

Far-right protest in times of crisis

Contingent adaptation or incremental transformation?

Andrea Pirro ¹ Pietro Castelli Gattinara ² Caterina Froio ³

¹University of Bologna

²Université Libre de Bruxelles

³Sciences Po

ECPR SGEU, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa

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Relevance

- From the "Weimar scenario" to the "Great Recession" the far-right (Mudde, 2007; Pirro, 2023) is often associated with periods of crisis, but the precise relationship remains an open empirical question.
- We examine **if and how far-right collective actors change their protest mobilization during crises** (Great Recession, Migration Crisis, COVID-19 Pandemic).
- Protest mobilization: set of demonstrative, confrontational, or violent protests in which nativist groups partake. (Castelli Gattinara et al., 2022).

Far-right protest in times of crisis

- Far-right parties and movements are part of a broader "collective actor" with shared nativist and authoritarian worldview (Castelli Gattinara et al., 2022; Minkenberg, 2003).
- Little attention paid to the non-institutional politics - notably protest mobilization - of the far-right.
- Far-right mobilization has been linked to periods of crisis, either reacting to (Kerbo, 1982; Kriesi, 1995) or proactively manufacturing a sense of crisis (Moffitt, 2015; Taggart, 2000).

Theoretical framework: adaptation vs. transformation

Assesses whether mobilization reflects *adaptation to or transformation through* periods crisis.

- Adaptation mechanism:
 - Strategic response to crises
 - Reacts to changing opportunities (contingent effect).
- Transformation mechanism:
 - Part of a broader counterhegemonic project
 - Aims to root in civil society (incremental effect).
- We consider classic aspects of protest mobilization inspired by social movement studies (della Porta and Diani, 2020).

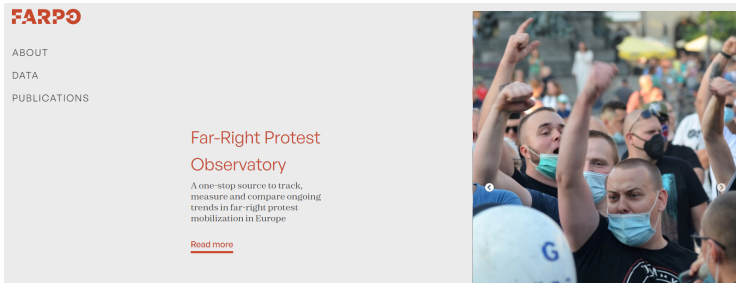
Theoretical framework: adaptation vs transformation

Examine if crises relate to four aspects of protest:

- **Numeric**
 - The rate and size of far-right protests.
 - Whether far-right protests attracted more participants.
- **Performative**
 - The repertoire of action used in far-right protests.
 - Whether protests became more contentious and violent.
- **Thematic**
 - The themes the far-right mobilized around.
 - Congruity between crisis type and mobilization themes.
- **Synergetic**
 - The networks and cooperation in far-right protests.
 - If crises offered prospects for cooperation between political parties and social movements.

Data and design

farpo.eu




FARPO

ABOUT
DATA
PUBLICATIONS

Far-Right Protest Observatory

A one-stop source to track, measure and compare ongoing trends in far-right protest mobilization in Europe

[Read more](#)

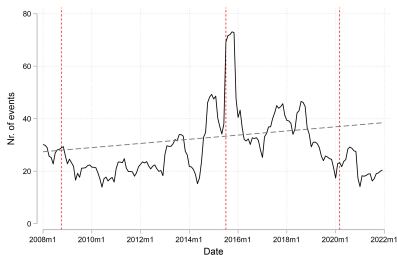


Data and design

- **Countries**
 - AT, BE, DE, ES, FR, IT, NL, NO, PL, SE.
- **Protest event analysis** (Hutter, 2014)
 - Actor-centered with snowball sampling (N=4,440).
- **Periodization**
 - 01 Jan 2008 – 31 Dec 2021.
 - Great Recession (Oct 2008 – Jun 2015).
 - Migration Crisis (Jul 2015 – Feb 2020).
 - COVID-19 (Mar 2020 – Dec 2021).
- **Indicators**
 - Overtime trends: monthly frequency of protest average size.
 - Repertoires radicalness: conventional; confrontational; violent.
 - Issue focus:
 - GR: Anti-elitism; Europe/EU; Economy, Banks, Industry, Welfare; Youth.
 - Migration: National identity and culture; Immigration; Islam.
 - COVID-19: Healthcare + specific items.
 - Type of actors interactions: political parties social movements.

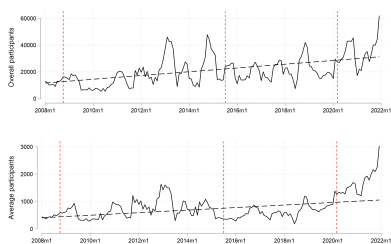
Crises and far-right protest / numeric

Figure 1a: Rate (frequency)



Note: Incremental growth of protest mobilization rates.

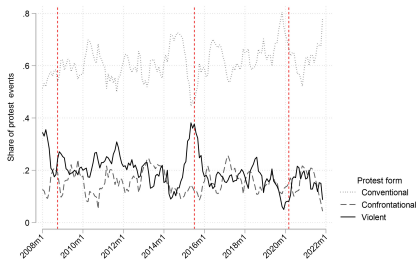
Figure 1b: Size (participants)



Note: Incremental growth of participants.

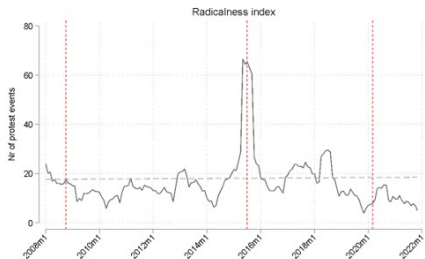
Crises and far-right protest / performative

Figure 2a: Tactics (monthly shares)



Note: Unclear, no contingent impact.

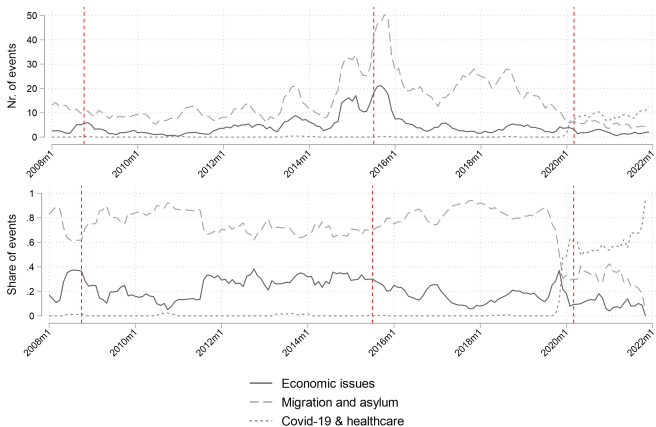
Figure 2b: Radicalness (monthly shares)



Note: Contingent radical tactics (migration crisis).

Crises and far-right protest / thematic

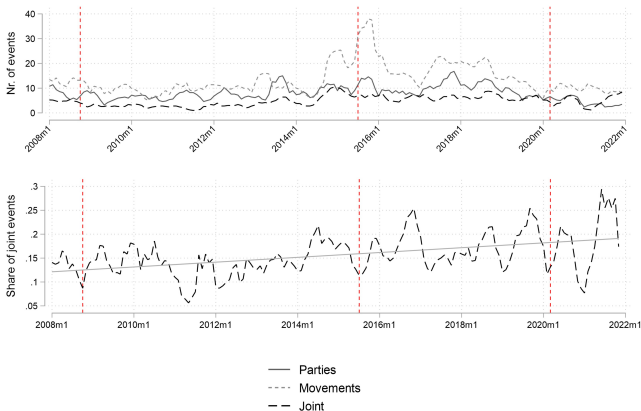
Focus of far-right protest (2008-2021)



Note: Issue-focus continuity with contingent attention shifts. 'Trademark' issues and mix of immigration and economy. Incremental adaptation to specific grievances (COVID).

Crises and far-right protest / synergetic

Type of actors in far-right protest, 2008-2021



Note: Protest arena no longer exclusive domain of non-institutional actors. Increasing collaboration not a product of migration crisis.

Conclusions

Not just crises adaptation but long-term transformation and societal rooting since the 2000s.

- **Upward trajectory of protests**
 - Steady increase in rate and size since late 2000s.
 - Suggests ongoing societal penetration.
- **Moderate tactics radicalization**
 - Conventional tactics preferred across time.
 - Strategic adaptation for visibility.
- **Thematic stability: nativist concerns**
 - Focus on immigration, multiculturalism.
 - Integration of crisis-specific grievances.
- **Increasing synergies**
 - Steady rise in joint party-movement protests.
 - Long-term cooperation beyond crises.

Challenges

Challenges:

- Defining crisis timelines.
- Identifying "non-crisis" periods.
- Overlapping crises: economic, migration, COVID-19.
- Institutional capture timing?

Thank you for your attention!

Literature I

- Castelli Gattinara, P., Froio, C., and Pirro, A. L. (2022). Far-right protest mobilisation in Europe: Grievances, opportunities and resources. *European Journal of Political Research*, 61(4):1019–1041.
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Literature II

- Moffitt, B. (2015). How to perform crisis: A model for understanding the key role of crisis in contemporary populism. *Government and Opposition*, 50(2):189–217.
- Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge University Press.
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- Rucht, D. (1998). The structure and culture of collective protest in Germany since 1950. *The social movement society*, pages 29–58.
- Taggart, P. (2000). *Populism*. Open University Press, Buckingham.



APPENDIX

List newspapers and archives

Country	Newspaper	Archive
Austria	Die Presse	Factiva
Belgium	De Morgen (Flanders) Le Soir (Wallonia)	GoBelga Europresse
France	Le Monde	Europresse
Germany	Tageszeitung	Factiva
Italy	La Repubblica	Factiva
Netherlands	De Volkskrant	Lexis Uni
Norway	Aftenposten	Retriever
Poland	Gazeta Wyborcza	Lexis Uni
Spain	El Pais	Factiva
Sweden	Dagens Nyheter	Retriever

Radicalness index

(Radicalness): (Kriesi et al. 2020: 3-28):

$$\text{Radicalness} = 2 \times \text{Radical_Tactics} + \text{Conventional_Events}$$

where:

- Radical_Tactics represents the count of radical tactics (e.g., confrontation, violence).
- Conventional_Events represents the count of conventional events.

Data collection procedure

Protest Event Analysis (Kriesi, 1995; Rucht, 1998)

Quantitative content analysis
Established in social movement research

Advantages	Disadvantages
Qualitative & quantitative	Labor intensive and time consuming
Handles unstructured data	Requires proficiency in multiple languages
Context sensitive	Text corpus too large for comprehensive examination
Copes with large data	Limited analysis scope introduces bias
Combines multiple sources	Bias can only be minimized, not eliminated (sampling)

Data collection procedure

Coding unit: a protest event

A collective, public action by far-right actors to express critique or dissent, or advance demands via non-institutional means.

Data sources

One quality broadsheet newspaper per country

Event identification: boolean search string on newspaper databases (FACTIVA, EUROPRESS, Retriever)

(relevant far-right actors) AND (protest terms) + snowball

Three-step process

- 1 Preliminary tasks and testing
- 2 First round of coding with 3-step validation
- 3 Snowball search + second round of coding

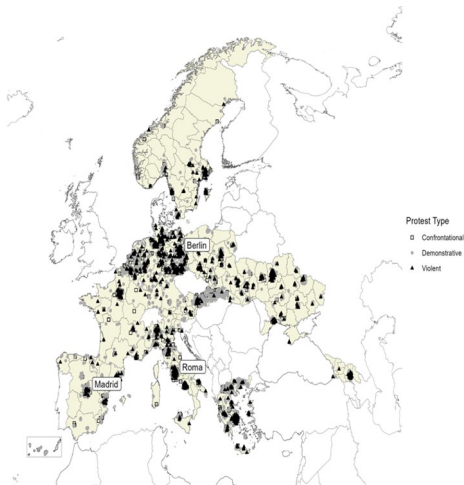
Codes

Basics: Country code, Source, Event ID, Date, URL/headline, Place, Level

Actor-specific: Name, Role, Type, Scope

Event-specific: Size, Counter mob., Police, Type, Issues, Description

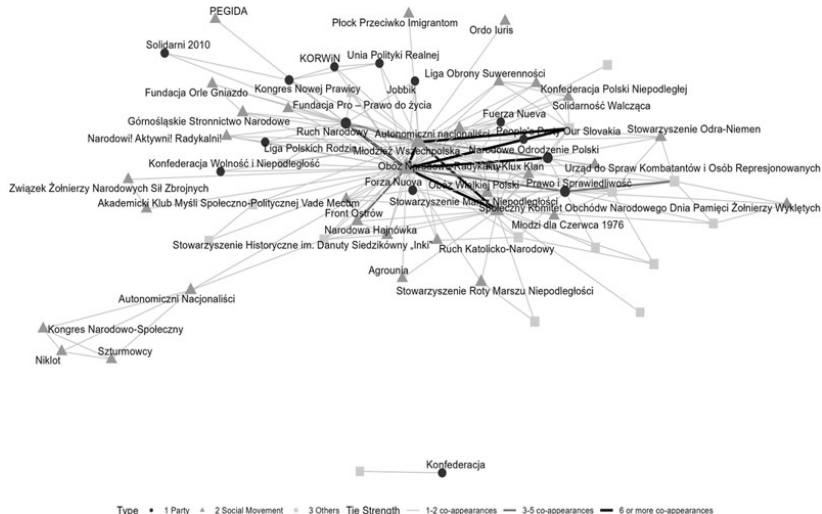
Protest distribution and tactics in Europe (2008-2021)



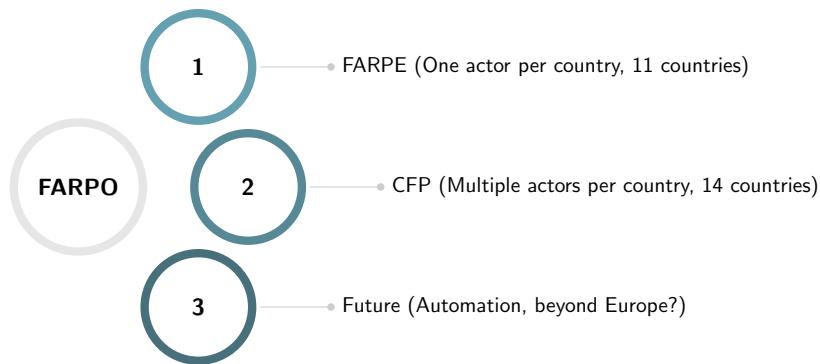
Crises and far-right protest / synergetic / networks

Network of far-right protest in Poland

Poland Network of Actors



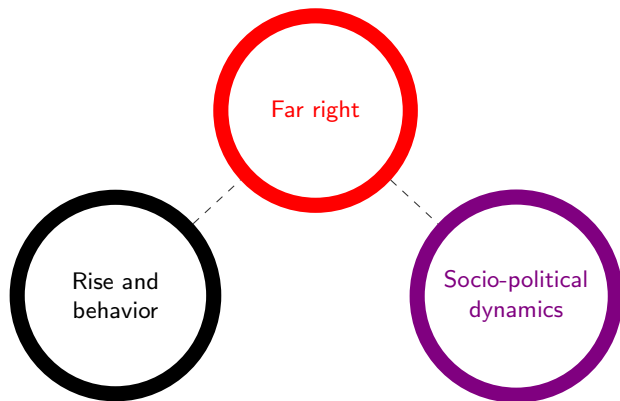
Evolution of FARPO



Fundings: Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX) University of Oslo, Marie Skłodowska-Curie by P. Castelli Gattinara (No 883620), Fondation Nationale de Sciences Politiques by C. Froio (SAB-20222025).

Alternative use of FARPO

Dual perspective



Societal penetration, networks. Social norms, policy, (MEDem, HUMAN).