https://ese-journals.unisalento.it/index.php/paco/index

ISSN: 1972-7623 (print version)
ISSN: 2035-6609 (electronic version)
PACO, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2026: 921-952

https://doi.org/10.1285/i20356609v19n3p921-952

Published 15 November, 2026

OPEN SECTION / ARTICLE

Contagious Dissent: Radical Right Spillover and Anti-Vaccine Mobilization. Insights from the Italian Case

Manuela Caiani
Scuola Normale Superiore, Italy

Nikolaos Saridakis
Scuola Normale Superiore, Italy

ABSTRACT: Despite growing scholarly attention to radical right responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, we still know relatively little about how radical right actors interacted with and influenced the broader anti-vaccination and anti-Green Pass movement. This article addresses this gap by examining the relationship between radical right actors and the wider protest arena in Italy, a critical case of anti-restriction mobilization in Europe. Building on a social movement perspective, we conceptualize the radical right as a heterogeneous field of interconnected collective and individual actors operating across the boundaries between institutional and contentious politics. Drawing on a mixed-methods design that combines a protest event analysis (PEA) of 157 protest events reported in the Italian press (2021–2022) with 23 semi-structured interviews with activists, movement leaders, and experts, we analyze how radical right actors mobilized, interacted with other protest actors, and adapted their strategies throughout the protest cycle. The findings show that the pandemic created new opportunities for organizational and discursive spillover between the radical right and the broader anti-vaccination movement. Radical right actors contributed to shaping protest frames, became increasingly embedded in protest networks, and diversified their repertoires of contention through a functional division of labor between more confrontational and more conventional actors. At the same time, these interactions were contingent on local political contexts and generated both opportunities for cooperation and constraints on radical right mobilization. More broadly, the pandemic functioned as a critical juncture that expanded the radical right's ideological repertoire beyond its traditional focus on nationalism, immigration, and ethnicity to include public health governance, scientific authority, and epistemic distrust.

KEYWORDS: Anti-vax mobilization, Covid-19 protests, Protest mobilization, Radical right, Regressive social movement spillover

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR(S): manuela.caiani@sns.it; nikolaos.saridakis@sns.it

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

1. Introduction

Mobilizations opposing vaccinations and other Covid-19 containment measures became a dominant feature of contentious politics during the pandemic. Across Europe and beyond, these protests were frequently intertwined with radical right (RR) actors and networks (Tarrow 2021; Volk and Weisskircher 2024).[1] Despite growing scholarly attention to radical right responses to the pandemic, empirical research on the interactions between RR actors and the broader anti-vax movement remains limited. Existing studies have tended to focus on party discourses and framing strategies or, from a contentious politics perspective, on Covid-19 as a protest wave (della Porta and Lavizzari 2022). Yet recent survey evidence shows that political distrust, radical right orientations, and an emerging "freedom divide" have shaped the potential for participation in anti-vax demonstrations (Hunger et al. 2023). This article addresses this gap by conceptualizing the radical right as a social movement[2] composed of interconnected collective and individual actors and by examining its role within anti-vax protest mobilization during the pandemic. The article conceptualizes Covid-19 as a critical juncture with significant political consequences, including the diffusion of radical right actors, frames, and networks into broader protest arenas.

Focusing on Italy as a "crucial case" (Gerring 2006)—given both its severe exposure to the pandemic and its dense radical right organizational milieu—the article investigates how protest mobilization unfolded across the boundaries between institutional and contentious politics. In doing so, it bridges analytical perspectives that are often treated separately, namely party politics and social movement dynamics. Empirically, the study draws on extensive fieldwork, combining 23 in-depth interviews with radical right and anti-vax activists and leaders and a protest event analysis (Hutter 2014) based on newspaper coverage of right-wing anti-vax mobilization between 2021 and 2022. Drawing on social movement theory and an agent-centered perspective (Eren 2025), this article asks how, and through which mechanisms, radical right actors interacted with and extended their influence into the broader anti-vaccination and anti-Green Pass movement in Italy. To answer this question, we analyze the main actors, claims, organizational strategies, and repertoires of action—including the role of political violence—and relate them to activists' perceptions of political and discursive opportunities, organizational resources, and motivations (della Porta and Diani 2020).[3]

The findings show that the pandemic opened a window of opportunity for the empowerment of both new and pre-existing radical right collective actors. This resulted in significant horizontal influences within the "movement sector," which can be conceptualized as a spillover effect (Meyer and Whittier 1994)—a mechanism rarely applied to the study of radical right mobilization. Specifically, radical right actors: (i) gained a prominent role in protest events and mobilizational networks; (ii) contributed to shaping public discourse and framing of the broader anti-vax movement; and (iii) influenced the diversification of the protest repertoire, which combined confrontational and more conventional or symbolic forms of action. These dynamics suggest that the anti-vax mobilization can be understood as a case of radical right "social movement spillover." In the

[1] We are grateful to Sidney Tarrow for his insightful suggestions. We also thank the AUTHLIB project (including Batuhan Eren, Nicolò Pennucci, Alessio Minicozzi, Jakub Stauber), and Martín Portos, for their helpful comments and feedback.

[2] Acknowledging the complexity of the terminological debate, we use the term radical right to refer to those groups that exhibit in their common ideological cores the characteristics of nationalism, xenophobia (ethno-nationalist xenophobia), anti-establishment critiques and socio-cultural authoritarianism (law and order, family values) (Mudde 2019). This deliberately includes political party and non-party organizations, including violent subcultural groups as well as cultural associations and think tanks. Other scholars prefer to use the broad and inclusive category of the 'far-right', which encompasses other labels commonly used in the literature such as 'extreme right' or 'populist radical right' (Pirro 2023).

[3] Political opportunity structures are consistent dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for collective action by affecting people's expectations of success or failure (Tarrow 2022).

context of the Covid-19 crisis, the radical right found a favorable setting to reassert core ideological elements—particularly the perceived threat to individual rights and freedoms, often linked to the defense of the family—while simultaneously expanding its thematic repertoire to include public health and skepticism toward scientific authority.

This article contributes, on the one hand, to the literature on contentious politics "in times of crisis," which has predominantly focused on left-wing progressive mobilizations (Gerbaudo 2020), and, on the other hand, to radical right scholarship, which—despite important exceptions (Castelli Gattinara et al. 2022)—has largely concentrated on party politics and electoral dynamics (Minkenberg 2019). By focusing on radical right protest mobilization, the study provides an analytical lens to capture the increasing relevance of street politics (Hunger et al. 2023; Saridakis 2026) and highlights both continuities with broader social movement dynamics and novel features that advance our understanding of radical right activism in the twenty-first century.

In the following sections, after presenting the study's key conceptual framework (Section 2) and outlining the case selection and methodological approach (Section 3), we examine the intensity and temporal dynamics of radical right mobilization within anti-vax protests, relating these to shifting contextual opportunities (Section 4). We then analyze the range of action strategies employed by different radical right actors—including forms of protest that at times involve violence—and how these are shaped by varying material and cognitive resources (Section 5). Subsequently, we explore radical right anti-vax mobilization "in action", focusing on organizational networks and issue framings (Sections 6 and 7). The conclusion summarizes and critically discusses the main findings and their implications (Section 8).

2. Theory: Radical Right and Anti-Vax Protest as a Social Movement

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, social movement scholarship has predominantly focused on progressive actors and forms of contention (Pleyers 2020), as well as on anti-lockdown and anti-vax mobilizations more broadly (Gerbaudo 2020; Liao 2022; Flesher Fominaya 2022; for exceptions see della Porta 2023; della Porta and Lavizzari 2022). At the same time, research on the far right has largely concentrated on populist radical right parties, their discourse, and electoral performance during the pandemic (Wheeler 2020; Heinze and Weisskircher 2023; Lehmann and Zehnter 2024; Rovira Kaltwasser and Taggart 2024; Wondreys and Mudde 2022; Zanotti and Turnbull-Dugarte 2024). More recent contributions have highlighted an "elective affinity" between populist radical right actors and vaccine skepticism, rooted in anti-elitism and distrust toward expertise (Falkenbach 2025).

This division of labor has left relatively underexplored the interactions between radical right actors and the broader anti-vax movement, especially from a social movement perspective. While some studies highlight the relationship between the pandemic context (e.g., lockdown severity) and support for the radical right (Peacock and Biernat 2022), as well as the link between vaccine skepticism and far-right orientations (Kennedy 2019; Rietdijk 2021), recent longitudinal evidence shows that far-right voters are significantly more likely to display vaccine hesitancy, although this relationship evolves over time and is responsive to political leadership and framing (Serrano-Alarcón et al. 2023). A growing body of research has instead examined anti-vax mobilization and protests as forms of contentious politics. These mobilizations have been interpreted as expressions of "anti-politics" (Russell 2023), but also as highly performative, aesthetic, and emotionally charged forms of protest (Bratich 2021). The pandemic context has fostered processes of frame alignment and coalition-building across heterogeneous actors (Zeller 2021; Rulli and Campbell 2022), while also requiring tactical adaptation and innovation in repertoires of action (Kowalewski 2021; Rohlinger and Meyer 2024).

Recent studies further stress the complexification and expansion of anti-vax discourse during and after the pandemic. Large-scale analyzes of online communication show that Covid-19 has increased both the diversity and the political embedding of anti-vax narratives, with conspiracy beliefs strongly shaped by political

orientations and emotional dynamics (Caiani, Carlotti and Padoan 2021; Galais and Guinjoan 2023). These findings reinforce earlier work on the centrality of misinformation ecosystems and social media in sustaining vaccine skepticism (Di Ronco and Allen-Robertson 2019; Kouros et al. 2023; Smith and Graham 2019). Importantly, several recent contributions explicitly highlight the role of radical right actors within these mobilizations. In Germany, radical right participation has been associated with increasing radicalization and violence during protests (Nachtwey et al. 2021). Similarly, Volk and Weisskircher (2024) show how PEGIDA adapted its pre-existing frames, repositioning itself as a defender of democracy and civil liberties while delegitimizing state institutions. This transformation reflects broader shifts in radical right ideology, where formal support for democracy coexists with anti-institutional and conspiratorial narratives.

At the discursive level, Cowden and Yuval-Davis (2022) emphasize how far-right actors have used the pandemic to diffuse conspiratorial narratives—such as the "white replacement" theory—within broader anti-vax mobilization, often masking exclusionary ideologies behind claims of victimhood and freedom of speech. Extending this perspective, Askanius et al. (2025) demonstrate the transnational diffusion of far-right pandemic narratives, showing how anti-establishment and anti-government frames circulate across contexts (e.g., Sweden and Canada) while being flexibly adapted to national political environments. Recent comparative and cross-national research further highlights the politicization of public health communication in contexts shaped by populism. Hallin et al. (2024) show how polarization, distrust of expertise, and anti-elitism have structured pandemic communication processes across countries such as Brazil, Poland, Serbia, and the United States, reinforcing the resonance of far-right narratives.

Recent scholarship also stresses the importance of movement–party linkages in understanding these dynamics. A recent comparative study by Caiani, Susánszky, and Saridakis (2025) shows that the pandemic opened a window of opportunity for both new and pre-existing radical right actors, who gained visibility and influence in both street protest and party politics, albeit with different configurations across countries. Analyzes of protest waves during Covid-19 in Italy highlight the importance of distinguishing between different phases and actors within broader cycles of contention (della Porta and Lavizzari 2022). Finally, recent research has begun to explore new arenas and modalities of conflict, including visual and digital environments. For instance, Klein et al. (2024) point to the increasing relevance of visual platforms such as Instagram for the articulation of political conflict, while also highlighting the methodological challenges of capturing fragmented and overlapping protest discourses across digital spaces.

2.1 Toward a social movement approach to radical right anti-vax mobilization

Despite these advances, existing studies still tend to analyze radical right actors, anti-vax mobilization, and political parties as distinct phenomena. Building on and integrating these strands of research, this article proposes an understanding of radical right and anti-vax protest as a *social movement.* While the radical right has traditionally been addressed through breakdown theories—in contrast to left-wing movements analyzed through mobilization approaches—social movement theory has increasingly been applied to the radical right (Caiani et al. 2012; Caiani and della Porta 2018; Johnston 2022; Blee 2007). It emphasizes agency, the interaction between structure and action, and key mechanisms such as political opportunities, framing processes, repertoires of contention, and organizational networks (della Porta and Diani 2020; Caiani 2023). From this perspective, the pandemic can be understood as generating both grievances and political opportunities. While crises such as Covid-19 produce social discontent and uncertainty (Taylor 2022; van der Zwet et al. 2022), these conditions only translate into collective action when they are politicized and framed as opportunities to challenge authorities (Brooks et al. 2020). Building on these assumptions, the article focuses on three main analytical dimensions.

First, it examines the *organizational structure (i.e. networks)* of radical right and anti-vax mobilization, conceptualized as a constellation of formal and informal actors engaged in both cooperative and competitive

interactions. As in other social movements, the density and structure of these networks shape mobilizing capacity and coalition-building (Tarrow 1989). Second, it analyzes the *repertoires of action* adopted by radical right actors, moving beyond a narrow focus on electoral politics or violence alone. Instead, it considers the full range of protest strategies—from conventional to confrontational—and how these are shaped by resources and perceived political opportunities (Rohlinger and Meyer 2024; McCarthy and Zald 1977). Third, it considers the issue *framing* through which the collective actors involved in the radical right anti-vax protest construct and communicate their political and social interpretations of the pandemic. Ideas and narratives play a crucial mediating role between structural conditions and individual motivations for participation (Laumond 2020), particularly in a context where conspiracy beliefs and distrust toward expertise have become increasingly politicized. In addition, the concept of critical juncture (Tarrow 2022; della Porta 2022) provides a key analytical lens for interpreting the pandemic as a turning point capable of reshaping political opportunities, collective identities, and mobilization dynamics. As shown by della Porta and Lavizzari (2022), Covid-19 protests developed through distinct waves within broader cycles of contention, producing lasting transformations in protest arenas.

2.2 Social movement spillover and the radical right

Social movement research has long emphasized that movements do not operate in isolation but as interconnected fields in which ideas, activists, organizational resources, and repertoires circulate across organizational and ideological boundaries (Diani 1992; Meyer and Whittier 1994). This relational perspective is captured by the concept of social movement spillover, namely the process through which one movement influences the development, strategies, identities, and mobilization of another (Meyer and Whittier 1994). Spillover occurs through several interconnected mechanisms. First, movements may converge around shared frames and agendas, allowing actors with different ideological backgrounds to mobilize around common grievances (Snow et al. 1986; Benford and Snow 2000). Second, organizational networks and overlapping memberships facilitate the circulation of activists, resources, and tactical repertoires across movement boundaries (Diani 1992, 2003; McAdam 1986). Finally, movement brokers and organizational leaders connect otherwise separate constituencies, fostering coalition building and the diffusion of organizational practices and collective action frames (McAdam et al. 2001).

The Covid-19 pandemic offers a particularly suitable context for examining these dynamics. Across Europe, opposition to lockdowns, vaccination policies, and the Green Pass created a broad protest arena in which radical right organizations interacted with anti-vaccination groups, grassroots committees, and other civic actors (della Porta and Lavizzari 2022; Kriesi and Oana 2023). Building on this literature, we examine how, and through which mechanisms of social movement spillover, radical right actors interacted with and extended their influence into the broader anti-vaccination movement. More specifically, we focus on four mechanisms: frame alignment, organizational networking, overlapping memberships, and leadership brokerage. Italy represents a crucial case for investigating these processes. Compared with many other European countries, anti-restriction mobilization in Italy was particularly sustained and organizationally heterogeneous, bringing together radical right organizations, grassroots committees, anti-vaccination networks, student groups, and other civic initiatives in repeated protest events (Caiani et al. 2025). This dense protest arena provides a valuable setting for examining how spillover develops across movement boundaries.

3. Case and Methods

Across Europe, opposition to Covid-19 restrictions gave rise to an unprecedented wave of protest despite the constraints imposed by lockdowns and social distancing measures. These mobilizations typically brought together heterogeneous coalitions of actors—including vaccine-skeptic groups, conspiracy-oriented networks, civil liberties activists, occupational groups, and, increasingly, radical right organizations—whose cooperation

often transcended pre-existing ideological boundaries (Kriesi and Oana 2023; della Porta 2023). Italy represents one of the most significant cases within this broader European protest cycle. Compared with many other European countries, anti-restriction mobilization was particularly sustained and organizationally dense, involving a large number of grassroots committees, civic initiatives, occupational groups, and radical right organizations that frequently converged in joint protest events, especially following the introduction of the Green Pass. This broad protest arena created favorable conditions for interactions between radical right actors and other sectors of the movement, making Italy a particularly suitable case for examining processes of movement spillover and organizational networking.

This article examines radical right and anti-vax protest mobilization in Italy, selected as a "crucial case" (Gerring 2006) for the period between January 2021 and June 2022.[4] Italy constitutes a particularly relevant context for three main reasons. First, it was severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic (Falkenbach and Caiani 2021) and implemented among the strictest lockdown measures in Europe. Second, it is characterized by a long-standing and highly structured radical right milieu, both at the institutional and societal levels (Table A in the Appendix).[5] Third, it combines high levels of vaccine skepticism with strong support for populist parties, making it an especially fertile context for anti-vax mobilization.

These conditions suggest the presence of favorable political and discursive opportunity structures for both radical right and anti-vax protest.[6] In terms of discursive opportunities—understood as the salience and perceived legitimacy of movement claims (Koopmans and Olzak 2004)—Italy ranks among the highest in Western Europe in vaccine skepticism, with approximately 14% of the population considering vaccinations unimportant and 44% voting for populist parties in 2014, reflecting a broader climate of distrust toward elites and experts (Rietdijk 2021). In this context, the combination of strict containment measures and uneven local pandemic conditions contributed to political discontent, the diffusion of conspiracy narratives, and a growing sense of alienation that radical right actors were able to exploit.

Against this backdrop, the study investigates the mechanisms underlying radical right involvement in anti-vax protest, focusing on actors' motivations, strategies, and organizational dynamics. To do so, it adopts a methodological triangulation strategy. First, it draws on a protest event analysis (PEA) based on newspaper articles covering the period from the beginning of the vaccination campaign in January 2021 to June 2022, yielding a dataset of 157 coded events. The quantitative coding was complemented by a qualitative frame analysis of the protest claims reported in the news coverage (Caiani 2023). This analysis captures the intensity, temporal trends, actors, issues, targets, and repertoires of action associated with radical right and anti-vax mobilizations (Tables C.1 and C.2 in the Appendix).

Second, the study relies on 23 semi-structured interviews, with radical right activists and leaders involved in anti-vax mobilization across different organizational forms, including social movements, "movement-parties", and subcultural groups (Table D.1 in the Appendix). Interviewees were selected from a range of

[4] In Italy, survey data identified the typical profile of the anti-vax protester as under 50, right-wing, male, with lower levels of education, residing in the North-East (Bordignon and Piacentini 2024).

[5] In terms of organizational milieu, the Italian radical right constitutes a complex and heterogeneous galaxy composed of various types of organizations, including political parties, 'movement-parties', social movements, subcultural groups, and conservative Catholic religious organizations (Caiani and Parenti 2013).

[6] Political opportunity structures refer to the set of opportunities and constraints offered by the institutional structure and political culture within which these groups operate (Koopmans et al. 2005). The concept has mainly been conceptualized in relation to the degree of openness or closure of a political system (e.g. in terms of electoral system, degree of centralization, configuration of power between allies and opponents), as well as to the presence of more inclusive or exclusive cultural contexts vis-à-vis the challengers (e.g. elite political culture and the way authorities manage collective action). For a detailed review of the literature on political opportunity structures and their operationalization, see Meyer (2004).

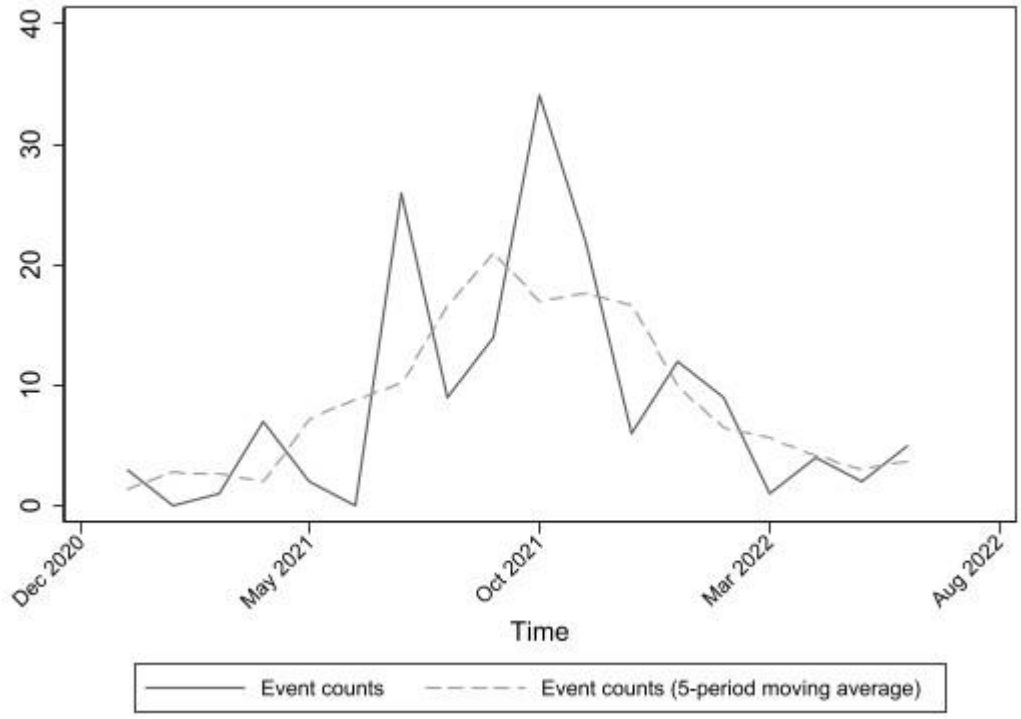
radical right (or radical right-linked) organizations known to have participated in anti-vaccination mobilization. For the interview sample, we selected the main types of radical right organizations mobilizing in the country against vaccines, in order to saturate the field of the radical right milieu. We included a couple of parties, or rather "movement-parties," that were central players within the anti-vax movement. A combination of snowball sampling and a positional approach was used to access the field and reach key actors. Interviewees were selected to ensure variation in age, gender, organizational affiliation, role within the movement (e.g. organizer/founder or rank-and-file member), and geographical location (urban, rural, or peripheral areas). Gaining access to these actors proved to be a challenging process (Blee 2003). These interviews allow for a more interpretive and constructivist analysis of the same set of variables, with particular attention to actors' motivations, beliefs, and justificatory frameworks (Krippendorff 2018) (see Table D.1 and D.2 in the Appendix). Finally, the analysis is complemented by two expert interviews. These interviews provide additional insights into the broader context of political opportunities and the organizational resources underpinning radical right anti-vax mobilization in Italy.

4. Political Opportunities and Radical Right Anti-Vax Mobilization: When and Where

Collective action literature shows that mobilization, including radical right mobilization, is shaped by political and discursive opportunities, as movements mobilize when access channels open or are perceived to open, as well as by shifting contextual factors such as alliances, laws, and power relations. While open opportunities tend to facilitate mobilization and moderate protest forms, their closure often leads to escalation and more contentious action (della Porta 1995).

What, then, is the level of mobilization that characterized the radical right in Italy during the anti-vax protest? First of all, our protest event data confirm that right-wing mobilization represented a significant aspect of the period under analysis, although with considerable variations over time (Figure 1). A total of 157 actions initiated by these groups are identified between January 2021 and June 2022, with three major peaks (April, July, and October 2021), which mainly corresponded to changes in governmental containment measures (see also della Porta and Lavizzari 2022). After this phase, the intensity of radicalism of radical right mobilization declined significantly, with no more than 12 registered cases per month during the remainder of the period.

Figure 1. Trends in Radical Right Anti-Vax Mobilization Levels in Italy (2021–2022)



Note: N = 157; the figure shows absolute values.

Besides the number of actions, another relevant factor related to RR mobilization is the number of participants in RR and anti-vax protest events (Figure A in the Appendix). According to our data, the size of the anti-vax events organized by right-wing groups in Italy, although consistently substantial, varied considerably, ranging from tens of thousands of participants to only a few dozen. Examples of large-scale mobilizations include the No Green Pass demonstration held in Rome on 9 October 2021, which involved approximately 15,000 participants, and the parade organized by the committee against the Green Pass in Milan on 31 July 2021, which gathered around 10,000 people.[7] By contrast, smaller events included sit-ins organized by Forza Nuova (e.g. in Rome on 16 October 2021) and university occupations organized by the student organization Studenti No Green Pass (e.g. in Turin on 26 January 2022).

Our interviews confirm and further clarify this fluctuating pattern of mobilization, which appears to follow the political and cultural opportunities of the institutional context, highlighting the importance of triggering events that either pushed protesters into the streets or created obstacles to mobilization. As one RR activist explained, the "critical issues that led us to the streets were the first lockdown and then the Green Pass (…).

[7] A key turning point in the Italian protest cycle occurred on 9 October 2021, when a large demonstration against the Green Pass in Rome culminated in the storming of the national headquarters of the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL), the country's largest trade union. The assault was led by prominent members of the neo-fascist organization Forza Nuova and resulted in widespread political condemnation, arrests, and renewed public debate over the role of radical right organizations within the anti-Green Pass movement. The event significantly altered the political opportunity structure: while it increased public and institutional scrutiny of radical right actors, it also encouraged other organizations within the movement to distance themselves from openly extremist groups, prompting the latter to adapt their mobilization strategies and organizational networks.

Another significant point was the Draghi government, which we strongly opposed" (ID.18). Activists and leaders, regardless of organizational affiliation, generally perceived the Italian political context as hostile to their demands, particularly in terms of restrictions on political participation, lack of public support, limited allies in power and hostility from mainstream media. As one activist stated, "with the Covid-19 emergency the spaces for the radical right have been restricted and police repression is stronger than in the past (…). Before they used to tolerate us, whereas now there is very little room for expressing our views …" (ID.11).

Political parties, including those formally in opposition, are often considered "the main enemies of the movement" (ID.17), because of their pro-vaccine positions. As one activist argued, "Italian politicians are scared of being accused of aligning with the anti-vax movement…" (ID.16), while "only some individual MPs" (e.g. from the right-wing party Fratelli d'Italia) were perceived as willing to listen to movement claims (ID.17). Furthermore, mainstream media are described as a "regime media system" that promoted government positions on vaccines, shaped public opinion against the anti-vax movement, and reproduced "government propaganda" (ID.12; ID.3). Conspiracy narratives were also widespread, including claims about a "governmental plan to destroy the radical right forces of the country" (ID.1; ID.9).

However, RR anti-vax activists perceived the structure of opportunities as dynamic and constantly changing, especially with regard to Italian public opinion, described as "the most important element affecting [our] protest" (ID.3). Similarly, mainstream media are perceived as gradually changing their attitudes toward the anti-vax movement over time, particularly during the central months of the period under analysis. As one activist observed, "now they let us talk a bit, although we are still criticized…" (ID.3). The discursive opportunities generated by growing societal support for the RR anti-vax struggle appeared to play a major role in activists' perceptions. As one interviewee noted, "during the pandemic right-wing forces have managed to gain acceptance from broader and broader audiences" (ID.13). In this sense, the pandemic is also perceived as "an opportunity to re-establish our legitimacy in the public debate" (ID.9), to "gain the silent support of those people that might not share our ideology, but who are willing to join us in the streets" (ID.10), and to "expand the audience of potential sympathizers" (ID.1). At the same time, support among Italian citizens for the anti-vaccine cause is described as having "dramatically declined especially after the violent events of 9 October 2021 in Rome" (ID.10; ID.18), which were widely perceived as a crucial turning point in the broader protest wave. This moment also constituted a turning point in the perceived legitimacy of far-right actors within the anti-vax movement. As one radical-right activist explained, "these events changed our strategies and organizational resources… decreasing our legitimacy in the movement" (ID.13).

Additionally, the local context of the mobilization, including both the strength of the right-wing organizational milieu and the meso-level dynamics between allies and opponents, emerged as crucial for right-wing activists and groups. As one local right-wing representative explained, immediately after the first governmental containment measures "local committees[8] were created in various Italian cities to organize the protest and they received different levels of acceptance (…) some cities are more open to our claims, while others are mostly hostile" (ID.13). In some cities, such as Verona, where the radical right is particularly strong, activists reported that "we do not receive opposition from other local groups and do not have to face police repression, while most of our initiatives are authorized by the municipality" (ID.5). By contrast, "in other cities (e.g. Bologna, a traditional red belt of the Italian Left) we had many left-wing political groups blocking the anti-vax demonstrations because of the radical right presence in those events" (ID.7). This confirms the importance of spatial and small-scale dynamics for RR mobilization (Lundstedt 2023). As with other collective actors, the resources and actions of right-wing actors appear to be shaped by their position within wider networks (Diani 2015).

[8] In fact, many anti-restriction committees took the form of loosely structured grassroots organizations, a common organizational form within Italian protest politics (della Porta and Diani 2020).

Collective actors can, however, employ a wide array of tactics, designed to convey their claims and influence decision-makers or public opinion. Such action strategies, whether conventional or unconventional, may differ considerably in both their underlying logic and their degree of radicalism (della Porta and Diani 2020). Looking at the degree of radicalism of radical right mobilization (i.e. the percentage of violent actions out of the total number of registered actions) in Italy between 2021 and the first half of 2022 (Figure B in the Appendix), more than one-fifth (21%) of the 157 recorded actions initiated by radical right groups involved violence. These actions ranged from forms of 'low-intensity' violence against people or property (such as insults or threats directed at MPs and politicians supporting the Green Pass, graffiti and slogans against vaccines or lockdown measures, and speeches inciting violence) to more serious acts of 'high-intensity' violence (della Porta 2013) including assaults against political adversaries,[9] attacks on the offices of political adversaries or journalists, and clashes with the police during protest events (e.g. Naples, 28 August 2021; Milan, 23 October 2021).

According to our analysis, these cycles of violence fluctuated in sequences (Lundstedt 2023) and culminated during the second half of 2021, a finding consistent with previous studies on the topic (della Porta and Lavizzari 2022).[10] As one anti-vax activist explained, "When the anti-vax movement was reaching its peak in terms of frequency of protests and intensity of participation, some right-wing groups, such as Forza Nuova, decided to radicalize the movement's tactics, in various violent acts, which escalated in the well-known attack against the Italian left-wing trade union confederation CGIL (i.e. Rome, 9 October 2021)" (ID.5). This attempt to further radicalize the anti-vax movement had direct consequences for the relationship between the movement and the far-right actors involved in it. As one far-right leader noted, "after this event, part of the anti-vax movement distanced themselves from us" (ID.10). According to many right-wing activists and leaders interviewed, this shift can be attributed, on the one hand, to a widespread perception of increasing repression by authorities—"we experienced stricter control by the police" (ID.10).[11] This declining trend in the intensity of participation in the anti-vax protest was also confirmed by our experts and related to the weakening of radical right organizational strength "…they become organizationally weaker" (ID.21; ID.2). On the other hand, the declining legitimization of the anti-vax movement following the violent events increased the costs of participation. As a consequence, most radical right protesters involved in the mobilization opted to moderate their tactics "in order to continue the protest" (ID.10).

5. The Social Characteristics of Radical Right Anti-Vax Mobilization: Key Actors and Groups

Research shows that right-wing mobilization cannot be explained by contextual conditions alone but is also shaped by internal organizational factors (Caiani and Císař 2018). In particular, strategic choices reflect both how organizations communicate with their constituencies (Kitschelt 1988) and how they adapt to structural, political, cultural, and technological contexts in which they operate (della Porta 1995).

Looking more closely at the *protagonists*[12] of radical right anti-vax mobilization during the period under analysis (Figure C in the Appendix), we observe that the most active groups are 'political movements' (initiating 43% of events), and individual/generic right-wing activists (26%). Most importantly, we observe

[9] E.g. the destruction of some Italian political parties during anti-vax marches (24th July 2021; 28th August 2021).

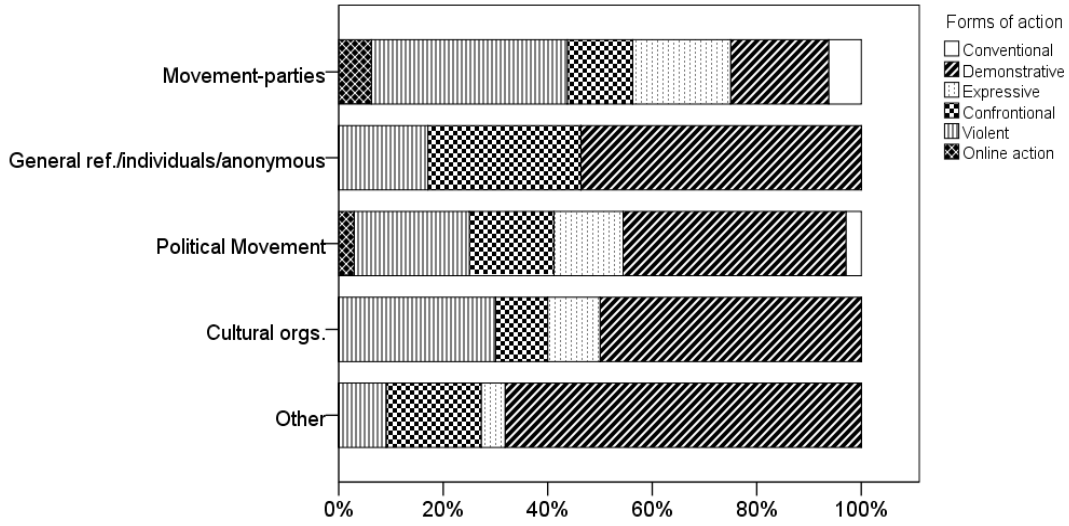
[10] Similarly, della Porta and Lavizzari (2022) found that the radicalization of the overall anti-vax movement increased during the second wave (July to December 2021), with 13% of violent events in that period.

[11] For example, the FN organization and its social media outlets were banned and its leader was imprisoned.

[12] For the classification of the radical right organizations and anti-vax protesters initiating the events, we followed the most diffused classification of the RR used in protest event analysis of its mobilization (e.g. Caiani et al. 2012). See Table A in the Appendix for more detailed description.

that different types of organizations tend to adopt different action repertoires (Figure 2), suggesting that they tend to specialize in specific action strategies in order to achieve their goals.[13] Moreover, contrary to what emerged in previous research on the radical right (e.g. in the Italian case, Caiani and Parenti 2013), the most radicalized organizations are 'movement-parties' as well as cultural-conservative groups, whereas the least violent are single-issue groups and individual or anonymous right-wing activists. This differentiation of tactics within the anti-vax movement demonstrates the breadth of the radical right's repertoire of action, as confirmed by the expert interviews (ID.2; ID.21). This repertoire includes conventional and online actions (each accounting for approximately 2% of total events; for more details on online right-wing anti-vax protest, see Buehling and Heft 2023), demonstrative actions (47%), expressive (about 9%), confrontational actions (19%) and violent actions (21%, including both low and high violence).

Figure 2. Forms of Protest Action by Type of Radical Right Anti-Vax Organization (%)



Note a: N=157. Forms of action are presented as percentages (100%).

Note b: Legend: RR 'Movement-Parties'= i.e. Forza Nuova, CasaPound, Movimento Nazionale; 'Political movements'= students and RR youth organizations, Committees against green pass/vaccines, neo fascist/Nazi groups; 'Cultural-Conservative organizations'= ultra-catholic religious groups, anti-gender organizations, parents' groups mobilizing on the basis of conservative values, RR Identitarian organizations; 'Generic ref./individual/anonymous'= generic reference to RR groups and individual or anonymous RR actors; 'Other' = single-issue groups, active on a specific subject, e.g. civil rights/individual liberties; economic actors.

In detail, movement-parties, characterized by long-standing ties to traditional fascism and established histories of violence, are the actors that rely most heavily on violent protest repertoires (38%), alongside expressive (26%) and demonstrative repertoires (27%). 'Political movements' are those that tend to use a more balanced repertoire of action, including violent and confrontational actions, but also expressive (13%) and mainly demonstrative (43%) actions. Demonstrative actions are frequently used by 'individual RR activists

[13] This is also confirmed by a high and significant Cramer's V coefficient between 'action form' and 'type of actor' (Cramer's V, 0.21**). Protest repertoires are categorized into six types: conventional, demonstrative, online, expressive, confrontational, and violent actions (Koopmans 1993; Caiani et al. 2012; Tarrow 1989).

and anonymous organizations' (50%). Finally, 'cultural conservative organizations' are mainly involved in demonstrative and expressive events.

We find a relationship between the internal organizational structure of groups (horizontal vs. hierarchical) and the tactics they adopt, with hierarchical organizations being more strongly associated with violence. Forza Nuova, as a traditional Italian right-wing party with a highly hierarchical organizational structure centered around the leader, justifies violence as a legitimate means of action. As one activist explained, "in the radical-right milieu, whoever fights more gets more attention and wins more supporters. FN is always in the front line and whenever we have to fight, we simply do it…." (ID.9). By contrast, other Italian RR actors mobilizing within the anti-vax protest, such as CasaPound and Movimento Nazionale, which internally have a "kind of inner democracy" (ID.10), while still accepting violence as a potential protest repertoire, also take into account the 'high costs' associated with violence. As the leader of Movimento Nazionale stated: "We have to consider the costs of violence and its consequences especially after what happened to FN [i.e. the banning of the organization after the violent attacks against the unions]. Italians distanced themselves from the overall movement and anti-vax protest, and government's reaction was strong (…) the attack against the unions gave an excuse to the government to fight us" (ID.10). At the same time, other significant actors within the Italian anti-vax milieu, such as student groups (e.g. Students against the Green Pass), which follow horizontal decision-making processes, mainly adopt expressive and conventional forms of action to support their demands, stressing that "violence is useless, it's not an answer to the problem" (ID.5) and that "we want to express our demands through speeches and peaceful protest" (ID.3). We also find evidence of tactical innovation deployed by radical right actors during the protest. In order to "adapt and penetrate" the broader anti-vax movement, radical right actors and activists often participated in protests without displaying their usual symbols—"we leave our flags down" (ID.15). They also adopted less radical repertoires of contention and strategically avoided confrontation with their traditional political adversaries, emphasizing that "this battle was not about the left and the right" (ID.15). At the same time, they promoted a strategy of ideological neutrality to broaden their appeal and attract a wider audience: "protesting together with 'ordinary' people is our first aim" (ID.10), something that "would have been impossible some years before" (ID.15).

Finally, the perceived high costs of violence—in terms of "de-legitimization" and "de-mobilization" of the movement (various IDs)—appear to discourage the systematic adoption of violent strategies by radical right actors. Overall, these tactical innovations seem to have facilitated what can be described as a "spillover effect" (Meyer and Whittier 1994) in terms of organizational ties and issue alignment, as we illustrate in the following sections.

6. Radical Right Anti-Vax Mobilization: Networks

Right-wing mobilization does not occur in isolation but develops through ongoing interactions among multiple social and political actors. From this perspective, social networks play a key role in recruitment and the expansion of mobilization (Diani 2015), as grievances alone are not sufficient to generate collective action (Buechler 2000). In examining RR anti-vax mobilization, we observe *dense horizontal networking* across different types of organizations within the movement. Italian radical right organizations rarely organize protest events alone: approximately one-fifth of the total events recorded (20%, 31 events) are co-organized with one or more actors from the broader anti-vax movement. These collaborators mainly include single-issue groups and economic actors; other radical right organizations (e.g. CasaPound); right-wing political actors, including representatives from FdI, Forza Nuova, and Lega; as well as "non-organized" fascists, anonymous activists, and youth organizations such as student associations (Table E in the Appendix).

As our interviews indicate, these horizontal networks play a crucial role in reinforcing "the overall cohesion of the protest" (ID.1), as well as strengthening ties within the Italian RR milieu, as illustrated by the new

collaboration between the Movimento Nazionale and CasaPound Italia. As one of the leaders pointed out "the pandemic opened a new page for the Italian radical right (…). During the battle against Covid-19 governmental measures, our organization started to broaden its connections with religious groups, incorporating the Catholic movement Militia Christi (…). Overall, actors that previously did not protest, are now on the streets with us and even during Covid-19 they joined our organization" (ID.10). As another interviewee explained, "once the campaign against the governmental restrictions was launched, anti-vax activists created local committees in each city, in order to organize local weekly demonstrations and national protests" (ID.3). These local committees, in turn, created "online groups on Facebook with the aim of recruiting new members and coordinating national actions" (ID.14), including "previously politically inactive individuals who wanted to protest against the governmental measures" (ID.10).

We find many instances of overlapping memberships between these committees, student organizations and small radical-right groups. During the anti-vax protest, the boundaries between activists' memberships became increasingly blurred.[14] Many radical right activists also succeeded in assuming key roles within local groups by providing material resources (e.g. banners, microphones, and flyers). In this context, they often presented themselves as "apolitical individuals" or as "independent activists (…) fighting against the government" (ID.5), while concealing their affiliation with far-right organizations. A striking example is that of a woman activist who participated in "Verona per la libertà" alongside non–radical right actors, presenting herself "as a teacher and an 'ordinary' person, and not a politician or a criminal" (ID.3), while simultaneously being one of the main activists of Forza Nuova in Verona.

Moreover, as frequently emphasized in our interviews, these ties are further reinforced during protest events. As a leader of a far-right group explained, "a chat on WhatsApp was created among leaders of various radical right Italian organizations, designed to organize and hold offline meetings to coordinate actions against the government" (ID.14). These findings suggest that pre-existing ties within far-right organizations are reactivated during the anti-vax mobilizations, with most of them based on personal connections and informal networks. This is illustrated by the case of Forza Nuova, where one of its leaders emphasized the role of personal contacts in mobilizing ultras (organized football supporters), to organize a violent protest event. As the interviewee explained: "We (FN) are the mind behind actions, and they (ultras) are the hands"; "they (the ultras) are willing to participate with us in difficult situations, for example when we know that the police are going to attack us, so we call them because Ultras know how to behave in the streets" (ID.9).

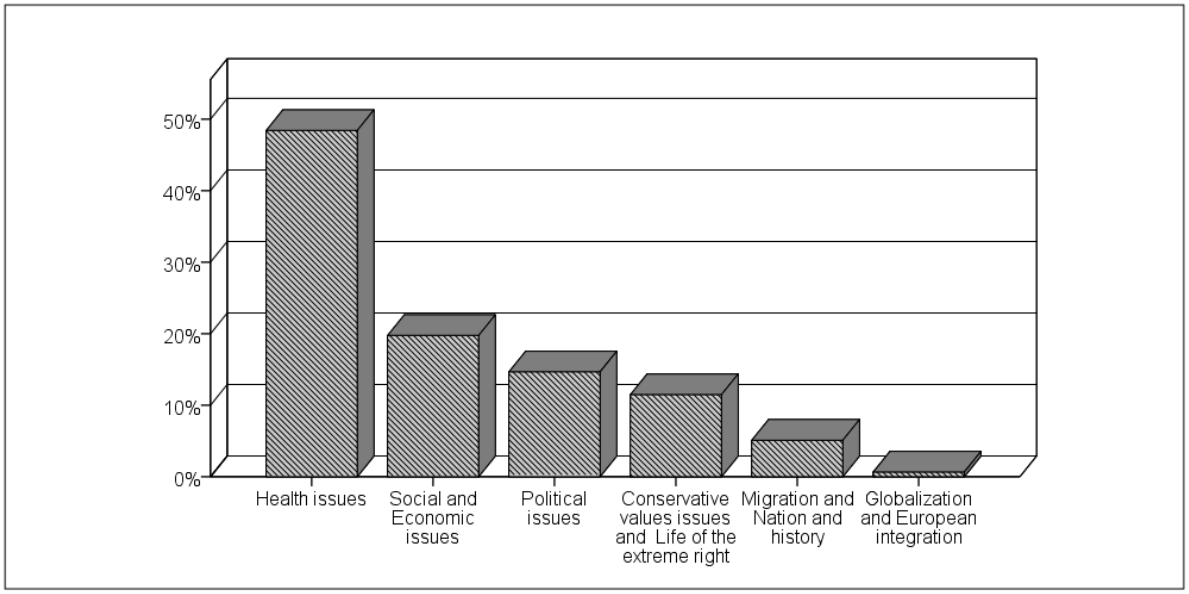
In this sense, protest events themselves appear to function as spaces of political interaction between actors, resulting in new potential coalitions (Van Dyke and Amos 2017), as in the case of the collaboration between the religious group 'Militia Christi' and the right-wing movement-party 'National Movement – Network of Patriots'. Overall, despite the perceived closure of political opportunities within the broader context (see Section 4 above), it is the links and ties between organizations that create the resources for mobilization through personal connections and alliance-building processes. In sum, in the Italian case, networking emerges as a crucial factor in the development of the anti-vax movement. RR actors continue to rely on their pre-existing networks while using the Covid-19 emergency to further expand their connections, thereby becoming catalysts for opposition and organizational expansion. These dense interaction networks create a fertile breeding ground for the development of a common political discourse on the pandemic, as we will present in the next section.

[14] As stressed, many radical right activists "joined the committees and students' organizations to promote their political agenda on Covid related issues" (ID.7), and "even when such a systematic attempt failed, they continued to participate in the activities of the groups, influencing the issues of debate (ID.5)".

7. Framing Anti-Vax Protest: The Issue Focus of Radical Right Anti-Vax Mobilization

When examining the main issues around which the Italian radical right mobilized within the anti-vax protest (Figure 3), a strong focus on health-related issues emerges (48% of anti-vax-related events), confirming the centrality of this theme. However, some specific patterns can be observed. Socio-economic issues (19%) and political issues (15%) also play a significant role, aligning the Italian radical right with broader European trends (Kriesi and Oana 2023). By contrast, immigration and national issues—traditionally central to radical right mobilization (Caiani and Parenti 2013)—account for only 5% of all coded events. Another significant share of mobilization concerns "conservative issues" (12%), with a strong emphasis on religious themes, as illustrated by weekly anti-vax demonstrations incorporating anti-gender claims. Overall, the Covid-19 pandemic appears to have reshaped the issue focus of radical right mobilization.[15]

Figure 3. Radical Right Anti-Vax Mobilization Events by Issue Field (%)



Note: N = 157 (100%).

This also appears to be a conscious strategic choice by radical right groups, aimed, as emphasized by one right-wing leader, at "expanding the potential audience, particularly beyond the 'usual suspects', that is, right-wing activists and sympathizers" (ID.1).[16] As one activist explained, "when the pandemic and governmental restrictions began, we [right wing forces] immediately started to mobilize, as we realize that our country was at risk…fighting for the future of our people and our sons was the most important issue for us, immigration, ideology or family matters would have come later" (ID.1; see also ID.12). Similarly, another activist stressed that "now there is the 'green pass' which also brings a different perspective on other themes of our political

[15] The distribution of protest events across issues is similar among right wing anti vax actors, as indicated by a low and non-significant Cramer's V.

[16] Although many activists against the Green Pass underline the apolitical nature of their movement, they recognize that "only the radical right share our same claims" (ID.5). For example, as stressed by one interviewee, "…me and my family were leftist, but I agree with the radical right at this moment, because they are focusing on the problem of the Green Pass" (ID.5).

activism" (ID.10). These results point to another tactical innovation undertaken by the RR during the Covid protests: a shift in the issue focus of mobilization.[17]

Indeed, our interviews identify five main master frames (Caiani and della Porta 2010) structuring the reasons and justifications underlying anti-vax protest, which are broadly shared across the different organizations within the movement. These include both traditional right-wing frames and newer ones: 1. 'fight for freedom', 2. 'state of discrimination against citizens', 3. 'Covid-19 restrictions as a part of a broader plan' (including conspiracy theories), 4. 'Italian exceptionalism,' and 5. 'health dictatorship'. In more detail, first, across all types of anti-vax organizations, activists stress that "the restrictions on liberty are the most important problem" (ID.15), and the anti-vax protest is framed as a battle "against the sanitary dictatorship of the system…" (ID.14), which is seen as conducive to "further restrictions in the near future" (ID.11). The 'fight for freedom' emerges as the main recurring and prominent frame, capable of bridging more traditional right-wing frames with newer claims (Caiani and della Porta 2010). The 'freedom of choice' frame also recurs frequently in the words of interviewees (ID.18), as reflected in the anti-vax movement slogan 'Italia Libera'. Activists describe the protest as "a common battle against the vaccine obligation" and portray the Italian government as "incapable of dealing with the crisis" (ID.4; ID.11).

Second, activists recognize that Covid-19 is real and potentially dangerous for some people; however, they strongly criticize the government's decisions. As one participant stated, "people must be free to choose whether they want the vaccine or not" (ID.17). They do not necessarily self-identify as 'anti-vax activists,' but instead argue that "whoever wants the vaccine must be free to take it" (ID.11). In this sense, their protest is framed as opposition to 'new forms of social control'. As one interviewee explained, "people believe that if someone has not taken the vaccine, they are irresponsible and should be automatically excluded by society (…), the problem is not the vaccine, it's the discrimination against people who don't get vaccinated" (ID.4). Third, conspiracy theories emerge as central elements in activists' framing of external reality. Government measures are often interpreted as part of "a strategic plan" aimed at exerting social control over fundamental civil liberties. Within this narrative, the media are portrayed as complicit and aligned with the government (various IDs). A recurring belief is that an 'abstract or obscure' group of actors benefits personally from the Covid-19 crisis (various IDs), or that "our government keeps a secret agenda and promotes vaccines in order to support the big pharmaceutical companies and to undermine the national health system" (ID.19). Furthermore, activists claim that "the Green Pass will be connected with a barcode and point system to be used for other purposes, beyond the health emergency" (ID.5; ID.1). In a similar vein, the violent right-wing attack against the trade union confederation CGIL is described as "a police infiltration that created the event, in order to de-mobilize the anti-vax movement" and "a big trap to criminalize the movement against the Green Pass" (ID.10).

[17] In our analysis, we classified the various issues of radical right mobilization which emerged into seven categories (see also Caiani et al., 2012): 'health issues' related to the Covid-19; 'social and economic issues', which includes all events related to the social and economic consequences of the Covid-19 regulations (e.g. schools and economic activities' lockdown measures, etc.); 'political issues' which includes events related to political life and the Covid-19 governance in the country (e.g. decisions on vaccines, green pass); 'conservative values', which includes all anti-lockdown/green-pass/masks/anti-vax protest events related to conservative values and issues (e.g. religious, law and order, family); 'life of radical right organizations', which refers to events related to the internal life of the radical right milieu (e.g. stigmatization of the ER and anti-vax protest; radical right groups and strategies, relations with the judiciary, etc). 'Globalization and European integration', which entails Covid-19 issues and supranational politics (e.g. Covid-19 regulations and the EU, etc.) but also events focused on the Covid-19 and neoliberal globalization and/or its presumed principal promoters (including the G8, WTO); 'migration and nation', which includes all events giving a perspective on the Covid-19 protest as regards immigration and/or nationalism (import of the virus from abroad; security, economic and cultural situation of immigrants vs. Italians amid the Pandemic in the country etc.).

Finally, we also find the presence of more traditional right-wing frames, such as the idea of 'Italian exceptionalism' and nationalism. According to these narratives, protest during the Covid crisis is "specifically about our nation" (ID.5), combined with references to a "glorious national myth" and claims that "we are Italian citizens trying to make Italy a better place, … not a group of migrants exploiting our country" (ID.5). At the same time, more traditional frames such as ethnonationalism are notably less central within anti-vax mobilization, which instead takes on a predominantly anti-political and pro-conservative values orientation (e.g. anti-gender, libertarian, nationalist, and conspiratorial themes). These findings suggest that movements can accommodate divergent core narratives (see also Deerman 2017). They also indicate that social movements may shape one another's agendas—particularly through the diffusion of RR actors' issues and frames into the anti-vax movement.

8. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the relationship between the Italian radical right and the broader anti-vaccination mobilization was characterized by significant processes of spillover, through which radical right actors expanded their role in protest, networking, and framing. These dynamics cannot be explained by grievances alone, but emerged from the interaction between organizational resources, political and discursive opportunities, and activists' perceptions, motivations, and framing processes. While Italy provided a particularly favorable context, the findings highlight that discursive opportunities and perceived alliances and enemies were more influential than formal institutional conditions, especially at the local level (for the importance of the local in mobilizations, see Daphi et al. 2025). These dynamics resonate with recent evidence on the link between vaccine skepticism and far-right orientations (Rietdijk 2021; Serrano-Alarcón et al. 2023), as well as with studies showing how populist communication environments shape pandemic responses (Hallin et al. 2024).

Radical right protest in the anti-vax arena was marked by both continuity and innovation. It was not only quantitatively significant but also qualitatively transformed compared to pre-pandemic patterns of contention. These dynamics were shaped by organizational resources and internal structures (Kitschelt 1988; della Porta 1995), with more hierarchical groups being more likely to engage in violence. At the same time, the pandemic fostered tactical innovation and diversification of protest repertoires (Kowalewski 2021; Plümper, Neumayer and Pfaff 2021; Rohlinger and Meyer 2024). This included reduced emphasis on ideological markers, the emergence of new performative forms of protest, and a broader expansion of action repertoires combining conventional, symbolic, and violent forms of contention. These shifts suggest that Covid-19 did not simply intensify existing patterns of radical right mobilization but also contributed to their reconfiguration.

Crucially, situational dynamics—especially issues, targets, and framing processes—emerged as central explanatory dimensions. Rather than focusing primarily on immigration or ethnic nationalism, RR actors increasingly mobilized around health-related issues, socio-economic grievances and anti-elite narratives. This discursive shift aligns with findings on the politicization of public health communication in populist contexts, as well as with studies highlighting the growing centrality of anti-expertise and conspiratorial frames during the pandemic (Cowden and Yuval-Davis 2022). As shown also by Volk and Weisskircher (2024), such framing strategies often combine formal appeals to democratic values with strong delegitimization of institutions and scientific authority. Networks and relational dynamics also played a decisive role. Consistent with Diani (2015) and Tarrow (1989), mobilization was strongly shaped by inter-organizational linkages, overlapping memberships, and the capacity to build coalitions across both established and emerging radical right actors. As suggested by recent comparative work on far-right pandemic narratives (Askanius et al. 2025), these networks facilitated both diffusion and adaptation of frames across contexts, thereby strengthening the resonance of anti-establishment discourse.

Overall, these dynamics are best captured through the concept of social movement spillover (Meyer and Whittier 1994; Deerman 2017). Understood as the horizontal diffusion of frames, actors, strategies, and organizational practices across movement sectors, social movement spillover refers to a process through which movements influence one another within a broader movement sector. These influences may involve organizational aspects, strategies of action, and political agendas (Ring-Ramirez and Earl 2021). Spillover can occur through shared agendas (i.e. the adoption of one movement's ideological frames by another), the diffusion of protest tactics, overlapping memberships and social movement communities, shared personnel, and the role of leaders (e.g. in our case, the increased presence of radical right actors in leadership positions within the anti-vax protest). It can also occur through the adoption of organizational structures derived from another movement's practices (Volk and Weisskircher 2024; della Porta 2022), as well as through networking and coalition-building processes (Van Dyke and Amos 2017). Broader changes in the external environment may also function as mechanisms of transmission between movements.

While spillover has traditionally been studied in relation to progressive movements, our findings demonstrate its relevance for understanding radical right mobilization as well (Caiani et al. 2025). In the Italian case, radical right actors significantly shaped the anti-vax movement by contributing to public discourse, occupying key positions within protest networks, and diversifying repertoires of action (as summarized in Table F in the Appendix). From this perspective, anti-vax protest can be seen as a site of interaction in which radical right actors diffuse frames, practices, and organizational forms across movement sectors, contributing to the expansion and transformation of their ideological and mobilizational repertoire. These findings suggest the need for further comparative research to examine how similar spillover dynamics operate across different national contexts and issue domains, including gender politics, climate skepticism, and other emerging fields of contention.

The Covid-19 crisis thus acted as a critical juncture, enabling both the reconfiguration of radical right activism and the diffusion of its influence across the broader protest landscape, with important implications for future coalition-building and ideological expansion. Beyond traditional concerns such as immigration and nationalism, radical right actors increasingly incorporated themes related to public health governance, freedom, and epistemic distrust, marking a broader transformation consistent with the ongoing fourth wave of far-right politics in Europe.

References

Askanius T., B. Molas, and A. Amarasingam (2025), "Far-Right Extremist Narratives in Canadian and Swedish Covid-19 Protests: A Comparative Case Study of the Freedom Movement and Freedom Convoy", Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression, 17(2): 164-184. https://doi.org/10.1080/19434472.2024.2340492

Benford R.D., D.A. Snow (2000), "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment", *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26: 611-639. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.611

Blee K.M. (2003), *Inside Organized Racism: Women in the Hate Movement*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Blee K.M. (2007), "Ethnographies of the Far Right", *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36(2): 119-128. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241606298815

Bordignon M., F. Piacentini (2024), "Technocratic Populism and Public Opinion during the Covid-19 Pandemic", *Quaderni di Scienza Politica*, 31(1): 3-24. https://doi.org/10.48271/113273

Bratich J. (2021), "'Give Me Liberty or Give Me Covid!': Anti-Lockdown Protests as Necropopulist Downsurgency", *Cultural Studies*, 35(2-3): 257-265. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2021.1898016

Brooks S.K., R.K. Webster, L.E. Smith, L. Woodland, S. Wessely, N. Greenberg, and G.J. Rubin (2020), "The Psychological Impact of Quarantine and How to Reduce It: Rapid Review of the Evidence", *The Lancet*, 395(10227): 912-920. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30460-8

Buechler S.M. (2000), *Social Movements in Advanced Capitalism: The Political Economy and Cultural Construction of Social Activism*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Buehling K., A. Heft (2023), "Pandemic Protesters on Telegram: How Platform Affordances and Information Ecosystems Shape Digital Counterpublics", *Social Media + Society*, 9(3): 20563051231199430. https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231199430

Caiani M. (2023), "Framing and Social Movements", *Discourse Studies*, 25(2): 195-209. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614456231154734

Caiani M., B. Carlotti, and E. Padoan (2021), "Online Hate Speech and the Radical Right in Times of Pandemic: The Italian and English Cases", *Javnost - The Public*, 28(2): 202-218. https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2021.1922191

Caiani M., O. Císař (eds. 2018), *Radical Right Movement Parties in Europe*, London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315123851

Caiani M., D. della Porta (2010), "Extreme Right and Populism: A Frame Analysis of Extreme Right Wing Discourses in Italy and Germany", *IHS Political Science Series*, 121, Vienna: Institute for Advanced Studies.

Caiani M., D. della Porta (2018), "The Radical Right as Social Movement Organizations", in J. Rydgren (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 327-347. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190274559.013.17

Caiani M., D. della Porta, and C. Wagemann (2012), *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right: Germany, Italy, and the United States*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199641260.001.0001

Caiani M., L. Parenti (2013), *European and American Extreme Right Groups and the Internet*, Farnham: Ashgate.

Caiani M., P. Susánszky, and N. Saridakis (2025), "Radical Right and Anti-Vax Protests between Movements and Parties: A Comparative Study", *Acta Politica*, 60(1): 139-166. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-024-00339-5

Castelli Gattinara P., C. Froio, and A.L.P. Pirro (2022), "Far-Right Protest Mobilization in Europe: Grievances, Opportunities and Resources", *European Journal of Political Research*, 61(4): 1019-1041. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12484

Cowden S., N. Yuval-Davis (2022), "Contested Narratives of the Pandemic Crisis: The Far Right, Anti-Vaxxers and Freedom of Speech", *Feminist Dissent*, 6: 96-132. https://doi.org/10.31273/fd.n6.2022.1264

Daphi P., J.M. Dollbaum, S. Haunss, and L. Meier (2025), "Local Protest Event Analysis: Providing a More Comprehensive Picture?", *West European Politics*, 48(2): 449-463. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2024.2363709

Deerman J. (2017), "Spillover Effects: Explaining Narrative Divergences of the Christian Right, 1979-1989", *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 30(3): 561-586. https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12129

della Porta D. (1995), *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

della Porta D. (2013), *Clandestine Political Violence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139043144

della Porta D. (2022), *Contentious Politics in Emergency Critical Junctures: Progressive Social Movements during the Pandemic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009025638

della Porta D. (2023), *Regressive Movements in Times of Emergency: The Protests Against Anti-Contagion Measures and Vaccination During the Covid-19 Pandemic*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198884309.001.0001

della Porta D., M. Diani (2020), *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 3rd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

della Porta D., A. Lavizzari (2022), "Waves in Cycle: The Protests against Anti-Contagion Measures and Vaccination in Covid-19 Times in Italy", *Partecipazione e Conflitto*, 15(3): 720-740. https://doi.org/10.1285/i20356609v15i3p720

Diani M. (1992), "The Concept of Social Movement", *The Sociological Review*, 40(1): 1-25. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1992.tb02943.x

Diani M. (2003), "Networks and Social Movements: A Research Programme", in M. Diani and D. McAdam (eds.), *Social Movements and Networks: Relational Approaches to Collective Action*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 299-319. https://doi.org/10.1093/0199251789.003.0013

Diani M. (2015), *The Cement of Civil Society: Studying Networks in Localities*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316163733

Di Ronco A., J. Allen-Robertson (2019), "Activism against Medicine on Social Media: Untangling the #Novax Protest in Italy on Twitter", in A. Lavorgna and A. Di Ronco (eds.), *Medical Misinformation and Social Harm in Non-Science-Based Health Practices: A Multidisciplinary Perspective*, London: Routledge, pp. 116-132. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429424434-9

Eren B. (2025), "'Love Is Over, This Is Going to Be Turkey!': Cathartic Resonance between the June 2013 Protests in Turkey and Brazil", *Social Movement Studies*, 24(3): 309-325. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2023.2230140

Falkenbach M. (2025), "The Populist Radical Right and Vacinations", *European Journal of Public Health*, 35(Supplement 4): ckaf161.691. https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckaf161.691

Falkenbach M., M. Caiani (2021), "Italy's Response to Covid19", in S.L. Greer, E.J. King, E.M. da Fonseca, and A. Peralta-Santos (eds.), *Coronavirus Politics: The Comparative Politics and Policy of Covid-19*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, pp. 320-338.

Flesher Fominaya C. (2022), "Reconceptualizing Democratic Innovation: 'Democratic Innovation Repertoires' and Their Impact within and beyond Social Movements", *Democratic Theory*, 9(2): 78-100. https://doi.org/10.3167/dt.2022.090205

Froio C., P. Castelli Gattinara, G. Bulli, and M. Albanese (2020), *CasaPound Italia: Contemporary Extreme-Right Politics*, London: Routledge.

Galais C., M. Guinjoan (2023), "The Ideological Slant of Covid-19-Related Conspiracies: A New Niche for the Far Right?", *Representation*, 59(2): 347-356. https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2022.2034660

Gerbaudo P. (2020), "The Pandemic Crowd: Protest in the Time of Covid-19", *Journal of International Affairs*, 73(2): 61-76.

Gerring J. (2006), *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hallin D.C., S. Mihelj, P. Ferracioli, N. Rao, K. Vanevska, A. Stojiljković, B. Klimkiewicz, D. Rothberg, and V. Štětka (2024), "Pandemic Communication in Times of Populism: Politicization and the COVID Communication Process in Brazil, Poland, Serbia and the United States", *Social Science & Medicine*, 360: 117304. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2024.117304

Heinze A.-S., M. Weisskircher (2023), "How Political Parties Respond to Pariah Street Protest: The Case of Anti-Corona Mobilization in Germany", *German Politics*, 32(3): 563-584. https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2022.2042518

Hunger S., S. Hutter, and E. Kanol (2023), "The Mobilization Potential of Anti-Containment Protests in Germany", *West European Politics*, 46(4): 812-840. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2023.2166728

Hutter S. (2014), "Protest Event Analysis and Its Offspring", in D. della Porta (ed.), *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 335-367. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198719571.003.0014

Johnston H. (2022), "Nationalist Movements", in D.A. Snow, D. della Porta, B. Klandermans, and D. McAdam (eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, 2nd ed., Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470674871.wbespm477.pub2

Kennedy J. (2019), "Populist Politics and Vaccine Hesitancy in Western Europe: An Analysis of National-Level Data", *European Journal of Public Health*, 29(3): 512-516. https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckz004

Kitschelt H.P. (1988), "Left-Libertarian Parties: Explaining Innovation in Competitive Party Systems", *World Politics*, 40(2): 194-234. https://doi.org/10.2307/2010362

Klein O., H.-J. Trenz, and N. Hesse (2024), "Political Conflict on Instagram during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Europe: Challenges of a Cross-Country Comparison of Visual Content", *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 21(3): 274-287. https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2024.2308886

Koopmans R. (1993), "The Dynamics of Protest Waves: West Germany, 1965 to 1989", *American Sociological Review*, 58(5): 637-658. https://doi.org/10.2307/2096279

Koopmans R., S. Olzak (2004), "Discursive Opportunities and the Evolution of Right-Wing Violence in Germany", *American Journal of Sociology*, 110(1): 198-230. https://doi.org/10.1086/386271

Koopmans R., P. Statham, M. Giugni, and F. Passy (2005), *Contested Citizenship: Immigration and Cultural Diversity in Europe*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Kouros T., V. Papa, M. Ioannou, and V. Kapnisis (2023), "Conspiratorial Narratives on Facebook and Their Historical Contextual Associations: A Case Study from Cyprus", *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 47(4): 422-439. https://doi.org/10.1177/01968599221117235

Kowalewski M. (2021), "Street Protests in Times of Covid-19: Adjusting Tactics and Marching 'as Usual'", *Social Movement Studies*, 20(6): 758-765. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2020.1843014

Kriesi H., I.-E. Oana (2023), "Protest in Unlikely Times: Dynamics of Collective Mobilization in Europe during the Covid-19 Crisis", *Journal of European Public Policy*, 30(4): 740-765. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2022.2140819

Krippendorff K. (2018), *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*, 4th ed., Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Laumond B. (2020), "Passeurs and Their Beliefs: Preventing Right-Wing Extremism in the German Land of Brandenburg", *Revue Française de Science Politique*, 70(5): 617-637.

Lehmann P., L. Zehnter (2024), "The Self-Proclaimed Defender of Freedom: The AfD and the Pandemic", *Government and Opposition*, 59(4): 1109-1127. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2022.5

Liao T.F. (2022), "Understanding Anti-Covid-19 Vaccination Protest Slogans in the US", *Frontiers in Communication*, 7: 941872. https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2022.941872

Lundstedt M. (2023), *Pathways to Violence Against Migrants: Space, Time and Far-Right Violence in Sweden, 2012-2017*, London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003368229

McAdam D. (1986), "Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer", *American Journal of Sociology*, 92(1): 64-90. https://doi.org/10.1086/228463

McAdam D., S. Tarrow, and C. Tilly (2001), *Dynamics of Contention*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McCarthy J.D., M.N. Zald (1977), "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory", *American Journal of Sociology*, 82(6): 1212-1241. https://doi.org/10.1086/226464

Meyer D.S. (2004), "Protest and Political Opportunities", *Annual Review of Sociology*, 30: 125-145. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.30.012703.110545

Meyer D.S., N. Whittier (1994), "Social Movement Spillover", *Social Problems*, 41(2): 277-298. https://doi.org/10.2307/3096934

Minkenberg M. (2019), "Between Party and Movement: Conceptual and Empirical Considerations of the Radical Right's Organizational Boundaries and Mobilization Processes", *European Societies*, 21(4): 463-486. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2018.1494296

Mudde C. (2019), *The Far Right Today*, Cambridge: Polity.

Nachtwey O., N. Frei, and R. Schäfer (2021), "Generalverdacht und Kritik als Selbstzweck: Empirische Befunde zu den Corona-Protesten", in W. Benz (ed.), *Querdenken: Protestbewegung zwischen Demokratieverachtung, Hass und Aufruhr*, Berlin: Metropol, pp. 194-213.

Peacock N., M. Biernat (2022), "Two Tales of Two Protests: Principled and Partisan Attitudes toward Politically Charged Protests", *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 52(1): 51-67. https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12832

Pirro A.L.P. (2023), "Far Right: The Significance of an Umbrella Concept", *Nations and Nationalism*, 29(1): 101-112. https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12860

Pleyers G. (2020), "The Pandemic Is a Battlefield: Social Movements in the Covid-19 Lockdown", *Journal of Civil Society*, 16(4): 295-312. https://doi.org/10.1080/17448689.2020.1794398

Plümper T., E. Neumayer, and K.G. Pfaff (2021), "The Strategy of Protest against Covid-19 Containment Policies in Germany", *Social Science Quarterly*, 102(5): 2236-2250. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.13066

Rietdijk N. (2021), "Radicalizing Populism and the Making of an Echo Chamber: The Case of the Italian Anti-Vaccination Movement", *Krisis*, 41(1): 114-134. https://doi.org/10.21827/krisis.41.1.37163

Ring-Ramirez M., J. Earl (2021), "Spillover through Shared Agendas: Understanding How Social Movements Set Agendas for One Another", *Partecipazione e Conflitto*, 14(3): 1102-1126. https://doi.org/10.1285/i20356609v14i3p1102

Rohlinger D.A., D.S. Meyer (2024), "Protest during a Pandemic: How Covid-19 Affected Social Movements in the United States", *American Behavioral Scientist*, 68(6): 810-828. https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642221132179

Rovira Kaltwasser C., P. Taggart (2024), "The Populist Radical Right and the Pandemic", *Government and Opposition*, 59(4): 977-997. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2022.46

Rulli T., S. Campbell (2022), "Can 'My Body, My Choice' Anti-Vaxxers Be Pro-Life?", *Bioethics*, 36(6): 708-714. https://doi.org/10.1111/bioe.13033

Russell F. (2023), "Pox Populi: Anti-Vaxx, Anti-Politics", *Journal of Sociology*, 59(3): 699-715. https://doi.org/10.1177/14407833221101660

Saridakis N. (2026), *Explaining the Extreme Right Wing Political Violence in South-Eastern Europe during the Period of the Great Recession (2008–2018)*, PhD dissertation, Athens: Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences.

Serrano-Alarcón M., Y. Wang, A. Kentikelenis, M. McKee, and D. Stuckler (2023), "The Far Right and Anti-Vaccine Attitudes: Lessons from Spain's Mass Covid-19 Vaccine Roll-Out", *European Journal of Public Health*, 33(2): 215-221. https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckac173

Smith N., T. Graham (2019), "Mapping the Anti-Vaccination Movement on Facebook", *Information, Communication & Society*, 22(9): 1310-1327. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1418406

Snow D.A., E.B. Rochford Jr., S.K. Worden, and R.D. Benford (1986), "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation", *American Sociological Review*, 51(4): 464-481. https://doi.org/10.2307/2095581

Tarrow S.G. (1989), *Democracy and Disorder: Protest and Politics in Italy, 1965-1975*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Tarrow S.G. (2021), *Movements and Parties: Critical Connections in American Political Development*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Tarrow S.G. (2022), *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 4th ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Taylor S. (2022), "The Psychology of Pandemics", *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 18: 581-609. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-072720-020131
van der Zwet K., A.I. Barros, T.M. van Engers, and P.M.A. Sloot (2022), "Emergence of Protests during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Quantitative Models to Explore the Contributions of Societal Conditions", *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 9: 68. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01082-y
Van Dyke N., B. Amos (2017), "Social Movement Coalitions: Formation, Longevity, and Success", *Sociology Compass*, 11(7): e12489. https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12489
Volk S., M. Weisskircher (2024), "Defending Democracy against the 'Corona Dictatorship'? Far-Right PEGIDA during the Covid-19 Pandemic", *Social Movement Studies*, 23(6): 719-737. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2023.2171385
Wanted in Rome (2021), "Italy Police Block Forza Nuova Website amid Calls to Ban Neo-Fascist Group", October 12, 2021, Retrieved July 20, 2026 (https://www.wantedinrome.com/news/italy-police-block-forza-nuova-website-amid-calls-to-ban-neo-fascist-group.html).
Wheeler D. (2020), "Vox in the Age of Covid-19: The Populist Protest Turn in Spanish Politics", *Journal of International Affairs*, 73(2): 173-184.
Wondreys J., C. Mudde (2022), "Victims of the Pandemic? European Far-Right Parties and Covid-19", *Nationalities Papers*, 50(1): 86-103. https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2020.93
Zanotti L., S.J. Turnbull-Dugarte (2024), "Surviving but Not Thriving: VOX and Spain in Times of Covid-19", *Government and Opposition*, 59(4): 1128-1147. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2022.7
Zeller B. (2021), "New Religious Movement Responses to COVID: Frame Alignment Strategies and Social Context", *Approaching Religion*, 11(2): 62-81. https://doi.org/10.30664/ar.107731

Notes on Contributors

Manuela Caiani is Associate Professor of Political Science at the Scuola Normale Superiore. She is Director of BACKDEM – Centre for the Study of Democratic Backsliding, a joint initiative of the SNS and the European University Institute (EUI). Her research focuses on far right, populism and democracy, social movements and political participation in Europe. https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2174-6579

Nikolaos Saridakis is a postdoctoral researcher at the Scuola Normale Superiore, where he works on the CIDAPE project. He is also a research fellow at BACKDEM – Centre for the Study of Democratic Backsliding and a member of COSMOS. He holds a PhD in Political Science from Panteion University. His research focuses on far-right politics, democratic backsliding, social movements and political violence. https://orcid.org/0009-0008-1143-4994

Appendix

Table A. The Multiorganizational Milieu of the Radical-Right and Anti-Vax Protest in Italy

Forza Nuova: Forza Nuova is an Italian radical-right political party. Being one of the oldest far-right parties in Italy, Forza Nuova has local offices in most Italian cities and it has developed a transnational network of collaborations with other European far-right parties. The party's ideology is neofascist, conservative, and ultra-nationalist. Under the leadership of its founder, Roberto Fiore, the party follows a dual strategy by organizing various protest mobilizations, while simultaneously participating in elections. Forza Nuova members have committed various acts of violence. Lately, Forza Nuova leaders have been accused of organizing violent attacks targeting the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL), and the resulting prosecution led to the imprisonment of party leaders.
Movimento Nazionale- La Rete dei Patrioti: Movimento Nazionale is an Italian far-right political party. Movimento Nazionale was created following a split from Forza Nuova in 2020 in controversy with the management of Forza Nuova. Movimento Nazionale's ideology combines neofascism, conservatism and ultra-nationalism. According to the party leader, Movimento Nazionale shares similar ideological roots with Forza Nuova but it follows a less violent protest strategy. The party has recently formed an alliance with CasaPound Italia and Militia Christi.
Militia Christi: Militia Christi is a Catholic social movement based in Rome. Militia Christi promotes ideas of strong Catholicism and conservatism, and it is strongly opposed to abortion, LGBTQ+ demands, and cultural liberalism. The movement seeks to strengthen the position of the Catholic Church and aims to politically promote its demands. During the last two years, Militia Christi has participated in many manifestations against the implementation of the Green-Pass and mandatory vaccination. Militia Christi collaborates with Movimento Nazionale-La Rete dei Patrioti.
Fronte Romano Riscatto Popolare: Fronte Romano Riscatto Popolare is an Italian far-right movement based in Rome. Despite its relatively small number of activists, the movement is quite active in the protest arena since it co-organizes and participates in every demonstration against the Green- Pass in Rome. The movement draws political power from the social capital of its founder and leader, who has also been a candidate for the municipal council in Ostia with the list of CasaPound Italia. Inspired by the first wave of Italian fascism, Fronte Romano Riscatto Popolare's ideology is neofascist, ultra-nationalist, and conservative. The movement prioritizes issues related to the cleanliness and security of Rome in its political agenda and by doing so it tries to create links with the local community.
Magnitudo- Identity movement: Magnitudo- Identity movement is a far-right identitarian movement in Rome. In its ideological foundations, there are the ideas of defending traditions, Italian and European identity, and traditional family. The movement is opposed to immigration, abortion, and LGBTQ rights. Magnitudo pays particular attention to the cultural dimensions of the far-right scene due to its belief that national and traditional culture fuels national identity. Magnitudo participates in and organizes demonstrations against the Green-Pass in Italy and it declares that it rejects political violence, although it co-organizes demonstrations with Forza Nuova and CasaPound Italia.
Students Against the Green Pass Student network established in 2021 to oppose Green Pass requirements in universities. Included activists with previous involvement in radical right organizations and maintained stable collaborative ties with radical right groups during the protest cycle.

CasaPound Italia: CasaPound Italia[18] is a neo-fascist movement-party openly inspired by historical Fascism (Froio et al. 2020). While its electoral force in Italy remains marginal, CasaPound has developed a network of activists in multiple Italian cities. Given its nativist nature, CasaPound has received significant media attention for its demonstrations against migration, Roma people and LGBTQ rights. Between 2020 and 2022, the movement-party has participated in the broader mobilizations against the Green Pass and it has formed an alliance with Movimento Nazionale-La Rete dei Patrioti.
For the classification of the radical right organizations and anti-vax protesters initiating the events, we followed Caiani et al. (2012) and the classification most commonly used in protest event analyses of radical right mobilization (see also Castelli Gattinara et al. 2022). Radical right 'parties' (or specifically 'movement-parties' such as the Italian Forza Nuova and Casa Pound) are those groups which define themselves as such and participate in elections. In the category 'political movements', we inserted those groups that openly partake in political activities, without participating in elections. We also included youth organizations close to the RR (e.g. 'Students against Green pass'), RR magazines and media, as well as new actors such as the various Committees and coordinating networks against green pass/vaccines emerging in the wake of the Covid protest such as 'Napoli no Green Pass', 'Comitato Libera scelta', 'No Green Pass Trieste'. Within the category 'cultural conservative organizations' we grouped traditional cultural RR organizations (for example the 'Associazione Nazionale Arditi d'Italia' https://arditiditalia.com/), and the Catholic ultra-traditionalist organizations, such as Militia Christi, as well as Identitarian RR and groups, and some parents' groups mobilizing on the basis of conservative issues and values. The category 'generic ref./individual/anonymous' is a generic reference to RR groups and individual or anonymous RR actors as initiator of the protest event. Finally, in the category 'other' we grouped: single issue groups (e.g. organizations fighting against vaccines and governmental measures on the basis of juridical-civil-individual rights - such as 'Romagna Costituzionale', and 'Dubbi e Precauzione', https://generazionifuture.org/dupre/, Emilia Romagna FB page), as well as economic groups that mobilized alongside the RR anti-vax movement for instrumental or economic reasons, reflecting the heterogeneity of anti-vax protest actors beyond the radical right (see also della Porta and Lavizzari 2022).

Table B. The Political Opportunities of Protest: Timelines of the Lockdown measures in Italy

Measures taken by the Italian government 2020-2021		
Date	**Measures**	**Sources**
31 January 2020	All flights from and to China were suspended	https://www.thelocal.it/20200131/italy-suspends-all-china-flights-after-coronavirus-cases-confirmed-in-rome
8 March 2020	Prime Minister imposes quarantine lockdown on Lombardy	https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51787238
22 March 2020	Imposition of the first national lockdown	https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-orders-total-lockdown-over-coronavirus/
18 May 2020	Freedom of movement was re-established	https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2020/may/18/coronavirus-live-news-record-daily-cases-in-south-africa-as-india-extends-lockdown
5 November 2020	Imposition of a new national lockdown including curfew	https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54839429

[18] Due to the problems of field accessibility, we were unable to conduct interviews with activists and representatives of this organization, who have consistently demonstrated a reluctance to engage with us throughout the duration of our fieldwork.

Measures taken by the Italian government 2020-2021		
18 January 2021	End of National Lockdown – Confirmation of the "color system"	https://www.simmons-simmons.com/en/publications/ckh3mbdvv151g0a03z6mgt3dr/covid-19-decree-brings-strict-restrictions-for-italy
5 March 2021	Remote schooling in Lombardy and Strict lockdown in Milan	https://www.ft.com/content/881fac79-5515-421d-be60-3e1c3a74673e
28 June 2021	Lifting of Lockdown measures, the use of face masks is no longer mandatory outdoor in "white zones"	https://lexatlas-c19.org/an-update-as-the-italian-government-gradually-lifts-the-covid-19-containment-measures/
22 July 2021	Government introduces the "Green Pass"	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jul/22/italy-covid-19-green-pass-vaccinations-restrictions
9 August 2021	Government extended the requirement of Green Pass to many different sectors (work, sports universities etc.)	https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-58115213
15 October 2021	"Green Pass mandatory for all workers"	https://edition.cnn.com/2021/10/15/world/italy-green-pass-covid-protests-intl/index.html
14 December 2021	The state of emergency has been extended until 31 March 2022.	https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italy-extends-covid-19-state-emergency-end-march-2021-12-14/

Table C.1 More on Protest Event Analysis (Factiva dataset, 2021-2022)

ITALY			
	Newspapers		
Keywords (for articles' search)	*La Repubblica*	*Il Corriere della Sera*	*La Nazione*
(In Italian) No vax Green Pass Protesta Destra radicale Estrema destra Forza Nuova CasaPound Movimento Nazionale	Newspaper type: left wing, national Timespan: 01/01/2021 – 30/6/2022 Total number of articles: 2208	Newspaper type: centre right, national Timespan: 01/01/2021- 30/6/2022 Total number of articles: 323	Newspaper type: local/national and "tabloid" Timespan: 01/1/2021 - 18/6/2022 Total number of articles: 189

ITALY
**The codebook used was built on similar codebooks for the protest event analysis of radical right mobilization (Caiani and Parenti 2013); main coding variables: actor type, issue (and its scope), frame, target (and its scope), form of action, presence of counter movement.
***_Unit of analysis_: in our PEA analysis of the anti-vax mobilization we only coded protest events organized or co-organized by right wing actors, as reported in newspaper articles. Radical right collective actors have been therefore our prime focus of attention through their (co-)organization of, and participation in, protest events (for a similar procedure see Castelli Gattinara et al. 2022). By doing so we aimed at grasping empirically the widest possible range of non-institutionalized or unconventional action forms by the RR, beyond events directly sponsored solely by radical right parties at the grassroots level.

Table C. 2. Codebook

	Variables for the Coding	
1.	***Country:***	
	1.	IT – Italy
2.	***id***: id of the protest event. Insert a progressive number for each event which you code (e.g. 01, 02….09….10, 11…etc.)	
3.	***date*****:** Specify the date of the event eg. 04/03/22 (day/month/year)	
4.	***place*****:** The place where the event did take place.	
5.	***Actype1, 2, 3:*** Type of the actor who organized the event.	
	1.	Political party
	2.	Political movement (here also right-wing newspapers and magazines and youth political movements related to parties)
	3.	Youth subcultural group (a. skinheads; b. Right-wing Music Bands or Labels, c. Ultras / Soccer fans / Hooligans)
	4.	General reference to extreme right activists of organizations/anonymous actor/ unknown actor
	5.	Nostalgic & Revisionist extreme right organizations
	6.	Neo-Nazi groups
	7.	Extreme right Cultural, new age and neo-mystical organizations (here also integralist catholic organizations) and historical organizations (organizations for the protection of culture, history, language)
	8.	Extreme right commercial organizations and publishers
	9.	other _____
6.	***action*****:** form of action	
	1.	conventional
	2.	demonstrative,
	3.	expressive,
	4.	confrontational
	5.	light violence
	6.	heavy violence

	7.	online action
7.	***npartic:*** number of participants.	
8.	***target_type:*** type of target/addressee of the event against/in favour of whom the event is directed.	
	1.	social minorities (e.g. homosexuals, homeless)
	2.	religious minorities (Muslims)
	3.	ethnic minorities (immigrants, etc)
	4.	political adversaries (social groups es. Antifascists, squatted centres/Anarchists, The Left, The Communists, etc),
	5.	national institutions/political parties,
	6.	extreme right actors,
	7.	non-national(e.g. the French government) or supranational institutions (e.g. EU, the NATO, the WTO)
	8.	other _____
9.	***Issue 1, 2, 3***	
	1.	Against mandatory vaccination
	2.	Against the curfews and lockdowns
	3.	Economic issue (e.g. for opening shops and restaurants)
	4.	Nativist concerns
	5.	*frame* (string)_____
10.	***counter-mob****:* countermobilization (dummy 1/0)	

Table D. 1 List of Quoted Interviews with Right-Wing Anti-Vax Activists and Experts

*** Interviews were conducted online, by phone, and in person. Expert interviewees were selected on the basis of their professional or social roles (e.g., academics, journalists), which provide them with close engagement and a privileged perspective on the phenomenon under study. It was not possible to interview CasaPound.*

Italy
ID1: Male, main national leader of **Forza Nuova**, Northern Italy, 15/1/2022, Verona, Italy (face to face).
ID2: Female, *expert*: Prosecutor of Turin, 16/1/2022, Turin, Italy (online).
ID3: Female, Organizer of **Students against the Green Pass**, 17/1/2022, Verona, Italy (face to face).
ID4: Male, Member of **Students against the Green Pass** and member of **Verona per la liberta**, 17/1/2022, Verona, Italy (face to face)
ID5: Male, Member of National Committee of **Students against the Green Pass**, 18/1/2022, Verona, Italy (online).
ID6: Female, Member of **Students against the Green Pass**, 18/1/2022, Verona, Italy (face to face).
ID7: Male, Member of Students against the Green Pass and member of an **autonomous extreme-right group**, 18/1/2022, Verona, Italy (face to face).
ID8: Male, activists of **Forza Nuova**, 19/1/2022, Verona, Italy (online).
ID9: Male, leader of **Forza Nuova/ Youth organization** in Rome, 19/1/2022, Rome, Italy (face to face).
ID10: Male, National Secretary of **Movimento Nazionale**, 20/1/2022, Rome, Italy (face to face).

ID11: Male, activists of **Movimento Nazionale**, 21/1/2022, Lecco, Italy (online).
ID12: Male, **Magnitudo – Identity movement**, 21/1/2022, Rome, Italy (face to face).
ID13: Male, Spokesman of **Forza Nuova**, 24/1/2022, Palermo, Italy (online).
ID14: Male, leader of **Movement Front against the Green-Pass**, 22/1/2022, Rome, Italy (face to face).
ID15: Male, member of national committee of **Movimento Nazionale**, 25/1/2022, Rome, Italy (face to face).
ID16: Male, activists of **Forza Nuova**, 26/1/2022, Perugia, Italy (online).
ID17: Male, social media manager of **Movimento Nazionale**, 26/1/2022, Milan, Italy (online).
ID18: Male, activist of **Militia Christi**, 27/1/2022, Rome, Italy (face to face).
ID19: Male, activist of **Movimento Nazionale**, 28/1/2022, Rome, Italy (face to face).
ID20: Male, activist of **Forza Nuova**, 29/1/2022, Rome, Italy (face to face).
ID21: Male, **expert,** Magistrate, Procura of Milan, Chief of the Anti-terrorism Unit in Italy, face to face, 4th January 2022, Milano.
ID22: Male, activist of **Forza Nuova**, 15/1/2022, Perugia, Italy (online).
ID23: Female, activist of **Forza Nuova**, 18/1/2022, Palermo, Italy, (online).
***Note: Interviews* were conducted in 2022. A snowball and positional method were used to reach the radical activists and leaders and to access the field. Interviewees were selected to vary by age, gender, group, their role in the movements (either organizer/founder or member) and geography (urban/rural). Gaining access to them was a challenging process (see also Blee, 2003), although once access to the field was secured and trust was established, participants were open to sharing their experiences and views on the mobilization in the anti-vax protest- but were reluctant to answer questions about their use of political violence (their own experiences of violence were often presented in an abstract way in order to ensure the safety of their comrades).

Table D.2 Questionnaire Used

Introduction
Each interview lasted approximately one hour and focused on the following topics: experiences of political participation in anti-vaccination protests (including the use of violence as a strategic or tactical choice), networks and contacts with other groups or parties, and perceptions of the political and discursive opportunity structures surrounding the movement.
Previous political activism (and overlapping memberships)
Socio-demographic information (age, education, occupation).
How and when did you join the organization? Do you participate in any other organizations or groups?
How did you first come into contact with the organization (e.g. through friends, online, or other channels)?
How would you describe your organization and its mission?
Why do you participate in this organization? To what extent does your political ideology motivate your participation? What does being a member of this organization mean to you personally?

What do you see as the main costs and benefits of your activism?
How are decisions made within your organization (e.g. regarding protest activities or campaigns related to COVID-19 and vaccination)? Is decision-making formalized, or is it mainly informal?
Cross-sectoral and transnational contacts
Is your organization in contact with organizations that are not primarily political (e.g. religious organizations, sports associations, or civic groups)? Could you describe the nature of these contacts? What kinds of resources, information, or activities do you exchange? Did you cooperate or communicate on issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccination?
Is your organization in contact with similar organizations in Italy or abroad? Are these contacts part of a transnational network or federation? What do you exchange with them (e.g. information, ideas, strategic reflections, or interpretative frames)? Did you discuss the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccination-related issues?
Perceptions of political and discursive opportunities
How would you describe the political and social environment in Italy? Do you perceive it as supportive, neutral, or hostile to your organization's claims? Please elaborate.
Who do you consider to be your organization's main allies and opponents in Italy (e.g. political actors, civil society organizations, or other institutions)?
To what extent do you think public opinion supports your cause and ideas?
How do you perceive the role of the media? And what about political parties and other civil society organizations?
Frames (diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational)
In your view, what is the main problem related to the COVID-19 pandemic? How do you interpret its origins and its consequences?
What, in your opinion, is the main issue concerning COVID-19 vaccines?
What solutions would you propose regarding the management of the pandemic, and vaccination in particular?
If you had to summarize your position in a slogan, what would it be? What are the key words or ideas that best represent your position on COVID-19 and vaccination?
Protest participation and political violence
Could you describe your political participation? Have you taken part in demonstrations, campaigns, or other political initiatives?
What are your personal motivations for participating in these protest events?
Throughout your political participation, what have been the main issues that motivated you to protest (e.g. COVID-19 measures, immigration, the economy)? Why these issues in particular?
To what extent has the COVID-19 pandemic influenced your political participation? In what ways?
During the COVID-19 pandemic, what events or government measures most strongly motivated you to participate in protest activities?
During protests against COVID-19-related measures, there were several incidents involving clashes between protesters and the police. How do you interpret these events?
Were you personally present during any of these clashes? If so, could you describe what happened?

How did you experience these clashes emotionally? How did you react?
In your opinion, under what circumstances, if any, is the use of political violence justified?
If you expect that a demonstration may become confrontational, how do you prepare for it?
Could you describe a particularly memorable moment from your participation in protests?

Table E. Main recurring actors 'co-organizing' anti-vax protest events with the RR

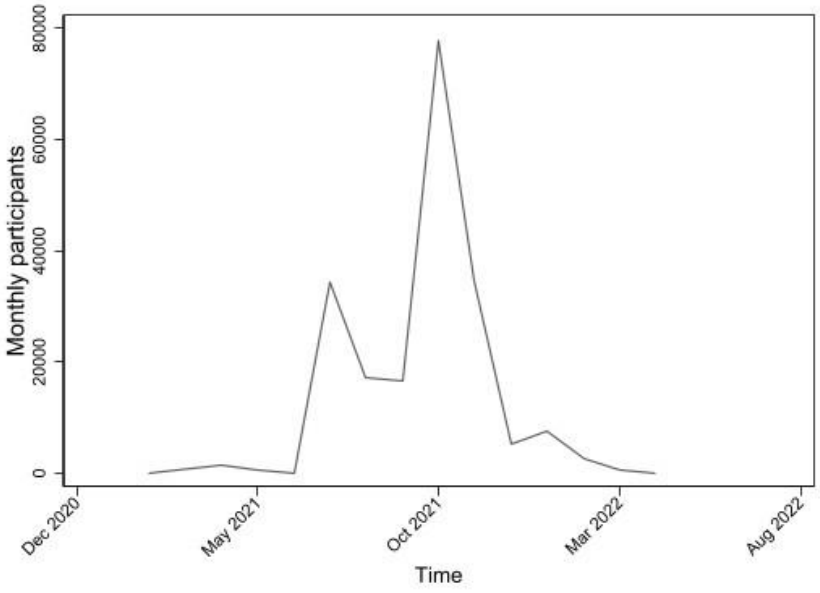
Name of the group	*Political Orientation*
#ioapro	Not-specified
Alternativa	Far-right
ATM workers	Left-wing
CasaPound, ultras	Far-right
Center-right candidate	Center-Right
CPI	Far-right
Do.RA	Far-right
FdI & MPs	Far-right
FN (Forza Nuova)	Far-right
Italexit	Far-right
Lega	Far-right
Movimento 7 novembre	Left-wing
No G20	Left-wing
No tav movements	Left-wing
No vax anonymous/individual protesters	Not-specified
Non organised fascists	Far-right
Port workers	Left-wing
Riconquistiamo l'Italia	Far-right
Students against the Green Pass	Not-specified/with Far-Right wing

***Note: Specific actors of the variable 'actor 2'*

Table F. The RR and anti-Vax protest in Italy: A case of spillover?

Pandemic as 'critical times'	*Internal impact* on the RR milieu: **New recruits or re-mobilisation of usual RR activists/groups**	*External impact*, i.e. reshaping the protest arena: **Spillover effect?19**
Italy	Re-mobilisation of RR social movements and activists (no vax protest as an occasion to re-gain visibility in civil society)	Horizontal effects among SMOs mobilizing in the anti vax protest, in terms of: 1. *Organization:* overlapping membership/SMOs communities, shared personnel, and RR activists in leadership positions 2. *Agenda:* spread of similar RR ideological frames 3. (partly) *Tactics*: spreading RR tactical innovations, but only some protesters adopting RR violence.

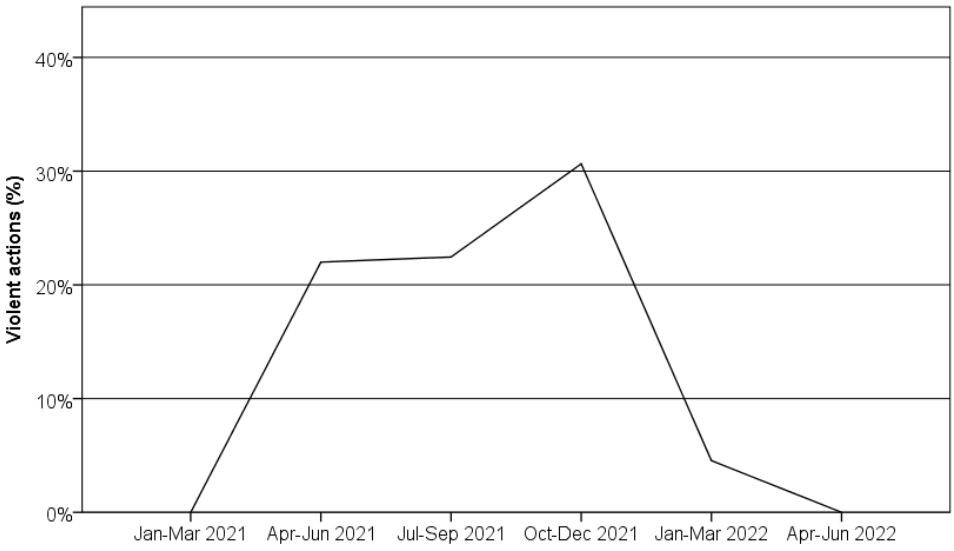
Figure A. Number of participants in RR anti-vax mobilisation events (2021-22, Italy) (absolute values)



Note: The 80,000 participants is the sum of several events. The peak in October 2021 comes from 34 events, many of which have the highest number of participants in the country.

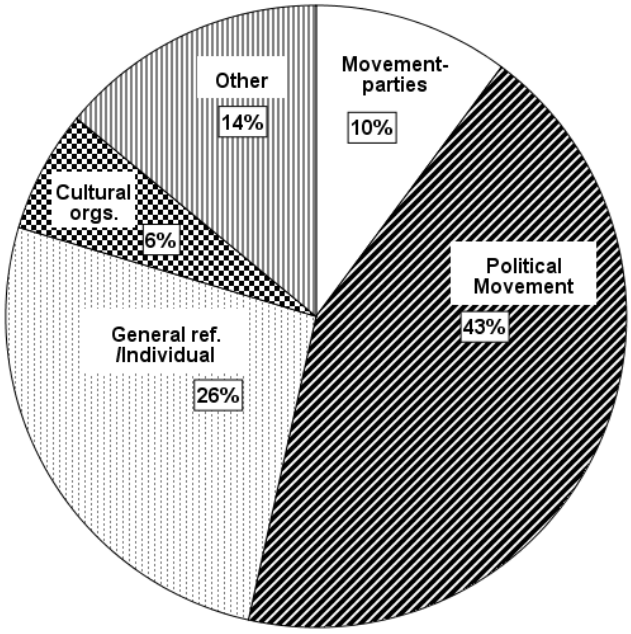
[19] *Social movement spillover*, as a horizontal effect among social movement organisations, i.e. here operationalised as the influence of the RR into the no vax movement (see also Deerman 2017).

Figure B. Violent actions in RR anti-vax mobilisation events (2021-22, Italy)



Note: Percentage of violent actions on the total of actions registered is shown. N =157 (100%)

Figure C. RR Anti-Vax Protest Events by Type of Actor, (2021-22, Italy)



Note: N =157 (100%). X^2=62.709, p<0.001. Legend: see Table A for the classification of actor types.