollenbach” 2014

This case started in 2011. An Austrian woman after she went bankrupt with her massage parlour ran into problems with the local youth welfare office due to bad housing conditions. In 2014 a female solicitor was appointed as legal guardian for this woman. After not paying her bill the electricity in the woman’s house had been turned off. She blamed her legal guardian for this mishap and subsequently, she started to engage with the OPPT ideas.⁵⁴

This case nicely demonstrates why people might start to engage with such, sometimes abstruse, ideas of heterodox movements. She joined OPPT obviously in a state of despair and dissatisfaction with societal institutions, rules and legal norms in general.

At the same time, this case was a perfect starting point for the self-appointed court, putting the legal guardian on trial. The trial was organized by the self-appointed ICCJV. Due to the assumed higher status of natural law in the legal hierarchy the court declared itself and its judgements to be internationally valid and globally enforceable, according to the OPPT rationale (see: <https://www.iccvj.org/node/854>). The ICCJV came up with special officers, the so-called “Common Law Sheriffs”, whose task is to implement confirmed judgments of a Common Law court, such as the ICCJV, or also to execute warrants. In the past, such warrants had been issued by the ICCJV against the woman’s legal guardian, the former governor of Lower Austria, Erwin Pröll, and the whole federal Austrian government for assumed “crimes against humanity”⁵⁵ The court trial was propagated through Facebook and was referred to as event under the heading of “Austrian Summer”.

Before the trial was convened, “Common Law Sheriffs” tried to issue an arrest warrant against the affected defendant, the legal guardian. The local police were informed about this upcoming arrest early on. In July 2014, the court trial took place at the woman’s property, but shortly after it started, police intervened. 60 police officers met 200 persons on the property and in an adjacent building the officers detected a provisional courtroom and documents prepared for the trial. During this police deployment 40 persons were arrested due to refusals of identification and two officers were injured. Some of the arrested individuals were carrying fire arms. After identification, they were released by the police. The woman who initiated the whole “event” was committed to a psychiatric hospital. Subsequently, the crowd of heterodox activists dispersed. The prosecutor’s office in Krems (Lower Austria) started an investigation against the main actors for attempted abuse of authority and persistent pursuit. The media coverage about this “court trial” was very high.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ (see: <http://fm4v3.orf.at/stories/1743783/>; http://diepresse.com/home/panorama/oesterreich/3847732/OPPT_Wie-die-Verschwoerung-nach-Hollenbach-kam)

⁵⁵ see: <https://www.iccvj.org/sheriff>

⁵⁶ To list only a few articles:

<http://diepresse.com/home/panorama/oesterreich/3847371/> (accessed on 2nd October 2017).

http://diepresse.com/home/panorama/oesterreich/3846255/Krems_Ermittlungen-gegen-selbsternannte-Sheriffs (accessed on 2nd October 2017).

https://www.vice.com/de_at/article/4wpez3/freeman-besuch-849 (accessed on 2nd October 2017).



Second case – Joe Kreissl

Joe Kreissl⁵⁷, self-proclaimed “Freeman” in Austria is the main character of the second case. The media coverage here demonstrates the multifaceted entanglements of the different sovereign citizen movements. Joe Kreissl is one of the key figures of the entire movement in Austria. The story started in 2012 when Joe Kreissl addressed a written statement to the Austrian state, declaring his resignation as a citizen and opting out from the state. He attracted media attention since he was involved with spectacular activities of several groups. He also was involved in the above described “trial” case and was considered as one of the key figures acting as negotiator between police and heterodox activists.⁵⁸ The court trial, while organized by members of OPPT, also involved members of the Freemen. His performance at this event earned Joe Kreissl the status of a “Guru” among the Freeman community and all sovereign citizens’ movements in Austria.

He also founded - like the abovementioned Monika Unger - his own state “Erlösterreich” and resides with a group of followers in a castle in Upper Austria. According to Joe Kreissl, he is the only proper Freeman in Austria because he opted out from the state “officially”, others, in contrast, cannot become real Freemen without this eminent step.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, he has acquired high attention, not only from media, but primarily from individuals who entertain a general critical attitude towards “the system”. As a Guru of the movement he attracts followers with financial problems, or individuals who suffer from unsolved problems with all kinds of public authorities.⁶⁰ As the face of the heterodox movement in Austria his actions attract the attention of media and receive broad coverage.

<http://www.tt.com/panorama/verbrechen/12742641-91/staatsverweigerer-prozess-in-krems-gestartet.csp>
(accessed on 2nd October 2017).

http://www.wienerzeitung.at/nachrichten/oesterreich/politik/885647_Eher-milde-Urteile-fuer-ICCV-Pseudogerichtshof.html (accessed on 2nd October 2017).

⁵⁷ His full name is Johannes Ewald Kreissl

⁵⁸ https://www.vice.com/de_at/article/4wpez3/freeman-besuch-849 (accessed on 3rd October 2017).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ For example, consider the following media articles about Joe Kreissl’s person:

<http://www.nachrichten.at/oberoesterreich/salzkammergut/Freeman-schlittert-in-die-Pleite-und-fordert-225-Millionen-Euro;art71,2165431> (accessed on 3rd October 2017).

<http://derstandard.at/2000019919452/Brauntoene-im-Bioteig> (accessed on 3rd October 2017).

http://diepresse.com/home/panorama/oesterreich/5121083/Belaechelt-nett-und-brandgefaehrlich_Die-Welt-der-freien-Maenner (accessed on 3rd October 2017).

<http://derstandard.at/2000055697004/Staatsverweigerer-Lieber-Wunderwelt-Walchen-statt-Republic-Oesterreich> (accessed on 3rd October 2017).

<http://www.nachrichten.at/oberoesterreich/salzkammergut/Angesagte-Demo-fuer-Freeman-vor-BH-fand-nicht-statt-Joe-Kreissl-dennoch-frei;art71,2201779> (accessed on 3rd October 2017).

https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20170517_OTS0097/am-schauplatz-reportage-ueber-die-oesterreichische-bewegung-der-staatsverweigerer (accessed on 3rd October 2017).



6.1.4 Law enforcement and legal perspectives on heterodox politicization in Austria

In Austria, heterodox movements meanwhile are considered as a serious problem for state authorities. Consequently, the Austrian government has decided to pass a new law providing a legal basis to punish actions undertaken by these groups. It is assumed that such movements are threatening the democratic constitution since their primary goal is undermining the state's institutions and its laws respectively.

In 2016 there the new law on "*Staatsfeindliche Verbindungen*" (subversive associations) was enacted, declaring illegal all "associations" openly and in public disregarding government and the Austrian Constitution.⁶¹ Throughout the year 2016 law enforcement authorities identified a substantial number of activists. The movement seemed not well organized but its members share a negative attitude against the state and its laws.⁶² They either act in loose groups individually. Due to a lack of formal organisation the heterodox activists often are difficult to identify and so a further legal instrument was introduced to get hold of the decentralised groups (Paragraph § 246a StGB, i.e. federal criminal code).

This amendment of the federal criminal code addresses "*Staatsfeindliche Bewegungen*" (subversive movements).⁶³ This new legislation introduced a subtle and at the same time imprecise difference between the legal concepts of "associations" and "movements". An association can be considered as illegal, but getting hold of a loosely knit movement is much more difficult. Hence the introduction of the new concept "movement" into the criminal code to lower the threshold for law enforcement agencies to intervene. The legal document providing an interpretation of this concept defines a "movement" as a group of at least 30 persons, sharing the same ethos, or orientation towards a common goal.⁶⁴ This allows for intervention at an earlier stage, making it easier to prosecute acts of harassment by sovereign citizens.⁶⁵ The maximum punishment is imprisonment for up to two years.

However, this amendment of the Austrian criminal code has provoked critique by legal experts and the public. Their main concern has been that non-violent democratic protests against political decisions of authorities come under legal scrutiny too.⁶⁶ This could curtail democratic practices of civil protest and have a chilling effect on citizens. Another, much more fundamental critique was

⁶¹ <https://www.jusline.at/gesetz/stgb/paragraf/246> (accessed on 4th October 2017).

⁶² http://diepresse.com/home/innenpolitik/5107347/Reichsbuerger_Sobotka-schlaegt-eigenen-Straftatbestandvor?direct=5107531&_vl_backlink=/home/innenpolitik/5107531/index.do&selChannel (accessed on 4th October 2017).

⁶³ <https://www.jusline.at/gesetz/stgb/paragraf/247a> (accessed on 4th October 2017).

⁶⁴ https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/ME/ME_00294/fname_617545.pdf (accessed on 4th October 2017).

http://diepresse.com/home/innenpolitik/5210523/StGBNovelle_Was-sind-staatsfeindliche-Bewegungen (accessed on 4th October 2017).

⁶⁵ <https://www.jusline.at/gesetz/stgb/paragraf/246> (accessed on 4th October 2017).

<https://www.jusline.at/gesetz/stgb/paragraf/247a> (accessed on 4th October 2017).

<http://bmi.gv.at/news.aspx?id=48776562733443503274493D> (accessed on 4th October 2017).

⁶⁶ <http://derstandard.at/2000056940662/Weiter-Kritik-an-Staatsverweigerer-Paragrafen> (accessed on 4th October 2017).



raised by “epicenter.works” – an Austrian non-profit association for democratic rights, human rights, and informational self-determination. They were criticising the highly vague term and legal definition of “movement” (“Bewegung”).⁶⁷ Legally, it was simply defined as a bunch of people with the same ethos. Such an open definition could lead quickly to a criminalization of civil disobedience, of civil and artistic forms of protests. These concerns were taken up in the final version of the new regulation, giving a more precise definition of the term “movement”. The revised version now is focused on establishing and leading such a “movement” and requires precise evidence of the assumed threat coming from the activists.

Looking at the reaction of Austrian authorities to heterodox political groups reveals their hybrid nature as being perceived as a political problem and a problem of quasi-religious esoteric sectarianism alike. Heterodox groups are dealt with by the Austrian federal authority for sect-related issues. They produced reports about OPPT and the Freeman movement in 2014 and 2015 respectively. This federal agency is considered as the official government body of experts with regard to these groups.⁶⁸ This classification of heterodox political groups as “sects” and esoteric cults offering quasi-religious salvation⁶⁹ to their members was heavily criticised by left-leaning civil society groups like “StopptdieRechten”, who suggested to treat heterodox movements as right-wing extremists.⁷⁰ Also, from a legal perspective, the heterodox activities are defined as “political crime”. This nicely reflects the heterodox nature of these movements, mixing together right-wing rhetoric with left-wing critique of the “capitalist system”, linking esoteric conspiracy theories with promises of quasi-religious salvation.

⁶⁷ https://epicenter.works/sites/default/files/epicenter_works_stellungnahme_stg-novelle_2017_294_final.pdf (accessed on 4th October 2017).

⁶⁸ See: Tätigkeitsbericht der Bundesstelle für Sektenfragen an das Bundesministerium für Familien und Jugend (2014)

⁶⁹ https://www.vice.com/de_at/article/4wpez3/freeman-besuch-849 (accessed on 4th October 2017).

⁷⁰ <https://www.stopptdierechten.at/2017/09/10/der-harmlose-sektenbericht-ueber-die-freeman/> (accessed on 4th October 2017).

6.2 France

6.2.1 Introduction

Heterodox politicisation in the form of sovereign citizens or similar groups are, apart from one exception, in France non-existent so far. This does however not mean, that (part of) the ideas and beliefs which constitute these groups – anti-governmental, conspiratorial, sometimes even cultist, are not represented in other movements. Often subsumed under the term of *antisystème*, many public-political debates in France since the turn of the decade revolve around the idea of a governmental, elitist conspiracy – represented as the system – against their own citizens. These debates cover both a wide range of political ideologies and at the same time a wide range of socio-political topics.⁷¹ Being *antisystème* dominates in the (far-)left as well as the (far-)right, in political parties as well as movements and organisations, coined as *mouvements contestataires*⁷² (movements of revolt) by Perry Anderson (2017). The idea is not only used as an argument against capitalism, it is used for being against the elites, the economy, neoliberalism, globalisation, social evolution, etc.⁷³ *Antisystème* is used as a critique against the status-quo. With this report, the aim is to provide an overview of how heterodox politicisation in the form of *mouvements contestataires* represent themselves in France, how they act, but also the public, governmental and legal reactions towards these movements.

6.2.2 Heterodox political movements in France

As noted, so far there is only one group in France which operates in an equivalent manner as other sovereign citizens groups around the world, refuting the legitimacy of the French government and calling for drastic measures – abolishing the state and “returning” all the power to the French citizens.⁷⁴ At first the group was established as the *mouvement du 14 juillet*⁷⁵ in April 2014 by Eric Fiorile, with the aim of bringing people together, who disagree “with the official discourse” and denounce “the lies of the media or of the leaders of our country”, as people who are commonly called “dissidents”. The movement wants to enable a structural change in the current political system as the “political class (...) is corrupted (...) by the system”. They aim at creating a France which is independent from the European Union, the Euro and the NATO and which is sovereign and not reigned by the USA through trade associations. In his initial blog post, Eric Fiorile calls for preparation

⁷¹ Dagnaud, 2014, “Que signifie, dans la France de 2014, être «anti-système»?”, Slate.fr., <http://www.slate.fr/story/83113/anti-systeme-definition> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

⁷² Anderson, 2017, “Bouillonnement antisystème en Europe et aux États-Unis”, Le Monde Diplomatique, <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2017/03/ANDERSON/57243> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

⁷³ Dagnaud, 2014, op cit.

⁷⁴ <https://www.conseilnational.fr/> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

⁷⁵ <http://mvt14.blogspot.co.uk/> (Accessed 13.10.2017).



for a – peaceful – coup-d'état on the 14th July 2015 – Bastille Day – and thus eponymous for the movement.⁷⁶

The concept behind the movement is the *demosophy*, apparently coined by Fiorile himself⁷⁷ and composed of the Greek words 'demos' for people and 'sophia' meaning wisdom. According to Fiorile demosophy should replace the democracy, which represents a dictatorship of a political elite which instead of serving in the interest of the citizens instead serves in the interest of multinational corporations by whom they are financed. The demosophy will be led by "the logic and common-sense of the citizens" without any discrimination regarding social situation, political party or "sect", serving only at the interest of the people. The authority will be "exercised directly by the entirety of the citizens through a representation based on a concept of a council." All big companies and sources of production will be at the hand of the people.⁷⁸ How the concept of demosophy actually would work out in practice is however not precisely mentioned by Fiorile.

The movement and the website of Eric Fiorile cover a wide variety of common conspiracy theories, mostly focusing on France, other countries or the whole world not being governed by politicians but by corporations or other hidden forces – the new world order, freemasons or the Illuminati, the Bilderberg Group, etc.⁷⁹ Other conspiracy theories promoted are about Chemtrails, alternative medicine vs. the pharma lobby, or about how 'new and free energy technologies' are repressed by the leading energy corporations.

The plan and the idea of the *mouvement du 14 juillet* is the organisation and performance of a coup-d'état on Bastille Day 2015, with the hope of gaining the support of the national military and the law enforcement⁸⁰, successfully introducing a National Transition Council – Conseil National de Transition de France (CNT)⁸¹ – and finally establishing a demosophy in France. The CNT was proclaimed already on the 18th June 2015, and draws its legitimacy from the Art. 2 and Art. 3 of the French declaration of human and civic rights of 26 august 1789.⁸² The movement claims that as the French government has ruled in multiple occasions against the will of its citizens (e.g. at the French referendum on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe⁸³, the current state of emergency in France, or because France

⁷⁶ <http://mvt14.blogspot.co.uk/2014/04/> (own translation). (Accessed 13.10.2017).

⁷⁷ Introduced in a book he wrote in 2006/2007, titled "la démosophie – pour construire une société du future sans politiciens" <http://www.demosophie.com/fr/dentroweb/libros/lademosophie.pdf> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

⁷⁸ <http://www.demosophie.com/index.htm> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

⁷⁹ E.g. <http://mvt14.blogspot.co.uk/2014/09/franc-maconnerie-et-illuminati.html> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

⁸⁰ <http://mvt14.blogspot.co.uk/2015/04/message-aux-forces-armees-francaises.html> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

⁸¹ <https://www.conseilnational.fr/> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

⁸² These articles state that: (2) The aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of Man. These rights are Liberty, Property, Safety and Resistance to Oppression.

(3) The principle of any Sovereignty lies primarily in the Nation. No corporate body, no individual may exercise any authority that does not expressly emanate from it. <http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/english/constitution/declaration-of-human-and-civic-rights-of-26-august-1789.105305.html> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

⁸³ [https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Referendums/elecresult_referendum_2005/\(path\)/referendum_2005/000/000.html](https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Referendums/elecresult_referendum_2005/(path)/referendum_2005/000/000.html) (Accessed 13.10.2017).



joined the NATO), it has lost any legitimacy of power over its citizens. As such a National Transition Council – the CNT – should take over all governmental and diplomatic business.⁸⁴

In a similar fashion as the freeman movement in Canada, or the Sovereign Citizens in the United States, the movement and the CNT – as the official successor of the movement⁸⁵ – uses “Organized Pseudolegal Commercial Arguments” (OPCA)⁸⁶ as a form of legitimacy for their claims. In their reality however, they are not based on any real legal foundation but on legal misinterpretations. A misinterpretation which nonetheless can be promoted, especially through the – eloquent – usage of pseudolegal terminology which provides a certain authority to the claims, especially when confronting lay citizens.

Up-until a few days before Bastille Day 2015, the movement, its ideas and plans did not receive any media coverage. The first media outlet which brought a report on the *mouvement du 14 juillet* was the cultural magazine *Les Inrockuptibles*, giving insight on the ideas and plans of the movement, as well as a portrayal of the initiator of the movement Eric Fiorile and his demosophy. A former member of the movement explains there that “it is impossible to describe what that [demosophy] exactly is, as it is Eric Fiorile who masters the art of ambiguity, for the purpose to manipulate as he sees fit.”⁸⁷ Another article by *Le Monde* was published on the day prior the planned peaceful coup-d’état and their protests.⁸⁸ The events on Bastille Day happened without any major incidents: a protest of the CNT was held and the number of people attending varied from 300⁸⁹ to 500⁹⁰ according to news articles, 4-7000 according to the organisers.⁹¹ 300 people were verified and investigated by law enforcement agencies, as they did not have official approval for the protest.⁹² The plan to convince the military and take over important governmental buildings, such as the Élysée, Matignon, Palais du Luxembourg or the Assemblée nationale unsurprisingly failed – however some protesters established a camp at the ‘esplanade des Invalides’, a few of minutes away from the National Assembly.⁹³

⁸⁴ <https://www.conseilnational.fr/appele-du-18-juin/> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

⁸⁵ <http://mvt14.blogspot.co.uk/2015/09/> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

⁸⁶ Rooke, 2012, Court of Queen’s Bench of Alberta, Meads v. Meads 2012 ABQB 571, p.1.

⁸⁷ Marlier, 2015, “Ces complotistes qui préparent un coup d’Etat le 14 juillet”, *Les Inrockuptibles*, <http://www.lesinrocks.com/2015/07/09/actualite/ces-complotistes-qui-preparent-un-coup-detat-le-14-juillet-11759762/> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

⁸⁸ Tual, 2015, “Le 14 juillet, nouveau grand soir des complotistes”, *Le Monde*, http://www.lemonde.fr/pixels/article/2015/07/13/le-14-juillet-nouveau-grand-soir-des-complotistes_4681830_4408996.html (Accessed 13.10.2017).

⁸⁹ Bourdon, 2015, “Le “mouvement du 14 Juillet”, un putsch qui a fait pschitt”, *L’Obs* <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/societe/20150716.OBS2725/le-mouvement-du-14-juillet-un-putsch-qui-a-fait-pschitt.html> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

⁹⁰ RT France, “300 manifestants du «Mouvement du 14 juillet» appelant à un «coup d’Etat» interpellés”, <https://francais.rt.com/france/4342-300-manifestants-mouvement-14-juillet> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

⁹¹ <http://mvt14.blogspot.co.uk/2015/07/le-vrai-bilan-du-mouvement-du-14-juillet.html> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

⁹² Noack, 2015, “French protesters attempted a coup d’etat. They didn’t succeed.”, *The Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/07/15/french-protesters-attempted-a-coup-detat-they-didnt-succeed/?utm_term=.cdace3b4547b (Accessed 13.10.2017).

⁹³ *Le Point*, 2015, “Invalides : des “révolutionnaires pacifiques” veulent renverser le gouvernement”, http://www.lepoint.fr/video/invalides-des-revolutionnaires-pacifiques-veulent-renverser-le-gouvernement-04-08-2015-1954817_738.php (Accessed 13.10.2017).



Thus, although some journals covered the planned and failed coup-d'état, most of them did not take them serious – for example L'Obs titling the event as “the putsch that went pschitt.”⁹⁴ However, it provided an opportunity of gaining an idea of the members and the people interested in the movement and the CNT. While it is still not easy to know how many members the movement and the CNT exactly has, the reports show that around 300 to 500 peoples were at least willing to participate in a peaceful coup-d'état. The spokesperson of the CNTF mentioned in an interview, that as of July 2015 the group had 315 members.⁹⁵ The *movement du 14 juillet* was however also promoted by other *mouvements contestataires*, some having multiple thousands and even million followers on social media, such as Dieudonné, a French comedian and an important voice in the *antisystème* discourse.⁹⁶ Through this promotion, some of the videos of the CNTF and of Eric Fiorile are seen over 100 000 times.⁹⁷ The typology of its members appears to vary from anarchistic far-left members, to far-right and thus difficult to specifically situate on the political scale.⁹⁸

Since the protests on Bastille Day, the CNT has disappeared from the public stage again, apart from some (right-wing) members of the movement which were part of a protest against the demolition of a church in Paris.⁹⁹ However, the CNT has not remained entirely inactive since, establishing for example a supreme court for their National Transition Council¹⁰⁰ and issuing an arrest warrant for **François Hollande, Nicolas Sarkozy, Manuel Valls, and other political members** for undermining state security and high treason.¹⁰¹ However, it appears as if most of the groups activity is depending on Eric Fiorile or initiated by him, which might be linked to Fiorile having financial benefits through the movement – which include sales of his books, his talks, as well as membership fees.¹⁰²

From a legal, law enforcement or governmental point of view, there has been so far no reaction towards the group in question, despite having tried a coup-d'état. As France has been subject to a series of radical Islamic terrorist attacks in the last few years, there have been a large amount of legal and law enforcement modifications falling under the domain of anti-terrorism measures. Although these measures have been implemented to combat the radical Islamic terrorism, several events in the last two years have also shown that these measures are also used on other (non-terrorist) groups, such as worker-rights protesters for example.¹⁰³ It can thus be expected that although no

⁹⁴ Bourdon, 2015, op cit.

⁹⁵ Marlier, 2015, op cit.

⁹⁶ Piquet, 2015, “ Quel est ce collectif qui rêve de faire un «coup d'État» en France ?”, Le Figaro, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2015/07/14/01016-20150714ARTFIG00264-quel-est-ce-collectif-qui-reve-de-faire-un-coup-d-etat-en-france.php> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

⁹⁷ Marlier, 2015, op. cit.

⁹⁸ ibid.

⁹⁹ Bardou, 2016, “Un totem pour les « tradis » et les animaux de compagnie”, Libération, http://www.liberation.fr/france/2016/08/03/un-totem-pour-les-tradis-et-les-animaux-de-compagnie_1470152 (Accessed 13.10.2017); Margaritelli, 2016, “À Paris, l'église Sainte-Rita évacuée malgré la résistance de ses fidèles”, Le Figaro <http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2016/08/03/01016-20160803ARTFIG00106-paris-l-eglise-sainte-rita-evacuee-malgre-la-resistance-de-ses-fideles.php> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

¹⁰⁰ <https://conseilnational.blogspot.co.uk/2017/08/cour-supreme.html> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

¹⁰¹ <https://www.conseilnational.fr/haute-trahison-et-atteinte-a-la-surete-de-letat/> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

¹⁰² Marlier, 2015, op. cit.

¹⁰³ A recent report by Amnesty International has broadly analysed the anti-terrorism measures implemented by the French government and their effects, also on other groups: Amnesty International, 2017, Des Mesures Disproportionnées – L'ampleur grandissante des politique sécuritaires dans les pays de l'UE est dangereuse.



open or official response on the CNT has been issued, the current legal and law enforcement anti-terrorism measures also cover – or are able to cover – the activities of the CNT.

6.2.3 Survey data on political indicators in France

With the *mouvement du 14 juillet* and the CNT as the only sovereign citizen-type group in France, there are thus other *mouvements contestataires*, which take in a similar role. In terms of official political parties, there are especially those on the two extremes of the political sphere, which take a key role for being *antisystème*.¹⁰⁴ Politicians of both the left and the right recur every now and then to discourses also used by sovereign citizens, often in form of anti-system conspiracy theories.¹⁰⁵ From these political parties, especially the far-right parties are often successful in the presidential elections – mainly with the *Front National* (FN) being a first choice for protest voters. The system for the presidential elections in France is a two-round system. While in the first round all the candidates are up for election, only the two candidates with most of the votes are standing in an election in the second round. In the last 15 years, the FN has managed twice to advance into the second round – in 2002 with Jean-Marie Le Pen and in 2017 with Marine Le Pen. In 2002, the FN had 16.86% of all votes in the first round, advancing the *Parti Socialiste* (PS) by 0.68 percentage points and trailing 3 percentage points behind the leading party *Rassemblement pour la République* (RPR) of president Jacques Chirac, which was for many a major surprise and led to major protests with around 1.5 million protesters in the cities of France.¹⁰⁶ In the second round, the FN only managed to gather 17.79% of the votes and thus lost the election to the RPR. Another far-right party, the *Mouvement national républicain* also managed to gain 2.34% of the votes in the first round. As for the far-left parties, two parties – the *Lutte Ouvrière* (5.72%) and the *Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire* (4.25%) also managed to rally a substantial number of voters behind them in the first election round, with a third, the *Parti des travailleurs* only having 0.47% of the votes.¹⁰⁷

In the following 2007 election, both the far-right as well as the far-left were less successful. The FN with the support of the *Mouvement national républicain* only gained 10.44% in the first round, and the different far-left parties also decreased in voter shares, ranging from 0.34% to 4.08%, and with all three parties combined achieving only 5.75%. The election mainly focused around the two major parties of Nicolas Sarkozy (*Union pour un mouvement populaire* UMP) and Ségolène Royale (PS), with

https://amnestyfr.cdn.prismic.io/amnestyfr%2Fd2f8ee9f-2ec3-4c3a-acea-02acc9cb3c10_eur_01_5342_2017_ext_fra-final.pdf (Accessed 13.10.2017).

¹⁰⁴ Anderson, 2017, op. cit.

¹⁰⁵ Beitone, 2011, “La “loi Pompidou, Giscard, Rothschild” votée en 1973 empêcherait l’Etat de battre monnaie”, *Le Monde*, http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2011/12/29/la-loi-pompidou-giscard-rothschild-votee-en-1973-empacherait-l-etat-de-battre-monnaie_1623299_3232.html (Accessed 13.10.2017).

¹⁰⁶ France 2, 01.05.2002, “Manifestation à Paris le 1er mai 2002 contre Jean-Marie Le Pen”, <http://fresques.ina.fr/jalons/fiche-media/InaEdu01101/manifestation-a-paris-le-1er-mai-2002-contre-jean-marie-le-pen.html> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

¹⁰⁷ [https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/elecresult_presidentielle_2002/\(path\)/presidentielle_2002/index.html](https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/elecresult_presidentielle_2002/(path)/presidentielle_2002/index.html) (Accessed 13.10.2017).



Sarkozy winning the election.¹⁰⁸ The election in 2012 saw again a rise in popularity amongst the far-end spectra of the political range. The FN as the major far-right party achieved 17.9% of the votes in the first round, being 9.28 percentage points short of the second place of Sarkozy and the UMP (27.18%) and 10.73 percentage points short of the first place of François Hollande and the PS (28.63%). On the far-left side, the *Front de Gauche* (FG) of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a new left to far-left electoral alliance gained 11.1% of the votes in the first round, leaving the other two far-left parties, the *Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste* (1.15%) and *Lutte Ouvrière* (0.56%) far behind. The election was narrowly won in the second round by the *Parti Socialiste* of François Hollande with 51.64% against 48.36% of the UMP of President Sarkozy.¹⁰⁹

As mentioned already, also the 2017 saw the far-right party FN of Marine Le Pen advancing into the second round, this time with 21.3% of the votes and thus almost 5 percentage points more than in 2002. Also, the left/far-left alliance of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, this time called *La France Insoumise*, achieved 19.58% of the votes in the first round, resulting in a fourth place. In the second round, the FN did not manage to increase its vote significantly, obtaining 33.9% of the votes as to 66.1% for Emmanuel Macron and his electoral alliance *En Marche!*.¹¹⁰

The electoral turnout for the presidential elections were rather stable since 2002, ranging between 77.77% (1st round 2017) and 83.97% (2nd round 2007). However, there were two notable exceptions. In the first round of the 2002 elections, only 71.6% of the eligible voters participated in the vote – being an all-time low.¹¹¹ And in the 2nd round of the 2017 elections, only 74.56% of the voters participated in the vote, leading to a lowest participation for a second-round vote since 1969.¹¹²

Another indicator of why citizens might or might not recourse to heterodox politicisation groups, or *mouvements contestataires*, is how much trust citizens have towards political bodies, governmental institutions and the actors involved. Survey data from the Eurobarometer shows the evolution of citizens trust since 2010. In France, especially political parties tend not to be trusted, ranging between only 5.74% (in 2016) and 26.21% (in 2012) of citizens having confidence in political parties. Interestingly however, citizens tend to increase their trust towards political parties in the year of the presidential elections (between 2011 and 2012 +16.82 percentage points; between 2016 and 2017 +4.59 percentage points). The national government as well as the national parliament are trusted a bit more than political parties, while still a general distrust towards these institutions prevails, with

¹⁰⁸ [https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/elecresultat_presidentielle_2007/\(path\)/presidentielle_2007/FE.html](https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/elecresultat_presidentielle_2007/(path)/presidentielle_2007/FE.html) (Accessed 13.10.2017).

¹⁰⁹ [https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/elecresultat_PR2012/\(path\)/PR2012/FE.html](https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/elecresultat_PR2012/(path)/PR2012/FE.html) (Accessed 13.10.2017).

¹¹⁰ [https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/elecresultat_PR2012/\(path\)/PR2012/FE.html](https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats/Presidentielles/elecresultat_PR2012/(path)/PR2012/FE.html) (Accessed 13.10.2017).

¹¹¹ Rousset, 2017, “Premier tour de la présidentielle : une abstention légèrement supérieure à 2012”, *Les Echos*, https://www.lesechos.fr/23/04/2017/lesechos.fr/0212005563823_premier-tour-de-la-presidentielle---une-abstention-legerement-superieure-a-2012.htm (Accessed 13.10.2017).

¹¹² Bellouezzane, 2017, “Présidentielle 2017 : abstention record pour un second tour depuis l’élection de 1969”, *Le Monde*, http://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/05/07/presidentielle-2017-abstention-record-pour-un-second-tour-depuis-l-election-de-1969_5123757_4854003.html (Accessed 13.10.2017).



around ¾ of the citizens distrusting their government or their parliament – with a slight decline over the years. Also here we can observe that in the years of a presidential election the percentage of people are trusting their government and parliament is considerably higher than in the previous year (47.45% and 47.53% in 2012 and 45.4% and 26.48% in 2017).

	Political Parties		Nat. Government		Nat. Parliament		European Union		Reg. Authorities	
	Trust	Don't Trust	Trust	Don't Trust	Trust	Don't Trust	Trust	Don't Trust	Trust	Don't Trust
2010	15,24%	84,76%	27,42%	72,58%	38,92%	61,08%	42,95%	57,05%	61,11%	38,89%
2011	9,39%	90,61%	22,37%	77,63%	28,84%	71,16%	33,55%	66,45%	56,96%	43,04%
2012	26,21%	73,79%	47,45%	52,55%	47,53%	52,47%	39,55%	60,45%	65,23%	34,77%
2013	11,09%	88,91%	24,29%	75,71%	26,03%	73,97%	35,40%	64,60%	58,22%	41,78%
2014	6,00%	94,00%	18,78%	81,22%	23,65%	76,35%	38,33%	61,67%	54,73%	45,27%
2015	7,73%	92,27%	20,10%	79,90%	20,80%	79,20%	27,71%	72,29%	46,84%	53,16%
2016	5,74%	94,26%	18,03%	81,97%	21,42%	78,58%	28,10%	71,90%	51,17%	48,83%
2017	10,33%	89,67%	45,40%	54,60%	36,48%	63,52%	45,49%	54,51%	62,28%	37,72%

Citizens trust towards political bodies and institutions (Source: Eurobarometer 2010-2017)

The French citizens' trust towards the European Union is higher than towards their own government or parliament, however also here we can observe that the general trend leans towards an increase in distrust– with some notable exceptions. While in 2010 57.05% of the respondents didn't trust the EU, this figure rose to 72.29% in 2015 and 71.90% in 2016. In 2017 this number drops again to 54.51%. As with the other categories, it appears as if this might be connected with the elections in that year – in 2017 the strongly pro-European candidate Emmanuel Macron won the presidential election against the anti-European candidate Marine Le Pen.

Regional authorities tend to be most trustful for the French citizens, with generally more than half of the respondents claiming to trust their regional authorities. Only in 2015, this number dropped to 46.84% but since has risen again to 62.28% in 2017. As citizens in their daily life mostly are only in contact with their regional authorities, they might be better aware of how they operate, and be more acquainted to the people working there. This trust might reflect also the lack of interest in heterodox politicisation groups and sovereign citizens group – if the daily work of the regional authorities is acceptable and trustworthy, the distrust towards the national and supranational might be a nuisance, but which is neglectable.

6.2.4 Heterodox politicization in context

Apart from the political parties, other political movements and public figures claiming to be *antisystème* are popular in France. They often address both people from the left-wing and the right-wing as well as the second and third generation migrant youth in France, especially from the Maghreb and Arabic countries. The most prominent of these examples is *Dieudonné*, a French comedian and political activist. While in the late 90ies, he clearly opposed right-wing parties like the



FN and had a popular sketch-show with the French-Jewish comedian Élie Semoun, mocking racist and Jewish stereotypes¹¹³, this changed in the early 2000s. Dieudonné not only openly associated with the Jean-Marie Le Pen and the FN but also his jokes and political stances became blatantly anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist. He made on stage appearance with holocaust denier Robert Faurisson¹¹⁴ and got convicted several times for his anti-Semitic speeches and sketches glorifying/apologising terrorism against Jews.¹¹⁵ Anti-Semitism in France has seen a surge since the early 2000s, especially amongst young people from black or Arab immigration families. A form of anti-racist anti-Semitism as it is often described – “asserting that the Nazis today are in fact the Jews. (...) Dieudonné’s followers say that they don’t hate Jews, they hate Jewish racism. They say that Israel is like Nazism, like apartheid.”¹¹⁶ A form of anti-Semitism which also often can be found at the far-left.

Dieudonné has probably gotten most of his international attention through his gesture called *la quenelle* – pointing the right arm down and placing the left hand on the right shoulder. First used in a sketch as a vulgar sign, it was later reframed as a signal for courage, freedom and being against-the system by Dieudonné and his proponents. However, Dieudonné’s anti-Semitism and the close resemblance of the *quenelle* with the Nazi salute sparked its controversy.¹¹⁷ Dieudonné used it on a poster for his political list for the 2009 European elections called *Liste Antisioniste* reinforcing its controversial public debate. Especially in relation with Dieudonné openly partaking in a political campaign with a political Anti-Zionist list, calls of forbidding his public appearances and performances became louder, especially driven by politicians, mayors of towns where he planned to perform and some media outlets. This backlash served Dieudonné in return to further promote his anti-systemic stance and his belief of the censorship of the (Jewish and financial) elite against people daring to tell truth, while insisting that the *quenelle* is not meant political but satirical.¹¹⁸

Especially with this *antisystème* approach and his role as a victim of the political elite, Dieudonné has become ever more popular in the last years as a political person. He has created a “*Dieudosphère*”, a sort of counter-society with its own signs (of which the *quenelle* is only one of) and a particular form of communication, which is popular on the internet while at the same time being “highly visible on the main-stream media”.¹¹⁹ Dieudonné addresses many topics of inequality, in Africa (his father being from Cameroon) as a result of colonialization, in the middle-east, or here in Europe and in

¹¹³ Stille, 2014, “The Case of Dieudonné: A French Comedian’s Hate”, The New Yorker, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-case-of-dieudonn-a-french-comedians-hate> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

¹¹⁴ Reiss, 2007, “Laugh Riots, the French star who became a demagogue.” The New Yorker, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/11/19/laugh-riots> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

¹¹⁵ Le Figaro, 2015, “Dieudonné à nouveau poursuivi pour apologie du terrorisme”, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2015/01/12/01016-20150112ARTFIG00197-dieudonne-a-nouveau-poursuivi-pour-apologie-du-terrorisme.php> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

¹¹⁶ Reiss, 2007, op. cit.

¹¹⁷ Licourt, 2013, “D'où vient la «quenelle» de Dieudonné”, Le Figaro, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2013/12/30/01016-20131230ARTFIG00404-d-o-vient-la-quenelle-de-dieudonne.php> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

¹¹⁸ Cassely, 2013, “La dieudonnisation des esprits, une (grosse) quenelle qui vient d’en bas”, Slate.fr, <http://www.slate.fr/story/74429/dieudonne-quenelle> (Accessed 13.10.2017) ; Stille, 2014, op. cit.

¹¹⁹ Cassely, 2013, op. cit., own translation.



France. He manages to take on pressing issues, to which many of the young and marginalised people in France can relate. Topics which are also often part of a left-wing narrative.

It is however the anti-Semite spin – linking the inequality with the global elite, of which the Jews are a big part of – which make his political stance questionable. An important part of the critique on Dieudonné's rhetoric is that it is intensifying the already swelling anti-Semitism in France. A critique which gains legitimacy when followers and fans of Dieudonné are pictured doing the *quenelle* in front of Synagogues, concentration camps and others.¹²⁰

With his general and globalist critique, Dieudonné also links himself with a people from different political realms. He has publicly appeared with conspiracy theorist, Thierry Meyssan, who wrote the book “L’Effroyable Imposture” (“The Big Lie”) about 9/11 being an inside job; Palestine activist and co-founder of the Green Party Ginette Skandrani; and most importantly Alain Soral, former writer and advisor of the FN and now president of the political movement/alliance and alternative internet news site *Égalité et Réconciliation* (E&R).¹²¹ Although E&R is often classified as far-right and also operates with the same terminologies and topics, the site also often covers topics normally associated with the (far) left, especially concerning globalism, the role of the US and how countries like Venezuela, Iran or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea are systematically exploited by the globalist elite.¹²²

Dieudonné and Soral have successfully managed to address a wide range of people with their *antisystème* topics, which is also visible at the yearly *Bal des Quenelles* organised by Dieudonné, a satirical award show and important promotion show for Dieudonné as well as Soral and E&R.¹²³ The *Bal des Quenelles* seems to gather right-wing, left-wing, conspiracy theorists, Muslims and young 2nd and 3rd generation migrants, and thus has a rather diverse flair to it. It shows the effect and success which Dieudonné has with his – controversial – way:

“Dieudonné plays a game of deliberate ambiguity, (...) using a lot of the language and metaphors of old-fashioned French anti-Semitism before a young audience that does not have a very developed idea of anti-Semitism. (...) And then you take this into the banlieue, where many young people feel oppressed by Islamophobia and angry and frustrated about the Palestinians. And everything is ambiguous and mixed together: anti-Zionism, anti-Semitism, and anti-system anger. Humor and hatred. The resentment of the Le Pen right and the anger of the recent immigrants of the banlieue. Even the gesture of the quenelle is ambiguous.”¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Willsher, 2014, “Mass ‘quenelle’ outside synagogue sparks court action in Bordeaux”, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/12/french-courts-to-decide-over-quenelle> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

¹²¹ Reiss, 2007, op cit., <https://www.egaliteetreconciliation.fr/> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

¹²² Le Blevenec, 2013, “Égalité et Réconciliation, le site de Soral et aussi de votre voisin”, L’Obs avec Rue 89, <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/rue89/rue89-nos-vies-connectees/20131205.RUE0636/egalite-et-reconciliation-le-site-de-soral-et-aussi-de-votre-voisin.html> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

¹²³ Cassely, 2013, op. cit., Boileau, 2017, “Blagues antisémites, vente de Mein Kampf, nous avons assisté au bal des quenelles de Dieudonné”, Les Inrockuptibles, <http://www.lesinrocks.com/2017/06/19/actualite/blagues-antisemites-vente-de-mein-kampf-nous-avons-assiste-au-bal-des-quenelles-de-dieudonne-11956598/> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

¹²⁴ Damien Glez, 2014, in Stille, 2014, op. cit.



They manage to combine a justified critique – the inequality created by globalism, the lasting effects of colonialization, racism and Islamophobia – and combine it with anti-Semitism disguised in a humorous fashion. And in this, they have created a whole sphere – the *Dieudosphère* – of alternative media, including the fake-news accusation against the mainstream-media, communication and thinking. They have created a discourse in which every form of critique against their anti-Semitic anti-systemic provocations is turned into an attack against free-speech and especially against his form of comedy which should not be taken too serious. In the *Dieudosphère* also other conspiracy theory writers are being promoted, like Étienne Chouard¹²⁵ and – as shown above already – also the *mouvement du 14 juillet* did not pass by entirely unnoticed,¹²⁶ although the outcome was considered a flop.¹²⁷

Thus Dieudonné, Soral and their followers can be seen as popular *mouvements contestataires* apart from the political parties, and an epitome of the heterodox politicisation in France – reaching hundreds of thousands, sometimes even millions of people with their alternative news articles and videos. And due to their success and the overlapping topics, they might be a reason for the lack of other more radical sovereign citizen movements in France.

¹²⁵ <https://chouard.org/blog/> (Accessed 13.10.2017).

¹²⁶ Marlier, 2015, op cit.

¹²⁷ <https://www.egaliteetreconciliation.fr/Sketch-34005.html> (Accessed 13.10.2017).



6.3 Germany

6.3.1 Introduction

In Germany, several heterodox political groups can be identified such as the “*Reichsbürger*” (Imperial Citizens) and the “*Selbstverwalter*” (groups aspiring to become “self-governing” citizens). Qualifying as heterodox political group are the members of a recently growing *survivalist scene*, making headlines as so-called “preppers” (referring to their status “to be prepared” for a final catastrophe they believe will be coming soon). Finally, there is a social movement that started a few years ago in 2014 in the East-German city of Dresden under the name of PEGIDA, an acronym for *Patrioten Europas gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (European Patriots against the Islamisation of the Occident). This movement is closely linked with a new right-wing populist political party AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) that in recent elections won a substantial number of seats in regional and also the national parliaments.

The different activities of heterodox movements over the recent years have caught the attention of German law enforcement and Intelligence Services after several attacks on public servants and police officers in confrontation with members of these groups.¹²⁸ Police raids in private homes led to the confiscation of firearms, illegally owned by some of the more militant members of these groups. As in other European countries, members of the heterodox groups often share a history of personal economic and financial problems, although the overall political motivation of the constituency goes beyond the desire to find a justification for this kind of personal problems.

The pool of political and ideological ideas and persuasions from which these groups construct their belief systems ranges from anti-European and anti-migrant attitudes to open antisemitism. They deny the legitimacy of the existing political order and are driven by ideas of an ethnically homogeneous nation state and/or haunted by dystopian scenarios of an imminent breakdown of society as a whole, requiring the preparation for survival after a fantasized doomsday. All of them are susceptible to esoteric ideas and conspiracy theories, explaining the misery of the world in terms of a global strategy of some elite groups acting behind the scenes to exploit ordinary people. Heterodox groups in Germany often develop in remote rural areas and small towns where citizens share feelings of being left alone or left behind. Using a term recently introduced in the discussion about Donald Trump’s electoral victory in the United States the main home territory of heterodox political groups could be classified as the German Fly-over states.

Apart from reports released by national intelligence agencies¹²⁹ a number of recent academic publications have addressed the problem of heterodox politicisation, investigating the

¹²⁸ In Oct. 2016 a police officer was shot by a self-declared Reichsbürger during a raid of his house in a small village in Bavaria. Several other violent encounters have been reported in confrontations with members of this movement in Germany.

¹²⁹ Bundesministerium des Inneren (2016). *Verfassungsschutzbericht 2016*, Berlin.



constituencies, ideologies and practices of German Reichsbürger and other groups.¹³⁰ Civil society organisations have published handbooks about the ideological approaches of the heterodox groups and how to react, when exposed to them in public debate.¹³¹

6.3.2 Heterodox political movements in Germany

The annual report of the German Intelligence Service (Verfassungsschutzbericht) in 2016 for the first time mentions the *Reichsbürger* and *Selbstverwalter* as political groups under surveillance of the Intelligence Service. Both movements have grown over the last years and despite differences in their ideological frameworks there seems to be a substantial overlap in ideology and membership.

Reichsbürger

One of the first groups of Reichsbürger appearing on the radar of law enforcement agencies in Germany was the so-called “Kommissarische Reichsregierung (KRR)” (provisional government of the Reich). KRR was established in 1985 in Berlin by Wolfgang Günter Ebel, an activist who declared himself as the *Reichskanzler* endowed with the government of Germany by the Allied Forces who had occupied German territory after WW II. His main task, so Ebel, was the re-establishment of the German Reich. Following this first initiative a number of other organisations and groups across Germany were established, all sharing the basic idea, that the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was not a legitimate political unit. German laws hence are not considered binding for the adherents of the Reichsbürger. Putting themselves outside the jurisdiction of the FRG, Reichsbürger refuse to pay taxes and fines or accept any other legal regulations, like e.g. court orders. Under the ideological umbrella concept of Reichsbürger several activists over the years began to set up their own autonomous territories and self-declared “states” or even “Kingdoms”. One of the more prominent figures was Peter Fitzek, who made nation-wide headlines in 2009 when he declared himself as King of Germany in the East-German town of Wittenberg, where he had set up his royal territory with palace on the premises of a former hospital. He was arrested in 2017, on a number of criminal charges and sentenced to several years in prison.¹³² Over the years he had managed to turn his kingdom into a successful business, selling passports and licence plates, setting up a royal insurance company, a pension fund and running stores for esoteric paraphernalia adjacent to the royal palace. Fitzek also organised seminars and lectures for his followers, elaborating his ideas about the legal basis of his kingdom and teaching his followers in what he called “legal self-defence”.¹³³ He launched a special event in 2009, captured on video and available on YouTube¹³⁴ showing his coronation ceremony in front of an audience of followers.

¹³⁰ See Wiling, D., (ed.) 2015. *Reichsbürger. Ein Handbuch*. Potsdam. Speit, A. (ed.) 2017. *Reichsbürger. Die unterschätzte Gefahr*. Berlin

¹³¹ Amadeu Antonio Stiftung (2014). *Wir sind wieder da. Die Reichsbürger: Überzeugungen, Gefahren und Handlungsstrategien*. Berlin.

¹³² See Baeck J.-P. (2017). *Wenn er König von Deutschland wär’. Peter Fitzek und sein Imperium in Wittenberg*, in Speit, A. (ed.), p. 62-78

¹³³ See Baeck p. 64

¹³⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnNI6g2j4aE&t=607s>



Ridiculous as it may seem, the case of Fitzek nicely demonstrates the melange of political and sectarian esoteric elements in the ideological set-up of many of the Reichsbürger groups. Combining elements from conservative, communitarian and left-wing political discourse with a promise of salvation from mundane burdens of citizenship and hard labour, this movement attracts a wide variety of followers who are willing to engage for the different groups and invest their money to support self-declared leaders. (Fitzek over the years had collected approx. 1.3 million Euro from more than 500 “investors” in his kingdom.¹³⁵)

The Reichsbürger movement obviously responds to very heterogeneous grievances and desires, promising solutions to problems ranging from bankruptcy to social isolation and exclusion from mainstream society. The different groups emerging under this label seem to operate in isolation at local level without any nationwide organisation. Often, they compete for the authentic interpretation of their gospel, leading to the establishment of hostile new spin-offs. In some cases, single individuals aspire to represent an independent heterodox political organisation, a new Reich, state or Kingdom in a one-man show. Their activities stretch from the infamous forms of paper terrorism based on heterodox legal reasoning¹³⁶ to more mundane activities like setting up fences around their premises, declaring their backyards as sovereign, independent territory, flying self-designed national flags, and issuing passports and heterodox legal documents sold for a fee to their “citizens”.

Selbstverwalter

While Reichsbürger groups typically invoke the existence of a sunken German Reich as the basis for their activities, the so-called Selbstverwalter groups (aspiring to autonomous self-governance independent and outside the existing legal-administrative political order) claim the priority of a superior natural law as the basis for their activity. They send declarations of “personal independence” declaring their opting out from the German state and claiming an extraterritorial status with regard to the Federal Republic of Germany.

Members of these heterodox groups have set up a company in Malta under the name of Pegasus International Incasso Limited to exploit a loophole in the Maltese payment demand procedure. This company is part of the “Malta scam” a fraudulent strategy to claim financial compensation from public authorities. In a first step a financial claim is registered with the online platform of the Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) in the United States. Anyone can register such a claim without further proof. Having obtained a legal title from the UCC this claim is transferred to the Maltese company that sends a European enforcement order to the presumed public debtors in Germany.¹³⁷

According to investigations of German law enforcement authorities, active members of heterodox groups like *Reichsbürger* and *Selbstverwalter* add up to approx. 10.000 individuals, spread across

¹³⁵ Baeck p. 67

¹³⁶ see e.g. Caspar, Ch & Neubauer R. (2012). Durchs wilde Absurdistan – oder: wie ‘Reichsbürger’ den Fortbestand des Deutschen Reiches beweisen wollen. *Landes- und Kommunalverwaltung* vol. 12, p.529-537

¹³⁷ see <http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2016-12-08/local-news/Germany-shuts-down-Reichsburger-Malta-scam-6736167665> The Maltese government after having been approached by German authorities have intervened and attempts have been made to end this fraudulent scheme. So far no payments were made to any claimants from the heterodox movement in Germany.



Germany. While no nationwide coordination exists, they share their ideas and ideology in a series of Internet forums and promotional videos.¹³⁸

PEGIDA – A heterodox social movement

Beginning in 2014 Germany saw the rise of a citizen movement with a strong right-wing agenda under the name of PEGIDA. Several thousand supporters congregated regularly in a public square in Dresden to voice their protest against the German government's refugee and asylum policy. Similar events took place in many cities across Germany (like in Berlin, Hannover, Munich) all with considerable turnout of several thousand supporters nationwide. While the political message of the PEGIDA movement was primarily anti-migrant, protesting against the expected "Islamisation of the Occident" the protesters shared a critique of the political status quo in Germany, similar to that of the heterodox group discussed in this chapter. Representatives of the German government were attacked as "liars" and the wave of critical media reporting triggered by this outburst of right-wing public anger was labelled by PEGIDA supporters as "Lügenpresse" (liars' press). Key figures of the PEGIDA movements were travelling across Germany and gave speeches at the weekly rallies of the movement in big cities. PEGIDA used social media to organise their mass events and to attract followers. Blogs and Facebook accounts also were important to spread the heterodox gospel and provide the adherents of the movement with "news and facts" allegedly suppressed or ignored by mainstream media.¹³⁹ In a survey of PEGIDA supporters conducted by the Initiative für Protest- und Bewegungsforschung¹⁴⁰ investigating the political orientation and party preferences of participants of PEGIDA marches a significant majority said they would consider themselves neither as left nor right-wing, while at the same time 90% of the respondents explicitly declared they would vote for the AfD, the new right-wing, neo-populist party in Germany, promoting a nationalist, anti-European, anti-migration agenda. PEGIDA supporter share a critical attitude towards the existing political system and the mainstream political parties, they do not trust mainstream media, they do not feel represented by the conservative or social democratic political parties making up the majority in German parliament (CDU/CSU and SPD). PEGIDA promotes a strong and sometimes hostile anti-elitism combined with usual conspiracy theories. The German chancellor Angela Merkel has been labelled as a "dictator", ignoring, if not suppressing the will of the people.

While a majority of the supporters accept the institutional set-up of parliamentary democracy in principle, they are extremely critical of the present state of democratic rule. In the survey, parliament, media, and financial institutions received very low trust scores. The declining trust in institutions seems to reflect a problem shared by all heterodox movements across Europe. It reflects an erosion of shared interpretations of social reality or a growing disagreement about the societal status quo. Data about migration, the number of asylum seekers and refugees living in the local area have been regularly overestimated by supporters of these movements. Official figures from police statistics about the crime rate of refugees are believed to be fabricated, concealing a presumed

¹³⁸ See e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q58-pb7r0qk>

¹³⁹ Pegida has set up its own webpage and YouTube channel, see <https://www.youtube.com/user/capesonne> and <http://www.pegida.de>. A "Pegida anthem" can be downloaded from the Webpage as well.

¹⁴⁰ Daphi, P. et al (2015). *Protestforschung am Limit. Eine soziologische Annäherung an Pegida*. Berlin (unpubl. Paper)



crime wave caused through mass migration. Heterodox media outlets spread alternative facts circulating among the members of groups like PEGIDA who refer to these “facts” to justify their political agenda.

Preppers and survivalists

This blend of heterodox groups entertains a dystopian mind-set and sees society at the brink of disaster. Their scenario of the final catastrophic end comes in different forms, again combining elements from a wide variety of seemingly unrelated ideological narratives. As opposed to the other groups discussed so far, they are not involved in protest activities but their focus is on surviving an envisaged doomsday scenario. They seem to be driven by a raised awareness of the vulnerability of modern techno-culture on the one hand and by the idea that governments are either incapable or unwilling to support citizens in case of apocalyptic emergencies. A breakdown of the existing order and the supporting techno-infrastructures will create a Hobbesian war and small bands of armed survivors will roam the country in search for food and shelter. Hence, preparatory action is required, either learning survival skills in the wilderness or turning the private homes into self-contained castles. Organisations like the “Human survival project”¹⁴¹ offer advice and support for the survivalists advertising a blend of tribal ideas and Boy Scout romanticism. What qualifies the members of this movement to be added to the variety of heterodox political groups is their basic conviction that contemporary societies are doomed to fail (rather sooner than later), that existing governance structures are not capable of preventing the envisaged disasters and that any active involvement within the existing institutional structures of political participation is futile.¹⁴²

6.3.3 Media discourse on heterodox political groups

Heterodox political groups make good media stories, last not least due to the sometime bizarre activities of some of their key figures, like the self-declared rulers of new Kingdoms. Also, in Germany some strange alliances have been observed and some prominent political activists from the extreme left end of the political spectrum switched sides to support extreme right-wing groups.¹⁴³ Reichsbürger groups attracted media attention after a series of violent confrontations with law enforcement agencies, most prominently the case of an 50 year old activist, who killed a policeman and wounded several others during a raid at his premises in a small village in Bavaria in October 2016. He was sentenced to a life-time prison sentence and is now serving time at a federal prison. Also, recurrent press releases from national intelligence authorities about the rising numbers of membership of heterodox groups triggered response from public media in Germany. However, the most discussed topic in German media was the PEGIDA movement, not only because it seemed to

¹⁴¹ see <http://www.human-survival-project.de/index.html>; <https://www.prepperwebsite.com>

¹⁴² The prepper movement even has been turned into a TV series by the US National Geographic media channel, see <http://channel.nationalgeographic.com/doomsday-preppers/>

¹⁴³ Horst Mahler, a former defense lawyer of the radical left Rote Armee Fraktion in Germany, who had served a long prison term for supporting left-wing militant terrorists, now is moving among extreme right-wing groups, see <http://www.zeit.de/thema/horst-mahler>. Also, a German popstar, Xavier Naidoo spoke at a rally of the PEGIDA movement, supporting Reichsbürger ideas. Having a figure like Naidoo as a testimonial helps to improve the image of these movements.



explode into a mass movement in a very short time, attracting tens of thousands to protest marches on public squares in German cities every week, but also because it seemed to be difficult to simply do away with this movement as a marginal right-wing radical splinter group. German TV stations ran documentaries about the sympathisers of PEGIDA¹⁴⁴ and the weekly marches were regularly covered in primetime news programmes in 2015 during the high time of the movement. Since then numbers have gone down and only a few activists congregate for their weekly marches in Dresden. A controversial public debate has developed around the status of PEGIDA, as either a platform for violent xenophobic, racist radicals or an expression of legitimate disenfranchisement, experienced by a significant number of German citizens. Many of the moderate voices quoted in newspaper articles justify their support for this movement with feelings of social injustice, a lack of respect and general feelings of being left behind (particularly as citizens living in East Germany, i.e. the former GDR). Playing on motives of economic and social injustice heterodox political groups tend to reframe such systemic problems in a populist manner, blaming refugees for an assumed fiscal crisis of the state and the ongoing cutbacks of different welfare programs. This narrative is supported by urban legends, circulating on Facebook about refugees receiving unjustified support and e.g. being offered high-tech mobile phones for free from local service providers.¹⁴⁵

Media coverage has definitely sustained public interest and contributed to the popularity of heterodox political activities in Germany. However, what seems to be more important is the impact of a sphere that could be labelled the heterodox media-sphere. Webpages, YouTube channels and Facebook accounts have contributed to keep the heterodox scene in Germany alive, supporting the activists with “alternative facts”, spreading “suppressed news” and spreading urban legends.¹⁴⁶

6.3.4 Law enforcement and legal reactions to heterodox movements

Heterodox groups like the Reichsbürger or Selbstverwalter had for a long time been operating below the radar of law enforcement and intelligence services.¹⁴⁷ Until recently heterodox political activism was not considered as a genuine and specific form of political radicalism by German law enforcement authorities. Scattered activities were treated as a variation of right-wing political extremism. No specific information was collected about the members of the relevant groups, nor was a specific strategy available to follow them or keep them under surveillance.

What makes it difficult for police and intelligence services to develop comprehensive coherent strategies and policies to react to heterodox political groups is their hybrid nature, oscillating between legal symbolic actions, annoying disturbances of public authorities (like paper terrorism)

¹⁴⁴ See <http://www.zeit.de/2017/47/pegida-sabine-michel-regisseurin-protagonisten-gespraech>

¹⁴⁵ see e.g. for Austria <http://www.nachrichten.at/oberoesterreich/salzkammergut/Varena-Meldung-ueber-Gratis-Handy-fuer-Fluechtlinge-unwahr;art71,2029407>

¹⁴⁶ The activities of heterodox political groups in the virtual sphere will be discussed in a separate section of this report.

¹⁴⁷ The following paragraphs draw on the results of a workshop with experts from German and Austrian intelligence services discussing heterodox political groups as a new challenge for law enforcement, organised by VICESSE as part of the SOURCE WP3 activities in Vienna in fall 2017.



and outright illegal behaviour, like forging official documents or massively harassing public servants. Unless heterodox political activists are not crossing a clearly defined threshold of illegal and criminal behaviour law enforcement agencies lack any legal handle to intervene or even systematically observe these groups. In some jurisdictions like Austria (see country report Austria) the legal framework of criminal law has been adapted to facilitate the prosecution of heterodox political groups like the Reichsbürger. However, this adaptation has triggered critical reactions from civil society organisations who see the loosening of legal regulations as an inroad for problematic forms of political justice criminalising social protest movements across the ideological spectrum. Law enforcement agencies in Germany still lack a coherent approach. The federal German intelligence service (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz) in December 2016 has declared the Reichsbürger movement as a legitimate object of general surveillance for the agency. However, due to a lack of a clear nationwide organisational structure it is not quite clear, how this policy of general surveillance or observation will be implemented. The only group, to have developed a halfway serious organisational structure so far seems to be the Deutsche Polizei Hilfswerk, (German police support network) a vigilant self-declared popular grass-root movement of concerned citizens, aspiring to step in, where police defect to enforce the law.¹⁴⁸ The DPHW was established in 2012 in East Germany, members wear police like uniforms and pretend to enforce public order.

6.3.5 Heterodox politicization in context

The emergence of heterodox political groups in Germany has attracted the attention of public media and recently, last not least triggered by parliamentary initiatives from MP of the left political spectrum, national intelligence services began to systematically observe these groups. What makes Germany stand out is the recent political history of the country. When the former GDR was integrated into the existing political order or West-Germany, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in 1989 two political cultures collided. Movements like PEGIDA took off in the former Eastern regions of the country. Citizens in these regions, many of them having grown up under a socialist regime felt disenfranchised and were susceptible to radical political narratives.¹⁴⁹ The prevailing social and cultural insecurity fostered a volatile voting behaviour, leading to frequently shifting majorities in regional parliaments in the Eastern part of Germany. East Germany proofed as a fertile ground for some of the new heterodox groups discussed here and the mass movement of PEGIDA acted like a sounding board for them. While it would be short-sighted to reduce heterodox political movements to a post-reunification problem emerging primarily in the territory of the former GDR, the differences in economic performance, employment rate and wages between East and West Germany at least to some extent account for the fact that heterodox groups have a greater stronghold in the East.

What makes it difficult to seriously assess the impact and political relevance of heterodox political groups is the lack of data about the support the reasoning behind their explicit and sometimes

¹⁴⁸ See their Facebook page <https://de-de.facebook.com/DPHW.de>

¹⁴⁹ See the lucid analysis of Engler, W. (1992). *Die zivilisatorische Lücke: Versuche über den Staatssozialismus*. Suhrkamp.



bizarre ideas would find from a broader audience. The radical critique of the very foundations of the existing political institutional status quo can be seen as a syndrome shared by an insignificant minority of anti-statist radicals. It might also reflect a broader disenchantment and erosion of legitimacy simmering under a surface of political quietism and shrinking active involvement. At present, any serious political assessment of the future role of heterodox political groups has to remain guess work.



6.4 Greece

6.4.1 Introduction

In this report, we will analyse the citizen groups of “*Ellinon Synelefsis*”, “*Den Plirono*” and the blog “*Katohika Nea*” as initiatives that meet some of the criteria of “sovereign citizen groups”. We use *Action Organisation Analysis* based on website retrieval and the subsequent content analysis of the websites; this approach was developed in protest event analysis and political claim analysis (Kousis, Giugni and Lahusen 2016).

An exact equivalent of sovereign citizen’s groups as they are described in the literature (sovereign citizen groups active in Europe like OPPT, Survivalists or Freemen-of-the-land originating in the US and adopting to national contexts) do not actually exist in Greece. However, during the last years and out of the severe economic crisis that has hit Greece, some citizen groups have appeared that in a sense pose a discursive threat to societal security. In particular these groups with their rhetoric and to a lesser extent with their actions challenge the rule of law. They especially focus on issues related to public and household debt. Based on obviously irrational accounts they “explain” the creation of debts and propose an easy way out of economic problems. At the same time they accuse politicians and state officials for treason because exactly, they do not implement these easy solutions. Nevertheless, in the course of time, irrational behaviour, demagoguery and a mixture of populism and nationalism are appearing not only at the margins of the Greek political system and society but seem to be moving to its very centre.

6.4.2 Heterodox political movements in Greece

Ellinon Syneleysis

In Greece, the single most important group, in numbers and influence, within the “sovereign citizen” strand is *Ellinon Syneleysis* (Assembly of Greeks). This group was established and is directed by Artemis Sorras.

Sorras started the initiative from his personal website (<http://www.artemis-sorras.gr/whois/>) Sorras, a businessman from the Greek city of Patras,¹⁵⁰ made his money in trade, constructions, the energy sector and technological patents. He claims that he wants to help his fellow Greeks to become prosperous again and regain their freedom. Besides helping his compatriots Sorras also fights the *global financial regime that has enslaved all the peoples of the planet*. He publicly transfers the knowledge he possesses regarding the secrets of global wealth.

¹⁵⁰ Patras is the third largest city of Greece. It used to be a city with large industrial sector but due to de-industrialization the citizens of Patras were facing high unemployment rates long before the eruption of the Greek sovereign debt crisis in 2010.



In particular Sorras claims that he rightfully possesses 40 shares of the *Oriental Bank*. According to his website the National Bank of Greece and the National Bank of Germany created this bank in 1904. Almost all the money that belonged to the minorities who used to live in the Ottoman Empire was deposited to this bank. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire the National Bank of Greece absorbed the Oriental Bank but its shares are still valid and their current value is enormous. The current value of each share of the Oriental Bank is 600 billion US dollars. So, Sorras has ordered one US bank to cash out one of his Oriental Bank shares to the benefit of the Greek Republic. In 2011, in the midst of the Greek crisis, Sorras revealed the hidden story of the Oriental Ban, claiming that we had deposited 600 billion US dollars out of his personal fortune to be used by the Greek state to pay off the whole Greek public debt and also pay the unpaid taxes of all Greek citizens.

Sorras accuses the Greek state for refusing his offer. He also blames the mainstream media for not seriously discussing his offer and the political forces from the entire political spectrum (including both the far-right and the far-left) for being treacherous. Greek politicians instead of accepting his money and instantly write-off the public debt is accepting Troika's bailouts,¹⁵¹ whose terms are having devastating effects for Greek people and undermine national independence. Therefore, Sorras has created *Ellinon Syneleysis* (the Assembly of Greeks) as a political platform without explicit political ideology for the sole purpose to inform Greeks about his generous offer. Although they claim not to be a political party *Ellinon Syneleysis* decided to enter electoral politics because the Greek state and all Greek parties do not accept Sorras's offer and the enslavement of the nation is continuing.

For the time being the above plans were postponed since Sorras in April 2017 was convicted to an 8-year sentence to prison for financial fraud and is now a fugitive of law. However, his website and his organization are still active. In early October 2017, some other leading figures of *Ellinon Syneleysis* declared that they would elect a new leader of the group. Sorras posted a video in the Internet and accuses these members as traitors. In October 22 2017 Sorras posted one more video where he calls the members of his group and all Greeks to get activate and start suing the Greek state.

Ellinon Syneleysis is organised like a typical NGO. Local chapters of *Ellinon Syneleysis* can be found all over Greece and in cities in Europe, America and Australia where Greeks are living. In total 228 chapters of *Ellinon Syneleysis* seem to exist. 216 of these chapters are located in cities and towns all over Greece. 4 chapters can be found in Germany, 1 is in Belgium, 1 in Switzerland, 1 in Norway. 3 chapters of *Ellinon Syneleysis* are located in the USA and 2 in Australia.

In the main website of the group contact information for all local chapters is provided.¹⁵² Each local chapter has its own email address. In most cases a mobile phone number as well as a postal address are listed. For the Greek chapters, there are also photos of the localities bearing the group's banners.

¹⁵¹ Troika is the combination of European Union Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund that financed the consecutive bailouts of the Greek economy in 2010, in 2012 and in 2015.

¹⁵² The central website for Greece can be found under <http://e-sy.gr/>, the movement's highly active Facebook account is <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1503257103321480/> and a blog is available under <http://alfeiospotamos.gr/>



There is no information on how many people exactly are organized in these groups but it seems that most of the local chapters are active and they indeed managed to gather some active followers. Besides Sorras many activists appear in television shows and Internet broadcasts and speak as members and active supporters of *Ellinon Syneleysis*. The group held public meetings where Sorras spoke. These meeting often attracted large crowds.

The values of *Ellinon Syneleysis* are overly nationalistic. The primary beneficiary group is clearly stated to be the Greek people *by blood and DNA*. Sorras is speaking in the name of the Greek nation and everything is done, or has to be done, for the salvation of Greece. According to Sorras's and *Ellinon Syneleysis* narrative the Greek nation was in danger many times in its long history but it always was finding ways to survive due to the actions of devoted patriots. This time Greece is threatened by the public debt, which was illegally assumed, and the demands of foreign lenders.

The goal of Sorras and his organization is to save the Greek nation. The means to achieve this goal are a combination of financial and legal methods. Sorras is offering his personal fortune to write-off public and household debt and he is suing Greek authorities for not accepting his offer.

In order to understand this extraordinary claim, we have to take into consideration the wider political and economic context that allowed for such claims to be sustained and successfully introduced into public debate.

In the summer of 2009 Greece was already going through a deep economic recession, the public deficit was high and the public debt was getting out of control. The single-party government of New Democracy (ND the traditional Greek conservative party) called for an early election, stating that a series of austerity measures were needed in order to stabilize the economy. The main oppositional party, PASOK (representing the Greek social democracy) on the contrary promised to stabilize the economy without taking any austerity measures but by cutting some unnecessary public expenses and by boosting economic growth through increases in public investment in green economy. As a result, PASOK won the October 2009 elections by a landslide.

The new government soon realized that the previous government had delivered to them an almost bankrupt economy. The public deficit proved to be the double than what ND's government had officially had declared. The international markets were unwilling to refinance the Greek debts at viable rates and the European Union institutions were furious with Greek officials. The Greek state was running out of money and after a series of dramatic negotiations with the EU and the IMF PASOK's government agreed on a bailout agreement in April 2010. According to this agreement (or the Memorandum as it is widely known in Greek public discourse) Greece had to balance its public deficit by enforcing severe austerity measures (cuts in salaries and pensions) and cuts in all public expenditure and as an exchange Troika would finance the Greek public debt through a new loan at a very low rate.

Soon afterwards this deal was signed all other Greek political forces started accusing PASOK's government for signing it and were predicting its failure to revive the Greek economy. ND accused PASOK for taking too many austerity measures and said another "mixture" of economic policies beyond the Memorandum would work better. The Greek Communist Party (KKE), which then was the



third largest party in the Greek Parliament, was saying that the only way to get out of a capitalist crisis to the benefit of the working-class people is through the formation of a socialist economy. The far-right LAOS predicted the failure of the Memorandum but it voted in support for reasons of national interest. The Greek Radical Left party (SYRIZA) accused PASOK for its broken promises and was saying that the public debt was illegal and should be written-off, the Memorandum should be cancelled but Greece should remain in the European Union and contribute to its transformation towards an anti-neoliberal orientation.

In the course of the 2010-2017 period the Greek public deficit was balanced, Greece lost almost 30% of its GDP, the unemployment rose to 25% and one out of three Greeks lives under the official poverty line. The ratio of public debt to the GDP has risen, recession stopped but the economy is stagnant. In 2012 a second Memorandum with the consent of New Democracy was signed and a third Memorandum followed it in 2015 with the consent of SYRIZA this time.

The 2010-2012 period is especially crucial for the purposes of our analysis. Sorras and his extraordinary claim appeared at this period. It was also a period that was characterized by a massive protest wave that swept the country and radically realigned its political system in 2011-2012.

During this period, the features and claims listed below gained wide acceptance in the Greek public discourse:

- The Greek public debt is illegal. Corrupt and irresponsible politicians of the old political system (meaning PASOK and ND) have accumulated this debt for their own benefit. Thus the Greek people should not contribute to the repayment of this debt
- Memoranda are imposing austerity and undermining national sovereignty, therefore they could be avoided. Politicians who signed and enforce them are traitors. Especially the leader of PASOK in 2010 is responsible for handing over Greece to Troika and actually is a traitor.
- The Memoranda are responsible for the economic crisis in Greece. The Memoranda and not the soaring deficit created the Greek economic crisis.
- There is an easy solution out of the crisis as far as capable and trustworthy politicians will handle the national affairs and negotiate properly with the Troika.

Against the backdrop of such claims some older nationalist narratives were also revived. “The forces of the new global order envy Greece because of its glorious past”, “The foreigners want to buy very cheaply the undisputedly beautiful land of Greece”.

The end result of all these claims is that irrationalism occupied the minds of a large segment of the Greek population. Therefore, ideas, claims and solutions advocated by people like A. Sorras found a fertile ground to grow.

Den Plirono

Another group in our sample could be “Den Plirono” (I am not paying). This group has started as protest movement against the payment of tolls and other taxes that were imposed to the Greek population during the Greek crisis. While Den Plirono has similarities with some of the “sovereign citizens” groups it does not display their full-blown irrationality. This group and its supporters are actually protesting against austerity and the rise of taxation. They are deifying the Memoranda and other austerity laws out of economic necessity and not out of belief.



The “I am not Paying Movement” appeared in 2009 as a citizen’s initiative against the payment of tolls on Greek highways. During the Greek economic crisis, it expanded its activities and in 2012 it was transformed into a political party. Its main objective is the cancellation of the Greek public and private debt.

“Den Plirono” raises a typical radical left critique, which has also been raised by SYRIZA in the 2009-2015 period, and advances civil disobedience against paying taxes, fees, and foreclosures.

While “Den Plirono” should not be considered as a “sovereign citizens group” we have included it in this report in an effort to show: a) how deep the issues of public and household debts have affected the Greek society, b) how widespread has become the fear of economic degradation in Greece, c) how widespread has become the belief that through some sort of voluntary action the economic problems could be tamed.

“Den Plirono” group and even more so “Den Plirono” collective action frames were very influential during the Greek Indignados protests in the summer of 2011. These protests attracted almost one out of three Greek citizens and contributed vastly to the dismantling of PASOK’s government. Additionally, the main repertoire of action of “Den Plirono” – the denial to pay the highway tolls became so popular that even the leader of SYRIZA participated in such actions. SYRIZA along with “Den Plirono” also instructed the Greek citizens in September 2011 not to pay the newly imposed tax on property.¹⁵³ The movement uses all social media channels and has attracted over 35.000 followers¹⁵⁴ to boost their key message that the Greek citizens did not create the debt; they are not in a position to pay the public and the household debts and they shouldn’t pay them

Katohika Nea

A third group grew around the blog “Katohika Nea” (Occupation News). Although this group seems only to exist on the internet we have included them in this report because the topics it raises have become very popular in crisis-ridden Greece. Katohika Nea basically is a website and a Facebook page with about 44.000 followers, run by a group of anonymous authors where all kinds of conspiracy theories can be found.¹⁵⁵ They were formed in Athens in 2011 in the midst of the Greek crisis. In particular they claim that there is a global conspiracy of the banks against the people. Some mysterious forces control the “banks”. These forces manipulate the people’s mind by spraying them with the use of airplanes. This “spraying” theory is very popular and according to a recent poll more than 25% of the Greek population actually believes in it.¹⁵⁶

Another popular theme in “Katohika Nea” is the existence of a group called “Illuminati” intervening in politics and actually controlling the whole earth. Greek people and the Greek nation are the eternal enemies of the “Illuminati” because Greece represents the truth and the good throughout

¹⁵³ The cancellation of this property tax was one of the main explicit promises of SYRIZA in the 2015 elections. Of course, under the terms of the 3rd Memorandum SYRIZA’s government did not cancel this unpopular tax.

¹⁵⁴ See <https://www.kinimadenplirono.gr/>; <https://www.facebook.com/denplirono/>; <http://epitropesdiadiastop.blogspot.gr/>

¹⁵⁵ <http://katohika.gr/>; <https://m.facebook.com/KatohikaNea>

¹⁵⁶ https://www.dianeosis.org/research/tpe_2017/



the centuries. The current economic crisis was imported to Greece in order to manipulate it and enslave its people.

While only very few people may be actually running this blog, the ideas and claims it promotes have become really popular in Greece during the last decade: Greece is under occupation by evil forces; Greek politicians are all traitors and instruments of the new global order.

6.4.3 Survey Data

A look at available survey data shows how the established balance of political parties in Greece began to change during the economic crisis.

In the national elections of May 2012 ND (the conservative party) and PASOK (the socialist party) gathered on aggregate 32% of the votes (ND 18.85% and PASOK 13.18%). In earlier elections both parties were used to gather in the national elections around 80% of the votes (see graph 1). The newly formed party of “Independent Greeks” (ANEL) – a populist split of ND parliamentarians who opposed the signing of Memorandum 2 – obtained an impressive 10.61% of the votes. However the most spectacular realignment in the far-right political spectrum was the rise of the neo-nazist group of Golden Dawn that obtained almost 7% of the votes.

In the left political spectrum, the new party of the Democratic Left (DIMAR) – a split in 2010 of old euro communist cadres of SYRIZA (the radical left part) who opposed its leftist turn – obtained 6.11 % of the votes. KKE (the communist party) arose to 8.48% of the votes but for the first time in its long history lost its position as the biggest party of the Greek left. This happened because SYRIZA, the actual winner of the national elections of May 2012, obtained an impressive 16.78% of the votes.

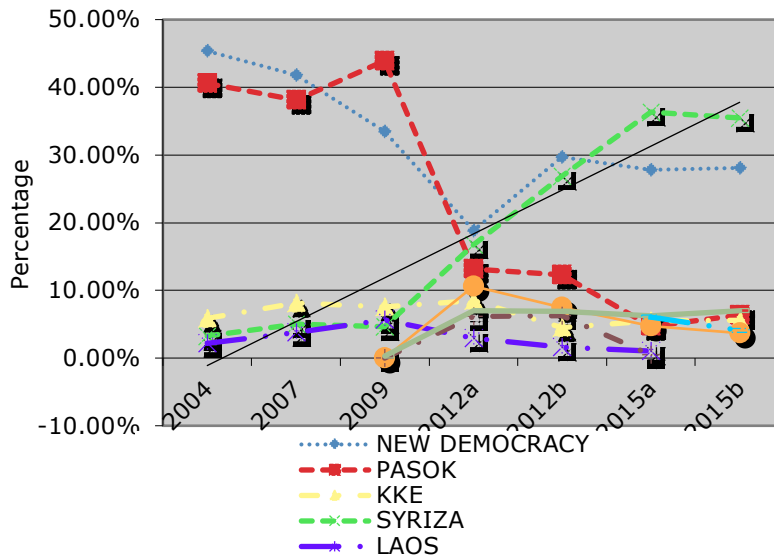
In the aftermath of the elections no government could be formed and a new election was called for June 2012. SYRIZA’s strategy for these elections was the formation of left government out of a coalition of all left parties. KKE refused any such possibility. SYRIZA was the big winner the election, obtaining 26.89% of the votes – the best ever outcome for a left party in Greek politics – while KKE lost almost half of its electoral power and became the smallest party of the Greek Parliament. DIMAR remained stable (6.26%) as PASOK did (12.28%). “Independent Greeks” lost many voters to ND but they managed to secure a 7.51% of the votes. Golden Dawn also managed to retain its electoral strength (6.92%). ND eventually won the elections by obtaining 29.66% of the votes. ND’s win had certainly to do with international pressure and a last-minute alignment of the conservative voters (see also Mavris 2012). Another crucial parameter for the result was that the participation in elections had significantly fallen over the years, reaching a historical low in the elections of June 2012 of 62.47%, compared to 76.50% in 2004.

In the elections of 25 January 2015, SYRIZA won with 36.34%, followed by ND with 27.81%, Golden Dawn with 6.28%, POTAMI with 6.05%, KKE with 5.47 %, Independent Greeks (AN.EL) with 4.75% and PASOK with 4.68%. The day after the elections SYRIZA formed a coalition government with AN.EL, promising to put an end to the austerity policies of the Memorandum, countering the “humanitarian crisis” of the Greek society. Eventually SYRIZA and ANEL proved incapable to alter austerity policies



and soon agreed on a new Memorandum of Understanding with the Troika institutions containing a new round of austerity cuts, privatizations, and neoliberal reforms. However, SYRIZA and ANEL managed to win the September 2015 elections and form anew a coalition government.

Greek election 2004-2015



National Election Results in Greece, 2004-2015 (Source: Ministry of Interior)

The recent elections significantly changed the party system. The victory of SYRIZA brought the Left in power in Greece, being the major partner in government. ND and PASOK, the dominating parties of the Greek political scene during the period between the collapse of the dictatorship and the eruption of the crisis in 2009-10 lost the support of Greek society. The Communist Party continues to be a stable political force with high rates compared to the respective communist parties in Europe. The relative success of ANEL in the elections shows that opposition to austerity policies and supervision by international and European institutions boosts nationalist and right-wing political groups as does the consolidation of the Golden Dawn (whose leadership team is still in custody) in the third position. Public support for right-wing ideologies deriving from resentment and opposition to the political system and the corruption of the "old" political party regime seems to have spread across Greek society.

The trend away from established politics and the inclination towards heterodox forms of political activity are reflected in Eurobarometer data for Greece, such as development of GDP, unemployment rates and the declining levels of confidence in European and national political institutions.

GDP in Greece grew until the outbreak of the 2008 global financial crisis. In fact, during this period, the growth rate was among the highest in the European Union and the Euro zone. In 2008 the GDP declined. The global economic crisis accelerated the negative trend reaching up to -8.9% in 2011. Meanwhile Greece had signed the first memorandum with the IMF, EC and the ECB in 2010. Until 2013, and under the supervision of international and European organizations, negative rates of GDP prevailed. First positive growth rates (0.8%) were registered in 2014.



Unemployment rates in Greece hovered around 10% for a period of almost six years (2000-2005) and since 2006 there had been a gradual reduction reaching 7.8% in 2008. This changed from 2009 onwards, when unemployment was rising rapidly, reaching 24.5% and 27.5% in 2012 and 2013 respectively. Although 2014 has been a slight decrease in rates, Greece has the highest unemployment rate in the European Union with a share of around 26.5%.

Against this background Greeks began to question the legitimacy of key European and national institutions. The European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Council and the ECB were enjoying high level of confidence of Greek citizens in the period between 2005-2009 (the confidence rates were among the highest in the European Union). In 2011 confidence rates dropped by almost half and in 2013 went further down. General confidence in the European Union among Greeks also dropped in 2013 to 21%. The only exception is trust into the single European currency, the Euro. From 2009 there is growing confidence in the single currency and trust levels stay above European average.

Institution	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013
European Commission	58%	69%	58%	28%	20%
European Parliament	62%	77%	60%	32%	20%
European Council	56%	68%	54%	28%	
ECB	54%	53%	51%	22%	16%
Single Currency	46%	51%	63%	75%	62%

Greek levels of trust to EU institutions (source *Euro barometer surveys*)

The same pattern of distrust is observed for national institutions. Of course, the degree of public confidence in them was already, before the crisis, lower than that for the European institutions. Thus, for the period 2005-2013, trust in the press was 43% and falling to 23%, in the national parliament from 57% to 12%, in the national government from 43% to 10%, and in political parties from 22% to 4%. These figures suggest that policies adopted by governments to address the crisis and regain citizens' trust exacerbated further an already existing resentment and distrust of citizens. Here we see a fertile ground for the emergence of all kinds of heterodox political movements.

Institution	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013
EU	62%	65%	60%	29%	21%
Press	43%	37%	39%	28%	23%
National Parliament	57%	52%	47%	12%	12%
National Government	43%	46%	44%	8%	10%
Political Parties	22%	21%	19%	5%	4%

Greek levels of trust in national institutions (source *Eurobarometer surveys*)



6.4.4 Media discourse on heterodox political groups

A media search for key words like sovereign citizens across Greek news media yielded no results. Groups using this label do not exist in Greece, hence the term is not used in public media. For the groups, we included in our sample (Ellinon Syneleysis, Den Plirono, Katohika Nea), only very few results were found in Greek newspapers. This, however, should not be seen as an indicator for a low popularity of these groups in Greece. They spread their message through the Internet and public discussion about their ideas takes place on social media and not in the traditional newspaper or TV.

6.4.5 Law enforcement and legal reactions to heterodox movements

Heterodox political movements have not caught the attention of Greek lawmakers up to this day and there are no specific legal regulations in the Criminal Code addressing the activities of this movement. Law enforcement agencies, police or intelligence services have so far not stepped forward to voice their concern about such a movement as an imminent threat to public order.

Since most of the activities of the groups discussed here are taking place in the virtual sphere of the Internet, no manifest violations of public order have been reported so far. Some of the leading figures had to appear in court and were sentenced on different charges. However, compared to other countries, the legal system and the law enforcement community have not reacted to the emerging heterodox movements.

6.4.6 Heterodox politicization in context

From the 1970s through the 1990s, studies of the relationship between political parties and social mobilizations in Greece, like those of other post-dictatorial southern Europe regions (Diamandouros and Gunther, 2001), focused on civil society groups rather than social movements and activism, emphasizing political clientelism, party-dominated politics, and populism (Mouzelis 1989), a ‘hyper-’, but in essence a ‘hypo-’, politicization (Spourdalakis 1988) described as an intense illusionary and pragmatic adherence to the state which is seen as a locus of private gains of security, resources, privileges and status (Demertzis, 1990). Especially up to the late 1980s, party-dominated politics witnessed intense competition with political parties seeking to integrate organized groups and trade unions under party control (Mouzelis and Pagoulatos, 2002). While anti-dictatorial mobilizations dominated in the early 1970s, socio-economic justice oriented mobilizations of the 1975–85 period took place when PASOK’s domination was increasing. Since 1974, and especially with PASOK’s entry in government, in 1981, new voluntary associations such as cultural associations, sports clubs, internal migrant clubs, students’ and parents’ associations, were established. This trend reversed from the mid 1980s, when the number of newly founded voluntary associations began declining (Sotiropoulos 2004). Although acknowledging that to a large extent, interest representation in Greece is dominated by state corporatism, Sotiropoulos argues that the consolidation of Greek



democracy allowed for the emergence of multiple single-issue movements, such as the environmental, feminist, health, cultural and consumer (see also Kousis 1999).

The high interest in politics during the 1974–81 period subsided by the late 1980s as PASOK was tarnished by scandals, and political cynicism and alienation rose (Spourdalakis 1998). Nevertheless, even since the late 1980s, parties continued to strive for control of newly founded NGOs. By the 1990s this partyocracy lost ground to public cynicism, political de-ideologisation, and increasing professional opportunities in the private sector.

The 1990-2010 period was characterized by de-politicization but many political movements were active in the national context covering the ideological spectrum from left/right to religious and ecological ideologies. On the left extra-parliamentary groups were relatively strong in the University campuses and many anarchist groups flourished throughout the country. Nationalist ideology became stronger as a counter movement to globalization and even political organizations of the left adopted nationalism in some ways. The Greek Orthodox Church saw also its influence rising.

With the eruption of the Greek economic crisis in 2009-10 all these counter culture movement gained prominence.

If we characterize the supporters of Den Plirano as heterodox political activists we could say that they indeed were strongly linked to the Greek anti-austerity campaign (see Kanellopoulos et al. 2017). Regarding the supporters of Ellinon Syneleysis and of Katohika Nea we have not found any evidence that relates them to any social and/or political movement in Greece and abroad.

In sum, it seems that a combination of structural, social, political and cultural drivers is producing the rise of heterodox political initiatives and movements in Greece. At the structural level the crucial element is undoubtedly the severe economic crisis that Greece is going through since 2009 without a clear sign to overcome it. At the social level, it is the considerable weakening of social bonds, the rising social exclusion and diminishing social cohesion that had started before the breakout of the economic crisis. The crisis accelerated and deepened these phenomena. At the political level Greece is going through a crisis of political representation. The old bipolar political system has collapsed and the new era is characterized by the meteoric rise of populist and xenophobic political parties. At the cultural level, long-standing perceptions of the “unique nature” of the Greek nation have entered anew the public discourse. These perceptions are many times combined with some overtly irrational beliefs of a deeply frustrated and disoriented population.

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6.5 Norway

6.5.1 Introduction

Searching for a heterodox political movement in Norway reveals a number of groups with a mainly right-wing nationalist orientation. Around this ideological core of a nationalist set of ideas spiced with Nordic mythology some of the standard themes of anti-statist and anti-elitist attitudes are mixed together with elements of esoteric narratives and conspiracy theories to create the typical heterodox political syndrome. The variety of associations, often organised around Facebook groups, aspire to work against the present political system in general and in particular stand up against the recent wave of migration into Norway which is seen as a threat to the ethnic purity of the Norwegian people. Also, as in most other countries, many of these groups are built around some leading figures, single individuals with a history of conflictual confrontation with public authorities who collect followers and appear as the outspoken voices of the respective movement or group in the general public.

Below we will briefly present a number of these groups active in Norway.

- The One People Norway
- Nordic Resistance Movement
- The Party of Norway
- The Alliance
- Independence Party
- Friends of the constitution
- We who have had enough of the dictatorship at the Parliament
- Radiation Protection
- Unlawful in Orkdal and Agdenes police district
- Media portal uncensored

6.5.2 Heterodox political movements in Norway

As mentioned above, heterodox groups in Norway exploit the heritage of Nordic mythologies linking themselves to a glorified past. This is reflected in the way group leaders have given themselves new names that are quite uncommon today and considered as old-fashioned in Norway. The leader of the first group listed below has given herself the middlename “Sigurdsdaughter”, i.e. the daughter of Sigurd. While this way of using middle names today is still common in Iceland, it is considered as outdated in Norway and the tradition ended many decades ago.

Sovereign Citizens (Suverene borgere)

This group is led by Ingunn (Sigurdsdaughter) Røiseland and Allan (Lion heart) Broch. Journalists having followed and observed this group estimate the membership between 400 and 1000 followers,



spread across the whole of Norway. The peak of the group's activity until now was in 2014. The group was established by Røiseland who some years ago decided to sign herself out of the Norwegian state after meeting resistance from the authorities of this very same state. She became famous for her outspoken critique of public health policy in Norway and a campaign against vaccination, spreading her opinions in the media.

The group members share a cut-and-glue ideology based on standard conspiracy theories. They are convinced that citizens are being lied to and that some hidden and secret forces and not the democratically elected government is in charge of governance and ruling the country. One of the more bizarre main ideas entertained by the Suverene borgere is that citizens' proper names and the identity number assigned to each Norwegian citizen are used as tokens and instruments in a gigantic and secret fraud scheme involving the large banks and financial institutions, using personal data as security. The birth certificates issued by the public administration in their view are security documents in a financial conspiracy. The main villain identified in the belief system of this group is the Vatican in Rome. Rulers in the Vatican, many centuries ago allegedly set up a deal to the effect that in all Western nations the national financial businesses are governed by some sort of "maritime laws". Issuing birth certificates to its citizens turns them into a commodity owned by the state.

Hence, the main declared goal of the group is to "redeem the strawman", i.e. to get rid of one's state defined identity. This involves formal administrative activities in order to get rid of one's personal identity number. In that way, a person can be separated from the juridical fiction (strawman), liberating the real human and breaking the chains.¹⁵⁷

The group no longer has their own Facebook group, (at least not any public ones) only a website) but the group members seem to support the two leading figures using their personal profiles. Both of the leaders are also highly active as authors, contributing to several online alternative news websites that are not directly linked to the group, but where they find an audience to spread the group's ideology. Meanwhile the founder Røiseland has moved to Brazil to escape the Norwegian state. There she allegedly lives with her family in a small village in the Amazonas and is obviously less controlled by the Norwegian government.

A number of sub-groups emerged from the original Suverene borgere. They are present on Facebook and spread the ideology of the Suverene.

Allan "Lionheart" Broch, one of the founders of Suverene borgere, is active on several social media platforms and also has set up his own website. He also runs a Facebook group that he promoted as a news channel where people can share "real" news. His website, starting as a project for sharing heterodox news, meanwhile has turned into a platform to promote of himself and his services.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ The website of the group can be found under <http://tovsugeren.blogspot.dk/2014/10/jeg-er-min-egen-stat-fordi-det-er-min.html>

¹⁵⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/341062299323235/?ref=search>, <http://www.allanbroch.net/> The group has about 900 followers.



On his website, he presents himself as a clairvoyant and master of hypnosis. Since he is Danish all texts are written in Danish. Broch has a background as a human rights lawyer and has put the United Nations symbol up front on his website, offering under “Services” information about United Nations and their Human Rights rules.

He also has a YouTube channel, that mainly seems to be devoted to the alternative social and administrative “liberation” practices.¹⁵⁹ His promotional motto is: “The slavery and fraud is revealed! NO NAME NO GAME.

Other related media spin-offs have titles like “*Me that should not be a ‘legal’ name*”, (105 members on Facebook) or “*The Norway movement*”, a virtual group telling their audience to wake up and realize how elite-criminals and globalism openly have taken hold of the country, people and natural resources. They want to enlighten citizens, start a revolution and create a free country with sovereign people.¹⁶⁰

Another related site uses the title “*How does the banking system work?*” It is run by a man named Hans Sigmundson and has about 1472 followers on Facebook. Users are made to believe that the banking system is rotten and the activist sets out to prove this and to show what you should be done about this state of affairs.¹⁶¹

The One People Norway

This group is a blue print of the OPPT movement and advertises its ideas on one national and three regional Facebook pages (Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim).¹⁶² Another regional chapter in Stavanger is mentioned but without their own Facebook page. The activities seem to have largely vanished, The Facebook group only has 492 members, and their last public post was in 2015.

They use a familiar heterodox narrative and draw directly from the American OPPT and how they in 2012 made it public that all governments are registered as corporations in Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) in Washington DC. The visitor of the Facebook page is informed that “The One People will help each other as well as the Planet. We will use all available tools to help each other.”

Nordic Resistance Movement

The Nordic Resistance Movement¹⁶³ are a National Socialist organization that is active in Sweden and Finland as well. Their political vision is presented in nine points. Their goal is to 1) immediately stop the mass immigration, 2) regain power from the global Zionists, 3) create a Nordic nation with a joint military, currency and central bank, and universal laws and rules, 4) establish a powerful government

¹⁵⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/user/newenergybalance/videos> He advertises slogans like: “*Could you be the name of the birth certificate*” – as long as the birth certificate is a security – a corporation OWN BY the state?

¹⁶⁰ On the Internet this group Norgesaksjonen can be found under: <https://norgesaksjonen.org/intelligent-selvorganisering-invitasjon/>

¹⁶¹ https://www.facebook.com/groups/hvordan.fungerer.banksystemet/?fref=gs&dti=1387236481488491&hc_location=group

¹⁶² <https://www.facebook.com/groups/TopNorway/> The leader seems to be the above-mentioned Hans Sigmundson, who later appointed two more administrators: Peter Kondogonis and Paula Zammit.

¹⁶³ <https://www.frihetskamp.net/information-in-english/>



with a strong oversight by the people, freedom of speech is important. In their vision 5) mass media will be owned by the Nordic Nation citizens, and media being hostile to Nordic people might be banned, 6) all will be living in harmony with the laws of nature 7) resources will be distributed to benefit all people, to sustain a social welfare safety net. Also, the Movement wants 8) to reinstate national compulsory military service, increase armed forces, all citizens should wear weapons and keep their equipment after completing military service, 9) set up a constitutional state where all citizens are equal in the eyes of the law shall be established.

Their latest public marches have met high resistance from other citizens, and their planned summer event for 2017 had to be moved from one city to another, since municipal administrations did not grant them permission because they feared a big clash between this group and others protesting the event. Finally, they were allowed to walk in public space based on the legal right to freedom of speech. To curb the risk of confrontation, supporters from foreign countries were stopped at the border to avoid a massive clash between the Movement and its opponents. The march went without confrontation and most people they passed by turned their back towards them. Their latest propaganda campaign is to fight gay rights and “gay politics” and the “gay lobbyism” which in their view is taking over today's politics.

The Party of Norway

This group started in 2007 and ran for the first time in the parliament election in Norway in 2017. They advertise their programme on the webpage and on Facebook over 16.000 users like the message and a similar number follow the page.¹⁶⁴

The goal of this party is to liquidate the “representative party rule” and to replace it with a direct people's government. To reach this goal, the ‘legislative power’ has to be transferred from the Parliament to the people. This move shall liquidate party politics and give the people back their genuine legislative power. Parties in their view are just undemocratic intermediaries. The real democracy is when “The people” have then chosen themselves as legislative actor and run the country directly. They want Parliament to be closed down and replace it with a “Peoples house” – get rid of “Stortinget” and replace it with “Folketinget” (a subtle irony, since this is the word used in Denmark for the national parliament).

Elections should comprise a direct election of the government (“something the Norwegian people have never been allowed”). The same should happen with city administrations to “strengthen the local democracy”. “The People” as legislators will be supported by a legal group that makes new laws and legal reforms the topic of binding referendums. Switzerland is quoted by the group as an example for this type of governance.

Their critique of the present status quo is based on the assumption that today's government is violating the spirit of the constitution, as well as human rights and people's genuine rights. Norway in their view is governed by capitalist interests, forcing the country to participate in wars and terror in other countries. The state has forgotten its own people.

¹⁶⁴ See <http://www.norgespartiet.no/> (the webpage); <https://www.facebook.com/Norgespartiet/>



This group makes a good example for the heterodox mixture of right-wing nationalist and left-wing radical anti-capitalist narratives in a somewhat incoherent political programme.

The Alliance

This political group qualifies as another textbook case of a heterodox political movement. It was founded by and is led by Hans “Lysglimt” (Light glimps) Johansen, who runs under the name “Light glimps”. He is famous and became known for being a supporter of Donald Trump. The slogan of his movement is: “Norway first. Vote the Alliance”. On Facebook, the Alliance counts: 3600 followers and a similar number of “likes”.¹⁶⁵ Designed as a wide transversal political alliance to regain Norwegian self-government and independence this group runs on the promise to put the country’s own interests first, claiming that today’s politicians play a dirty political game putting themselves first before the interests of the country. Similar to Party of Norway their declared goal is to install a direct democracy and to pull Norway out from the Schengen agreement and EEA. The Alliance ran for national elections in 2017 under slogans like “Norway first. Vote the Alliance” and “We need you, we need Norway!”. They were able to run an election campaign after receiving a donation of about 78.000 Euros from a former ship company owner who declared he was dissatisfied with ruling politicians who no longer can take care of Norway. They managed in a very short time to collect the 5000 signatures from supporters required to register as a political party in Norway.

An interesting feature of the party is that all members are free to promote their own cases, as long as they subscribe to the rather short political programme of the party. Many of the candidates on the list of the Alliance also figured on the lists of other parties, such as e.g. the Coastal party (a party that had won one seat in earlier elections) and the Independence party (described below).

Independence Party

The Independence Party represents another case of a new heterodox political movement.¹⁶⁶ The party promotes “Norwegian values” and addresses the “Norwegian people”. Their reading of the constitution focusses Norway as an independent and free country. They are against most international treaties and forms of collaborations binding Norway such as the EU, TISA, Schengen, etc. High on their political agenda is to ban Islam from public space. Closing the borders for migrants would help to regain the leadership of Norway and shutting down child services would prevent migrants from having more children. As good populists, they also want to strengthen the voice of the people in politics by having mandatory opinion polls for important decisions, and last not least they want to abolish the existing party system. The group also easily managed to collect the 5000 signatures required for registration in the 2017 election. The leader Willy Håkon Hansen, and the vice leader, Ellen Due Brynjulfsen, also ran on the list of The Alliance for the 2017 election (being listed as number one representative in each of their counties).

¹⁶⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/AlliansenNorge/> : http://www.stemalliansen.no/about-alliansen/https://www.facebook.com/binga.johansen?hc_ref=ARS1_ky1TnloQmXNTmp6B6Zi7GqH6Na8vjojeL-7fkSKOJIThgs84WIBAuck1y8nFUc&pnref=story

¹⁶⁶ <https://selvstendighetspartiet.no/index.html>



Friends of the Constitution

This group collected 1513 members on Facebook.¹⁶⁷ Their goal is to preserve Norway's freedom and independence by securing and preserving the Norwegian Constitution. They protest and work against what they perceive as the destructive powers in Parliament. Members of Parliament in their view adjust the Constitution to their party-political agendas. "We do not approve of people's 'Letter of Freedom' gets torn apart.". Beyond the radical critique of existing governance by established political parties they want to secure Christian values in schools, and revitalise the constitution, arguing against political statements claiming that the Constitution has expired. Following the typical populist rhetoric Norway should again become an independent, free country, and not surrender to either the Globalists (represented by today's politicians), the EU or the European movements and their "secret parliamentary group".

We who have had enough of the dictatorship at the Parliament

This is a Facebook group with 7609 members¹⁶⁸ rehearsing the typical heterodox, anti-establishment anti-elitist tune. The People should be involved through popular voting in important decisions in a legally binding way. Real Democracy should flourish again in Norway. Politicians should not have the right to ignore the will of the people, what, so the line goes, they do today. Political elites are blamed for turning their head towards the constitution and ignore human rights. The Norwegian constitution should be followed literally and the "landssvikerparagraf" should be abolished.¹⁶⁹

A guy named Ingar, who started the group, finishes the "about" section of his online presentation with an almost desperate call for help to the visitors of his page: "PLEASE come with suggestions/ideas to how the people should redeem legislative power!!"

Radiation protection

With this group and their Facebook presentation¹⁷⁰ we enter the esoteric section of heterodox politicisation. Radiation protection has approx. 3200 followers and 3300 people like their page. Apart from the open page visitors are invited to joined a members-only section, where access is granted for an annual fee of 40 Euro.¹⁷¹

"What you do not know, is hurtful" was chosen as the groups slogan and visitors on the web are informed that this is not an activist organization, but presentations will be held for an adequate fee. Radiation protection claims that although scientific research has shown that electromagnetic radiation is hurtful, the government does not inform the public about this threat. The group's goal is to protect and inform the public about this highly important topic. They want to raise awareness with

¹⁶⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/grunnlovsvenn/>

¹⁶⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/159132152446392/>

¹⁶⁹ This "paragraf" refers to Art 115 of the Norwegian constitution that states: "In order to safeguard international peace and security or to promote the international rule of law and cooperation, the Storting may, by a three-fourths majority, consent that an international organisation to which Norway belongs or will belong shall have the right, within specified fields, to exercise powers which in accordance with this Constitution are normally vested in the authorities of the state, although not the power to alter this Constitution. For the Storting to grant such consent, at least two thirds of its Members shall be present, as required for proceedings for amending the Constitution. The provisions of this Article do not apply in cases of membership in an international organisation whose decisions only have application for Norway exclusively under international law." See https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/1814-05-17/ARTIKKEL_icle3#ARTIKKEL_icle3

¹⁷⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/folkets.stralevern/>

¹⁷¹ <http://www.folkets-stralevern.no/>



regard to possible damages. Everyone should protect him- or herself. Also, limits for different types of radiations should be enforced to protect humans and animals alike. What makes groups like Radiation protection an important element in the domain of heterodox political groups is their basic assumption of politically ignored threats and/or officially suppressed vital (scientific) information about hazards and eminent dangers. Here, heterodox politics links with heterodox science forming esoteric belief systems.

Unlawful in Orkdal and Agdenes police district

This is a small Facebook group with about 175 members.¹⁷² Since Jørgen Arne Skarsvåg, the official moderator of the group currently serves a prison sentence together with another member of the group, Ola Nordmann, (see: <https://www.facebook.com/mr.hillclimb>) the page is temporarily managed by Gunnar Virittsekk Håvik.

This case is a typical example for small groups emerging in virtual space, sharing the typical heterodox narratives, mutually re-enforcing their world views and political attitudes. The group members are against the state that has too much power, which is true especially for the governmental institutions they have encountered. Examples are provided: child services that kidnap children. State broadcasting employees are impounding houses to collect the annual fee, etc.

The official moderator and his buddy, Skarsvåg and Nordmann, have been imprisoned for violations of freedom of speech. In their view, the government controls everything and will not let them voice their protests. They were sentenced for speaking up against the government, a tremendous injustice in the eyes of their supporters, who showed up during the court trials, harassing the police and local politicians in the small village where Skarsvåg was arrested.

Some newspaper articles classified this group as "freemen", but the members themselves do not use this label for self-description.¹⁷³ The current group moderator Håvik has refused to pay fines imposed by a local court now owing more than 30.000 NOK and boasting himself in an interview for a newspaper that "he lives to bother the police".¹⁷⁴ He has also created his own website posting about his conversations with Skarsvåg in prison, and how he is being treated unjust there (see: <https://plagern.wordpress.com/>)

Media portal uncensored

This is one of the heterodox Facebook groups that focus on specific topics to demonstrate their general and fundamental critique of the state, its values and the political order it represents. The Media portal is run by Rune Fardal¹⁷⁵ and has approximately 6200 followers.

The main topic of the Portal is the provision of child services in Norway. These public services are abusing children by putting them in closed institutions, exposing them to a hostile environment that damages children, in some cases even ending up in deaths. They ask to charge the director in these cases holding them responsible. This line of critique is supported by stories about other governmental employees abusing their powers. The victims of such maltreatment therefore should

¹⁷² <https://www.facebook.com/groups/737750709687636/>

¹⁷³ <https://www.dagbladet.no/kultur/frimenn-herjer-etter-tvangssalget-av-jorgens-48-hus--voldtektssaker-blir-andreprioritet-hva-slags-opplegg-er-det/65372487>

¹⁷⁴ <https://www.dagbladet.no/nyheter/gunnar-42-gjor-alt-han-kan-for-a-plage-politifolk-og-offentlige-ansatte/66402989>

¹⁷⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/rune.fardal?fref=search;>
<https://www.facebook.com/Mediaportalensensurert/?pnref=lhc>



stand up for their rights. Supported by the Media Portal there have been demonstrations in main cities in Norway.

6.5.3 Survey Data

As this brief screening of heterodox political groups, active in Norway, has demonstrated, there are several typical initiatives similar to groups and movements that can be found in other countries in this area. Looking at the indicators for political culture across Europe Norway in many dimensions stands out as a positive example with high trust scores and high level of citizens' satisfaction with the political institutional arrangement.

In Norway, there are national elections every fourth year, with municipal election in between. Since 2010, Norway had national elections in 2013 and 2017 (no official statistical numbers are available for 2017 yet). The voter turnout was 78.2% in 2013, with a lower turnout for men (77%) than women (80%) in all age groups up to 66 years. This is an increase of 1.9 percentage points since 2009. The numbers seem to stay steady in 2017. Those with a university or college education had the highest turnout with about 90%, while the participation among those with primary/lower secondary education was 65%.¹⁷⁶

Until 2013, there had been eight years of a collaborative, liberal government. In 2013, the liberal parties such as Labor Party, Socialist Left Party and Center Party all declined in percentage. A new government was formed by the Conservative Party and the Progress Party.

In the 2017 elections, all conservative parties supporting the government lost votes. However, they remain in power since the Labor party (largest liberal party) also lost support at the ballot. Other smaller parties such as the Centre Party, Socialist Left Party, Green Party, and Red Party increased their number of votes. The Red Party now enters the Parliament for the first time with one representative.

An election survey showed that the support for Labor and Socialist Left Party is greater among women than men, and the Conservatives and Progress Party have more male supporters. The lowest average age is found among Green Party voters with 39.8 years, while the Christian Democratic has the highest with 50.7. Another possibly interesting information is that there has been a steady decline among Norwegians that are members of a political party, which in 2014 was 7 per cent.

As the ESS shows Norwegians are the second most satisfied people with regard to the democratic institutions in their country, scoring 7.2 (10 being extremely satisfied). Also, Norway scores the highest in political trust among all of the participating countries with 5.8 out of 10.¹⁷⁷ The ESS in 2010 also showed that Norwegians, like citizens in other Scandinavian countries, are quite satisfied with the police and also their procedural fairness (UNDER).

¹⁷⁶ <https://www.ssb.no/en/valg/nokkeltall/elections> (National Statistics Norway)

¹⁷⁷ https://www.scp.nl/english/Publications/Publications_by_year/Publications_2016/Trust_life_satisfaction_and_opinions_on_immigration_in_15_European_countries



6.5.4 Media discourse on heterodox political groups

Despite a considerable spread of heterodox groups, these activities do not attract broad attention in the Norwegian newspapers. Occasionally they make headlines, when e.g. an activist has been evicted from his home or a group manages to attract attention for having been treated incorrectly by a public authority or the government. Although the groups in the coverage have not been mentioned explicitly, public attention has helped them to attract followers and gather support.

The only exception is the Nordic Resistance Movement, that has received quite a lot of media attention. Their opinions are quite extreme and there is strong resistance against them. Some people even seem to be scared of their activities. Such public arousal of course is taken up by media. Several newspapers reported about these reactions to the Nordic Resistance movement.¹⁷⁸

The other groups presented above have not made it into the national media.

One newspaper in 2017 runs an article on Freemen in Norway, discussing how this new type of activists has appeared in Internet groups. The article quotes the story of a man who was evicted from his house and how he succeeded to solicit support through Facebook.¹⁷⁹

The media search for Sovereign citizens in Norway yields a similar result. Only one newspaper reports about Ingunn “Sigrudsdatter” Røiseland, the main activist of “Sovereign citizens”. After she was evicted from her home the newspaper ran an interview with an author who had done research on Røiseland and had published about sovereign citizens.¹⁸⁰

6.5.5 Law enforcement and legal reactions to heterodox movements

There are no specific legal rules targeting heterodox groups in Norway, and their activities have not attracted attention from law enforcement or the government with one exception, the Nordic Resistance Movement. However, also this group had permission to organise public marches and rallies.

A legal debate started about the question whether these heterodox political groups should be considered eligible for financial support and public funding.

According to Norwegian law, religious groups might get support if they have more than 500 members and will receive a certain amount per member. This has led to a few religious societies being convicted for fraud for listing more members than they actually had. Among the convicted groups

¹⁷⁸ One article quoted citizens saying that they would get physically ill from seeing this group in the streets <https://www.dagbladet.no/nyheter/her-konfronterer-mdg-politiker-den-kjente-nynazisten--folk-blir-kvalme/68550031>. Another article reported about the reluctance of police who did not want to stop a march of Nordic Resistance supporters. <https://www.aftenposten.no/norge/i/mq9gv/Hoyreekstrem-demonstrasjon-i-Kristiansand--politiet-ville-ikke-gripe-inn>. An article discusses the Movement’s recent protest against gay rights <https://www.nrk.no/sorlandet/nynazister-demonstrerer-i-kristiansand-1.13621490>

¹⁷⁹ <https://www.dagbladet.no/kultur/frimenn-herjer-etter-tvangssalget-av-jorgens-48-hus---voldtektssaker-blir-andreprioritet-hva-slags-opplegg-er-det/65372487>

¹⁸⁰ <https://www.ta.no/nyheter/disse-folkene-ma-vi-ta-alvorlig/s/1-111-7679592>



was also the Catholic church in Norway. Other groups can ask for financial support from government for specific activities, such as e.g. initiatives integrating Muslims into the Norwegian society. The legal and political definition of eligibility criteria has led to some controversial discussions in public media. Groups with different religious and political backgrounds had received support without meeting the criteria or launching the activities as promised. Groups like the Human Rights Service have been criticised for pushing a controversial political agenda, considered legitimate by some and racist and judgmental by others.

Many of the heterodox groups would like to get access to public funding as political or civil society associations. Having attracted a sufficient number of members and being formally recognized as an association eligible for funding would create a substantial income for the heterodox groups. However, so far none of the groups so far succeeded in getting public funding.

6.5.6 Heterodox politicization in context

Norway has developed a broad political spectrum reaching from left-leaning and ecological movements/parties to moderate and radical conservatives and right-wing groups.

The left side and ecological movements are represented by the “Reds” and the “Green party”, which for the last few years have received a lot of public attention and support. Both won one seat in Parliament, where the Green party was represented since 2013.

The Green party are a part of the city council in Oslo since 2015, responsible for environmental politics in Oslo. They managed to implement quite a few changes in the city, (more bicycle paths and less parking space) trying to ban cars from the inner city. This plan has met a lot of resistance from the conservative parties. Another main green topic is offshore oil drilling, triggering controversies in elections over the last decade.

The far-right end of the political spectrum is represented by activist groups of conservative extremists. One of the groups receiving attention is the abovementioned Human Rights Service, funded by Hege Storhaug and Rita Karlsen in 2002. Hege Storhaug became a well-known author in 2015 when she published the book called “Islam, the 11th country disease” that became a bestseller. She also won an online voting for “Name of the year” organised by one of the largest newspapers in Norway the same year. Human Rights Service claims to be concerned with human rights, criticising Islam for its treatment of women. Storhaug posted pictures of women dressed in burkas and niqabs, on Facebook to demonstrate how disadvantaged Islamic women are. Such actions are declared by the organisation as being a contribution to a better integration of immigrants, countering the violation of human rights by Muslims. The group’s slogan is “Knowledge. Clear minds. Sharp pens.”.

Working along similar lines is the activist group “Stop Islamisation of Norway” (SIAN). It was established in 2008 and stands up against Islam. In their view Islam is a “totalitarian political ideology that violates the Norwegian constitution as well as democratic and human values”. The group is led by Arne Tumyr, and has several thousand members and supporters according to Wikipedia (Wikipedia, 2017). They have received massive negative feedback in press statements from political parties and people marching against them, when they took their protest to the street. The latest demonstration was held in Gjøvik, a smaller Norwegian city, and was met by many hundreds of oppositionists. It led to a violent conflict where one police officer was hurt. Reading SIAN’s website



gives a quite different picture of the conflict than official newspapers, and they post pictures of different people who are responsible for Islam's entry to Gjøvik.

A main target of the right-wing groups are religious political movements and radical Islamic groups. The Prophet's Ummah, a Norwegian based Salafi-Jihadist group became famous in 2011 for their vocal demonstrations and statements praising Islamic terrorism. They have been inspired by Al-Qaida, and several of the Norwegian foreign fighters for ISIL originated from this group. Two of the leaders of this group, Arfan Bhatti and Ubaydullah Hussain, both well-known in Norway for publicly supporting war and violent activities, and physically and verbally attacking Ministers and other politicians in Norway. They both served time in prison for recruiting members to terrorist activities. Less radical but as prominent in Norway is the group Islamic Net, that launched a "missionary expedition" reaching out mainly to students in Norway. Many Norwegians have converted to Islam in their meetings, and they run a school for converted in Oslo. They released rather controversial statements asking e.g. for the execution of homosexuals.¹⁸¹

While no openly declared connection exists between heterodox political activists/groups and these other right-wing movements the ideology of the right-wing movements are clearly similar to the heterodox groups: They all entertain a negative and hostile attitude towards immigrants and share the same anti-establishment sentiments. Many of the members of the heterodox groups' Facebook pages are most likely also supporting Human Rights Service and SIAN. However, there seems to be a strong dislike and disapproval across the right-wing groups. There is little mutual support among the different groups. While they might look similar from the outside they seem to share little when viewed from the inside. As in all other countries Norway has developed a heterodox political scene displaying a set of heterogeneous ideological frameworks supporting activities against the existing political establishment.

¹⁸¹ On these groups see Hege Storhaug: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hege_Storhaug
Human Rights Service (HRS): <https://www.rights.no/>
Prophet's Ummah: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Profetens_Ummah
SIAN: <http://www.sian.no/>
Wikipedia (2017): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stop_Islamisation_of_Norway



6.6 Slovakia

6.6.1 Introduction

Since the establishment of Slovakia as an independent state in 1993, and the preceding discussions about the position of the country within the Czechoslovak federation framework, there has been a heightened political conflict about the position of Slovakia within the political landscape in Europe. The beginning of the conflict is epitomised by the parliamentary vote on the Slovak constitution in 1992, when the draft bill was presented in the parliament on September 1, and the vote took place in the evening of the same day. A majority of the MPs (114) voted for the constitution, while 16 voted against, 4 abstained and 16 were not present. Therefore, the establishment of the state was not consensual and there was major conflict about the basic law of the state. Malová argues that the hastily drafted constitution proved to be insufficient to foster the consolidation of democracy and the rules were designed to grant parliament dominance in the political process.¹⁸²

The political conflict in the forthcoming years originated from a historically insecure understanding of nationhood deep-rooted in the Slovak political tradition, which understands politics primarily as the struggle for national realization.¹⁸³ The political conflict, which consisted in both struggle over institutional means and cultural goals gathered momentum during the period of Mečiarism (1994-1998), as a struggle between liberal democracy and authoritarian tendencies, and controversy about the position of Slovakia as being part of the Western European cultural space vs. being a “cultural bridge” between the East and the West.¹⁸⁴ In a less heightened manner, the political conflict prevailed throughout the latter years, and is currently manifested in the clash between pro-European ideas and opponents of “EU enforced cultural liberalism.” This was best manifested in the case of the reactions towards the migrant and refugee crisis during 2015 and 2016.¹⁸⁵

Although the activities we termed as heterodox politicization are traditionally different from orthodox civic political engagement, political protest or anti-politics, their elements in the form of the struggles over cultural goals and institutional norms can be identified in the institutionalized political conflict in Slovakia since the foundation of the independent state. This is especially true for the deviant behavior that we capture under the label of rebellion, which can be found in institutionalized politics to this day. In the Slovak case, the most enlightening examples would be protest movements with no stable membership and common belief system such as *Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti* [Common people and independent persons], which was transformed into a parliamentary party in 2012, the anti-immigrant movement *Sme Rodina* [We are family] and the

¹⁸² Malová, D. (2001). Slovakia: From the Ambiguous Constitution to the Dominance of Informal Rules. In J. Zielonka (ed.), *Democratic Consolidation in Eastern Europe Volume 1: Institutional Engineering*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 347-377.

¹⁸³ Harris, E. (2010). Slovakia since 1989. In S. P. Ramet (ed.), *Central and Southeast European Politics since 1989*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 182-203.

¹⁸⁴ Baer, J. (2001). Boxing and Politics in Slovakia: 'Mečiarism' Roots, Theory, Practice, *Democratization*, 8:2, p. 97-116.

¹⁸⁵ See last year's ASSR



right-wing extremist Kotleba – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko [Kotleba – Our Slovakia People’s Party], both in parliament since 2016.

This results in the situation, where heterodox politicization not only exists as a new form of grassroots political activism in a plethora of small heterogeneous groups, with varying ideological beliefs and focusing on a variety of activities but also within the institutional framework of parliamentary politics. The movements found outside of mainstream political activism and parliament cover a wide range of groups and philosophies ranging from retreatism to rebellion. No large organized heterodox movement, such as Freemen or Reichsbürger can be found in Slovakia. The groups operating in this country are relatively small in size.

6.6.2 Heterodox political movements in Slovakia

In the following section, we will present an exemplary selection of groups, representing different forms of heterodox politicization. We will start with groups who have separated themselves from main-stream society following a path of retreatism and move on to those who rather follow the path of rebellion.

Retreatism in Slovakia

The approach of retreatism is represented by a variety of small communities of individuals living outside the “modern world.” Their different ideological approaches can be divided into separatist communities, family communities and the so called “kin” communities.

Separatist communities have received the biggest media attention in Slovakia. The most prominent among them is the community of Zaježová.¹⁸⁶ They have social media presence, their Facebook site has more than 4300 followers – see a highly visible media presence (see <https://www.facebook.com/Zajezova-62537635411/>). Zaježová is a loose community of individuals living in Zaježová and nearby communities in the mountains in the Middle Slovakia. They share the vision of “an effort to live freely, to cooperate, to protect the countryside and nature and to create the conditions for a full-fledged life.” This community has existed since 1991. In the beginning it focused on traditional crafts and folk architecture they wanted to protect. Later the focus shifted to environmental issues and attracted a large number of followers, who moved into the community. According to the official webpage, there are 50 adults and 30 children actively living and engaging in the community at this time. Currently the community focuses on ecologically sustainable living, it operates a kindergarten, food bank and meditation centre.

Zaježová neither advertises an official ideology, nor is there any declared leadership. On the other hand, the shared beliefs include striving for freedom and independence. They criticize the contemporary state and its politics for neglecting environmental issues. The official webpage hosts a number of articles on environmental problems such as increasing ecological footprint and sustainable living. Within the community, there is a number of civic associations, which aim at addressing a wider public. One of them is Pospolitosť pre harmonický život [Community for

¹⁸⁶ official website <http://www.zajezka.sk/>



harmonious life], whose mission is to “develop and spread the idea of life in harmony with nature, with other people and the needs of personal development (so-called harmonious life).¹⁸⁷” Other associations include a community centre, the magazine *Naozaj*, a school and an education centre. The community is open to the public, they organize a number of events – such as summer schools, craft workshops, etc. and offer accommodation for visitors. In this sense, their retreatism is not absolute and members of the community reach out and engage to some extent with the general public.

Another separated community, which is situated near Poprad with the view of High Tatras is *Krásne Sady Mlynica*. This project has a more commercial character, providing housing opportunities for the public, and has its own philosophy of fulfilling “the desire of every person after a real home, life in harmony with the nature and the need for people to eat healthy and quality food.” The group has a strong environmental agenda; the community provides a communal ecological garden, and operates a forest pedagogy centre. Buildings in the settlement are built from ecological materials. The project’s website¹⁸⁸ does not list any other activities. Around 1400 users follow the group on Facebook.

Separated communities have started a number of local initiatives and projects, one of them being *Alter Nativa Brdárka*. *Brdárka* is a small village in the mountains in Eastern Slovakia, and *Alter Nativa* is a community, which organizes various courses and seminars, focused on environmental issues, sustainable living and spiritual transformation. One of the latest courses is on “quantum transformation of relationships.” *Alter Nativa* has a social media presence¹⁸⁹ with around 2200 followers on Facebook. Another project focused primarily on the spiritual life is *Nová Ekačakra*, a community of Hare Krishna followers. They consider the community to be “a temple project and a rural community” focusing on “simple life and deep thinking, according to the teachings of Abhay Charanaravinda Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.” The community is located in a small village of *Abranovce* near *Prešov* in Eastern Slovakia. Their social media profile (<https://www.facebook.com/NovaEkacakra/>) suggests a modest number of around 1000 followers. Another small Hare Krishna society called *Bhaktiloka* (<https://www.facebook.com/bhaktiloka/>) is located in *Chorvátsky Grob* near Bratislava, but it serves mostly as a community centre.

There are communities, which have a webpage but no social media presence. A group near Bratislava is *Ekoosada Olšinka*, connecting individuals, who wish to live a “nicer, fuller and cleaner life”, even within the city. The main idea is to support a way of an ecologically sustainable life. According to their official website, they plan to set up local *ekoosada* [eco settlement] as part of a city or village as a separate territory meeting the ecological criteria. These include an efficient home energy standard (low energy or passive houses) with regional use of renewable energy sources, a high proportion of green, shared areas, an alternative transport concept, (including car-free zones) Residents of these eco settlements will share common living values, creating sustainable neighborhoods and community relationships.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Official webpage is <http://www.zajezka.sk/sk/users/pospolitost-pre-harmonicky-zivot>

¹⁸⁸ <http://www.krasnesady.sk/>

¹⁸⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/Alter.Nativa.Brdarka/>

¹⁹⁰ *Ekoosada pri Bratislave*, official webpage accessible at <http://ekosidlisko.wikidot.com/>



A group heavily influenced by the old Slovak/Slavonic paganism and pagan traditions is Karpatský Pecúch. The community is situated in the so called spiritual settlement Na krížnych cestách [On the cross roads], located in Myjava in Western Slovakia. It has only few permanent residents but the community offers various courses and summer schools. While staying in the community premises, tenants and visitors have to adhere to relatively strict rules, no alcohol, no smoking and no eating animals. The group refuses to use modern technologies, no chemical fertilizers, electrical energy comes from solar panels. All this is presented with a strong focus on traditional living, spirituality and self-sustainability.¹⁹¹

A very specific type of community settlements are the so-called “ancestral communities.” This movement originated in Russia, inspired by the philosophy of Vladimir Megra, developed from a series of fictional interviews with Anastasia, a hermit, published in the 1990s. This philosophy is based on the criticism of modern life and promotes the need to return to a traditional, ancestral way of life in harmony with nature, animals and plants.¹⁹²

In the recent decade, ancestral communities started spreading in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Although there is not much information available about the ancestral communities operating in Slovakia, there are a few Internet platforms providing advice for the foundation of new settlements.¹⁹³ A social media platform for those interested in ancestral communities, the philosophy of Vladimir Megra and related issues named Naša Svetelná (<https://www.facebook.com/nasasvetelna/>) has attracted a small group of less than 500 followers. Based on the information on the internet, there are two or three ancestral settlements in Slovakia.¹⁹⁴

On a smaller scale, retreatism is represented by family communities, sharing an ideology of leaving modern life and surviving within a natural environment. Example of this approach is Sad Livia (<https://www.facebook.com/Sad-Livia-270825776283870/>), an ecological farm and eco centre located in Kolíňany in Western Slovakia. They mostly focus on farming and production of goods, but their ideology is mixed up with the traditional religion of Slovaks.¹⁹⁵ Gazdovstvo Druživa (<https://www.facebook.com/transylwahnja/>) is a similar eco farm located in Uzovská Panica in Southern Slovakia. Their focus is also on the production of goods and ecologically sustainable living. The last example with social media presence is Mašekov Mlyn (<https://www.facebook.com/Mašekov-mlyn-170880396397706/>), located in Horný Ohaj in Western Slovakia. This establishment also offers courses on traditional crafts and has accommodation for the visitors.

There are only a few of these family communities in Slovakia who set themselves apart from mainstream society. Since the 1990s, the country underwent a process of suburbanization, and

¹⁹¹ Karpatský Pecúch, official webpage accessible at <http://karpatskypecuch.org/>

¹⁹² Karásek, A. (2010). Ruská rodová škola jako alternativní pedagogický směr. Bakalářská práce. Praha: Husitská teologická fakulta.

¹⁹³ Examples are <http://www.biosferaklub.info/category/ekoosady-rodove-osady/> or http://dolezite.sk/old/Moznosti_vytvarania_komunit_na_Slovensku_25.html

¹⁹⁴ Information is from the website Komunity v sieti [Communities in the web], accessible at <http://komunity.vsieti.sk/node/3>

¹⁹⁵ Reflections on the traditional religion can be found ex. at <http://www.sadlivia.sk/uvaha-o-povodnych-rastlinach-a-nabozenstvach-od-gazdu/>



young families with children started moving into rural areas. According to Gajdoš and Moravanská, this happened for a variety of reasons, mostly economic. However, more than 10 percent moved to the suburban areas because of better environmental conditions and almost 5 percent due to preference of rural lifestyle.¹⁹⁶ This trend has supported a cultural attitude of retreatism embracing pre-modern visions, and varieties of a natural and ecological lifestyle have spread in all parts of Slovakia.

Slovak Libertarians: From retreatism to rebellion

Libertarians are a specific group, sharing ideas of institutional transformation of society. They view the state as an oppressive actor, limiting the freedom of the individual. It is interesting, that in the Slovak political environment, no political party is advocating the libertarian worldview of a very limited state. Slovak right-wing liberal and conservative parties established in the 1990s promoted a neo-liberal programme of deregulation and privatization, later implemented during the two Dzuridna governments in the 2000s. In the current political landscape, only one party Sloboda a Solidarita [Freedom and Solidarity], shares the neoliberal worldview. However, they still accept the state as an indispensable and important actor needed for the provision of certain services.

The Slovak libertarians have strong ties to the Czech scene, due to the language and cultural similarities, as well as a large number of Slovaks living in the Czech Republic. One of the leading institutes in the region is Libertariánský institut [Libertarian Institute], which claims that contemporary states are amoral, asocial, complicating the lives of individuals, while at the same time being ineffective, irresponsible and humiliating their citizens. The institute's mission is to point out these failures and to prove that it does not have to be this way.¹⁹⁷ The Libertarian institute has modest social media presence of less than 900 followers¹⁹⁸. One of their major centres in Slovakia is Paralelná Polis [Parallel Polis], which sees itself as "an island of freedom, technologies, decentralization and crypto currencies."¹⁹⁹ It was established as an offshoot of Czech Parallel Polis (<https://www.facebook.com/paralelnapolis/>). Another meeting point for likeminded people, hosting a variety of events and also serving as a hacker space is Progressbar. It is located in Bratislava and focuses on public education in matters of technology safety, crypto currency and related issues. Progeessbar developed a relatively strong social media presence (<https://www.facebook.com/progressbar/>) with around 3000 followers.

The libertarian idea of keeping outside of the reach of the state and its agencies perfectly connects with the use of crypto currencies. One of their perceived advantages is their independence from the state and its economic situation. The state cannot interfere into a cryptocurrency's exchange rate. In Slovakia two virtual communities are focusing on cryptocurrencies – Bitcoinová komunita CZ & SK [Bitcoin community in Czech Republic and Slovakia] – which is a Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/bitcoincz/>) with more than 8000 members and the community

¹⁹⁶ Gajdoš, P. and Moravanská, K. (2011). Suburbanizácia a jej podoby na Slovensku. Bratislava: VEDA – Vydavateľstvo SAV.

¹⁹⁷ See: <http://www.libertarianskyinstitut.cz/proc/>

¹⁹⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/libertariani/>

¹⁹⁹ See: <http://www.paralelnapolis.sk/>



of Kryptomena [Crypto Currency] - <https://www.facebook.com/Kryptomena/> - which is very small and seems to be not functioning well.

One of the interesting libertarian blogs is Menej štátu [Less state], which sees its mission as stopping “further strengthening of the state and appealing for the weakening of the regulations, which are the cause of many societal problems.²⁰⁰” Menej štátu has a strong social media presence (<https://www.facebook.com/menejstatu/>) with more than 10.000 followers on Facebook. This blog has personal ties with a Slovak think-tank INESS (Institute of Economic and Social Studies). Another libertarian initiative is Nepracujeme pre štát [We do not work for the state], which unites private companies, that decided not to work for the state and its organizations, due to state’s interference into the free market.²⁰¹ The webpage includes the list of these companies. Currently, the total number is only 15.

Libertarian initiatives are an interesting type of heterodox politicization, combining retreat from the state’s watchful eyes by maximizing privacy and promoting the use of cryptocurrencies with rebellion, since all individual activities should contribute to undermining and weakening the state, albeit in small steps and in an evolutionary way.

Militant heterodoxy Rebellion in Slovakia

The rebellious spectrum of heterodox politicization comprises groups who not only reject the prevailing cultural goals, but also the institutional organization of the state. Their aim is removing, altering or subverting the existing institutional state-centred order. The variety of groups, can be split into three distinct types, the paramilitary group Slovak Conscripts and various extremist and radical left and right-wing organizations.

Slovak conscripts

A paramilitary group, which has recently attracted attention by the media, is called Slovenskí Branci [Slovak conscripts]. They were founded in 2012. Officially, Slovak conscripts label themselves as “an apolitical, nonprofit organization that has a role to play in developing young people’s love of homeland, nature and our cultural heritage through various voluntary and charitable events such as eco-actions, helping victims of natural disasters and the provision of military exercises to children ... We are trying to teach and prepare young people to deal with various crises, how to protect ourselves, our families and relatives and our country.²⁰²” Conscripts are organized into several regional divisions, all militarily trained and ready to take action in case of emergency. Slovenskí Branci have a strong social media presence. Their page <https://www.facebook.com/slovenskibranci1> has around 12 000 followers. Individual departments have their own pages.²⁰³

The exact numbers of Slovak Conscripts are unknown. It was estimated that there were approximately 200 members in 2015.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ See: <https://www.menejstatu.sk/preco-menej-stat/>

²⁰¹ See: <http://www.nepracujemeprestat.sk/prehlasenie>

²⁰² Information is from the official webpage, accessible at <http://www.slovenski-branci.sk/kdo-sme/>

²⁰³ such as 8th Division Považan (<https://www.facebook.com/Povazan/>), 11th Division Šarišan (<https://www.facebook.com/SB.Sarisan/>) or 17th Division Záhorák (<https://www.facebook.com/17.oddiel/>).

²⁰⁴ See <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/370430-militanti-cvicia-mladych-policia-ich-len-sleduje/>



Although the conscripts are officially not an ideological organization, there have been proven ties to Russia and its special forces Spetsnaz. Two of the official instructors (Švrček and Feling) passed a comprehensive military training course offered by the Russian organization *Stiag*. The organization also invites visiting instructors for the trainings of its members. Foreign instructors are usually Russians, including the instructors of Spetsnaz and OMON.²⁰⁵ There are also known cases of ex-Slovak Conscripts fighting in the Ukraine was on the side of pro-Russian forces.²⁰⁶

Although the ideology of Slovak Conscripts is not clearly defined, some of the members, including the current leader Peter Švrček, attended public meetings organized by the far-right political movements, commemorating the fascist wartime Slovak state. Švrček, however, distanced himself from these activities, labeling it a youth naïveté.²⁰⁷ Other groups' activities and opinions of some of the members suggest that they hold pan-Slavic and pro-Russian views.²⁰⁸ However, it needs to be stressed that the organization itself does not have any political program.

Extremist and radical right

The majority of organizations qualifying as extremist and radical are located at the far right, including neo-Nazis. All promote an explicitly defined political programme, some are officially registered others more informal. A far-right scene of activists has existed since the end of communism in the political arena of Slovak Republic. In April 1990, Slovenská ľudová strana [Slovak people's party] was created and it endorsed the heritage of the Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana [Hlinka's Slovak people's party], which was a governing political force during the wartime fascist Slovak state and its president Jozef Tiso. The party is active to this day, it went through several name changes and currently is called Slovenská ľudová strana Andreja Hlinku [Slovak people's party of Andrej Hlinka]. The party remains irrelevant in institutional politics. The last time they took part in parliamentary elections was 2006 where they won 0,16 percent of the votes. Currently, they are presenting candidates to the regional municipalities for the November 2017 elections. The party has a relatively modest social media presence.²⁰⁹ Another vanguard far right political party, registered in January 1991 was Slovenská národná jednota [Slovak National Unity]. Although still being a registered party, it is currently inactive without any social media presence or official webpage.

The second step in the development of the official far right scene was the establishment of Slovenská pospolitosť [Slovak togetherness], that started as a civic association in 1995 and grew into a political party in January 2015. Slovenská pospolitosť has an anti-democratic programme, aims at removing the liberal democratic order and limiting the rights of certain groups of citizens, mostly minorities. This programme, violating constitutional principles, led to the dissolution of the party by the Slovak Supreme Court in March 2006.²¹⁰ However, the civic association exists under the same name up to

²⁰⁵ Mesežnikov, G. a Bránik, R. (2017). Hatred, violence and comprehensive military training. The violent radicalisation and Kremlin connections of Slovak paramilitary, extremist and neo-Nazi groups. Budapest: Political Capital.

²⁰⁶ Krekó, P., et al. (2016). The weaponization of culture. Kremlin's traditional agenda and the export of values to Central Europe. Budapest: Political Capital.

²⁰⁷ See <https://dennikn.sk/57900/rozhovor-s-brancami-co-je-zle-na-tom-cvicit-v-lese-zbranou/>

²⁰⁸ Mesežnikov, G. a Bránik, R. (2017). Hatred, violence and comprehensive military training.

²⁰⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/Slovensk%C3%A1-%C4%BEdov%C3%A1-strana-Andreja-Hlinku-1453030871583082/>

²¹⁰ Mikušovič, D. (2007). Slovenská pospolitosť včera a dnes. REXTER.1/ 2007, p. 1-24.



this day, and it has a relatively large social media presence (<https://www.facebook.com/SlovenskaPospolitost1995/>) with around 8500 individual followers.

After the dissolution of Slovenská pospolitosť, leaders of the party were able to get on the candidate's list of Slovenská ľudová strana for the 2006 elections. In 2009, the former president Marian Kotleba and his collaborators took over the registered but inactive Strana priateľov vína [Party of the wine lovers] changing its ideological orientation and renaming it. Currently, the party is called Kotleba - Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko (K-LSNS) [Kotleba – Our Slovakia People's Party]. The party was successful in the 2016 parliamentary elections, with a surprising electoral result of 8.04 percent, now scoring more than 10 percent in the polls.²¹¹ There is currently a motion from the Slovak General Prosecutor at the Supreme Court aiming at the party's dissolution for its anti-democratic orientation.²¹²

Interestingly, parts of the Slovak extremist far right scene, including Slovenská pospolitosť, disagree with K-LSNS and a conflict emerged among the far-right groups, due to K-LSNS collaboration with the official regime and the abandonment of original ideas.²¹³ The party has a strong social media presence (<https://www.facebook.com/NaseSlovenskoBratislava/>) with a following of 13.000. The party and its sympathizers have control over at least another 100 Facebook accounts, some of them with a large number of followers.²¹⁴

The final important political group is Slovenské Hnutie Obrody (SHO) [Slovak Movement of Revival], established in 2004 as a civic association and formally registered as a political party in 2016. They focus on typical national themes, praising the Slovak wartime state, entertaining strong anti-Hungarian sentiments and embracing pan-Slavonic cooperation. They have contacts with the members of Slovak conscripts and conflicts with Kotleba's party.²¹⁵ They collected over 46.000 "Likes" <https://www.facebook.com/SHOsvk/>.

The development of an informal far-right extremist scene coincided with the rise of Nazi skinheads' subculture. Organizations such as Hammerskins, Combat 18 and Blood and Honour were established in the 1990s, which was the most prominent era for this movement. Except for skinheads, there was a variety of other groups such as football hooligans and groups connected with martial arts.²¹⁶ Their violent activities went into the background around 2005-2006, colliding with the intensification of anti-extremist activities of the state and the dissolution of the Slovenská Pospolitosť party.

Another important milestone in this context was the creation of Národný odpor [National resistance] movement in 2005, comprised of autonomous nationalist movements, with no clear organization and hierarchy. Národný odpor objected any institutionalized politics and preferred violent means towards their revolutionary ends in fulfillment of ideas of National Socialism.²¹⁷ Another active group

²¹¹ See e.g. <https://domov.sme.sk/c/20654576/prieskum-focus-vladne-strany-oslabuju.html>

²¹² See: <https://dennikn.sk/775198/ciznar-podal-na-najvyssi-sud-podnet-na-zrusenie-kotlebovej-lsns/>

²¹³ See: <https://pospolitost.wordpress.com/2016/01/30/vyhlasenie-sp-my-nie-sme-kotlebovcj/>

²¹⁴

See:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1oqWX266kjDKpYFfODWLbPmFxf9GwTV2njKJstid8F3I/edit#gid=0>

²¹⁵ Mesežnikov, G. and Gyárfášová, O. (2016). Súčasný pravicový extrémizmus a ultranacionalizmus na Slovensku. Stav, trendy, podpora. Bratislava: IVO – Nadácia Hannsa Seidela.

²¹⁶ Nociar, T. (2012). Right-Wing Extremism in Slovakia. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

²¹⁷ Struhár, F. (2016). Vývoj neoficiálnej pravicovo-extrémistickej scény na Slovensku od roku 1989. REXTER, 1/2016, p. 1-43.



in the late 2000s were Autonomní nacionalisti [Autonomous Nationalists], also operating on principles of decentralization and autonomy. They embraced not only traditional nationalist ideology, but also social and environmental issues. After 2010, most of these initiatives left the relative anonymity of small autonomous groups, and started engaging in the more institutionalized political life of civic associations and political parties.²¹⁸

The next step in the development of the informal scene was the creation of the paramilitary units, who attempt to remain anonymous and stay below the radar of state institutions and media coverage. Representatives of these groups are Akžná skupina Vzдор (ASV) [Action group Resistance] and various others operating within some of the existing movements, such as SHO and K-LSNS. Skupina Vzдор was founded by the members of Slovenská pospolitost' in 2011 in Žilina. They set themselves apart from neo-Nazi groups and skinheads, claiming nationalism as their official programme. In their view, political participation within the democratic system is irrelevant. What counts is training and a change of lifestyle. This image changed to a certain extent after a public presentation of one of their members, Marián Magát, during a so-called March for Slovakia in Poprad in 2013, where he delivered a strong anti-Zionist speech, criticized European Union and contemporary politicians. Over the years ASV deepened their cooperation with Kotleba's party, and Marián Magát was one their candidate's list for 2016 elections on the 88th position. This is a known neo-Nazi symbol, representing the 8th letter in the alphabet H – referring to the phrase of “Heil Hitler”. Marián Magát remains a visible figure in the public discourse, promoting nationalist, anti-EU and anti-immigrant topics. He had a relatively strong social media presence on Facebook, although his profile was recently cancelled.

Although heterodox politicization refers to the activities outside of the institutionalized political spectrum, its character in the far-right spectrum cannot be understood without the wider developments in the political arena. The movement functions in anonymity and autonomy in the times of unfavorable political conditions, and then emerges from the exile and tries to influence the institutional politics from within. Heterodox politicization on the far-right spectrum therefore appears as a strategy of keeping the movement together until there is a gap in the institutionalized politics, which can be used.

Radical left

The situation on the left side of the political spectrum is different. The radical leftist scene is very limited. Within the organized political spectrum, there is Komunistická strana Slovenska [Communist party of Slovakia], which has a modest social media following. It was established as a parliamentary party after the 2006 elections. In 2012, they gained 0,72 percent of the votes and did not run in 2016. Another radical leftist party is VZDOR - strana práce [Resistance – Worker's Party]. They have a relatively strong social media following (<https://www.facebook.com/vzdorhp/>) with more than 16 000 “Likes” on Facebook. However, in the last parliamentary elections in 2016 they gained only 0.12%. The only representative from civil society is Front ľavicovej mládeže [Front of the leftist youth], which is a youth organization focusing on the “propagation of leftist and anti-fascist ideas”, as well as “school self-government.” They have only a modest social media following -

²¹⁸ Ibid, p. 18.



<https://www.facebook.com/Front-Lavicovej-mladeze-1117766084904420/>. These radical leftist organizations present a worldview, which aims at changing the institutional means, not the cultural goals.

6.6.3 Media discourse on heterodox political groups

Since a wide variety of groups can be fitted under the umbrella of heterodox politicization in Slovakia, the media coverage of such groups differs. The phenomenon itself is hardly discussed in the public debate, but its various manifestations receive media attention.

Retreatism is reflected in the media reporting about separated communities, with a focus on the well-known Zaježová. Their community life embracing nature is presented as a curiosity. Articles explain the lifestyle of the settlers and their daily routines and activities offered for the visitors.²¹⁹ Other communities are presented in a similar manner.²²⁰ The Hare Krishna community in the Eastern Slovakia is presented differently. The focus here is on the religious ideology, its foreignness and their coexistence with the local Slovak population.²²¹

Right wing extremism is a phenomenon that has been getting a lot of attention in the media since the rise of Kotleba. A first wave of attention came after his election as a head of the Banská Bystrica regional self-government in 2013, and this attention intensified after the ascension of K-LSNS into the parliament in 2016. Research focusing on the period of regional elections of 2013, with the focus on media framing of Kotleba showed that he was considered a threat and his success a failure of traditional authorities.²²² Since then, most of the articles focused on the Kotleba and his political party, and framed him as an extremist or fascist.²²³ Interesting work has been produced by a blogger, Ján Benčík, who scans social media channels and produces screenshots of various extremist proclamations by the party members and their sympathizers. He is searching for links between party members and the neo-Nazi scene and publishes them on his blog.²²⁴ Other far right organizations outside the institutionalized spectrum do not attract significant media interest. There are, however, a few cases, such as a recent wave of publicity for a secret private location in Western Slovakia, where neo-Nazi concerts take place and attract visitors from the whole of Europe.²²⁵ While far right radical

²¹⁹ See e.g.: <https://www.sme.sk/c/4110716/zajezova-ako-sa-zije-v-sulade-s-prirodou.html>, <https://myzvolen.sme.sk/c/6497271/zajezovu-objavuju-aj-cudzinci.html> or <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/508666/fenomen-zajezova-orat-im-pomahaju-kone-potraviny-maju-spolocne/>

²²⁰ See: <https://gemer.korzar.sme.sk/c/5352307/takmer-vymreta-brdarka-pomaly-oziva.html>

²²¹ See: <https://kosice.korzar.sme.sk/c/5044183/susedia-ich-obvinovali-ze-vymyvaju-mozgy.html> and <https://mynovohrad.sme.sk/c/5019727/zije-v-klastore-a-siri-filozofiu-hare-krisna.html>

²²² Kluknavska, A. (2015). A right-wing extremist or people's protector? Media coverage of extreme right leader Marian Kotleba in 2013 regional elections in Slovakia. *Intersections*. EEJSP 1(1), p. 147-165.

²²³ See e.g.: <https://domov.sme.sk/c/20111210/analytici-kotlebovym-voicom-fasizmus-nevadi.html?ref=av-center> or <https://dennikn.sk/398951/marian-kotleba-skutocne-fasista/>

²²⁴ The blog can be found at <https://dennikn.sk/autor/jan-bencik/>

²²⁵ See: <https://plus7dni.pluska.sk/Domov/Brluh-neonacistov-v-Plaveckom-Mikulasi.-Stopy-vedu-ku-Kalinakovmu-znamemu>



and extremist organizations are presented as a threat by the media, the main media focus is on the political party K-LSNS, ignoring the grass-roots level and actors outside the realm of traditional politics.

When it comes to libertarians, their agenda is mostly outside of the interest of the mainstream media. Their public presence is based on self-promotion, advertising their agenda through blogs such as already mentioned Menej štátu and other less visible channels.²²⁶

6.6.4 Law enforcement and legal reactions to heterodox movements

Since heterodox politicization is not a clearly crystallized phenomenon, there is no specific legislation targeting these individuals. From the areas identified as heterodox politicization in Slovakia, specific legislation focuses only on the extremists. The Criminal code defines the so-called crimes of extremism which include, for example, the offense of supporting and promoting groups aimed at suppressing fundamental rights and freedoms, the offense of denial and approval of the Holocaust and the crimes of political regimes, or a crime of incitement to national, racial and ethnic hatred.²²⁷ With regard to extremism, the code was novelized in October 2016, to enable easier prosecution for the hateful and extremist proclamations shared on the Internet and social media.²²⁸ Other heterodox activities are not seen as criminal by the state, as long as they do not conflict with other provisions of the criminal code.

The focus of law enforcement is on fighting extremism. The new policy approach for 2015 – 2019 identifies four main areas for the law enforcement intervention – strengthening individuals to resist proliferation of anti-democratic ideologies and extremism, raising awareness about the seriousness of extremism and radicalization, authorities strive to improve monitoring and make sure crimes of extremism are adequately sanctioned, and finally the programme foresees the creation of sufficient institutional and personal capacities at the level of the state. These goals are formulated in a relatively broad fashion. It needs to be mentioned that in February 2017, a special National unit for combating terrorism and extremism was created within the National criminal agency. On the other hand, the Conception claimed that “the situation in the field of radicalization and extremism can be considered stable in the Slovak Republic and is without significant incidents threatening the stability of the state.”²²⁹ In this sense, extremism is not considered to be an immediate threat by the public authorities.

²²⁶ See e.g.: blog of Pavol Luptak at <https://medium.com/@wilderko>

²²⁷ Full criminal code can be found at <http://www.zakonypreludi.sk/zz/2005-300>

²²⁸ See: <http://www.epi.sk/odborny-clanok/Novelizacia-Trestneho-zakona-a-Trestneho-poriadku-so-zretelom-na-extremizmus.htm>

²²⁹ The full conception is available at <https://www.minv.sk/?VRAX&subor=225999>



6.6.5 Heterodox politicization in context

Heterodox politicization refers to a wide variety of alternative lifestyles, entertained by citizens who reject the prevailing cultural and institutional organization of the state, and who stay outside of the traditional institutional politics. These citizens mistrust and thus reject the state and its organization. Post-communist societies are however characterized by the prevailing distrust of the state and its institutions.²³⁰ This lack of trust, coupled with the weakness of civil society institutions²³¹, incapable of mediating between the individual and the state, create an obstacle for the proper functioning of representative institutions, especially political parties. Post-communist party systems are characterized by comparatively low levels of popular party identification, high levels of electoral volatility and low levels of party membership.²³² This mistrust towards the institutions and lack of representation of the citizens in the decision-making process leads to a situation, where a comparatively large number of citizens is suspicious of the state and its institutions.

Slovakia's political party system can be characterized as stable in its instability, with new, mostly anti-elitist parties promoting an anti-corruption agenda enter the parliament, and then perish.²³³ This combination of these factors might present an answer to the question, why heterodox politicization is not such an issue in Slovakia. Struggles over cultural goals and institutional setting of the state are in the centre of the institutionalized political conflict. Heterodox politicization elements can only be found among the groups, who either reject modern life and chose retreatism, or subscribe to extreme ideologies, such as far right extremism, leftist radicalism or libertarianism. However, a number of members of these groups aspire to enter the mainstream politics to have the ability to rebel within the institutionalized confines.

²³⁰ Rose, R. (1994). Postcommunism and the Problem of Trust. *Journal of Democracy*. Vol. 5, No. 3, July 1994, p. 18-30.

²³¹ Howard, M. M. (2002). The Weakness of Postcommunist Civil Society. *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2002, p. 157-169.

²³² K opecký, P. (2006). Political parties and the state in postcommunist Europe: The nature of symbiosis. *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 22:3, p. 251-273.

²³³ Haughton, T. (2014). Exit, choice and legacy: explaining the patterns of party politics in post-communist Slovakia. *East European Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2014, p. 210-229.



6.7 Turkey

6.7.1 Introduction

Examining the Turkish case of heterodox politicization and sovereign citizenship movement requires the consideration of various aspects. The idea of a sovereign citizen movement is hard to apply here for a number of reasons originating in Turkey's 20th century political history that fostered a strong obedience of citizens to the state and the perception of the Turkish Armed Forces as the pillar of the Kemalist tradition (until 2016). This resulted in continuously high voting turnout and high level of trust in state institutions, including the military. Hence, we will start with a brief account of Turkish political history providing some context information for the analysis of what could be called a Turkish version of heterodox political movements.

1923 marks the date when the history of modern Turkey begins. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, as the first president of the Republic, established the parliament in Ankara and the Grand National Assembly ratified the Constitution in 1924. The Republican People's Party (CHP) was founded in 1919 from a union of resistance groups against the invasion of Anatolia according to Sevres Treaty. The union acted as a unified front during the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1923). In 1923, the Party officially declared itself as a political organization, announced the establishment of the Turkish Republic and Turkey entered into a period of one-party governance. CHP could be considered a social-democratic political party and as the oldest political party of the Republic of Turkey, is currently representing the main opposition in the Grand National Assembly. CHP understands itself as "a modern social democratic party, which is faithful to the founding principles and values of the Republic of Turkey". They pride themselves as "the founding party of modern Turkey".

6.7.2 Political context

Modern Turkey began as a single-party state, governed by CHP as the major political organization. After Atatürk's death in 1938, İsmet İnönü took over as President and party leader. Right after WWII, İnönü introduced multi-party elections. The first non-CHP Government came into power in 1950, led by the Democratic Party (DP), promoting a predominantly centre right-wing programme. The DP-led government was initially very popular, loosening restrictions on Islam and encouraging a booming economy. But in the latter half of the 1950s, after the end of foreign support through Marshall Plan Aid the economic boom ended, inflation and national debt soared and the government introduced censorship laws limiting political dissent.

In 1960, the military led a coup d'état, removing the President and Prime Minister who both were executed under martial law together with two other ministers of the government. Civilian control was reinstated in 1961, marking the beginning of a decade of unstable government coalitions in parliament alternating between the Justice Party (AP) of Süleyman Demirel on the right and the CHP of İsmet İnönü and Bülent Ecevit on the left.



In 1971 the Turkish Armed Forces again issued a memorandum warning, leading to another coup d'état, which resulted in the fall of AP government and the establishment of interim governments. The governments of the National Front, a series of coalitions between right wing parties, a fractured political scene and a poor economy led to increasing violence between ultranationalists and communists in the streets of Turkish cities, resulting in thousands of deaths during the late 1970s. In 1980, the Turkish Army overthrew the civilian government again, abolished Parliament and government, suspended the Constitution, dissolving all political parties and trade unions. Martial law was extended to all provinces of Turkey. Within two years, the military restored civilian government, although keeping close control of the political scene. Since all pre-coup parties had been dissolved, the political system in Turkey again developed a one-party government controlled by the center-right neoliberal Motherland Party (ANAP) of Turgut Ozal (Prime Minister from 1983 to 1989). The ANAP combined a globally oriented economic program with the promotion of conservative social values. Under Ozal, the economy boomed, converting some of the towns from small provincial centres into mid-sized economic boom-towns. Military rule began to be phased out at the end of 1983. In particular in provinces in southeastern Turkey it was replaced by a state of emergency, which would last until 2002. In 1985 the government established village guards (local paramilitary militias) to oppose separatist Kurdish groups such as PKK, who started to launch terrorist attacks in the region from 1984 onward.

Political instability returned in the 1990s. The 1995 elections brought a short-lived coalition between two major central right-wing parties: Mesut Yilmaz's ANAP and the True Path Party (DYP successor of AP) of Tansu Ciller. This coalition was followed by another one in 1997: Ciller's DYP and Necmettin Erbakan's Islam-oriented right-wing party Welfare Party (RP).

In 1997, the military, alarmed by the government's support for religious policies, that seemed to threaten the secular foundation of the Turkish state, sent a memorandum to Prime Minister Erbakan requesting that he resign, which he did. This event has been famously labeled a "postmodern coup" by the Turkish media. Shortly thereafter, the Welfare Party (RP) was banned and reborn as the Virtue Party (FP). ANAP and Ecevit's Democratic Left Party (DSP) supported by the center-left CHP, formed a new government. The DSP became the largest parliamentary party in the 1999 elections. Second place went to the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). These two parties, alongside Yilmaz's ANAP formed a coalition government. They were rather successful, introducing economic reforms, instituting human rights legislation, and bringing Turkey ever closer to the European Union.

A series of economic shockwaves led to new elections in 2002, bringing into power the conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) of Recep Tayyip Erdogan. From this date on, AKP has been the winner of every election in the country and has majority of the seats in the parliament.

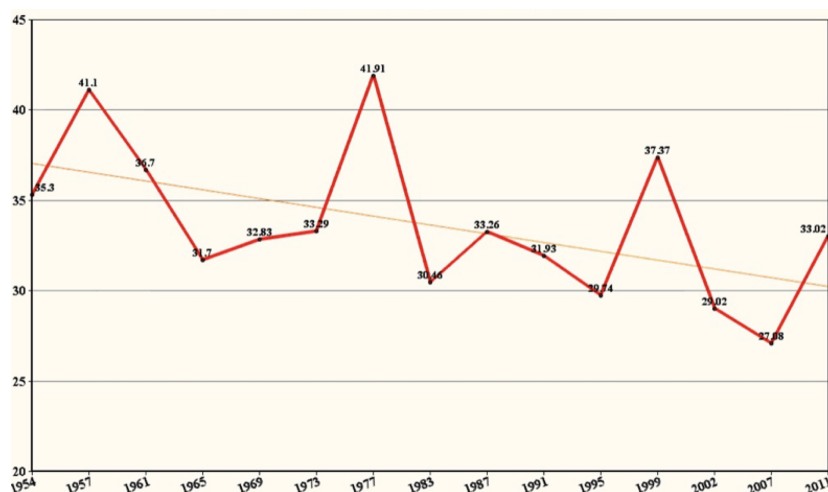
What seems to be the basic predicament of Turkey's political history is the conflict between a secular orientation, successfully promoted under a single political party regime of CHP and the resurgent religious traditionalism and ethnic regionalism, re-entering the political arena due to the secular move to establish a multi-party democratic electoral system. Reinforced by economic crises Turkey oscillated between a secular and a religious orientation with the military being put in the position of a stabilizing force, saving the secular heritage of the Republic's founder Ataturk.



What might seem paradoxical from a central European perspective is the role of the military as a stabilizing secular force within the political system. Turkey as a modern state is still struggling with a religious heritage and it has been the military who protected the secular heritage against religious backlashes. Islam-oriented political parties, which have primarily right-wing conservative orientation, were first observed in 1930. Ataturk initially introduced the multi-party democracy with the establishment of the opposition represented by the Liberal Republican Party as part of an attempted transition to a multi-party system. The CHP government soon dissolved it, when Ataturk found this party to be too strongly influenced by Islamist-rooted reactionary elements. Following the relaxation of authoritarian political controls in 1946, large numbers of people began to call openly for a return to traditional religious politics. During the 1950s, even certain political leaders found it expedient to join religious leaders in advocating more state respect for religion. The most well-known of Islam-rooted parties emerged in the form of a movement: National Outlook (Milli Gorus) in the mid-1960s which is actually the mother of all Islamist political parties in Turkey and was led by Necmettin Erbakan.

Centrifugal tendencies threatening the unity of Turkey as a political unit came from regional-ethnic political groups. The first pro-Kurdish party, People's Labor Party (HEP) was established in 1990 as a central left – left wing party. HEP entered in 1991 elections by signing an electoral alliance with the central left Social Democratic People's Party (SHP). This enabled HEP to be represented in Parliament, which would not have been the case otherwise because of a 10% electoral threshold needed for parliamentary representation. Up until today, pro-Kurdish parties are either banned or dissolved by the Constitutional Court, which led to the establishment of new organisations after each decision by the Court. Currently HDP is represented in the Parliament with 54 MPs.

Since mid-1940s, when the Turkish voters were given the chance to vote for a party other than CHP, except for the 1946 elections, around 65% of voters have supported the right-wing parties. The period 1970-1980s was the peak era of national conservatism and economic neoliberalism. For the last 60 years, except for the period 1973-79, mainstream right-wing parties have always governed Turkey. The table shows the accumulated percentage of central left and left party support in general elections held 1954 - 2011:



Accumulated support (%) left-wing parties in Turkey (1954-2011)

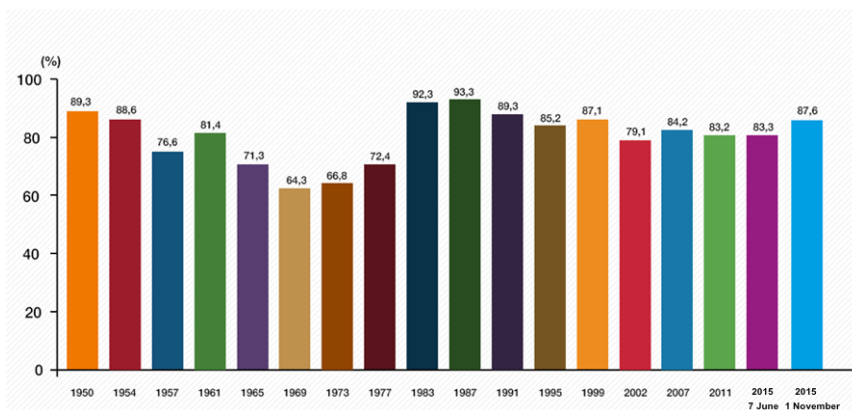


The inseparable unity of state and politics can be considered as an important founding principle of the Turkish nation-state. The inseparability of the Turkish state and its nation and the irreversibility of its boundaries form the headstone of the Turkish identity and therefore, citizenship appears as a concept which is described from above by state authorities. Within the context of Turkey, the conception of citizenship has evolved in a way that excludes any individualist dimension of the modern understanding on citizenship. The citizen is prior to the individual, although the concept of individual found its place in philosophic texts long before introduction of the modern citizen in Western Europe.²³⁴

This approach to citizenship, ignoring the sphere of an autonomous civil society is adopted by both central left and right-wing parties. Although CHP describes itself as central left-wing, it follows this conservative state-centred tradition and operates in a very similar fashion like central right-wing parties when it comes to the perception of obedience to the State rule.

Since the introduction of a multi-party system, only two to four strong parties have been represented in the Turkish parliament. This is the effect of a high threshold, where a party has to collect at least 10% of the votes to be represented in parliament. This is higher than that in EU countries and constitutes a problem for pluralism and representation of marginal parties.

Turkey has compulsory voting and voter turnout hence is higher than in other countries. As the figure below shows, turnout always increased after intervention of the military.



Voter turnout in Turkey (1950 – 2015)

Overall turnout is high and voters actively participate in elections, a sign of “great democratic maturity” as Zuhtu Arslan, head of Turkey's Constitutional Court declared.

Given the specific trajectory of Turkish parliamentary politics and the role of the military, the armed forces were considered as the most trustworthy societal institution for a very long time. Surveys conducted since 2000 saw the military top-ranked. This has changed since 2015.

²³⁴ Kadioglu, A. (2002). Citizenship and Individuation in Turkey: Triumph of Mind over Reason, Keyman, E. Fuat (Ed), *Liberalism, State, Hegemony*, Everest Publications, Istanbul, p. 269, 280



According to a poll conducted by Kadir Has University in 2016, the military has lost its position as the most trusted institution in the country, being considered by 47.4% of the respondents as top ranked, compared to 62.4% the year before in the same poll conducted by the University. The trust in presidency on the other hand rose from 46.9% in 2015 to 49.4% in 2016, bringing the president and/or his office to the top of the list of trusted institutions.

The poll, conducted in the first half of December 2016 in 26 provinces, revealed that many institutions have suffered a loss of public confidence. In addition to the military, universities are also big losers, with 24.7% saying they trust universities, down from last year's 49.8%. NGOs faced a similar decrease, with 26.2% saying they trust NGOs, down from last year's 42.3%. Only 1.5% of those polled said they were a member of an NGO.

Also trust in political parties decreased sharply, from 33.9% to 21.8%, while parliament took an increase of 3% from 43% to 49%. The media came at the bottom of the list of trusted institutions, with only 15.1% saying they trusted the media, down from 27.8% last year (2015).

Trust scores are not uniformly distributed across the Turkish population. As a study on Ethnicity and Trust in National and International Institutions shows, Kurds have low levels of trust in domestic institutions, but high confidence in pro-international institutions; that is, compared to Turks, they hold higher trust in international institutions.²³⁵

6.7.3 Heterodox political movements in Turkey

In the light of the above background information, figures and interpretations, radical Islamists and/or Kurdish rebellion groups (mainly consisting of far-left groups) could be the candidates for a heterodox political movement in Turkey.

As heterodox movements, they are driven by a critique of democratic rule rooted in religious sentiments or separatist ideas of regional ethnic autonomy. Especially radical Sunni Islamist groups such as Turkish Hezbollah consider Turkish Republic's regime explicitly as Taghut. Taghut is an Islamic term denoting a focus of worship other than God. It refers to any person or group accused of being anti-Islamic and an agent of Western cultural imperialism. The term was introduced to modern political discourse by Ayatollah Khomeini during the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

According to a study conducted by PEW Research Center in 2014, along with distaste for foreign allies, Turks in general also reject extremist groups and their tactics. Although data on Turkish population's opinion of the ISIS are not available, 85% in Turkey have a negative opinion of its Al-Qaeda forbearer, with similarly poor views of other extremist groups like Hamas (80%) and Hezbollah (85%).

²³⁵ Karakoc, Ekrem (2013). Ethnicity and Trust in National and International Institutions: Kurdish Attitudes toward Political Institutions in Turkey. In *Turkish Studies Journal* (Vol 14, No 1, pp. 92-114)



Turkish Hezbollah supporters are gathered under smaller sub-groups and each one of them has their own ways of communicating their ideas. One of them, *Tevhid Dergisi* (Tawhid Magazine), is available only in Turkish both hard copy and online) as well as a radio channel.²³⁶

In accordance with the PEW study, *Tevhid Dergisi* is well-received among the Turkish Sunni community but has only a limited number of followers on Facebook (2250 people as of October 2017). It may be because of the arrest of their Leader Halis Bayancuk (code name: Ebu Hanzala) for engaging in activities aiming at aiding Al-Qaida and ISIS and insulting Turkish government. He is still in prison as of October 2017.

This group refuses to vote in the elections and declared it as a sin since voting in a Taghut State would put the voter in trouble before God. They published this case on their website (<http://www.tevhidigundem.biz/oy-kullanma-yaraticina-sirk-kosma-59g.htm>) and claimed that they would send 1 million SMSs and 5 million emails to their followers until the election day (7 June 2015) to inform how the articles in the Constitution contradicts to the verses in Quran and thus they should not vote.

Another group whose followers refuse to vote for completely different reasons are the Kurdish. During the Turkish Constitutional Referendum in 2010, the pro-Kurdish Party (BDP) declared that they would boycott the elections because the rights of the Kurdish population were not mentioned in the constitution. The turnout was 73.7% across Turkey. In some of the South-Eastern, i.e. Kurdish cities the turnout was as low as 9% (in Hakkari) and 22% in Sirnak. In Diyarbakir, the largest city in the region only a third of the eligible voters voted in the referendum. The question here was not disobedience to the democratic political system as such but the desire of the region's Kurdish population for a new civilian constitution enriching the rights of Turkey's Kurdish minority. The paradox here was that 85% of those who participated in the vote approved the proposed changes.

6.7.4 Conclusion

Turkey spent more than 80 years marching slowly, with many setbacks, toward democracy. High turnout in the elections is one of the indications of how this now-modern state has progressed from its former status as part of the Ottoman Empire to its current embarking upon democracy.

In terms of heterodoxy, Turkey has heterodox candidates from certain fundamentalist religious groups (cemaats) and Kurdish nationalist groups which appear as non-voting or, in other words, elections-protesting groups. The sovereign citizenship movement which was originated in the Anglo-world has been under the spotlight since 2000s and are usually in the news for their court cases related to mostly tax frauds and/or refusing to pay taxes altogether. In this regard, Turkish non-voting groups, although they do not call themselves as such, can be a type of sovereign citizens who engage in refusal to vote only rather than questioning the legitimacy of State's financial or legal

²³⁶ For the magazine see <http://tevhiddergisi.net/>; <http://www.tevhidigundem.biz>; for the Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/tevhiddergisi2/> and for the radio channel <http://www.radyotevhid.net/>.



system. Therefore, Turkey appears with its heterodoxy not only in terms of a mix of Western-style State authoritarianism and religious fundamentalism of minor groups but also its unique approach to heterodox politicisation.

6.8 United Kingdom

6.8.1 Introduction

Delimiting the activities of sovereign citizen groups – as a generalised term – to specific countries and regions can be quite a challenging task. As the idea of these groups is the rejection of state institutions, also state borders tend to be ignored. In the Anglo-American context, this can be observed by groups originating from the US, also being active in the UK and sometimes including Ireland. The most popular sovereign citizens group in the United Kingdom and Ireland for example, are the Freeman-on-the-land (fmotl), also called the Freeman movement, which first emerged in Canada around 2005. As with many of these movements an exact number of active members are difficult to assess as those groups often consist of a loose association of people²³⁷. Currently (as of November 2017) 3405 members are in a Facebook group called ‘*Freeman on the land & common law uk*’²³⁸ (sic). The forum of the “official” website of the Freeman-on-the-land has 11696 registered users.²³⁹

These membership numbers only have limited validity, as everyone who wants can register on their forums or join their Facebook group, and thus also can include people who do not consider being a *Freeman*, or multiple user accounts. The numbers however give an idea about the number of individuals interested – in one point or another – on the topic of the Freeman. Generally, everyone who is interested can join the Freeman-on-the-land, as the discussion on the group are mainly organised through the internet and social media sites. The memberships are very decentralised and non-hierarchical. While there are some individuals who appear to have a stronger voice within the movement, there is no leader or official organiser amongst the Freeman.

6.8.2 Heterodox political movements in the United Kingdom

The history of the Freeman on the land movement is difficult to trace. Their general idea and purpose is an anti-governmental stance and the belief to be able to opt-out of any duty relating to the national government – either tax-wise or legally, by what they call *lawful rebellion*. The argumentation used is based on an own wrong understanding of the ‘common law’. In their belief, the “common law” was established by the Magna Carta of 1215 – which is generally considered as the foundation of the Anglo-American legal system and a cornerstone of the British Constitution.²⁴⁰ For the Freeman, specifically the clause 61 of the Magna Carta is important, as in 1215 it gave 25 barons the possibility to overrule the King, being one of the first clauses restricting the rule of a

²³⁷ Kent, 2015, “Freemen, Sovereign Citizens, and the Challenge to Public Order in British Heritage Countries”, *International Journal of Cultic Studies*, Vol. 6, 1-15.

²³⁸ https://www.facebook.com/groups/657949177604252/?ref=br_rs (Accessed 12.11.2017).

²³⁹ <http://www.fmotl.com/forum/index.php> (Accessed 12.11.2017).

²⁴⁰ Kelly, 2016, “Where is the Magna Carta Today”, in: Gibson-Morgan, Chommeloux (eds.), “The Rights and Aspirations of the Magna Carta.” Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, pp. 137-154.



unique leader and thus one of the earliest forms of checks and balances. While this clause was shortly removed again by the King and the clause never foresaw the power to overrule to be transferred to others than the barons,²⁴¹ the Freeman on the land use this clause 61 as their legitimate reason to opt-out of their civil duties in the form of *lawful rebellion*. For their argumentation, the common law and the Magna Carta is reduced to its basics rules. In this understanding, individuals can only break the law by harming another human, damaging its property or using fraud or mischief in contracts:²⁴²

*"We are not only fully entitled to rebel LAWFULLY, we are actually ENCOURAGED to do it AS OUR DUTY to our ancestors & our descendants. We are entitled to throw as many 'spanners in as many works', as may be necessary, in order to bring the United Kingdom BACK TO LAW. The only restraint on us is that we do this IN PEACE. Simple non-cooperation. We do this not only for ourselves and 'ours' ... BUT FOR YOU AND YOURS. **And never forget that.**"²⁴³*

Kent²⁴⁴ has traced first movements of the like back to the 1960s in the US and Canada, where similar beliefs and reasonings are used for not having to pay taxes or not being tangible for the current legal system. The argument of the common law as the only applicable law, are often combined with the argument that individuals must give consent to the wider legal or the tax systems in their country. As an example, the forum of the freemen on the land website provides an easy to 'understand' quick guide, explaining that according to their 'research', everyone can (successfully) challenge the court by answering to every question: "I am here making a Special Appearance to establish jurisdiction. I claim Common Law jurisdiction. I do not consent to contract for any services, and I waive all corresponding benefits". The basis of the claim is that the court is a "a Court of Commerce" and thus "has no jurisdiction over me as a sovereign Human being, remaining solely under Common Law jurisdiction."²⁴⁵

The Freeman-on-the-land movement first emerged in-between 2005 and 2008 in Canada and around 2009 in the UK, mainly traceable through the emergence of the internet sites fmotl.com and worldfreemansociety.org and their respective forums.²⁴⁶ With the popularity of the internet and especially social media sites such as Facebook, these groups also managed to increase their membership. Another important event for promoting their beliefs and ideas was the *Occupy London movement* in which some individuals identifying with the freeman movement seized the opportunity

²⁴¹ Danziger & Gillingham, 2004, "1215: the year of Magna Carta", Coronet, London.

²⁴² See for example the arguments used by Freeman Robert Arthur Menard: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtoFgh2PTUk&feature=player_embedded http://rationalwiki.org/w/images/4/46/Capture_78f78ebb151dda7fe4992022bcafbcb671a833bb.png (Accessed 12.11.2017).

²⁴³ From the homepage of the Freeman on the land (2017) <http://law.fmotl.com/> (Highlights in the original, Accessed 12.11.2017).

²⁴⁴ Kent, 2015, op. cit.

²⁴⁵ Veronica: of the Chapman family (2009) <http://www.fmotl.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=136> (Accessed 12.11.2017).

²⁴⁶ Kent, 2015, op. cit.; <http://www.fmotl.com/>; <http://worldfreemansociety.org/forum/26-england-ireland-scotland-wales> (Accessed 12.11.2017).

to gain media attention and present themselves and their ideas in the open comment sections of *The Guardian* newspaper.²⁴⁷

If the Lunatics on the left can achieve 300,000 signatures on a petition to welcome all the potential terrorists and scroungers of the World into our once great nation, then surely the realists and true patriots of this country should be able to exceed this.
 Please sign and spread this petition far and wide, let us show these left wing 'Nut Balls' what true Brits think about their plans to give our homeland away

Petitions
UK Government and Parliament

Petition: Stop allowing immigrants into the UK.
 The UK government need to prevent immigrants from entering the UK immediately! We MUST close all borders, and prevent more immigrants from entering Britain. Foreign citizens are taking all our benefits, costing the government millions!...

PETITION.PARLIAMENT.UK

5 8 Comments

Fucking disgusted that someone would make a petition to block all REFUGEES from a country that you don't fucking own! What the fuck did you do for this country that meant that you could say who passes through made up borders or not? I thought so, fuck all! You make me sick!

Like 3

Do these refugees (invaders) or the twats who want to let them in own it then?

Like 1 Edited

I worked for forty years paying excessive amounts of tax and insurance, in order to fund a welfare and health service to be used by my own countrymen, I paid into the system naively thinking that when my parents retired the state would look after them.
 I have since woken up and now realise that all my hard work was for nothing as a bunch of bent politicians, aided by useful idiots and brain-dead nutballs like you, have given the insurance money paid in by the workers of this nation away to scrounging foreigners and lazy idle scumbags.
 Oh by the way, have you ever had a job?

Like 1 Edited

Just so you know, I have paid tax and will continue to do so. You worked for forty years? Congratulations!!!! I applaud you on being as useless as your predecessors!! You were able to fit into being a cog of this monstrous inhumane machine for I imagine most of your life, clap bloody clap!

However, if you think that accepting 20,000 refugees over the next four years is acceptable when we're ordering drone strikes and supply line blockades to the countries where people are fleeing, using your so very hard-earned tax money (which I imagine was a low amount anyway) to kill various amounts of people... And all you care about is your contribution?? You have added to the bloodshed for forty years so don't you talk to me about scrounging foreigners and lazy idle scumbags when you're one of those scumbags that has allowed this to happen for well before my generation was even born! People like you should be sent over to Syria and other war-torn countries, lets see if you want what they have for you in terms of your taxpayers contribution.

An argument in an open Freeman Facebook group about immigration

Besides the Freeman on the land movement, other similar movements are the British Constitution Group²⁴⁸ and the Scottish Sovereigns.²⁴⁹ These movements use similar arguments and rhetoric, relying on their version of the common law and have also emerged around the same time in the UK.

²⁴⁷ E.g.: Playford, Howard & 'commonly known as dom', 2011, "We are the change: welfare, education and law at the Occupy camp", *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/nov/15/welfare-education-law-occupy-london>; Witterick, 2011, "Yes, defaulting on debts is an option", *The Guardian*, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/nov/15/debt-agencies-economy?CMP=tw_t_gu; For a comment on the Freeman in *The Guardian* and the *Occupy London* movement, see: Gardner, 2011, "The law is not the enemy of protest but an essential tool of impartiality", *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/libertycentral/2011/nov/16/law-protest-occupy-freemen> (All accessed 12.11.2017).

²⁴⁸ <https://www.britishconstitutiongroup.com/about-us> (Accessed 12.11.2017).



All these movements are difficult to locate on a political scale, as they use right-wing as well as left-wing argumentations. This becomes apparent in their anti-governmental stance, which sometimes slides into an anarchistic direction. The presence of sovereign citizens at the *Occupy London* movement and their similar ideas – restricting or abolishing banks – are one example. In other cases, they have a strong right-wing, nationalistic and libertarian tone. The chairman of the British Constitution Group for example was a former UKIP member, a right wing political party in the UK²⁵⁰. Also on the public Facebook page of the Freeman-on-the-land, typical left-wing/anarchist and right-wing/nationalist discussions are present, sometimes leading to debates amongst the members arguing for or against certain positions (see Figure 1).

Other popular discussion topics within these heterodox politicisation groups are ‘typical’ conspiracy theories, covering mostly governmental conspiracies against their own citizens or against foreign citizens – e.g. 9/11 as a false flag operation, or governmental cooperation with terrorists. ‘Prominent’ names from the conspiracy theory realm, like David Icke²⁵¹ seem to be either an important source for the general ideas or even involved in coining the name of the freeman on the land.²⁵² Other recurring topics portray the police as acting solely against citizens, or discussing how the ‘fake’ media fails to report on the truth – generally being *their* truth. Finally, another often repeating topic is about health, more specifically how the pharmaceutical industry (in cooperation with the governments) already have found cures to different diseases like cancer but don’t want to release them, or on how vaccines are dangerous for their health. It should be noted though that not all freemen-on-the-land or sovereign citizens are equally believing conspiracy theories. For some, the emergence of conspiracy theories is even a reason to leave the group, as it diverts from the actual cause – the common law. For example in the Scottish Sovereigns, a former member explains the reason he left was that he didn’t want to stay with “weirdos and chancers trying to take over the group.”²⁵³

The main field of operation of the freeman-on-the-land, apart from being “keyboard conspiracists”²⁵⁴ can best be subsumed as blocking and opposing governments and administrations by using “Organized Pseudolegal Commercial Arguments” (OPCA), meaning using “a collection of techniques and arguments (...) to disrupt court operations and to attempt to frustrate the legal rights of governments, corporations, and individuals.”²⁵⁵ These operations include sending made-up fees and other financial claims to state and governmental actors or institutions, while themselves ignoring state duties such as paying taxes, fees, or court warrants. As some of the examples further down will show, none of these arguments and operations have been successful.

²⁴⁹ Ferry, 2014, “These Scottish Truthers Reckon They Live Outside the Law”, *Vice Magazine UK*, https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/qbewz5/these-scottish-truthers-reckon-they-live-outside-the-law-707 (Accessed 12.11.2017).

²⁵⁰ The Daily Mail, “Hundreds of council tax protesters storm courtroom in attempt to make citizens' arrest of judge”, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1364091/Council-tax-protesters-storm-courtroom-arrest-judge.html> (Accessed 12.11.2017).

²⁵¹ <https://www.davidicke.com/> (Accessed 12.11.2017).

²⁵² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtoFqh2PTUk&feature=player_embedded (Accessed 12.11.2017).

²⁵³ Ferry, 2014, op. cit.

²⁵⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵⁵ Rooke, 2012, Court of Queen’s Bench of Alberta, Meads v. Meads 2012 ABQB 571, p.1.



Lastly, there is another archetype of sovereign citizen movement which emerges every now and then, and which combines the antigovernmental ideas with regionalist, independent convictions. The focus in these groups is thus not only on the presumably ‘illegal’ actions of governmental and state actors, but also are convinced that their region they live in should be considered as an independent region. This can either be seen in regions which already have strong secessionist movements, as for example in Scotland, or are based on a more ‘ancient’ regional identity. One example of such a group is the “Acting Witan of Mercia”²⁵⁶ which declared the independence of Murcia – an ancient kingdom in the Midlands (between 527-918) – from England in 2003. On their website, they claim to have more than 2000 members who have since registered as “citizens of Mercia”. Another more recent group is called the International Secessionary Movement (ISM) and presents itself as “a supra-political movement for the decentralisation of power” standing “for the rights of all peoples to uphold their communities and cultures.”²⁵⁷ And also the Scottish Sovereigns appear to have tendencies favouring the Scottish Independence, however not being their prime objective.²⁵⁸ In comparison with more prominent sovereign citizens / freeman movements, the activities of these secessionary groups appear to be more low-key, revolving around organising the occasional meetings and campaigning in the public in order to gain attention.

6.8.3 Survey data on political indicators in the United Kingdom

While these movements try to delimit themselves from the established political parties, it is necessary to reflect the emergence of strict anti-governmental movements with the general political atmosphere in the UK. Looking at the major elections in the UK, there are a few major events and trends requiring specific attention. The general election results of the last 20 years have seen some substantial changes, which are only difficult to assess on their own. Combined with some of the other elections, and specifically with the referendums the UK has had in the last 20 years, the results show some interesting evolvments.

From 1997 until 2010, the UK has had a Labour led government, however with their votes decreasing at every election since they took office in 1997. While the Labour Party has been decreasing in votes and thus losing parliament seats, it was the Conservative Party and especially the Liberal Democratic Party who managed to increase their votes in the following elections. In the 2010 elections, the Conservative Party won the elections, although without having a majority resulting in a hung parliament. The Conservative party decided to form a government coalition with the Liberal Democratic Party – the first coalition since second world war. For the Liberal Democratic Party, the participation in the government was not fruitful, since they lost more than half of their votes and only obtained 8 seats in the 2015 election.

The elections in 2015 are especially interesting for two reasons. On the one hand, it was the first General election after the unsuccessful Scottish Referendum vote in 2014. Still the Scottish

²⁵⁶ <http://www.independentmerciamerica.org/> (Accessed 12.11.2017).

²⁵⁷ <http://ism.land/> (Accessed 12.11.2017).

²⁵⁸ Ferry, 2014, op. cit.



Nationalist Party (SNP) obtained a vote share of 50% in Scotland, resulting in 59 seats in the parliament and thus achieving their best result so far. On the other hand, the EU-scepticism in the UK had seen a drastic increase in-between the 2010 and 2014 election. The United Kingdom Independent Party (UKIP) did not only win the 2014 European Parliament elections, but also Prime Minister David Cameron promised to hold a referendum on the membership of the UK in the EU in case of his re-election in 2015. In these election, the UKIP again managed to be rather successful, especially in terms of obtained votes and the share of votes – having their best result with 3,88 Million votes and a 12,64% share. However, due to how the peculiarities of the British election system, this resulted in only one seat in the parliament. With David Cameron’s Conservative party re-elected and increasing their lead in parliament seats, the way for the European Union referendum was paved.

The 2017 elections were also important, being the first election after the referendum and the UK officially leaving the European Union. Prime Minister Theresa May – who took office after David Cameron resigned after the Brexit referendum – called for new elections in 2017 to give her a mandate and strengthen her position for the upcoming negotiations with the EU. At first backed by high prediction polls for a majority for the Conservative Party, the Conservative Party’s share decreased as the election campaign moved on.²⁵⁹ After the elections, the situation had worsened for the Conservative Party. While they won the vote and the share, they did not achieve a majority and thus resulted again in a hung parliament. Meanwhile vote-wise, the Labour Party has positioned itself as a strong opposition against the Conservative Party. The 2017 elections resulted also in a strong decline of the UKIP party to 1,8% of the voting share. This might be a result of the successful Brexit referendum followed by a lack of purpose of the UKIP party. This was also an argument used by Nigel Farage on his resignation as party leader, as with the successful Brexit referendum, he had achieved his goal.²⁶⁰ Surprisingly also the SNP lost 13% of their vote share in Scotland, with quite some votes going to the Conservative Party who managed to increase their seats gained through the Scottish elections from one in 2015 to 13 in the 2017 elections.

The turnout for the General Elections in the UK have also evolved drastically in the last 20 years. While the turnout fluctuated between 70 and 80% in every General Elections since the second World War²⁶¹, it dropped by 11,9 percentage points to a mere 59,4% for the 2001 elections compared to the 1997 elections. This low turnout was mainly due to the comfortable lead of the Labour party in most polls and thus predicted to win anyway. Other voters however decided to stay at home as they considered that voting did not matter anyway, or because they did not trust politicians.²⁶² Since the 2001 elections, the turnout has steadily increased again, reaching 68,8% in the 2017 elections. The

²⁵⁹ Opinion Bee, “Westminster Voting Intention”, <http://opinionbee.uk/polls/westminster>, (Accessed: 12.11.2017).

²⁶⁰ Mason, Booth & Gentleman, 2016, “Nigel Farage resigns as Ukip leader after 'achieving political ambition' of Brexit”, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jul/04/nigel-farage-resigns-as-ukip-leader> (Accessed: 12.11.2017).

²⁶¹ Audickas, Hawkins & Cracknell, 2017, “UK Elections Statistics 1918-2017”, *Briefing Paper CBP7529*, House of Commons Library.

²⁶² BBC News, 2001, “Turnout 'at 80-year low'”, http://news.bbc.co.uk/news/vote2001/hi/english/newsid_1376000/1376575.stm (Accessed: 12.11.2017).



lack of interest thus seems to have recovered slightly, while never achieving to return to the figures of the previous century.

	CON	LAB	LD	PC/SNP	Other	Total
Seats won						
1997	165	418	46	10	20	659
2001	166	412	52	9	20	659
2005	198	355	62	9	22	646
2010	306	258	57	9	20	650
2015	330	232	8	59	21	650
2017	317	262	12	39	20	650

UK General Elections - seats won 1997-2017 (Source: Audickas et al., 2017).

Regarding the European Parliament elections, the general interest of the public in these elections is rather low, with a turnout fluctuating between 23,1% (in 1999) and 38,2% (in 2004). It is especially in the EP elections where right-wing and far-right parties like the British National Party (BNP) or the UKIP party have been particularly successful. The BNP gained 2 sets in the EP in 2009 and the UKIP even reached the first-place vote wise in the 2014 elections. These results reflect not only the lack of interest in the European Union by the UK citizens, but also the gives an idea of the rejection of the EU by a part of the population. This rejection peaked in the 2016 EU referendum, in which 51,9% of the UK voters wanted to leave the EU.

Besides the results in the last elections and referendums in the UK, different polls also show how the public feels regarding their government and its institutions. The Eurobarometer survey queries on a yearly basis how citizens trust different political actors and bodies. For the UK, the results depict a rather sombre picture. Looking at the survey data since 2010, we see that UK citizens least trust political parties (18,22%), followed by the European Union (23,88%), the national Parliament (24,92%) and the national government (27,35%). The regional and local authorities are trusted the most by the UK citizens (48,48%). Since, there have been some positive changes, however not towards every actor or institution. Especially regarding the political parties, the change has rather been negatively – hitting a low in 2011 (10.47%) and stagnating around 15% since. The national government and the national Parliament have been able to increase the trust they receive by their citizens quite a bit. Especially towards the Parliament, 44,3% of the respondents claim trusting the Parliament in 2017. A significant increase of more than 10 percentage points for both bodies can especially be observed between 2013 and 2014.

The British stance towards the EU has always been rather distant and as such it also is of no surprise that the trust of citizens in the EU has been low. While the trust in the EU has been fluctuating between 2010 and 2015, especially in the 2016 and the 2017 survey, citizens tend to be more trusting again towards the EU – a bit surprising in the light of the referendum leading to the UK leaving the EU. Finally, also regarding the trust of citizens in their local authorities, especially the last two years show that there are more respondents who tend to trust their local authority, than those who don't really trust them. This reflects also findings of the latest Scottish Social Attitudes (SSA)



Survey, which also shows that the Scottish respondents tend to trust more the Scottish government (65% in 2016) of acting in their interest than the national (UK) government (25% in 2016).²⁶³

	Political Parties		Nat.Government		Nat.Parliament		European Union		Reg. Authorities	
	Trust	Don't Trust	Trust	Don't Trust	Trust	Don't Trust	Trust	Don't Trust	Trust	Don't Trust
2010	18,22%	81,78%	27,35%	72,65%	24,92%	75,08%	23,88%	76,12%	48,48%	51,52%
2011	10,47%	89,53%	22,12%	77,88%	25,32%	74,68%	18,24%	81,76%	45,53%	54,47%
2012	15,54%	84,46%	21,91%	78,09%	24,55%	75,45%	16,97%	83,03%	48,20%	51,80%
2013	14,97%	85,03%	23,22%	76,78%	25,99%	74,01%	21,96%	78,04%	50,56%	49,44%
2014	14,06%	85,94%	34,20%	65,80%	37,68%	62,32%	28,46%	71,54%	42,78%	57,22%
2015	14,95%	85,05%	32,45%	67,55%	35,39%	64,61%	24,51%	75,49%	46,23%	53,77%
2016	15,30%	84,70%	38,86%	61,14%	41,53%	58,47%	33,36%	66,64%	53,13%	46,88%
2017	17,55%	82,45%	41,99%	58,01%	44,30%	55,70%	35,68%	64,32%	57,75%	42,25%

Citizens Trust towards political bodies and institutions (Source: Eurobarometer 2010-2017)

Nonetheless, despite the increase in trust towards political and governmental actors and bodies, it is obvious that the citizens in the UK have a general mistrust towards governmental and political bodies and especially towards political parties. This mistrust could reflect the citizens' openness for groups like the freemen-on-the-land or the sovereign citizens, who provide an alternative concept and apparently easy answers against governments who are acting against the interests of their citizens.

6.8.4 Media discourse on heterodox political groups and law enforcement reactions

The activities of many of the heterodox politicisation groups are rather low-key and most often are limited to resisting in paying fines and taxes. Media reports are thus mostly about events where such actions lead to court cases in which freemen and sovereign citizens try to argue with the common law and their lack of consent with the legal system in the UK. Accordingly, and on a non-regular basis the freeman-on-the-land movement appears mainly in local news. An early case – which was reported in a few newspapers – was of a Norfolk freeman-on-the-land, who was brought to court for not paying council taxes. His defence consisted in using Organized pseudo-legal Commercial Arguments as others already tried before.²⁶⁴

“I asked the judge to walk into the court under common law and not commercial law. If I had entered under commercial law it would prove that I accepted its law. I was denied my rights to go in there. All councils and courts are private, profit-making organisations. and it’s all a money-making scam.”²⁶⁵

²⁶³ Scottish Government, 2016, “Scottish Social Attitudes: Attitudes to government and political engagement”, <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/03/4648/3> (Accessed: 12.11.2017).

²⁶⁴ Rooke, 2012, op. cit.

²⁶⁵ Bale, 2010, “Norfolk tax dodger arrested... after writing to Queen”, *Norwich evening news*, <http://www.eveningnews24.co.uk/news/crime/norfolk-tax-dodger-arrested-after-writing-to-queen-1-745681> (Accessed: 12.11.2017).



In a very similar court case in Manchester, a man claiming to be a freeman-on-the-land also failed to pay council taxes and attending the court. Using similar arguments and suggesting that “people were only subject to English laws if they consent to them” did not help him in his court case. He was sentenced to a total of 54 days in prison, with the reason to show “that people won't get away with it”.²⁶⁶ Another case happened in Glasgow, in which a man claimed to be part of the Scottish Sovereigns, and who was convicted to a 310 days detention, for behaving in a hostile or offensive way in public on more than 20 occasions in three months, always followed by telling the police that he doesn't consent to their statutes or laws.²⁶⁷

While these cases generally tend to be non-violent, some risk of escalating, showing the deeper problem such groups might cause. In Edinburgh for example, a man was sentenced to 3 months prison for multiple offences. His case started because he illegally bypassed the electricity meter at his home, mainly to grow cannabis. When this was discovered, a warrant officer with a lawful warrant wanted to gain access to the premises, which the accused man not only had barricaded but also resulted in him posting pictures “of live electrical cable attached to a window frame and a hand grenade wired to a door handle – implying that they were at his home – and threatening to “deploy” boiling cooking fat over anyone who entered his home “unlawfully”” on Facebook.²⁶⁸ In another case in Liverpool, a court case against a freeman challenging to pay his council taxes lead to big tumults when other freemen protesting outside stormed the court in an attempt to arrest the judge. The case had to be postponed and six of the protestors were arrested for breach of peace, assaulting the police, breach of the police and obstructing the police.²⁶⁹ Although no actual harm was done in these case, it shows the potential threat of these movements and the willingness to resort to violence if necessary.

These heterodox politicisation groups are however seldom seen as a real threat in the media discourse, and if so mostly only in relation to the events happening in the United States. Some newspapers have reported about the “sovereign citizens” movement in the US and their extremist and deadly actions.²⁷⁰ In these reports, these movements are mostly portrayed as right-wing, nationalist and extremist, while a link to similar movements in the UK is not established.

²⁶⁶ BBC News, 2017, “Tax dodger's freeman on the land defence fails” <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-39885397> (Accessed: 12.11.2017).

²⁶⁷ McAnally & Ayrshire Post, 2016, “Troon lout who blasted loud music at George Square memorial days after bin lorry crash jailed” <http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/local-news/troon-lout-who-blasted-loud-8513185> (Accessed: 12.11.2017).

²⁶⁸ Edinburgh Evening News, 2015, “‘Freeman on the land’ causes chaos in court”, <http://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/freeman-on-the-land-causes-chaos-in-court-1-3715573> (Accessed: 12.11.2017).

²⁶⁹ Murphy, 2011, “Protestors storm Birkenhead county court and attempt to arrest judge”, *Liverpool Echo*, <http://www.liverpooecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/protestors-storm-birkenhead-county-court-3379505> (Accessed: 12.11.2017).

²⁷⁰ The Daily Mail, 2012, “

'They decide which laws to obey and to ignore - and they don't pay their taxes': Inside the anarchist sovereign citizens movement blamed for murder of two police officers”, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2191108/Sovereign-citizens-Alleged-cop-killers-linked-far-right-extremist-group.html>; Conroy, 2017, “They hate the US government, and they're multiplying: the terrifying rise of 'sovereign citizens'”, *The Guardian*,



Beside the possible use of violent means, another main concern with heterodox politicisation movements concerns the individuals involved and the danger of using “organized pseudo-legal commercial arguments”. While some of their members are firm believers of their legal understanding and their actions, most of the people involved seem to be blinded by these pseudo-legal arguments, especially when they seem an ideal solution for their own problems – mainly in case of debt. Websites such as getoutofdebtfree.org or beatthebailiffsandthebanks.co.uk are prominent examples in the UK. The first was founded by Jon Witterick²⁷¹, who is also linked to the freeman movement²⁷²; the second by Matthew Sanders, who has been a member of the of The British Constitution Group and Lawful Rebellion²⁷³. The sites they promote are quite popular, reaching up to 100.000 people²⁷⁴ and have a professional and legitimate appearance. However, the advice they provide is based on the same pseudo-legal arguments used by the Freeman and similar groups. Looking at how Jon Witterick argues in the Guardian open comment section this becomes obvious:

“After a bit of research, I realised the debt collectors buy debts for less than 10p in the pound, after the bank writes the debt off. I also found out that under the Bills of Exchange Act 1882, the debt collector is actually paying off our debt when they buy it. I also realised how debt collectors trick us into contracts with them, by asking us how much we could pay. When you agree to one pound a month, which costs more to administrate, they now have a contract with you, where none existed.”²⁷⁵

Another similar approach is the WeRe Bank²⁷⁶, issuing the currency ‘Re’ with which they claim people can pay off debt, also referring to the Bills of Exchange Act 1882. WeRe Bank’s activities have led to the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) issuing a warning regarding the statements made by the WeRe Bank. Not only is the WeRe Bank no official bank, the use of its currency for paying off debt will most of the times result in additional charges, sanctions or repossession proceedings due to overdue payments, as creditors won’t be accepting this currency.²⁷⁷ The ‘advice’ such websites are giving are thus rather questionable.

These groups however can have a big negative impact on people in debt, who often see these activities as their last resort. Especially since these groups do report ‘success stories’, claiming that creditors were realising that their claims are unlawful. While there might be some cases, where the debt is being let off, this is most certainly not a direct result of the claims the debtors make when

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/15/sovereign-citizens-rightwing-terrorism-hate-us-government>. (Accessed: 12.11.2017).

²⁷¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2owMSESOCHQ> (Accessed: 12.11.2017).

²⁷² Witterick, 2011, op. cit.

²⁷³ Lloyd, 2014, “Bennetts Hill parking stand-off: What we know about Matthew Sanders”, *Birmingham Mail*, <http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/bennetts-hill-parking-stand-off-what-8340970> (Accessed: 12.11.2017).

²⁷⁴ Beat the baliffs and the banks Facebook group has 97.000 members (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/beatthebailiffsandthebanks/>, Accessed: 12.11.2017) and Jon Witterick reports of reaching “thousands of people in 7 countries”. Witterick, 2011, op. cit.

²⁷⁵ *ibid.*

²⁷⁶ WeRe Bank, <https://www.werebank.co.uk/> (Accessed: 12.11.2017).

²⁷⁷ Financial Conduct Authority, 2015, “Consumer notice: WeRe Bank” <https://www.fca.org.uk/news/news-stories/consumer-notice-were-bank> (Accessed: 12.11.2017).



referring to the Bills of Exchange Act 1882 or the Magna Charta, but rather due to the sum not being high enough for the effort to collect, or because the creditor realises that the debtor has no assets or money to claim. In most cases however, insisting on the 'common law' and claiming not having given consent to the legal and financial system will result not only in increasing daily interest charges and thus subsequently the debt, but can in the worst case – as shown above – also result in arrests.

As initially already noted, the freeman-on-the-land movement also gained some attention through the occupy London protests – as two articles by freeman where published in The Guardians 'Comment is Free' section – the one by Jon Witterick cited above, promoting his 'Get out of debt free' idea, and (partly) one by an author called "commonly known as dom" promoting the freeman's idea of the legal system and making claims like: "The prison without bars is made by bits of paper. Bits of paper like your birth certificate. All registered names are Crown copyright."²⁷⁸ These two articles have drawn some critical attention towards the freeman movement and the Guardian for giving them a platform.

These critiques mainly were issued by lawyers and barristers in the Guardian or individual blogs, debunking the claims made by freemen and showing the dangers behind believing and promoting such ideas.²⁷⁹ This critique also subsumed nicely how these groups are dealt with in the last 5-7 years in the UK: mainly on the legal level. As these groups so far only relied on their "Organized Pseudolegal Commercial Arguments" and the linked actions, such as not paying their taxes or bills, they are currently only met on a legal basis and less on a law enforcement or security level – unlike in other countries like the US, or Germany and Austria. Consequently, these groups or movements are also not considered illegal, or under increased surveillance.

6.8.5 Heterodox politicization in context

As we have tried to show here, heterodox politicisation movements in the UK are present, however are seldom openly visible. While some of their actions are reported in the media, they are not perceived as a real threat and most often not taken seriously. Also in the court cases dealing with freeman or sovereign citizens, their actions are rarely taken seriously. In one case, their argumentations are portrayed as "pseudo-legal mumbo jumbo."²⁸⁰ And as shown already above, also the official or expert responses towards these movements are limited and mostly revolve around their pseudo-legal activities. Looking at the perspective of the members of these groups, upon closer inspection it appears as if most are attracted by exactly these pseudo-legal activities as a (last) resort

²⁷⁸ Playford, Howard & 'commonly known as dom', 2011, op. cit.

²⁷⁹ Gardner, 2011, op. cit.; Legal Bizzle, 2011, "The freeman-on-the-land strategy is no magic bullet for debt problems", *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/nov/18/freeman-land-strategy-bullet-debt>; Wagner, 2011, "Freemen of the dangerous nonsense", *UK Human Rights Blog*, <https://ukhumanrightsblog.com/2011/11/15/freemen-of-the-dangerous-nonsense/>; Chard, 2011, "'Sovereign' citizens in the UK: a study in nonsense", <https://rainbow.chard.org/2011/11/10/sovereign-citizens-in-the-uk-a-study-in-nonsense/>. (Accessed: 12.11.2017).

²⁸⁰ BBC News, 2017, op. cit.



for their problems, as shown above. They do not appear to be fundamentally believing in the deeper ideas and conspiracy theories propagated by these groups.

Looking at the wider political context in the UK, it can be assumed that this is partly because there are some more mainstream political alternatives available for people. Although – as the Eurobarometer polls show – the trust in political parties in the UK is low, especially movements at the right-wing spectrum or with strong nationalist tendencies are present and relatively popular vote wise. Political parties like the UKIP or the British National Party have had a considered amount of success in some elections. Also, the Conservative Party can be divided into a more nationalist/Eurosceptic wing and a pro-European wing. Nationalist and regionalist policies might also provide a political alternative for people tending to heterodox politicisations, be it in Scotland with a very strong separatist movement, or other parts of the UK, who promote their own regional identity with their language and history like in Wales or in Cornwall.

Political movements also provide an alternative for citizens in the UK, ranging on the political scale (right and left-wing). Two prominent examples are the Occupy (London) movement and the English Defence League (EDL). On the one hand, the Occupy movement provides individuals with an opportunity of incorporating an anarchistic and anti-systemic ideologies²⁸¹, which is also one of the main ideologies of the freeman movements. As shown already above, some freeman also actively participated in the Occupy movement or used it as a way of promoting these ideologies. The EDL on the other hand covers the right-wing, anti-immigration and nationalist ideology, which are also part of some of the freeman. With an estimated 25000-35000 active members, the EDL also reaches a substantive amount of people.²⁸² Although the ties between the freeman movement and the EDL are not so prominent as with the Occupy movement, it appears as if some few members of the EDL also engage in promoting freeman beliefs like the common law of the Magna Charta and lawful rebellion.²⁸³ All in all however, it appears as if the more radical and sometimes even violent acts of the EDL are less compatible with the – so far – non-violent actions of the heterodox politicisation movements in the UK. And highlights once more that these movements are not really considered a security threat in the UK by law enforcement agencies – unlike the EDL²⁸⁴ and the Occupy movement.²⁸⁵

²⁸¹ Gibson, 2013, “The Anarchism of the Occupy Movement”, *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 48:3, pp. 335-348.

²⁸² Bartlett and Littler, 2011, “Inside the EDL, Populist Politics in a Digital Age”, Demos, London.

²⁸³ Exeter EDL News, 2014, “Eva Silver, Facebook spam, lawful rebellion and the English Volunteer Force” <https://exeteredlnews.wordpress.com/2014/01/22/eva-silver-facebook-spam-lawful-rebellion-and-the-english-volunteer-force/> (Accessed: 12.11.2017).

²⁸⁴ Hopkins, 2016, “English Defence League And British National Party Are As Dangerous As Islamic State, Derbyshire Police Claim”, *The Huffington Post UK*, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2016/02/18/english-defence-league-are-as-dangerous-as-islamic-state_n_9263416.html (Accessed: 12.11.2017).

²⁸⁵ Quinn, 2015, “City of London police put Occupy London on counter-terrorism presentation with al-Qaida”, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jul/19/occupy-london-counter-terrorism-presentation-al-qaida> (Accessed: 12.11.2017).

Appendix: Country Report Template

Project acronym:	SOURCE
Project title:	Virtual Centre of Excellence for Research Support and Coordination on Societal Security
Website:	www.societalsecurity.net
Project number:	313288
Programme:	FP7-SSH-2014-7.4.2
Objective:	Networking of researchers for a high level multi-organizational and cross-border collaboration.
Contract type:	Small or medium-scale focused research project
Start date of project:	1st January 2014
Duration:	60 months
<p>D3.7: Annual Societal Security Report 4 Working title: Heterodox Politicization Case Study Template</p>	
Task leader:	Vienna Centre for Societal Security (VICESSE)
Contributors:	External experts
Dissemination level:	PU
Deliverable type:	Report
Version:	1.0
Due date of deliverable:	31st December 2017 (M48)
Acronyms	
ASSR	Annual Societal Security Report
D	deliverable
M	month



**SOURCE WP3
D3.7 Annual Societal Security Report 4 (2017)**

HETERODOX POLITICIZATION

Template for Case Studies

**Reinhard Kreissl & Norbert Leonhardmair, VICESSE
July 2017**

Draft version 1

About this document

This document is the first draft of the case study template for deliverable D3.7 of SOURCE. It has been drafted by Reinhard Kreissl and Norbert Leonhardmair following the SOURCE Societal Security Conference and consortium meeting in Vienna where the ASSR-3 was presented and discussed.

The aim of the document is to define the case study protocol. In particular, the:

1. Intellectual basis of the case studies
2. Case study unit of analysis
3. Reporting format for each partner
4. Timeline
5. References

1. Intellectual basis of the case studies

The term “heterodox politicization” introduces a specific analytical difference or opposition. This difference is intended to capture an emerging new form of grass-roots political activism that is different from orthodox civic political engagement, political protest or anti-politics.

Political protest, addressing new grievances, reflecting changing value orientations or shifts in the economic structure of societies can in most cases be considered as a form of orthodox political activity, sometimes giving rise to new political parties (as e.g. the Green Party in Germany). Political protest may have recourse to illegal means of civil disobedience, but rarely puts into question the legitimacy of basic constitutional principles of democratic governance. Anti-politics, rooted in libertarian and anarchist traditions, refusing any form of state-based political order strives for a society beyond the state, doing away with its very foundational principles.

The movements and groups here labelled as “heterodox politicisation” share this radical critique of the modern state in its existing forms. Excluded are thereby new formations of (traditional) ideological factions (e.g. the extreme right Identity Movement), who may have discarded or adapted traditional forms of representation (symbols, strategies, rhetoric), however do not reject the legitimacy of the state.

What makes heterodox politicisation stand out from other forms of political protest or counter movements is this somehow paradoxical combination of very fundamental critique of the political status quo (“state as commercial firm”) launched against the background of an alternative scenario that looks like a blue print of the order they reject. Although this movement of heterodox political activism has neither developed a common and coherent ideological framework nor robust organisational structures and may seem rather insignificant in terms of the numbers of active supporters or members it nonetheless can be seen as indicative for a number of predicaments of modern Western or European democracies shading light on central issues of societal security. It expresses a deep-seated mistrust in the legitimacy of modern democracies and their political-institutional order. Presently movements like Freemen, Sovereign Citizens, Reichsbürger (GE), Staatenbündler (AT), Terranier or OPPT mainly attract occasional interest of law enforcement agencies for the sometimes racist, Anti-Semitic, right-wing extremist ideas they promote and for their refusal to accept the existing legal frameworks, honour property rights, tax laws and legal-administrative documents from civil marriage contracts to driver licences.

SOURCE D3.7 ASSR 4 2016 / 2



A way to approach these groups is drawing from Robert K. Merton’s (1938) Strain Theory of Deviance using his famous typology of deviant behaviour. [5] Merton, drawing on Durkheim’s seminal work, developed the concept of ‘anomie’ to describe this imbalance between cultural goals and institutionalized means. He argued that such an imbalanced society produces anomie – there is a strain or tension between the goals and means which produce unsatisfied aspirations. While this template has proven inadequate as general theory on crime, it provides a suitable analytical framework to situate the groups we target in this ASSR.

Table 1. Typology of Deviance

Cultural Goals	Institutionalized Means	
	accept	Reject
accept	CONFORMITY	INNOVATION
reject	RITUALISM	RETREATISM

REBELLION

1. Conformity: pursuing cultural goals through socially approved means.
2. Innovation: using socially unapproved or unconventional means to obtain culturally approved goals.
3. Ritualism: using the same socially approved means to achieve less elusive goals.
4. Retreatism: to reject both the cultural goals and the means to obtain it, then find a way to escape it.
5. Rebellion: to reject the cultural goals and means, then work to replace them.

Sovereign Citizens between Retreatism and Rebellion

By rejecting institutionalized means (arbitrary acceptance of laws) as well as cultural goals, combined with the “initiation act” exiting membership of the state by issuing a pseudo-legal contract, sovereign citizen groups exhibit at their core a high level of retreatism. Often these acts are accompanied by physical retreat to a territory declared as “sovereign”. The primary motivation seems to physically and symbolically exit the existing system, rejecting any (legal or financial) demands made, and live by autonomous means and beliefs. Conflict arises in reaction to different bureaucratic agencies (such as youth welfare, solicitors, tax/debt collectors, etc.) who are enforcing state-administrative tasks, which are seen as intrusions, reaffirming notions of state surveillance and oppression. (4) While the refusal to engage in or cooperate with state authorities has been labelled as “paper terrorism”, clogging agencies with pseudo-legal requests, there have been escalations into violent conflict between LEA and sovereign citizens. Certain variations of these groups seek to establish an alternative (new) order in competition with the existing state structure (Staatenbündler). Their claims reach the immediate territorial space they occupy, and often they redraw borders within and between nation states, creating new districts and bureaucratic institutions. (5) The irony being, of course, that the (new) order they seek to declare, resembles the existing structures to a high degree.¹

A superficial screening of the profile of the activists gathering under the banner of these movements reveals on the one hand the type of the disenfranchised, white, lower-class citizen, often struggling with financial problems, seeing himself as a victim of unrestrained globalisation. On the other many of the more outspoken lead figures use a rhetoric combining elements of grass root democracy discourse, green ecological arguments riddled with standard lines of left critique of the detrimental effects of an unrestrained, globalized capitalist economy (while at the same time avoiding the term “capitalism”). This amounts to a kind of ideological grab tray and provides the building blocks for a wide variety of conspiracy theories. Such conspiracy theories have an obvious psychological use value: they provide a cognitive frame to link seemingly unrelated events and contradicting information in a coherent interpretation, often involving a kind of Aristotelean single prime mover or dark force, held responsible for the course of the world.

From this brief description, the diverse groups we classify as activists of heterodox politicisation at first glance look like many other sects or cults, sealed off from mainstream society and practicing idiosyncratic rituals in a collectively shared and isolated social-cognitive bubble. New social media and the new forms of communication provided by the

¹ For a brief introduction and history of sovereign citizens in the us, see: [7] <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/sovereign-citizens-movement>.



Internet have created a new form of highly diversified and fragmented virtual public sphere. This has facilitated the spread of heterodox political ideas and world views and made them more sustainable, offering links to websites and blogs where “evidence” for the different conspiracy theories can be found and followers can exchange their views. At the same time the low threshold of access allowing communication with a wide audience has triggered an inflationary increase of information circulating in cyberspace and this inflation also can affect the credibility of the information distributed.

Putting these emerging movements in the context of societal security, they can be seen as a challenge to the institutional and cultural basis of European – or more general Western – societies, pointing to a decline of social integration haunting these societies. This weakening of social bonds has been observed and investigated by scholars like Putnam [6] or Etzioni [1]. In their view, this leads to increasing isolation of individuals and atomisation of society. The groups we collect under the label of heterodox politicisation however do not retreat into individual isolation or fall prey to the typical consumerist habits of late-modern societies, as Bauman has described them. They strive to rebuild what they see as a new, pure, and better social order, based on a shared world-view and sustaining collective action and practice. While some of these practices may simply be illegal and hence can be treated as criminal acts by law enforcement, others simply look bizarre. Taking the obvious attraction for ordinary citizens joining these groups as a starting point the analysis will work its way back to identify the structural, social, political and cultural drivers giving these movements momentum. This may provide important insights and help to better understand erosive societal trends destabilizing what could be called the implicit social contract of European societies, posing a hitherto unknown threat to societal security.

2. Case study unit of analysis

1. *Determining the groups active in each country:*

A number of sovereign citizen groups active in Europe like OPPT, Survivalists or Freeman-of-the-land originated in the US and adopted their ideology for their respective country, some emphasizing their distinctiveness from their US origins, others recurring to similar strategies and arguments as employed in the US. However, there are a number of groups like the “Reichsbürger” – while structurally similar – whose explanations refer to a specifically German context and do not lend themselves to an analogous transnational adoption. Thereby, it is to be expected, that such groups exist in some variation across Europe.

- List of groups and representatives (incl. links to homepages and Facebook-pages)
 - Short descriptions of key beliefs, goals, history, strategies, # of members (links to media outlets, blogs)
 - A list of main topics, lines of critique and recurrent issues can be compiled
 - Repertoires of actions and forms of “counter-institutions” can be investigated
- ### 2. *Collecting available national survey data for*
- Voter participation in national elections and political alignments (since 2000)
 - Satisfaction with/trust in federal institutions/parties/economic/legal system (ESS, Eurobarometer)
- ### 3. *Screening the public media discourse to identify discussion on and context of sovereign citizen groups*
- 1 year back using search terms like “OPPT”, “Freemen”, “Sovereign Citizens” (or national nomenclature)
 - 1-2 daily newspapers to map events and coverage of these groups (number of articles should not be excessive)
- ### 4. *Law enforcement and legal perspectives on heterodox politicisation can be investigated*
- Are sovereign citizen group activities considered as illegal? (Specific laws addressing them?)
 - How do law enforcement experts assess the threat level? (Publications, Policy papers, etc.)
 - Are activities more in the virtual domain, what are manifest actions?
- ### 5. *Analysing heterodox politicisation in context*
- What are the most significant (i.e. receiving most public attention) political movements active in the national context covering the ideological spectrum from left/right/religious/ecological?
 - Are heterodox political activists/groups linked to these other movements?

SOURCE D3.7 ASSR 4 2016 / 4



- Draft a “mind map” of the national political counter culture

6. Countries

AT, GE, UK, FR, SK, NO, EL, TR

3. Report format

Partners will produce a 3-5,000 words report which details the findings for their case studies structured by the five dimensions above. Upon receipt of the reports, VICESSE will content analyze and interrogate them as data according to questions derived from the theoretical framework. They will enter the deliverable as country reports, with the aim of homogenous structure and sources across countries. VICESSE will integrate the cross-national findings in a systematic comparison chapter.

Deliverable outline: The deliverable template of the ASSR 4 will be sent out to partners by end of July 2017.

4. Timeline

The timeline for D3.7 is shown below.

Table 2. Timeline

Month	Activity
10 Jul 2017	VICESSE: Case study template to partners Partners: Start with Step 1 and send a compiled list of active groups/people/links.
1 Aug 2017	VICESSE: Deliverable template to partners ALL: Work on Step 2-5
30 Sep 2017	ALL: Send first draft of country report
15 Oct 2017	ALL: Send final/amended draft of country report
31 Oct 2017	VICESSE: Synthesis of country reports
	VICESSE: finalising general analysis
15 Nov 2017	VICESSE: Deliverable draft to reviewers
10 Dec 2017	Reviewers: D3.7 review finalized
20 Dec 2017	VICESSE: Integration of comments and final upload

5. References

- [1] Etzioni, A (1995) Die Entdeckung des Gemeinwesens. Ansprüche, Verantwortlichkeiten und das Programm des Kommunitarismus, Schäffer-Poeschel Verlag, Stuttgart 1995
- [2] Kreissl, R et al. (2015) Annual Societal Security Report 1. SOURCE Project Deliverable 3.4.
- [3] Kreissl, R et al. (2015) Annual Societal Security Report 2. SOURCE Project Deliverable 3.5.
- [4] Kreissl, R et al. (2016) Annual Societal Security Report 3. SOURCE Project Deliverable 3.6.
- [5] Merton, R (1938) Social Structure and Anomie. American Sociological Review. 3 (5): 672–682.
- [6] Putnam, R (2000) Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. Simon & Schuster, New York 2000
- [7] [Southern Poverty Law Centre] (2017) Sovereign Citizens Movement. [Online] URL: <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/sovereign-citizens-movement>.



6. Reading List

Studies on Sovereign Citizen Groups

- [Anti-Defamation League] (2012) The Lawless Ones. The Resurgence of the Sovereign Citizen Movement. ADL Special Report, 2nd edition. [Online] URL: <https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/combating-hate/Lawless-Ones-2012-Edition-WEB-final.pdf> (17-07-18).
- Kent, Stephen A. (2013) Freemen, Sovereign Citizens, and the Threat to Public Order in British Heritage Countries. Paper presented at the European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Sectarianism (FECRIS), Copenhagen, Denmark (May 30, 2013). [Online] URL: http://griess.st1.at/gsk/fecris/copenhagen/Kent_EN.pdf (17-07-18).
- [Southern Poverty Law Centre] (2017) Sovereign Citizens Movement. [Online] URL: <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/sovereign-citizens-movement> (17-07-18).

Theoretical input to "Anti-Politics"

- Schedler, Andreas (1997) Introduction: Antipolitics – Closing and Colonizing the Public Sphere. In: Schedler, Andreas (ed) The End of Politics? Explorations into Modern Antipolitics. New York: St Martin's Press, pp. 1-21. (PDF)

News reports on SCG/political trends

- <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/05/03/the-end-of-politics-as-we-know-it-left-right-sanders-trump-corbyn/>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/20/world/europe/how-a-sleepy-german-suburb-explains-europes-rising-far-right-movements.html>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/15/sovereign-citizens-rightwing-terrorism-hate-us-government>
- Chard, Ian (2011) 'Sovereign' Citizens in the UK: A Study in Nonsense. Rainbow Chard [Online] URL: <http://rainbow.chard.org/2011/11/10/sovereign-citizens-in-the-uk-a-study-in-nonsense> (17-07-18).
- <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/libertycentral/2011/nov/16/law-protest-occupy-freemen>

Official responses to SCG

- <https://leeb.fbi.gov/2011/september/sovereign-citizens-a-growing-domestic-threat-to-law-enforcement>