Between Real and Virtual: Strategies of Mobilisation of the radical right in Eastern Europe

Introduction

Over the past few years, especially after the 2008 economic crisis (Kriesi and Pappas 2015), the resurgence of strong radical right (RR) parties and movements is a significant phenomenon in European politics and particularly pronounced in Eastern and Central Europe (CEE) (Butiskova 2019; Mudde 2017). In Hungary, the ultranationalist, antisemitic, and neo-fascist (at least until 2015) Jobbik, received 14.7% of the vote in the 2014 European elections and 26 seats (19% of the vote) in the country's 2018 parliamentary elections. In Slovakia, the radical right, anti-Roma, anti-immigration, antisemitic, and anti-NATO Kotleba-People's Party Our Slovakia gained 8.6% of the vote in 2016 and 7.9% in 2020 (obtaining 17 seats). In the Czech Republic, the Eurosceptic, anti-immigrant Freedom and Direct Democracy party gained more than 10% of the vote in the 2018 national elections. Poland's radical right achieved big victories in the 2015 and 2019 elections (6.8% of the vote). These parties appeal to a broad range of social groups by claiming to support 'ordinary people' and using social media to foster an image of 'working (…) to assist the people in their everyday struggles, such to '[protect] harvests from Roma thieves' (Gyàrfasovà 2020)[1]. These groups amplify their messages using websites that diffuse disinformation and conspiracies (ibid.). The recent European financial and migration crises have provided further opportunities for radical right mobilisation, since these parties and movements capitalise on citizens' discontent (Greskovits 2020; Butiskova 2019). Moreover, beyond political parties, new forms of radical right social movements have emerged, which function as a 'laboratory' for novel ideas and ways of doing politics (Shafir 2001; Minkenberg 2011; Mudde 2007; Pankowski 2010). They also side with the losers of globalisation and receive support from those who feel economically and culturally threatened (Holubec and Rae 2010; Karl 2017; Minkenberg 2013).

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[1] https://www.friendsofeurope.org/insights/explaining-the-popularity-of-the-extreme-right-in-slovakia/.

This increasing activism of the radical right is part of a wider zeitgeist present in many Western societies (Mudde 2019). However, whereas the RR (political parties as well as social movements) in Western Europe received significant scholarly attention even before the 2008 economic crisis (e.g. XXX et al 2012), radical right protest activities in Eastern Europe have been studied to a lesser extent (for exceptions, see Minkenberg 2011; Pirro 2019; Kopecky and Mudde 2005; Vejvodová 2016).

In this article, without denying the importance of structural political, economic and cultural-migration related factors in the recent revitalization of the radical right, we want to look at the role of the internet and protest mobilisation[2]. By comparing four Eastern European countries (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, and Slovakia), and various types of radical right actors (political parties and non-party groups), this study aims to better understand the recent (after 2008) mobilisation of the radical right online and outside the electoral arena[3].

This is a relevant research topic under many respects. Theoretically, the literature on the radical right generally focuses on political parties and their electoral success (Rydgren 2018). On the other hand, studies that look at protest and the online sphere usually focus on progressive left-wing groups (see Císař 2017 for CEE examples). Furthermore, systematic empirical studies that compare different radical right organisations are rare. Eastern and Central Europe is not an exception, although valuable studies do exist on (non- parliamentary) radical right politics. Some have focused on the relationship between right wing parties and civil society organisations politically and ideologically close to them and their role in fostering cultural narratives for the RR (Bill 2020). Others (Grzymala-Busse 2015, 2019; Kotwas and Kubik 2019) demonstrated the deep ties between radicalised Catholic Church and

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[2] We acknowledge the role that structural political (Mair 2013; Hernández and Kriesi 2015), economic (Roberts 2017), and migration-related (Inglehart and Norris 2016) factors that have played in the revitalisation of parties and movements of the radical right, but a thorough examination of these causes is beyond the scope of this paper.

[3] Here we understand political mobilisation (of the radical right) as the collective (or individual) political action beyond electoral behaviour. We provide evidence of that through protest event data (for offline mobilisation) and online data (for online mobilisation).

right wing groups (e.g. in Poland) or investigated the discourses and collective memories that characterise these political forces (e.g. Kazharski 2019 on the Slovak radical right; Korycki 2019 on Poland). Finally, to date, empirical research on the radical right and their spread of political mobilisation, identity, and propaganda online remains quite fragmented and limited, and it focuses mainly on political parties (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2019, for an exception) and on Western countries (but see Fofiu 2015; Andreescu 2015; Karl 2016).

In this study, starting from these reflections, by combining quantitative and qualitative data derived from a protest event and formalised web content analysis of 212 RR websites, we will investigate the degree and forms of the recent (2008-2016) radical right political mobilisation on the street and though the internet, in different countries and across different types of groups. Similarities and differences will be underlined, as well as relevant aspects of the comparison with the Western counterpart. Because we triangulate online and offline data about mobilisation (Mosca 2014), we capture a broader picture of the current developments in radical right politics in the CEE region, beyond elections and electoral campaigns. This approach also allows us to better understand the capacity of non-party radical right organisations, like think tanks and other civil society organisations, to increase RR political parties' opportunities to mobilise the electorate (Rydgren 2018 2). Furthermore, because the boundaries between the 'radicalised right' and 'radical right', and between protest and electoral politics, are especially blurry (Butisknova 2018; Minkemberg and Kosac 2015), our research question and methods are particularly relevant.

As for the definition of our empirical referent, acknowledging the existence of a still open conceptual debate among different labels (e.g. radical right vs. far right, Norris 2005; Carter 2005), we use the term 'radical right' to refer to the groups whose ideologies espouse nationalism, (ethno-nationalist) xenophobia, anti-establishment critiques, and socio-cultural authoritarianism (law and order, family values) (Mudde 2007). We will however consider the CEE region specificities, as for example the main focus on 'internal enemies', such as Roma groups or Jews instead of immigrants as in the Western Europe (Pirro 2019); the communist legacy (Pytlas 2013) which also influence their type of

nationalism; as well as a peculiar form of national identity (Minkenberg 2017). This deliberately includes political party and non-party organisations, even subcultural violent groups.

The article is structured as in the following: in section 2 we delineate the conceptual framework of the analysis and in section 3 we present our methods, data, and sources. Sections 4 and 5 will investigate the characteristics (i.e. actors, strategies, targets, issues) of the RR protest and online mobilisation. Finally (sec. 6), in we problematize our findings locating the complex relationship between radical right groups and the Internet in a broader scenario of new challenges and opportunities provided by new technologies to civil society organisations. This article contributes to the study of the radical right literature by shedding light on contentious politics of these forces in Eastern Europe as characterized by a variety of actors and strategies. If the virtual, and the online activities that it allows, has potentially increased the ability of such groups to address their activists, engage them in the organisation's life, and spread their message around, the question remains as to how much this is mirrored in an increase of radical right mobilisation in the real.

How our study could be used by and help other scholars in the field? First, *i.* there are still few works approaching the radical right as a social movement (e.g. for exception, Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2019) and this article, drawing on concepts, methods and data usually applied in the research of (left wing progressive) collective actors can add to this scholarship. Second, *ii.* by using common tools and (coding) categories of previous research on radical right mobilisation outside the electoral arena in Western countries, it offers comparable empirical data, adding to cumulative research on the topic; *iii.* finally, proposing to go beyond simplified notions of institutional vs. not-institutional radical right politics, it can add knowledge usable by the scholarship which focuses on the relation between movement and parties (XXX 2018) or protest and vote (Hutter 2014).

Conceptual framework: The radical right as a social movement

Social movement studies have rarely addressed right wing extremism and research on the radical right has rarely located it within a social movement perspective (XXX 2012). More generally, research on

the (non-party) radical right has sought to identify societal, political, and cultural dysfunctions and pathologies as causal preconditions for the movements' growth (della Porta 2012). Furthermore, it is characterised by a focus on either macro- or micro-level conditions, with more limited attention to the meso-organisational level (ibid.).

In line with social movement studies, we agree that *grievances* can trigger mobilisation, but in this article, we emphasise the capacity of collective actors—such as radical right organisations—'to take advantage of the available (political) *opportunities*' of the context in which they mobilise (Rydgren 2018, 49). The context we analyse is the rise of (offline and online) radical right in the years following the European financial and refugee crises. While the economic crisis had indirect and varied effects on radical right mobilisation in the four countries under scrutiny, the immigration crisis had direct, significant, and similar effect across the CEE region (Bustikova and Guasti 2017; Weisskircher 2020). The perceived influx of refugees or immigrants offered new opportunities for the radical right (in the East as in the West) to revitalise its mobilisation against minorities (Kriesi and Pappas 2015) and expanded the 'portfolio of minorities' to rally against in CEE (Butiskova 2018).

However we also assume that 'multiple causes' instead of key socio structural features (related to matters of economics, migration, and representation) of the countries under analysis may provide a setting to understand RR activism (Weisskircher 2020). While most of (relatively new) democracies of Central Europe have some characteristics commonly considered conducive to RR mobilisation, electoral and otherwise- such declining trust in democratic institutions, emboldened uncivil society, the rise of populists as political leaders, civic apathy, and nationalistic contestation, Bustikova and Guasti 2017), not all CEE countries are the same: for instance the illiberal "turns" of some countries, such as the Hungary, differ from the "swerves" of others (like the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia; ibid. 2017).

Another assumption we import from social movement research is that the radical right is a *multi-organisational actor*, rather than just an assortment of parties. These actors are networks of more or less formal groups and individuals, each with their own preferred strategic action choices (della Porta

and Diani 2020). For example, it is necessary to distinguish between radical right political parties geared towards elections and public office and social movements that aim to mobilise public opinion, as well as agglomerations of subcultural groups, but the non-electoral articulations of far-right politics remain understudied (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2019). In this study we assume that the radical right phenomenon is part of a larger mobilisation process and approach it with methods, conceptualisations and measurements, transcending solely institutional politics.

We also argue that these multi-organisational networks use *broad repertoires of collective action*. Traditionally, 'the Left' uses protests, while 'the Right' mainly uses electoral channels to voice its discontent (Hutter 2014). While previous research on the extreme right has usually focused either on electoral behaviour or violence (with few exchanges between the two fields of research), we want instead to illustrate the different forms of protest the radical right uses (see also Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2019). By focusing on a broader repertoire of collective action, we hope to better understand the recent political behaviour—from voting to violence to online engagement—of the radical right.

Indeed, less scientific attention has been devoted to the online behaviour of the radical right than to that of its left-leaning or more institutionalised counterparts. Furthermore, systematic comparative analysis of how the radical right uses the web infrastructure in different countries is lacking. The internet facilitates the mobilisation of civil society collective actors, (including the radical right) with its low costs, ability to connect isolated individuals and groups, and tools for coordination and socialisation that overcome problems of leadership (see, among others, Bennet and Segerberg 2011; Bennett et al. 2008; Van Laer and Van Aelst 2010). It allows for new forms of political participation and increased ease of organising collective actions (Dolata and Schrape 2016). These aspects are even more relevant for radical actors, for whom the web provides a virtual arena in which they can share their views and run a lower risk of being banned or persecuted (XXX 2012; Klein and Muis 2019). Finally, research on social movements suggests that the internet can help generate collective identities (della Porta and Mosca 2006). In this study, including online activism within the repertoire of action at disposal by the radical right, we will investigate among the various functions the Internet can play

for radical right actors (i.e. mobilisation, identity formation, propaganda, communication and recruitment, etc.), the actual degree and forms of radical right online activities in our selected countries.

Methods and data[4]

We combined qualitative and quantitative research techniques in an approach inspired by social movement studies. First, we have conducted a *protest event analysis* (PEA) based on newspapers, looking at the degree and forms of offline mobilisation of right wing extremist organisations as well as at their strategies of action between 2008 and 2016-- for a total of 1040 codified events. In order to conduct the protest event analysis we used a formalized codebook (for the codebook used and the relevant coding variables, see table A in the appendix; for further details about our coding procedure and the limitations and advantages of PEA, see table D). Our unit of analysis (the 'protest event') consists of the following elements (variables for the coding): an actor who initiates the protest event; the form of action; the target at which the action is directed; an object actor whose interests are affected by the event; and finally the substantive content of the event, which states what is to be done (issue)[5]. Each protest event concerning right wing actor and taking place in our six countries under studied has been coded[6]. Starting from these definitional assumptions, we conducted a protest event analysis drawing on newspapers articles published in the major non tabloid national newspapers in

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[4] We would like to thank Daniel Platek, Grzegorz Piotrowski, and Pal Susánszky for the invaluable help with the data collection.

[5] Although we are aware than one event can have multiple actors and issues, only the main one (e.g. ACTOR1, ISSUE1) has been coded.

[6] In our study a 'protest event' consists in a political event initiated by an extreme right actor (either collective or individual, even an anonymous one), regardless of the type of actor (e.g. political party, subcultural skinhead group, etc.) and regardless the form the event takes (e.g. heavy or light violence, unconventional symbolic and expressive actions, conventional actions etc.).

each country analyzed. In particular we have used the following: the liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza* for Poland; the liberal-conservative *Mladá fronta Dnes* for the Czech Republic[7]; the liberal *Denník SME* for Slovakia, and the liberal opposition *Népszabadság Online* for Hungary (which was suspended in 2018)[8]. In order to retrieve relevant articles we conducted a keyword search of the electronic editions in each case[9]. Among the most important shortcomings associated with the analysis of 'protest events' reported by newspapers are: the 'selection bias' toward big demonstrations (Hutter 2014) and the focus on institutional actors and/or mobilisation issues that fit into the 'media issue attention cycle' at the time, (Bourne and Chatzopoulou 2015). However research demonstrated that biases are consistent over time and most studies demonstrate that results tend to be stable especially within individual newspapers and over longer periods of time (e.g. McCarthy et al. 1996). On this regard, considerations of costs and time have determined our specific methodological choices.

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[7] We used *Mlada Fronta*, whose political orientation is different from the other newspapers, due to accessibility constraints.

[8] In general, it is commonly shared that multiplying the sources of the protest event analysis (e.g. relying on both media and judiciary sources or on newspapers from different political orientations, left wing and right wing, for each country) is preferable in order to reduce the possible bias. The argument is that biases are consistent over time and most studies demonstrate that results tend to be stable especially within individual newspapers and over longer periods of time (e.g. McCarthy et al. 1996). However considerations of costs and time have determined our methodological choices. For instance, several studies have shown that taking two newspapers instead of one in general duplicate the time of coding, without however increasing "the amount of events obtained adding a second source" (Koopmans and Rucht 2002: 238). The combination of two newspapers for example (e.g. of different ideological orientation) offer only one fourth of events more than each source individually (Ibid.).

[9] As for the sampling criterion, data have been collected from the Lexis Nexis database and or from CD Rom versions/online archives of the selected newspapers using several keywords (e.g. 'extreme right', 'neonazi', 'white supremacis*', 'far right', 'skinhead*', 'nazi', etc.). A reiterative process has been used by searching with all keywords for each year, and then eliminating redundant articles. Copies of original articles were stored to go back to qualitative information not captured by the variables of the codebook. Inter-coder reliability tests were undertaken for article selection and coding in order to ensure coherence among coders and countries, in the coding procedure.

Secondly, we performed a formalized *content analysis* of radical right websites in the four countries, for a total of 212 organisations (for the codebook, see table B in appendix; for the lists of radical right organisations/websites included in the analysis, table C). For its construction we relied on terrorism research (e.g. Weimann 2004), as well as on studies that use a formalized approach to the investigation of extremist websites (e.g. Gerstenfeld et al. 2003, Zhou et al. 2005, Qin et al. 2007). We have also drawn on similar studies on civil society websites in the East (e.g. see Bruszt et al. 2005). The codebook focuses on the following broad dimensions that we consider relevant to Internet use by radical right groups: *(a) information* (including variables recording how much the organisation diffuse informative materials such as articles, bibliographical materials etc. on its website); *(b) communication* (including variables measuring how much the organisation makes use on its website of communication tools such as email, telephone contact, feedback forms, etc.); *(c) ideology* (with variables aiming at detecting the website use for portraying the goals of the group, defining its general policies, and presenting the foundational ideology); *(d) propaganda* (including variables to capture the presence of content concerning propaganda directed towards 'outsiders' and 'insiders', e.g. hate symbols, multimedia materials); *(e) virtual community/identity* (with variables referring to the use of the Internet as an arena for debates and discussions, e.g. forum, newsletters, chats, etc.); *(f) mobilisation* and *recruitment* (concerning the use of Internet as a tool of activation of members and sympathizers for offline as well as online actions, e.g. publicizing political campaigns, promoting online petitions, providing instructions for offline actions, etc.); and *(g) internationalization* (with variables related to the use of the Web to build transnational contacts with other extremist groups and to appeal to an international audience, e.g. content of the Web translated in other languages, etc.). In order to empirically investigate each of these broad dimensions, we use several 'lower level' indicators. Each feature of the codebook is recorded as a dummy variable, attributing a value 1 if a given feature is present and zero if it is not found on the website (for a similar method, see Bruszt et al. 2005). The web content analysis was performed in 2017 by native speakers in the language of the four countries selected. Reliability tests were conducted periodically.

To identify all RR organisations with an online presence in our selected countries, we applied a 'snow-ball' technique. Based on sources of various kinds (official reports, secondary literature, etc.), we first identified the most important extreme right organisations in the four countries (as for example the political parties). Then, starting from these and focusing exclusively on 'friends' links explicitly indicated by these organisations[10], we discovered the websites of minor and less known groups[11]. The process was repeated up to the point at which it became impossible to add new sites or organisations to our sample for each country that had not already been mentioned. We have arrived in this way at identifying approximately 50-80 RR organisations in each country—for a total of 212 groups analysed.

Our research design includes *two comparative dimensions: cross-national and cross-right-wing organisation*. The four CEE democracies (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) have been chosen because they share some common historical legacies (pre-1989 communist pasts, democratic transitions in the early 1990s, EU accession in 2004), but also differ on the 'demand side' of radical right activism (i.e. different strength and duration of the electoral success of the radical right; Caiani and Csiar 2018). Moreover, overall, radical right parties are quite weak in our four cases ('V4', Visegrad four), rarely exceeding 7% of the popular vote; however Slovakia's radical right-wing party is the most successful and enduring. The Catholic Church serves as a vector and potential ally of the radical right in all of them (however this is particularly true in Poland; to a lesser degree in Slovakia) (Grzymala-Busse 2015, 2019; Kotwas and Kubik 2019). Moreover, the legacies are different across the countries, and particularly prominent in Slovakia and Hungary. Finally, although right-wing populism has become part of the V4's political arenas (especially in Hungary and Poland), we cannot ignore the specificities of these populisms: one leaning toward Russia-inspired national

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[10] Namely a "separate page or dedicated section specifically for links to other websites" (Bruszt et al. 2005, 153).

[11] On the 'reputational' approach, see Scott 2000. We relied on the self-definition of the group and the predominant messages transmitted through the website to determine if the group constituted a 'radical right-wing organisation'.

populism-based surveillance capitalism and the other attempting to preserve the remains of a liberal democratic order (Szabó 2020).

These differences, we assume, might affect the degree of RR organisations' online and offline activism, force them to confront different markets of consumers for the spread of their ideas (Caiani and Parenti 2013), and influence their ideology according to the groups' histories and previous activities (Minkenberg 2017) All of these factors we expect will contribute to the form and content of the organisations' use of the protest arena and the web to do politics.

Moving from the *contextual opportunities* for the radical right to the *meso-organisational milieu characteristics* (which also, according to social movement scholars might influence the emergence and form of the mobilisation), despite differences within the region, the radical right in Eastern Europe has three unique characteristics that distinguish it from its older West European cousins: left-leaning positions on the economy; linkages between identity and political opening, which leads to the association of minority policies with democratization; and the coexistence of radical right parties with radicalized mainstream parties (Butiskova 2018). This could help us to contextualize our object of research as well as our findings vis à vis the Western RR.

Moreover, this article focuses on both radical right political parties and non-party organisations, including violent groups. They are: *i.* radical right political parties[12] (e.g. the Slovak Nationalist Party, the Jobbik in Hungary, or the Freedom and Direct Democracy in Czech Republic and the National

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[12] In this category we include groups defining themselves as political parties that openly partake in elections and sometimes enter the national assembly (for a detailed list of radical right-wing parties in the CEE region, see Minkenberg 2017).

Movement in Poland); *ii.* radical right political movements[13]; *iii.* neo-Nazi groups[14] (such as paramilitary groups in Hungary or white supremacy groups in the Czech Republic); *iv.* revisionist/negationist and nostalgic[15] groups (e.g. the Trianon Association in Hungary or the National Institute for Education in Czech Republic); *v.* cultural and commercial radical right groups[16]; *vi.* subcultural youth organisations (such as skinheads, music subcultures, and sports groups)[17]; and *vii.* right-wing nationalists (like those in Poland)[18]. ==The radical right is not a monolithic actor (Minkenberg 2017), and there is not reasons to expect that these various actors will use the web and the protest arena for the same purposes and at the same extent. For instance more institutional actors are considered more likely to use conventional actions instead of protest; while it has been seen a generational impact (i.e. youth) on organisations usage of the Web (della Porta and Diani 2020).==

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[13] This category includes less institutionalised actors that do not run for public office (but rather try to mobilise public support; Minkenberg 2017) or 'party parallel organisations' (Veugelers and Menard 2018), associations relating to political parties (like the '64 county youth movement' in Hungary or the 'movement of young intellectuals' in Poland). We also include journals and magazines close to political parties (e.g. the magazine *Právo Národa* in Slovakia).

[14] Neo-Nazi organisations refer to German Nazis or their ideological cousins in the four cases (like the Hungarist movement in Hungary).

[15] The main characteristics of the revisionist and 'negationist' groups are historical revisionism and the denial of the Holocaust; aspirations of re-writing history; and the documentation of the crimes of communism. In the Hungarian case, these organisations refer to the Horthy Era between the two World Wars.

[16] These extreme right organisations can be divided into traditional cultural associations, including Catholic ultra-traditionalist organisations, on the one hand, and 'new age' and 'neo-mystic' groups on the other. Veugelers and Menard (2018) note that publishers that sell classical Nazi-fascist texts, memoirs, and gadgets play an important role in the radical-right's non-party sector.

[17] Subcultural organisations refer to 'small groups' such as football fan clubs, skinhead music bands (Veugelers and Menard 2018), and graffiti or hooligan groups. They have their own lifestyles, characterised by specific clothing, clothing brands, and music styles.

[18] Right-wing nationalist groups are close to 'political sects'. This category includes military groupuscules as well as the Polish Defence League.

Radical right mobilisation (and violence): Where and when outside the web?

What is the level of offline mobilisation that characterises the contemporary radical right in Eastern Europe? We considered the number of protest events as well as the number of people participating in each event as two important indicators of the intensity (i.e. volume) of RR mobilisation. Our protest event data demonstrate that radical right mobilisation is a significant—and increasing—phenomenon in the period under analysis: 1,040 total actions have been identified during our timeframe (302 in the Czech Republic, 401 in Poland, 125 in Slovakia, and 212 in Hungary) (Figure 1).

Figure 1 about here

However, considerable variations across the four countries can be observed, with stable or increasing, levels of radical right mobilisation for the majority of them. In particular, Hungary is the only country showing a decrease in the mobilisation of radical right groups and activists in the period under investigation (from about 30 to 10 events registered from 2008 to 2016). On the contrary, in Poland, already rather high at the beginning of our analysis, radical right mobilisation demonstrates a sharp increase in the most recent years (almost tripling the number of events initiated by these actors from about 30 in 2006 to 80 in 2016). Similarly in Czech Republic and Slovakia, the intensity of radical right mobilisation first declines (after 2009 until 2014)-although not linearly in Czech Republic but with peaks and downs--and then it increases.

The refugee crisis seems to coincide with peaks of radical right activism (in Slovakia) or a sharp increase, in all of our countries under study, except Hungary[19]. This could surprise if one considers

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[19] Tarrow (1989), like many other social movement scholars, refers to these characteristics of the context as 'political opportunities': the set of 'consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives [or constraints] for people to undertake collective action, by affecting their expectations for success or failure' (1994, 85).

the success of the Hungarian radical right in the electoral arena in these years (and the diffusion of xenophobic discourses by political party leaders), on the other hand it would support the hypothesis of an inverse relationship between the institutional setting and the more radical activities of the radical right movement sector (Hutter 2014). These trends in radical right collective action can be contextualized against the background of the increasing fear of 'phantom refugees' (Butikova 2019).

Besides the number of actions, an additional relevant factor related to radical right mobilisation is the number of participants at radical right events. According to our data, the size of the events organised by radicals in Eastern Europe varies a lot (figure not showed but data available from the authors upon request), from thousands of participants (such as, for instance, the cases of the commemorative demonstrations in Poland each year for the National Independence Day, involving about 100,000 RR participants), to several of only a few activists[20]. However in all countries, more than 40% of events involve a moderated number of participants (ranging from 10 to 30 on average). This partly confirms, for the CEE countries too, that most radical right supporters engage in actions individually or in small groups, and not on behalf of any specific organisation (TE-SAT Report 2009), however it differs from previous research on the RR on Western Europe which found a very small scale for the diffusion of ER activism (on average no more than 5-6, see XXX). Most interestingly, if we look at the number of participants and the number of *violent actions* (see below for more details), they both increase from 2015, passing from 6 to 15 participants the former and from 1 out of six to 1 out of four, the latter.

Varieties of radical right actors and action repertoires

However beyond violence, there are other action strategies which characterises the recent

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[20] Such as the 2018 Mayday parade ('Szturmowy Pierwszy Maja') in Warsaw, organised by six groups, which gathered less than 50 people or the various 'counter events', such as the small protests (grouping between 10 to 30 people each) all around Poland, against the progressive reaction to the LGBTs free zones (e.g. in 2019 the RR protest with the banner 'Swidnik free from rainbow propaganda!').

mobilisation of the radical right RR in the East. Looking at the specific action strategies adopted by these forces in our timeframe, we indeed observe that (figure 2), first of all, right wing groups have a variegated repertoire of action, made up of conventional (mainly in Slovakia-data not showed), demonstrative (similarly across all countries analysed), expressive, confrontational (mainly in Hungary and Poland), and violent (including both soft violence and heavy violence) actions.

Figure 2 about here

In order to classify the action forms in our protest event analysis, we distinguished six main categories, on the basis of increasing radicalness (for similar classification, on Western RR, see Castelli and Pirro 2019; XXX 2012): (a) 'conventional actions', which are those political actions associated with conventional politics (lobbying, electoral campaigns and press conferences, etc.); (b) 'demonstrative actions', which are legal actions aiming to mobilize large numbers of people (e.g., rallies, petitions, street demonstrations); (c) 'expressive actions', which are legal actions focusing on radical right activists and sympathizers, in order to reinforce the in-group cohesion and identity (e.g., commemorations, music festivals); (d) 'confrontational' actions, which refer to events that are non-violent, but usually illegal, whose aim is to disrupt official policies or institutions (e.g. blockades, occupations, illegal but not violent demonstrations, etc) ; and (e) finally 'violent actions' , which are illegal actions implying some forms of symbolic or physical violence against things or people[21]. The category 'online' action includes online events by right wing groups reported in the press.

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[21] These are analytical categories, it is clear that in the empirical reality the boundaries among different action forms are sometimes blurred—even within the same ER protest event. This holds true also for the classification of radical right groups, into different categories of actors, which are not mutually exclusive, as the increasing success of the recent concept of 'movement-party' testifies (XXX 2018).

Secondly, we see that radical right action strategies vary a lot from one type of actor to another. In particular, overall, political parties (but also nostalgic-revisionist organisations and political movements), representing the most institutionalized actors among the four categories, rely heavily on the most 'orthodox' forms of mobilisation, mainly conventional (22 %, together with nostalgic, 22%) and demonstrative (58%, followed by political movements with 52%) actions[22]. Demonstrative actions are however much more frequently used by cultural right wing associations (70% of their mobilisation events registered), including religious associations and patriotic groups. Finally, youth subcultural skinhead groups and nostalgic associations are mainly involved in expressive events (11% and 8%) in all countries under study, with the exception of Hungary where also political parties perform expressive events (4.3 %). Most of these events do not target the mainstream public, but aim at reinforcing in-group identities by creating 'strong social ties' (McAdam 1986).

The most 'radicalized' organisations are subcultural groups and individual/anonymous activists, which account respectively for 60% and 28% of violent events, such as for instance violent clashes with political adversaries[23]. These violent events include desecrations of graves (e.g. that of Karl-Maria Kertbeny, the man who coined the term 'homosexuality', *Népszabadság Online*, 3.08.2010 or vandalising Jewish graves with swastika symbols at a cemetery in Liberec in 2014, 19.05.14, *Mladá fronta Dnes*), or violent attacks on authorities (e.g. against the police), political adversaries (e.g., LGBTQIA activists, squatted social centres, left-wing parties, or newspapers) (as the violent attack

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[22] As for example the various electoral campaigns organised during our timeframe for the Presidential or local elections in our four countries.

[23] Overall, our data indicate notable levels of radical right violence in CEE in the period under study (around 15% of all events initiated by radical right groups between 2008 and 2016). Poland is the only country which showed a decline in violence, although overall an increase in RR mobilisation, in the period under analysis.

against a squat center planned by a group of skinheads attacked in Poland in 2012[24]) or social minorities, in particular homosexuals[25] (also foreigners, Jews and Roma)[26].

In addition, sometimes these types of events are also staged directly online, as shown by the case of the online petitions of some radical right organisations in Poland (directed to Marc Zuckerberg), in order to protest against the ban of their facebook pages[27]. In fact, although the number of 'online actions' reported in the press is very low comparing to the other strategies of action of the radical right (6%) of total recorded protest events—vs. 8.3 % in the Western European cases on average, XXX), we can observe strong links between the actions staged by right wing groups offline and the Internet arena. As example of online right wing actions (reported in the press) we can mention the case of the internet campaign "Not for immigrant, yes for repatriate" in Poland[28], or the dissemination on the Web of recruitment video (for paramilitary extremist organisation) in Czech Republic[29]. Indeed, as our dataset shows, either conventional or unconventional mobilisation events of the RR organized outside the Web are strictly related to, and often supported by, online activities of these organisations. Also very common are videos of demonstrations and clashes with the police[30], which seem to play an important role, not only in transmitting a message concerning the group's ideology, but also in emphasizing the existence of a numerically significant organisation behind the website. Although they reflect offline events, many of these events reach the sphere of the internet, in an

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[24] *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 15.05.12.

[25] Hungarian RR groups assaulted a group of young homosexual men and women, beating them to death, during the Gay Pride demonstrations in 2010 (*Népszabadság Online*, 4.07.2010).

[26] For example, in 2009, a Roma family was attacked at night in Tatárszentgyörgy, a village in Hungary. A father and his son were killed by radical right militants (*Népszabadság Online*, 23.02.2009).

[27] *Gazeta Wyborcza* , 02.11.16.

[28] *Gazeta Wyborcza,* 23.08.13

[29] *Mladá fronta Dnes,* 11.03.10.

[30] For example, see the website of the Slovak Neo-Nazi group https://vzdoruj.wordpress.com/.

interesting interplay between 'real' and 'virtual', which right wing groups skilfully manage. Individual RR activists and unidentified organisations rely on this type of strategy most frequently (in 4.2% of cases). In short, these data suggest that different types of actors tend to specialise in specific action strategies in order to reach their goals.

Finally, social movement scholars underline the importance for the investigation of collective action, of more contextual and contingent factors such as the broader 'organisational field', whose it is product (della Porta 2012). In our study, when looking at what are the main targets and/or issues of the mobilisation of the RR in the Est (figure 3), we observe that, overall (in our four countries under study), the emergence of right wing mobilisation is more likely when the targets (and or issues) are, first, ethnic minorities (or migration issues)-which account for 27.8% of all events registered--, especially in Slovakia and Czech Republic, with respectively about 40% and 50% of all the coded events under our timeframe on these categories. In fact, when it comes to the radical right targeting of ethnic minorities, interestingly, specific minority groups (e.g. Roma) are targeted in each of the countries analysed, depending on the ethnic composition of the country and the master frames used in constructing xenophobic discourse. The second most important sets of issues for radical right mobilisation are political issues (or against political adversaries such as left wing parties, Unions or national politicians and institutions. These issues are especially salient in Poland and Hungary, where they constitute about 25% of all protest events. Conservative values and social minorities each correspond to about 19% of events. The former category of issue and target is especially present in protest events organised in Slovakia and Czech Republic (about 40%-50% each).

Figure 3 about here

More in particular, prominent of the CEE radical right mobilisation on 'conservative values'/on the conservative value category are anti-LGBTQ and anti-feminism/gender equality issues (similarly to what happens in Western Europe, Mudde 2005; Caramani and Manucci 2019, as well as in East

Germany). These groups highlight that morality is the most important issue (as the Czech Pro-Vlast). For example, in 2010 and 2011, RR activists and neo-Nazis severely beat gay rights' activists during demonstrations in defence of LGBT rights in Poland (*Gazeta Wyborcza* 19.07.10; 21.11.11). This is in line with other recent studies which stress the importance of these issues (LGBT communities, abortion) in the language used by the Polish nationalist right (and the Church) (Żuk and Żuk 2019), forming an 'ideological backbone' for the governing right-wing populist right—as well as it confirms as for the protest arena what has been already stressed for the CEE ER political parties (for example the discourse of the Slovak radical right ĽSNS which includes within an overarching conspiracy-minded narrative of the 'system' threatening the decent people foreigners, ethnic and sexual minorities, Kazharski 2019) or other institutions (as the Church, see Żuk and Żuk, 2019). Finally, somewhat counterintuitively, given that our time frame was characterised by the shadow of the great European recession, we found a lesser amount of radical right activities (only 6% of the cases) were on economic issues (mainly in Hungary and Poland). Radical right mobilisations spurred by supranational politics or institutions (e.g. the EU) were very rare, suggesting that radical right mobilisation mainly depends on local conflicts and grievances (as in the case of RR groups in Western Europe, XXX).

The radical right and online politics

All the advantages offered to collective actors by the new information and communications technologies seem to be well known by radical right groups in the countries analysed, as their significant online presence testifies. In fact, not only the 212 radical right organisational websites identified were very active and skilfully 'fun', but also the majority of them were often related to own official Facebook pages, radio stations, blogs and online chat forums, allowing a 'cyber cascade' effect of their messages. More specifically (table E, appendix) the type of radical right organisations more prominent online are political movements (such as youth movements like the '*64 county youth movement'* in Hungary, or the Czech '*Workers' Youth')*. Then it comes nostalgic or revisionist

groups/websites (17 %) as well as nationalistic, patriotic, and subcultural radical right organisations (about 16%).

When looking at the different uses of the internet by the radical right, *country patterns* and *type of organisation patterns* do emerge. Figure 4, offers a summary of the six aspects of political activism online explored (expressing the intensity of activity by right-wing groups on each index)[31]. They are the elementary forms of online political participation (Bruszt et al. 2005: 152). The Czech radical right is the most active in the use of the Internet on most of the functions analyzed (showing the first or second highest values on almost all the indexes). Hungary comes as the second most online oriented RR. More specifically, Czech RR organisations show the most variety of online activities (with an average value on all indexes of 0.32), i.e. they use the Internet in the more different ways, especially for what concerns 'internationalization', 'propaganda' and 'communication' functions. Slovak and Hungarian RR organisations are those strongest in mobilizing their supporters using the Web (with values on this function of 0.32 and 0.33 respectively). Finally, Poland seems a particularly conducive context for an active use of the Internet by the RR for 'information to the public' purposes.

Figure 4 about here

Overall, the majority of the Eastern RR organisations in our countries under analysis tend to use the web for propaganda (66% of them compared to about 50% in the West, see Table F in appendix). These messages are oriented toward insiders (i.e. members) and outsiders (e.g. sympathisers and other visitors), and the websites offer a rich repository of documents, photos, and propaganda material explicitly recalling nationalist, xenophobic, fascist, and Nazi iconography and rhetoric. One-fifth of

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[31] Each of these six additional indexes of the forms of Internet usage derive from the sum of the lower lever indicators used for each dimension (see method section). Each index has been normalized, in order to vary between 0 and 1, and standardized to the 0 to 1 range by dividing the resulting score by the maximum possible value.

all the analysed radical right websites (20.7%) contain hate symbols, such as swastikas, tristikas, and historical fascist symbols like the arrow cross (used by the Hungarian Nationalist Movement) or the short *gladio* sword,[32] photos of nationalist leaders, such as Hitler, Ferenc Szálasi, or Andrej Hlinka, images related to the Third Reich, and flags representing local fascist movements, past and present (symbols such as the phalanx, the arrow-cross, and so on abound). Militarist symbols (guns, marching soldiers, emblems of historical armed forces, etc.) also appear frequently, as do Celtic crosses.[33]

Additionally, 10% of all the RR websites contain banners[34] depicting representative figures and graphic symbols or seals intended to incite hatred toward social and/or political adversaries, such as the 'left-leaning clubs' that the by Polish group Aktyw Północy targets. The website of the Hungarian organisation ArrabonaCrew displays an image that represents Israel oppressing Palestine, calling for 'Protest against Zionist world domination'. Similarly, the website of the Polish nationalistic organisation Zadruga features a banner showing men and a woman as 'the Germanic ideal', calling for 'fight, resistance and action' and a call imploring women to defend their blood and motherland, with a drawing of a naked women wearing the group's armband, an ammunition belt, and military boots. One important function of these materials is rank and file mobilisation, as political pictures, which draw upon emotions rather than rationality, can activate and foster group loyalty (Powell, Boomgaarden, De Swert and de Vreese 2015).

The use of multimedia material (present in 50% of all RR websites analysed) is also a common propaganda strategy. These diverse collections of media are presumably directed toward young people, for whom the web has become a crucial device (Street 2011, 263). Videos and music characterised by political content are especially common on the websites of political movements and

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32 See, for example, the website *Droga Legionisty*.

33 We relied here on the FIFA and UEFA catalogue of hate symbols, which are symbols that are banned from stadiums and football games.

34 Banners are images (GIF or flash) usually in a high-aspect ratio shape, often employing animation, sound, or video.

Nazi and nationalistic organisations—not to mention, of course, among music groups). Audio files of sermons and archival speeches (e.g. by leaders of the Fascist/Nazi regimes)[35] are also common, as are podcasts accompanying radical right newspapers or magazines. Videos of demonstrations and direct action (e.g. clashes with the police, as well as confrontations between the police or 'ordinary citizens' and refugees, immigrants, Roma people, and other targeted groups)[36] also feature heavily on these websites. These videos seem to play an important role, not only in transmitting a message concerning the group's ideology, but also in implying the existence of a numerically significant organisation behind the website.

Radical right organisations in CEE also strive to create virtual communities of debate/identity—the second most important function of their web-based tools (about 40% of them compared to about 50% among their Western counterparts). 17% of these websites have newsletters that highlight ongoing activities. Another 17% provide a chat or forum for the group; spaces for asynchronous discussion (indirect interactivity among the users) are more widely used (present in 25% of websites) than spaces of synchronous discussion (present in 7.4% of the cases). However, more than two-thirds of radical-right web sites analysed (68.1%) provide a section containing information regarding the group (such as 'about us', 'who we are', etc.), and the majority (66% of cases) have sections devoted to illustrating the group's goals (e.g. 'mission statement', 'statute', 'constitution', 'manifesto', 'what we want', etc.). Some websites sum up the goal of the group in a few sentences by highlighting special key words (for example, on the site of the Hungarian Turn Right,[37] the organisation defines itself as the 'voice of real radicals') while others offer a detailed description of the group's core values and history. This is the case, for example, on the site of the Czech Neo-Nazi organisation Svobodná mládež, which stresses that they are "a group of dedicated young people unsatisfied with this political situation,

35 For example, on https://aryanrebel.wordpress.com/.

36 For example, see the web site of the Slovak Neo-Nazi group https://vzdoruj.wordpress.com/.

37 https://www.facebook.com/JobbraAt/?fref=ts

regime and failing moral, social and cultural values of this society, which balances on the edge of big precipice".[38]

The third most important function of the use of the Websites by Eastern radical right organisation is political information (about 30% of them vs. 70% of their Western counterpart). This implies, the offer by RR sites to the users of a large range of information for 'political education', like the publication of 'articles, papers and dossiers' (7.4%); having a 'news section'- in which they make reference to media coverage and link to newspaper articles, or carry out news coverage, taking information from other newspapers or TV programs[39], as well as the offer of bibliographical references (to classical text of ideologues of the nazi/fascist or national past, e.g. biographies on classic Hungarian radical-right thinkers or reports and statistical data concerning sensitive issues such as immigration.

Our analysis also shows that these groups face some difficulties in exploiting all the available tools for web-based interactivity. Only 15% of them use their website for online or offline mobilisation (compared to 30% in the West). Only a few of them illustrate online current or past political campaigns, and still fewer have an archive of the group's annual events or a chronology of the organisation's history. Some groups have questionnaires or surveys for their supporters, but online actions such as petitions or information about the group's political actions are relatively rare.

Among organisational types (data not showed), radical right political movements and nationalistic organisations (as well as political parties) are more likely, in all countries analysed, to use the internet to fulfil more traditional web-based functions, like 'informing' (values on the index 0.21 and 0.15-0.17 respectively) and 'communicating' (0.26 and 0.13) with potential audience-members. These

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38 http://www.svobodnamladez.org/

39 In addition, 21.3 % of the right-wing websites analysed also have an archive of the group's press releases. This figure increases to roughly 30 % in the case of political parties and political movements. In a cross-country perspective, Hungarian, Czech and Polish radical-right groups are more likely to offer an archive of their press releases on their websites (in almost 40 % of the websites), followed by Slovakia (in about 15 % of cases).

groups tend to use the internet as a means of consensus-seeking among members. To the contrary, overall, neo-Nazi groups are more likely to use the Web for building 'international contacts' (0.35); and subcultural youth groups for 'mobilizing' adherents (0.18). Neo-Nazi pages use more symbols, or at least use them more explicitly than political parties[40]. For example, subcultural and neo-Nazi groups are more likely to provide multimedia materials for propaganda and organise political campaigns on their websites in 72.2 % and 59.1 % of cases, respectively. These types of multimedia features include YouTube videos of interviews with a leader, speeches of radical right MPs in Parliament, or videos from demonstrations with invitations to future demonstrations. As opposed to more institutional actors, these groups tend to use the internet as an innovate alternative to face-to-face interactions. In sum, in spite of the varying country contexts, there are similarities among 'similar' radical right organisations, suggesting a link between offline identities and online practices.

Conclusion

In response to the increasing intensity of right-wing mobilisation all over Europe, in this study we argued that focusing on only one arena (i.e. either offline or online) can be limited or misleading for researchers who want to understand the changing dynamics of contemporary radical right. In fact, first of all, as our protest event analysis indicated, Eastern radical right activism is a notable and widespread phenomenon, and that it is growing[41]. This also includes the capacity of these political forces to mobilize a large number of people, which, although discontinuously in time and space, appeared in our study to be on the rise as well[42]. However, our data also showed that the main actors

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[40] We are grateful to an anonymous referee for this observation.

[41] As a side note: this emerged especially true in Poland and Czech Republic which also those countries which showed the highest levels of radical right activism on the internet.

[42] Particularly in Slovakia, and Hungary, especially in the most recent years, which also appeared as the countries with the more Internet oriented RR mobilization-- apparently these efforts on the Net are able to exit from the virtual sphere and reach the real word.

of RR activities, including violence, are usually small political movements (or at least activists operating in small groups). This observation may suggest a certain degree of organisational weaknesses or possibly the existence of a strategic division of labour, with the more institutionalised actors (such as political parties) focusing on the conventional and demonstrative arenas-as we saw- and smaller informal groups on the more disruptive strategies. This specialisation in mobilisation is also common in the online arena, where we saw that different RR groups use the Internet for different purposes.

In fact, we found that the radical right in Eastern Europe too, as already showed for the Western European cousins, uses a broad repertoire of action, beyond violence and elections, including online activism. As our web content analysis showed, these organisations are particularly aware of the enlargement of opportunities offered by the Web for their propaganda in particular. They use the Internet to reach their followers, propagate their ideology and mission, and build and re-affirm their identity. Most interestingly they are all present on at least one social media platform (usually Twitter or Facebook). The internet therefore for these organisations is making "easier to share ideas, coordinate activities, disseminate propaganda, form alliances, sell merchandise, and recruit members" for left- and right-wing organisations alike (Rydgren 2018, 9-10). However the question remains as to how much this is mirrored in an increase of radical right mobilisation in the real, although our data seemed to suggest some links between the two arenas. As illustrated, the boundaries between their offline and online politics are blurred in the political mobilisation of right wing groups. Future empirical comparative studies, including a micro level analysis (e.g. with interview data with activists), would be necessary to detect the real impact of the online sphere on the offline world.

Beyond commonalities, we also found some countries (and types of organisations) specificities. If the refugee crisis offered similarly an unique opportunity to "[Westernise] the East European radical right in its opposition to Islam and migrants with non-European backgrounds" (Butiskova 2018), therefore it can be interpreted as a 'critical juncture' that spurred radical right mobilisation, as our data showed, RR groups in the four countries differed from each other, not only in the intensity of

mobilization (and violence), but also in terms of their preferred issues and targets (and how they use web-based resources, as said above, for addressing them). They can be partly related to the particularly favourable 'political opportunities' (which also include the 'discursive' ones, XXX 2012) for RR mobilisation in Poland and Slovakia, for the explicit connections with the church here; but also in terms of country saliency of different issues of mobilisation and prominent RR activism (i.e. conservative groups and issues).

The differences found may be also related to countries' variation in terms of ethnic heterogeneity, economic performance, and cultural legacy (Butiskova 2018). Slovakia, for example, is more (e.g. ethnically) heterogeneous and these cleavages can structure radical right politics; whereas in the other three countries under analysis (more homogeneous) radical right mobilisation generally focuses, as also stressed by our data, mainly on Roma or on social and religious issues (Butiskova 2018). In general, despite the new forms of contentious engagement of the radical right in Eastern Europe, historical legacies (on which the current RR in the region seem keen to rely, Butiskova 2018), seem to "cast a long shadow on contemporary events, due to the increasingly widely held belief that liberal democracy is not compatible with a vision of societies ruled exclusively by titular majorities" (ibid). As for the East-West European divide in the way the radical right uses the Web, if the web is in both regions mainly used for the political propaganda of these forces, this is especially evident in Eastern Europe. More empirical research is needed to assess the link between political opportunities and radical right activism on the web, as well as to reflect on the policy implications of these results.

Our findings, finally, emerge as particularly central for the recent debate on the democratic potential of the Internet (i.e. "hate speech or free speech"?), since discourses and actions (also online) of the RR organisations are also important in the context of democratic representation (Mudde 2016). What happens, when more than merely constituting a 'global village', the Internet is used as a space where differences are reproduced and emphasized, and not negotiable identities prevail? (Roversi 2006). Through the Internet people can access to limitless news and information options, especially in the blogosphere, however, as argued, in a situation where partisan weblogs emerge as a significant

political force, the relationship between democracy and the Internet may become critical (Ibid.). On the one hand, for constitutionalists, regulation of hate speech violates the First Amendment and damages a free society. On the other hand, other commentators reject this view, underlining that hate speech should be regulated as part of a commitment to human dignity and to inclusion and respect for members of vulnerable minorities.

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