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START NOW
Getting ‘right’ into the news: grassroots far-right mobilization and media coverage in Italy and France

Pietro Castelli Gattinara¹· Caterina Froio²

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

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Introduction

How do non-established far-right actors\(^1\) achieve visibility in the media? Media coverage is a crucial resource in politics, especially for actors that struggle to access office or that aim to influence the political mainstream from the social movement arena (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2012). While much research has addressed the media politics of left-wing movements and Radical Right Populist parties (RRPPs), to date little is known about the visibility and coverage of the far-right grassroots movements that have acquired increasing relevance in Western Europe throughout recent years (see Mudde 2016, pp. 5–6).

Social movement specialists suggest that media coverage of progressive movements is related to the characteristics of the protests staged by these actors (Wouters 2013) and that mainstream parties tend to react to movements’ mobilizations only if they receive media visibility (Koopmans 2004). Specialists of far-right politics, instead, propose that news value depends on the type of discourse and style advanced by RRPPs (see Akkerman 2011; Bos et al. 2016; Ellinas 2010; Sheets et al. 2015).

Inspired by insights from these separate strands of literature, this paper suggests that media coverage is a function of the mobilization strategies of non-established far-right actors. To understand when, why and how their claims and protests make it into the news, one must look at whether the mechanisms that apply to established political actors and left-wing social movements are also confirmed for grassroots far-right organizations that do not have an institutional power base and consolidated societal relevance.

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

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\(^1\) The article refers to ‘far right’ as an umbrella concept including extreme and radical organizations located at the right end of the ideological spectrum. The radical right is hostile to liberal democratic principles, but it subscribes to the rules of parliamentary democracy. Conversely, extreme right groups (such as the two organizations considered in this study) oppose democratic principles and ultimately aim at subverting the democratic order (see, e.g. Mudde 2007).
The empirical analysis considers the case of CasaPound Italia (CPI) and the French Bloc Identitaire (BI), as two non-established far-right organizations in comparable political contexts (see below). We use a new dataset based on a novel procedure to measure the interaction between political claims-making and the mass media, by means of logistic regressions. Inspired by previous research on agenda building (Hägglund and Kriesi 2010), our approach compares the quantity and content of press releases published by CPI and BI on their websites, with their subsequent media coverage in national quality newspapers. By linking online campaign material to the content of the newspaper reports, we explore the extent to which mass media agendas reproduce the political claims of non-established far-right actors.

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

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

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

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

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

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2 Starting from July 2016, the Bloc Identitaire changed its name in The Identitarians (Les Identitaires).
While news value changes across media outlets and broadcasters, there is a certain agreement in the literature that the more an event is in line with these criteria, the higher the chances that it will get coverage (Cushion 2010).

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

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

To summarize, this literature suggests that mass media contribute to the breakthrough of RRPPs because far-right politics and ‘media logics’ (Esser 2013) would share at least three main traits: a tendency towards personalization, a preference for emotionalization, and an inclination towards anti-establishment attitudes (Decker 2008). Indeed, the mediatisation of political communication evolved alongside a broader transformation of the media industry towards forms of information content that respond more directly to audience demands, providing larger supplies of entertainment, sensationalism, and infotainment (Akkerman 2011). Newsworthiness thus results from the desire of the mass media for sensational, simplified, and controversial news stories (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2012), which explains the interest for the unconventional, conflictual, and at times violent repertoires characterizing RRPPs' politics.

This convergence takes place in at least three main ways. First, the attention provided to law and order issues in RRPPs’ discourse would match the tendency of the media to prioritize dramatic and securitized news (Akkerman 2011). Second,
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nativist interpretations of immigration and integration would satisfy media appetites for simplification of news stories and the adoption of conflict frames (Semelko and Valkenburg 2000). Third, controversial claims that are outrageous enough to attract the attention of the public would have a high news value, which could explain why the mass media are often willing to cover RRPPs’ outbursts against the government and the establishment, especially when these involve street disorder, or personal attacks against political opponents (Fella 2008). In sum, the populist radical right would benefit from media visibility not only because it mobilizes on widely held feelings of national identification and insecurity, but also because it does so by means of a political repertoire that meets ‘the commercial imperatives imposed by the dramatic transformation of the media landscape’ (Ellinas 2010, p. 35).

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

Hypotheses

Drawing upon this literature, we develop four expectations based on different explanations for the visibility of far-right actions in the media: issue focus, adopted repertoires of contention, public reactions, and counter-mobilization.¹

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

¹ 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.).
Van Spanje 2010; Ivarsflaten 2007). We thus expect that mobilization on immigration and migrant integration, issues upon which far-right actors enjoy the most ownership, will more easily attract news coverage. Contrarily, when they address other topics visibility in the mass media is less likely, since neither the media nor the public will recognize their legitimacy to intervene on debates that are unfamiliar to the far-right family. Hence, we expect that:

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

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

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

Beyond issue preferences, we also expect, in line with social movement research, that the media are sensitive to the repertoire of action adopted by the far right. Political actors may increase the news value of their events by becoming more aggressive or increasing the conflict in their political communication strategy (Hänggli and Kriesti 2012). While this strategy might alienate moderate supporters of institutional actors, grassroots far-right organizations do not run this risk, since they generally do not aim at winning elections, but at mobilizing their own constituency during and after each campaign (Harmel and Janda 1994). If the mass media anticipate that controversial stories attract larger audiences, then coverage of far-right actors depends on the degree of confrontation in their activism. In turn, media exposure provides them with legitimacy, giving the impression that they have larger followings (Tarrow 1998, pp. 126–129). Taking advantage of the reactivity of the mass media, unconventional tactics might enable the far right to achieve visibility with minimum organizational costs. We thus expect that unconventional repertoires, and in particular confrontational and violent political events, are most efficient to transmit far-right claims to the media.
H3 (Confrontation hypothesis) media coverage is more likely when far-right mobilization adopts unconventional and confrontational repertoires of action, including violence, matching persistent media demands for controversy.

Finally, the mass media prioritize stories imbued with ‘conflict frames’ emphasizing ‘conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions as a means of capturing audience interest’ (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000, p. 95). They promote oversimplification of complex political debates and trigger mistrust in political representatives (Patterson 2011). Since the public interventions of the far right are often highly controversial, it is common for them to generate reactions and counter-mobilization by other actors in the system. When this is the case, the mass media are most likely to provide coverage, since the stories can be easily simplified into two opposing and conflictual camps (the ‘us versus them’ paradigm; see Ellinas 2010, p. 34), and thus are known to have greater popular appeal than less confrontational topics (Altheide and Snow 1979). Thus, our last hypothesis expects that:

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

Case selection, data, and methods

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

As regards the media system, Italy and France belong to the ‘Mediterranean or polarized pluralist’ media model (Hallin and Mancini 2004), characterized by a press intimately involved in national political conflict, weak professionalization, and strong state intervention. As recent empirical measurements confirm that Italy and France belong to the same (southern) cluster (Brüggemann et al. 2014, p. 1057), it is safe to assume that media practices and standards differ little between the two countries. Similarly, Italy and France display comparable political contexts within which far-right movements are active. Indebted to the historical experience of the New Right (Mammone 2015), French and Italian extreme right movements often explicitly reject institutionalized politics to pursue more unconventional forms of activism (Mammone 2015). Additionally, both countries host old and successful
RRPPs: the Front National (FN) and the Lega Nord (LN), although historically the Italian radical right has been considerably more fragmented. Thus, in both contexts, far-right movements compete with established RRPPs to get access to the media.

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

The empirical analysis combines data from online press releases produced by BI and CPI—extracted from their official websites—and from media coverage in national quality newspapers (Hanggli and Kriesi 2012; Hutter 2014). If this approach is inspired by the input–output strategy of previous studies on agenda building (Hanggli and Kriesi 2010; Kioussis et al. 2006), our unit of analysis is based on instances of claims-making. In Political Claims Analysis, these are defined as the expression of political opinion by physical or verbal action in the public sphere, thus including both verbal acts, conventional forms, and intervention, as well as protests (Koopmans and Statham 1999). 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).

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

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

5 While the two newspapers have slightly different political leanings, our study focuses on the visibility of far-right actors in the mass media, rather than on the tone of coverage. In this respect, extant scholarship confirms that while the tone and the logics of information production may change according to the political orientation of a newspaper, there is no significant difference in the likelihood that left-wing or right-wing newspapers cover far right politics (see Koopmans 2004).
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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
306 From both data sources, we coded all instances of claims-making by CPI or BI based
307 on the same codebook. The coding accounts for the date, location and main topic of the
308 action and includes a dummy for whether it provoked a counter-mobilization (coded 1
309 if yes and 0 otherwise).6 In addition, we distinguish the forms of action of each instance
310 of claims-making in terms of conventional and protest tactics (see e.g. Caiani et al.
311 2012). Conventional activism includes all types of verbal actions (e.g. public state-
312 ments, interviews, and public speeches), as well as lobbying, voting, petitioning, and
313 electoral campaigning. Protest activism, instead, encompasses demonstrative actions
314 (such as legal actions and authorized demonstrations), confrontational actions (illegal
315 demonstrations and blockades), and violent action (symbolic or physical violence).
316
317 The full dataset reports the systematic collection of interventions of the two
318 actors, differentiating between claims in the mass media and in online press releases.
319 Finally, we linked claims in the media with claims in online press releases through
320 a double-blinded coding of the content of the news stories and the date of the
321 action described in the text. Hence, our dataset comprises three types of observa-
322 tions: claims that are reported only in online press releases; claims that appear in
323 online press releases and in newspapers; and claims that appear only in the media.7
324 These data are then analysed in models controlling for two crucial characteristics
325 at the political system level: the size of the far right in the country,8 and the timing
326 of the action during electoral campaign cycles.9 Moreover, we include three

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

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

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

9 This is coded 1 if an action takes place during the 6 months preceding a national election, and 0 otherwise.
immigration-related contextual factors: the annual inflow of migrants\textsuperscript{10} and of asylum seekers,\textsuperscript{11} and public opinion on immigration.\textsuperscript{12} Finally, we also test whether the press releases of far-right actors are more likely to generate media attention when far-right mobilization is intense.\textsuperscript{13} We run logistic regressions to predict mass media coverage of far-right mobilization, using characteristics of the claims in the online press releases (repertoire of mobilization, issue topic) as predictors of media coverage.

**The media coverage of grassroots far-right mobilization**

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

\textsuperscript{10} Measured as the total annual inflow of foreign population in France and Italy, in hundreds of thousands of individuals. Source: OECD Statistics: https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=MIG (accessed on 10/05/2016).

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

\textsuperscript{12} Measured as the share of public opinion considering immigration one of the two most important problems in the country. Source: Eurobarometer 2003–2015.

\textsuperscript{13} The intensity of the mobilization of the far right over the month when the media stories take place is measured as the number of actions promoted in the press releases in the 30 days preceding the event.
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![Map of France with marked events](image)

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Forms of actions and issue emphasis by CPI and BI (mass media and press releases)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CasaPound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Freq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action type</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conventional</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issue emphasis</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law and order</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Moving beyond aggregate figures, Table 1 compares the action repertoires and issue emphasis of CPI and BI in online press release and newspaper coverage. Conventional forms of political engagement are more common in France than in Italy, as shown in BI’s press releases and in the media coverage of its protests. Conversely, the relevance of protest actions is higher for CPI, both in media coverage and in its press releases. In both cases, however, we can observe an overemphasis of protest events in the media compared to the share of this type of action in far-right press
releases. The opposite is confirmed for conventional actions, which have a relatively lower weight in the media than in the claims-making of the far right.\footnote{This is also confirmed if we differentiate among, on the one hand, ‘demonstrative’ actions and, on the other ‘confrontational’ and ‘violent’ ones. While both actors promote the former much more frequently, the media tend to over-report on the latter.}

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

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

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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 4</th>
<th></th>
<th>χ² (d.f.)</th>
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<td></td>
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<td>SB</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent variable:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent variable</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Immigration issue</td>
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<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.72**</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.63**</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.73***</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>2.08</td>
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<td>0.37</td>
<td>−0.61</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>−0.51</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.59</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest actions</td>
<td>0.34**</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.42**</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counter-mobilization</td>
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<td>0.37</td>
<td>11.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Electoral strength of far-right parties (%)</td>
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<td>0.10</td>
<td>−0.11</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>−0.11</td>
<td>0.07</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.77</td>
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<td>0.82</td>
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<td>0.83</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.01</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>1.01</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1.55***</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>1.48***</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>1.48***</td>
<td>0.38</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.03**</td>
<td>0.01</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
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<td>−4.69</td>
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<td>−3.67</td>
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<td>−3.65</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>1885</td>
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<td>1885</td>
<td></td>
<td>1885</td>
<td></td>
<td>1885</td>
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<td>−583.67</td>
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<td>−581.74</td>
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<td>−534.27</td>
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<td>0.03</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>χ² (d.f.)</td>
<td>31.1 (7)***</td>
<td>33.7 (8)***</td>
<td>37.5 (9)***</td>
<td>132.4 (10)***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

**Dependent variable:** media report of BI actions

|                          |         |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |           |
| **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 | 0.26   | 2.40 |         |       |           |
| Counter-mobilization     | 1.99*** | 0.50  | 7.40   |       |         |       |         |       |           |
Table 2 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control variables</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
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<td>SE</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral strength of far-right parties (%)</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.01</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annual inflow of migrants*</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual inflow of asylum seekers*</td>
<td>2.83***</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>2.84**</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most important problem (% immigration)</td>
<td>–0.00</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>–0.00</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>–0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral cycle</td>
<td>–0.40</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>–0.42</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>–0.64*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensity of mobilization</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( N )</td>
<td>753</td>
<td>753</td>
<td>753</td>
<td>753</td>
<td>753</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( -2 ) log likelihood</td>
<td>–345.71</td>
<td>–345.01</td>
<td>–333.34</td>
<td>–324.76</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pseudo-( R^2 )</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \chi^2 ) (df)</td>
<td>28.9 (7)**</td>
<td>30.3 (8)**</td>
<td>53.6 (9)**</td>
<td>70.8 (10)**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***\( P < 0.001 \); **\( P < 0.05 \); * \( P < 0.1 \)

*aIn hundreds of thousands
a higher likelihood of CPI obtaining visibility in the mass media during electoral campaigns, which indicates a certain capacity by CPI to take advantage of electoral opportunities.

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

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

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

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

\footnote{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).

\footnote{16} The effect is positive and significant in both Italy and France (not reported in table).
counter-mobilization: for CPI, the odds of receiving media coverage when there is counter-mobilization are 11 times larger than the odds for events that did not face such opposition. In France, the same odds are 7 times larger for events facing counter-mobilization. Similarly, the odds for events focusing on immigration and for
confrontational events are about 2 times larger than those focusing on other issues and employing other repertoires of action, in both countries. To account for the substantive magnitude of the likelihood of mass media coverage, we used the results of the logistic regression to calculate the predicted probabilities that one initiative by the far right would receive media attention. Accordingly, Fig. 3 displays the predicted probabilities that the media will provide coverage of an activity promoted by CPI and BI, for each of the crucial features defining our four hypotheses. As is shown, holding all other variables constant, actions by non-established far-right actors in Italy and France are most likely to get coverage in the mass media when they face some form of counter-mobilization, thus creating controversy. In Italy CPI’s actions in the presence of opposition have a probability of about 65% of receiving media coverage, while in France the predicted probability for the BI is 58%. Moreover, the probability of receiving media coverage when focusing on the immigration issue is about 20%, for both actors, although the probability for BI is slightly higher than that of CPI. Similarly, the likelihood that protest actions get media attention is higher for BI (24%) than for CPI (18%). Taken together, the results presented in Table 2 and Fig. 3 provide evidence for some of our expected mechanisms, most notably for the idea that issue ownership, confrontational and protest repertoires, and the presence of counter-mobilization increase the likelihood of media coverage.

Conclusive remarks

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

In line with our overarching expectations, the analysis that we conducted suggests that the mass media in both countries are responsive to the ownership of the far right as regards the immigration issue. Irrespective of context-level immigration figures, we found empirical evidence that the media recognize a ‘privileged’ position to far-right actors when they deal with issues related to migration and the integration of migrants. Put simply, non-established right-wing organizations have a considerably higher chance to get media coverage if they focus their claims on issues that they ‘own’, most notably immigration. While the focus on such a broad area might hide stronger effects of thematic emphasis related to more specific topics or to the framing of sub-dimensions within this bundle of issues (Helbling 2014), we could not find supportive evidence for our hypothesis on dramatized political communication.

In this respect, we must acknowledge that our data only allows the measurement of dramatization in terms of a thematic emphasis on law and order, thus neglecting...
potentially relevant aspects linked to the tone and framing by which the far-right approaches security issues.

Our analysis could, however, confirm that the choice of the forms of actions by which the non-established far right articulates its claims in the public sphere has consequences for their visibility in the news. In both Italy and France, the two organizations are most likely to get media coverage if they adopt protest strategies and engage in confrontation, whereas conventional forms of political engagement tend to pay off considerably less. In line with the premises of this study, we are therefore able to highlight the crucial role played by internal supply-side factors in the interaction between non-established organizations of the far right and the media.

Public visibility in the press thus also depends on the strategic choices of mobilization by these actors. Similarly, news coverage also stems from movement/counter-movement dynamics. Most notably, the media tend to cover far-right actions more frequently if their claims manage to create conflict and trigger a reaction from their opponents. These findings might hint, albeit tentatively, at the strategic choices of grassroots right-wing actors, as they might seek to create controversy in order to increase their chances of obtaining public visibility.

While offering an innovative perspective on the interaction between the mass media and the far right, this study inevitably faces the question of generalizability. Considering the constraints in terms of data and design, it is thus legitimate to ask whether our findings apply beyond France and Italy, to other forms of news coverage, and to other types of actors. To begin with, future scholarship might want to extend this model to a larger set of countries, investigating the effects of relevant mechanisms linked to the personalization and simplification of politics. Moreover, while our focus is exclusively on the mainstream press, we believe that commercial TV channels and tabloids are equally, if not more, likely to display the preference for dramatized and controversial news stories that we could observe in this study.

Indeed, future studies that extract data from social media could overcome one limitation of this article and provide further insights on the nexus between news coverage and far-right mobilization. Finally, to complement our findings future research might want to look at the media politics of far-right parties and movements more systematically, and in a comparative fashion, since it is likely that the nature of interaction with the mass media varies depending on the primary arena of engagement of single actors.

Despite these limitations, the article offers important insights not only to specialists of far-right politics, but also to scholars of political communication and party politics. Our study provides information on crucial mechanisms concerning political movements before their electoral breakthrough, which could generate new hypotheses on the life cycle of radical parties and movements. The research design that we propose also represents an innovative methodological contribution for the scholarship studying political protest and mobilization across other political families.

Catching the attention of the mass media, in fact, is fundamental for all non-established actors, as they try to take advantage of the media to get public support.

Even though the mechanisms singled out in this paper apply to all actors facing the problem of visibility, we would be particularly interested in seeing to what extent they explain the dynamics that led to the breakthrough of successful radical
Getting ‘right’ into the news: grassroots far-right...

References


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


Pietro Castelli Gattinara is a research fellow in Political Science and Sociology at the Centre On Social Movement Studies, Scuola Normale Superiore, Florence. His interests lie, especially, in the study of comparative politics, the far right, and migration in Europe. After obtaining his PhD at the EUl with a dissertation on party competition on migration in Italy, he joined the Department of Politics of the University of Leicester, where he worked on governmental responsiveness to public opinion and protest. He recently published his first monograph *The politics of migration in Italy* (Routledge, 2016), and his work appeared in several international peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes.

Caterina Froio received a PhD in Political Science from the European University Institute (2015). She is currently a Vox-Pol Research Fellow at the Oxford Internet Institute, Department of Politics and International relations, University of Oxford. She holds a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Florence and a double M.A. from the Institut d’Etudes Politiques of Paris in Political Sociology and Public Policy. Her research is comparative, and it develops on two main lines. The first deals with issues related to party government and agenda setting, and the second deals with movements and parties of the far right. She has published in various international peer-reviewed journals, including *Party Politics, French Politics, International Journal of Conflict and Violence*. 