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NEO-FASCIST MOVEMENT PARTIES IN ITALY

The extreme right between electoral and protest politics

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Introduction

Extant literature on political cleavages in Europe suggests that the relationship between the electoral and protest arenas is generally substitutive, rather than reinforcing, for the political Right (Hutter and Kriesi 2013; Hutter 2014b). This implies that the presence of radical right parties in the institutional arena reduces the space available for right-wing street actors. Put differently, right-wing protest would decrease in a context characterized by a strong established political party (Koopmans et al. 2005, 185–187; Giugni et al. 2005; Kriesi 2012). In this chapter, I set out to illustrate how this ‘trade-off hypothesis’ (Pedahzur and Weinberg 2001) neglects the role of intersectional actors **transiting** from the extra-institutional to the electoral arena. In line with the remit of this edited collection, the analytical strategy focuses on ideological factors and political opportunities as explanations for the interpenetration of activism across arenas of conflict (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2018; see also Froio 2018). I focus on Italy as a case study, addressing two specific political and cultural factors expected to facilitate the development of far-right movement parties.

First, Italy has been at the core of the three major crises that have revitalized far-right street politics in recent years: the Eurozone crisis, the so-called migration crisis, and the crisis of representation in established democracies (Kriesi and Pappas 2015; Castelli Gattinara 2018). As shown by previous research, these events have shaped far-right politics, both quantitatively and qualitatively (Mudde 2016, 612), and thus might have offered right-wing actors opportunities to mobilize across political arenas. Indeed, during political crises, far-right parties may recognize that street organizations can help them in rooting in society, facilitating co-existence, and even co-operation across arenas (Pedahzur and Weinberg 2001). The crises might thus disrupt pre-existing opportunity structures, triggering new

‘brands’ of actors, ideally bridging the forms, organization, and practices of political parties and social movements (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2018).

Second, Italy’s neo-Fascist milieu enables the embedding of contemporary manifestations of far-right politics in their historical and cultural context (Mammone 2009), most notably in terms of Fascism’s outspoken mistrust of party politics (Payne 1995; Gentile 2008). A crucial stream of Italian fascism is, in fact, the one described by Renzo De Felice (1969) as ‘fascism as a movement’, which is characterized by revolutionary anti-capitalist and secular tendencies, as opposed to the conservative, institutional ‘fascism as a regime’. If conservative streams of neo-fascism emphasized order and tradition, fascism as a movement pursued revolutionary ideals based on dynamism, youth activism, and the rejection of modernity and democracy (Ignazi 2003). While this tension has characterized neo-fascism since its inception, here I look at its manifestation in terms of repertoires of action in contemporary activism. Thus, by addressing the legacy of fascism as part of the opportunity structure for far-right mobilization in Italy, I intend to tackle the ideological and cultural evolution of extreme right actors transitioning from movement to party politics.

Empirically, this chapter focuses on the three most visible neo-fascist actors in contemporary Italy, with the goal of assessing if, and to what extent, their mobilization can be likened to that of social movements, rather than political parties. The groups – *Movimento Sociale-Fiamma Tricolore* (MS-FT),¹ *Forza Nuova* (FN),² and *CasaPound Italia* (CPI)³ – share many ideological traits: a fascist legacy, nativism, and opposition to liberal democracy. They stand out as hybrid political organizations in that they originally emerged in the extra-institutional arena, but eventually opted to contest electoral campaigns. Still, they differ considerably in terms of their organization and mobilization. MS-FT represents a prototypical example of a political party: it self-defines as such, it regularly contests elections, and it has long been involved in routinized politics. In contrast, CPI is a network of political and cultural movements, which is deeply involved in Italy’s neo-fascist youth subculture, and thus privileges the rhetoric and imagery of social movements (Rao 2014). Between these extremes, the FN presents itself as a ‘political movement’. Unlike the MS-FT, it can count on established ties with subcultural milieus and street-based groups, yet it is also considerably more institutionalized than CPI, and it regularly contests elections (see Caldiron 2013).

In the next sections, I shall compare the claims-making and repertoires of action of the three groups over time, looking at the way in which they relate to the domain of protest and party politics. As political parties, they are expected to be office seeking, to act as representatives of citizens’ interests, and to compete with other parties for votes by means of electoral contests (Mudge and Chen 2014). As social movements, they are primarily agenda-setters, and they engage in contentious non-institutional political action based on shared beliefs and identities (Diani 1992). Yet neo-fascist actors can also qualify as hybrid political organizations that are ideally located at the intersection between these two configurational types. In this respect, while these actors have progressively transitioned from the extra-institutional to the electoral arena, I expect that their transition remained

incomplete due to the ideological legacy of fascism as a movement. To address these expectations, in the next sections, I present the data and methods of the study, and offer an overview of Italy's neo-fascist parties and movements. I then move on to the empirical analysis, which will shed some light on how neo-fascist actors have been able to bridge the office-seeking logic of political parties with the agenda-setting one ~~driving~~ social movement action.

Data and methods

The empirical study uses new quantitative data on the repertoires of action of the extreme right,⁴ collected through an extensive Political Claims Analysis (PCA) of right-wing collective action in Italy, 1992–2015. Claims-making 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, 254). The news stories originate from the *Factiva* digital archive of the daily broadsheet *Il Corriere della Sera*, and capture all articles containing references to the three extreme right organizations. Considering all claims initiated by one of these actors, as well as events attributed to their sympathisers, the political field of extreme right politics in Italy amounts to 2,209 instances of claims-making. While some have raised doubts about using newspaper data to measure public events, previous research has proved the robustness of PCA to systematize and assess collective action (e.g. Kriesi 1995; Koopmans et al. 2005; Hutter 2014a). Unlike other quantitative methods of data collection and analysis, in fact, PCA accounts for all types of intervention in the public sphere, while also emphasizing their thematic focus (Koopmans and Statham 1999).

Since a political claim might refer to a speech act, but also to various forms of collective mobilization, PCA is most suited to studying actors at the intersection between protest and institutional politics. To account for mobilization taking place at the intersection between protest and conventional action, each non-verbal claim was coded according to its degree of radicalism (Tarrow 1989; Caiani and Borri 2013). Repertoires of action are categorized as follows: conventional forms of contention (electoral campaigning, petitions); demonstrative actions (demonstrations, rallies); expressive actions (commemorations, cultural events, and other internal meetings); confrontational actions (blockades and occupations); and violent actions (including symbolic and physical violence). In addition, the coding accounts for the two main issues at the core of each public intervention, resulting in six broad issue fields of right-wing claims-making: socio-economic affairs, cultural liberalism, Europe, immigration, law and order, and ideological statements (see Kriesi 2012).

Political and cultural opportunities for far-right mobilization: Italy's post-war fascism

Building upon the symbolic dimension of political opportunity structures ~~outlined in the introductory chapter (Chapter 2)~~, this section focuses on cultural aspects of

Italian neo-fascism. Specifically, I ~~shall~~ focus on the cultural and symbolic legacy of the fascist ideology, which had a profound influence on the identity of extreme right parties and movements in the post-war years (Cento Bull 2007).

While the neo-fascist camp had initially envisaged itself as a militia-style organization, it abandoned this idea soon after the war in favour of a party organization, and became the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* in 1946 (MSI). The MSI was configured as a legal political party organized along the mass-party model, and contested elections with a programme combining vague calls to national pacification, and nostalgia for the symbols and culture of the régime (Ignazi 1998). From its origins, the party was torn between two main factions, which can be likened to De Felice's (1969) famous differentiation between the fascist 'movement' and 'regime'. The 'movement' faction claimed continuity with the revolutionary, non-conformist, and anti-bourgeois style of the republican fascism of the mid-1940s, opposing the principles of the democratic system. The moderate faction, instead preferred the clerical, corporatist, and conservative tendencies of the fascist regime: it was more inclined to access the party system, supporting NATO and the ruling parties against Communism.

If the moderate politics of the MSI proved electorally rewarding in the 1950s and early 1960s, the progressive isolation of the party enfeebled the moderate leadership and revitalized the radical faction in subsequent years. On the one hand, this fostered the development of new groups calling for hard-line clashes on the streets with opponents. On the other, it paved the way for ideological renovation within the movement faction of the party, mainly inspired by the French *Nouvelle Droite's* critique of the liberal-capitalist system, individualism, and consumerism (Bar-On 2012). Of considerable impact on younger generations was the organization of a series of communitarian summer camps, which aimed at taking the MSI out of the gloomy neo-fascist ghetto, to take an active role in the Italian society.

The attempts by the radical faction would, however, fall short in solving the MSI's isolation, due to the party's enduring nostalgia for the regime, and its complicity with street violence and terrorism. If the 1980 Bologna railway station massacre led to the dismantlement of most extra-parliamentary right-wing organizations, the changing global context progressively made confrontation with communism and street violence lose momentum. By the early 1990s, the MSI had gradually turned into a collector of protest by legal means, unambiguously denouncing violence, and clearly distancing itself from the extreme right fringes. As MSI candidates achieved resounding success in local elections, the party greatly improved its coalition potential (Ignazi 1998). Taking advantage of these opportunities, the 1995 congress marked the transition of the MSI into a modern European conservative party, allegedly detached from its fascist legacy. *Alleanza Nazionale* (National Alliance – AN) could now present itself as a legitimate ally for the emerging mainstream right coalitions that would rule Italy in the following decades (Campani 2016).

~~Inevitably,~~ several MSI activists and officials did not support the transition, and the rejection of the revolutionary features of fascism. A group of prominent

members of MSI's movement faction thus founded *Movimento Sociale-Fiamma Tricolore* (Social Movement-Tricolour Flame – MS-FT). While AN progressively took a clear stand against biological racism and anti-Semitism, MS-FT did not renounce its fascist legacy, especially its 'social' revolutionary principles (Castelli Gattinara, Froio, and Albanese 2013). Its radical positions against globalization, immigration, and liberal economy contributed to its popularity among marginal groups in metropolitan areas, qualifying the party as a clear example of extreme right politics (Ignazi 2003). The splinter group managed to elect one MP at the 1996 national elections, and one Euro-MP at the 1999 European Parliament elections. Over the years, however, the party lost momentum, as other actors in the same area increasingly challenged its distinctive profile.

In the same years, in fact, former members of neo-fascist militant organizations founded the party *Forza Nuova* (New Force – FN). While originally, the group was the grassroots faction of the MS-FT, after splintering, FN primarily focused on street activism, with a series of campaigns against abortion, euthanasia and same-sex marriage. Despite this propensity for social movement activism, in fact, FN's politics combined fascist ideals with ultra-Catholic values, which set it apart from the secularist tradition of Italy's neo-fascist movement faction. During the 1990s and early 2000s, FN infiltrated organized soccer clubs to recruit militants among hooligans, and the subcultural music milieu to attract young skinheads (Caldiron 2013). While the link between neo-fascism, hooliganism, and skinhead culture soon became the trademark of FN, the group also tried to gain legitimacy in the electoral arena, by collaborating with small splinter groups originating from the AN. From 2008 onwards, however, FN has run its own independent candidates in national and local elections, generally with little success. Thus, similar to the factions that characterized Italian neo-fascism in the post-war years, FN displays a conflicted nature, seeking respectability as a political party, while claiming to be 'revolutionary', and open to violence, in the protest arena (Campani 2016).

In the early 2000s, MS-FT progressively transitioned to the electoral arena, where it repeatedly established alliances with the mainstream right coalition of Silvio Berlusconi. The electoral turn led to internal tensions, especially with the youth branch of the party, which demanded more flexibility in the decision-making process, while also contesting the rigidity of the party apparatus. This eventually led to a split, as a small group of militants left the party in 2008, under the leadership of a recognized public figure in the neo-fascist music subculture. In the following months, the group started the 'metapolitical' project of *CasaPound Italia* (CPI), as a youth cultural centre promoting alternative music events alongside demonstrative political actions. In a few years, CPI has been able to develop an innovative political language and imagery, largely inspired by the experiences of 1970s youth neo-fascism, thus attracting both the nostalgic neo-fascists and youth cultures. By the late 2000s, CPI was actively engaged not only on the web and in the neo-fascist subculture, but also with demonstrative political actions, occupations, as well as street clashes (Albanese et al. 2014). Only in 2013 did CPI decide to run in elections with its own candidates.

The Italian extreme right: electoral and protest politics

As observed, the three actors can be reconciled with the ideological tradition of Italian neo-fascism that considered street activism and electoral politics complementary, rather than incompatible. Initially, the three actors represented the ‘social movement’ wing of broader and more institutionalized political parties. Over time, moreover, they all progressively transitioned from the extra-institutional to the electoral arena, which is in line with the operational definition of movement parties used in this volume. In order to offer an in-depth account of the extent to which MS-FT, FN, and CPI have accomplished this transition, this section shall observe their choice of repertoires of action and the focus of their mobilization empirically.

The general picture: patterns of extreme right mobilization in Italy

First, I look at the overall claims making of the three actors over time, as reported in newspaper articles (Figure 6.1). MS-FT first appears in 1995, whereas FN and CPI only appear in 1998 and 2004 respectively. The figure offers three crucial insights for our understanding of the extreme right along the party–movement continuum. First, it shows that extreme right claims-making in Italy is punctuated. None of the actors displays a clearly identifiable upward or downward historical trend in visibility in the mass media, nor do they show an extended period of stasis. Rather, claims-making by all three actors varies considerably on a yearly basis.

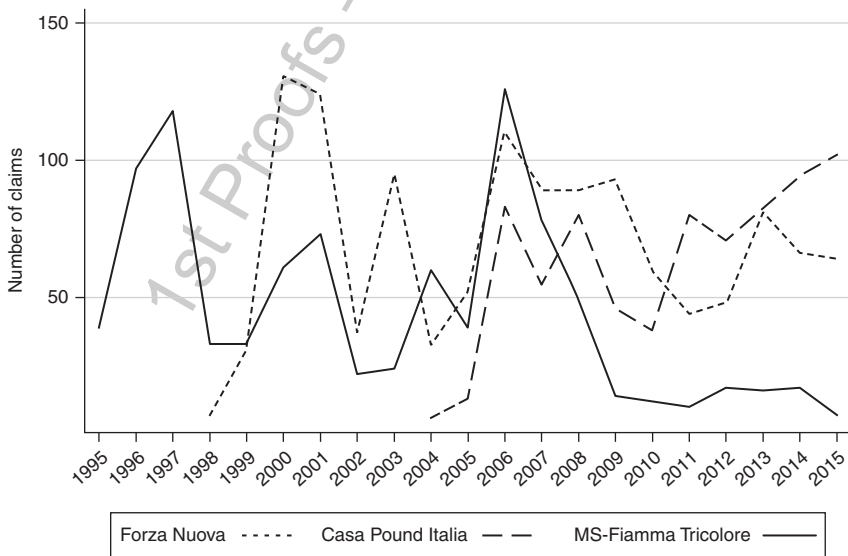


FIGURE 6.1 Extreme right claims making in the public space (1995–2015).

Second, peaks in claims-making are associated with the years of Italy's national elections: 1996, 2001, 2006, 2008, and 2013. This suggests that extreme right mobilization takes advantage of available electoral opportunities. While only MS-FT presented its lists in 1996, FN contested the elections in 2001, and CPI filed its candidates from 2013. The nature of their electoral participation, however, changed over time. At times, they signed alliances with mainstream parties. For instance, MS-FT reached strategic agreements with the representatives of Italy's mainstream right, to avoid competition with them at the 1996 and 2001 elections. At other times, instead, they joined forces with other extreme right organizations or presented independent candidates. In 2003–2006, FN successfully joined forces with other minor organizations of its area, forming the cartel *Alternativa Sociale* (Social Alternative). The group managed to elect one EMP, and ultimately allied with the mainstream right coalition in 2006, albeit failing to elect any MPs. As for CPI, its first experiences in national and European elections were rather unsuccessful, but the group was later able to elect local representatives, and managed to attract much media attention with its communicative and expressive style of political campaigning.

Third, the mobilization capacity of the three organizations ~~under observation~~ is considerably different. While obviously in the early years MS-FT, and then FN, took the lion's share of extreme right claims-making in the public ~~space~~, ~~MS-FT's claims-making~~ has progressively declined after 2006. Conversely, CPI emerged rapidly in the early 2000s, and acquired increasing importance from 2010 onwards. More specifically, the figure suggests that the outbreak of the economic and political crisis in Italy might have provided new opportunities for social movement actors of the extreme right, such as FN and CPI, which ~~demonstrate increased mobilization~~ in the last few years.

Moving on to the comparative analysis, Table 6.1 displays the different repertoires of action of extreme right mobilization for MS-FT, FN and CPI. At one extreme are conventional actions, corresponding to the most traditional and routinized forms of mobilization typical of political parties. At the other end of the spectrum there are social movement actions, including demonstrative, as well as confrontational, actions against the police and opponents, and all types of violent actions.

TABLE 6.1 Form of action of extreme right mobilization (aggregate)

<i>Form of action</i>	<i>Forza Nuova</i>	<i>Fiamma Tricolore</i>	<i>CasaPound Italia</i>
Expressive	13.7	11.5	18.8
Conventional	22.7	53.5	13.1
Demonstrative	22.1	14.7	18.3
Confrontational	21.9	9.3	24.0
Violent	19.6	10.9	25.9
Tot	100%	100%	100%
<i>N</i>	943	686	580

MS-FT displays a clear tendency towards conventional forms of ~~action~~, accounting for more than half of the public interventions. These include electoral campaign activities, and participation in the policy process through elected officials, especially at the local level. Demonstrative actions account for only 15 per cent of the mobilization, whereas confrontational and violent actions account for an additional 10 per cent. The latter mainly took place in the early years of MS-FT's activity, when the group was more frequently engaged in street confrontations.

Only 13 per cent of CPI's mobilization, instead, takes place by means of conventional action, although the group is rather active in the promotion of cultural and music events for members and sympathizers. Social movement repertoires, such as demonstrations, and confrontational and violent actions, account for almost 70 per cent of CPI activism. Over one quarter of CPI's actions involved at least some degree of either symbolic or physical violence, and an additional 25 per cent entailed confrontational actions. Indeed, especially in its early years, CPI gained visibility after a series of episodes of street violence, and with the occupation of abandoned buildings in Rome, which at times also led to physical clashes with law enforcement agencies.

Finally, FN holds an intermediate position. On the one hand, it is relatively more engaged in conventional forms of actions than CPI (22 per cent), including the routinized participation in local and national elections. On the other, it is more prone to social movement actions than MS-FT: 45 per cent of FN's actions correspond to demonstrative and confrontational protests, and 19 per cent to violent actions. These mainly had to do with cycles of counter-mobilization. On some occasions, ~~clashes emerged from the intervention of~~ anti-fascist movements. In ~~other cases, FN~~ militants stormed demonstrations by their opponents, especially during gay prides and civil rights protests.

The transition: from the social movement arena to electoral competition

Following Kitschelt's definition (2006), 'movement parties' are transitional configurations of political actors which have developed in the social movement arena, but are progressively shifting to electoral competition as a primary means of political engagement (see also: Pirro and Castelli Gattinara 2018). To see whether this proposition stands up to empirical scrutiny, Figure 6.2 below displays extreme right claims-making, singling out protest actions (demonstrative, confrontational, and violent actions) from other conventional repertoires of action. For each year, the figure thus reports the share of protest actions for all the activities promoted by each of the three organizations.

Once more, the figure shows a different pattern for MS-FT, on the one hand, and FN and CPI, on the other. In the first case, protest actions account for less than half of the repertoires of action of MS-FT. Furthermore, three years stand out for increased shares of protest actions in MS-FT's mobilization: 1998, 2006, and 2015. The observations for 1998 and 2015 (i.e. the absolute number of

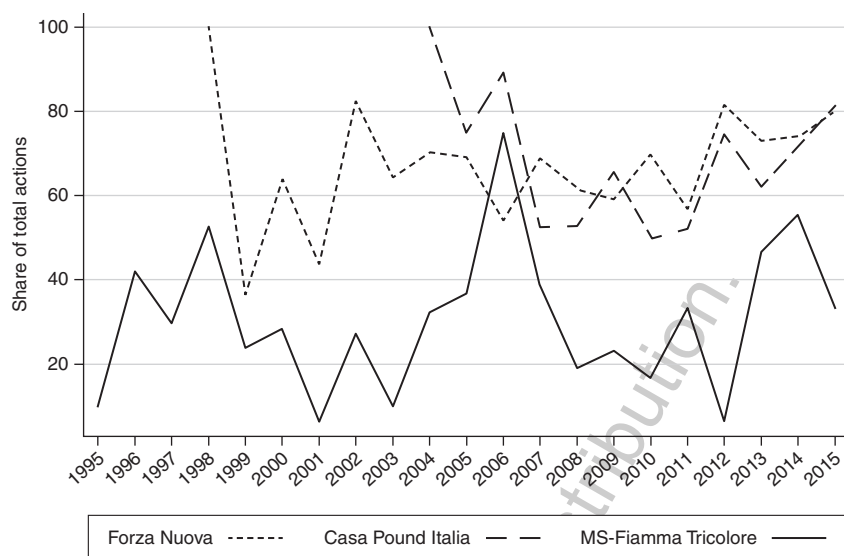


FIGURE 6.2 Share of protest actions in extreme right mobilization, by actor (1995–2015).

claims promoted by MS-FT) are too few to draw any substantial conclusion from this finding. However, the figure for 2006 suggests that electoral opportunities (national elections) triggered mobilization also in the streets. Indeed, in 2006, MS-FT filed its candidates in the lists supporting Berlusconi's mainstream right coalition; while the electoral returns of this choice were scarce, it appears that MS-FT took advantage of available opportunities in the electoral arena to mobilize in the protest one as well.

FN and CPI, instead, display a considerably higher propensity for street protests. As is illustrated by the preferred forms of mobilization in the early years, the two groups first emerged as protest actors. Over time, they progressively 'normalized' their strategies of contention, arguably finding an equilibrium between street politics and routinized forms of electoral competition. In recent years, however, both FN and CPI seem to have returned to protest activism as a primary form of engagement, especially with the outbreak of the economic crisis in Italy (2011), and even more so during the so-called European migration crisis (2015).

To elaborate on this, Figure 6.3 reports extreme right claims-making, this time singling out violent actions from all other conventional and protest repertoires. The figure shows unequivocally that the use of violence is a viable option for extreme right organizations in Italy. In particular, FN and CPI display a high propensity for violence, and they are considerably more likely to engage in violent actions than the more institutionalized MS-FT. Furthermore, violent episodes by FN and CPI appear to be on the rise, especially after 2011 and in 2015. Once again, street activism appears to be responsive to the socio-political circumstances, irrespective of previous electoral choices.

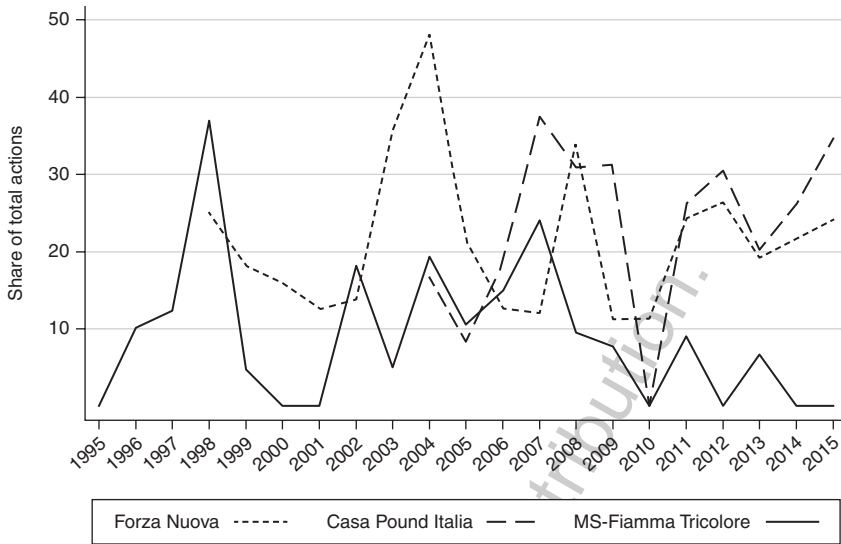


FIGURE 6.3 Share of violent actions in extreme right mobilization, by actor (1995–2015).

Regarding Kitschelt’s assessment, the findings outlined so far suggest that the three extreme right groups under observation qualify as movement-parties, defined as hybrid actors located in between the protest and electoral arena (Kitschelt 2006; Pirro and Castelli Gattinara 2018). Yet, it also appears that FN and CPI, unlike MS-FT, are still far from completing the transition from social movement to political party. Furthermore, the analysis suggests that the trajectory of the ‘transition’ from one arena to the other is neither unidirectional nor irreversible. On the contrary, it is highly sensitive to external circumstances and, as discussed below, strategic choices, which might actually reverse the expected direction and drive actors that opted for electoral competition back to the social movement arena.

Movement party transition as strategic choice: issue focus and repertoires of actions

As discussed in the theory chapter of this volume (Chapter 2), the choice of repertoires of action does not respond exclusively to external circumstances (such as political opportunities), and internal incentives (such as ideology and values), but also to strategic factors linked to the issue focus of claims-making. If this is indeed the case, it is reasonable to expect some issues to dominate when the extreme right engages in conventional politics, and others when it opts for street mobilization. Accordingly, Table 6.2 reports data on the issue focus of the claims-making by FN, MS-FT, and CPI.

TABLE 6.2 Issue focus of extreme right mobilization, by actor

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Forza Nuova</i>	<i>Fiamma Tricolore</i>	<i>CasaPound Italia</i>
Socio-economic affairs	9.2	15.9	20.3
Cultural liberalism	19.6	13.7	18.4
Europe and the EU	3.1	4.2	5.7
Migration and integration	35.4	12.6	14.7
Law and order	4.2	11.3	4.3
Ideological statements	26.7	36.1	33.8
Other issues	1.8	6.2	2.9
Tot	100%	100%	100%
<i>N</i>	872	452	512

At a most general level, the analysis of thematic fields offers interesting insights on the similarities and differences in claims-making by the neo-fascist right. A considerable share of the public interventions by all three groups focus on strictly ideological statements, by which they simply claim a connection with the historical experience of Italian fascism, without referring to any substantial policy issue. CPI and MS-FT are relatively more prone than FN to engage on socio-economic issues, especially through political campaigns that call for strong state intervention in the economy, and criticize financial capitalism for depriving the nation of its sovereignty. Conversely, FN engages the most on migration affairs, as over a third of its claims-making deals with either immigration or integration politics. In this respect, FN is the only actor that could resemble, at least to a certain extent, the idea of a ‘single-issue’ party developed in the literature on the far right (Mudde 1999).

To complement this information, Table 6.3 compares the forms of actions of each of the three actors across issue fields. MS-FT adopts conventional repertoires of action on all issue areas, confirming that the group has completed its transition to standardized and routinized politics. The opposite holds for CPI: on all issue areas, CPI makes the least use of conventional repertoires, and is most likely to engage in street violence. While for CPI, social movement repertoires are especially predominant when it comes to socioeconomic issues, migration, and law and order issues, for FN they prevail in actions focusing on cultural liberalism and Europe.

Overall, the analysis outlined in this section could not identify a clear-cut differentiation between preferred forms of activism, and the content of claims-making. Still, the findings provide further evidence that neo-fascist actors are hybrid political actors. Specifically, the three organizations are located at distinct stages in the transition from social movement to the electoral arena. MS-FT displays the typical traits of a political party, engaging in routinized forms of activism irrespective of the policy issue at stake. FN displays the traits of an institutionalising movement: it focuses almost exclusively on one issue, which it approaches through multiple means, including election campaigns and policy proposals, as well as demonstrative actions and street violence. Finally, CPI mainly qualifies as a street-based movement: it prioritises the activism and narrative of social movements, while also occasionally participating in elections, and interacting with the party arena. In this

TABLE 6.3 Form of action and issue focus, by actor

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Conventional actions</i>	<i>Social movement actions</i>	<i>Violent actions</i>	<i>Tot</i>	<i>N</i>
<i>Forza Nuova</i>					
Socio-economic affairs	30.0	53.3	16.7	100%	60
Cultural liberalism	21.3	58.2	20.5	100%	122
Europe and the EU	34.8	56.5	8.7	100%	23
Migration and integration	25.5	56.7	17.9	100%	224
Law and order	28.6	60.7	10.7	100%	28
Ideological statements	42.4	41.8	15.8	100%	165
Other issues	53.8	38.5	7.7	100%	13
<i>Fiamma Tricolore</i>					
Socio-economic affairs	76.3	20.3	3.4	100%	59
Cultural liberalism	50.0	39.1	10.9	100%	46
Europe and the EU	76.9	23.1	0.0	100%	13
Migration and integration	39.0	46.3	14.6	100%	41
Law and order	53.4	33.3	13.3	100%	30
Ideological statements	42.7	39.1	18.2	100%	110
Other issues	80.0	20.0	0.0	100%	20
<i>CasaPound Italia</i>					
Socio-economic affairs	22.5	67.5	10.0	100%	80
Cultural liberalism	30.7	44.0	25.3	100%	75
Europe and the EU	25.0	55.0	20.0	100%	20
Migration and integration	7.4	68.5	24.1	100%	54
Law and order	27.3	72.7	0.0	100%	22
Ideological statements	55.1	27.2	17.6	100%	136
Other issues	42.9	42.9	14.3	100%	14

respect, FN differs from CPI, in that it engages in street politics to obtain electoral gains – thus applying the office-seeking logic of political parties. Conversely, CPI differs from FN in that it participates in the electoral arena with the goal of driving attention to its extra-parliamentary activities and issues – thus applying the agenda-setting logic that characterizes social movement politics.

Conclusion

This chapter has appraised neo-fascist actors in Italy as hybrid political organizations located at the intersection between the party and social movement forms. Building upon the political process theory, and focusing on both external and internal factors, I analyzed the Italian far right as a movement party (Castelli Gattinara and Pirro 2018). Focusing on political and discursive opportunities, I have stressed the importance of the contextual circumstances in which the choice of repertoires of actions across different arenas of engagement takes place. Furthermore, by looking at the ideology of the groups, I have discussed how ~~fascism plays a crucial role in defining~~ extreme right political activism in terms of social movement and political party practices. Specifically, in line with Kitschelt's definition of movement parties

(2006), I anticipated that neo-fascist actors emerging in the extra-institutional arena would progressively transition to electoral politics, depending on the available political opportunities for institutionalization (Pirro and Castelli Gattinara 2018). At the same time, I also expected that their transition would remain incomplete, mainly due to the ideological legacy of fascism as a movement.

I have then tested the expectations empirically, looking at claims-making by three neo-fascist actors in Italy that I considered susceptible to qualify as movement parties: *Movimento Sociale-Fiamma Tricolore*, *Forza Nuova*, and *CasaPound*. Emerging from the radical wing of post-war neo-fascism, in fact, these groups splintered from pre-existing political parties due to their stated preference for social movement activism. Their emergence is thus closely tied with ideological motivations, most notably a professed proximity to the spirit of the 'fascism as a movement' as opposed to the party-oriented tendency of the conservative faction of the Italian far right (De Felice 1969; Ignazi 2003).

Based on an extensive quantitative data analysis, I have then illustrated empirically the main features of the repertoires of action of MS-FT, FN, and CPI. The empirical evidence confirmed that none of the three actors under examination has ever been exclusively involved in either the electoral or the social movement arena. Rather, all three actors participate selectively and strategically in both electoral and protest politics. As hybrid actors, they engage in politics by means of different repertoires throughout their history of mobilization, promoting actions that are typical of social movements, as well as routinized and standardized actions that normally pertain to established political parties.

While confirming the main definitional criteria of movement parties as hybrid actors transitioning from the extra-institutional to the electoral arena, the analysis has also shown some crucial differences in how extreme right actors relate to social movement and party politics. Most notably, the analysis has suggested that the transition from one arena to the other is neither unidirectional nor irreversible, and that changing political opportunities might influence the extent to which actors engage in electoral, rather than street, activism. As a result, if MS-FT has fully transitioned to the arena of party politics, CPI seems to consider the electoral arena a corollary to social movement activism, whereas FN displays a more balanced propensity for social movement politics as well as electoral campaigning.

The finding that there might be an interpenetration between different arenas of conflict has paved the way to conceptualizing alternative configurations within the movement party paradigm, which are likely to apply beyond the specific case of Italy's neo-fascist right. Even if only illustratively, I have suggested appraising movement parties not only based on the extent of their transition from one arena to the other, but also in terms of their underlying motivations for activism. Rather than as a univocal and unidirectional process, the transition from the social movement to the electoral arena ought in fact to be understood as a reversible pattern shaped by external circumstances and strategic choices. On the one hand, movement parties might thus apply the office-seeking logic of political parties, and therefore engage in street politics with the goal of

attracting voters, ~~gaining~~ an electoral advantage over their competitors. On the other, they might apply the agenda-setting logic of social movements, and thus participate in electoral politics with the primary goal of attracting attention to their extra-parliamentary activities. Future empirical research at the intersection between party politics and social movement studies is thus needed to assess whether and how collective actors can successfully bridge the logics of protest and those of electoral competition.

Notes

- 1 <http://www.fiammatricolore.com> (accessed 17.11.2017).
- 2 <http://www.forzanuova.eu> (accessed 17.11.2017).
- 3 <http://www.casapounditalia.org> (accessed 17.11.2017).
- 4 *Neo-fascist* organizations belong to the category of the extreme right, which opposes democratic principles and ultimately aims at subverting the democratic order. This is distinct from the radical right, which generally subscribes to the rules of parliamentary democracy. Both categories, however, can be appraised as ‘far-right’ (e.g. Mudde 1996).

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