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## Politicizing Europe on the far right: Anti-EU mobilization across the party and non-party sector in France

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines public contestation of Europe by the far right in France. It investigates whether far-right mobilization on the EU has changed over time, and how it diverges in the party and non-party sectors. Specifically, we follow a politicization approach and address mobilization in terms of three interrelated dimensions: intensity, issue focus, and action repertoire. This allows comparing collective action in the electoral and protest arenas, thus assessing how the far right politicizes Europe in public debates. The study relies on a mixed quantitative and qualitative analysis of the content of the press releases posted by far-right parties and movements on their official websites, scraped automatically from 2012 to 2019. The results show that European integration is increasingly at the core of far-right politics in France, but its politicization unfolds in different ways in the protest and electoral arenas. As political conflict over the EU expands, far-right parties and non-party actors are challenged to differentiate their respective profiles. These findings complement existing research on the linkages between protest and elections, and suggest that the rooting of the far right in society is reconfiguring the structure of political conflict in Europe.

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Politicization; far right; social movements; political parties; contentious politics; eu

### Introduction

European integration is now part of everyday politics. The long-lasting tension between national and supranational sovereignty and the consequences of the European crises of the early XXI century have brought the European Union (EU) at the core of domestic politics (Hooghe & Marks, 2018). Political conflict on Europe is no longer limited to restricted elite sectors, but now includes a broad range of collective actors in the electoral and the protest arena, as outlined in the introduction to this special issue). Today, political contestation of the EU involves political parties as well as social movements, even though with different means and in different channels (elections vs the ‘streets’). While this ‘expansion of actors’ (Hutter et al., 2016, p. 113) is widely acknowledged in the study of left-progressive politics, much less is known about the far-right end of the political spectrum.<sup>1</sup> If this was once justified because Euroscepticism was primarily

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voiced by political parties (Vasilopoulou, 2019), today the scenario has changed as illustrated by recent far-right protests at the border between France and Italy (Gattinara Pietro, 2019). Little research, however, investigates mobilization on the EU by far-right parties and social movements, although both arguably contribute to the politicization of European integration.

The paper attempts to fill this gap by studying EU-related mobilization by far-right parties and non-party actors in France – a context where the transfer of authority from the domestic to the EU-level has been particularly contentious (Ivaldi, 2018). Building on previous research on politicization, we tackle the following research questions: *Has far-right contestation of the EU increased over the past years? To what extent is this explained by transformations in the electoral and protest arenas? How do far-right parties and non-party actors differ in the way they mobilize against European integration?* To do so, we follow research suggesting that the protest and electoral arenas represent two complementary yet different sites of public contestation (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010) and address far-right parties and social movements within a single model (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro, 2019).

We expect mobilization on the EU to follow distinct trajectories in the party and non-party sectors. We consider three intertwined characteristics of mobilization: *intensity*, *issue focus*, and *repertoire of action*. *Intensity* is informative of the extent of politicization of the EU. To be politically relevant, in fact, an issue must be discussed not only by a restricted elite but also by other actors, notably in the protest arena (Statham & Trenz, 2015). In this way, we assess the extent to which politicization of the EU rests mainly on the activity of far-right political parties or also on that of social movements. *Issue focus* helps understanding how collective actors qualify their views of Europe. European integration may in fact be coupled with issues pertaining to both the cultural and economic dimensions of political conflict (Otjes & Katsanidou, 2017). This allows evaluating whether far-right parties and movements converge over the same understanding of the EU, or rather differentiate their profiles by addressing different dimensions of European integration. The *repertoire of action* informs of the contentiousness of mobilization on Europe (Hutter et al., 2016). The choice of conventional vs. protest types of action, in fact, refers to the specific tactics used by collective actors to polarize debates. By looking at the repertoire of action, thus, we assess another way in which far-right movements and parties may, or may not, differentiate their messages.

We use novel data on far-right mobilization in France between 2012 and 2019, gathered through automatic web scraping. Specifically, we rely on the official websites of the two most successful far-right political parties (*Front National/Rassemblement National*-National Rally, FN/RN and *Débout la France*-France Arise, DLF), and those of the three most active non-party groups in the country (*Les Identitaires*-The Identitarians, LI; *La Manif Pour Tous*-The Demonstration for All, LMPT; and *Institut Civitas*-Civitas Institute, IC).<sup>2</sup> The dataset is analyzed through a mixed methods approach. We use quantitative content analysis of press releases posted on the websites to map the characteristics of far-right contestation overtime and across arenas, with political claims as units of analysis. In addition, we use qualitative content analysis of these press releases to reconstruct the context of mobilization and to qualify collective action goals. We show that European integration is now a constitutive part of far-right contestation in both the electoral and the protest arenas, although with important

differences. While limited to the case of France, these findings hold broader implications for the study of political conflict in Europe and contribute to ongoing debates about the linkages between elections and social movements.

### ***EU politicization in the electoral and protest arenas***

Politicization is a much-debated concept that achieved increasing relevance in political sociology and party politics (Hooghe & Marks, 2018; Zürn, 2019). The paper addresses politicization as the process of expansion of conflict over a given issue, and the politicization of *Europe* as the process of more publicly visible contestation related to the various dimensions of European integration (Hutter et al., 2016). This notion implies that political conflict is informed by processes unfolding in both the electoral and the protest arena (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010). In contrast to recent studies linking these fields (Porta Donatella et al., 2017), we do not emphasize the interactions between protests and political parties as crucial moments of political conflict (Hutter & Vliegthart, 2016). Instead, we develop a single model to compare the dynamics of politicization in the protest and electoral arenas. Following this approach, we can address two main limitations in existing scholarship on the politicization of the EU, which explain why the literature on political parties and that on social movements mostly do not talk to each other. On the one hand, the ‘election bias’ characterizing studies of party politics, which focus predominantly on far-right parties to the detriment of street protest. On the other, the ‘grassroots bias’ of social movement research placing much emphasis on left-progressive protest and neglecting far-right politics (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro, 2019).

Politicization of the EU has been widely studied by scholars of party politics. They consider it as a long-term process that accelerated around key moments of European integration, as well as national and EU elections (Statham & Trenz, 2015). A subset of studies has focused on Euroscepticism, looking especially at political opposition to the EU by far-right parties (Stier et al., 2020; Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2008). These studies attribute a specific importance to populist radical right parties, whose emergence has crucially contributed to ending the ‘permissive consensus’ on European integration (Pirro & Taggart, 2018). This is because the core ideological feature of the far right is nativism (Mudde, 2019), which is at odds with EU integration and notably the freedom of movement (Halikiopoulou et al., 2012; Kopecký & Mudde, 2002). Using the example of the French FN/RN, however, scholars also suggested that the positions of far-right parties on the EU could change over time (Crépon et al., 2015). The advancement of EU integration, in fact, increased the importance of this issue for far-right parties, which now contest the EU on multiple fronts, including the political unresponsiveness of its institutions, cultural aspects associated with free movement and immigration, and economic concerns linked to the common market and currency (Ivaldi, 2018). While these studies help understanding the various patterns of opposition to the EU, they tend to look at politicization exclusively in terms of electoral competition. At least until recently, party scholars have failed to engage in a fruitful dialogue with researchers on social movements to understand large-scale processes such as politicization of Europe (Minkenberg, 2019). If it is true that elections are still the most formal channel to

articulate political preferences, this approach might thus neglect other forms of interest articulation by civil society actors.

In this respect, scholars of contentious politics have looked at social movements contesting the EU in the protest arena. Gary Marks and Doug McAdam have posited that the decline of the nation-state resulting from European integration is closely tied with the development of domestic social movements to contest the EU (Marks & Doug, 1996). Other researchers focused on the Europeanization of domestic movements (Monforte, 2014), and on the left-progressive side of mobilization against the EU (Grasso & Giugni, 2019). These studies complement party politics literature and suggest that politicization also comes from bottom-up processes in the protest arena. Yet, they tend to replicate some of the limits of research on political parties – in this case suffering of a ‘grassroots bias’. Based on the idea that the relationship between the electoral and protest arenas is reinforcing for the Left, whereas it is substitutive for the Right (Hutter, 2014), very few studies have looked at right-wing contestation of the EU in the protest arena (Ganesh & Froio, 2020; Pavan & Caiani, 2017). This led to overlooking grassroots far-right movements and equating far-right ‘protest’ with the ‘protest vote’ for radical right political parties. This is especially the case in France, arguably because the far-right scenario is dominated by a well-established party like the FN/RN (Lebourg, 2015); (Castelli Gattinara, 2019).

To sum up, existing studies recognize that the politicization of the EU unfolds in both the electoral and the protest arenas, and that the far right plays a crucial role in this process. Yet, the analyses by scholars of party politics are restricted almost exclusively to elections and party competition, whereas the ones by political sociologists are often limited to the progressive side of EU contestation. In other words, these two streams of research mostly talk past each other. To cope with these shortcomings, the next section presents a framework addressing the politicization of the EU by far-right parties and social movements within a single model.

### ***An integrated model of far-right mobilization on the EU***

Bridging party politics and social movement literatures, we study whether and how the French far right is involved in the public contestation of Europe. We consider politicization as a multi-dimensional process (de Wilde, 2011), which includes the visibility of issues in the public sphere, the expansion of the actors participating to public debates, and the polarization of their positions (Hutter et al., 2016). Our overarching expectation is that far-right mobilization on the EU takes place in both the electoral and protest arenas, albeit in different forms. Specifically, since the EU is increasingly relevant in national politics, political conflict is likely to have expanded from the arena of political parties to that of social movements. This, in turn, has driven a progressive differentiation in the strategies pursued by far-right parties and social movements interested in politicizing the EU. As political space on the far right becomes increasingly crowded, in fact, actors in the two arenas need to differentiate their profiles, either in response to existing commitments to voting blocs, or by radicalizing their strategies (McAdam & Tarrow, 2010). To study this process and its specificities, we consider three intertwined characteristics of mobilization: *intensity*, *issue focus*, and *repertoire of action*.

To begin with, we expect far-right mobilization on the EU to increase over time, expanding progressively to the social movement arena. This has to do with the deepening of European integration and with the consequences of the major European crises of the last decade, which not only increased the relevance of EU-related debates but also expanded the range of actors participating in these (Meijers & Rauh, 2016). Accordingly, we look at the *intensity* of mobilization on the EU, which indicates the visibility of this issue in the activities of far-right political parties and social movements in France. This allows assessing whether far-right mobilization over Europe has increased over time, and to what extent this depends on changes in the party and non-party sectors.

Subsequently, we anticipate that far-right social movements and political parties follow different strategies to mobilize on the EU. This is consistent with the idea that protest and electoral mobilization by right-wing actors are not aligned (Hutter, 2014). When contestation of a given issue is already voiced by an established far-right party, in fact, the available space for protest mobilization on the same issue shrinks. To find their space, therefore, movements have to differentiate their strategies, in terms of *issue focus*, and/or in terms of *repertoire of action*. The *issue focus* of collective action is the substantive content of public contestation. When mobilizing on the EU, actors may concentrate on one or more of its multiple dimensions (Otjes & Katsanidou, 2017; Guinaudeau et al., 2013), such as economic governance, institutional integration, as well as cultural aspects linked to diversity within and across member states. We expect that social movements will try to differentiate their agenda from that of political parties. Far-right parties, in fact, have been campaigning on the EU since the early 1990s and currently express positions on various aspects of EU integration to accommodate the preferences of their increasingly heterogeneous electorate (Vasilopoulou, 2019). In contrast, social movements are likely to focus selectively on a single aspect to make their claims and causes more recognizable.

The choice of a *repertoire of action* is another way in which movements and parties can differentiate their messages. The repertoire of action, in fact, refers to the specific tactics used by far-right actors to contest Europe in the public sphere. While both party and non-party groups can resort to either conventional or unconventional tactics (Kitschelt, 2006), far-right parties often stray away from engaging in overtly contentious practices, as they fear stigmatization by political opponents. This is all the more the case when parties are in quest of institutionalization (like in the case of the FN/RN), and when they address issues on which they enjoy a certain credibility (such as the EU). In contrast, social movements can resort to more contentious forms of action to mark their difference from institutional politics and polarize public debates (Froio et al., 2020). By looking at the issue focus and repertoire of collective action, therefore, we can uncover whether and to what extent far-right mobilization on the EU follows distinct patterns in the electoral and protest arenas.

## Design and methods

The study follows a most different research design to compare party and non-party organizations in France from 2012 to 2019. France is a case of special interest to study the political contestation of the EU, for reasons related to the transfer of authority from the



domestic to the EU-level. A founding member of the EEC, France has hosted one of the major referendums on the EU constitution in 2005. According to Eurobarometer data, over the past decade, the image of Europe in France has been consistently more negative than the European average, with a peak of 33% of negative views of the EU in 2013 (EU average: 27%). By 2019, 24% of respondents in France express negative views over the EU, which is 7% higher than the EU average.

The paper considers the most visible far-right organizations in France (see [Table A1](#) in Appendix). Focusing on *collective* actors is an established practice in social movement research (della Porta et al., 2020), which, however, excludes other potentially relevant *individuals*, notably intellectuals, journalists or influencers which may or may not be considered part of far-right politics but can nevertheless contribute to the diffusion of their ideas in the public sphere (Tittley et al., 2017). In the electoral arena, we address two established far-right parties characterized by different levels of electoral support: the FN/RN, which is one of the largest parties in the country, and the considerably less successful DLF. Both have regularly participated to elections, but only the FN/RN has a rooting in social movements, since it emerged from the neo-fascist group *Ordre Nouveau* in the early 1970s. In contrast, DLF has a stronger relationship with mainstream politics since it appeared in the late 1990s as the radical branch of the mainstream right Rally for the Republic (RPR) (Igounet, 2014). In the non-party sector, we consider three groups: LI, LMPT and IC. All three can be considered social movement organizations of the far-right, but their mobilization profiles are distinct: while LI promotes innovative forms of street mobilization inspired by expressive culture and agitprop activism (Castelli Gattinara & Bouron, 2019), IC and LMPT favor more conventional forms of street activism, occasionally cruising into the electoral arena.

Overall, this case selection offers an overview of the most important far-right actors in contemporary France and the multiple linkages between groups and across arenas. Until recently, there has been no collaboration between far-right parties. This only changed due to the political-financial scandals which involved the leadership of the French mainstream right RPR in 2017, leading DLF to support the FN/RN candidate in the second round of presidential elections. Similarly, there has been traditionally little cooperation between far-right social movements. The different groups included in this study are in fact located at the opposite edges of the French secularist cleavage (Froio, 2018; della Porta et al., 2020). More precisely, if LI engages on religion only to oppose so-called ‘islamization’, *Civitas* and LMPT are networks of traditionalist catholic associations, opposing gender equality and calling for a greater role of religion in France and in Europe (Avanza & della Sudda, 2017). The linkages between the electoral and protest arenas are porous but not officially established. In fact, it is not uncommon that movement activists are included in the local electoral lists of FN/RN, although this is increasingly less the case due to the efforts to ‘normalize’ the party promoted by Marine Le Pen (Lebourg, 2015).

The paper relies on a mixed-method approach. We used automated web-scraping techniques to extract all text material from the official websites of the five organizations and stock it in a single dataset (done with *Python*). Specifically, we use the press releases posted in the news section of the websites, which are considered a reliable source to measure claims-making (Kruikemeier et al., 2015). We opted to focus on the content of official websites rather than social media accounts for two main reasons. On the one

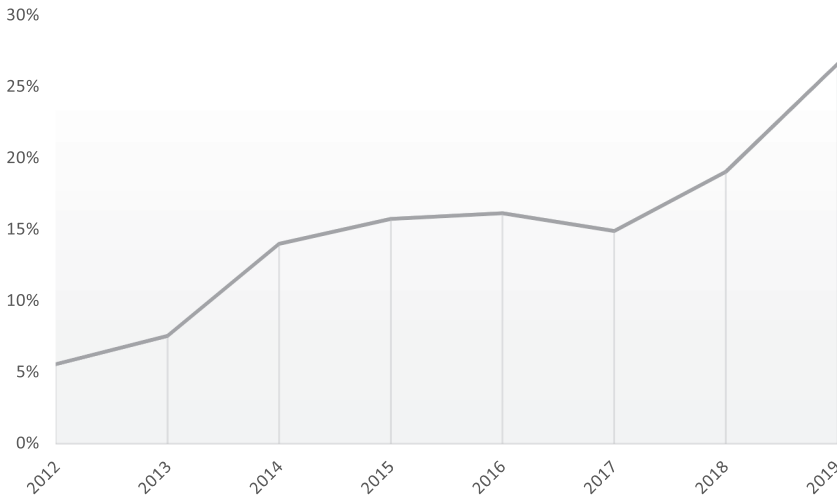


hand, because political organizations seem to use websites and social media for different purposes: while social media are used for interacting with other actors, websites serve primarily for information about their issues and campaigns, which is the focus of this paper (Nitschke et al., 2016). In this respect, previous studies found that the websites of far-right organizations not only provide information about initiatives for followers, sympathizers, as well as external observers (including journalists), but they also represent the bulk of the text that is subsequently shared by the social media accounts of these organizations (Bouron, 2017). On the other, because social media are used very differently by the actors under scrutiny, as is often the case within the far right: while some groups simply do not use social media for their activities (*Civitas*), other groups have had official accounts but subsequently incurred in censorship due to the content they shared (*Les Identitaires*). The choice of websites thus also ensured a certain consistency between the sources.

Following previous studies on agenda building, we consider press releases in official websites as instances of claims making,<sup>3</sup> and use them as units of analysis for Political Claims Analysis (Hänggli & Kriesi, 2010). The automated scraping of these sources produced many pages of text. We filtered relevant material using keyword search and then analyzed qualitatively its content. The web scraping produced a dataset of over 10.000 posts, out of which 7.000 corresponded to our definition of political claims (see Table A2 in Appendix). With the help of the open-source desktop application *OpenRefine*, we then systematically coded the retrieved material to account for the date and main topic of each press release. To account for the *intensity* of mobilization over time, we identified all claims focusing on Europe/the EU and compared them to those addressing other relevant topics (Agriculture, Economy, Immigration, and Islam).<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, we differentiated claims on Europe in terms of their specific *issue focus*, and choice of *repertoire of action*. On the one hand, we considered whether claims on Europe emphasize its cultural and nativist dimension (Islam and Immigration), as opposed to more materialist aspects (Economy and Agriculture). On the other, we distinguished the forms of action of each claim, differentiating protest actions (demonstrative, confrontational and violent events) and conventional actions, such as verbal interventions, announcements and public statements.<sup>5</sup> The retrieved material was then analyzed qualitatively to grasp each group's specific strategy of mobilization and the related understanding of Europe.

### **Politicizing Europe on the far right**

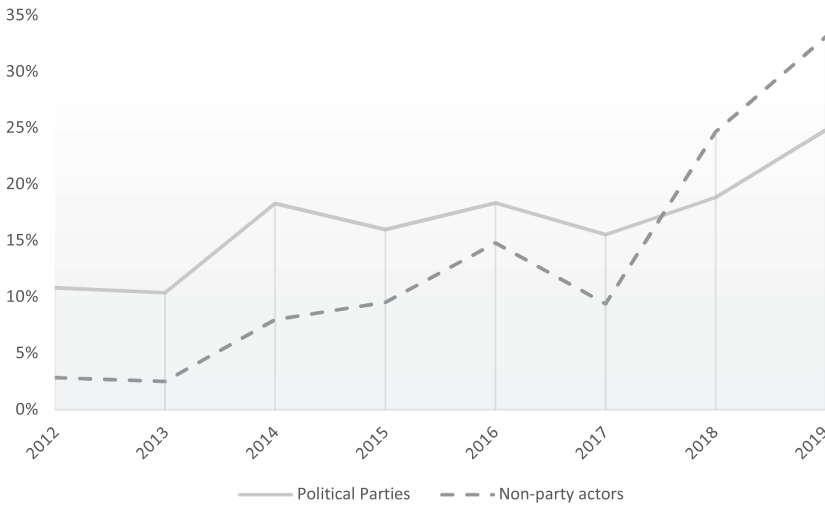
Over the whole period, 948 claims out of the total 6979 focus on Europe. Accounting for about 14% of claim making, the EU is thus a major topic of mobilization for the far right. While the most emphasized issue is the Economy (33%), the EU holds as much importance as the core far-right issue of Immigration (15%), and is considerably more relevant than either Islam (8%) or Agriculture (5%).<sup>6</sup> To understand whether mobilization is on the rise, we start by mapping the intensity of claims-making over time. Figure 1 plots the aggregate share of claims about the EU over the total number of claims posted online by all far-right actors, on a yearly basis. The aggregated figure is generally supportive of our expectation: the importance attributed to this issue increases over time, which confirms that the far right crucially contributes to the politicization of the EU.



**Figure 1.** Share of claims on the EU by year, France 2012–2019. Source: FARPE project (France)

Somewhat surprisingly, however, we find that European integration received little attention by the far right in the first years under observation, at least until 2014. Following the outbreak of the Great Recession, in fact, public debates dealt mainly with socio-economic issues like pensions and unemployment. In this period, opposition to the EU was mostly informed by domestic economic claims about austerity measures and financial negotiations between the French government and the Commission. After the 2014 European Parliament elections, instead, the EU became progressively more important in far-right activities. In particular, the far right thrived after the 2015 terror attacks in Paris, as it could link the EU to issues that easily relate to its core ideology, such as security and the integration of ethnic and religious minorities. The trend further increased over the following years. This may have to do with moral panic about Muslims in the country, but also with the unfolding of debates about the asylum policy crisis, and notably the conflict over the Calais ‘jungle’ (Castelli Gattinara and Zampon, 2020). Furthermore, debates were inspired by the consequences of the *Brexit* referendum, especially as the FN/RN launched its own *Frexit* campaign in 2017. By 2019, in occasion of the new European elections, about one-fourth of the press releases posted by the French far right online dealt with Europe, which is five times more than just seven years before, confirming the increasing importance of the EU for the far right.

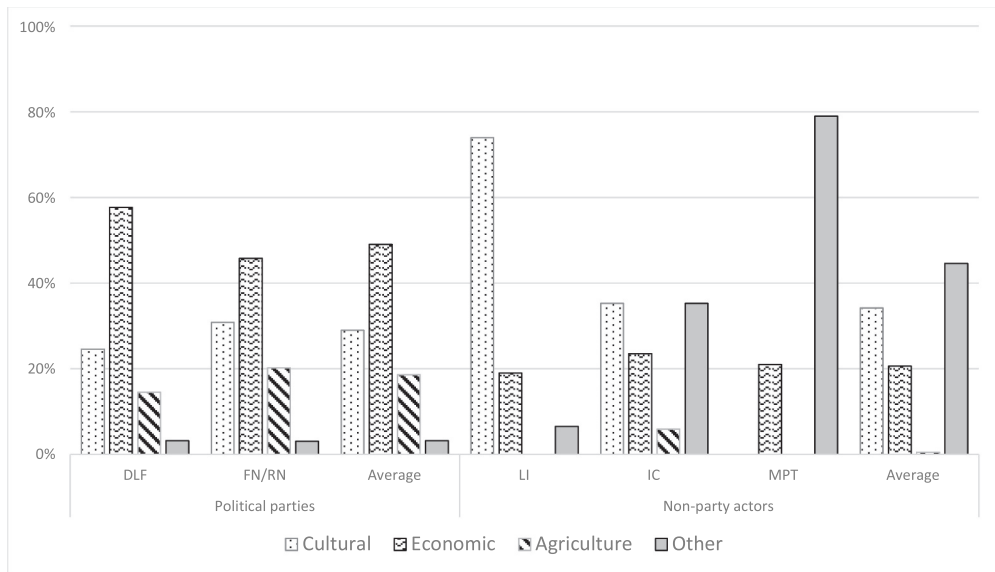
To address whether this increase had to do with an expansion of the actors mobilizing on Europe, Figure 2 disaggregates the information by political parties and non-party organizations and looks at the evolution in the intensity of mobilization in the two arenas. This allows seeing to what extent politicization can be attributed to the activities of political parties or to those of street groups. The figure shows that the increase in mobilization against the EU takes place in both the electoral and protest arenas, but it is particularly pronounced for non-party actors. In line with our expectation, this suggests that politicization has progressively expanded from the electoral arena to that of social movements. In other words, the EU is no longer the exclusive interest of far-right parties, but it is increasingly at the core of far-right protests too.



**Figure 2.** Share of claims on the EU by party and non-party actors, France 2012–2019. Source: FARPE project (France)

In the first years under observation, the graph shows an upward overtime trend for both types of actors, suggesting that the relative importance of the EU is similarly on the rise for electoral as well as protest actors. In absolute terms, the overall number of claims on the EU is much higher for political parties than for grassroots organizations. From 2017 onwards, however, the share of EU-related claims by non-party actors becomes larger than that of political parties, which confirms that European integration is progressively more important for protest actors than for electoral ones. These results are indicative of major transformations in the politicization of Europe by the far right, stemming from the growing importance of the EU in the non-party sector. A closer qualitative look at the material reveals that this has to do with the efforts of *Les Identitaires* and *Civitas* to link the asylum policy crisis in France to European integration. This occurs in somewhat different ways: while LI links the arrival of migrants to the failure of the Schengen agreements and Dublin regulations, IC mobilizes more explicitly for the exit of France from the Eurozone. Hence, *Civitas* promoted public debates on *FrExit*, whereas the Identitarians engaged in the *Defend Europe* campaign, by which they staged a shutdown of the Alpine border between France and Italy with the stated goal to halt the inflow of asylum seekers. Overall, it appears that politicization has progressively expanded from the arena of political parties to that of social movements.

To dig further into the strategies of mobilization on Europe by party and non-party actors, we proceed in two steps, looking first at the issue focus and then at the repertoire of action of far-right actors. To begin with, we scrutinize whether far-right parties and social movements differentiate their agendas when they mobilize on European integration. **Figure 3** distinguishes the share of claims associating the EU to Immigration and Islam (cultural dimension), from those focusing on the link between European integration and the Economy, Agriculture or any other aspects. The graph presents average figures for party and non-party actors, as well as separate data for each actor included in the analysis. As anticipated, we find that political parties and social movements display



**Figure 3.** Dimensions of European integration in far-right claims, by type of actor. Source: FARPE project (France)

distinct attention profiles, hinting at their different strategies of politicization of the EU. In line with our expectations, political parties emphasize multiple dimensions of the EU, whereas social movements tend to focus on specific aspects only. While political parties mobilize on the implications of EU integration for the economy, culture, as well as agriculture, movements are considerably more selective in their attention profile.

The figure displays a number of substantial differences between the two arenas. Material grievances linking the EU to economic concerns are prominent among parties (about 50% of all claims on Europe), but considerably less important for protest groups (20%). Similarly, agriculture seems to be relevant only for political parties, whereas it is largely ignored in the protest arena. Furthermore, while the attention profiles of political parties are similar to one another, there is much variation within the non-party sector, as protest groups concentrate on different aspects of EU integration. LI mobilizes almost exclusively about culture (74% of the claims); IC addresses this dimension (35%) alongside economic concerns (23%), whereas MPT is mainly concerned with gender issues that do not fall into either of these categories.

Overall, the findings suggest that the strategies of politicization diverge across the two arenas. The diversified attention profile of political parties may be a sign of their commitment to increasingly heterogeneous voting blocs, as exemplified by the emphasis on material grievances that are not at the core of far-right ideology. In contrast, the variation that can be observed in the protest arena might imply that far-right movements are in quest of new publics, and therefore need to make their claims and causes highly recognizable.

Looking at the content of the claims qualitatively, furthermore, suggests that far-right contestation of the EU in the protest and electoral arena has less to do with supranational politics than with national ones. In line with previous research, we find that all far-right

actors address European integration in light of domestic concerns rather than supranational ones (Ivaldi, 2018). Political parties blame the Commission for economic distress and social insecurity in the country (Mayer, 2019). Notably the FN/RN criticizes EU policies in the field of food quality and trade to protect its core constituencies, such as customs officials and agricultural workers. Similarly, social movement organizations like LI and IC deal with Europe primarily in relation to terror attacks in France and the accommodation of religious diversity within the country. Perhaps the most blatant example of the domestic understanding of the EU by the French far right is mobilization on civil rights by LMPT. To stop government initiatives on same-sex marriages and abortion, in fact, a number of activists from this network strategically opted to address these issues at the European level, appealing to EU courts with the goal of slowing down the domestic policy process. In sum, the strategies by which far-right movements differentiate their profiles from those of political parties seem to be largely driven by each actor's domestic issue priorities.

A closer scrutiny of the repertoire of action employed by the far right helps further qualify the strategies of politicization pursued in the two arenas. The level of contentiousness in far-right mobilization is measured by the relative frequency by which each group engages in protest actions (demonstrations, confrontational acts and violent events) as opposed to conventional forms of mobilization and verbal interventions. The data reported in Figure 4 indicates the share of protest actions over the total claims on five issue-categories: Europe, Immigration, Economy, Agriculture and all other issues. As expected, the repertoire of actions stands out as another strategy differentiating the profiles of far-right party and non-party actors. We find that, in general, movements pursue more contentious tactics than political parties, and that this difference is higher when mobilizing on Europe.

Source: FARPE project (France)

Specifically, far-right parties do not seem particularly prone to political protest. On average, protest actions account only for 2% of all their claims, and about 4% of the claims on Europe. The figure is considerably different for non-party actors, which instead

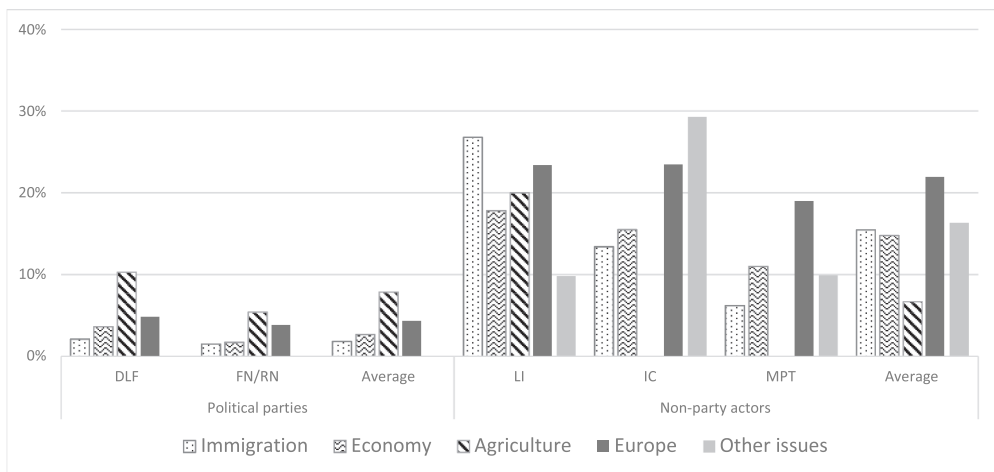


Figure 4. Share of protest actions by topic and type of actor.

use protest tactics more frequently on all issue areas (14% of the total claims), and most notably on the EU (22%). The qualitative analysis of the data provides further evidence supporting our expectation that mobilization on the EU follows distinct patterns in the electoral and protest arenas. Political parties in quest of institutionalization are very attentive to avoid stigmatization by opponents, and therefore refrain from engaging in overtly contentious tactics. They are seldom the main promoters of political protests, but they engage in contentious events organized by other actors gravitating in their network – notably in the field of Agriculture. Our data reveals that protest actions involving the FN/RN and DLF are mainly demonstrations organized by parts of their core constituency, such as the 2015 highway blockades by French farmers against the European Union food import laws, and the mobilization against the European Wine Reform by French wine growers. In contrast, far-right social movements opt for contentious tactics more frequently, as a way to mark their difference from institutional politics. They promote protests on several issues, including the rallies against same-sex marriage organized by LMPT and regular demonstrative events against migrants and religious minorities. Still, the data shows that mobilization on Europe is particularly contentious, including controversial yearly commemorations of Jean d’Arc and ‘Christian Europe’ by *Civitas*, or the 2015 occupation of the building hosting the European Commission in Paris by Identitarian activists. In sum, the politicization of the EU by the far right follows a distinct pattern in the electoral and protest arena, suggesting that political parties and social movements differentiate their tactics rather than converging over similar ones.

Taken together, these findings uncover several differences in the strategies adopted by far-right parties and social movements to politicize Europe. Political parties have a long tradition of mobilization on the EU and address broad constituencies. Hence, they tend to privilege non-contentious tactics, emphasizing not only cultural aspects of European integration, but also the economy and agriculture. In contrast, non-party actors have started campaigning on the EU more recently and need to draw the attention of new audiences. Accordingly, they are more inclined to contentious protests and try to make their profiles distinguishable by concentrating on specific dimensions of European integration. In our understanding, however, this does not imply that the protest and electoral channels of interest intermediation are simply detached from one another. Rather, as we discuss in the next section, this is informative of how mobilization in one arena may spill over to the other, linking contention to elections, and vice versa.

## **Conclusions**

The paper combines insights from the literatures on party politics and social movements to study the politicization of the EU by the far right in France. To this goal, we presented an integrated model addressing mobilization by far-right parties and social movements over time. Using data from the Far-Right Protest in Europe project (FARPE), we compared mobilization in the party and non-party sectors in terms of intensity, issue focus and repertoire of action. This contribution complements previous research on the politicization of the EU in two main ways: on the one hand, we look simultaneously at, and compare, protest and electoral actors; on the other, we take into account the often-neglected protest dimension of far-right politics.

Overall, we can draw two main conclusions from our findings based on the case of France. First, European integration is increasingly at the core of far-right politics. As we have shown, this does not necessarily point at a genuine interest in supranational affairs by the French far right, but rather at the attempt to signal positioning on domestic problems by using an issue of increasing societal relevance. The comparison shows that this is mainly due to transformations taking place in the protest arena: the intensity of far-right mobilization on the EU increases in general, but especially for social movements. This is in line with the findings of previous studies noting a steep rise in far-right street politics in the aftermaths of the EU asylum policy crisis (Mudde, 2019). More broadly, our study supports the idea that politicization implies the expansion of conflict across multiple arenas and actors (Hutter et al., 2016), including far-right protest groups that have for a long time lacked the resources to mobilize in the streets. While we did our best to capture this expansion of actors, our data only cover a narrow sample of groups and rest on self-reported information about mobilization. Future studies could thus integrate these findings with additional information from conventional sources such as newspaper and police reports, and analyses of social media platforms to uncover shared contents and viral campaigns.

Second, politicization of the EU unfolds in different ways in the protest and electoral arenas, as political parties and social movements pursue distinct mobilization strategies. We find that actors in each channel emphasize different dimensions of European integration and mobilize by means of different tactics. In our understanding, this has to do with the increasing relevance of European integration in national public debates, and the concomitant crowding of the political space on the 'right' end of the political spectrum. Under these circumstances, actors are challenged to differentiate their profiles from the ones of other far-right groups. As we have shown, they do so by emphasizing their positions on domestic problems rather than developing specific views on European affairs, confirming that the public (or constituency) that they address is ultimately a national one. Accordingly, far-right parties stuck to conventional strategies of mobilization that would not endanger their established domestic voting blocs, whereas non-party actors refrain from cruising into the electoral arena, but actively mobilize against Europe in the streets. While we compared mobilization strategies across arenas, the data was not suited to tackle the interaction between elections and protest. Future studies could thus look at the relational aspects of party-non-party linkages more in detail, by looking at overlaps in their constituency, at the development of hybrid organizational structures, and by testing the hypothesis that protest and electoral mobilization by far-right actors are becoming increasingly aligned.

The findings hold broad implications for future research. Beyond specialists of French politics and the far right, we offer insights on European integration and its contestation in general. In line with previous studies on the expansion of left-progressive actors, we have illustrated that a similar scenario is currently at work on the right end of the political spectrum. Follow-up research could build on these results to question if far-right social movements have the potential for a ratcheting up effect, introducing new ideas and tactics that more established parties could represent in frontstage politics. The question that still needs to be addressed, in fact, concerns the linkage mechanisms between far-right protest and elections, and its consequences for the radicalization of mainstream public debates.



## Notes

1. In this paper, we follow the definition of ‘far right’ proposed by Mudde, which identifies, at a minimum level, actors sharing three core ideological features – nativism, authoritarianism, and populism – while differentiating between ‘extreme’ organizations that openly oppose the democratic constitutional order, and ‘radical’ right groups that are simply hostile toward its liberal democratic principles (Mudde, 2019).
2. See Table A1 in Appendix for further details. The data has been collected by the Far Right Protest in Europe project (FARPE), funded by the Centre for Research on Extremism (C-REX) and the Research Council of Norway; details available at <https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/topics/allprojects/projects/farpe/>.
3. Claims-making as a form of political behaviour implies ‘the purposive and public articulation of political demands, calls to action, proposals, criticisms, or physical attacks, which, actually or potentially, affect the interests or integrity of the claimants and/or other collective actors’ (Koopmans et al., 2005, p. 245).
4. Specifically, we filtered all claims explicitly mentioning Europe using the following keywords: *Europ\**; *EU*; *Union Européenne*; *BCE*; *Banque Centrale Européenne*. In addition, we considered the following issues: Agriculture (*Agric\**), Economy and labour (*Econom\**; *Emploi*; *Travail*), Islam (*Islam*, *Musulm\**, *mosque*, *imam*, *Quran*), and Immigration (*Migra\**; *Immigr\**; *Asil\**).
5. We distinguished claims that included a reference to protest mobilization using the following keywords: *manifestation*; *manif*; *cortege*; *demonstration*; *commémoration*; *assemblée*; *march\**; *défil\**; *violence*; *affrontement*; *occupation*; *squat*; *action*; *rassemblement*; *émeute*.
6. See table A2 in the Appendix.

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## Appendix

Table A1. List of Acronyms

**Table A1.** List of acronyms.

Name in French	Name in English	Acronym	Website
<i>Front National /Rassemblement National</i>	National Front /National Rally	NF/FN	<a href="http://www.rassemblementnational.fr">www.rassemblementnational.fr</a>
<i>Débout La France France</i>	France Arise	DLF	<a href="http://www.debout-la-france.fr">www.debout-la-france.fr</a>
<i>Les Identitaires</i>	The Identitarians	LI	<a href="http://www.les-identitaires.com">www.les-identitaires.com</a>
<i>Institut Civitas</i>	Civitas Institut	IC	<a href="http://www.civitas-institut.com">www.civitas-institut.com</a>
<i>La Manif Pour Tous</i>	The Demonstration for All	LMPT	<a href="http://www.lamanifpourtous.fr">www.lamanifpourtous.fr</a>
	European Union	EU	
	European Economic Area	EEC	
	European Central Bank	ECB	

Table A2. Share of claims by group and main topic

**Table A2.** Descriptive statistics: total claims by group and main topic.

Group	Europe	Agriculture	Economy	Migration	Islam	Other	Total
<i>FN/RN</i>	633	298	1552	824	423	434	4164
<i>DLF</i>	248	87	634	182	107	142	1400
<i>LI</i>	77	5	140	77	35	469	803
<i>Civitas</i>	17	2	58	43	24	116	260
<i>MPT</i>	90	4	173	3	13	785	1068
<i>tot</i>	1065	396	2557	1129	602	1946	7695
%	13.8	5.1	33.3	14.7	7.8	25.3	100%