Institutionalisation of the Polish extreme right[1]

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Introduction

Civil society is considered an important element of the modern democratic order and is expected to fill the space between the state, the market and the private sphere. Such a normative understanding of civil society assumes that civic activism builds social capital, trust and shared values, which are then transferred into the political realm and help hold society together (Putnam et al. 1994). However, there are social movements that try to occupy this particular sphere, yet deviate from the ideal of civic-minded organisations that support and sustain democratic order. The main feature of such movements is the acceptance of violence as a means of political struggle and an anti-state and anti-egalitarian ideology. The extreme-right movement, with its antidemocratic and racist policies, is an important part of so-called "uncivil society".

Laurence Whitehead (1997) defines uncivil society as a sphere populated by actors that (1) lack commitment to act within the constraints of legal or established rules, and (2) lack the spirit of civility, "civic responsibilities" or "civic-mindedness". Yet the boundaries between "civil" and "uncivil" societies are neither clear nor definite, especially in newly born and struggling democracies. According to Cas Mudde, "uncivil movements and contentious politics should be included in the study of civil society (in post-communist Europe)" (Mudde 2003: 164). The story of the extreme right movement in Poland confirms Mudde's doubts over the necessity of a strict delineation between two visions of civil society. It is not reasonable to dismiss the extreme right as an actor occupying only the dangerous margins, as is often the case in media discussions. In the course of its activity, the movement has managed to shift from the margins it occupied after the transformation and has claimed a place at the very heart of the public sphere: in 2001 its representatives have held elected positions in parliament, while its rank and file activists, skinheads and hooligans have been considered defenders of national values and tradition by a large part of Polish society. Of course, the extreme right invariably adheres to definitional traits of the uncivil society (Piotrowski 2009: 179), yet its repertoire of action changes and, as this paper

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illustrates, under favourable conditions the movement can blend into the civil society. In this way, the movement is able to transcend the boundaries between these two spheres. I argue that this happens in the process of the institutionalisation of the movement's repertoire of action.

In sociology *institutionalisation* refers to the general process of the embedding of a given organisation into a wider social environment, social system or society as a whole. The term is also used to describe the creation or foundation of governmental institutions or specific bodies responsible for overseeing or implementing policy. In the sociology of social movements, the notion of institutionalisation is used to highlight a distinction between socially accepted and legal forms of collective actions and those that are more contentious and violent. Institutionalisation means that conventional forms become prevalent in the repertoire of a given movement. Scholars claim that unconventional forms of protest are growing less prevalent in the repertoires of social movements. For example, Soule and Earl (2005) find that the number of protests that use contentious tactics declined from the early 1960s to the late 1980s in the USA, while McAdam notes the virtual disappearance of violent protest in Chicago after the 1970s (McAdam, Sampson, Weffer, and MacIndoe 2005). Everett (1992) finds evidence of a shift in tactical repertoire towards lower risk activities over a similar time period. This is closely related to the argument that there has been an increase in the number of social movements that aim to support the "public interest" through the use of institutional means (Minkoff 1994; Walker 1991). Some argue that the decline in confrontational collective action is associated with the increasing organisational complexity and institutional involvement of social movements (Piven and Cloward 1977; Staggenborg 1988).

In the case of extreme right movements the very presence of an extreme right party in the parliamentary arena could be considered institutional involvement. In such a situation the movement's repertoire of contention of is expected to be much more conventional (i.e. less violent) than in a situation when the movement does participate in institutional politics and can only act in an extra-parliamentary arena. The trajectories of extreme right parties vary strongly across different countries. For example, while the French Front National gained the support of 15.3% of the electorate in 1997, triumphed over the Socialist Party in the first round of the presidential elections in 2002, and then, in 2007, its leader came fourth in the presidential election, it did not gain any seats in the parliamentary elections of the same year. At the same time, the British National Party remains steadfastly at the margins of politics. Koopmans et al. (2005) show that the important factor that fosters the use of a more conventional repertoire of action is the presence of an extreme right party within the established political system. The French example shows that the lowest number of confrontational protests occurred in France during the years when the National Front occupied seats in the parliament. On the contrary, the highest amount of racist violence has been recorded in Germany, which does not have an established extreme right party (Koopmans et al. 2005: 197). I argue that similar phenomena can be observed in the case of the Polish extreme right movement.

My first hypothesis states: an extreme right political movement that operates in the

presence of a strong extreme right political party is more likely to reduce its amount of extra-parliamentary mobilisation and choose moderate types of action, but the overall level of mobilisation is expected to be higher than in other periods because of a higher degree of visibility and legitimacy of extreme right claims in the public sphere.

My second hypothesis states: when there is no favorable context for the emergence or political presence of a strong extreme right political party, the level of extra-parliamentary confrontational and violent actions is expected to be relatively higher and the overall level of mobilisation is expected to be lower than in the situation of institutionalisation.

The extreme right in Poland

What is the extreme right? Most definitions define the movement as nationalist, xenophobic and promoting antidemocratic authoritarianism (Carter 2005). A comparative study by Wimmer (2002) shows that extreme right ideology consists of a political and ethnic component, i.e. the devotion to the idea of a sovereign nation state, ethnic exclusivity and cultural homogenity. Koopmans and Statham (2005) also stress the ethnocultural idea of citizenship in the extreme right's words and actions. Other authors stress the movement's "all or nothing", radical stance (Caiani, Parenti 2013). Perhaps the common denominator for all actors who belong to the category of the extreme right is their commitment to an ideology of an intrinsic inequality among humans on the one hand, and the acceptance of violence as a mean of political expression on the other (Eatwell 1996). Manuela Caiani et al. (2012: 6) state: "Beyond ideology, the extreme right has also been defined by its preference for disruptive or even violent forms of action. Anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian frames have normally been accompanied by aggressive behavior towards political opponents as well as ethnic, religious, or gender minorities". I find this general definition especially accurate and apt for the aims of this article, yet it should be complemented with a note on the specificity of the context within which an extreme right grouping operates.

Due to the virtual absence of ethnic minorities or immigrants in Poland, the extreme right here is forced to construct its enemy using different tactics to those used in Western European countries. Its attitude towards other nationalities is based on historical sentiment rather than current affairs, as in the case with traditional anti-Semitism or Germanophobia. Its major political claims refer to the notion of a traditional national identity defined by Catholicism, the Polish language and Polish ethnicity. In the early nineties one of the central elements of Polish extreme right ideology was anti-Semitism (Pankowski 2010: 3). Later on, questions of access to the European Union and a fight against sexual minorities have become more important. What defines the Polish extreme right as a relatively coherent political milieu is its constant reference to the nationalist programs and organisations of the inter-war period (Lipiński 2013: 5). The Polish extreme right also emphasises its attachment to traditional values, such as the traditional family and Catholicism.

What extreme right movements in the West and the East have in common is a desire for a

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culturally and ethnically homogeneous society. According to Statham (1997), the extreme right conveys an ethnocultural conception of national identity. By "the extreme right movement" he means strategic interventions, either verbal or nonverbal, in the public domain "by groups who react to and mobilize against the presence of migrants and ethnic groups, demanding that the state enforce measures that exclude such groups from social, political and cultural rights" (Statham 1997: 14). In the case of the Polish radical right this definition has to be slightly modified. By "the extreme (or radical) right" I understand political groups who mobilise around the task of preserving "national identity" (defined by ethnicity, religion and language), demanding that the state enforce measures that support this vision of "national identity" and oppose competing visions, especially the idea of the nation as a political and democratic civic community (see: Koopmans et al. 2005: 181).

In this article I use the terms "extreme right" and "radical right" interchangeably. Some authors (Eatwell 2004: 7; Pankowski 2010: 4) argue that the two are analytically separate, yet in the light of my study they only denote two different strategies of acting employed by the one movement. Below, I show that the choice between the conventional repertoire of political contention (those actions said to be preferred by the radical right, according to Eatwell) and a confrontational and violent repertoire (attributed to the extreme right) is associated with institutionalisation.

Data and methodology

In order to test my hypotheses I have created a dataset of extreme right activities in Poland covering the last twenty-four years (1990-2013). The sociological method of recording protest events from the daily press I have chosen for the job is called Protest Event Analysis (PEA). The main unit of analysis in PEA is a single protest event mentioned by the daily newspapers. Thus, PEA is a method that allows for the quantification of detailed properties of protests (McCarty et al. 1996). It informs a researcher about changes in the forms of action and targets, and helps to identify periods of intensification or decrease in frequency of confrontational protests and other similar phenomena. Despite some reservations, and its many weaknesses, the newspapers-based analysis allows us to present, if not the real number of protests, at least the associations among specific variables of forms of protest events, as well as much more general trends (Franzosi 1987; McCarthy et al. 1996). For the analysed period of time I used articles published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* and the Polish Press Agency – the largest and most reliable press agency in Poland. I have used a standardised codebook and coded all protest events that fit my operational definition of an extreme right protest event. As a result, a database consisting of a total of 962 recorded events has been created. Protest events were afterwards divided into three temporal groups identified on the basis of significant similarities and differences between their characteristics: the first phase of mobilisation (1990-1999) which consists of 293 events, the second phase of mobilisation (2000-2005) with 336 events, and the third phase (2006-2013) with 333 events.

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Regarding the operational criteria used for the dataset, three aspects of a protest event (unit of analysis) are important. All of these aspects were variables for coding. The first aspect concerns the repertoire of the actions of a movement. Since I were interested in all forms of Polish extreme right actions, the spectrum of codes ranged on a scale from the most violent actions to the most moderate forms. These repertoires are as follows: (1) **confrontational actions** (usually illegal and violent) against people considered as enemies, or actions whose aim is to disrupt official meetings or opponents' demonstrations; (2) **demonstrative actions** (mostly legal, or illegal but non-violent demonstrations, pickets, marches, occupations of buildings etc.): and (3) **conventional actions** (such as press conferences, lawsuits, letters, and campaigns, including those in the parliamentary arena). This type of action is considered to be the most moderate form of repertoire. The last type of action is (4) **expressive actions**. This type is a kind of residual category, situated beyond the scale of confrontational-conventional action. It contains legal actions directed at extreme right activists themselves, in order to reinvigorate in-group cohesion and identity; activists usually come together during national holidays, and during these events they do not target any other group considered an enemy, but focus mainly on themselves. Conventions, conferences, concerts, festivals and any other types of event closed to the wider public are a good example of this type of activity.

The second aspect applies to the thematic focus of the covered events. My codes encompass acts performed by extreme right activists directed at any targets and in any field of issue: (1) **politicians** is a code concerning political actors (persons or political organisations) who appear in the parliamentary arena; (2) **the socio-economic** code includes all issues concerning the living conditions of the Polish people: privatisation, loss of jobs, taxation, the sale of national assets to foreigners etc.; (3) **leftists** includes organisations and individuals on the extra-parliamentary level targeted by the extreme right (anarchists, socialists, punk subculture) and also public figures (e.g. public intellectuals, leftist writers etc.); (4) **the ethnic minorities; foreigners** code refers to all people considered by the extreme right as foreign or racially inferior (Roma, black people and also those from other countries, like Germans and Jews); (5) **the sexual minorities** code refers to homosexuals (gays and lesbians) as well as the political and cultural organisations that defend LGBT rights or support same-sex relationships (feminist movements, human rights activists who defend the rights of sexual minorities etc.); (6) **the international politics** code refers to international organisations, foreign institutions (e.g. the European Union, NATO etc.), embassies of foreign countries targeted by the extreme right movement; (7) in the category **traditional values and us** I included all the targets and issues related to the celebration of national holidays, various national anniversaries, conventions dedicated to the celebration of extreme right organisations' historical moments etc.; this category also includes acting in defense of the values considered "purely Polish" (e.g. protecting the lives of "unborn children"). Most of the events belonging to this category of targets correlate with the category of expressive actions.

Results

Figure 1 depicts the distribution of Polish extreme right protest events between 1990-2013. The majority of events coded in the considered period consisted mostly of street demonstrations (35.1%) and confrontational actions (33.2%). More than a quarter of the events were conventional (26.5%). Very few were directed at strengthening the identity of the movement (expressive actions: 5.2%). However, the fact that the movement remains faithful to its general strategy, which is expressed in terms of the choice of confrontational and demonstrative actions, does not tell the whole story. The difference lies in the ratio of specific actions against specific targets in specific periods of time.
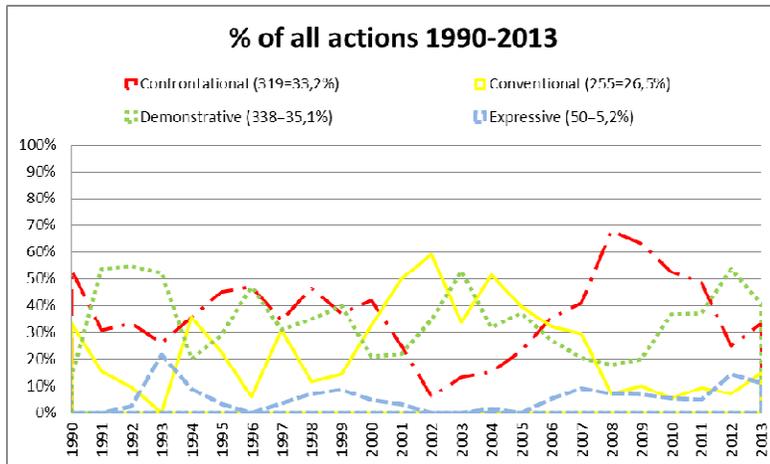

Figure 1.1. The proportion of all types of actions in the total number of events (N=962)

The extreme right can and do employ both a "civil" and "uncivil" repertoire of actions and some of these activities may prevail in given periods. There is a relative reduction in the proportion of confrontational events in the years 2000–2007. In 2000 and 2001, the percentage of confrontational events stayed at levels comparable to the previous years (38.6% of all events between 1990 and 1999 were confrontational and 18.4% were conventional), yet just after the extreme right party the League of Polish Families (*Liga Polskich Rodzin* – hereafter LPR) entered parliament, the share of violence significantly reduced. The proportions were reversed when compared to the previous period: 23.9% of actions were confrontational and 40.8% were conventional (see Figure 1.2). During the period of LPR's participation in power, extreme right organisations focused on claim-making through by legal institutions, and had, at least formally, cut ties with the skinheads responsible for the majority of violent acts committed in this and in the previous period.

In the first phase, between 1990 and 1999, the extreme right gathered around one major political movement – *The Polish National Community* (*Polska Wspólnota Narodowa* – hereafter PWN). PWN was registered as an official political party, yet its activities and organisational structures resembled a youth gang consisting of skinheads. This is why it should not be treated as a political party proper, but rather as a semi-formal political movement. PWN neither kept a record

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of its members, nor ran regular enlistment. People appearing or speaking during its demonstrations were often not officially affiliated with PWN and a great number of press reports claimed that the culprits of beatings or murders were merely "sympathisers" of the party. The movement was composed mainly from skinhead subculture, loosely related to the core of the PWN activists. Characteristically, the dominant political movement of the early transformation period was inspired by doctrines hostile to the Catholic tradition. PWN worked on the development of Pan-Slavism, which is mostly viewed as a pagan and racist ideology. This is the likely cause of their failure to win an important place in political discourse, as the general society was Catholic and Western-oriented.

My analysis shows that between 1990 and 1999 the magnitude of mobilisation was on average 29.3 events per year, but with a high standard deviation (11.2), which means that the number of events per year tends to be spread out over a wide range of values. The movement's actions took the form of demonstrations featuring acts of violence in most cases. This violence became a way to communicate with the external world. In the years 1990-1999, movement's sympathisers and skinheads killed 20 people and 153 were injured. The majority of the confrontational actions organised by the political movement targeted ethnic minorities and leftists (42 events – 48.3% of confrontational actions, and 38 events – 43.7% of confrontational actions respectively). Such actions were almost never aimed at politicians in parliament, however. Demonstrative actions were mostly directed at ethnic minorities and international institutions (such as the EU and NATO) whereas, the relatively infrequent expressive actions (18 events) concentrated on traditional values and political identities.

As Andrews and Edwards (2005) stress, newly emerged or rebuilt movements are often characterised by an inability to form long-lasting alliances, a weak identification of proper political targets and a narrow repertoire. The case of the Polish extreme right in the first decade after the transformation confirms this view. The overall magnitude of protest increased after 1990. The transition of regimes, the transfer of political power, and the introduction of dramatic economic reforms produced a high level of popular mobilisation and contentious politics. Ekiert and Kubik (1998: 555) reported 1475 protest events during the years 1989-1993, which amounted to a total of 14,881 days. Poland turns out to have been the most contentious state among all Central Eastern European states at that time, but the Polish extreme right political movement only rarely raised socio-economic issues (5% of all actions in this period).

The breakthrough for the movement came with the parliamentary elections in 2001. The elections opened a new phase in the histories of two extreme right organisations. One of these organisations was the aforementioned *League of Polish Families* political party. LPR was founded in 2001 as a coalition of various conservative and nationalist organisations and in the very same year it managed to win 38 seats in the Polish parliament. It was formally supported by the *All-Polish Youth* (*Młodzież Wszechpolska* – hereafter MW), a political movement grouping together youth and aspiring nationalist politicians. In post-war communist Poland, the organisation was

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banned. A revival came, as it did for other nationalistic groups, in post-communist Poland. From the early 1990s, MW portrayed itself as a national organisation in the spirit of the politics of patriotism. One of the main tasks of the newly reformed organisation was the building of central and regional structures, but in its first period of activity MW failed to gain much political sympathy. With the advent of the 21st century, the movement managed to change its image by distancing itself from negative connotations, such as open ties with the skinhead subculture and anti-Semitic ideology. For MW and LPR, the reinvigoration of the nationalist tradition from the inter-war period, as well as fundamentalist Catholicism, served as a vehicle that enabled them to enter mainstream political discourse.

MW and LPR accounted for almost all the extreme right events' organised in this period: LPR focused on conventional actions, while MW organised demonstrative as well as conventional actions. The magnitude of mobilisation, as predicted in the first hypothesis, increased. The number of events was on average 56.1 events per year, but, as in the previous period, this featured high standard deviation (16.0). The proportion of conventional events to confrontational events is presented in Figure 1.2. The specific period of time is marked by two vertical bars.
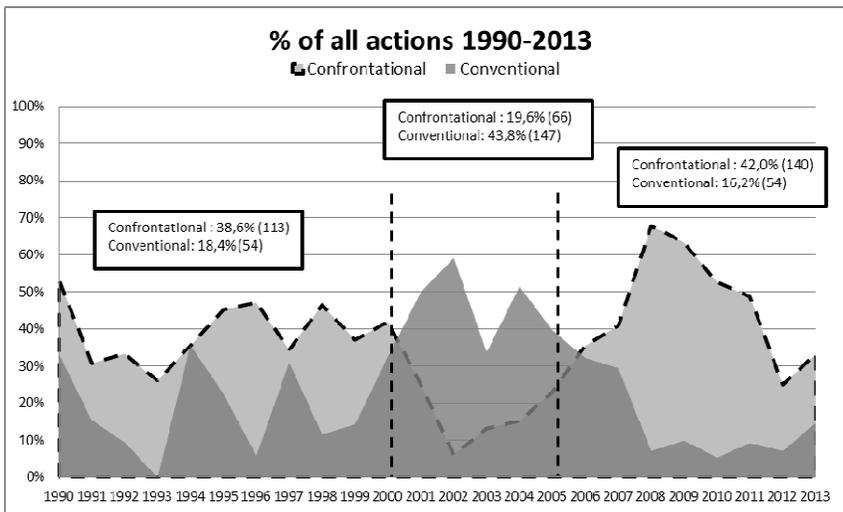

Figure 1.2. The proportion of conventional and confrontational types of actions divided into three periods (frequency of events in parentheses) (N=962).

In comparison to the first period of mobilisation, in this period conventional actions were predominant, as the parliamentary party employed mainly legal means of political struggle and discouraged confrontational (violent) interventions. Having a parliamentary party on its side allowed the extreme right to employ conventional instruments of protest: appeals, conferences, open letters, legislative initiatives and lawsuits. More than half of all events in the category "actor: political party – type of action: conventional action" concentrated on politicians in parliament. This is a consequence of the concentration of almost all episodes involving confrontation in the category "actor: subculture – target: sexual minorities and ethnic minorities, foreigners". Skinhead subculture and its actions had been displaced beyond the field of permissible political actions and the

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proportion of violent actions was significantly reduced.

LPR is individually responsible for just one confrontational event during this period. When MW and LPR participated together in protest events confrontations occurred only 3 times. Members of the skinhead subculture were responsible for 32 confrontational actions and MW, with some other extra-parliamentary organisations, for 24 confrontational actions. This is proof of the process of institutionalisation taking place: the movement is organised around certain formal institutions (i.e. a political party) and adopts an appropriate repertoire. Actions associated with the previous phase of marginalisation are actively discouraged by dedicated activists, as they could do more harm than good to the institutionalised movement.

In this phase of mobilisation, the extreme right distanced itself not only from violence, but also from issues and targets that could be regarded as most controversial. LPR seldom, if ever, openly (not counting the verbal attacks frequently presented in the party propaganda) confronted or demonstrated against sexual and ethnic minorities. The party made an effort to break any associations with neo-Nazism, fascism or skinhead subculture. Its aims were as legitimate as possible, and did not involve breaking the law. More controversial issues or actions were left for the political movement (MW) to tackle. "Jews" left the group of enemies targeted by the extreme right in this period, but it was clear that sexual minorities had taken their place.

At the beginning of the third of the analysed periods, the LPR party dissolved amid political scandals and it was left divided into several factions. After the parliamentary elections of 2007, which President Lech Kaczynski called early (only two years after the 2005 elections) LPR lost all its 34 seats and the biggest right wing party, *Law and Justice* (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS), obtained a virtual hegemony on the right wing of the political scene. As well as MW, which is active to this day, two organisations, the *National Radical Camp* (Obóz Narodowo Radykalny – hereafter ONR) and the *National Rebirth of Poland* (Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski – hereafter NOP), were reactivated on the extra-parliamentary level. The NOP is the only organisation in Poland that openly promotes racist and neo-fascist ideology. It is a member of several extreme-right international organisations, such as International Third Position and the European National Front. The MW and ONR political movements distance themselves from such associations and instead manifest their ties with traditional inter-war nationalist ideology. In 2012 the nationalist part of the movement tried to unite and attempted a return to parliamentary politics. *The National Movement* (Ruch Narodowy – hereafter RN) – an umbrella organisation and party – was formed by the coalition of MW, ONR and the conservative-libertarian *Real Politics Union* (Unia Polityki Realnej – UPR).

The results of my study offer strong support for the argument about the role of political parties in institutionalising movements' actions. In the years 2006 through 2013, political organisations such as MW and ONR employed a demonstrative repertoire in 33.3% of actions (111 events), and a confrontational one in 42.0% of actions (140 events). A total of 84% (21 events) of the political parties' actions (RN and LPR) were conventional. At the same time, the overall

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frequency of conventional actions decreased from 43.8% (147 events) in the second phase to only 16.2% (54 events) in this third phase, and the number of expressive events rose from 4 to 28.

I obtained results almost similar to those presented in the first period of mobilisation, except for the magnitude of protest. Here, my findings are contradictory to my predictions. The magnitude of mobilisation was on average 41.5 events per year, with a high standard deviation (13.3). In contrast to the model of mobilisation in the first period, they are performed not by independent skinheads, but mainly by the members of political organisations. What is new in this phase is the increasing number of confrontational actions directed at sexual minorities. The number of such acts rose, with a peak between 2008 and 2010, when they comprised more than two-thirds of all events (see Figure 1.2). These results coincide with demonstrations by sexual minorities, LGBT rights movements and feminist organisations, against which the extreme-right movement organised counter-demonstrations.

Conclusion

Some scholars argue that protest is a traditional strategy of political participation used by left wing actors, one which articulate goals that adhere to ideal of a civil society (Dalton 2002). While protests in Western Europe and the United States have been historically associated with progressive social forces, recent evidence suggests that protest activities are drawing activists from across the political spectrum. The surge of right wing mobilisation is evidence for this thesis. Soule and Earl state (2005: 357): "In the 1960-65 period, just over 31% of right wing events drew between 10 and 99 people, while in the 1980-85 period, this figure was 28%. On the other end of the size spectrum, in the 1960-65 period, 1.4% of right wing events drew 10,000 or more people, while in 1986 3% of right wing events were this massive." More recent qualitative data highlights the reinvigoration of different (neo)conservative and extreme movements, such as the anti-abortion movement (Blanchard 1994), the extreme right in Germany (Koopmans and Olzak 2004), the Tea Party (McVeigh 2014) and white power militants in the United States (Dobratz and Waldner 2012).

My research is the first quantitative attempt to analyse the trajectory of the mobilisation of the Polish extreme right. I have observed that in a favourable socio-political environment the movement was able to not only institutionalize its structures (create a political party), but also institutionalise its repertoire of contention (favour conventional forms of action). As hypothesised, the average percentage share of conventional events rose in the second period of mobilisation. Contrary to my expectations, I have observed high standard deviation in the number of protests in each period of my study. The number of events per year tends to spread out over a wide range of values, which suggests that the movement follows a cyclical pattern of mobilisation rather than linear growth. At the beginning of an extreme right mobilisation cycle, activists experience a rapid radicalisation as they attract sympathisers deeply dedicated to a radical ideology and recruit new members to their cause. Then, growing movement organisations are forced to compete over the resources available in their social niche. Increasing institutionalisation deters radical supporters,

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and this leads to an eventual contraction and the beginning of a new mobilisation cycle.

The extreme right movement is stable in its anti-systemic attitude toward politicians from mainstream political parties and its actions are also always directed against different minorities, be they ethnic or sexual. This way, the movement clearly belongs to the "uncivil" part of society. However, as I have demonstrated, radical right activists can and do employ both a "civil" and "uncivil" repertoire of action depending on the current public debates and political configurations. It should also be mentioned that all the abovementioned studies on the institutionalisation of the radical right, including Koopmans' work on the European extreme right repertoires of actions presented here, have been conducted in conditions of democratic (pluralistic) party political systems, where the radical right is mostly a minor component of the parliamentary arena. This may partly explain why extreme right activists and politicians want to mitigate their confrontational actions, as they see themselves as belonging to parliament and within democratic institutions that do not tolerate violence as a means of political expression. Interesting further research questions could concern the issue of the functioning of the extreme right and changes in its repertoire when surrounded by other right wing political actors. Recalling David Ost (2009), it should be noted that political anger is not automatically stirred towards minorities or those responsible for unjust economic transformation, but it is instead a complex process of the adaptation of movements to prevailing political, cultural, social, and economic conditions, and this requires both further qualitative and quantitative, in-depth research.

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