

# Germany's anti-Islam marches

The uprising of the decent

As xenophobic marches continue in parts of Germany, others stand up  
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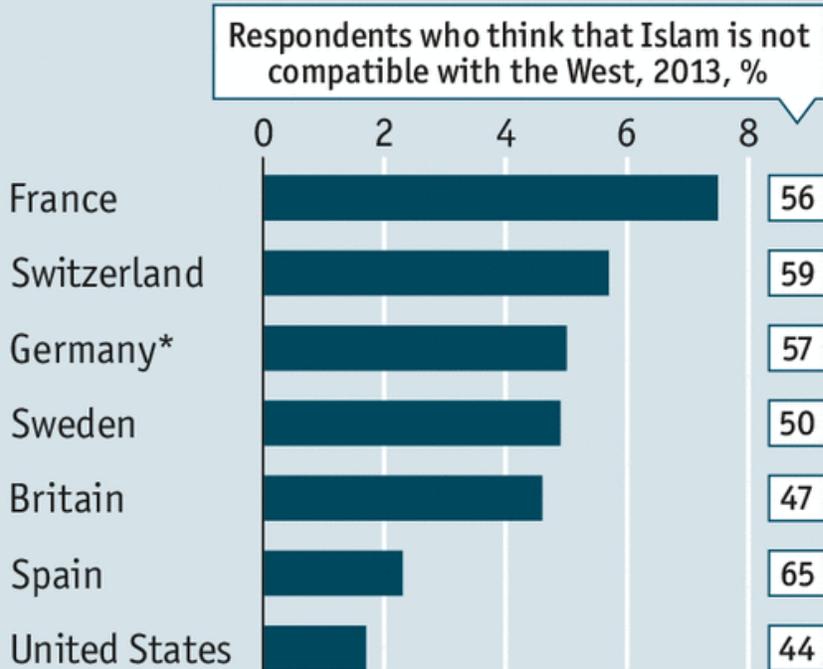
Darkening the dome to promote the light

1. STILL they march, every Monday in Dresden, as they have done since October. Numbering about 18,000, they call themselves Pegida, or “patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident”, and they are against too many asylum-seekers and migrants. They worry most about Islam, surprisingly for Saxony, where less than 1% of people are Muslim. Pegida’s specific demands are unclear, because supporters believe the media is a politically correct conspiracy not worth talking to. The marchers commit no violence and say

- nothing overtly racist, although the protests draw neo-Nazi tourists from all over the country.
2. More telling is how others are reacting. Chancellor Angela Merkel used her New Year's Day address to reaffirm Germany's welcome to asylum-seekers: more than 200,000 applied last year, the most in the rich world. In unusually strong language, she urged Germans to stay away from Pegida: "Do not follow people who organise these rallies, for their hearts are cold and often full of prejudice, and even hate."
  3. Counter-protests against Pegida, in Berlin and western cities, now outnumber Pegida's copycats beyond Dresden. Cologne's archbishop turned off the cathedral's lights to deprive a Pegida-like rally from its backdrop; antis stopped the marchers on a bridge over the Rhine. Berlin darkened the Brandenburg Gate, although its marchers were kept far away by a larger pro-diversity crowd. *Bild*, a tabloid, published a list of 50 celebrities against Pegida. It included business leaders, several ministers and two former chancellors.
  4. Pegida appears to be a "collective insanity" that exists only in places like Saxony where people have hardly any experience with foreigners, says Werner Schiffauer, chairman of the Migration Council, a network of researchers. The movement is strongest among "easterners who never really arrived in the Federal Republic and who now feel they have no voice," he says. Pegida supporters mistrust democracy, criticise Germany's anti-Russian policy and yearn for a more authoritarian government. Behind all this lurks a desire for an ethnically homogenous nation, Mr Schiffauer says. But this has never existed in German history, except just after the war.

## Small, but worrisome

Muslim population, 2010, % of total



Sources: Pew Research; Bertelsmann Stiftung \*Eastern

5. Germans must “rethink their identity”, Mr Schiffauer argues. Instead of the traditional ethnic definition of nationality, they should move to a “republican” one, as in America or France, which is open to newcomers. German law on dual citizenship has slowly moved in this direction, as has public acceptance in bigger cities and the west. But pockets such as Saxony lag behind. The Migration Council recommends setting up a commission to push awareness in the right direction.
6. Such a body might not sway the people it aims to reach, since they would dismiss it as proof of a conspiracy. Populists will feed such scepticism. A new party, Alternative for Germany, which is anti-euro and now also anti-foreigner, is openly flirting with Pegida. The CSU, a conservative party that governs Bavaria and is allied to Mrs Merkel’s Christian Democrats, also sounds empathetic with the Dresden marchers, hoping not to be outflanked on the right.

7. The rest of the political spectrum, however, appears united in opposing the implicit xenophobia of Pegida's message. Stanislaw Tillich, the premier of Saxony, rejected the marchers' invitation to address them. Gerhard Schröder, Mrs Merkel's predecessor as chancellor, has called for an "uprising of the decent". Judging by the turnout at this week's counter-demonstrations, that uprising is in full swing and will in the end carry the day.

Q1: What do you feel about Pegida's message?

Q2: Do you think Cologne's archbishop did the right thing?

Q3: How can we create world peace?

*"Take it as a reminder: The enemy is not Arab people or the Muslim religion. The enemy is fanaticism, extremism, intolerance, hate. The madmen who commandeered those planes don't represent the followers of Islam any more than the madmen who blow up abortion clinics represent the followers of Christ."*

(Leonard Pitts)

*Journalist: "What do you think of western civilization?"*

*Gandhi: "I think it would be a good idea."*

(Attributed to Mahatma Gandhi)