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Getting ‘right’into the news: grassroots far-right mobilization and media coverage in italy and france

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1 ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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2 **Getting ‘right’ into the news: grassroots far-right**
3 **mobilization and media coverage in Italy and France**

4 **Pietro Castelli Gattinara¹ · Caterina Froio²**

5
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7 **Abstract** How do non-established far-right actors reach visibility in the media?^{AQ1}
8 While much research focuses on media visibility of progressive movements and
9 established parties, little is known about the coverage of grassroots far-right mobi-
10 lization. Inspired by insights from media studies, social movement literature, and^{AQ2}
11 scholarship on the far right, the paper suggests that media coverage is a function
12 of the protest strategies of non-established far-right actors. To this end, we use a
13 new dataset measuring political claims made on the websites of CasaPound Italia
14 (CPI) and the Bloc Identitaire (BI), and from newspaper reports in France and Italy.^{AQ3}
15 We use logistic regressions to quantify increasing media coverage based on specific
16 characteristics of mobilization (issue ownership, dramatization, confrontation and
17 counter-mobilization). Focusing on two countries with comparable political contexts
18 but major differences in other factors relevant to far-right mobilization (number of
19 migrants, asylum seekers, perceived most important problem, and proximity to elec-
20 tions), we illustrate that news coverage is more likely when CPI and BI mobilize on
21 immigration, engage in street protest, and create public controversy. While broader
22 comparative evidence is needed, the paper offers a novel meso-level perspective on
23 the interplay between far-right mobilization and media attention, and it sets out an
24 innovative method to combine online and offline data for the study of protest in far-
25 right politics.^{AQ4}

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26 **Keywords** Far right · Mass media · Issue ownership · Press releases · Italy ·
27 France

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28 Introduction

29 How do non-established far-right actors¹ achieve visibility in the media? Media cov-
30 erage is a crucial resource in politics, especially for actors that struggle to access
31 office or that aim to influence the political mainstream from the social movement
32 arena (Vliegthart and Walgrave 2012). While much research has addressed the
33 media politics of left-wing movements and Radical Right Populist parties (RRPPs),
34 to date little is known about the visibility and coverage of the far-right grassroots
35 movements that have acquired increasing relevance in Western Europe throughout
36 recent years (see Mudde 2016, pp. 5–6).

37 Social movement specialists suggest that media coverage of progressive move-
38 ments is related to the characteristics of the protests staged by these actors (Wouters
39 2013) and that mainstream parties tend to react to movements' mobilizations only
40 if they receive media visibility (Koopmans 2004). Specialists of far-right politics,
41 instead, propose that news value depends on the type of discourse and style advanced
42 by RRPPs (see Akkerman 2011; Bos et al. 2016; Ellinas 2010; Sheets et al. 2015).
43 Inspired by insights from these separate strands of literature, this paper suggests that
44 media coverage is a function of the mobilization strategies of non-established far-
45 right actors. To understand when, why and how their claims and protests make it
46 into the news, one must look at whether the mechanisms that apply to established
47 political actors and left-wing social movements are also confirmed for grassroots
48 far-right organizations that do not have an institutional power base and consolidated
49 societal relevance.

50 While we acknowledge that journalists represent key gatekeepers for the far right
51 (especially prior to breakthrough, see Ellinas 2010; Mazzoleni 2008), we also resist
52 overemphasizing the behaviour of the media, to avoid depicting far-right actors as
53 'hapless victims' of external circumstances (Mudde 2007, p. 256). On the contrary,
54 our goal is to stress the importance of internal supply-side factors that have too often
55 been neglected in the study of the far right. Just like their left-wing counterparts,
56 far-right social movements deploy media strategies with the intention of determin-
57 ing their own visibility in the news (Vliegthart and Walgrave 2012). First, to avoid
58 political irrelevance, they must demonstrate that they are newsworthy. Second, they
59 must conform—at least to a certain extent—to media codes, staging mediagenic
60 events, mobilizing public opinion on relevant issues, and creating controversy.

1FL01 ¹ The article refers to 'far right' as an umbrella concept including extreme and radical organizations
1FL02 located at the right end of the ideological spectrum. The radical right is hostile to liberal democratic
1FL03 principles, but it subscribes to the rules of parliamentary democracy. Conversely, extreme right groups
1FL04 (such as the two organizations considered in this study) oppose democratic principles and ultimately aim
1FL05 at subverting the democratic order (see, e.g. Mudde 2007).



61 The empirical analysis considers the case of CasaPound Italia (CPI) and the
62 French Bloc Identitaire (BI),² as two non-established far-right organizations in
63 comparable political contexts (see below). We use a new dataset based on a novel
64 procedure to measure the interaction between political claims-making and the mass
65 media, by means of logistic regressions. Inspired by previous research on agenda
66 building (Hänggli and Kriesi 2010), our approach compares the quantity and content
67 of press releases published by CPI and BI on their websites, with their subsequent
68 media coverage in national quality newspapers. By linking online campaign material
69 to the content of the newspaper reports, we explore the extent to which mass media
70 agendas reproduce the political claims of non-established far-right actors.

71 The findings illustrate that news coverage is more likely when the CPI and BI
72 mobilize on immigration, engage in street protest and create public controversy.
73 While only exploratory, these results nevertheless offer an innovative, meso-level
74 perspective on the dynamics of far-right politics before electoral breakthrough. By
75 shedding light on how these movements attract media attention, this paper paves
76 the way for further research on the interrelation between the media and the far right,
77 while also setting out an innovative way to combine online and offline data for the
78 study of protest in far-right politics.

79 **Mass media, social movements and far-right politics: theory** 80 **and hypotheses**

81 Media visibility is a crucial resource for political actors, especially when they hold
82 a minority position in the institutional arena, or when they strive to influence main-
83 stream values with non-electoral means. Extant scholarship suggests that established
84 actors differ crucially from non-established ones in terms of access to the media:
85 while the latter can count on it at all times, the former have to demonstrate that they
86 are worth it (Tresh 2009). Two streams of literature address the question of media
87 access by actors that do not have an institutional power base: studies focusing on
88 left-wing movements and research dealing with RRPPs.

89 Social movement research considers protest characteristics as the main driver of
90 media attention. Since the media only cover a small portion of all protests taking
91 place at a given time (Rohlinger 2006; Ryan 1991), social movements have to come
92 to terms with this attention bias and must anticipate newsgathering routines, adapt
93 to them, and set up their strategies of contention accordingly (Gamson et al. 1992).

94 On the one hand, the logics of news routine may induce activists to deploy strat-
95 egies facilitating the transmission of specific events to the media, for instance by
96 producing short press releases enabling easy identification of promoters and targets
97 (Tuchman 1978). On the other, the characteristics of events are said to impact news
98 value (Harcup and O'Neill 2001). The 'newsworthiness' of an event depends on fac-
99 tors such as the possibility of building dramatized and personalized stories, as well
100 as the event's degree of negativity, conflict, and involvement of elites (Tresh 2009).

2F1.01 ² Starting from July 2016, the *Bloc Identitaire* changed its name to The Identitarians (*Les Identitaires*).



101 While news value changes across media outlets and broadcasters, there is a certain
102 agreement in the literature that the more an event is in line with these criteria, the
103 higher the chances that it will get coverage (Cushion 2010).

104 In addition to news routines, the logics of collective action by social movements,
105 and especially the size of demonstrations and rallies, are crucial determinants of
106 newsworthiness (Fillieule 1997; Oliver and Maney 2000). However, when move-
107 ments cannot count on numbers they must utilize other factors to get media cover-
108 age. First, there is the logic of material damage, which applies to groups making
109 use of confrontational tactics (De Nardo 1985), or ‘civil disobedience’ (Koopmans
110 1993). Second, there is the logic of disruption, which implies promoting violence or
111 disorder that may lead to arrests, injuries and even deaths (McCarthy et al. 2008).
112 Third, there is the logic of bearing witness, by which social movements invest in
113 theatrical actions expected to resonate with mass media’s understandings of creativ-
114 ity, imagination and culture (Rochon 1988). Accordingly, not all protest events make
115 it to the news, because media coverage also depends on social movement tactics and
116 repertoires of contention.

117 A second strand of literature focuses on the association between media coverage
118 and the characteristics of RRPPs. This line of scholarship appeared mainly after the
119 turn of the century (Mudde 2007, pp. 248–255) and suggested that media visibility
120 is crucial for the electoral breakthrough of successful right-wing parties (Akkerman
121 2011; Bos et al. 2016; Ellinas 2010; Sheets et al. 2015). Furthermore, scholars focus
122 on the privileged relationship existing between commercial newsgathering routines,
123 and the way in which populist actors ‘do politics’ (Esser 2013). Thus, on the one
124 hand the mass media act as a gatekeeper in the period prior to the breakthrough
125 of RRPPs, altering the parameters of party competition by granting and deny-
126 ing access to political newcomers (Ellinas 2010). If mainstream party competition
127 structures the opportunities available to new actors, access to the media grants them
128 the resources necessary to capitalize on these opportunities. On the other, RRPPs
129 seem to be particularly effective in addressing a ‘domestic audience that has become
130 increasingly distracted from politics’, because of their personalized leaderships, and
131 their simplified political language (Hipfl 2005; Mazzoleni 2008, p. 52).

132 To summarize, this literature suggests that mass media contribute to the break-
133 through of RRPPs because far-right politics and ‘media logics’ (Esser 2013) would
134 share at least three main traits: a tendency towards personalization, a preference for
135 emotionalization, and an inclination towards anti-establishment attitudes (Decker
136 2008). Indeed, the mediatization of political communication evolved alongside a
137 broader transformation of the media industry towards forms of information content
138 that respond more directly to audience demands, providing larger supplies of enter-
139 tainment, sensationalism, and infotainment (Akkerman 2011). Newsworthiness thus
140 results from the desire of the mass media for sensational, simplified, and contro-
141 versial news stories (Vliegthart and Walgrave 2012), which explains the interest
142 for the unconventional, conflictual, and at times violent repertoires characterizing
143 RRPPs politics.

144 This convergence takes place in at least three main ways. First, the attention pro-
145 vided to law and order issues in RRPPs’ discourse would match the tendency of
146 the media to prioritize dramatic and securitized news (Akkerman 2011). Second,



147 nativist interpretations of immigration and integration would satisfy media appetites
148 for simplification of news stories and the adoption of conflict frames (Semetko and
149 Valkenburg 2000). Third, controversial claims that are outrageous enough to attract
150 the attention of the public would have a high news value, which could explain why
151 the mass media are often willing to cover RRPPs' outbursts against the govern-
152 ment and the establishment, especially when these involve street disorder, or per-
153 sonal attacks against political opponents (Fella 2008). In sum, the populist radical
154 right would benefit from media visibility not only because it mobilizes on widely
155 held feelings of national identification and insecurity, but also because it does so by
156 means of a political repertoire that meets 'the commercial imperatives imposed by
157 the dramatic transformation of the media landscape' (Ellinas 2010, p. 35).

158 To date, however, few efforts have been made to combine social movement litera-
159 ture and research on RRPPs, especially when it comes to the interplay between these
160 actors and the media (Caiani et al. 2012). While most existing studies in the field
161 of social movements and media coverage focus on left-wing actors, scholars have
162 also been 'biased' towards studying the far right exclusively in terms of established
163 political parties. In order to understand media selection processes in full, instead,
164 we propose to investigate the strategies by which non-established (far-right) actors
165 obtain media visibility.

166 Hypotheses

167 Drawing upon this literature, we develop four expectations based on different expla-
168 nations for the visibility of far-right actions in the media: issue focus, adopted reper-
169 toires of contention, public reactions, and counter-mobilization.³

170 First, even if far-right actors cannot be qualified as single-issue parties (Mudde
171 1999), it has been argued that they have triggered, and then took advantage of,
172 the emergence of new issues in West European politics over the 1980s and 1990s.
173 This is mainly the case with immigration, an issue that has been long neglected
174 by mainstream parties (Van Spanje 2010), and that ultimately came to be associ-
175 ated with far-right politics (Castelli Gattinara 2016; Green-Pedersen and Krog-
176 strup 2008; Ivarsflaten 2008). According to extant scholarship, radical right
177 parties benefit when issues such as immigration and elite corruption dominate
178 the political agenda, because the media gives them inadvertent support and free
179 advertisement (Walgrave and De Swert 2004; Williams 2006). While the immi-
180 gration issue gained much prominence in contemporary European politics, also
181 thanks of the 'contagion' of far-right politics, previous research shows that the
182 media and the public tend to associate these issues primarily with the far right

³ We will not focus here on two alternative mechanisms that can explain this process: personalization and simplification. In our understanding, personalization is both a cause and a consequence of media exposure and is therefore complex to include in our model. Moreover, previous research already focused extensively on the effect of personalized news coverage on far-right politics (Bos et al 2010; Sheets et al 2015). We do not address simplification in far-right claims-making, because this would require a comparison between the oversimplified claims of the far right and complex claims by other actors (e.g. experts, mainstream parties, etc.).



183 (Van Spanje 2010; Ivarsflaten 2007). We thus expect that mobilization on immi-
184 gration and migrant integration, issues upon which far-right actors enjoy the most
185 ownership, will more easily attract news coverage. Contrarily, when they address
186 other topics visibility in the mass media is less likely, since neither the media nor
187 the public will recognize their legitimacy to intervene on debates that are unfa-
188 miliar to the far-right family. Hence, we expect that:

189 **H1** (Ownership hypothesis) media coverage is more likely when mobilization
190 focuses on issues on which the far right enjoys ownership, such as migration and
191 migrant integration.

192 Clearly, not all events achieve news coverage, because the media tend to favour
193 stories that are spectacular and sensational, allowing an emotional and dramatic
194 treatment of social reality (Mazzoleni 2008; Soroka 2002). The tendency of the
195 media to overemphasize negative aspects and exaggerate incidents goes hand-in-
196 hand with some crucial features of the political repertoire of far-right actors, i.e.
197 the reference to violent crime, tensions and the dramatization of political conflict
198 (Ellinas 2010). If the media anticipate the newsworthiness of associating law and
199 order with the far right, mobilizations focusing on crime and insecurity will be
200 much more likely to grant non-established far-right actors access to the media
201 than any other non-dramatized public intervention. We therefore expect that:

202 **H2** (Dramatization hypothesis) media coverage is more likely when far-right
203 mobilization focuses on dramatized news of law and order, such as violent crime and
204 threats to physical security, matching media preferences to dramatize news stories.

205 Beyond issue preferences, we also expect, in line with social movement research,
206 that the media are sensitive to the repertoire of action adopted by the far right.
207 Political actors may increase the news value of their events by becoming more
208 aggressive or increasing the conflict in their political communication strategy
209 (Hänggli and Kriesi 2012). While this strategy might alienate moderate support-
210 ers of institutional actors, grassroots far-right organizations do not run this risk,
211 since they generally do not aim at winning elections, but at mobilizing their own
212 constituency during and after each campaign (Harmel and Janda 1994). If the
213 mass media anticipate that controversial stories attract larger audiences, then cov-
214 erage of far-right actors depends on the degree of confrontation in their activism.
215 In turn, media exposure provides them with legitimacy, giving the impression
216 that they have larger followings (Tarrow 1998, pp. 126–129). Taking advantage
217 of the reactivity of the mass media, unconventional tactics might enable the far
218 right to achieve visibility with minimum organizational costs. We thus expect that
219 unconventional repertoires, and in particular confrontational and violent political
220 events, are most efficient to transmit far-right claims to the media.



221 **H3** (Confrontation hypothesis) media coverage is more likely when far-right mobi-
222 lization adopts unconventional and confrontational repertoires of action, including
223 violence, matching persistent media demands for controversy.

224 Finally, the mass media prioritize stories imbued with 'conflict frames' empha-
225 sizing 'conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions as a means of cap-
226 turing audience interest' (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000, p. 95). They promote
227 oversimplification of complex political debates and trigger mistrust in political
228 representatives (Patterson 2011). Since the public interventions of the far right
229 are often highly controversial, it is common for them to generate reactions and
230 counter-mobilization by other actors in the system. When this is the case, the
231 mass media are most likely to provide coverage, since the stories can be easily
232 simplified into two opposing and conflictual camps (the 'us versus them' para-
233 digm: see Ellinas 2010, p. 34), and thus are known to have greater popular appeal
234 than less confrontational topics (Altheide and Snow 1979). Thus, our last hypoth-
235 esis expects that:

236 **H4** (Counter-mobilization hypothesis) media coverage is more likely when far-
237 right mobilization is associated with counter-mobilization by other actors, matching
238 media demands for simplified us-versus-them stories and conflictual frames.

239 Case selection, data, and methods

240 We focus on two non-established far-right organizations: Bloc Identitaire in
241 France and CasaPound Italia in Italy. Our comparison is justified by macro-level
242 factors relating to the media system, the nature of far-right politics, and avail-
243 able opportunities for mobilization. Exploring two countries that belong to the
244 'Mediterranean media model', host two of the eldest and most successful RRPPs
245 in Europe and have particularly active far-right social movements, allows us to
246 control for important macro-contextual factors: the number of migrants and asy-
247 lum seekers in the two countries, the extent to which migration is considered a
248 problem in the country, and proximity to general elections.

249 As regards the media system, Italy and France belong to the 'Mediterranean
250 or polarized pluralist' media model (Hallin and Mancini 2004), characterized by
251 a press intimately involved in national political conflict, weak professionaliza-
252 tion, and strong state intervention. As recent empirical measurements confirm that
253 Italy and France belong to the same (southern) cluster (Brüggemann et al. 2014, p.
254 1057), it is safe to assume that media practices and standards differ little between
255 the two countries. Similarly, Italy and France display comparable political contexts
256 within which far-right movements are active. Indebted to the historical experience
257 of the New Right (Mammone 2015), French and Italian extreme right movements
258 often explicitly reject institutionalized politics to pursue more unconventional forms
259 of activism (Mammone 2015). Additionally, both countries host old and successful



260 RRPPs: the Front National (FN) and the Lega Nord (LN), although historically the
261 Italian radical right has been considerably more fragmented. Thus, in both contexts,
262 far-right movements compete with established RRPPs to get access to the media.

263 The case studies (CPI and BI) are of two non-established organizations that can
264 be compared in ideological and organizational terms. Ideologically, both groups owe
265 much to the *identitarian* movement, from which they inherited not only a criticism
266 of modern economic thinking, but also an ambition to integrate right-wing platforms
267 with issues such as ecology, communitarianism, and opposition to globalization.
268 Born in the mid-2000s, CPI is composed of a set of political and cultural associations
269 emerging from a split in the main post-fascist party in Italy. Its leadership has repeat-
270 edly asserted that the group privileges the organization, rhetoric and practices of
271 social movements, which facilitate its emergence as Italy's most visible extreme right
272 organization (Di Nunzio and Toscano 2011). BI is a nativist-regionalist movement
273 that emerged in the early 2000s as the main network of right-wing street movements
274 in France, including groups of football hooligans, disenfranchised youth organiza-
275 tions, sport associations and identitarian music groups (Bouron 2015). Similar to
276 CPI, it addresses primarily young generations, and its activism promotes a self-styled
277 approach to right-wing mobilization formulated around community-building activi-
278 ties including concerts, sports, collective training, and excursions (Bouron 2017).

279 The empirical analysis combines data from online press releases produced by
280 BI and CPI—extracted from their official websites—and from media coverage in
281 national quality newspapers (Hänggli and Kriesi 2012; Hutter 2014). If this approach
282 is inspired by the input–output strategy of previous studies on agenda building (Häng-
283 gli and Kriesi 2010; Kioussis et al. 2006), our unit of analysis is based on instances of
284 claims-making. In Political Claims Analysis, these are defined as the expression of
285 political opinion by physical or verbal action in the public sphere, thus including both
286 verbal acts, conventional forms, and intervention, as well as protests (Koopmans and
287 Statham 1999). Claims-making as a form of political behaviour implies ‘the purpo-
288 sive and public articulation of political demands, calls to action, proposals, criticisms,
289 or physical attacks, which, actually or potentially, affect the interests or integrity of
290 the claimants and/or other collective actors’ (Koopmans et al. 2005, p. 245).

291 Concerning the analysis of newspapers (output), we gathered data using extensive
292 datasets allowing advanced searches of articles by source, section, date and search terms
293 (Factiva and Lexis Nexis), using the names of the organizations as keywords.⁴ We focus
294 on mainstream quality newspapers (*Il Corriere della Sera* and *Le Monde*) because these
295 have been found to report more extensively on political matters than other types of out-
296 lets (Druckman and Parkin 2005).⁵ As for the input, we gathered all press releases posted

4FI.01 ⁴ Even though, as mentioned earlier, journalists' professional practices play a crucial role in determin-
4FL.02 ing media coverage, a study focusing on these routines would demand a completely different research
4FI.03 design (see, for example, Reese 2001), which is beyond the scope of a paper that explicitly focuses on the
4FL.04 agency (or internal supply side) of far-right actors. We thus account for these only in terms of how they
4FI.05 are anticipated in the media strategies of the two actors (Kriesi et al. 2009).

5FL.01 ⁵ While the two newspapers have slightly different political leanings, our study focuses on the visibility
5FI.02 of far-right actors in the mass media, rather than on the tone of coverage. In this respect, extant scholar-
5FL.03 ship confirms that while the tone and the logics of information production may change according to the
5FI.04 political orientation of a newspaper, there is no significant difference in the likelihood that left-wing or
5FL.05 right-wing newspapers cover far right politics (see Koopmans 2004).



297 in the news section of the two organizations' websites. On the one hand, press releases
298 from official websites are a reliable source for claims-making and activism (Reber and
299 Kyo Kim 2006); on the other, they serve a double function in far-right mobilization,
300 which sets them apart from other sources of online material. Located in the news section
301 of the web portals of far-right organizations, they not only provide information about ini-
302 tiatives for followers, sympathizers, as well as external observers (including journalists),
303 but also represent the bulk of the text that is subsequently shared by the social media
304 accounts of these organizations (Albanese et al. 2015; Bouron 2017).

305 From both data sources, we coded all instances of claims-making by CPI or BI based
306 on the same codebook. The coding accounts for the date, location and main topic of the
307 action and includes a dummy for whether it provoked a counter-mobilization (coded 1
308 if yes and 0 otherwise).⁶ In addition, we distinguish the forms of action of each instance
309 of claims-making in terms of conventional and protest tactics (see e.g. Caiani et al.
310 2012). Conventional activism includes all types of verbal actions (e.g. public state-
311 ments, interviews, and public speeches), as well as lobbying, voting, petitioning, and
312 electoral campaigning. Protest activism, instead, encompasses demonstrative actions
313 (such as legal actions and authorized demonstrations), confrontational actions (illegal
314 demonstrations and blockades), and violent action (symbolic or physical violence).

315 The full dataset reports the systematic collection of interventions of the two
316 actors, differentiating between claims in the mass media and in online press releases.
317 Finally, we linked claims in the media with claims in online press releases through
318 a double-blinded coding of the content of the news stories and the date of the
319 action described in the text. Hence, our dataset comprises three types of observa-
320 tions: claims that are reported only in online press releases; claims that appear in
321 online press releases and in newspapers; and claims that appear only in the media.⁷
322 These data are then analysed in models controlling for two crucial characteristics
323 at the political system level: the size of the far right in the country,⁸ and the tim-
324 ing of the action during electoral campaign cycles.⁹ Moreover, we include three

6FL01 ⁶ Counter-mobilizations are all interventions that were provoked by the action initiated by the far right,
6FL02 such as demonstrations by anti-fascist and anti-racist organizations, public statements by politicians and
6FL03 local authorities, petitions to ban far-right gatherings, etc. (Caiani et al. 2012; Tarrow 1998).

7FL01 ⁷ This procedure produces three distinct sets of observations: press releases that do not receive media
7FL02 coverage; press releases that receive media coverage; and media coverage without previous input from
7FL03 press releases. Since our focus is on media-related internal supply-side factors, we focus here on the first
7FL04 two types of data only. This does not imply that the coverage of those actions that are not promoted by
7FL05 the far right, or from which it takes explicit distance, is of no importance. Yet, the empirical material
7FL06 currently available did not allow accounting for media preferences per se, but only in terms of previous
7FL07 far-right input.

8FL01 ⁸ We considered the share of votes obtained by the main far-right party in each of the two countries, in
8FL02 the most recent national elections (presidential elections in France) and European Parliament elections.

9FL01 ⁹ This is coded 1 if an action takes place during the 6 months preceding a national election, and 0 other-
9FL02 wise.



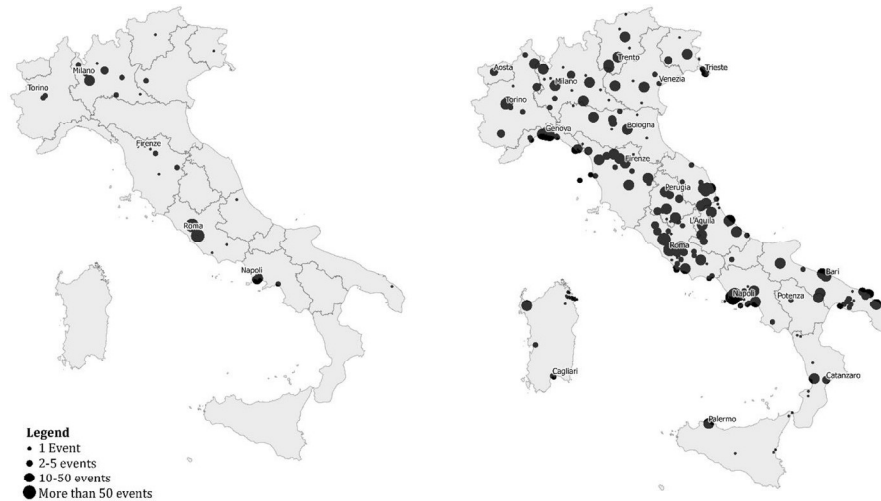


Fig. 1 CPI claims in the media and press releases: geographic distribution in Italy

325 immigration-related contextual factors: the annual inflow of migrants¹⁰ and of asy-
 326 lum seekers,¹¹ and public opinion on immigration.¹² Finally, we also test whether
 327 the press releases of far-right actors are more likely to generate media attention
 328 when far-right mobilization is intense.¹³ We run logistic regressions to predict mass
 329 media coverage of far-right mobilization, using characteristics of the claims in the
 330 online press releases (repertoire of mobilization, issue topic) as predictors of media
 331 coverage.

332 The media coverage of grassroots far-right mobilization

333 Figures 1 and 2 report the geographic distribution of the instances of claims-making
 334 promoted by CPI and BI, comparing online press releases (on the right) and mass
 335 media coverage (on the left). It is not surprising that only a share of extreme right
 336 actions and statements receive news attention, considering the limited resources and
 337 the related difficulty in accessing the media of similar organizations. Still, the maps
 338 also show that far-right claims-making is distributed unevenly over the national ter-
 339 ritory. More precisely, mobilization seems to be concentrated in metropolitan areas,

10FL.01 ¹⁰ Measured as the total annual inflow of foreign population in France and Italy, in hundreds of thou-
 10FL.02 sands of individuals. Source: OECD Statistics: <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=MIG>
 10FL.03 (accessed on 10/05/2016).

11FL.01 ¹¹ Measured as the total annual inflow of asylum seekers in France and Italy, in hundreds of thousands of
 11FL.02 individuals. Source: OECD Statistics: <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=MIG> (accessed on
 11FL.03 10/05/2016).

12FL.01 ¹² Measured as the share of public opinion considering immigration one of the two most important prob-
 12FL.02 lems in the country. Source: Eurobarometer 2003–2015.

13FL.01 ¹³ The intensity of the mobilization of the far right over the month when the media stories take place is
 13FL.02 measured as the number of actions promoted in the press releases in the 30 days preceding the event.



Getting 'right' into the news: grassroots far-right...

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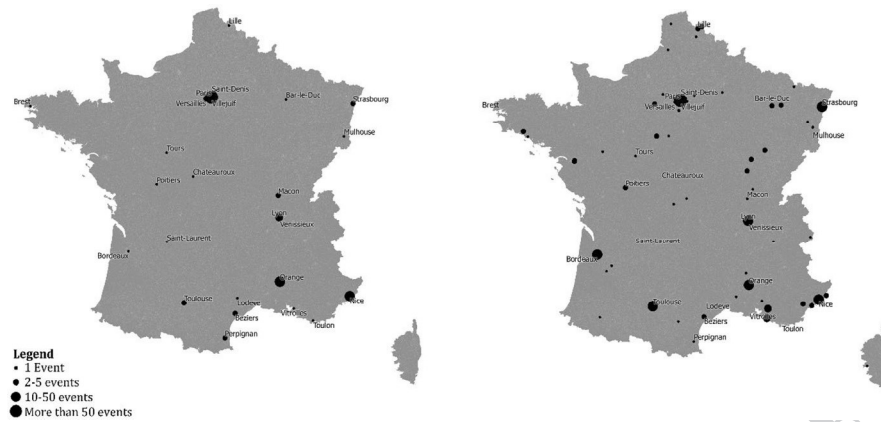


Fig. 2 BI claims in the media and press releases: geographic distribution in France

Table 1 Forms of actions and issue emphasis by CPI and BI (mass media and press releases)

	CasaPound				Bloc Identitaire			
	Media		Press releases		Media		Press releases	
	Freq	Percentage	Freq	Percentage	Freq	Percentage	Freq	Percentage
Action type								
Protest	184	51.4	512	27.3	64	34.6	98	13
Conventional	174	48.6	1.367	72.7	121	65.4	653	87
Total	358	100	1.879	100	185	100	751	100
Issue emphasis								
Immigration	24	10.5	103	5.7	85	49.5	385	51.1
Law and order	9	3.9	140	7.7	6	3.5	56	7.5
Other	197	85.6	1536	86.3	81	47	312	41.4
Total	230	190	1.779	100	172	100	753	100

340 which suggests a first distortive effect by the media: while newspapers tend to report
 341 events taking place in large cities, activities and claims in the provinces generally
 342 receive less coverage.

343 Moving beyond aggregate figures, Table 1 compares the action repertoires and
 344 issue emphasis of CPI and BI in online press release and newspaper coverage. Con-
 345 ventional forms of political engagement are more common in France than in Italy, as
 346 shown in BI's press releases and in the media coverage of its protests. Conversely,
 347 the relevance of protest actions is higher for CPI, both in media coverage and in its
 348 press releases. In both cases, however, we can observe an overemphasis of protest
 349 events in the media compared to the share of this type of action in far-right press



350 releases. The opposite is confirmed for conventional actions, which have a relatively
351 lower weight in the media than in the claims-making of the far right.¹⁴

352 Concerning issue emphasis, the table illustrates that only BI mobilizes extensively
353 on immigration affairs, devoting more than 50% of its claims to this issue. Instead,
354 only 6% of the claims promoted by CPI focus on migration. Law and order issues
355 account for about 8% of the attention of the two actors. In general, the media tends
356 to report quite faithfully the topics promoted in the press releases by both actors,
357 although law and order affairs are somewhat under-represented, while the immigra-
358 tion issue is certainly overemphasized by the media in the case of CasaPound.

359 To further elaborate on these descriptive findings, Table 2 presents the results
360 of the two logistic regression analyses undertaken for Italy and France to predict
361 take-up of far-right mobilization in mass media coverage. The dependent variable is
362 coded 1 if an action promoted in the online press releases of one of the two organi-
363 zations was covered in newspaper articles and 0 if the online press release did not
364 receive media attention. As per the independent variables, we include a set of control
365 variables addressing contextual factors that could influence the visibility of far-
366 right mobilization in the mass media, but are beyond the control of the far right.

367 The first model contains all main effects for contextual variables and tests the
368 issue ownership hypothesis expecting that attention to immigration is more likely
369 to lead to media coverage, while the second model presents the effect of attention
370 to law and order issues on the likelihood of receiving media attention. The third
371 model focuses on whether protest actions increase the visibility of the far right in the
372 media, and finally, the fourth model tests the hypothesis on the effect on media cov-
373 erage when far-right mobilization is associated with counter-mobilization. The test
374 of all of our models is statistically significant against a constant-only model, indicat-
375 ing that the predictors distinguish in a reliable way between press releases that the
376 news media act on or neglect. In particular, the full model (Model 4) is statistically
377 significant in both Italy (Chi-square = 132.4, $p < 0.001$ with df 10) and France (Chi-
378 square = 70.8, $P < 0.001$ with df 10).

379 Our findings for the effect of contextual factors on whether the media cover far-
380 right mobilization are mixed at best. The results for the three immigration-related
381 variables are not significant in the two countries. The annual inflow of asylum seek-
382 ers reaches statistical significance in Model 1 and 2 in France, but the high value of
383 the standard error makes us cautious in drawing conclusions from this result, and
384 in fact, Models 3 and 4 show no statistical effect for this variable on the likelihood
385 of media coverage of BI activities. While the effect of the electoral strength of far-
386 right parties at the country level is not significant in any model, we find a positive
387 significant effect of the electoral campaign period and a small effect of the intensity
388 of mobilization among far-right actors in Italy only. In line with our preliminary
389 expectations, the results indicate a limited influence of exogenous contextual factors
390 on the attention of the mass media towards far-right mobilization, although there is

14FL01 ¹⁴ This is also confirmed if we differentiate among, on the one hand, 'demonstrative' actions and, on the
14FL02 other 'confrontational' and 'violent' ones. While both actors promote the former much more frequently,
14FL03 the media tend to over-report on the latter.



Getting 'right' into the news: grassroots far-right...

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Table 2 Logistic regressions: impact of far-right mobilization on media coverage

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		ϵ^B
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	
<i>Dependent variable: media report of CPI actions</i>									
Independent variable									
Immigration issue	0.73***	0.27	0.72**	0.27	0.63**	0.28	0.73***	0.29	2.08
Law and order issues			-0.56	0.37	-0.61	0.40	-0.51	0.39	0.59
Protest actions					0.34**		0.42**	0.18	1.52
Counter-mobilization							3.44***	0.37	11.74
<i>Control variables</i>									
Electoral strength of far-right parties (%)	-0.11	0.10	-0.11	0.07	-0.11	0.07	-0.06	0.07	0.94
Annual inflow of migrants ^a	-0.01	0.10	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01	1.00
Annual inflow of asylum seekers ^a	0.80	0.30	0.83	0.77	0.38	0.82	0.26	0.83	1.30
Most important problem (% immigration)	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	1.01
Electoral cycle	1.56***	0.37	1.55***	0.37	1.48***	0.37	1.48***	0.38	4.40
Intensity of mobilization	0.02**	0.01	0.03**	0.01	0.03**	0.01	0.02**	0.01	1.02
Constant	-4.59		-4.69		-3.67		-3.65		
N	1885		1885		1885		1885		
-2 log likelihood	-584.94		-583.67		-581.74		-534.27		
Pseudo-R ²	0.02		0.03		0.03		0.11		
χ^2 (d.f.)	31.1 (7)***		33.7 (8)***		37.5 (9)***		132.4 (10)***		
<i>Dependent variable: media report of BI actions</i>									
Independent variable									
Immigration issue	0.67**	0.21	0.62**	0.21	0.59**	0.22	0.59**	0.22	1.81
Law and order issues			-0.52	0.46	-0.39	0.46	-0.54	0.49	0.58
Protest actions					1.21***	0.24	0.87***	0.26	2.40
Counter-mobilization							1.99***	0.50	7.40



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Table 2 (continued)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		e^B
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	
Control variables									
Electoral strength of far-right parties (%)	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.11	0.02	1.01
Annual inflow of migrants ^a	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.02	1.00
Annual inflow of asylum seekers ^a	2.83**	1.38	2.84**	1.4	2.29	1.43	2.37	1.46	10.74
Most important problem (% immigration)	-0.00	0.02	-0.00	0.02	-0.01	0.02	-0.01	0.02	0.99
Electoral cycle	-0.40	0.35	-0.42	0.36	-0.64*	0.37	-0.49	0.37	0.61
Intensity of mobilization	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	1.02
Constant	-3.95		-3.99		-3.58		-4.02		
N	753		753		753		753		
-2 log likelihood	-345.71		-345.01		-333.34		-324.76		
Pseudo- R^2	0.04		0.04		0.07		0.10		
χ^2 (df)	28.9 (7)***		30.3 (8)***		53.6 (9)***		70.8 (10)***		

*** $P < 0.001$; ** $P < 0.05$; * $P < 0.1$

^aIn hundreds of thousands



391 a higher likelihood of CPI obtaining visibility in the mass media during electoral
392 campaigns, which indicates a certain capacity by CPI to take advantage of electoral
393 opportunities.

394 Regarding the thematic preferences of non-established far-right actors, our find-
395 ings are supportive of the issue ownership hypothesis but not of our expectations
396 concerning the effect of dramatization. The first model in Table 2 indicates that
397 issue ownership significantly predicts whether the media pick up and report a cer-
398 tain event or claim promoted in the groups' press releases. This finding, which is
399 confirmed both in Italy and France, corroborates our first hypothesis and mirrors
400 the insights from previous studies suggesting that the mass media are more likely to
401 give attention to far-right actors mobilizing on issues that they 'own', such as immi-
402 gration (Bos 2016; Sheets et al. 2015). By contrast, we do not find the expected
403 effect of dramatization on media coverage (Smith 2010; Vliegenthart and Walgrave
404 2012). As shown in the second model in Table 2, the effect of focusing on law and
405 order issues on the probability of obtaining media attention does not reach statistical
406 significance and is even negative.¹⁵

407 Moreover, our results provide evidence for the confrontation and counter-mobi-
408 lization hypotheses. As shown in Table 2 (Model 3), news coverage of far-right
409 mobilization is most likely if the far right engages in protest rather than in more
410 institutionalized forms of political involvement. To further explore the potential
411 importance of mobilization tactics, we conducted an additional analysis in which
412 we looked at a subset of conflictual repertoires of protest, excluding demonstrative
413 actions and considering only those that are confrontational and openly violent. The
414 results of these models are in line with Model 3 and show that the media is even
415 more responsive to these forms of protests.¹⁶ This confirms the reactivity of the
416 mass media to unconventional tactics, and in particular to confrontational and vio-
417 lent political events, as suggested in previous studies (Myers and Schaefer Caniglia
418 2004).

419 Finally, Model 4 presents the effect of the presence of counter-mobilization on
420 the likelihood of media coverage of far-right activities. This effect is positive and
421 significant while controlling for the other main effects and for all contextual vari-
422 ables of control, both in Italy and in France. In other words, the events promoted by
423 the far right are most likely to be reported in the mass media if there is some form
424 of counter-mobilization and response by opposing actors and adversaries. Taken
425 together, these findings offer empirical support to research emphasizing that the
426 mass media prioritize conflictual stories that generate controversy, because they are
427 expected to have higher popular appeal than less conflictual ones (Oliver and Meyer
428 1999; Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2012).

429 The last column (Model 4) in Table 2 presents the odds ratios for our full
430 model, i.e. the odds that media coverage occurs for each of our main predictors.
431 Both in Italy and in France, the highest odds are associated with the presence of

¹⁵ We also tested for an interaction between the two items measuring the issue topic of press releases, but we found that there is no significant effect there either (not reported in table).

¹⁶ The effect is positive and significant in both Italy and France (not reported in table).



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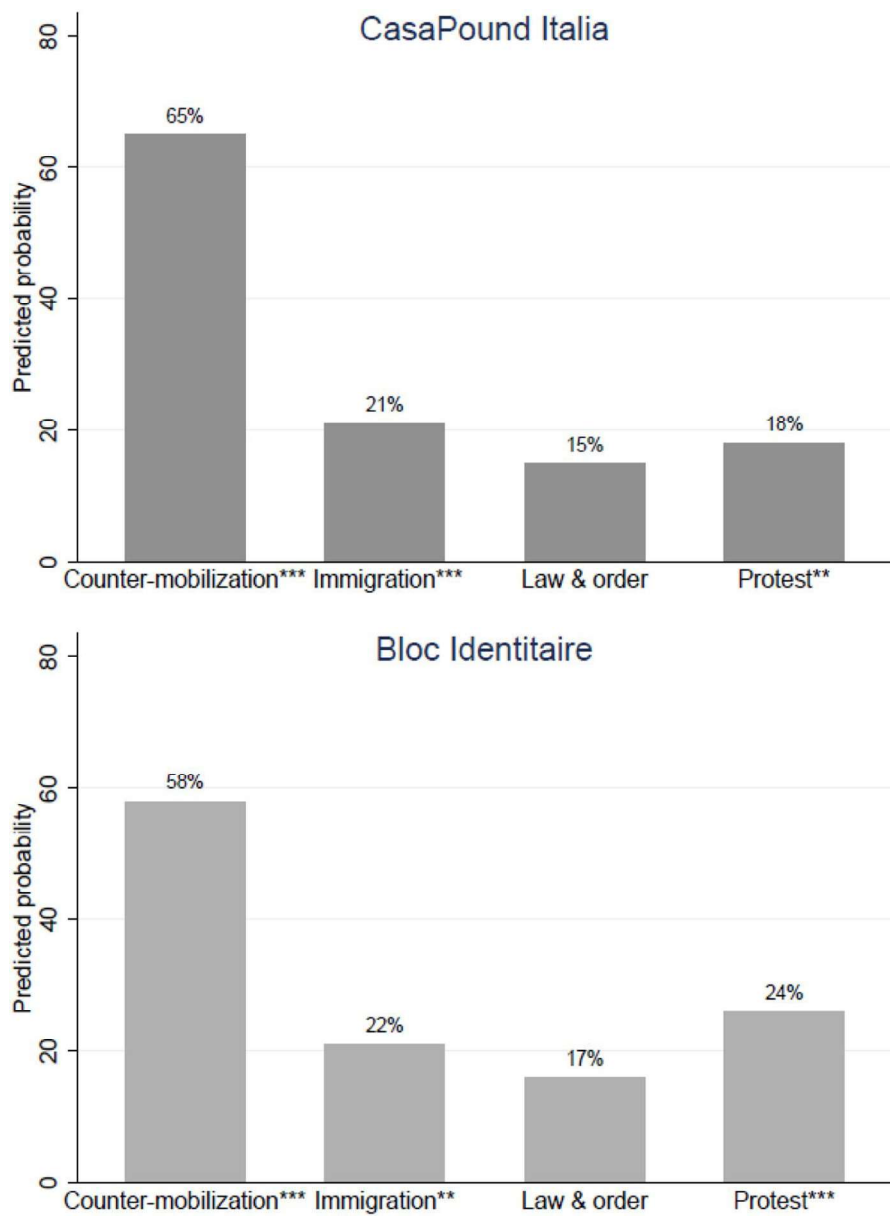


Fig. 3 Predicted probabilities of news coverage by type of action promoted

432 counter-mobilization: for CPI, the odds of receiving media coverage when there is
 433 counter-mobilization are 11 times larger than the odds for events that did not face
 434 such opposition. In France, the same odds are 7 times larger for events facing counter-
 435 counter-mobilization. Similarly, the odds for events focusing on immigration and for



436 confrontational events are about 2 times larger than those focusing on other issues
437 and employing other repertoires of action, in both countries.

438 To account for the substantive magnitude of the likelihood of mass media cover-
439 age, we used the results of the logistic regression to calculate the predicted probabil-
440 ities that one initiative by the far right would receive media attention. Accordingly,
441 Fig. 3 displays the predicted probabilities that the media will provide coverage of an
442 activity promoted by CPI and BI, for each of the crucial features defining our four
443 hypotheses. As is shown, holding all other variables constant, actions by non-estab-
444 lished far-right actors in Italy and France are most likely to get coverage in the mass
445 media when they face some form of counter-mobilization, thus creating controversy.

446 In Italy CPI's actions in the presence of opposition have a probability of about
447 65% of receiving media coverage, while in France the predicted probability for the
448 BI is 58%. Moreover, the probability of receiving media coverage when focusing
449 on the immigration issue is about 20%, for both actors, although the probability for
450 BI is slightly higher than that of CPI. Similarly, the likelihood that protest actions
451 get media attention is higher for BI (24%) than for CPI (18%). Taken together, the
452 results presented in Table 2 and Fig. 3 provide evidence for three of our expected
453 mechanisms, most notably for the idea that issue ownership, confrontational and
454 protest repertoires, and the presence of counter-mobilization increase the likelihood
455 of media coverage.

456 Conclusive remarks

457 Despite their modest electoral support, non-established far-right actors are acquiring
458 increasing importance in public debates throughout Western Europe, mostly thanks
459 to the visibility of their street activism (Mudde 2016, p. 5). Building on the liter-
460 ature on media coverage of progressive social movements and RRPPs, this paper
461 has examined how these actors have successfully managed to obtain visibility in the
462 media. Taking advantage of a dataset combining online and offline data for the study
463 of claims-making in the public sphere, we focused on the cases of *CasaPound* in
464 Italy and *Bloc Identitaire* in France.

465 In line with our overarching expectations, the analysis that we conducted suggests
466 that the mass media in both countries are responsive to the ownership of the far right
467 as regards the immigration issue. Irrespective of context-level immigration figures,
468 we found empirical evidence that the media recognize a 'privileged' position to far-
469 right actors when they deal with issues related to migration and the integration of
470 migrants. Put simply, non-established right-wing organizations have a considerably
471 higher chance to get media coverage if they focus their claims on issues that they
472 'own', most notably immigration. While the focus on such a broad area might hide
473 stronger effects of thematic emphasis related to more specific topics or to the fram-
474 ing of sub-dimensions within this bundle of issues (Helbling 2014), we could not
475 find supportive evidence for our hypothesis on dramatized political communication.
476 In this respect, we must acknowledge that our data only allows the measurement of
477 dramatization in terms of a thematic emphasis on law and order, thus neglecting



478 potentially relevant aspects linked to the tone and framing by which the far-right
479 approaches security issues.

480 Our analysis could, however, confirm that the choice of the forms of actions by
481 which the non-established far right articulates its claims in the public sphere has
482 consequences for their visibility in the news. In both Italy and France, the two
483 organizations are most likely to get media coverage if they adopt protest strategies
484 and engage in confrontation, whereas conventional forms of political engagement
485 tend to pay off considerably less. In line with the premises of this study, we are
486 therefore able to highlight the crucial role played by internal supply-side factors in
487 the interaction between non-established organizations of the far right and the media.
488 Public visibility in the press thus also depends on the strategic choices of mobiliza-
489 tion by these actors. Similarly, news coverage also stems from movement/counter-
490 movement dynamics. Most notably, the media tend to cover far-right actions more
491 frequently if their claims manage to create conflict and trigger a reaction from their
492 opponents. These findings might hint, albeit tentatively, at the strategic choices of
493 grassroots right-wing actors, as they might seek to create controversy in order to
494 increase their chances of obtaining public visibility.

495 While offering an innovative perspective on the interaction between the mass
496 media and the far right, this study inevitably faces the question of generalizability.
497 Considering the constraints in terms of data and design, it is thus legitimate to ask
498 whether our findings apply beyond France and Italy, to other forms of news cover-
499 age, and to other types of actors. To begin with, future scholarship might want to
500 extend this model to a larger set of countries, investigating the effects of relevant
501 mechanisms linked to the personalization and simplification of politics. Moreover,
502 while our focus is exclusively on the mainstream press, we believe that commercial
503 TV channels and tabloids are equally, if not more, likely to display the preference
504 for dramatized and controversial news stories that we could observe in this study.
505 Indeed, future studies that extract data from social media could overcome one limi-
506 tation of this article and provide further insights on the nexus between news cover-
507 age and far-right mobilization. Finally, to complement our findings future research
508 might want to look at the media politics of far-right parties and movements more
509 systematically, and in a comparative fashion, since it is likely that the nature of inter-
510 action with the mass media varies depending on the primary arena of engagement of
511 single actors.

512 Despite these limitations, the article offers important insights not only to special-
513 ists of far-right politics, but also to scholars of political communication and party
514 politics. Our study provides information on crucial mechanisms concerning political
515 movements before their electoral breakthrough, which could generate new hypoth-
516 eses on the life cycle of radical parties and movements. The research design that
517 we propose also represents an innovative methodological contribution for the schol-
518 arship studying political protest and mobilization across other political families.
519 Catching the attention of the mass media, in fact, is fundamental for all non-estab-
520 lished actors, as they try to take advantage of the media to get public support.

521 Even though the mechanisms singled out in this paper apply to all actors fac-
522 ing the problem of visibility, we would be particularly interested in seeing to what
523 extent they explain the dynamics that led to the breakthrough of successful radical



524 right populist parties across Europe. In this respect, the question to be addressed
525 through continued research is whether the unprecedented media visibility that radi-
526 cal right parties currently enjoy stems from their growing electoral prominence, or
527 whether it is also a by-product of the logics driving contemporary news production
528 and the logics of commercial media.

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