X. Innovations in Activism in the Digital Era
Campaigning for Refugee Rights in 2015–16

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New digital technologies offer citizens, interest groups, and political parties innovative ways to communicate, mobilise, and organise. The internet has heralded many innovations in collective action, from online petitions to viral memes and Twitterstorms. Digital organising and campaigning can have far-reaching effects in a world with over 10 billion devices connected to the internet and where 1 billion people own smartphones (Kissinger 2014). However, commentators are divided over the significance and impact of digital communications on democracy. It is not clear whether the internet has enabled greater and more informed political awareness and participation or whether it degrades political culture by encouraging so-called slacktivism and clicktivism. These are particularly important questions given the loss in confidence in established political parties and the growing strength of populist parties and far-right movements in many western democracies, as Anheier's introduction to this Report highlights.

Digital organising and campaigning can have far-reaching effects.

Some have argued that the internet has degraded political culture by diverting attention and action towards tasks that have little sustained or long-term impact. For these critics the internet has not profoundly changed political action but rather created an illusion of effectual political interventions (see Merkel in this Report). This is problematic for democratic participation as many citizens, particularly those in younger generations, may channel political action into Facebook and Twitter rather than taking action on the streets or through other established forms of lobbying and advocacy. In this view, the internet encourages clicktivism, as opposed to contributing to transformative change or addressing democratic deficiencies (Gladwell 2010; White 2010).

In contrast, others have pointed to the speed, ease, and low cost of communication in the digital era (Shirky 2008). They have emphasised the role of the internet in the Arab Spring, the Occupy movement in the United States, and the *Indignados* protests in Spain (Gerbaudo 2012). Individuals use digital

technologies to connect with others, share information, and mobilise, and in doing so they can trigger pivotal political changes (Margetts et al. 2016). Proponents of this view see digital technologies as transformative and addressing many problems in democracies, such as by enabling greater political awareness and participation in western democracies or by pushing for democratic reforms in less democratically consolidated countries. However, this perspective tends to focus on how individuals use the internet and overlooks the importance of formal organisations to sustain social movements (Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl 2012).

In fact, there are critical shifts occurring in advocacy organisations in the internet era. We now have new, permanent advocacy groups that use the internet to mobilise and lobby for economic, political, and/or social change (Hall and Ireland 2016). This chapter examines the role and contribution of new online advocacy organisations in western democracies. It focusses on groups that identify as progressive and that aim to counter populism and foster democratic participation and political awareness. These groups use online and offline methods to mobilise large membership bases at opportune moments and to drive progressive change (Karpf 2013). However, it is worth noting that also populist movements have used digital media to organise and influence political debate. In the US, new alt-right groups used social media extremely effectively to spread misinformation in their support of President Donald Trump's 2016 election campaign. They were 'shockingly effective' at identifying memes—hashtags, images, video clips, and other media that go viral—to influence mainstream news and undermine Hillary Clinton's campaign (Marantz 2016). The advantage of online organising is that a small group of individuals—even just one person—can without any editorial interference reach thousands more people than the mainstream media can. In short, digital technologies are used by many different groups, from terrorists to populists and from progressives to conservatives, to spread their messages. The focus here is on advocacy organisations that use digital technologies to push for progressive change.

In the last twenty years we have seen the emergence of a distinctive, new, and innovative model of digital advocacy organisation. These groups campaign on a range of issues, from the environment to LGBTQ rights, and their memberships can number in the thousands if not millions. This model exists in many different countries, from the US (MoveOn), the United Kingdom (38 Degrees), and Australia (GetUp!) to Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, Italy, and Romania. Unlike hashtags and digitally empowered social movements such as Black Lives Matter or Occupy Wall Street, these are permanent organisations with professional campaigning staff. Furthermore, they are not simply online petition platforms such as change.org, as their campaigns extend beyond the internet. They may also be on the streets demonstrating.

These advocacy groups all share an organisation model: they are independent, grassroots or netroots, member-driven, and member-funded

organisations. They are distinguished from earlier forms of political organisation by their digital campaigning tools and by their organisational structures and strategies. Traditional advocacy organisations were based around a common identity such as women or senior citizens or around single issues, for example Greenpeace and the environment or Amnesty International and human rights. These new digital-based advocacy groups work across many issue areas simultaneously, and their mode of activism differs. Whereas traditional non-governmental organisations (NGOs) often work tirelessly on single issues, trying to reframe public debate and put their issues on the political agenda, these new groups look for key tipping points, when there is public attention around a particular issue, and then seek to galvanise public opinion to shift decision-makers. Their strength is in identifying these moments and responding rapidly with campaigns–often launched on the same day–to leverage these windows of opportunity. They are not agenda-setting organisations but rather specialise in rapid-response campaigning. This model has been reported to perform exceptionally well in terms of 'impact and force implication', as organisations with relatively few resources can engage supporter bases for sustained periods of time and have 'achieved some degree of policy and cultural change' (Mogus and Liacas 2016: 5). In addition, many of these new advocacy organisations belong to a common international network, the Online Progressive Engagement Network (OPEN), and meet on a regular basis to share tactics and strategies.

This chapter examines five advocacy campaigns in the UK, Ireland, Australia, Germany, and Austria and how they have used online and offline tactics to campaign for refugee rights. One of the few comparative studies of digital-based, multi-issue advocacy organisations, it draws on publicly available information from websites, social media, and mainstream media as well as interviews with lead campaigners in several digital advocacy organisations, staff in refugee and migrant civil society organisations, and journalists and independent experts with knowledge on migration and refugee policy in their countries.[1] This study is a unique global comparison of how digital-based activist organisations worked on refugee rights in 2015 and 2016 in an increasingly polarised political context and contributes to a growing body of literature highlighting the continued importance of organisations for collective organising and mobilising in the digital era (Han 2014; Karpf 2012, 2016)[2].

Studying refugee advocacy in 2015–16 is particularly important, as the supposed refugee crisis has challenged democratically elected political elites across the world. Although the majority of refugees live in developing countries, the crisis is often framed as a European one (McCormick 2016). The increase in refugees worldwide comes at a time of growing populism that draws on xenophobic sentiments and advances anti-immigration and anti-refugee rhetoric and policies across many western democracies. In June 2016 the UK made the radical decision by referendum to leave the European Union, a decision partly motivated by public concerns about immigration. In

November 2016 Donald Trump was elected the next US president after having campaigned for strong anti-immigration policy. Earlier the same year the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) won a large proportion of votes—around 20 per cent—in many state elections in Germany. In Austria the far-right presidential candidate successfully challenged the results of the May 2016 election so that Austrians had to return to the polls for an unprecedented second presidential election in December 2016, which was ultimately won by the moderate candidate. In a context of highly contentious and nationalistic politics, it is important to understand how and in what ways digital-based advocacy groups have mobilised in support of refugees. This chapter asks: what did these activist organisations do to promote refugee access and rights? And were their interventions merely clicktivism, or did they in some way strengthen democracy and democratic participation?

Refugee Advocacy in 2015–16

In late August and early September 2015 there was a global tipping point on refugee issues. On 24 August German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced she would open the country's borders and disregard the EU's Dublin asylum system whereby refugees were required to register in their first country of arrival. Then on 2 September a Syrian toddler named Alan Kurdi drowned while attempting to cross from Turkey to Greece with his family. A photo of his body washed up on the shore featured on newspaper front pages and social media forums around the world. Public opinion shifted dramatically at this time: people were appalled by the loss of life, and even tabloids that had been anti-immigrant featured sympathetic coverage of the event. In fact, a number of campaigners and experts interviewed for this chapter referred to this tipping point as the 'Alan Kurdi moment'. Governments in Europe and beyond were forced to reconsider their policies and faced a hard question: how many refugees were they willing to accept? This section focuses on advocacy campaigns in five countries, especially during the September 2015 period, on the actions taken by advocacy organisations, and on outcomes.

The UK and 38 Degrees

After Merkel's decision to open Germany's borders, then-Prime Minister David Cameron was adamant that the UK would not accept any more refugees. Within twenty-four hours of the images of Alan Kurdi having surfaced, Cameron acknowledged that he was 'deeply moved' but gave no indication of any new UK policies to take in more refugees (Dathan 2015). All the major

newspapers had covered the story, and the tabloid *Daily Mail* ran an unusually sympathetic story towards refugees, headlined 'The final journey of tragic little boys washed up on a Turkish beach: Mother and sons who died in sea tragedy are taken from morgue after heartbroken father says goodbye to the family he couldn't save' (Stanton et al. 2015).

The morning of 3 September 2015, immediately after the Kurdi story had broken, 38 Degrees called a special meeting and launched a rapid campaign to put pressure on Cameron to shift his position. They initiated petitions under the slogan 'Refugees Welcome' that stated: 'We don't want Britain to be the kind of country that turns its back as people drown in their desperation to flee places like Syria' (38 Degrees 2016). 38 Degrees asked people to start their own petitions to demand that local councils accept more refugees. Six hundred and thirty-three local campaigns were launched across the UK, from the Scottish highlands to Norwich and Oxford, and gathered over 137,000 signatures. These petitions also led to the formation of local refugee welcome action groups and resulted in more than 78,000 emails sent to members of Parliament and thousands of phone calls. On 7 September Cameron announced that the UK would accept 20,000 Syrian refugees over the next four to five years. This was a dramatic shift in position, and although it cannot be attributed solely to the work of 38 Degrees, they were able to launch at a rapid pace and mobilise thousands at breathtaking speed.

The work of 38 Degrees went beyond an online petition. Their members (anyone on their email list) raised more than 300,000 British pounds for refugee causes such as refugee assistance packs for new arrivals to the UK. The organisation also played a role in bringing together UK NGOs and civil society organisations to provide the practical support councils and communities needed to resettle refugees. They used crowdsourcing to create the National Refugee Welcome Board, a national, independent coordination entity, and enabled it to start operating. In addition, 38 Degrees worked with partners to send lawyers to Calais, France to file cases on behalf of refugee children in order to bring them safely to the UK. Thus the work of 38 Degrees went beyond simply initiating an online petition: they raised funds, supported the establishment of a new national entity, and worked with others in the refugee sector to directly support refugees.

Ireland and Uplift

Ireland was insulated from the large increase in refugees entering Europe, largely due to its location and its opt-out from the European resettlement plan. In late August 2015 Uplift's director, Siobhan Donoghue, began receiving messages from members stating that they wanted the government to do more and that they would be happy to offer rooms to refugees. Motivated by these members' concerns, Donoghue decided to launch an online petition

in solidarity with refugees just a day before the Alan Kurdi story broke and Uplift received 38,500 signatures. After the Kurdi story, the Pledge a Bed petition was launched, and 14,000 beds were pledged—remarkable given that the total population of Ireland is just 4.5 million and that Uplift had only one permanent staff member and a volunteer working. The mainstream media covered the success of the petition, and the government had to respond to the Irish people's pledges to house refugees.

Uplift, working with other refugee advocacy groups, also organised vigils around Ireland in solidarity with refugees. As Donoghue explained in an interview with the author: 'One member encouraged me to create a physical space, as it was important to give people a space to connect with others.' They held vigils all around the country, from small towns in West Clare to Dublin, where over 1,000 people encircled the river Liffey holding hands. Other refugee organisations through the Refugee Migration Coalition also held vigils and escalated pressure on the government. Finally, on 10 September 2015, Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister) Enda Kenny announced that he would extend protection to 4,000 refugees, up from 600, by the end of 2017 under the EU resettlement and relocation programme.

Uplift's campaign is not the only explanation for this change in decision, but it was an important part of the civil society movement. Furthermore, the government decided to enlist the public's pledges of support, many of which were made through Uplift. The Irish Red Cross was officially appointed to manage pledges on the government's behalf and has followed up with individuals to check if they are still willing to host refugees and for how long and even to check their housing conditions. This is an unusual example of the government inheriting a public online petition with at least the stated intention of delivering on its promises. However, in December 2015 a coalition of refugee and migration advocates criticised the Irish government for 'not living up to the commitments made after considerable pressure from the Irish public to respond proactively to this situation' (Refugee Migrant Coalition 2015). As of July 2016 the Irish government had taken on 273 refugees, and many Irish pledgers were still waiting to host. As one Irish Red Cross staff member explained, the government's resettlement plan had been slowed down by delays in refugee processing in Greece and Italy.

Australia and GetUp!

Although Australia is far away from Europe and has a long history of anti-refugee policies, it was also touched by the Alan Kurdi moment. Immediately after Kurdi's death, over twenty refugee advocate organisations including GetUp! established the Light the Dark campaign to 'send a message to the world that Australians Say Welcome' to refugees (GetUp! 2015). A call went out to rally around the hashtags #refugeeswelcome and #LightTheDark

and to lobby the government to accept more Syrian refugees. They targeted then-Prime Minister Tony Abbott, who stated on 6 September that Australia would not increase its overall refugee quota. From Monday 7 September vigils were held in all the major cities, and over 10,000 people across Australia attended. On 9 September, Abbott declared that Australia would welcome an extra 12,000 Syrian and Iraqi refugees under pressure from politicians at the state and national levels and from the public.

This was a significant shift in the space of a week. As Daniel Webb, Director of Legal Advocacy at the Australian based Human Rights Center, explained to the author, Abbott 'was left with little choice, such was the public outcry. In just about every other moment, there's been more political capital in cruelty than compassion . . . but in that moment the political dynamic changed.' However, it is difficult to attribute the decision solely to GetUp! or the Light the Dark campaign: 'I don't think that the Abbott government listens particularly to those campaigns. . . . The government saw . . . a growing global expectation that Australia would do something given how big the need was. I don't know that he was particularly moved by Light the Dark', as Ben Doherty, an Australian journalist working for *The Guardian*, explained in an interview.

In February 2016, however, GetUp! in coalition with several refugee advocacy organisations did indeed have a significant impact on public opinion and government policy. They ran a campaign called Let them Stay to ensure that 267 asylum seekers (including thirty-three babies) could remain in Australia, where they were at the time for medical care, instead of being returned to offshore detention centres in Nauru or Manus Island. The detention centres are part of Operation Sovereign Borders, a broad strategy to stop asylum seekers from reaching mainland Australia by fiercely patrolling the northern sea border with Indonesia, forcing boats to turn back, and putting asylum seekers in offshore detention camps. Human rights experts, psychologists, and doctors have documented the horrific conditions in the detention centres where many asylum seekers have been abused or committed self-harm (Farrell, Evershed, and Davidson 2016). The campaign resulted from a court case against the Australian government that had been handled on behalf of the asylum seekers by Daniel Webb at the Human Rights Law Centre. When the case looked as if it might fail, Webb approached GetUp!, as, in his words, 'they're a formidable campaign machine'.

GetUp! and its partners–the Human Rights Law Centre, the National Council of Churches Australia, and the Darwin Asylum Seeker Support and Advocacy Network–made front-page news in the major Australian newspapers with photos of the babies who were going to be forced back into detention. They sought to win over the public by highlighting how refugees were much like locals: they featured stories of the refugees, their jobs, music tastes, and hobbies. The core campaign group worked closely with the broader refugee sector, lobbied politicians, and formed a broad-based movement of churches, medical practitioners, and teachers who called for

the government to #LetThemStay. For several weeks the campaign continued to headline news reports, with politicians and many members of civil society coming out in support. Thousands attended protests. The campaign culminated in a dramatic stand-off between guards and doctors at Lady Cilento Children's Hospital in South Brisbane. The doctors refused to release a one-year-old girl, dubbed Baby Asha, into the hands of the Australian government and were supported by protestors outside. The government was finally forced to back down and allow all the asylum seekers to stay. This was a remarkable turnaround, given the Australian government's intransigence on refugee policy. However it was only a partial victory: the government reserved the right to deport the asylum seekers with 72 hours' notice and on 26 July 2016 deported a Sudanese man to Christmas Island.

Germany and Campact

Campact in Germany was faced with a different political situation at the Alan Kurdi moment. Merkel, driven in part by humanitarian motives, had opened the country's borders in late August. Thousands of refugees arrived in Germany and were welcomed with open arms at the Munich main train station. There was a strong *Willkommenskultur* in Germany, where thousands of small civil society initiatives emerged across the country and where people offered refugees a home, a bed, a dinner, or legal assistance. Thus advocacy needs were very different from other countries: refugees needed assistance in Germany, not entrance to Germany. Campact was part of a broad wave of civil society refugee initiatives: in October 2015, they launched *Das Willkommensnetz*, an online platform to connect interested people with refugee-related volunteering opportunities.

Public sentiment towards refugees shifted on New Year's Eve 2015. Several migrants were arrested in Cologne and other cities for sexually harassing women in public places. Although it was not immediately clear to the public if the migrants were newly arrived refugees, the alleged incidents provided fuel for those arguing that Germany should not welcome so many refugees, particularly Muslims who had different views on women's rights. In an immediate response, Avaaz, another international digital-based advocacy group, launched an online petition and video showing refugees giving German women roses to illustrate that not all refugees were sexual abusers with problematic views of women. Following the Cologne attacks, political support for the AfD grew, and the party won a significant proportion of seats in many state parliaments during 2016. The AfD argued that 'Islam does not belong in Germany', and a survey conducted in May 2016 suggested that this view was supported by 60 per cent of Germans (Brady 2016).[3]

In early 2016, Campact worked with Amnesty International, Pro Asyl, NaturFreunde, Oxfam, and other NGOs to hold a national action day against

racism. On Sunday 19 June they organised human chains in several major cities (Berlin, Munich, Leipzig, and Hamburg) and in many other smaller cities where thousands held hands to protest 'against racism, for human rights and diversity' (Nienaber 2016). Campact's refugee campaigns, like the others examined here, illustrate a combination of offline and online activism, and they have worked closely with other advocacy groups. However, Campact's policy or legislative successes are more difficult to identify: this is partly because there were no clear easy wins in Germany in contrast with the UK, Australia, or Ireland. In addition, much of Campact's campaigning energy and attention focused on stopping the EU-Canada and EU-US free trade agreements during 2015 and 2016.

Austria and #aufstehn

#aufstehn (stand up) launched an email action in late July 2015 directly targeting mayors to encourage them to welcome refugees before the German or Austrian borders had been opened to refugees and the Dublin protocol suspended. Many refugees had arrived in Austria over the summer and were facing overcrowded camps without enough food or adequate sanitation. #aufstehn launched a campaign to show the government that there was good will and sufficient space in Austria for refugees. Executive Director Maria Mayrhofer explained in an interview with the author that the government was shifting the responsibility at the time: 'The national government said that the province governments should take care of it, and the province governments said the mayors should take care of it.' #aufstehn argued that there were over 2,100 townships and municipalities in Austria and enough space to provide housing. They set up an email protest with the call *'In unserer Gemeinde ist Platz!'* (In our community there is space!) and urged for *'Zimmerstattzäune'* (rooms instead of fences). #aufstehn initially asked 2,000 people to join the campaign through social media and email, and almost 4,000 people wrote to their mayors encouraging them to welcome refugees in their town or city. #aufstehn reported that working at the local level was effective, as people had greater contact with their local mayors, and many mayors who were already considering housing more refugees were 'relieved that people were backing them', while some others 'were convinced by people writing to them', as stated by Mayrhofer. In fact, #aufstehn found that there was a strong correlation between places from where people sent letters and places where the intake of refugees was subsequently raised. Another asylum NGO, SOS Mitmensch, acknowledged that it is difficult to identify and attribute the impact of this campaign but that in the European summer of 2015 only one-third of communities in Austria had housed refugees, compared to over three-quarters in the summer of 2016.

Austria's border control and refugee policies shifted in August in response to the increasing number of refugees and to Merkel's decision to

open Germany's borders. On 27 September 2015, seventy-one migrants were found dead in the back of an unventilated food truck near Vienna, and the government began inspections of vehicles attempting to cross the border with Hungary. In coordination with Germany, on 4 September the government announced that migrants would be allowed to cross the border from Hungary into Austria and onward into Germany. However, in December the Austrian government started to build a fence on the Slovenian border as part of a new border management system. On 17 January 2016 the government announced it would further extend border controls and repel even those refugees who did not intend to ask for asylum in Austria, in other words those seeking to enter Germany through Austria.

On 11 March, in response to these increasingly restrictive policies, #aufstehn launched the campaign *Anstand statt Notstand!* (Decency not emergency!).[4] The campaign showed two images comparing Austrian streets to a refugee camp and asked people to 'call on the Austrian government to, instead of creating an artificial state of emergency, finally act with decency and reason regarding the refugee issue' (#aufstehn 2016). More than 11,000 people signed this petition, and #aufstehn estimates that it reached over 230,000 people. However, they and other asylum and refugee organisations did not manage to stop the government, and on 27 April then-Chancellor Werner Faymann declared a state of emergency in Austria due to the refugee crisis. This came directly after the far-right candidate from the Freedom Party of Austria had won the first round of the presidential election. The situation continues to evolve, and #aufstehn has been involved in demonstrations, media appearances, and press conferences pressuring the government not to declare another emergency.

Innovations in Activism

How innovative were these campaigns? And what impact did they have on political awareness, participation, and refugee rights? Most of the campaigns were rapid responses that took advantage of a particular window of opportunity: the Alan Kurdi moment. Campaigns were launched within a matter of hours to encourage citizens to pledge a bed (in Ireland, UK, and Austria) and/or lobby the government to increase the refugee intake (in the UK and Australia). Organisations with extremely small numbers of staff were able to mobilise thousands of people and capture significant media and political attention. The fast pace of campaigning, combined with low transaction and organising costs, is one of the remarkable features of advocacy based on email, online petitions, and social media (Mogus and Liacas 2016). All of these campaigns were able to quickly scale up and have an impact at a moment of high public interest.

Furthermore, what is remarkable is the range of online and offline tactics these organisations used, summarised in Table 10.1. Some organisations (in the UK and Austria) used online petitions to directly target councillors and mayors. These campaigns had an impact on refugee rights because they targeted local politicians, who tend to receive less lobbying attention than members of national parliaments. In addition, activists in Austria reported that citizens are in close, direct personal contact with mayors in some towns, which complemented online petitions. Digital-based campaigning allows for the diffusion and decentralisation of campaigns at much greater ease and lower cost and is often more effective when reinforced with face-to-face action.

In fact, all of these campaigns went beyond the digital sphere. Many of the activist groups got people on the streets by holding vigils (in Australia, Germany, and Ireland). They worked with established refugee advocacy organisations and sought mainstream media coverage. Scholars who view digital activism as purely clicktivism miss how these groups combine offline and online tactics in a highly sophisticated style to increase and enrich political debate and participation.

There were also notable differences in the campaigns. Some groups (GetUp!) had more strategised, planned campaigns, while others followed the rapid mode of campaigning, reacting to a change in political opportunity structures. Some groups (38 Degrees) had more sophisticated technologies and were thus able to launch distributed petitions, while others did not have this technology. The ability to capture mainstream media attention also differed: GetUp! ran targeted advertisements and made front-page news for several days in a row in February 2016. What is significant is that these digital-based advocacy groups combined offline and online tactics, mainstream media, and social media to lobby for refugee rights and increase political awareness and participation on this issue.

In several cases, campaigns for increasing refugee numbers were at least partially victorious. Conservative governments in Australia and the UK and the Irish Labour-Fine Gael government pledged to welcome more refugees. It is difficult and beyond the scope of this chapter to attribute these initial victories to each organisation's campaigns. Firstly, there were many other advocacy groups pressuring these governments to welcome more refugees. Secondly, there was a broad shift of public opinion fuelled by the Alan Kurdi story and by global developments including Merkel's decision, which may have paved the way for other conservative leaders, especially in Australia, to make similar decisions. It is also possible that Cameron's decision in the UK swayed Abbott in Australia.

However, in many cases governments have not fulfilled their pledges (in Ireland and the UK), and/or have seen the continuation of anti-refugee policies (in Australia and Austria). Meanwhile in Germany, Merkel has stood strongly behind her decision to open the country's borders but has also pub-

Table 10.1 **Examples of tactics used by digital-based advocacy organisations**

Organisation (country)	**38 Degrees** (UK)	**Uplift** (Ireland)	**GetUp!** (Australia)	**Campact** (Germany)	**#aufstehn** (Austria)
Tactics					
Online petitions (local)	●				●
Online petitions (national)	●	●	●		
Social media campaigns	●	●	●		●
Creation of volunteering network platform				●	
Targeted mainstream media campaign			●		
Vigils and demonstrations		●	●	●	●
Material support (assistance packs for new arrivals)	●				
Crowdsourcing and institution building (National Refugee Welcome Board)	●				

licly acknowledged that this position resulted in losing votes to the AfD. This highlights the importance of campaigning over a sustained period of time for refugee rights and access. Otherwise, governments can make pledges but never deliver. In fact, one major shortcoming of multi-issue, rapid-response advocacy groups is that they often quickly shift attention to other issues and do not follow up to ensure their victories are adequately implemented. Another limitation is that these groups generally do not have expertise on the issues on which they campaign but rely on other organisations for this. Another weakness of this member-driven advocacy model is that it may be prone to populist tendencies and the tyranny of the majority. For instance, some groups were more reactive to their members' preferences and stuck with their refugee campaigns only as long as there was member interest. If members do not respond to an email or petition to 'welcome refugees', these organisations may choose to shelve their campaigns. In some cases professional campaigning staff will override group members and decide to run a campaign even in the face of membership apathy. How they decide which issues to campaign on and how they decide when to drop campaigns are crucial for assessing their ability to counter populist tendencies.

Further investigation should examine the contribution of these advocacy organisations within their national civil society and political contexts. Some groups were more embedded in the refugee and migrant advocacy movement than others. For instance, Uplift's director, Siobhan Donoghue, had previously been the director of the Migrant Rights Centre, and GetUp! worked closely with others in the refugee sector, particularly the Human Rights Law Centre and Darwin Asylum Seeker Support and Advocacy Network. There were also important differences in national political contexts that influenced what groups could campaign on and achieve. Many of the countries (except Ireland) had conservative governments that were traditionally unsympathetic to calls for increasing access for refugees or migrants. The situation was very different in Austria and in Germany, given the large number of migrants and refugees that had arrived overland in the summer of 2015 and Merkel's open-border policy in Germany, which contrasted with Austria's declaration of a state of emergency. The success of digital advocacy organisations is determined in part by how closely they work with other refugee advocacy organisations and by who holds political power.

Conclusion

The utility of new digital technologies for mobilising citizens is now well-established. However, the effect of these new tools is still being debated. A common concern is that online petitions and social media fuel clicktivism. Meanwhile, others point to the transformative power of digital technology for connecting individuals in non-hierarchical ways and with low transaction costs.

We should examine how digital technology is used by this new generation of activist organisations, born in the digital era and using online and offline technologies to campaign, that have led innovative campaigns on refugee rights and have contributed to important victories for refugee access in many cases. These victories cannot be solely attributed to any single organisation, as these organisations worked in partnership with existing civil society movements. Rather, new digital-based organisations have a particular niche: at a key tipping point, they mobilised thousands to pledge solidarity with refugees. They did this through rapid, reactive campaigning: seizing a window of opportunity after the Alan Kurdi moment and mobilising through mass emails, online petitions, and pledges to 'host a refugee' or 'offer a bed'. These were conducted alongside street action–vigils (in Australia and Ireland) and solidarity demonstrations (in Germany). In summary, scholars and practitioners interested in democratic innovations should pay greater attention not just to the new tools of organising but the new structures of organising. These groups are just the tip of an iceberg of new innovative activist organisations that use digital technologies.

More broadly, the rise of digital communication can enrich democratic participation and public debate. This is particularly true when internet technologies are used to complement conventional, offline methods of organising that bring people face-to-face. In fact, many well-established NGOs such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International are increasingly using digital platforms to campaign. Civil society organisations should look at whether and how they can employ digital tactics and/or partner with digitally savvy organisations to expand their outreach and spread their messages. However, digital technologies are also being used by populist movements, terrorists, and the alt-right to further their causes. To understand the internet's impact on democracy we must examine who is using new digital platforms, for what purposes, and how. Social media platforms, particularly Facebook and Twitter, have great power in today's democracies to create the news. Facebook determines what content is shared and viewed, yet we have surprisingly little knowledge about how these decisions are made. Chancellor Merkel recently argued that 'algorithms, when they are not transparent can lead to a distortion of our perception, they can shrink our expanse of information' (Connolly 2016). Governments should pressure social media companies and internet search engines to be transparent about the algorithms that they use and should ensure that digital platforms enrich and inform public debate and do not undermine it.

Endnotes

1 Other scholars have examined individual activist organisations within their national contexts but have not compared organisations within the OPEN network (see for instance Karpf 2016).

2 These latter scholars note the advantages of digital technologies for mobilising but also see their limitations: organisations must still 'organise' and develop their members' abilities and not just 'mobilise' them to take action (Han 2014). They offer more fruitful avenues for inquiry by examining if and how organisations use the internet to mobilise.

3 This stands in contrast with 49 per cent supporting the view that 'Islam does belong in Germany' in 2010, which had been declared by then-President Christian Wulff (Wagener 2010).

4 Note that #aufstehn also ran a number of other refugee rights campaigns, which are not detailed in this chapter due to space limitations.