Chapter 11

Mapping protest on the refugee crisis: insights from online protest event analysis

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Introduction - Shifting the focus from solidarity initiatives to protest fields

The refugee crisis had a huge impact on the European political landscape. While many civil society organisations and social movements have dealt with this issue by helping and supporting refugees and migrants in general, other political actors and counter-movements have jumped on the crisis to politically exploit what has been often publicly portrayed as an uncontrollable siege at the European borders.

At the crossroads between solidarity manifestations and harsh opposition, the flows of refugees and asylum seekers traversing the European territory have rapidly become a controversial issue. In this chapter, we use a protest field approach in order to investigate precisely this element of controversy and to understand more in detail the main facets of the contentious dynamics triggered by the refugee crisis. A protest field is defined as the social space in which actors make their claims by means of protest; its structure is composed of the organisations and the social actors who enter its space, the claims they make, their repertoires of action, and their interactions – both co-operative and competitive. When addressing protest dynamics in a given (often, but not exclusively, domestic) context, social movement scholars typically use the concept of 'protest space' (Hutter 2014) or 'arena' (e.g. Jasper 2015) – thus giving particular prominence to the contextual factors (primarily, rules and resources) that facilitate or hamper the unfolding of collective endeavours. As we look at protests around migration and refugees, we prefer instead to speak about 'protest fields', as this concept implies the existence of a peculiar social strategic action field that is a 'constructed mesolevel social order in which actors (who can be individual or collective) are attuned to and interact

with one another on the basis of shared (which is not to say consensual) understandings about the purposes of the field, relationships to others in the field (including who has power and why), and the rules governing legitimate action in the field' (Fligstein and McAdam 2012, p. 9). The concept of field, in Bourdieu's earlier elaboration (e.g., Bourdieu 1993), overcomes the traditional dichotomy between agency and structure and redirects our attention towards the interactions between and within fields that develop as actors try to reinforce or transform hierarchical and power relations (Hilgers and Mangez 2014). Hence, a perspective that is centred on protest fields allows us to switch from a view of collective endeavours as a 'set of discrete cases' to one in which collectivities are seen as 'complex bundles of multiple social relationships [. . .] that connect individual and organisational actors, as well as non-agentic elements such as events or cultural forms, and [that evolve] over time' (Diani and Mische 2016, p. 307).

Against this background, our focus is set on three South European countries – Greece, Spain, and Italy – that have been particularly exposed to the migration process and within which protests on refugee flows have unfolded in different ways, involving different actors and protest practices, targeting different subjects and nurtured by different frames. More specifically, drawing on the political process approach, we relate the peculiarities of the political environments characterising the three countries with the configuration of their protest fields (della Porta and Diani 1996; Tarrow 1989; Kriesi et al. 1995). Following the theoretical assumptions that underpin the research effort crystallised in this book, we explore how the three countries did provide different *political opportunities* for protest on migration issues to emerge side by side with solidarity initiatives that were reconstructed in the previous chapters; for different *actors* – from Greek, Spanish, and Italian citizens to the migrants and refugees themselves – to network and engage in the struggle over the dichotomy between inclusion and exclusion; for different *action repertoires* to be pushed

forward in this struggle; and, ultimately, for the *concept of citizenship* to be reframed and redefined. We do so by employing protest event analysis, a method that is often adopted in social movement studies to explore the relations between protest and the political environment as well as to reconstruct the protest field (Hutter 2014; Kriesi et al. 2012). However, in comparison to traditional applications of this method, we introduce an element of innovation: we make systematic use of Google News as a new and powerful source for news on protests for or against immigration issues. Starting from online news, we reconstruct the protest field in each country under observation and show how the specific dynamics of protest on migration and refugees tend to vary according to the political context.

While we make systematic use of media discourse as an entry point to explore the contentious dynamics accompanying the refugee crisis, we do not elaborate on the active role that the media played in these circumstances. We certainly acknowledge that traditional and digital media have been fundamental in creating a public space of awareness and legitimisation for the manifestations of solidarity with and/or rejection of refugees. However, the extent to which public media discourse endowed pro- and/or anti-immigration initiatives with different discursive opportunities (Koopmans 2004; Ferree et al. 2002), the ways in which traditional and digital media practices have come to constitute acts of resistance in their own right (Cammaerts, Mattoni, and McCurdy 2013), as well as the modes in which digitally-enabled mass self-communication and narratives (Castells 2011) have contributed to mobilisation dynamics in the different protest fields are all aspects that we do not address directly in this work.

The remainder of this chapter is organised as follows. We begin by providing a short overview of the three political contexts of Greece, Spain, and Italy. While more detailed reconstructions of the situations in the three countries are provided in other chapters in this book, here we aim at sketching a background picture to support the reconstruction of each

protest field. We then move on to illustrate how we have employed protest event analysis with specific reference to the Google News repository and the main results that emerged from the content analysis of news items retrieved. In the last section, we conclude by discussing our results in connection with the background picture we provided in section 2 and in light of our methodological choices.

The background picture: Political contexts of the refugee crisis in Greece, Spain, and Italy[1]

During the 'long summer of migration', Greece provided a crucial transit point for refugees and asylum seekers. The management of the refugee crisis in the Greek territory occurred within a context of nested political opportunity structures (Meyer 2003), with grassroots solidarity initiatives constrained by the decisions of the national government which, in turn, was constrained by the political management of the crisis at the European level. In this context, the EU–Turkey agreement in March 2016 signalled a turning point at various levels. First, it entailed a change of state for the whole Greek territory, which shifted from being a place for transit to a forced place of arrival. Second, it affected the role played by the Greek government, which eventually took over solidarity initiatives during rescue and shelter operations. Finally, it significantly affected the scope and the margins of manoeuvre of solidarity initiatives, which needed to shift their actions from care and assistance tasks to the defence of refugees' rights. Thus, informal and collective solidarity initiatives were forced to face what Oikonomakis in his chapter calls the 'dilemma of becoming official' in order to be able to maintain their active stand. However, many groups refused to abide by the new rules and openly entered a conflictual relationship with the government.

Italy constitutes another hot-spot of the refugee crisis. Open towards the south to the routes from Africa and, at the same time, bound at the northern border by the increasing

control of neighbouring countries, Italy struggled to manage what Lorenzo Zamponi calls the 'complexity of the refugee crisis'. Requests to comply with the Dublin regulation clashed with the intricacies of a government-co-ordinated reception plan. In this context, a loose and highly heterogeneous 'policephalous network' (Diani 2003, p. 308) of solidarity initiatives emerged in the country, lacking central co-ordination, incorporating already existing initiatives as well as new collective subjects, and aimed at providing onsite support to refugees and migrants reaching Italian shores but also at defending their rights. However, the manifold difficulties that have characterised the unfolding of the refugee crisis in Italy have also boosted the diffusion of strong anti-immigration feelings – catalysed by far right subjects such as Lega Nord, a political party represented in both the Italian and the European institutions; Forza Nuova, a renowned Italian far right political movement; or CasaPound, another Italian extreme right political movement – but also fuelled by the rapid multiplication of informal local groups opposing the reception of refugees in local facilities and claiming a priority for Italian citizens' rights (see Castelli Gattinara's chapter in this volume).

Finally, Spain is the sole European frontier with the African context, and dynamics related to the refugee crisis have been highly dependent on this strategic location. The high level of surveillance at the southern border limited the intensity of migration flows towards the country. In this context, the rhetoric of the 'migrant invasion' that permeated the Italian context did not get a foothold, and mobilisations in the country mainly adopted a pro-immigration stand. Committed to ensuring the safety of the southern border and, at the same time, pressured to participate in the management of the refugee crisis at the European level, the Spanish government adopted what Alcalde and Portos call in their chapter an 'ambiguous position'. Solidarity initiatives were organised within the space of civil society and yet developed in a scattered manner and mainly within the boundaries of single localities, seizing more or less favourable local opportunity structures, connecting to various extents to previous

mobilisation waves in other areas (e.g., anti-austerity protests), and opposing targets at different levels (both nationally and at the European level).

Comparing protest fields in Greece, Spain, and Italy

In this work, we investigate the configuration of the Greek, Italian, and Spanish protest fields by means of a method that is known in social movement literature as protest event analysis (henceforth, PEA). PEA draws on traditional content analysis, which generally uses media content to gather, codify, input, and statistically treat information on research objects – that is, protest events (henceforth, PEs). This specific method allows for cross-time and cross-space comparison of mobilisations and has become particularly prominent in social movement and protest studies (Hutter 2014). Indeed, over time, PEA has been employed as a fruitful tool in the analysis of the birth of contemporary social movements during state-building process as well as in the study of the evolution of violence and strikes in modern states by Charles Tilly (Shorter and Tilly 1974; Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly 1975). It has supported the examination of the unfolding of the U.S. civil rights movement (McAdam 1982) and the robust study on the long '68 in Italy (Tarrow 1989). PEA has also been applied within one of the few comparative works on new social movements in France, Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands (Kriesi et al. 1995). As the few works cited here demonstrate, PEA has proven to be central in studies focusing on the political process approach, as the dynamics and features of protest events can be contrasted with changes in political opportunities and structures over time and across space (Hutter 2014).

Most of the scholars working with this method use newspapers as sources to gather information on protests, especially when the aim is to cover a relatively long time span (Franzosi 1987). Through newspaper articles, it is indeed possible to collect useful information about several properties of PEs: the organisations staging the protest, the type

of social actors involved, the claims and the issues of the protest, the forms of action used, the targets of the protest, its scope, and other relevant information. Such information is then codified through a codebook, which defines the variables and labels for each protest property, and the resulting data are translated within a matrix that is treated statistically.

In spite of its potentialities, newspaper-based PEA has also been criticised for internalising the biases that are part of media news coverage (Rucht and Neidhardt 1998). Broadly speaking, 'newspapers *selectively* report on protest events, and do not provide a representative sample of all events taking place' (Hutter 2014, p. 338). Differences exist among different newspapers in their tendency to cover protest, with local and liberal or leftist newspapers tending to cover comparatively more PEs (Rucht and Neidhart 1998). Moreover, within their discretional coverage, newspapers tend to provide a biased portrayal of protest, as they are more likely to report and detail large or radical protests addressing issues that are already at the centre of media attention (McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996).

Newspaper articles are not the sole source used for PEA. News agency reports have also been employed, as they tend to be 'more inclusive' than final edited news (Koopmans and Rucht 2002, p. 238). However, for their specific format, news agency reports have been found to be inadequate to cover longer time periods and quite far from 'what is seen by the average citizen as a consumer mass media' (ibid.). Outside the media space, police archives have also been used, as they allow for systematic protest coverage (McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996). However, these archives are not always accessible to researchers, and the information reported by the police is generally very poor and schematic. Moreover, police archives are rather decentralised and, for this reason, they do not prove particularly accessible when it comes to collecting protest information at a national level (Hutter 2014). Finally, just as the media introduce their own bias in

generating information on protest, police do as well, providing information framed according to their own organisational or even political goals (Hutter 2014).

Those important biases notwithstanding, four arguments have been pushed forward to support the employment of PEA as a research strategy: first, any kind of information source produces biases that political and social scientists must deal with; second, within comparative and longitudinal research, the negative effects of biases can be mitigated by keeping biases constant (as much as possible); third, PEA allows for large amounts of data collection that would otherwise prove impossible or too demanding; fourth, only if they receive media attention are protests likely to enter the public debate, become known by the public and, in the end, influence elites and decision makers (Hutter 2014).

Online protest event analysis through Google News

To reconstruct and compare the protest fields of Greece, Spain, and Italy, we perform a PEA starting from news items contained in Google News (henceforth GN). GN is a news aggregator launched in beta version by Google in 2002 and released officially in 2006. As a news aggregator, GN collects and constantly updates web syndicated contents – for example, news, blog and vlog posts, or podcasts – and displays them on a webpage in response to users' queries. Not only does GN cover news coming from a variety of professional and nonprofessional informational services, but users themselves can indicate the sources to be included in the catalogue, thus contributing to an ever-evolving effort of news indexing. Moreover, because news coming from GN is displayed amongst the first results proposed by Google, GN also constitutes a widely-diffused information source that internet users check, even if only cursorily, quite regularly.

To be sure, leaning on GN as a repository to perform PEA grants the same advantages that have been associated with the use of electronic databases: the possibility to

search for more than one source at a time and thus to minimise the effects of newspapers' selective coverage; the ease of reading news from different sources in a consistent visual style; and the possibility of retrieving relevant texts in 'non-news sections' – that is, above and beyond headlines, captions, or first and last sentences (Maney and Oliver 2001, p. 137).

However, the enormous variety of sources crawled and the extreme automation of news indexing exacerbates the shortcomings that are typical of digital searches. A first criticality relates to the very large number of results that are generated in response to a search query in GN. While a typical search for information would require a user to browse the first pages of results proposed by the service (typically, the first two), the identification of actual PEs entails assessing the pertinence of all news retrieved by GN in response to a query. As the service returns hundreds of results pages, each of which contains dozens of news items that need to be opened in new web pages, the identification of relevant news stories becomes extremely challenging. In this context, electronic search strategies become even more crucial for identifying pertinent events, as does the identification of timeframes for the investigation (Maney and Oliver 2001).

Moreover, while it is acknowledged that electronic archives also do not contain all possible PEs on an issue (ibid., p. 136), the wide variety of sources crawled and the global scale of GN make any attempt to triangulate sources virtually unmanageable. Consequently, it is impossible to estimate how many events are not indexed within GN and, therefore, to assess the actual representativeness of the selected pool of events.

Finally, the specific materiality of GN introduces unprecedented sources of bias. Most notably, GN does not provide a neutral platform for research activities (Rogers 2013). Indeed, GN functions in highly personalised ways – arranging and proposing results depending on users' preferences and browsing history. In this sense, GN differs from other

electronic databases that have previously been employed to perform PEAs (e.g., digital newspaper archives), as it actively intervenes in the research process by allowing researchers with different starting points to perform their tasks.

In order to exploit the potentialities of GN while minimising the shortcomings connected to its use, we identified PEs in the three countries through a multi-layered research strategy. First, to grasp the broader context of the refugee crisis above and beyond the sole 'long summer of migration', we set our observation period from January 2015 to March 2016. Within this fifteen-month time-span, we further identified what could be called 'moments of issue salience' – that is, moments in which there seems to be more interest in the refugee crisis and, more broadly, in the issue of migration. To do so, we employed Google Trends – a Google service which, on the basis of a representative random sample of user searches, allows an exploration of how public interest on a specific topic has unfolded over time.[2] On this platform, we searched for the keywords *migrants* and *refugees* translated by native speakers in Greek, Spanish, and Italian and singled out the so-called 'spikes' – that is, moments in which online searches for these keywords were more frequent than usual. When a spike in search volume was found in a specific week, we considered the whole month as a moment of issue salience and searched on GN for news published online during that month.[3]

To avoid the biasing effects of service personalisation, we accessed GN through a clear research browser and logged out from any Google account (DMI 2015). News were searched through a 'generic event descriptor' (Maney and Oliver 2001, p. 138) in the form of a Boolean search – that is, *(migrant OR refugee) AND protest*. The query was translated into Greek, Spanish, and Italian and used to retrieve news items that were eventually deemed pertinent if they showed any of the three terms either in the news headline, caption, or short preview, and if the news referred to a protest event that occurred on the national

Greek, Spanish, or Italian territory.[4] Pertinent news items were saved and stored offline to be read, classified in relation to PEs, and codified according to the codebook.[5] Ultimately, we obtained a dataset of PEs that occurred in various points in time in the three countries.[6] Although this pool of events cannot be deemed complete or representative, it does capture a range of PEs on migration and refugee issues that have certainly entered public debate and catalysed public attention.

To elaborate on the configuration of the protest fields in Greece, Spain, and Italy, we search for similarities and differences amongst the three contexts, looking at some key features of PEs that are indicative of the main analytical dimensions explored by this volume:

i. the different numbers of protest episodes and their different reach, in order to explore the extent to which different *political opportunities* have been seized by either pro- or anti-immigration activism;
ii. the issues at the core of the protest, to investigate the *thematic components* around which opposition, solidarity, and resistance have been organised;
iii. the type of actors involved in contentious episodes, in order to elaborate on the aspect of the *networked nature of the struggle*;
iv. the type of actions supporting contentious episodes and the targets opposed through protest, to shed light on the variety of *protest repertoires* that fed opposition to and solidarity for refugees but also sustained protest actions organised by refugees themselves.

Seizing different opportunities: features and contents of the pro- and anti-immigration protests in the three fields

With regard to the different numbers of protest episodes and their reach, a first interesting

element is the fact that in Italy, levels of conflict on the issues of refugees and migration seem to have been higher than in the other countries (Figure 11.1). Here, the fact that both radical Right and Left parties are sitting in the opposition in the parliamentary arena seems to have triggered contentious actions in the protest field, as 123 PEs related to the refugee crisis took place over the three moments of salience we identified, with a mean of 41 for each spike month. In Greece, where three moments of salience were also identified, 56 protest episodes were found, with a mean of about 19 per spike month. Finally, in Spain, only 15 protests occurred in the only moment of salience we could identify.

Not only did the three protest fields differ in relation to the number of protest episodes they hosted but, more importantly, they are characterised by different thematic orientations. Indeed, amongst the 123 events that occurred in Italy, 64 protests had a pro-immigrant frame, while 59 were against immigrants, refugees, or reception policies. Conversely, in Greece, 49 of 56 PEs were pro-refugee, while in Spain no single protest event adopted a hostility frame against refugees or migrants (Figure 11.1). Moreover, while in Greece the few anti-immigration protests aimed mainly at criticising the perceived policy openness toward migrants and refugees, in Italy as many as 85 per cent (50 out of 59) of protests against migrants and refugees were expressed in a racist or xenophobic way.

Quite indicative in this respect are protests organised by far-right groups in several Italian cities. For example, at the end of April 2015, Forza Nuova organised a local protest in Torino di Sangro (Abruzzo) to repatriate a group of African refugees hosted in one of the city's hotels. Banners were hung denouncing the 'business of hospitality', deemed to benefit refugees with 'food, shelter, clothes, cigarettes, phones, charge cards, recreational and educational activities' at the expense of impoverished Italian citizens.[7] At the same time, CasaPound hung banners stating 'No Al Centro di Accoglienza' (literally, 'No to the reception centre'), opposing the choice to host asylum seekers and refugees in hotel facilities

in various localities in the province of Chieti. Along the same lines, in August 2015, a group of skinheads belonging to Veneto Fronte Skinhead (VFS) moved into a refugee location in Verona and showed a banner reading, 'State property: private for the Italians, public for illegal immigrants'.[8]

On the pro-immigrant side, protests raised claims against general policy directions toward refugees and immigrants that were considered too restrictive – especially with regard to border controls and residence rights. In the immediate aftermath of the agreement between EU and Turkey on the closure of the borders, about 50 protestors engaged in a sit-in at the train lines at the Idomeni camp, in the neutral zone between Greece and Macedonia. The group comprised refugees and immigrants of diverse ages and nationalities who promised to continue the sit-in as well as the occupation of the train line until the borders reopened.[9]

The tragic image of a Syrian child's drowned body lying on a Turkish beach, which shook the world in early September 2015, was a triggering event for protest actions in Spain.[10] Specifically, Alan Kurdi's death pushed hundreds to mobilise following the call of activists linked to the Plataforma de Inmigrantes de Madrid,[11] which spread mostly through social media platforms. In order to oppose European policies in the wake of the refugee crisis and criticise the Spanish government's lack of commitment to respond to the pressing circumstances, participants gathered in front of the European Commission's headquarters in Madrid. On this occasion, participants blamed Europe's lack of solidarity and defined its policies as 'shameful' and 'outrageous', claiming for a change in policy-making driven by 'humanity' and 'solidarity'. Moreover, they criticised the attitude of public authorities (but also of media and of civil society more in general), often referring to migrants and asylum-seekers as 'illegal human-beings', which violates various international treaties.[12]

In Italy, protests against border controls spread across the country in support of the permanent 'no border camp' established in Ventimiglia (Liguria) in June 2015 after a group

of migrants was blocked in their attempt to cross the border with France and climbed on the rocks to protest police eviction.[13] In September 2015, more than 400 people protested against border controls in front of the central train station in the city of Bologna. On that occasion, activists supporting the camp in Ventimiglia participated side by side with migrants, who provided direct testimonies on the difficulties of their lives in Italy. As reported on the website of a local Italian radio station, one of the participants justified on Facebook the choice to gather in front of the train station: 'We are here, few meters from the tracks, those tracks walked upon for hundreds of kilometres, through Serbia and Macedonia by Syrian refugees, from the tracks which, together with the cardboard suitcases, are so prominent in our memory of migrant people.'[14]

Common to the three contexts seems instead to be the reach of protest actions, which tend to be local almost everywhere. However, in Italy, decentralisation is a bit higher than elsewhere: here, 111 events (about 90 per cent of the total) had a district or town scope, whereas only two were organised at the regional level and ten at the national one. A different balance can be found both in Greece and in Spain. Whereas in both contexts a great bulk of events took place locally (respectively, 60 per cent in Greece and 50 per cent in Spain), a meaningful amount of protest also occurred at the regional level (40 per cent of Greek events and 15 per cent of Spanish)[15] and nationally (35 per cent of Spanish PEs).[16] If in general anti-immigrant protests are a bit more local than pro-immigrant ones,[17] the small differences disappear within countries.

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Figure 11.2 reports PE statistics on the types of organisation present in the three protest fields. It is worth noting that about 52 per cent of the total PEs were carried out with

no formal or informal organisation, most of them being relatively spontaneous protests by citizens of by migrants themselves. Unorganised PEs seem to be more associated with a pro-immigration frame in Greece and Italy, especially when migrants themselves protest against the border controls that block their journey toward other countries.[18] Particularly illustrative in this sense is the above-mentioned occupation by refugees at the Idomeni camp train-lines as well as a 'march' staged by a group of about 30 refugees in the surroundings of the Italian city of Udine. After leaving the reception centre in which they were hosted outside Udine, they walked in the rain to reach a bus station, travelling to the Red Cross headquarters in the city centre, where they asked to be updated on their document situation and protested against the municipality's decision to employ them for free during their residence in the reception centre.[19]

On the other hand, political parties, including radical left- or right-wing parties, and sometimes local political institutions, have staged about 25 per cent of the total PEs with a dominant anti-minority frame (about 49 per cent of anti-minority protests and only 13 per cent of the pro-minority ones).[20] In this case, as well, the situation is different within the three protest fields: the presence of political parties is rather low in Greece (11 per cent of PEs), close to the overall mean in the pro-minority protests in Spain (26 per cent), and higher in Italy (32 per cent).[21] It is worth noting that in Italy, institutions and parties are present in only 11 per cent of pro-minority protests and in as many as 54 per cent of the anti-minority ones,[22] while in Greece and in Spain political parties participated in pro-minority protest only.

Emblematic in this respect is the involvement in the anti-immigration front of the Italian Lega Nord, a prominent right-wing party represented in both the national and the European parliaments. Local leaders and supporters of the party have been involved in a series of protests against the reception of migrants within local facilities, claiming that help and support should be given to 'Italians first'. For example, in April 2015, one of these events

was organised in the city centre of Como (in the North of Italy),[23] while in August of the same year, the Lega Nord organised a demonstration and a sit-in in Temù (a town in the northern province of Brescia) that saw the participation of hundreds of citizens who joined in the attempt to 'stop the migrants' invasion'.[24] Most notably, the leader of the Lega Nord, Matteo Salvini (also a member of the EU Parliament), fuelled the anti-immigration front with his almost daily declarations to the media. Particularly during the electoral campaign for the regional election (which took place in May 2015), Matteo Salvini took a stand against the sheltering of refugees – for example, advocating for the razing of a large-scale building where several migrant families were living, and denouncing the complicity of left-wing parties in hosting terrorists on the national territory.[25]

On the contrary, in Greece, radical left parties such as the Communist KKE actively engaged in supporting refugees, both with solidarity actions such as food distribution (as in Idomeni, October 2015)[26] and using protest mobilisation (Thessaloniki, March 2016)[27] directly in the hot-spots. It is worth noting that Syriza, at that time the ruling party, also mobilised to support refugees' rights, criticising the contested EU–Turkey agreement.[28] In Spain, as well, leftist parties actively supported pro-immigration protests, as on September 2015, when Podemos, Izquierda Unida, and the same PSOE protested for increased refugee rights at the European level, both in Madrid and in Barcelona.[29]

Finally, civil society organisations – including trade unions, social movement organisations, and NGOs – staged about 31 per cent of the total PEs, with no statistical differences between pro- and anti-immigration protests: they were present in 29 per cent of the anti-immigration protests and 33 per cent of the pro-immigrant ones. Spain is the only country in which civil society organisations have been dominant in the protest field (twelve of fifteen PEs), while in the other two countries their protests comprise only about 27 per cent of the total PEs.[30] In most of the protest events organised in Spain, in fact, semi-institutional

actors (e.g. NGOs such as CEAR and Amnesty International) that work in the migrant and pro-refugee area have played an important role. Most mobilisation campaigns that unfolded in the country during the refugee crisis were in fact led by broad coalitions and platforms that involved various civil society actors, ranging from unions and NGOs to more autonomous activists and social movement organisations (e.g. Plataforma Somos Migrantes in Andalusia).[31] Alliances of this kind were built not only in the largest cities of the country, but also in other medium-sized and smaller towns. For instance, the pro-human rights local organisation Iruñea ciudad de acogida (Pamplona, city of refugees)[32] launched a call for a demonstration in September 2015 with the support of relevant organisations and NGOs such as the Coordinating Network of NGOs in Navarra, Oxfam, Médicos del Mundo, and SOS Racismo.[33]

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The specificities of the three protest fields also emerge by looking at the forms of protest action used by the protest actors (Figure 11.3). Overall, the action repertoire was dominantly demonstrative: actors expressed their claims mainly by recurring to rallies, strikes, sit-ins, or similar forms of action in 67 per cent of the cases (about 65 per cent in Greece and Italy, and 93 per cent in Spain). Generally speaking, activists engaged in anti-immigration protests were more likely to adopt these repertoires than were those active in pro-immigration protests (74 per cent against 63 per cent). However, several protests were also radical and have resorted to blitz, disruption of public events, occupation of squares, and even violence[34] in 25 per cent of the cases: 20 per cent in Greece, 27 per cent in Italy, and 33 per cent in Spain. These types of actions tended to characterise pro-immigration claims (30 per cent), especially when carried out by immigrants themselves, while anti-immigration

mobilisation has been much less radical (only 15 per cent of its protest was disruptive).[35] An exception is represented by the violent destruction of facilities identified as temporary shelters, a common strategy employed in Italy to oppose the hosting of refugee groups – for example, in the assault on the reception building in Licola, near Napoli, by thirty people armed with bars.[36]

As mentioned above, Italy has also witnessed several protests carried out by groups of refugees. Most of these protests were motivated by the reception conditions they have encountered or by their inability to leave the facilities in which they were located to continue their journey towards their intended destination. In August 2015, for example, refugees hosted at the hotel 'Di Franca Park' in Giugliano, a city in the province of Naples, threw mattresses and small pieces of furniture out of their windows to protest the conditions in which they were kept – particularly the overcrowding of rooms, the poor hygienic conditions, the lack of any medical assistance, and the missed delivery of the daily pocket money – a minimum amount of 2,50€ that the local prefecture was supposed to grant to the facility's hosts. Overall, the protest lasted less than four hours and was resolved after the (pacific) intervention of police forces and mediation by the organisation providing reception. However, the event had a certain resonance within the media discourse, which insisted in particular on the act of 'trashing' the space where refugees were hosted.[37] In the same period, near Milan, a group of approximately 80 refugees blocked a trafficked street near the reception centre to protest the delays of the identification procedures. As police forces intervened, some tensions arose, but no one was injured or arrested. The protest harshened the overall discussion, though, with members of the institutions, particularly in the far right, stressing the illegitimate character of the protest and blaming the Italian government for the 'poor handling' of the migrant situation.[38]

Conventional forms of action, such as petitions, leafleting, press conferences, or

assemblies have been used relatively less frequently (about 18 per cent), with no relevant differences between countries (Figure 11.3). Violence, clashes with police, riots, fire-setting, or similar events have all remained rare: while they account for only 8 per cent of all PEs, they comprise only 4 per cent of Greek, 10 per cent of Italian, and 14 per cent of Spanish events – with no significant difference between pro- and anti-immigration types of protest.

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Finally, protests have predominantly targeted political institutions (85 per cent of the cases in Greece, 92 per cent in Italy and 100 per cent in Spain), with no differences between pro- and anti-immigration protests. Only in Italy have migrants and refugees themselves become the actual targets of the protest, in at least 38 per cent of cases as opposed to about 5 per cent in Greece and Spain. It is worth noting, however, that the level of the institutional targets varies between countries and between types of protest (Figure 11.4). Pro-immigration protests have been much more oriented toward EU or other international institutions than were anti-immigration mobilisations which, consistent with their mainly local nature, were directed mainly towards local (regional or town) institutions. In Spain and in Greece, protests targeted mainly the EU or other international institutions, but while in Spain protests also targeted national governments, Greek protestors directed their claims towards local institutions and their representatives. The configuration of the Italian protest field is atypical in this regard, as the EU and other international institutions have been substantially ignored.

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Discussion and conclusions

In this chapter, by leaning on the concept of protest field, we reconstructed different patterns of actors, frames, repertoires, targets, and interactions that characterised protest dynamics in Greece, Spain, and Italy around the refugee crisis.

Results from our analyses substantially confirm our initial hypotheses that protest fields were shaped by specific domestic political opportunities that somehow bound the strategies of the actors involved. In Spain, a very peculiar geopolitical situation minimised the migration trajectories and resulted in a less contentious field, where civil society actors and their solidarity actions and protests have been substantially unchallenged by counterparts. As reported in Alcalde and Portos' chapter in this book, the immigration issue did not polarise too much in Spain and, as a result, protest on this topic has been very limited, with few protest events staged mainly by trade union, voluntary, and campaign organisations claiming for less restriction and more inclusive policies toward refugees, especially targeting EU institutions.

On the contrary, in Italy different contextual factors combined to shape a highly contentious field. Not only did we find a higher amount of protest on the immigration issue, but we also saw also a conflictual dynamic between pro- and anti-immigration actors. The exposure of the country to the migration trajectories during the refugee crisis has been politicised, albeit not exclusively, by more or less radical right-wing parties and organisations whose activists have been found at the front lines of (allegedly) spontaneous citizens' reactions in particular to refugees and migrants allocation and territorial distribution. At the grassroots level, far right movements and organisations such as Casa Pound and Forza Nuova mobilised wherever a refugee camp or hot-spot was located. However, at the institutional level, the Lega Nord, free from government responsibilities and confronting a centre-left government, both exploited and radicalised the issue by exacerbating citizens' frustration toward top-down and undebated policy measures via media channels.

On the other side of the field, migrant and grassroots organisations have been left alone in mobilising a counter-frame based on inclusion and integration. Our data showed that party mobilisation is significantly associated with an anti-immigration frame, while spontaneous protests with a pro-immigration frame have often remained confined to the solidarity initiatives aimed at providing immediate and longer-term shelter to refugees reaching Italian shores and cities. As the crisis in Italy unfolded in tight connection with the government-led effort to enact a decentralised and yet top-down management of migration flows, it is not surprising that the targets of the protest have been prevalently national and local institutions, deemed simply incapable of governing the crisis and of countering the dominant anti-immigration frame.

Finally, we found the Greek protest field in between these two opposite situations, but a bit closer to Spain in several respects. On the one hand, here the anti-immigration frame received little support from the protest field actors. Even political parties, when they engaged in the field, mobilised for refugees and migrants. On the other hand, EU institutions were the main targets of the protests, especially after the EU–Turkey agreement. Moreover, the national government, which took over solidarity initiatives during rescue and shelter operations, has rarely been targeted, while local institutions, mainly in Athens, have been criticised when they have been perceived as closed toward refugees and migrants. Nonetheless, the Greek protest field resembles the Italian one in one important aspect: in both cases, migrants and refugees have mobilised – sometimes on their own and sometimes side-by-side with grassroots networks and activists on the front lines.

Ultimately, results from the protest event analysis we performed allowed us to highlight several similarities and differences among the three contexts. Certainly, the multi-layered strategy though which we approached Google News as the main repository to identify protest events affects the generalisability of the portrayal that we sketched in this work.

Moreover, a more detailed understanding of the mechanisms that regulated the unfolding of protest dynamics in the three protest fields would definitely benefit from qualitative analyses such as in-depth interviews or document analysis. However, we believe that, read in conjunction with the insights provided by the other chapters in this book, the analysis we performed provides useful insights into the systemic nature of the refugee crisis and offers a first and useful step towards a more genuine understanding of its inherent heterogeneity, dynamism, and complexities.

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Figure 11.1. Protest events in Italy, Greece and Spain (absolute numbers)

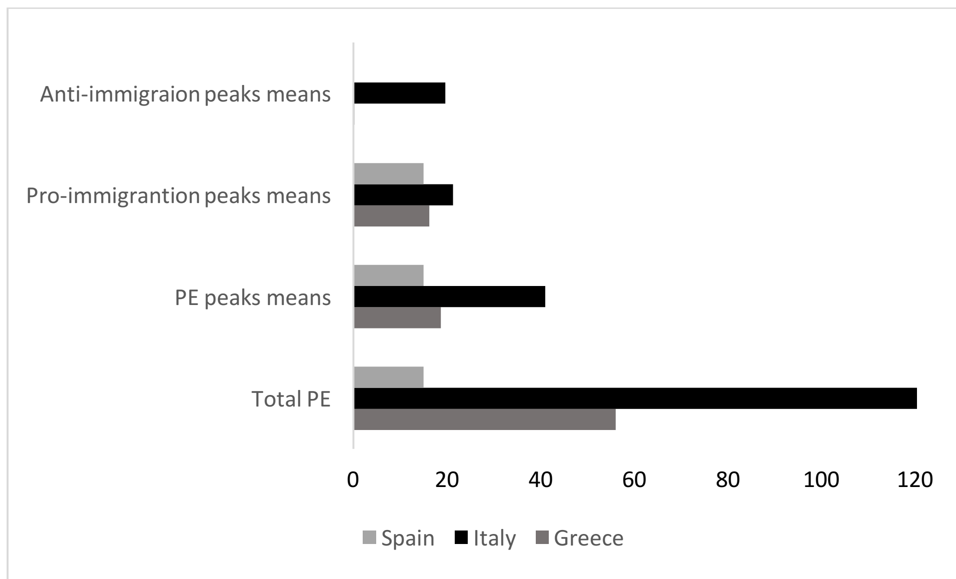


Figure 11.2 Types of organisation by type of protest and country (%)

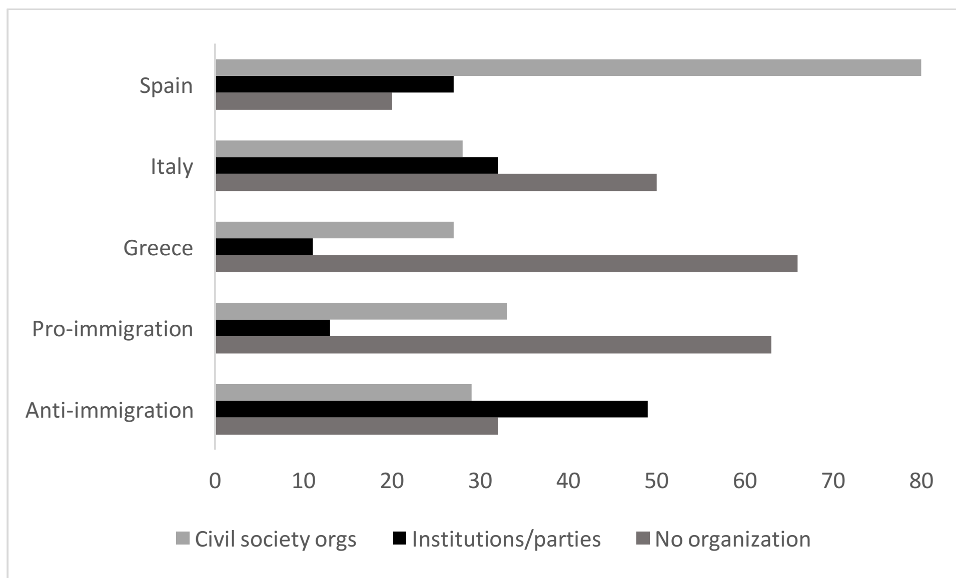


Figure 11.3. Forms of action by type of protest and country (%)

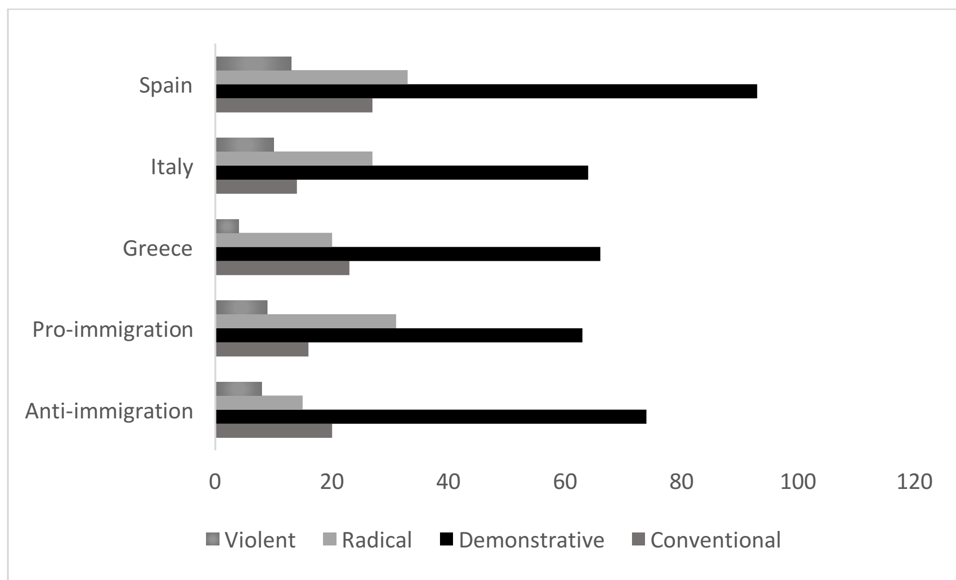
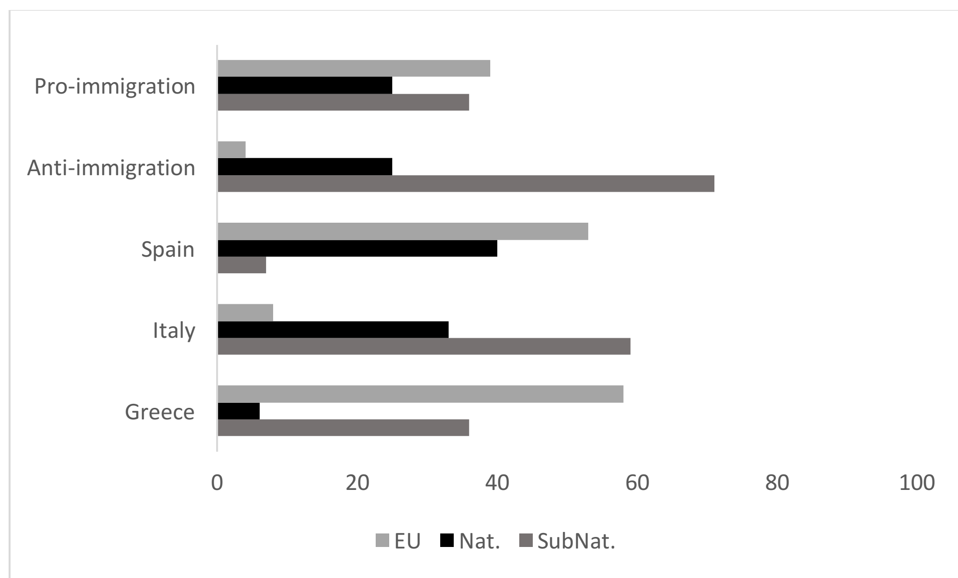


Figure 11.4. Target levels by countries and types of protest (%)



Notes

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[1] This section draws extensively on the chapters on Greece, Spain, and Italy authored respectively by Leonidas Oikonomakis, Javer Alcalde and Martin Portos, Lorenzo Zamponi, and Pietro Castelli Gattinara, to whom we are sincerely grateful.

[2] https://trends.google.com/trends/explore

[3] For Greece, we found three spikes (i.e., August and October 2015, and March 2016); for Spain, we found one (September 2015); in Italy, we found three (April, August, and September 2015). Notice that in June 2017, Google News substantially changed its interface (see https://www.blog.google/topics/journalism-news/redesigning-google-news-everyone/), limiting the ability to search news within specific time-spans.

[4] To circumvent the problems derived from the shutting down of GN España (Google 2015), we searched for Spanish news starting from the Spanish homepage of the search engine and using the tab 'Noticias'.

[5] The codebook is available upon request to the authors.

[6] We are grateful to Leoinidas Oikonomakis and Martin Portos for their implementation of the research strategy in Greek and Spanish. We are also grateful to Paola Imperatore and Luca Scollo, who collected and codified part of the PEs for Italy. The whole process of the research strategy implementation was prepared by training sessions and followed by our constant supervision.

[7] Original article available at http://www.primadanoi.it/news/cronaca/558969/Profughi-a-Torino-di-Sangro-.html.

[8] Original article available at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/macedonia/12019712/Clashes-between-migrants-and-police-break-out-on-the-Greek-Macedonian-border.html.

[9] http://www.protothema.gr/greece/article/563733/eidomeni-prosfuges-prospathisan-na-autopurpolithoun/.

[10] Original article available at http://www.huffingtonpost.es/2015/09/02/ninos-turquia-refugiados_n_8077636.html.

[11] See the Facebook page of the Plataforma at https://www.facebook.com/Plataforma-de-Inmigrantes-de-Madrid-143193942511267/.

[12] Original article available at http://www.eldiario.es/desalambre/Centenares-personas-refugiados-Espana-ilegalidad_0_427308222.html.

[13] See the Presidio Permanente No Borders – Ventimiglia Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/pg/Presidio-Permanente-No-Borders-Ventimiglia 782827925168723/about/?ref=page_internal.

[14] Original article available at http://www.radiocittadelcapo.it/archives/bologna-no-borders-presidio-ventimiglia-164551/.

[15] The regional level of administration is different in the three countries, although it always refers to an administrative level located between the town and the national level. In Greece, the term used to define this level can be translated as 'province', while in Spain and in Italy it should be read as 'region'.

[16] The Phi of the table crossing countries and level of protest action is .58 (significant at .001 level).

[17] The Phi of the table crossing level of protest and type of protest (pro and anti-immigration) is .19 (significant at .05 level). Spain is excluded, as no anti-immigration protest has been reported there.

[18] The Phi of the cross-tabulation between the absence/presence of an organisation and the type of protest (pro and anti-immigrant) is .29 (significant at .001 level).

[19] Original article available at

http://www.ilgazzettino.it/nordest/udine/profughi_marcia_palmanova_protesta_prefetto_udine-1243700.html.

[20] The Phi of the cross-tabulation between the absence/presence of institutions and parties in PE and the type of protest (pro or anti-minority) is -.38 (significant at .001 level).

[21] The Phi of the cross-tabulation between countries and absence/presence of institutions and parties is .22 (significant at .01 level).

[22] In Italy, the Phi of the cross-tabulation between type of protest (pro or anti-minority) and the absence/presence of institutions and parties in the migration protest field is -.47 (significant at .001 level)

[23] Original article at http://www.laprovinciadicomo.it/stories/Cronaca/il-carroccio-protesta-in-via-borgovico-no-ai-profughi-in-caserma_1128209_11/.

[24] Original article available at http://www.bresciatoday.it/cronaca/profughi-solidarieta-a-san-colombano-di-collio-tensione-anti-accoglienza-a-temu.html.

[25] Original article available at http://www.imolaoggi.it/2015/04/27/hotel-house-occupato-da-quasi-2000-immigrati-salvini-questo-e-il-terzo-mondo/.

[26] Original article available at http://www.avgi.gr/article/10842/5945069/antiphasistike-synkentrose-apopse-ste-lesbo-anepithymete-e-chryse-auge-sto-ne.

[27] Original article available at http://www.902.gr/eidisi/ergatiki-taxi/77684/eidomeni-kilkis-maziki-apostoli-me-eidi-protis-anagkis-stoys-prosfyges.

[28] Original article available at http://www.avgi.gr/article/10842/5945069/antiphasistike-synkentrose-apopse-ste-lesbo-anepithymete-e-chryse-auge-sto-ne.

[29] Original article available at http://www.rtve.es/noticias/20150912/toda-europa-sale-calle-solidaridad-refugiados/1217341.shtml.

[30] The Phi of the cross-tabulation between countries and the absence/presence of civil society organisations in the protest field is .30 (significant at .001 level).

[31] For more information, see http://www.observatoriodesigualdadandalucia.org/iniciativas/plataforma-somos-migrantes.

[32] For more information, see https://erabaki.pamplona.es/processes/9/f/35/proposals/31?feature_id=35&locale=es&participatory_process_id=9.

[33] Original article available at http://www.eldiario.es/norte/navarra/ultima_hora/manifestacion-Pamplona-refugiados-inaccion-instituciones_0_454604699.html.

[34] Violent actions included acts of vandalism, fire-setting, and clashes with the police. Those forms of action are included in what we qualify as disruptive: they account for 8 per cent of the total PEs, about 3 per cent in Greece, 10 per cent in Italy, and 13 per cent in Spain.

[35] This is the only statistically relevant difference found on the forms of action: the Phi is .17 (significant at .05 level).

[36] Original article available at http://corrieredelmezzogiorno.corriere.it/napoli/cronaca/15_aprile_28/con-spranghe-contro-migranti-devastato-centro-accoglienza-1e19cf80-ed72-11e4-8c01-3d3dc911e641.shtml.

[37] On this episode, see, for example, http://www.ilmessaggero.it/primopiano/cronaca/immigranti_devastano_hotel_rivolta_soldi-1183911.html; https://www.salernonotizie.it/2015/08/07/immigrati-devastano-hotel-in-campania-dateci-soldi-e-condizioni-migliori/;.

[38] Original article available at http://www.lastampa.it/2015/08/24/italia/cronache/protesta-dei-migranti-traffico-in-tilt-verso-milano-MZ1FBZu1s6cKTxjeObsdKK/pagina.html.