Far-right contentious politics in times of crisis
Between adaptation and transformation

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Abstract

The far right is often seen to thrive in times of crisis. The unfolding of the Great Recession, the migration crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic provide an unprecedented opportunity to delve into far-right collective actors' relationship with 'crisis'. With our study, we are interested to explore whether far-right mobilisation in the protest arena is indeed linked to short-term periods of crisis or part of a broader, longer-term process of societal transformation from the ground up. We deploy a new dataset on far-right protest events – part of the Far-Right Protest Observatory (FARPO) – covering 10 European countries and the period 2008-2021 (*N*=4,440) to elicit and characterise these collective actors' mobilisation at the non-institutional level. Although nativist collective actors have reacted to periods of crisis, the rate, size, and synergies of far-right protest mobilisation have been steadily on the rise, its repertoire of action has been overwhelmingly conventional, and its claim-making dominated by nativist issues. Instead of simply adapting to crisis, we contend that the far right prompted a broader process of transformation and is increasing its penetration of civil society.

Introduction

The fortunes of the far right are frequently associated with periods of crisis. Whether interpreted as a phenomenon that reacts to social and economic downturns (Kerbo 1982; Kriesi 1995) or that proactively manufactures a sense of crisis (Taggart 2000; Moffitt 2015), the far right[1] is normally perceived to benefit from heightened uncertainty. At the same time, '[p]rotest waves as periods of intense and widespread contention are characteristic for times of crisis' (Kriesi 2020: 77). While the far right and contentious politics[2] have individually gained extensive traction in the literature, the intersection between the two, and their relationship with crises, remain largely under-researched. In this article, we set out to explore whether the protest mobilisation of the far right is actually linked to short-term periods of crisis or part of a broader, longer-term attempt to transform society from the ground up.

So far, the analysis of far-right politics in times of crisis has mostly focused on elections and parties, evidencing mixed short-to-long-term electoral outcomes (e.g. Wondreys and Mudde 2020; Kriesi and Pappas 2015), or crises as 'pretext' for discursive shifts (e.g. Pirro and van Kessel 2017). However, far-right parties, as harbingers of anti-establishment protest, are only but one manifestation of nativist politics. As we consider the far right as a 'collective actor' including political parties, social movements, and subcultural groups (Minkenberg 2003), we make a plea to move beyond the analysis of institutional politics alone and consider grassroots mobilisation as a key component of its political activity. We subscribe to the notion that non-institutional politics is complementary to conventional political participation (van Deth 2014). Protest activity is just but one situationally determined option among many, 'ranging from unstructured collective action to interest group organization to activism within political parties and institutions' (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 1996: 27). There is essentially no reason to consider engagement in the protest and electoral arenas as fully detached; they should rather be considered in continuity with each other.

In this regard, we note very little attention paid to the non-institutional politics of the far right and the mobilisation of social movements *and* political parties in the protest arena – irrespective of 'normal' or 'hard' times. For example, the migration crisis ostensibly facilitated a symbiotic relationship between the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West (PEGIDA) (Weisskircher and Berntzen 2019). Yet, the recent convergence of the far right in support of German farmers' protests (Arzheimer 2024) confirms that a partition of labour between institutional and non-institutional actors can also occur amid relative stability. In our article, we seek to understand whether far-right collective actors change

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[1] With the term 'far right', we refer to collective actors sharing a common nativist and authoritarian worldview (Mudde 2007), and including both radical and extremist variants of right-wing ideology (Pirro 2023).
[2] By 'contentious politics', we mean collective and non-institutional manifestations of political struggle (e.g. Tilly and Tarrow 2015).

their protest mobilisation in times of crisis and, if so, how. The relationship between far-right protest mobilisation and crisis should in principle reveal whether the far right is adapting to changing circumstances or pursuing societal transformation from the ground up. To this end, we define far-right protest mobilisation as the set of demonstrative, confrontational, or violent protests in which nativist groups participate (Castelli Gattinara, Froio, and Pirro 2022), and consider the evolution of this phenomenon across a timespan covering three recent crises: the Great Recession, the migration crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our interest in protest mobilisation draws from the renewed efforts that the far right has poured into street politics (e.g. Ellinas 2020; Castelli Gattinara, Froio, and Pirro 2022; Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2024). Engagement at the grassroots level might serve different purposes – from providing alternative forms of political socialisation (e.g. Blee 2003; Meadowcroft and Morrow 2017) to setting the agenda through unconventional tactics (e.g. Jennings and Saunders 2019; Castelli Gattinara and Froio 2024; Walgrave and Vliegenthart 2012). Here, we wish to move beyond short-to-mid-range outcomes and tackle far-right contentious politics through the lens of two processes: *adaptation* and *transformation*.

As for the adaptation process, the recent crises might serve as a catalyst for nativist protest mobilisation, challenging the far right's earlier, almost exclusive, predilection for 'orderly' political action and institutional politics (Hutter and Kriesi 2013: 287). The idea that protest occurs in waves is widespread (e.g. Kriesi 2020). In this first scenario, the far right's non-institutional response to crisis would be mostly adaptive: it would consist in circumscribed trends of engagement and be related to the three aforementioned crises. The presence of such a mode of contention – which we term 'contingent' – would then suggest that the far right is strategically adapting to changing opportunities in the short run.

Another view would reconcile long-term and durable patterns of far-right protest mobilisation with a broader process of societal transformation. In this second scenario, the far right's engagement in street politics would not be occasional or merely driven by the opportunity afforded by the crises, but hint at a deliberate and far-reaching project of social penetration. This mode of contention – which we term 'incremental' – would be partly independent from the individual crises and would lend credence to a transformation attempt from the ground up.

An incremental mode of contention does not rule out far-right protest activity in times of instability, but appreciates the overall longitudinal growth of such mobilisation efforts. To elaborate further, we do not see adaptation and transformation processes as mutually exclusive. While the first emphasises short-term responses to periods of crisis, the second focuses on the long-term picture. Still, the difference between the two processes is such that while the far right could intensify protest activity in times of crisis, this would not necessarily lead to increased or more radical engagement in the longer run; and while the far right could

intensify protest activity in the longer run, this would not necessarily depend on increased mobilisation in periods of instability.

We particularly value longer-term perspectives because, since the late 1960s, nativist collective actors have been on a counterhegemonic mission to replace the liberal order with a nativist and authoritarian order at the national and international level (Spektorowski 2003; Bohle, Greskovits, and Naczyk 2023; Pirro 2024). The ideological 'renewal' subtending these aspirations has prompted a discursive shift from 'biological racism' to 'ethnopluralism', and partly contributed to boost the appeal of the contemporary far right from the 1980s onwards (Rydgren 2005). This counterhegemonic undertaking appears in some contexts complete (Bohle, Greskovits, and Naczyk 2023). What is often neglected is the fact that such a nativist and authoritarian project rests on the penetration of civil society (Greskovits 2020), thus prompting to move beyond metrics of electoral performance alone. The most direct implication of this process would be the far right's increased ability to mobilise support at the grassroots level. In a broader perspective, then, if the far right is succeeding in this endeavour, their engagement in the protest arena might anticipate – from a Gramscian perspective – a takeover of state institutions (Bohle, Greskovits, and Naczyk 2023; Pirro 2024).

To tackle the presence of adaptive and transformative processes through far-right contentious politics, we examine four aspects of protest mobilisation, which we term *numerical*, *performative*, *thematic*, and *synergetic*. These aspects draw from the characterisation of contentious politics in social movement studies and protest event analysis (PEA), which address the frequency, repertoire, issue foci, and alliance structure of collective actors (e.g. della Porta and Tarrow 1986; Kriesi 2020; Hunger and Lorenzini 2020; Gessler and Schulte-Cloos 2020; Pirro et al. 2021). In turn, these aspects allow us to understand the type of processes unfolding in far-right politics today. Looking at the rate and size of protest, we are indeed interested to ascertain whether the far right has engaged occasionally or consistently at the grassroots level since the outbreak of the Great Recession, and whether and how their non-electoral mobilisation has been able to attract more supporters during the period analysed (numerical aspect). Looking at the repertoire of action of the far right, we seek to understand whether crises elicit confrontation or violence in non-institutional activity (performative aspect). Looking at the claims made at the grassroots level, we want to know whether there has been congruity between the type of crisis and the themes upon which the far right has mobilised (thematic aspect). Finally, looking at possible synergies, we wish to establish whether the recent period of crisis has offered prospects for limited or durable cooperation between different types of collective actors in the protest arena (synergetic aspect).

Empirically, we use a new dataset on cross-national far-right protest mobilisation – part of the Far-Right Protest Observatory (FARPO) – that covers 10 European countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, and Sweden) and the period

between 2008 and 2021. The dataset includes a total of 4,440 protest events and is unprecedented in scope and kind, given its specific and unrestrained focus on far-right collective action. In the next sections, we outline the theoretical and substantive premises of our research effort; we then move on to the presentation of our data and operationalisation; successively, we present our empirical findings, addressing different aspects related to far-right protest mobilisation in normal and hard times. In the final section, we draw a number of conclusions, which lead us to contend that the far right has gained ground at the grassroots level in ways that partly transcend the unfolding of the recent crises. Although nativist collective actors have reacted to periods of crisis (mostly in performative and thematic terms), the rate, size, and synergies of far-right protest mobilisation have been steadily on the rise, its repertoire of action has been overwhelmingly conventional, and its claim-making dominated by nativist issues. In our reading, these findings confirm the import of longer-term views and the opportunity to focus on non-institutional politics to better understand the far right. The overall pattern corroborates the value of combining multiple perspectives in the analysis of far-right politics: while a short-term perspective evidences only partial responsiveness to crisis, a long-term perspective alludes to a broader process of penetration of civil society.

Far-right protest mobilisation in times of crisis

The far right's relationship to crisis is complex and often eludes easy rationalisation. In this article, we examine nativist collective action during a period marked by multiple crises. Our aim is to understand whether far-right protest mobilisation can be interpreted as a response to critical events and/or as a broader attempt at conquering civil society. At least three crises disrupted European politics since the late 2000s: the Great Recession, the migration crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Following previous periodisations (Kriesi 2020), we distinguish between phases of stability and instability. A series of vulnerabilities – from real-estate bubbles to limited financial regulation – led to the outbreak of the Great Recession, which reverberated across the globe and took a dramatic turn in the Eurozone. In this case, we unpack our timeframe of analysis and identify a 'shock' or 'pre-crisis' phase (until January 2010) and an 'Euro-crisis' phase (between February 2010 and July 2015), during which European governments' reactions ranged from the implementation of severe austerity measures to the adoption of bailout programmes. In the summer of 2015, unprecedented numbers of migrants and asylum seekers fleeing war-torn Middle East countries used the Western Balkan route to enter the European Union (EU). While certainly not a new phenomenon, arrivals from this route led to a humanitarian crisis of exceptional scale and to the politicisation of immigration even in Central and East European EU member states with net negative migration rates. The peak reached in the 'long summer of migration' unfolded amid widespread concerns about security and Islamist terrorism. We delimit this period of instability between August 2015 and March 2016. The period between April 2016 and February 2020 was otherwise marked by relative stability. The crisis surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic (from March 2020 until the end of the

period covered by our data, in December 2021) led to extraordinary containment measures (e.g. lockdowns and restrictions of movement) and exposed the EU to common health management and financial challenges. The COVID-19 crisis is indeed a textbook example of how a specific type of crisis might bear several consequences – from the stability of social fabric to that of democratic regimes (e.g. Bohle and Eihmanis 2022).

Against this backdrop, received wisdom has frequently linked periods of crisis to far-right inroads. While the far right might thrive in times of crisis, this phenomenon has much deeper roots (Mudde 2016). At least in electoral terms, their success cannot be solely or straightforwardly defined as a product of crisis. And yet, their prospects of success are in no small part defined by their ability to exploit crises to their advantage. As a result, the far right can either manufacture crisis – whether real or perceived – *proactively* (Moffitt 2015) or channel discontent and fear *reactively*, amid life-disrupting situations (Kerbo 1982). Movements of crisis like the far right have been elsewhere defined as those that 'mobilise social groups that are experiencing or anticipating social and economic decline in the future. They make specific demands in the name of preserving traditional privileges or defending their threatened life chances' (Kriesi 1995: 16).

Our reference to crisis and movements is by no means coincidental. In recent years, we have witnessed the close succession of periods of stability and instability across Europe. On paper, this context provides an opportunity for the far right to transfer contention outside institutional channels, like social movements. On the one hand, the far right could exploit crises and mobilise in the protest arena to voice multiple grievances. Far-right protest mobilisation could be circumscribed to phases of heightened uncertainty and resonate with the notion that, indeed, protest occurs in waves. On the other hand, it is important to put far-right protest mobilisation in perspective. Essentially, the rise of far-right engagement in the protest arena – regardless of periods of stability or instability – might signal that nativist collective actors are consolidating their presence at the non-institutional level – that is, among civil society. This advancement can be interpreted as part of a long-term counterhegemonic project (Pirro 2024). In a Gramscian perspective, the far right's mobilisation against 'liberal' and 'progressive' hegemony has a long gestation, and starts by conquering civil society before moving on to capture state institutions (Bohle, Greskovits, and Naczyk 2023; Greskovits 2020). This inevitably puts the accent on the non-institutional sphere of action and prompts us to turn our look to the protest arena.

While previous studies have focused on the dynamics of protest in times of crisis (Kriesi, Lorenzini et al. 2020; Kriesi and Oana 2023), far-right social movements and nativist engagement in the protest arena have remained a marginal field of enquiry until very recently (cf. Castelli Gattinara, Froio, and Pirro 2022; Hellmeier and Vüllers 2022; Volk 2022; Volk and Weisskircher 2023). This neglect is the product of an – artificial, in our opinion – epistemological

divide that has attributed specific analytical lenses and methodological toolkits to social movements and political parties, due to their activity in different (protest vs. electoral) arenas (Rydgren 2007; Pirro 2019). It follows that the two fields of enquiry – i.e. studies on the far right and those on contentious politics – essentially proceeded in parallel, hardly fostering any interdisciplinary dialogue (for exceptions, see Minkenberg 2003; Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2019). In this sense, the very same fact that far-right parties often stem from the movement sector and engage in the protest arena has been scantly problematised; the French National Front, Greek Golden Dawn, the Sweden Democrats, or the Movement for a Better Hungary are all relevant cases in point (Pirro 2019; Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2024).

Considering the far right as a 'collective actor' (Minkenberg 2003), moreover, we conceive of this phenomenon as organisationally heterogeneous – from the more to the less organised, i.e. from parties to movements and groups – but part of a common metapolitical project (Griffin 2000). As part of this reasoning, we contend that some of these collective actors might work in unison and thus share a common arena of action (i.e. the protest arena). Some others might subscribe to a partition of labour and operate in distinct arenas (i.e. the protest and electoral arenas), while sharing common political goals within a more or less coherent alliance structure. By engaging in the protest arena, far-right parties and movements might signal durable relations rather than contingent interactions (Diani and Mische 2015) and highlight forms of interdependence set to fulfil different functions – from the organisational to the symbolic (Diani 2003). Yet the far right's presence on the ground also reverberates beyond the non-institutional level: it increases the prospects for electoral breakthrough and consolidation, possibly projecting the far right to positions of power.

To be sure, our focus on contentious politics does not neglect that the same entrenchment of the far right in European politics might affect patterns of mobilisation in the protest arena. In more than a way, we consider the European context to be particularly prone to far-right inroads at the institutional level (e.g. Akkerman, de Lange, and Rooduijn 2016). Even countries traditionally refractory to far-right politics like Portugal and Spain have witnessed the breakthrough of successful nativist parties (Mendes and Dennison 2021). Another country like Germany saw the concomitant rise of the AfD in the electoral arena and PEGIDA in the protest arena (Weisskircher 2024). This is not to say that concepts like political or discursive opportunity structures (e.g. della Porta and Diani 2020) have lost their heuristic power in the assessment of movement-electoral interactions. We rather start from the premise that far-right politics have entered a new phase – a phase in which nativist ideas are part of the mainstream (Mudde 2019), and institutional and non-institutional actors and arenas have become permeable (Pirro 2023). As a result, mobilisation in the protest arena deserves attention in its own right. After gaining a foothold in representative institutions, the far right may leverage its movement origins and electoral performance to expand its influence on civil society. Indeed, the far right's hold on civil society may be functional to manufacture consensus once in power.

Bringing together these different insights, we wish to address adaptive and transformative processes surrounding far-right protest mobilisation. On the one hand, the identification of a specific link between protest activity and the recent crises would support the notion of a contingent mode of contention in far-right street politics. This would mean that the far right is adapting to phases of uncertainty and instability. On the other hand, a steady mobilisation growth would signal an incremental pattern of mobilisation. This would suggest that the far right has engaged in protest activity, beyond specific stimuli. To delve deeper into the 'if' and 'how' of far-right engagement in the protest arena, and their implications in terms of adaptation rather than transformation, we consider the numerical, performative, thematic, and synergetic aspects of protest mobilisation. Some of these qualify as traditional characterisations of PEA (e.g. Kriesi 2020; Hunger and Lorenzini 2020; Gessler and Schulte-Cloos 2020; Pirro et al. 2021), which help us understand the course of far-right contentious politics since the late 2000s.

With the *numerical* aspect, we wish to provide an overview of far-right movements and parties' engagement at the non-institutional level, both in terms of frequency of protest and number of participants joining these events. Crises could be opportunities for nativist agents to affect existing mobilisation structures in moments of transition or significant change (Kosellek 2006; Capoccia and Kelemen 2007). If the far right is actually adapting to the recent crises, their protest rate and their mobilising capacity should peak around the periods of crisis outlined above. Should we note a steadier longitudinal trend in far-right protest mobilisation in our timeframe of analysis, we could then reconcile this phenomenon with a broader process of societal transformation.

With the *performative* aspect, we consider the repertoire of action of far-right movements and parties in the protest arena. The interpretation of the far right as a 'movement of crisis' is based on its 'hostile outbursts and collective violence' (Kerbo 1982: 657). As a result, its protesting can take 'quite violent forms from the start' (Kriesi 1995: 17). Fringe anti-democratic movements frequently resorted to a radical repertoire of action in the 1990s (Koopmans 1996). Collective actors might also strategically subscribe to a 'logic of damage', getting involved in confrontational and violent activity to voice their grievances and attract public visibility (della Porta and Tarrow 1986) – especially so in times of crisis (Hunger and Lorenzini 2020). Steady levels of orderly protest activity would otherwise show the far right's willingness to take to the streets, and do so continuously, avoiding the reputational costs associated with disruption and violence. Therefore, should our data reveal more radical responses to individual crises, we could then speak of a contingent reaction to changing circumstances. The prevalence of conventional repertoires of action would then show that far-right protest mobilisation is engaging in a long-term process of societal transformation.

With the *thematic* aspect, we focus on the potential alignment between far-right protest claims and the specific type of crisis unfolding. When mobilising at the street level, does the far right capitalise on its trademark nativist issues (e.g. immigration, multiculturalism, etc.) or does it tap into specific, crisis-related grievances? Crises could be equated to 'focusing events' (Birkland 1998) able to give exposure to themes previously neglected by the political establishment, and thus tip the balance of contention in favour of protesting actors such as the far right. Considering recent protests across Europe, Hanspeter Kriesi and colleagues argued for a spillover between economic and political grievances after the outbreak of the Great Recession (Kriesi, Wang et al. 2020). Should we find far-right claims changing according to the type of crisis, we would regard protest mobilisation as part of an adaptive process by nativist collective actors. Should we derive thematic stability over time, we would consider this course part of the far right's transformative role – in this sense, 'prophetic' (see Lucardie 2000) – and an effort to spread influence beyond institutional politics.

Finally, with the *synergetic* aspect, we unpack the types of collective actors participating in contentious politics to understand whether the recent crises have offered prospects for cooperation between formal collective actors like political parties and looser organisations like social movements. Is the protest arena the exclusive domain of non-institutional actors? What is the partition of labour between movements and parties of the far right? Movements and parties might value the opportunity afforded by periods of crisis and team up in the protest arena; such choice would be consistent with a contingent pattern of mobilisation and be limited to phases of instability. At the same time, a steady increase in joint protest activity by movements and parties might signal an incremental mode of contention and thus the unfolding of a process of societal transformation orchestrated by the far right.

Data and operationalisation

In this article, we use a unique database of 4,440 far-right protest events taking place across 10 European countries between 2008 and 2021. The data was collected within the framework of the FARPO project, and covers all protest events involving the participation of far-right collective actors, understood here as political parties and social movements engaging in any type of publicly visible extra-parliamentary activity.

The period covered by our database allows us to account for contextual circumstances related to the Great Recession (February 2010-July 2015), the migration crisis (August 2015-March 2016), and the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020-December 2021), as well as periods of relative stability before and in between (see Table C1 in Appendix). The countries included in our database are Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, and Sweden. The case selection was based on a threefold rationale: first, we selected countries in North-West, South, and Central-East Europe that were differently affected by the

crises; second, we sought to have variation in the overall occurrence of protest activity at the country level (i.e. beyond far-right mobilisation);[3] and third, we focused on contexts with different types of far-right collective actors with a propensity for grassroots mobilisation.[4] Among these variations, our ambition is to identify trends in far-right protest mobilisation.

Methodologically, the dataset relies on content analysis of media coverage of protest events involving far-right collective actors, which allowed us to quantify and characterise such pool of events (Hutter 2014). The data collection operations followed an 'actor-centred approach' (Pirro et al. 2021; Castelli Gattinara, Froio, and Pirro 2022): for each country, we used substantive case knowledge, secondary literature, and the input of national experts to build an extended list of relevant far-right collective actors over the observed period, including grassroots groups, social movements, and political parties. As a following step, we merged this list with a set of keywords defining 'protest' or 'street activity' in a broad sense (using translations to cope with linguistic differences across countries). We used this complex Boolean search string to extract articles that concurrently referred to protest actions and at least one of the far-right actors of interest from the digital archives of national newspaper databases. Finally, we extended the original list of actors through snowball sampling by running the initial semi-automated search on protest activities with the names of those additional far-right actors that had come up during the first round of coding operations (see Appendix for further details on data collection and coding).

We relied on this database to construct various empirical indicators following consolidated practice in PEA (Lorenzini et al. 2022). In particular, we used information about the date in which the protest events occurred to define the monthly level of mobilisation (the number of events occurring over a month), and the number of attendees to determine the event size[5] (reported in aggregate numbers and average monthly number of participants per protest event).[6] Both indicators were weighed by the logarithm of population size to account for

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[3] POLDEM data, which measures all protest events taking place in Europe over the period 2000-2015, shows an average of 7.8 monthly events across the 10 cases, ranging from a maximum of 17.5 monthly events in France to a minimum of 1.2 events in Norway (Kriesi, Wüest et al. 2020).

[4] Far-right political parties showed high propensity towards grassroots action in Spain, with approximately half (46 per cent) of protest events being promoted by election-oriented actors, followed by Italy with 37 per cent. In contrast, the lowest rates were identified in Norway and France, where respectively 87 and 84 per cent of protest activity originated from social movements.

[5] The protest size was categorised into seven groups, and later each category was redefined to a numerical value at its midpoint. Specifically, the range of 2 to 15 persons was adjusted to 8 participants, 51-100 participants were recoded as 75, and the highest category (more than 10,000 persons) was recoded as 12,000 participants.

[6] Drawing data from mass media sources, we do not have information on the number of participants for at least 37 per cent of the events. To avoid losing any cases due to lack of information, we imputed the number of participants following established standards in PEA (Lorenzini et al. 2022). Specifically, to each event without information on the participants, we attributed the median number of people who participated in an event with the same form of action in the same country. See the Appendix for additional details.

important differences in country sizes. [7] Moreover, we considered the repertoire of action deployed at protest events[8], and used this information to build an indicator of radicalness[9] of protest tapping into the performative aspect of collective action. As for the issue foci of protests, we recoded a selection of the 27 original categories designating the mobilisation claims or issues into a single item indicating whether the protest referred to any of the crisis-related domains: economy, immigration/multiculturalism, and health/COVID-19.[10] Finally, we looked at the type of actors participating in collective action to uncover cooperation among different types of organisations. Specifically, we distinguished between full-fledged political parties that systematically run for elections, and social movements and other groups that are mainly geared towards protest action, do not run for elections, or only do so occasionally.

Assessing the linkage between far-right protest mobilisation and crisis

The numerical aspect

As a first step, we consider whether far-right protest mobilisation is linked to the recent crises. To address the numerical aspect of nativist collective action, we offer an overview of far-right engagement in the streets. We particularly look at the frequency of far-right protest mobilisation (Figure 1) and the number of people attending these events (Figure 2), displaying data by five-month running averages.[11] In each graph, the timeline is divided into periods of stability (white shades) and instability (grey shades).

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[7] Further details on the weighing choices applied in this analysis, including the use of a logarithmic scale based on country size, can be found in the Appendix and are complemented by Figure B1.

[8] We followed existing classifications (Hutter 2014) and recoded the 21 items into three categories: conventional actions such as demonstrative marches and rallies, vigils, and public assemblies (including non-authorised ones); confrontational actions ranging from roadblocks and occupations of buildings to the sabotage and interruption of public events; and violent actions such as threats, physical confrontation, and violence against property and people (Castelli Gattinara, Froio, and Pirro 2022).

[9] This item builds on the idea that the significance of a protest action is not solely contingent on its scale, but also on its newsworthiness and, thus, on its radical nature and originality (Rochon 1990). Accordingly, Lorenzini et al. (2022) proposed an item which excluded conventional protest actions while summing up other forms of protest and weighing violent events twice as much as confrontational ones. Although the frequency and radicalness of protest are closely related (since both stem from the count of events), the share of violent actions varies considerably in our dataset, ranging from a minimum of 8 per cent in Spain, to a maximum of above 30 per cent in Sweden, and that of confrontational actions from 9 per cent in Germany to 27 per cent in The Netherlands.

[10] Specifically, we used the following items. For the Great Recession: Anti-elitism and corruption (e.g. elites, technocracy, bankers, intellectuals); Europe, European integration, and the EU (incl. the euro); Industry, energy, agriculture, and the environment; Monetary politics and the economy (incl. taxes and taxation); Banks; Welfare, retirement, and pensions; Youth; Education. For the migration crisis: National identity and culture; Immigration and multiculturalism; Islam. For the COVID-19 pandemic: Healthcare; and a specific item for COVID-related events.

[11] Running averages are standard practice in studies based on PEA. Extant research shows that using five-month moving averages is the most meaningful way to pool protest event data, as it allows to standardise short-term variation without distorting descriptive and visual analyses (Lorenzini et al. 2022).

Figure 1. Monthly number of far-right protests in Europe, 2008-2021 (weighed, running averages)
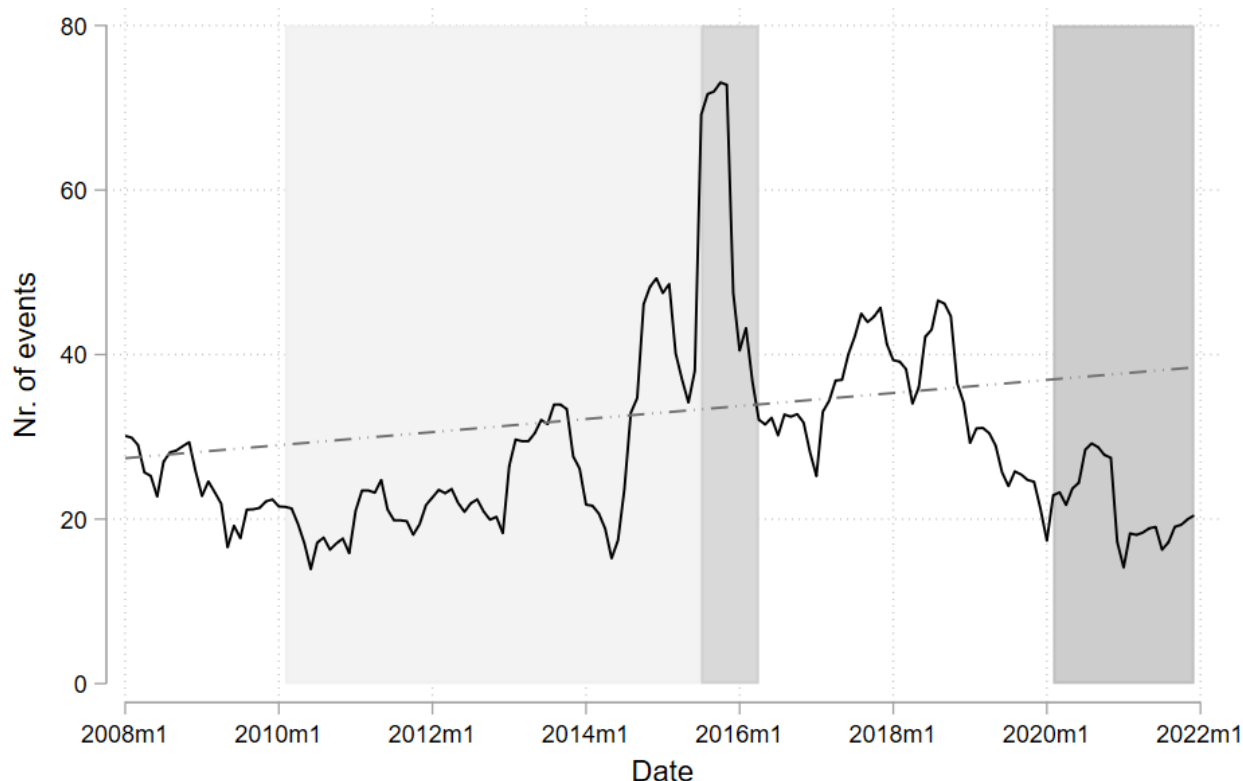
Regarding the number of far-right protest events in Europe, Figure 1 shows that grassroots mobilisation is marked by ebbs and flows, and by an overall increase over time. Protests in periods of stability averaged 8 per month, while we note an escalation in periods of instability: 23 events per month during the Great Recession, 54 during the migration crisis, and 19 during the COVID-19 pandemic (Table C1 in Appendix). If the number of events oscillated consistently around 20 per month before 2014, the migration crisis did effectively prompt increased protest activity. The number of events peaked 70 per month in the second half of 2015 – following the so-called 'long summer of migration' – and then hovered between 30 and 40 per month the following year. This is however the cumulation of a protest wave that had already started the previous summer, which supports the idea that the far right was a proactive manufacturer of the crisis via the politicisation of migrant arrivals (e.g. Castelli Gattinara 2018). After March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic did not simply inhibit protest action by the far-right but accelerated a downward trend that had started in late 2018.[12] Essentially, the rate of protest

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[12] To further elaborate on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we excluded the months following March 2020 from the analysis, under the assumption that mobilisation might have been complicated by lockdown and other restrictive measures (see Figure B1.1 in Appendix). The main results were however consistent: while we note an increase in the number of protest events, we noted that far-right protest mobilisation had already declined before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

events increased both during periods of instability (short term) and, on average, throughout the period 2008-2021 (long term).[13]

Participation in far-right protest events shows a clear upward trend, which holds beyond our weighing and imputation choices.[14] Figure 2 illustrates that in the year 2008, the overall participation in far-right protest events did not exceed 20,000 people; by 2021, it surpassed 30,000. The average participation in single far-right protest events was below 500 people in 2008, but above 1,000 in 2021. Specifically, we found an average of 778 participants per protest during the Great Recession, 293 during the migration crisis, and 1566 during the COVID-19 pandemic (Table C1 in Appendix). The average participation in periods of instability is thus higher than in periods of stability. However, the migration crisis period is marked by several protest events with relatively low attendance, with only a few, occasional mass gatherings involving several thousand participants. Conversely, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the overall number of demonstrations decreased due to restrictions, but participation often reached unprecedented highs. During this period there were fewer but better attended protest events, although not all participants in the anti-mask or anti-vaccine mobilisations were necessarily far-right supporters. In this regard, it is worth noting that the significant increase in the number of participants to far-right sponsored events is confirmed also if we exclude all COVID-related protests (see Figure B2.3 in Appendix).

Figure 2. Overall and average participation in far-right protests in Europe, 2008-2021 (weighed, running averages)

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[13] Considering the set of countries included in our study, an upward trend in the rate of protest events is more pronounced in countries like Germany and Sweden, but actually negative in France (see Figure B1.3 in Appendix).
[14] As noted above, we applied rather restrictive standards by excluding large events from the weighing by population size, and attributed a value of 12,000 participants to all events coded as having 'more than 10,000 people'. See Figure B2.1 and B2.2 in Appendix.
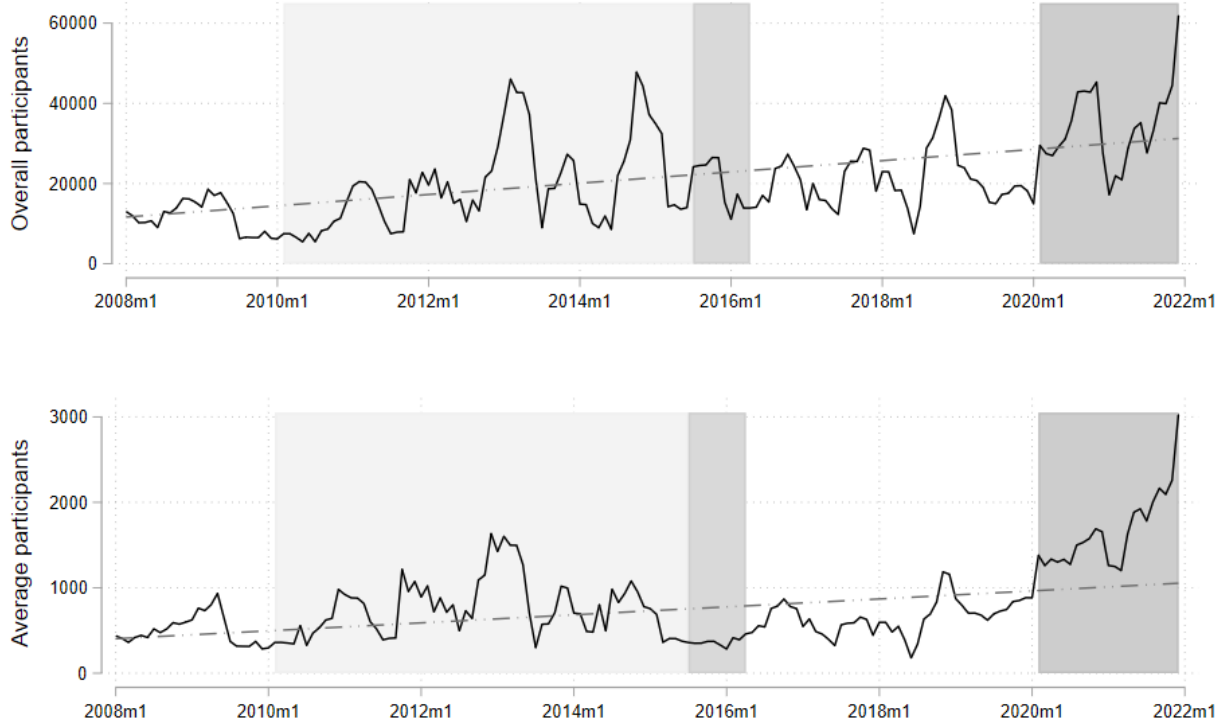
Overall, the analysis of the numeric aspect confirms that far-right collective actors did in fact engage in street activity. However, the far right's propensity for contentious politics lends itself to parallel interpretations. On the one hand, a short-term perspective shows that the far right has increased its protest rate and mobilising capacity in times of crisis. On the other, a long-term perspective demonstrates that both the rate of protest events and their attendance have been, on aggregate, on the rise. While we note a longitudinal increase in far-right protest participation, the rate of these events indeed peaked during periods of instability. Therefore, a contingent engagement *complements* the incremental rise of far-right protest, instead of ruling it out. In this sense, our results point to adaptation embedded in a broader transformative process led by the far right.

The performative aspect

To address the performative aspect, we consider the repertoire of action of far-right movements and parties in the protest arena, and investigate whether the three crises instigated a radicalisation of their tactics. This part of the analysis proceeds in two steps: first, we describe the relative frequency of distinct forms of action in far-right protest mobilisation; second, we dig into the radicalness of protest action to assess whether protest events have become more confrontational and/or violent over time. In each graph, the timeline is divided into periods of stability (white shades) and instability (grey shades).

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We distinguish between conventional, confrontational, and violent activity. Figure 3 reports the relative incidence of each form of action over the total of monthly protest events during the period 2008-2021. We note that the far right has predominantly relied on conventional forms of action: approximately 60-70 per cent of their activities fall within this category, while the remaining share involves confrontational and violent tactics. In this regard, there is a discernible impact of the migration crisis, leading to an increase in violent protest between 2015 and 2016. During this period, the frequency of violent activity outweighed the combined occurrence of violent and confrontational events throughout the remaining timeframe of analysis, which also coincided with a decrease in the relative frequency of conventional protest. This observation is further confirmed by Figure 4: the radicalness of far-right protest action did not substantially increase over time, but it rose to unparalleled levels during the migration crisis.

Figure 3. Forms of action in far-right protest mobilisation, 2008-2021 (monthly shares, running averages)
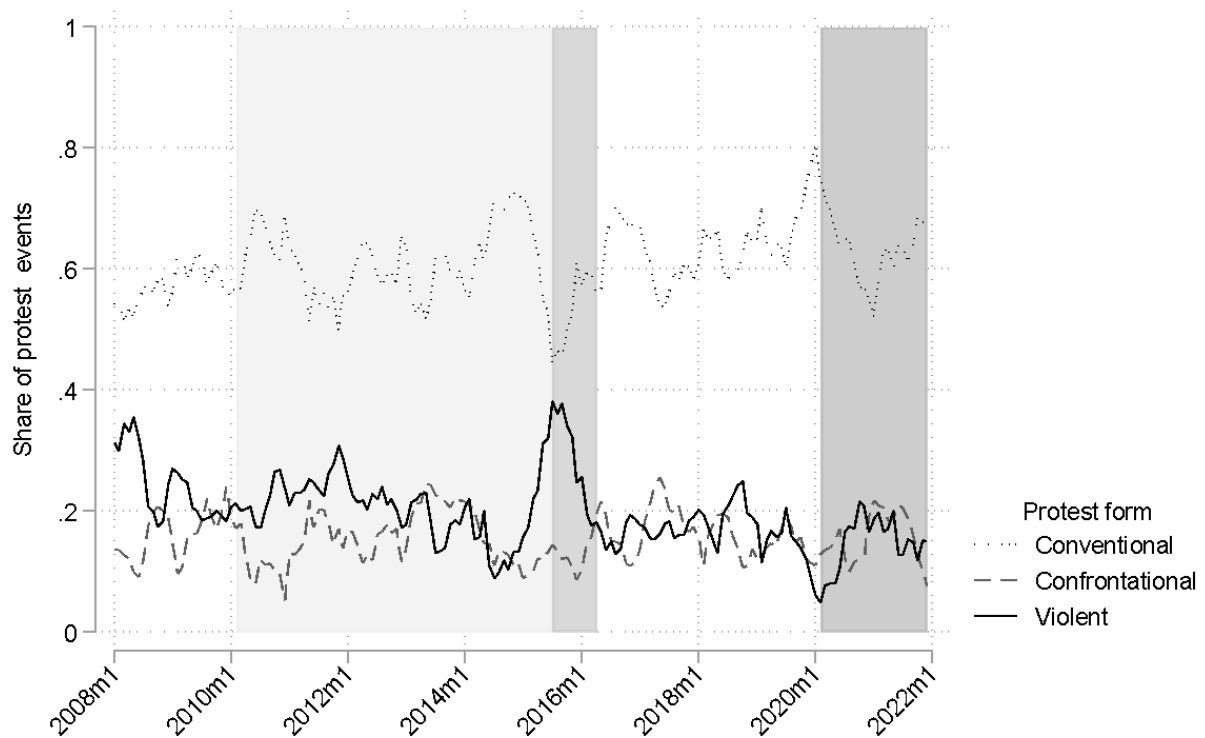
Figure 4. Radicalness of far-right protest events, 2008-2021 (running averages)

Radicalness index
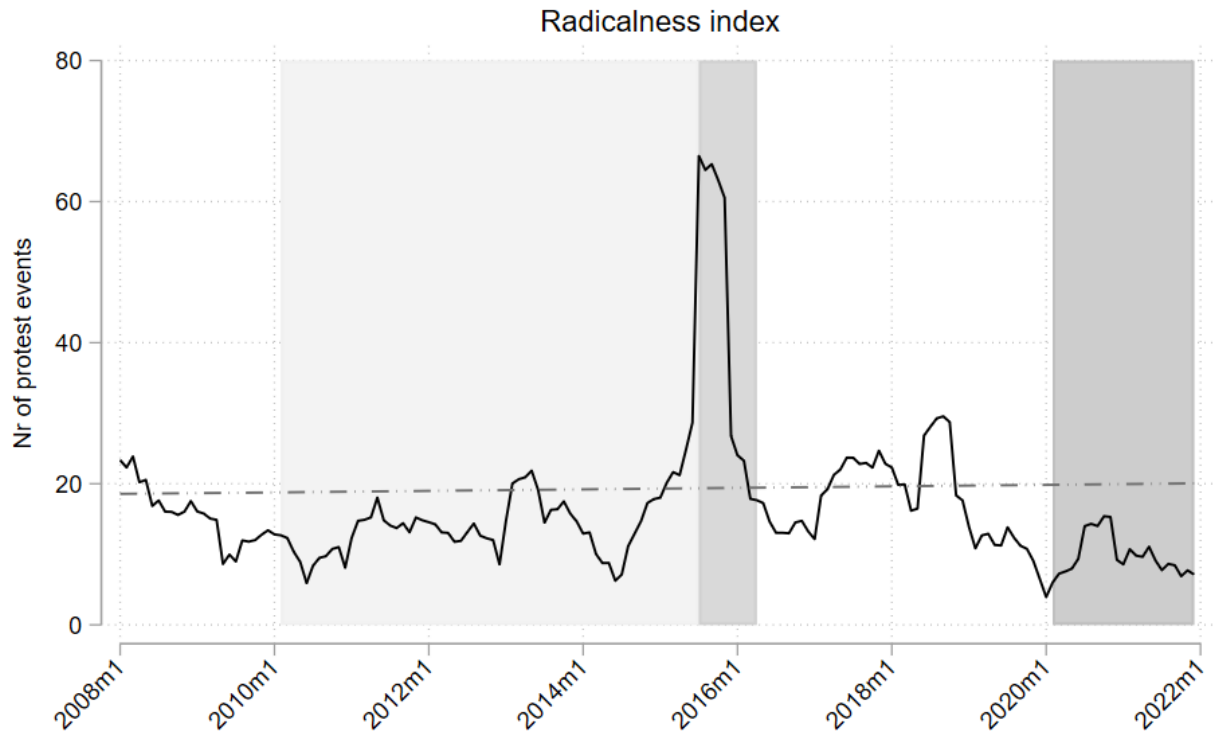
Overall, the analysis of far-right repertoires evidenced a case of 'punctuated stability'. The migration crisis indeed prompted radicalisation: during this phase of instability, far-right protest mobilisation proved more confrontational and violent. This observation would lend credence to the circumscribed nature of disruptive activity (Kerbo 1982; Kriesi 1995) and essentially confirm that the far right is capable of adaptation to evolving circumstances. However, leaving aside the migration crisis, the share of violent protest events in periods of stability is not lower compared to periods of instability, just as radicalness in periods of stability is not much higher compared to periods of instability. We think that both the prevalence of conventional protest and the relative stability of the far right's repertoire of action point to a 'normalisation of protest', which is compatible with the entrenchment of far-right politics at the grassroots level and a broader process of transformation.

The thematic aspect

As a third step in our analysis, we look at the congruence between the claims made and issues addressed through far-right protests and specific, crisis-related grievances. To do so, we associated the Great Recession, the migration crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic with economic grievances, immigration and multiculturalism, and healthcare/COVID-related issues, respectively. By looking at the issue foci of far-right protest events, we considered the salience of the topics linked to each of the three crises. Figure 5 shows the issue foci of far-right

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protest mobilisation over time. In each graph, the timeline is divided into periods of stability (white shades) and instability (grey shades). We report this information both as the aggregate number of protest events and as monthly shares to control for variations in the level of mobilisation at different points in time.

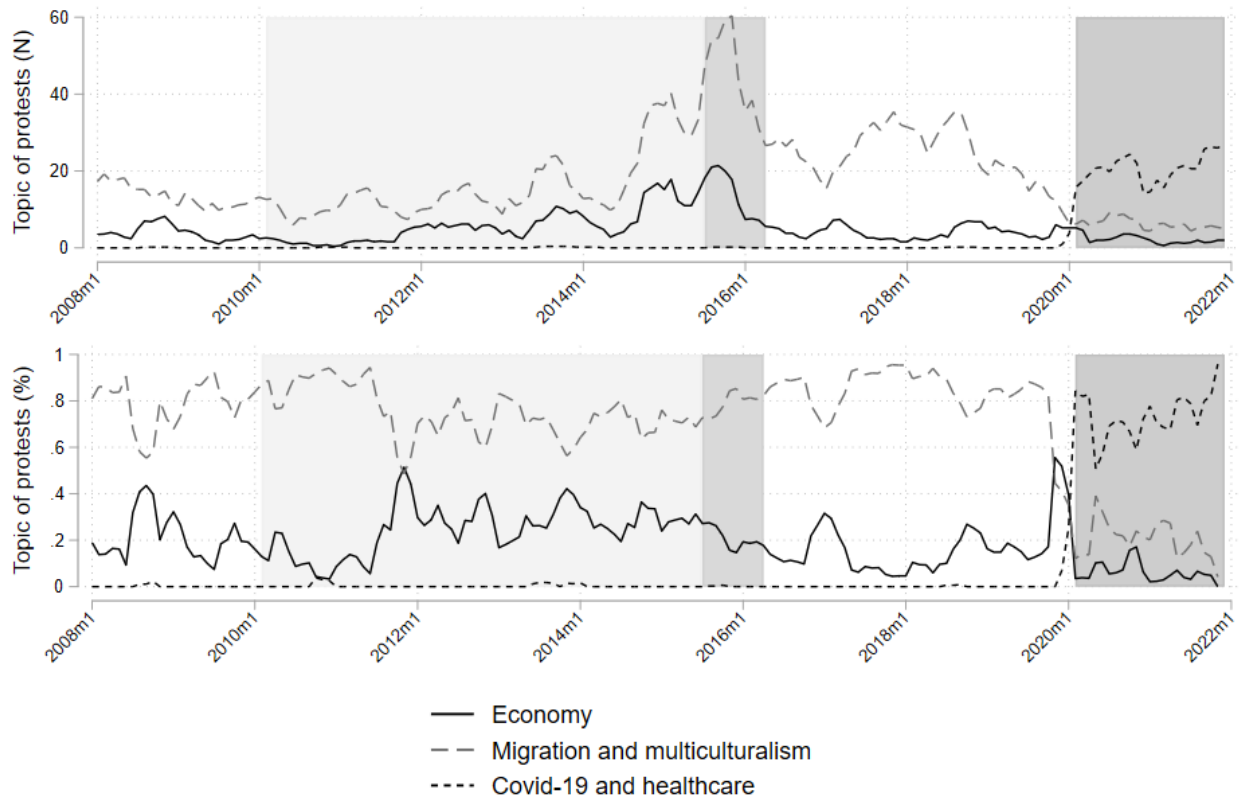**Figure 5.** Issue foci of far-right protest mobilisation, 2008-2021 (running averages)

- Economy
- Migration and multiculturalism
- Covid-19 and healthcare

Figure 5 indicates that each crisis elicited the attention of far-right collective actors around specific (i.e. crisis-related) issues, taking stock of pre-existing economic and cultural grievances.[15] Nevertheless, themes related to immigration and multiculturalism consistently took the lion's share in far-right protest mobilisation, with a predictable and notable peak during the migration crisis. The relevance of the issue is confirmed by its sustained mobilisation in subsequent years. Economic issues garnered variable attention but are especially linked to the initial phases of the Great Recession and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic; this is evident in relation to concurrent decreases in the salience of immigration and multiculturalism. Interestingly, these issues appear to intersect with economic claims before and during the migration crisis, which hints at spillover mechanisms between different types of grievances

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[15] Additional support for this interpretation comes from the analysis of the variation in entropy scores, which measured the degree of dispersion across issues or the dissimilarity of far-right protests across topics. Figure B3.1 in Appendix confirms that entropy varied substantially at the onset of each of the three crises, confirming the notion that these periods serve as catalysts and draw attention to specific issues.

(Kriesi, Wang et al. 2020).[16] By contrast, issues related to COVID-19 and healthcare were largely absent from protest mobilisation until March 2020, when they surged to prominence and fully dominated the agenda.

Overall, the analysis showed substantial continuity in the issue foci of far-right protest, but also contingent attention shifts in the face of specific crises. On the one hand, the far right has predominantly capitalised on its 'trademark' nativist issues. Leaving aside the COVID-19 pandemic, the attention distribution is essentially the same in periods of stability and instability. Among other things, this consistency is testimony to the far right's ability to read the economy through nativist lenses and/or interpret immigration also as an economic issue (Mudde 2007). On the other hand, far-right collective actors have been able to integrate the specific stock of grievances associated with the three crises. Most notably, the prominence of healthcare and COVID-related aspects confirmed the far right's ability to swiftly adapt to varying – even potentially unfavourable – circumstances and feed the fire of crisis. In sum, the evidence presented demonstrates a partial adaptive capacity amid the prominence of issues related to culture and ethnicity – elements that point to overall claim consistency and largely in line with expectations concerning a process of transformation.

The synergetic aspect

We finally consider whether the recent crises have offered opportunities for greater cooperation among different nativist collective actors, i.e. political parties and social movements. We first consider the (type of) collective actors that participated in protest events to understand whether the protest arena is still the chief preserve of non-institutional actors. In doing so, we also address the margins of cooperation across the movement–party divide, and thus the role of crisis in facilitating or hindering far-right collaboration. The top graph in Figure 6 displays the aggregate number of events involving only political parties, next to those involving only social movements, as well as events joined by both. The lower part of the graph shows the share of total protest actions featuring both movements and parties of the far right. In each graph, the timeline is divided into periods of stability (white shades) and instability (grey shades).

Figure 6. Type of collective actors in far-right protest mobilisation, 2008-2021 (running averages)

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[16] Although economic issues are frequently associated with the EU, this does not appear to be the case for protests linking migration to economic matters. Such protests seem to focus predominantly on domestic economic issues. Figure B4.3 in Appendix shows results including EU-related issues in the 'Migration' category, showing no significant differences from the data visualised in Figure 5.
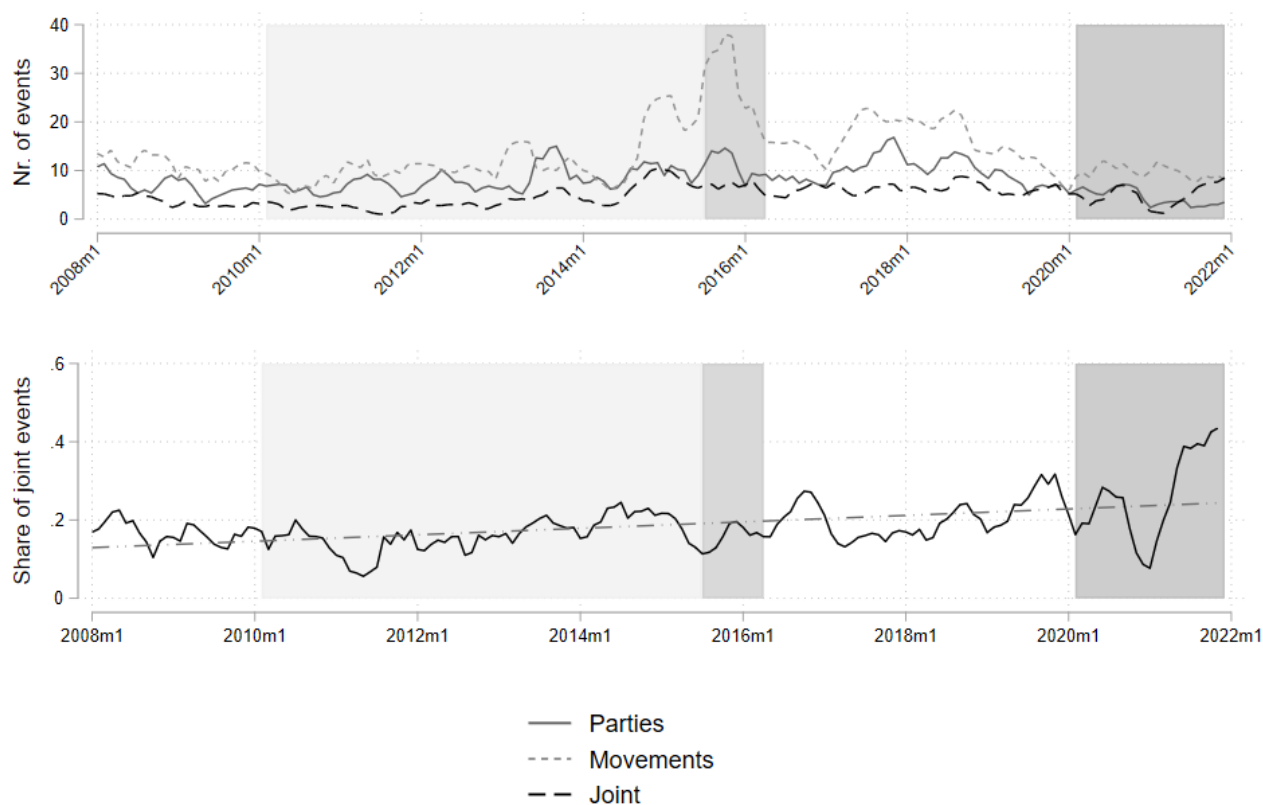
During the period 2008-2021, we note that the protest arena could hardly be considered the exclusive domain of non-institutional actors: far-right parties geared towards institutional representation are also, and quite frequently, 'in the streets'. Out of the 4,440 protest events included in our database, half involved exclusively social movements (51.2 per cent, or 2,273 events); roughly a third involved only political parties (30.6 per cent, or 1,357 events); and the remaining 18.2 per cent (810 events) included both types of collective actors.[17] Moreover, between 2008 and 2014, the patterns of protest mobilisation were strikingly similar for movements and parties, suggesting that institutional and non-institutional collective actors responded to similar factors and incentives, regardless of their propensity to contest elections. Even so, social movements were mostly responsible for the increased levels of far-right protest activism after the migration crisis, and their prominence in the protest arena continued in following years, only to slightly decrease at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Joint protest actions – i.e. involving both political parties and social movements – tended to be less frequent than those in which different types of collective actors participated separately. Yet, cooperation has been on the rise: as reported in the lower graph of Figure 6, joint actions represented about 12 per cent of total far-right protest events at the outbreak of the Great Recession and averaged around 20 per cent by the end of the period under observations, with

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[17] Differences are slightly bigger if we consider the type of collective that *initiated* protest (i.e. organiser or promoter) instead of simply participating in it. Social movements initiated about 56 per cent of protest events, political parties 30 per cent, and joint actions accounted for about 14 per cent of the total. See Figure B4.1 in Appendix.

peaks of 25 per cent in early 2017 and even 40 per cent in 2021 – notably, at a time of intermittent protest mobilisation.

Overall, our data shows that synergies between far-right parties and movements mirror long-term, consistent transformations in the protest arena, rather than contingent ones associated with specific periods of crisis. In this regard, the protest arena is no longer the exclusive domain of non-institutional actors, as movements and parties took to the streets quite frequently, and increasingly so in collaboration with one another. Specifically, if the migration crisis represented a high point of far-right grassroots engagement, the increased cooperation among different types of collective actors was not necessarily a product of the crisis; it actually preceded its outbreak, confirming a structural tendency towards joint mobilisation between parties and movements of the far right.

Discussion and conclusions

We started our article discussing the elusive relationship between the far right and crises. Far-right collective actors have been variously considered proactive or reactive forces, and able to benefit from times of uncertainty and instability. Conversely, the notion that nativist collective actors are trying to penetrate society as part of a counterhegemonic project has not received due attention. In such case, a specific crisis might merely serve as background condition in a sustained effort by the far right to root itself in society. This process of societal transformation involves becoming increasingly embedded in non-institutional politics, conquering civil society, and seeking change from the ground up. Disentangling these dynamics begs short- and long-term perspectives on far-right mobilisation.

Against this backdrop, we delved deeper into the linkage between far-right mobilisation in the protest arena and the three crises that shook European politics since the late 2000s: the Great Recession, the migration crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic. We took short-term as well as long-term perspectives to unravel the incidence of two processes. We essentially argued that contingent and circumscribed responses to these crises would entail an adaptive process by the far right. At the same time, we urged a reflection on broader longitudinal trends: steady and incremental modes of contention might also allude to a transformative process orchestrated by the far right. Making use of novel protest event data covering 10 European countries and the period 2008-2021, we approached the relationship between the far right and crisis tackling numerical, performative, thematic, and synergetic aspects of nativist contentious politics. Reflecting on these aspects, we could derive a number of conclusions.

First, far-right protest mobilisation has been on the rise since the late 2000s, both in terms of 'supply' of non-institutional activities by far-right parties and movements, and in terms of 'demand', as for the average number of people participating in these events. While the far right's mobilisation rate peaked around the migration crisis, its protest activity has been, on aggregate, on a steady upward trend (at least) from 2008. Our data also showed that a similar trend held for participants to protest events sponsored by the far right. The sheer numerical aspect thus suggests that, alongside adaptation to one of the three crises, the far right has steadily increased its presence at the grassroots level – in line with a process of transformation. This observation clearly substantiates the value of adopting short- as well as long-term perspectives, and the opportunity to interpret far-right protest mobilisation as both adaptive and transformative. Second, despite an increase in confrontational and violent activity during the peak of the migration crisis, the radicalness

of far-right street-level engagement did not change substantially across time. We defined this scenario in terms of punctuated stability. In this regard, the far right only partly qualified as a 'movement of crisis' (Kriesi 1995) and its protest mobilisation was only occasionally defined by hostile outbursts (Kerbo 1982). The far right's tendency to predilect conventional activity across time and shy away from radical contention is certainly telling as far as the prospects for the sustainability and acceptability of its non-institutional politics are concerned. After the mainstreaming of nativist actors and ideas (Akkerman, de Lange, and Rooduijn 2016; Mudde 2019), we also note a normalisation of far-right protest. A long-term perspective would lend support to the unfolding of a process of societal transformation. Third, a thematic alignment between far-right claims and the different types of crises (i.e. economic, cultural, health) did only partly materialise. Leaving aside COVID-related mobilisations (sponsored by far-right movements and parties, but also joined by other actors), the grassroots activity of the far right has been dominated by nativist concerns like opposition to immigration and multiculturalism. Instead of simply adapting to the recent crises, the far right has given prominence to its trademark issues and proactively offered its own exclusionary prognosis throughout the period analysed. Fourth, between 2008 and 2021, we observed increased cooperation between far-right movements and parties. While far-right movements have generally engaged more in the protest arena around the migration crisis, joint grassroots activity among movements and parties has steadily increased over time, regardless of specific periods of instability. This demonstrates the type of synergies unfolding in far-right politics and the fact that protest mobilisation is no longer the sole preserve of less institutionalised actors, but also of those contesting elections and holding public office. Overall, both thematic and synergetic aspects would be consistent with a process of transformation.

The evidence deployed in this article thus qualifies the advancements of nativist politics in recent times and better nuances the far right's relationship to crisis through short-term and long-term perspectives. Instead of simply adapting to crisis, there are signs pointing to broader changes instigated by the European far right and its increasingly successful attempt at penetrating civil society. Should this count as a stepping stone to the counterhegemonic project of the far right, the far right's conquest of civil society might anticipate a phase of institutional capture, whereby the nativist and authoritarian agenda is elevated from the non-institutional to the institutional level – a rehearsed dynamic in countries set on an illiberal trajectory.

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Technical appendix

Annex A. Protest events: identification, coding, and reliability

To identify and code protest events, we instructed six research assistants proficient with one or more languages of the country cases. We used the standard definition of a protest event as a public action organised by a far-right collective actor with the explicit purpose of expressing critique or dissent (Hutter 2014). The coding process involved three main steps. First, research assistants (RAs) were tasked with creating a search string. Each RA, assigned to country X, was responsible for developing a preliminary list of far-right actors that met the specific criteria outlined in the codebook (available upon request). Additionally, they were required to translate the standard search string into the relevant language. The search string included the following terms: Name of actor AND (protest*; demonstrat*; commemorat*; gather*; public assembly; verb indicating marching; violence; occupation; action; rally; riot). RAs also compiled a list of events where far-right activities were expected to occur. Both the preliminary list of far-right actors and the list of events were then submitted to a list of country expert for further guidance and advice.

Second, RAs were asked to identify relevant coding units in newspaper articles retrieved from Factiva, GoBelga, Lexis-Nexis or Retriever (Berkhout et al. 2015). We opted for the printed press because the comparative design covering ten European countries made accessibility a primary concern, and thus the national press preferable to other sources such as agency dispatches and police reports (Hutter 2014). Since we wanted to employ sources that were as comparable as possible, we opted for one quality newspaper per country, except for multilingual countries (e.g. Belgium). Following previous examples, we chose the main liberal outlet in each country: these are considered particularly suited for comparative studies because they mirror the debates in a detailed manner and influence the editorial decisions of a wide range of other news organisations (Kriesi et al. 2012). Coders were then asked to code protest events according to 20 variables, including action repertoires and issue focus. The full codebook with detailed definition of each variable is available upon request.

Since multiple researchers were involved in the coding, we ran reliability tests to check for inter-coder consistency (Berkhout et al. 2015). To test for selection bias, we asked coders to select the relevant articles/press releases within a broader sample whereby we included a number of false positives. To test for description bias, we then asked coders to code the relevant articles for the 20 variables included in the dataset. These tests yielded a strong consistency regarding both the selection/identification of events and their

description. The Krippendorff's alpha for selection bias (computed on all articles) was 0.806. The Krippendorff's alphas for description bias were 0.803, 0.788, 0.803, and 0.879, with an average of 0.818. The tables below report metadata about the sources used for coding, the search strings used for each country, and the main descriptive statistics for the protest event dataset.

Table A1. National newspaper and archive used for data collection

Country	Newspaper	Archive
Austria	Die Presse	Factiva
Belgium	De Morgen (Flanders)	GoBelga
	Le Soir (Wallonia)	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

Table A2. List of actor names and keywords used in search strings (before snowballing)

Country	Search string
Austria	Pegida, Identitäre Bewegung, Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ, Bündnis Zukunft Österreich, BZÖ, Die Bunten, Arbeitsgemeinschaft für demokratische Politik, AFP, Burschenschaft Olympia, Nationale Volkspartei, NVP, Identitären, IBÖ, Ulrichsberggemeinschaft, protest*, demonstr*, gedenk*, Aufmarsch, marsch*, Gewalt, Besetzung, Aktion, Kundgebung, Krawall*, gewalttätig*, Ausschreitung*.
Belgium	*De Morgen*: protest*, demonstr*, herdenk*, verzamel*, geweld*, Blood and Honour, Blood & Honour, Nieuw-Solidaristisch Alternatief, Pegida Vlaanderen, Autonome Nationalisten, Vlaamse Verdedigings Liga, Forza Ninove, Make Vlaenderen Great Again, SOS Democratie, S.O.S. Democratie, Right Wing Resistance, Vlaams Legioen, Project Thule, Project Yggdrasi, Vlaamse Wolven, Jera, Nationale Beweging, Nation Movement, Lidem, Libéraux democrates, Mouvement réformateur, Mouvement réformateur des libéraux bruxellois, Libertaire Direct Démocratique, Libertair Direct Democratisch, Vlaams Belang, Nationale Democratie, Démocratie Nationale, Debout Les Belges!, Parti Communautaire National-européen, Bloed Bodem Eer en Trouw, Feuerkrieg Division, Volksunie, Jeune Europe, Front Democratique des Francophones, Front Nouveau de Belgique, Force Nationale, FNationale, Voorpost, Katholiek Vlaams Hoogstudentenverbond, Nationalistische Studentenvereniging, VLOTT, Vlaams Liberaal Onafhankelijk Tolerant Transparant, Schild en Vrienden, Schild & Vrienden OR Louvain-le-mec. *Le Soir:* Wallonie d'abord, Vlaams Nationaal Jeugdverbond, Ijzerwake, Nationalistische Studenten Vereniging, Identitaires Ardenne, Schild & Vrienden, Voorpost, Terre et Peuple, Belgique et Chrétienté, Debout les Belges!, Debout les Belges, Project Thule, Vlaams

	Legioen, Vlaamse Legioen, Project Yggdrasil, Valeurs Nationales, En Colere, Droits & Libertes, L'Eveil NOT Nation Movement, Lidem, Libéraux democrats, Mouvement réformateur, Mouvement réformateur des libéraux bruxellois, Libertaire, Direct, Démocratique, Libertair, Direct, Democratisch, National Democratie, Democratie Nationale, Debout Les Belges, Parti Communautaire National-européen, Bloed, Bodem, Eer en Trouw, Vlaams Belang, Intérêt flamand, Feuerkrieg Division, Volksunie,Jeune Europe, Front Democratique des Francophones, Front Nouveau de Belgique, Force Nationale, FNationale, Katholiek Vlaams Hoogstudentenverbond, Nationalistische Studentenvereniging, VLOTT, Vlaams Liberaal Onafhankelijk Tolerant Transparant, Schild en Vrienden, Louvain-le-mec, protest*, demonstr*, manifest*, mobilis*, commémor*, réunion*, réuniss*, contestation*, marche*, assemblée*, rassembl*, occup*, cortège*, incident*, action*, rally*, rallye*, rallier*, révolte*, défilé*, festival*.
France	Action Française, Adsav, Parti pour l'organisation de la Bretagne libre, Alsace d'abord, Blood and Honour, Sang et Honneur, Breiz Atao, Bretagne Toujours, Charlemagne Hammerskins, Chrétienté-Solidarité, Civitas, France Jeunesse Civitas, Cocarde étudiante, Combat 18, Debout la France, Deus Vult, Dissidence Française, égalité et reconciliation, Fondation Lejeune, Fraternité Saint-Pie X, Front National de la Jeunesse, Génération Nation, Génération identitaire, Groupe Union Défense, Bastion Social, Institut de sciences sociales, économiques et politiques, Jeune Alsace, Jeunesses Hitlériennes, Jeunesses Nationalistes, L'Oeuvre française, Les Identitaires, Bloc Identitaire, Mouvement Social Européen, Ligue du Sud, Manif Pour Tous, Marche pour la vie, Mouvement National Républicain, Nissa Rebela, Nomad 88, Parti de la France, Parti National Radical, Parti National Liberal, Parti Nationaliste Français, Printemps français, Rassemblement étudiant de droite, Renaissance Catholique, Renouveau Français, Riposte Laïque, Résistance Républicaine, SIEL, SOS Chrétiens d'orient, Troisième Voie, Union Populaire Républicaine, Zouaves Paris, protest*, demonstr*, manifest*, mobilis*, commémor*, réunion*, réuniss*, contestation*, marche*, assemblée*, occup*, cortège*, incident*, action*, rally*, rallye*, rallier*, révolte*, défilé*, festival*. *Separate search strings were used for Front National and Rassemblement National, due to the name change and the fact that this is a major national political party.*
Germany	AfD, Alternative für Deutschland, Bürgerbewegung Pax Europa, Bürgerbewegung Pro Chemnitz, Bürgerbewegung pro Köln, Bürgerwehr Freital, Der III. Weg, Der Dritte Weg, Die Rechte, Die Republikaner, Deutsche Volksunion, DVU, Ein Prozent für unser Land, HoGeSa, Hooligans gegen Salafisten, Identitäre Bewegung, Junge Alternative, NPD, Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, PEGIDA, Zukunft Heimat, protest*, demonstr*, gedenk*, versamm*, *marsch*, gewalt*, besetz*, Kundgebung, Ausschreitung*, krawall.
Italy	Lega, Lega Nord, Fratelli d'Italia, CasaPound, Casa Pound, Forza Nuova, Generazione Identitaria, Lealtà Azione, Veneto Fronte Skinhead, Fiamma Tricolore, Alternativa Sociale, Movimento Idea Sociale, Casaggì, Fronte Nazionale, Nuovo Ordine Nazionale, Ragazzi d'Italia, Fronte Sociale Nazionale, Movimento Nazionale, Rete dei Patrioti, Fascismo e Libertà, Do.Ra., Militia, Avanguardia Nazionale, Hammerskin, Rivolta Nazionale, Manipolo d'Avanguardia, Storace, Blocco Studentesco, Azione Studentesca, Lotta Studentesca, Gioventù Nazionale, manifesta*, corteo, sit-in, commem,a*, fiaccolat*, sfilat*, assemble*, marcia*, scontr*, aggression*, occupazion*, protest*, radun*, scontr*, violenz*.

Netherlands	FvD, Forum voor Democratie, PVV, Partij voor de Vrijheid, JA21, Erkenbrand, Nederlandse VolksUnie, NVU, Pegida, Blood & Honour, Blood and Honour, Combat18, Combat 18, Voorpost, Identitair Verzet, Zwarte Pieten Actiegroep, Dutch Defense League, Rechts in Verzet, Nationalistische Volksbeweging, AZC Alert, AZC-Alert, Nijmegen Rechtsaf, Pro Patria, Demonstranten tegen gemeenten, Anti Terreur Brigade, Kameraadschap Noord-Nederland, Soldiers of Odin, Vizier op Links, de Vrijheidsbeweging Nederland, Dutch Survivors, Nederland in Opstand, De Nationale Stormvereniging, National Socialist Dutch Movement, Partij voor behoud van de Nederlandse Identiteit, Wij zijn Nederland, Neerlands Patriottisch Front, Nationaal Socialistische Aktie, Identiteit Nederland, Hollandse Traditiegroep, Stop Antifa terreur, Young activist together, Dutch Self Defense Army, Ulfhednar, Netwerk Nationale Socialisten, protest*, demonstr*, herdenk*, verzamel*, geweld*.
Norway	Vigrid, Nasjonalsosialistiske Bevegelse, Norsk Forsvarsallianse, Norwegian Defense League, Den Nordiske motsdansbevegelsen, Stopp islamiseringen av Norge, SIAN, Selvstendighetspartiet, Norsk Ungdom*, Alliansen, Pegida, Nordisk Styrke, protest*, demonstr*, manifestasjon*, marker*, minne*, samle*, møter opp, møte opp*, møtt opp, protestmarsj*, protesttog*, vold*, forsamling*, oppta*, opptok*, ta til gatene, tok til gatene, aksjon*, opprør*, opptøy*.
Poland	Konfederacja, Marsz Niepodległości, Młodzież Wszechpolska, Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski, Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, Ruch Narodowy, Marsz Patriotów, Szturm, Szturmowcy, Czarny Blok, Zadruga, Autonomiczni Nacjonaliści/Autonom, Niklot, Rodzima Wiara, Narodowy Świt, Falanga, Praca Polska, Zmiana, protest*, demonstr*, obchody, zgromadz*, marsz*, przemarsz, defil*, przemoc*, okup*, zajęcie, przejęcie, akcj*, wiec*, zamieszki, rozruchy, starcie.
Spain	Hazteoir, VOX, Democracia Nacional, Espana 2000, plataforma respeto, alianza nacional, falange Espanola de las JONS, La Falange, La Espana en Marcha, Plataforma per Catalunya, Soberania y Libertad, Frente Nacional Identitario, Partido Nacional-Socialista Obrero Espanol, Movimiento Social Republicano, Alternativa Espanola, Solidaridad, Hogar Social Madrid, Bastion Frontal, Casal Tramuntana, Blood & Honour Espana, Brotherhood 28, Hammerskins Espana, Ultras Sur, Suburbios Firm, Angeles del Infierno, protesta*, manifesta, conmemora*, reunir*, congrega*, marcha*, violento* / violencia*, asamblea publica, ocupa*, okupa*, irrupcion*, irrumpir*, accion*, rally*, concentracion*, mitin*, motin*, revuelta*, disturbio*.
Sweden	Sverigedemokraterna, Alternativ for Sverige, Sverigedemokratisk Ungdom, Ungsvenskarna, Salemfonden, Folkfronten, Nordisska motstandsrorelsen, Svenska motstandsrorelsen, Nordisk Styrka, Fria nationalister, Nationaldemokraterna, Nationaldemokratisk Ungdom, Nordisk Ungdom, Soldiers of Odin, Blood & Honour, "Blood and Honour, Nationalsocialistisk front, Nordiska nationalsocialister, Svenskarnas parti, Nordiska Forbundet, Combat 18, Sveriges Nationella Ungdomsforbund, protest*, demonstr*, hedra*, ära*, hylla*, samla*, marsch*, våld*, offentlig församling*, offentlig sammankomst*, ockup*, aktion*, handling*, politisk samling*, politisk möte*, politisk samverkan*, upplopp*, uppror*, kravall*.

Annex B. Descriptive data and robustness of findings

1.   Number of events

Table B1. Protest events by country

Country	Protest events	%
Austria	106	2.4
Belgium	182	4.1
France	372	8.4
Germany	1,490	33.5
Italy	845	19
Netherlands	173	3.9
Norway	58	1.3
Poland	253	5.7
Spain	678	15.3
Sweden	283	6.4
Total	*4,440*	*100*

Since population size plays a critical role in determining the level of protest activity reported in each country (Beissinger, Sasse, and Straif 2014), failing to adjust for country size leads to systematically associating larger countries with highest numbers of protests. Conversely, simply accounting for population size might end up overcorrecting the data, giving excessive prominence to protest events in small countries. Drawing on the work by Lorenzini et al. (2022), we apply a logarithmic scale to the weighting of protest events based on the size of the country; i.e. we divided the number of events by the logarithm of the country population where the events occurred. The disadvantage, however, is that the figures presented below are perhaps less intuitive and might not be interpreted in a simple linear manner. Figure B1.1 shows that the weighting procedures implemented for the country comparisons do not affect the overall trend in protest. During the fourteen years covered by our analysis, the two lines capturing fluctuations in the amount of protest move together. Importantly, the peaks correspond in both datasets. The main difference lies in the fact that the unweighted data accentuate some of these peaks.

Figure B1.1. Monthly number of far-right protests in Europe: weighted vs unweighted data

Number of events
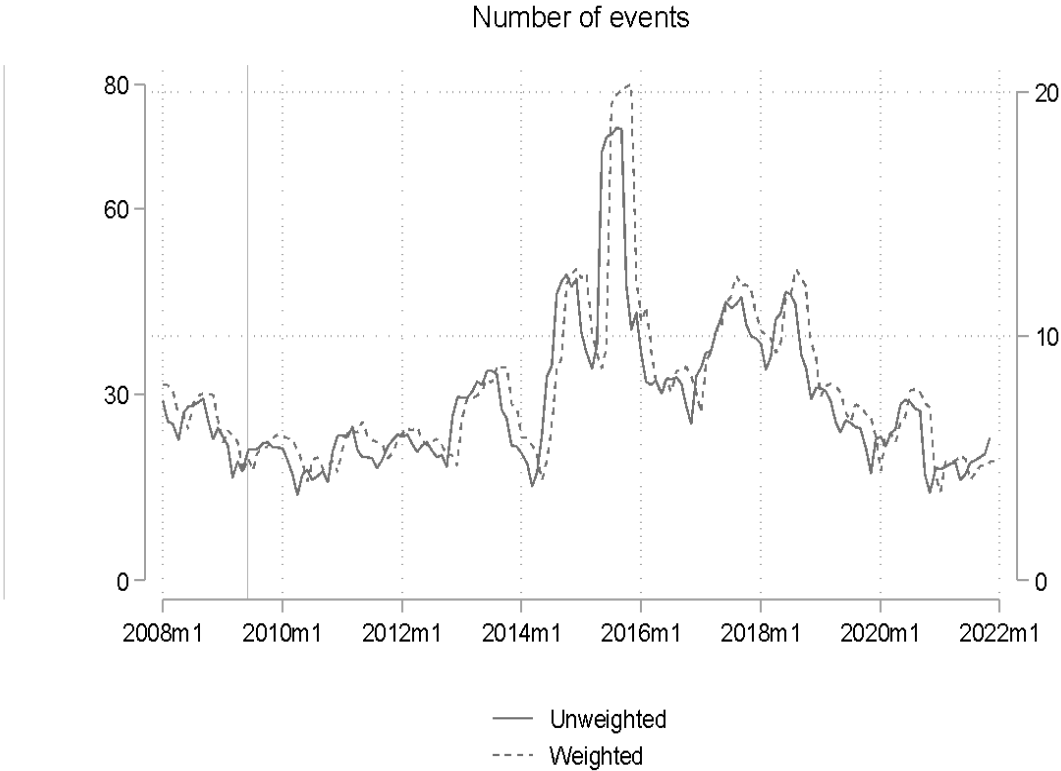
Figure B1.2. Monthly number of far-right protests in Europe, excluding COVID-19 months (weighted, running averages)
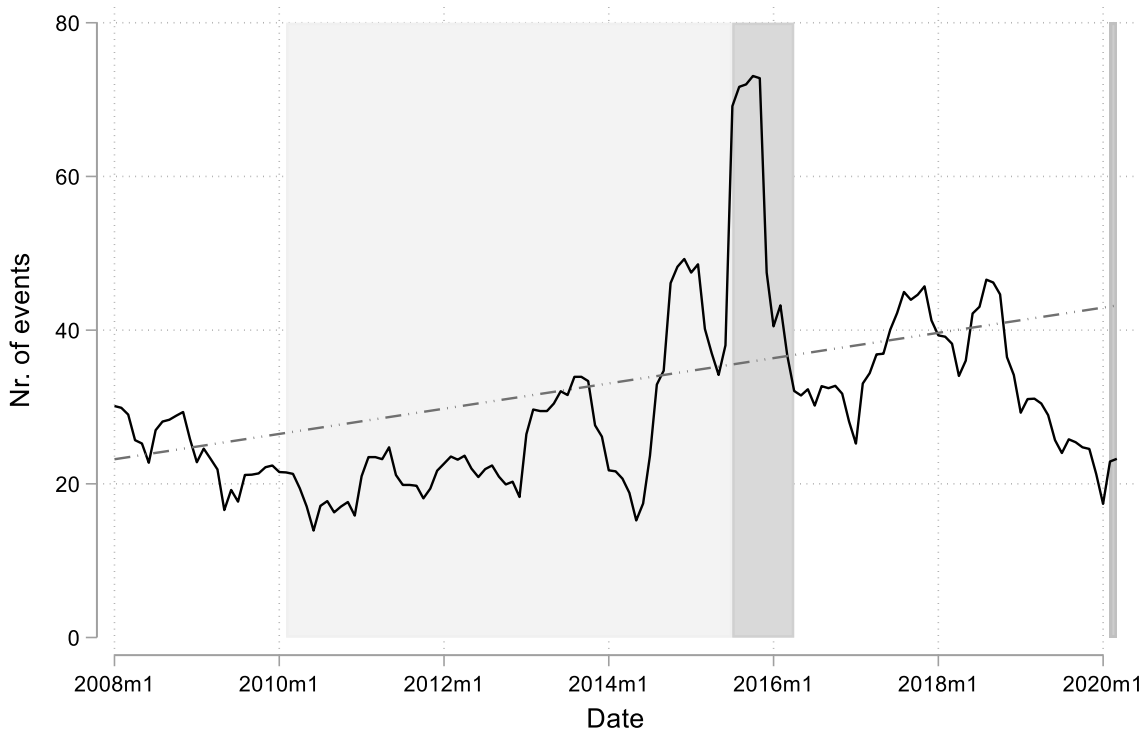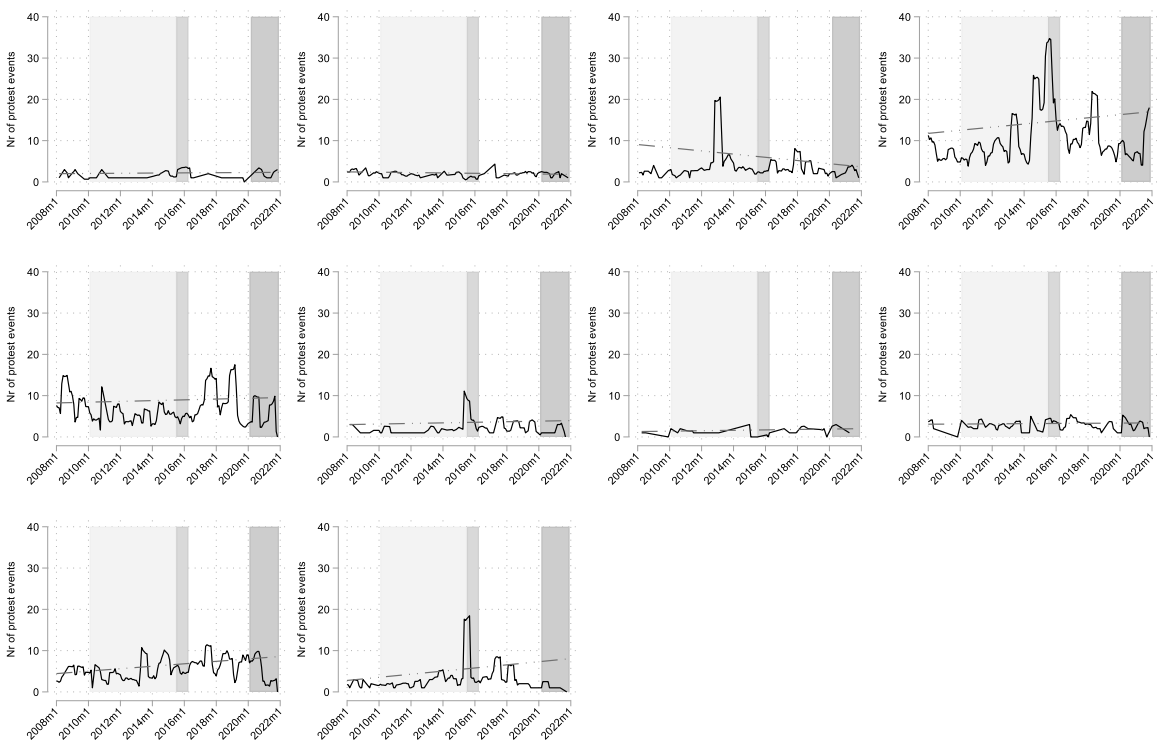
Figure B1.3. Monthly number of far-right protests by country (2008-2021)

2. Number of participants

Drawing data from mass media sources, we do not on have information on the number of participants for at least 37 per cent of the events accounted for. To avoid losing any cases due to lack of information, we imputed the number of participants following established standards in PEA (Lorenzini et al. 2020). Specifically, to each event without information on the participants, we attributed the median number of people who participated in an event with the same form of action in the same country. In some cases, there was no median for a given form of action in the country, because none of the reports on this form of action in the country report the number of participants. In these cases, we set the participants at 0. Finally, we weighted the number of participants as we did for the number of events, but with the difference that we applied a special treatment to 'big events': we weighted these equally across all the countries, i.e. we assumed that we had found all the 'big events' even in the countries in which we applied a lower sampling probability. The results of our robustness checks show that the imputation does not affect the results of our analysis significantly.

Figure B2.1. Number of participants in far-right protest events (with vs without missing data imputation)
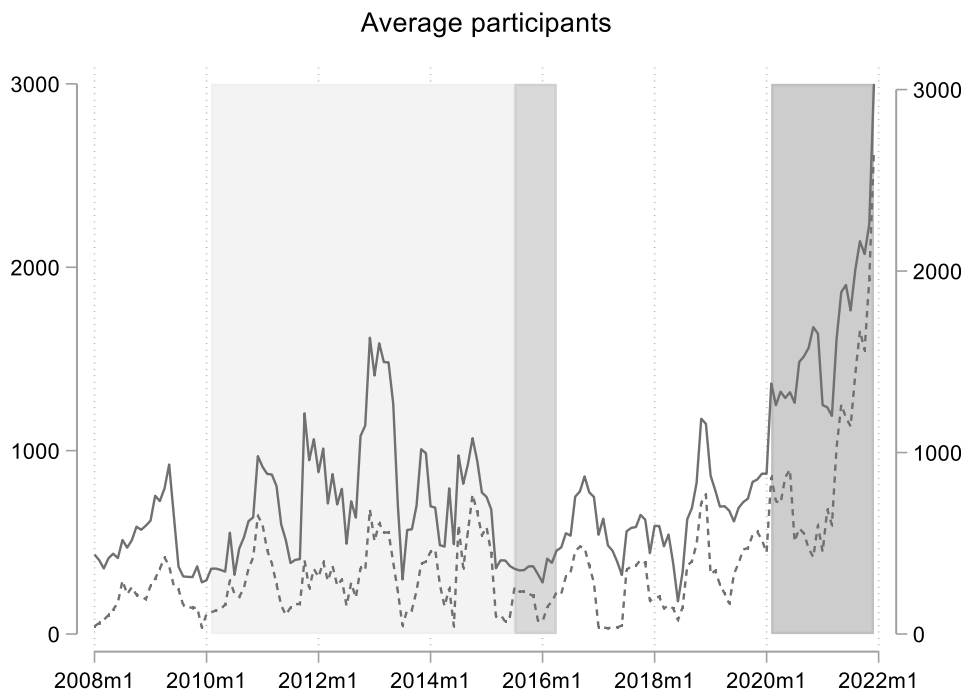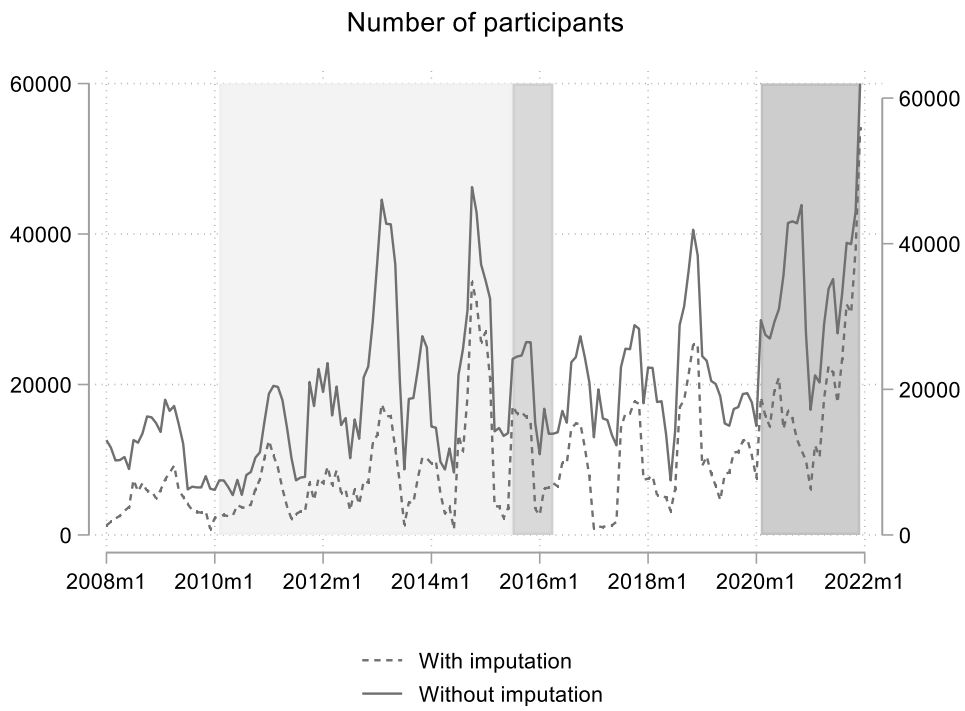
Figure B2.2. Average number of participants in far-right protest events (with vs without missing data imputation)
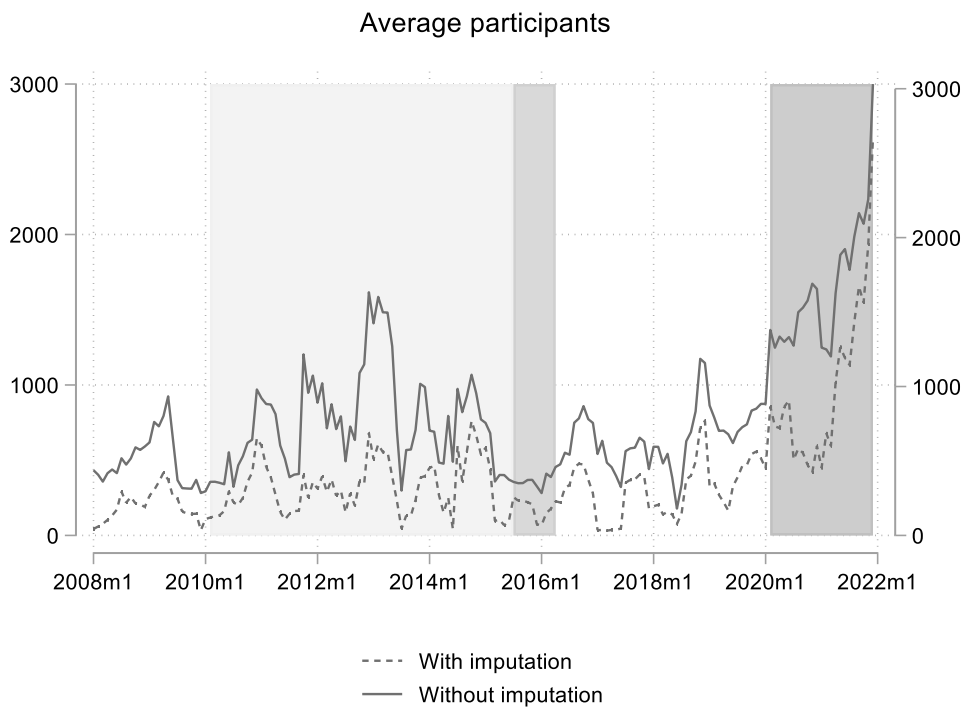
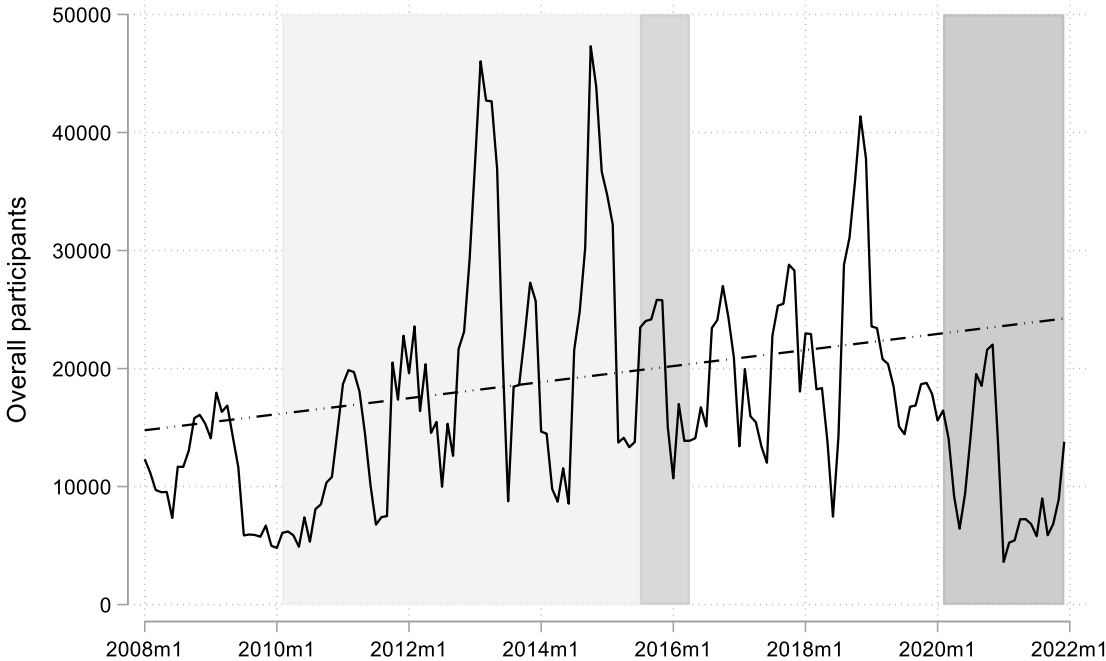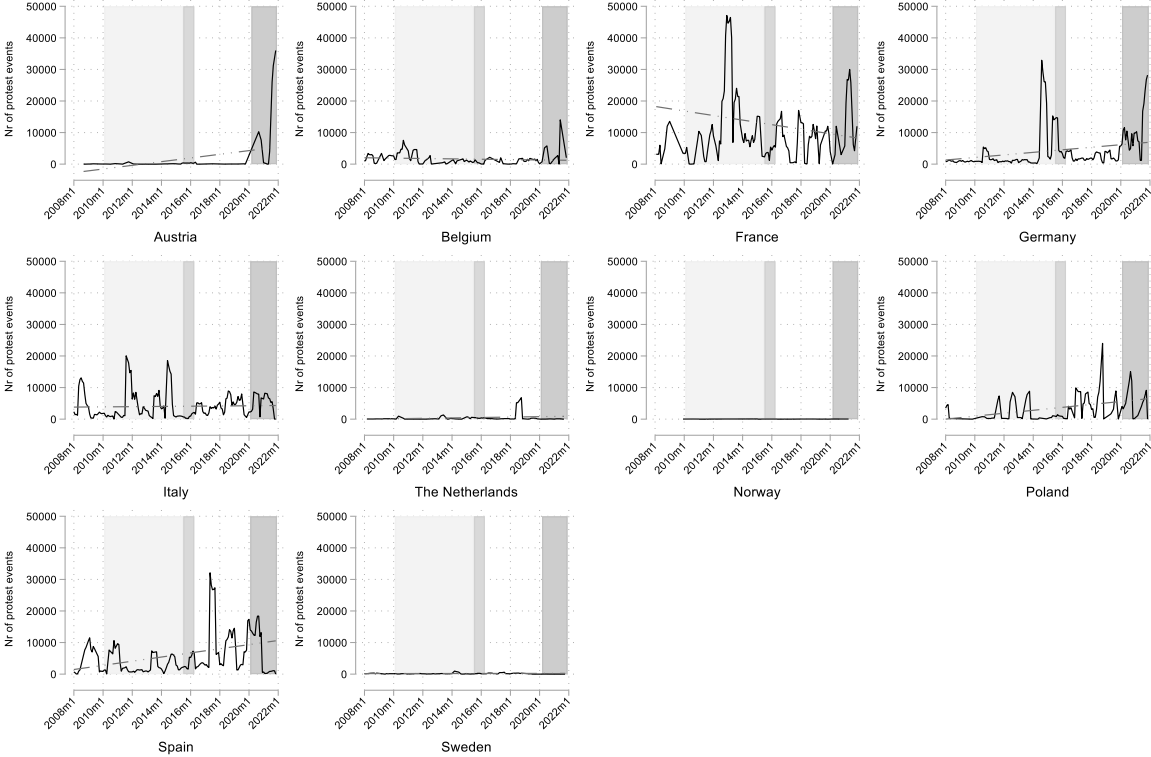**Figure B2.3.** Aggregate number of participants in far-right protest (excluding COVID-19 events)
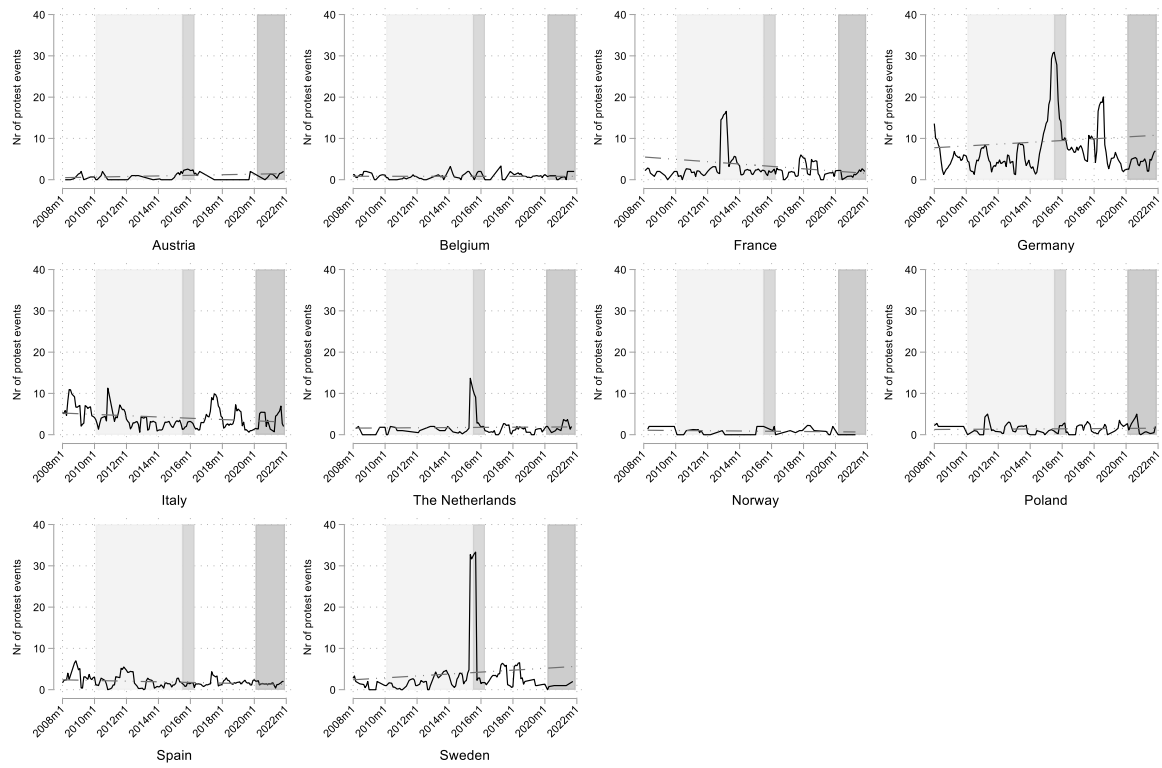

Figure B2.4. Aggregate number of participants in far-right protests by country (2008-2021)

3. Radicalness

Figure B3.1. Radicalness of far-right protests by country (2008-2021)

4.   Issue foci of protest events

Figure B4.1. Entropy scores (Shannon, ExpH, Simpson, Dissimilarity Index)

Economy
Migration/asylum
Covid
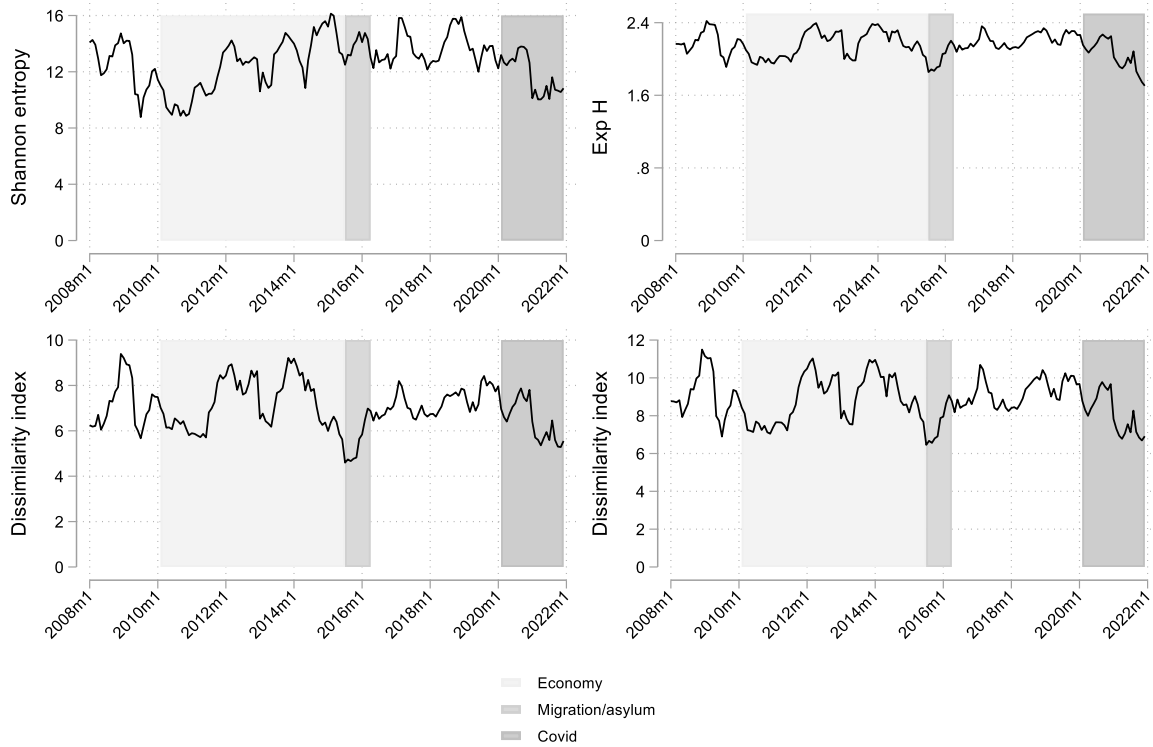
Figure B4.2. Issue foci of protest events (by country)

—— Economy
- - - - Migration and multiculturalism
—— Covid-19 and healthcare
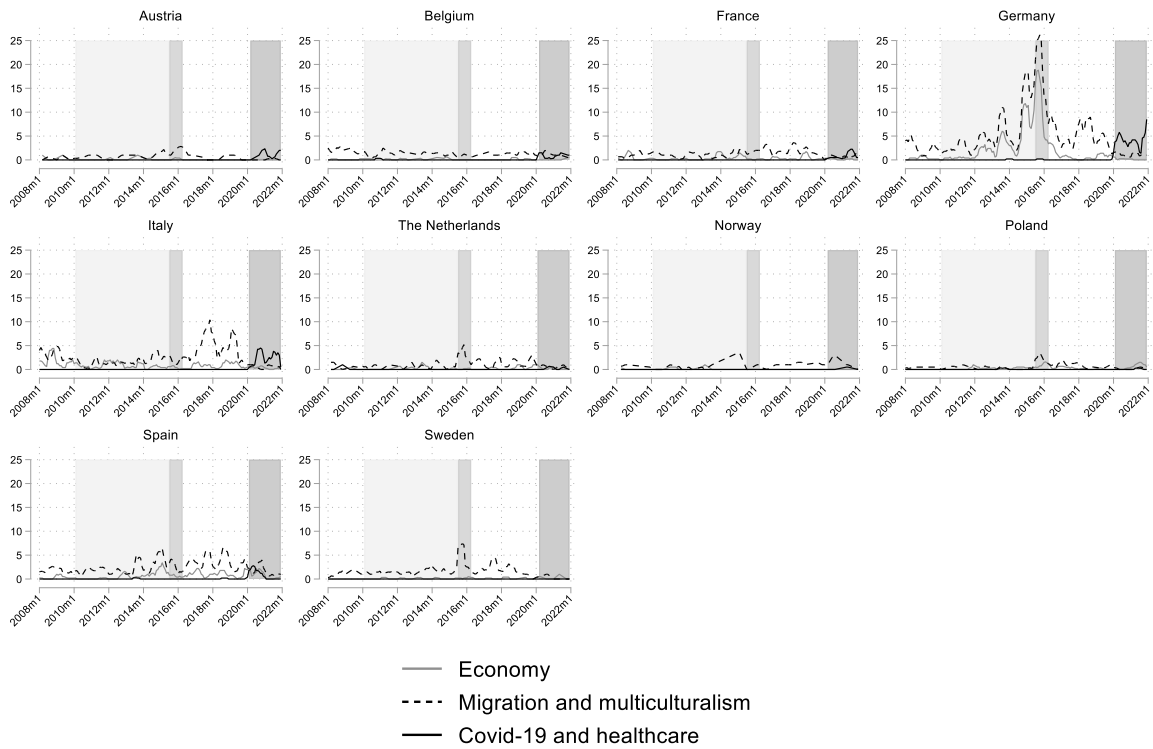
Figure B4.3. Issue foci of protest events with EU issues included in Migration category

Economy
Migration and multiculturalism
Covid-19 and healthcare
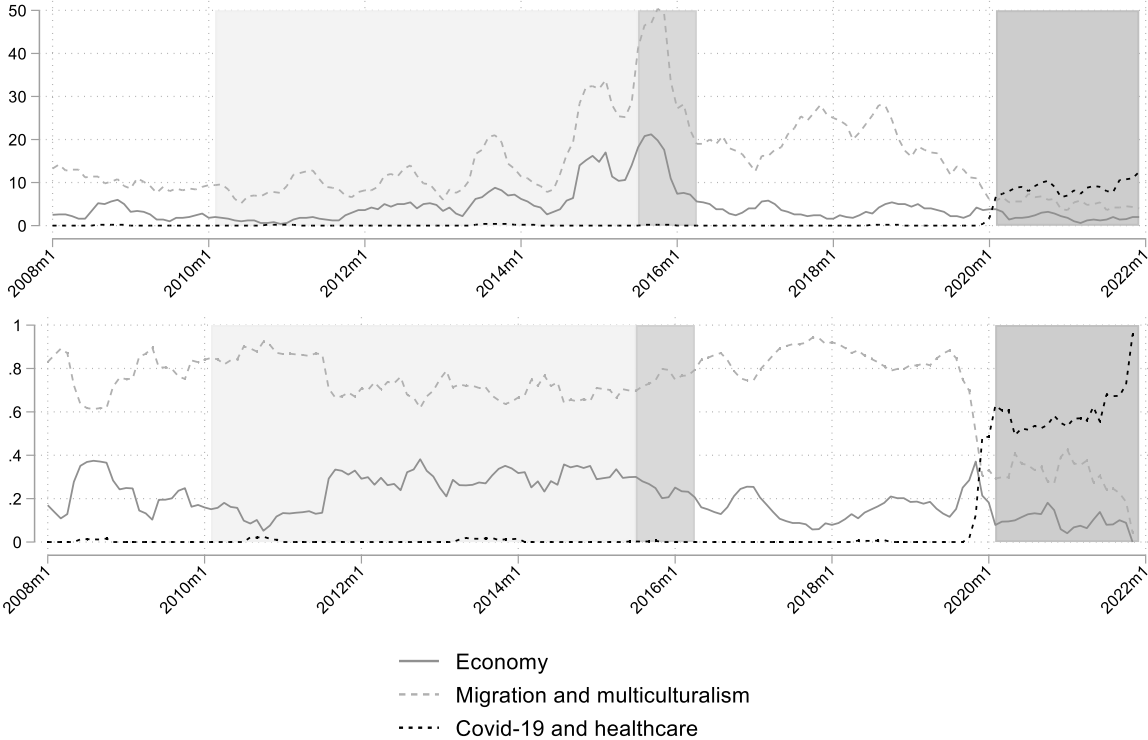
5. Type of actors

Figure B5.1. Type of actors initiating far-right protests 2008-2021 (running averages)

— Parties
--- Movements
— — Joint
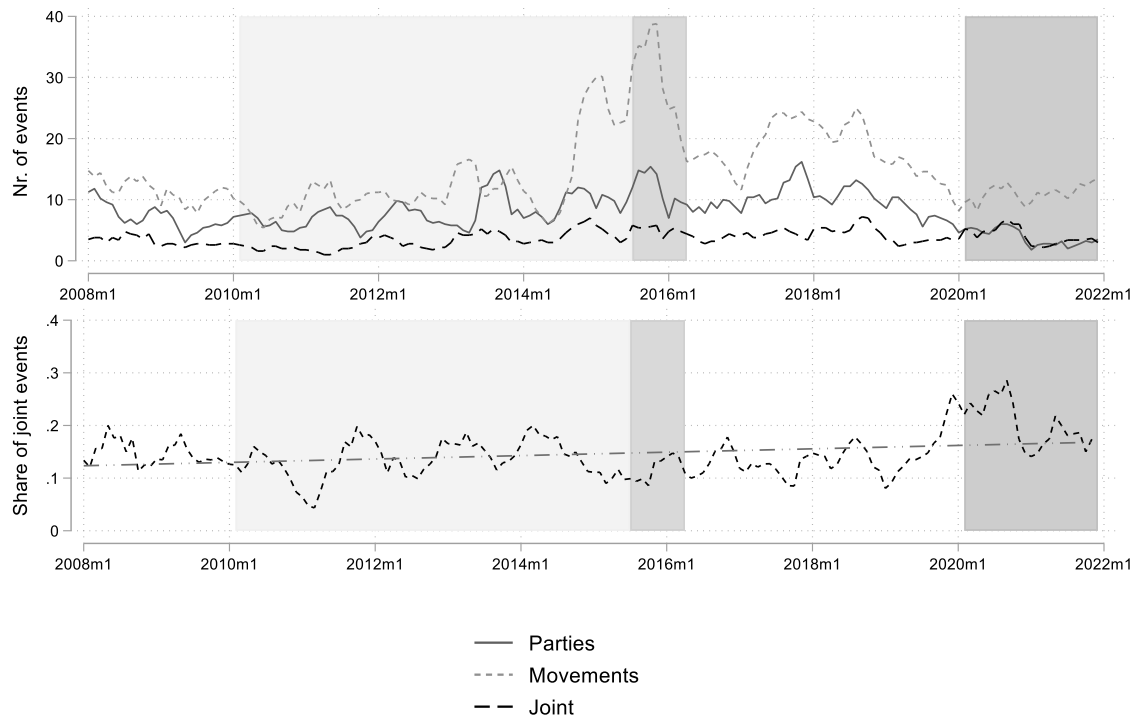
Figure B5.2. Type of actors initiating far-right protests 2008-2021 (by country)

— Parties
--- Movements
— — Joint
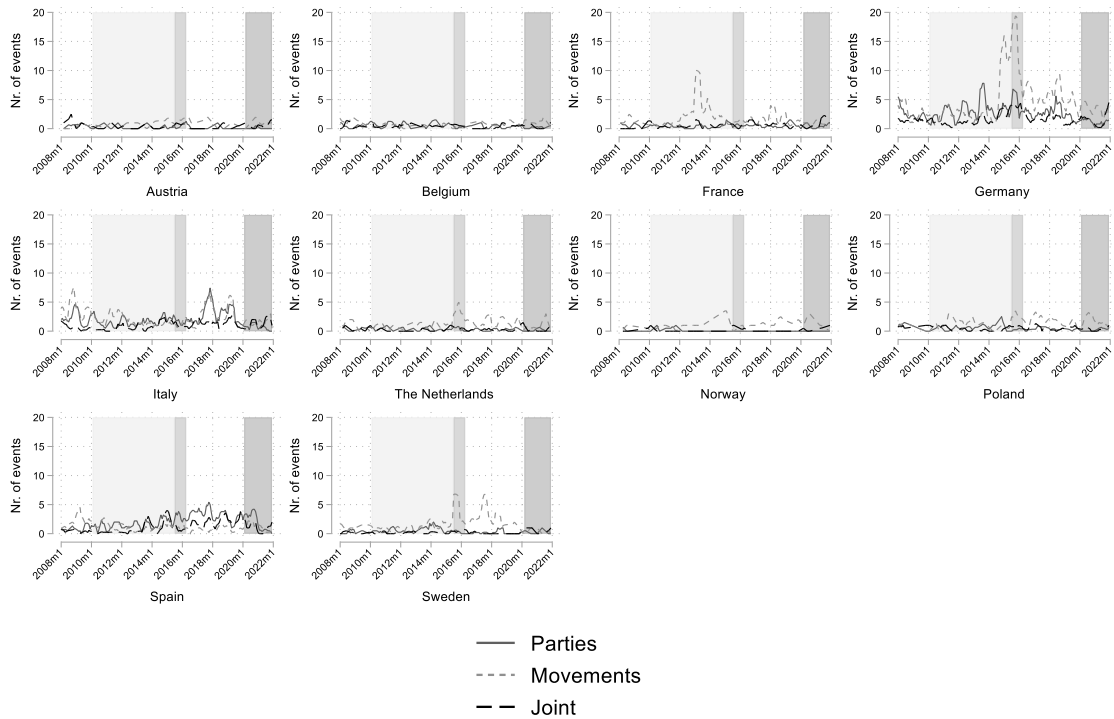
Annex C. Treatment of crisis periods

Since the way in which periods of crisis are treated is crucial to the analyses presented in the paper, Annex C presents an additional analysis that compartmentalises our data around the three distinct moments of crisis as defined in our article: the Eurozone crisis (February 2010-July 2015), the migration crisis (August 2015-March 2016), and the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020 onwards). We compared mobilisation patterns during these specific crisis periods to a fourth category whereby we aggregate data for periods of relative stability pre- or in-between crises (pre-crisis phase until January 2010, and April 2016-February 2020). Table C1 below shows that while there are indeed nuances in how far-right actors responds to crises and periods of (presumed) stability, the overall patterns are in line with the interpretations provided in text.

Table C1. Aggregate data on far-right protest mobilisation (cross-crisis comparison)

Aspects		Stability periods 2008-2010 & 2016-2020	Great Recession Feb 2010-Jul 2015	Migration crisis Aug 2015-Mar 2016	COVID-19 pandemic Mar 2020-Dec 2021	Total 2008-2021
Numerical	Av. protests p/m	8	23.2	54.1	18.9	26.1
	Av. participants	483.9	778.3	293.5	1565.9	780.4
Performative	Av. radicalness	16.6	15.1	50.1	10.2	23.0
	% Violent	0.25	0.2	0.32	0.1	0.2
Thematic	% Economy	0.11	0.13	0.16	0.05	0.1
	% Migration	0.39	0.37	0.49	0.15	0.4
	% COVID-19	0	0	0	0.52	0.1
Synergetic	% Party	32.1	33.8	22.8	24	28.2
	% Movements	51.3	48.9	62.5	52	53.7
	% Joint	16.5	17.2	14.5	24	18.1

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