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RESEARCH ARTICLE

TOWARDS A WESTERN EUROPEAN “SOCIAL MOVEMENT SOCIETY”?

An assessment: 1981–2009

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LUISS “Guido Carli”

ABSTRACT: Some social movements scholars argue that contemporary democracies are becoming “social movements societies”: citizens are often mobilized to make claims; protest actions are progressively becoming part of institutional politics; and protest has diffused to new constituents. In other words, participants in protest activities are more difficult to be identified. This article aims to provide an updated assessment of the “social movement society” thesis in Western Europe, with a focus on the expansion, institutionalization, and, in particular, to the diffusion of political protest to new groups. Using the European Values Study, which spans from 1981 to 2009, it is found that in Western Europe forms of protest are more popular than in the past, that a partial institutionalization has occurred, and that traditionally disengaged individuals protest more compared to the past. However, the process of “normalization” of the political protester has yet to be completed, given that differences in the levels of engagement still exist among social groups.

KEYWORDS: Social movement society, normalization of political protest, political action, Western Europe, multilevel analysis.

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1. Introduction

Scholars studying social movements argue that contemporary democracies have become “social movements societies” (hereafter SMS), where forms of unconventional political participation are accepted, institutionalized and, therefore, included in many citizens’ repertory of political engagement (Meyer and Tarrow 1998b; Tarrow 1998). In a few words, it is argued that protest politics has become “normalized” in advanced democracies (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001), which also implies that the protester has become “normal”. This means that the forms of political engagement are no longer employed by “outsider” citizens, or by leftists, students or unionized workers, but by “normal” citizens, who do not have peculiar characteristics. It also means that protest has become more frequent and institutionalized. It is indeed argued that a change has occurred in modern democracies: protest actions are no longer a synonym of turmoil and political instability, but an alternative way of expressing political opinions and dissent, of making political claims, and of promoting social change (Inglehart and Catterberg 2002; Rucht 2007; Dalton 2008a,b).

The importance of protest politics is due to the fact that it does not have a schedule, like the elections; that it addresses the issues directly to the political system, without the intermediation of other institutional actors (Teorell, Torcal, and Montero 2007); and that it represents an “extension of the political repertory of democratic citizens” (Kaase 2011, 539). The idea of a SMS contrasts with the idea of a decline in civic engagement, as stated by several scholars (see, for instance, Putnam 2000). On the one hand, the so-called “unconventional” political participation seems to be substituting the more “conventional” forms (Norris 2007). On the other, it is argued that the citizenship norms have changed (Dalton 2008b), and so are the modes of civic engagement. It is not uncommon to see on the news or to read in the newspapers that citizens are in the streets protesting against or in favor of fiscal policies, financial cuts, pension reforms, unemployment, immigration, gay marriage, environmental issues, corruption, wars and so on. Therefore, two questions may be of interest: how have the forms of political protest changed, and how have the citizens engaging in protest politics changed over the years in Western Europe? This article aims at providing an assessment of the SMS thesis in Western Europe. The focus is on three aspects of the argument: 1) the diffusion of political protest; 2) the institutionalization of political protest; and, in particular, 3) the expansion of political protest to new constituents.

With the exemption of a few studies that use a comparative framework (Meyer and Tarrow 1998b; Inglehart and Catterberg 2002; Dodson 2011), most of the research on the SMS focuses on single countries, cities, events, or types of action (Koopmans 1993;

Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001; Soule and Earl 2005; Caren, Ghoshal, and Ribas 2010; Quaranta 2014). This article, instead, attempts to not only show whether, and which, forms of political protest activities are more frequently used by the citizens compared to the past, but also to show if there has been a change in the "predictors" of protest participation. Many studies have underlined the association between personal characteristics and likelihood of protest participation (see Barnes and Kaase 1979; Inglehart 1997; Norris 2002; Dalton 2008a). However, little is known about the changing features of the citizens involved in protest activities. Moreover, comparative research on this particular point is still missing from the literature. Therefore, this article will also investigate whether one aspect of the SMS thesis, that is the diffusion of protest to new constituents, holds. If it does hold, those who engage in such political activities should be more difficult to recognize. In other words, they would not be so different than those who do not protest. This would mean that participants in political protest do not have peculiar characteristics and that, potentially, everyone can get involved in such actions.

Understanding this issue provides a complete picture of political protest in Western Europe. If protesters are "normal", it means that there has been a social diffusion of political protest, that it has become institutionalized, that it has gained legitimization and that political inequalities in protest are diminishing (see Meyer and Tarrow 1998a). If the SMS thesis is sound, political protest spreads not only among citizens, but also across countries and over time, meaning that there has been a "transnationalization" of it (Della Porta, Andretta, Mosca, and Reiter 2006). In a few words, it is argued that if political protest has normalized it has become more conventional, accepted and, therefore, could be an alternative to the traditional forms of political participation (Crozat 1998). This article provides an updated evaluation of the SMS thesis by using survey data from 1981 to 2009 drawn from the European Values Study (EVS) (2011), which not only allows testing the SMS thesis over time, but also across countries. Furthermore, it allows studying different forms of political protest: petitioning, boycotting, demonstrating, striking and occupying (Barnes and Kaase 1979; Quaranta 2013).

2. The "social movement society" thesis

Tarrow (1998) and Meyer and Tarrow (1998a) put forward the idea that in advanced democracies protest actions are so diffused that they have institutionalized and become part of the array of conventional political activities. Put it differently, protest actions have become "normal" in advanced democracies; they are accepted and legiti-

mized as conventional political activities (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001). The SMS thesis features three main arguments (Meyer and Tarrow 1998a, 4–6):

1. Political protest rather than a sporadic event has become a recurring element of democratic politics. This means that the number of protest events increases, as well as the frequency and importance in terms of participation (see also Norris 2002; Dalton 2008a).
2. Political protest is becoming more institutionalized and absorbed into conventional politics. This means that social movements become “professionalized”, and states learn how to deal with them (Della Porta 1995, 1998). A consequence of this hypothesized change is that the more “contentious” forms of political protest, such as occupations of buildings, would decrease in number and frequency, while more “moderate” and less confrontational forms, such as boycotting or petitioning, would increase (Soule and Earl 2005).
3. In a SMS citizens engage in political protest more than in the past, and this diffuses to social groups that traditionally do not engage in such actions. This implies that the protagonists of political protest are no longer, for instance, leftists, students, radicals, or workers. Even “normal” citizens get involved in it. Therefore, in advanced democracies more citizens are ready to mobilize, making political protest a routinized, institutionalized and accepted form of political behavior, just like the more conventional forms (Della Porta 1998; McCarthy and McPhail 1998). What is more relevant for this argument is that not only political protest is more frequent than in the past, but that its repertory has expanded over time (Kaase and Marsh 1979) and that the citizens who engage in it have less defined characteristics (Topf 1995; Crozat 1998; Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001). In practice, everyone is a “potential protester” in a SMS.

According to the SMS thesis, political protest is no longer seen as a threat to the political system, but simply a different way of voicing discontent, expressing opposition, taking stands on issues or making proposals. This is the reason why unconventional political actions are becoming more conventional as they are less noticeable and newsworthy (McCarthy and McPhail 1998; Norris 2007; Rucht 2007; Dalton 2008a).

3. Empirical evidence and expectations

The SMS thesis has been supported by several scholars, who have provided evidence about the expansion and institutionalization of political protest in Western democracies. Koopmans (1993) finds that the number of “new social movements” protests increased in Germany since 1965 and that these moved from being mainly small

and confrontational to being more moderate and larger. In fact, overtime the number of tactics such as sit-ins or occupations diminished, while actions like demonstrations rose. Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak, and Giugni (1995), analyzing Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and France, find that confrontational modes, such as blockades and occupations, were more common in the past, while in later years these have been substituted by demonstrative actions, like petitions or non-violent demonstrations. In fact, demonstrative actions have grown in number and size, opening a trend of mass moderate political actions. Rucht (1998) finds that between 1950s and 1990s the frequency of protest events and the number of people involved increased in Germany, and that different constituents engaged in such actions compared to the past. In fact, Rucht (2003, 174) argues that in Germany political protest is so frequent and social movements are so important that they "have occupied a broader thematic range, relied on a more solid infrastructure, and have had a deeper impact on public debate and policy-making. This may also be the reason why protest politics is no longer restricted to outsiders, but has become an ingredient of what was previously the realm of 'conventional' politics". Crozat (1998) shows that the acceptance of a number of political actions in some Western democracies did not grow between 1974 and 1990. The association between several individual characteristics and the acceptance of protest did not change significantly over time. Inglehart and Catterberg (2002) show that in consolidated democracies the number of citizens who have engaged in political actions, such as signing petitions or attending public demonstrations, has doubled in many instances. Similarly, Norris (2002) underlines not only that between the 1980s and the 1990s citizens were more likely to attend demonstrations or to sign petitions, but also links the growth of protest politics to new issues, such as the protection of the environment. Soule and Earl (2005) show that in the US the aggregate number of protests has not increased from 1960 to 1986. At the same time, the size of protest events has changed. In general, protest events have been attended by many more citizens in the period analyzed. This study also indicates that protest has gradually institutionalized: less violent forms of protest are present in the US, while more "insider tactics", i.e. lawsuits or petitions, are used. Similarly, Caren *et al.* (2010), analyzing participation in demonstrations and petitions signing, show that in the US the former just slightly increased over time, while the latter almost doubled. Dodson (2011) argues that there has been a steady expansion of participation in forms of political protest over time, in particular participation in confrontational activities. Moreover, there is a large variability across countries in terms of protest participation, but at the same time there has been a general expansion of protest across geographical contexts.

Based upon the literature, it should be expected that participation in forms of political protest has increased in Western European countries as well and that protest has become more institutionalized, i.e. confrontational forms of protest become less popular, while moderate forms have become more popular. In brief, it is expected that there has been an expansion of protest, but also that this expansion depends on the type of action: a decrease in confrontational actions and an increase in the moderate forms.

Other evidence on the SMS points at the diffusion to new constituents: the protester has gradually become “normal” (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001) and the characteristics of an “average” protester become less defined. A large part of the literature has shown that protest is often the product of the socio-economic status. Some resources, such as education and income, have a positive effect on participation in protest because they provide opportunities for engagement (Barnes and Kaase 1976; Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Dalton 2008a). Education provides the so-called “civic skills”, which define the cognitive resources to understand political stimuli. In general, citizens with higher levels of education tend to have stronger interest in politics and have social positions that make them more ready to mobilize to defend their concerns. Of course, education has also an association with income. Therefore, it is very likely that citizens with economic resources also have higher probabilities to engage in protest activities. It can be argued, however, that income is not always associated with protest. In fact, income might have a positive association with non-confrontational, or mild, forms of protest, while a negative association with confrontational, or more violent, forms of protest. Also gender defines the chances a person has to engage in protest. In fact, it has been widely shown that men and women join protest differently. Women tend to protest less, as they are generally less involved in politics, given the different political socializations they have (Barnes and Kaase 1976; Jennings and Farah 1980; Coffé and Bolzendhal 2010). Recent studies, however, find that women tend to engage in boycotts and petitions more than men, as they are private forms of participation requiring fewer resources (Stolle, Hooghe, and Micheletti 2005; Coffé and Bolzendhal 2010). One defining characteristic of protesters is certainly age, as the life cycle provides different chances for participation (Jennings and Niemi 1981). Generally, age should have a curvilinear relationship with participation in protest. When people are young, they have fewer resources and other interests than politics. When they become adults, they care more for the political sphere. Instead, when they become old, they progressively retire from politics (Highton and Wolfinger 2001).

Protesters are often members of political parties/groups or organizations, such as trade unions. This is because such organizations aim to influence political decisions and to prepare their members for action (Van der Meer, Grotenhuis, and Scheepers 2009), according to the "schools of democracy" argument (Putnam 2000). Political and interest groups produce a sense of attachment and incentives for protest (Finkel and Opp 1991; Armingeon 2007). Moreover, citizens who are members of such organizations have stronger feelings of efficacy that encourage participation in protest (Leighley 1996). Citizens who protest have higher levels of political dissatisfaction, although this relationship is not plain (Levi and Stoker 2000). Some scholars have shown that feelings of distrust for politics or low levels of political support are more easily found in those who have engaged in protest activities (Craig 1980; Muller, Jukam, and Seligson 1982; Kaase 1999). Others, however, do not find this relationship (Dalton 2004, 2008a). Eventually, protesters seem to have specific orientations and values. They tend to be leftists and post-materialists (Klingemann 1979; Inglehart 1990; Dalton 2008a), as they are closer to ideals such as equality, social change and opposition to authority and hierarchy (Sani and Sartori 1983; Inglehart 1990).

Overall, if a "normalization" of the protesters has occurred, the literature should provide evidence that it is more difficult to identify their characteristics. Topf (1995) indicates that some variables, such as age, education and gender, are still associated with participation in protest, but that their importance has declined. Dalton (2008a) reached similar conclusions. Crozat (1998) investigates whether party membership, ideology, age and gender are important for accepting protest between 1974 and 1990. He finds that party membership is more important than in the past, that the importance of ideology increases, that age is not important as it was in the past, and that gender do not discriminate among respondents. Quaranta (2014) finds that some individual characteristics linked to protest participation lose importance over time in Italy. Caren *et al.* (2010) find that the characteristics associated with signing petitions and participation in protest or demonstrations did not change relevantly across time in the US. Others have shown that protest is no longer a territory populated by progressive and left-leaning citizens. It appears that many right-wing movements are on the rise, especially in the US (Soule and Earl 2005). Even conservative parties are more ready to mobilize their members for protest (Meyer and Tarrow 1998a).

In conclusion, if the SMS argument is correct, the individual characteristics that often define a "typical" protester in Western European countries should no longer be relevant, leading to the interpretation that the protester has "normalized", and that protest has diffused to new constituents and social groups (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001).

4. Research design

4.1 Political protest: data and measures

The SMS thesis is evaluated using survey data coming from 2011 European Values Study (EVS)¹, which is the only international survey project with a time span of about 30 years and data collected over four waves: 1981–1984, 1990–1993, 1999–2001 and 2008–2009. However, this is not the only advantage. In fact, it includes indicators measuring political action and which follow the tradition initiated by Barnes and Kaase (1979). Therefore, this source of data allows for the assessment the dynamics of political protest in Western Europe over time.² The countries selected for the analysis are: Belgium (BE), Germany (DE), Denmark (DK), France (FR), Great Britain (GB), Ireland (IE), Iceland (IS), Italy (IT), the Netherlands (NL), Norway (NO), Spain (ES), and Sweden (SE).³

The EVS includes five indicators asking whether or not respondents *would never do, might do or have done* the following political actions:

1. signing petitions;
2. joining in boycotts;
3. attending peaceful/lawful demonstrations;
4. joining unofficial strikes;
5. occupying buildings or factories.

The items aim to measure not only “actual” protest, but also its “potential”. In fact, it is argued that since actions such as occupying buildings or factories, or joining unofficial strikes are illegal or in a gray area of legality in many countries, respondents may not feel comfortable answering positively questions asking about the participation in

¹ The SMS thesis has been tested using other sources of data in the literature. The most recurring method employs data coming from news reports. In most cases protest event data cover long periods of time (see, for example, Koopmans 1993; Rucht 1998) but concern single countries. Other studies take a comparative approach (see Kriesi *et al.* 1995) that, however, is limited in scope. Although this strategy has some advantages, as it provides the number of events or their size, it fails when it has to deal with micro-level relationships and behaviors and it has some bias, such as sampling or over-reporting (Oliver and Myers 1999). Walgrave and Verhulst (2011) argue that other methods of data collection, such as protest event surveys, are very rare before 1995 and may be biased. For the matter of this study, it is argued that survey data are best suited for our scopes as they allow to test all the hypotheses of the SMS thesis, in particular the one concerning the diffusion of political protest to new constituents.

² Other comparative surveys, such as the European Social Survey (2011), have a more limited time span and a fewer number of indicators measuring political protest.

³ These countries were selected as the data are available for at least the first and the last wave of the EVS.

these actions (Welzel and Deutsch 2012).⁴ However, other authors argue that in some cases it is more appropriate to measure "actual" participation in protest actions as hypothetical questions may arise issues of social desirability of the answers (Norris 2002, 194). Notwithstanding, a very important piece of information would be lost if "potential" protesters were excluded. In fact, as already argued by Marsh and Kaase (1979, 58), taking into account potential protesters allows measuring the "potential to participate, the individual readiness to be mobilized, [that] is an abiding property of a wide sector of the whole political community, whether currently active or not", and therefore the acceptance of protest.

In this context, a respondent who answers that she/he "would do" a political action tells us that she/he considers as real the possibility of doing that action. This would solve the problem of political participation well summarized by Brady *et al.* (1995, 271): citizens may not participate politically because they cannot, because they do not have the resources or because they have not been asked to. If a respondent did not do an action, this does not necessarily mean that she/he does not want to take part in political actions. It may mean that she/he might engage in politics, but has not done it yet. Consequently, the fact that a respondent has or has not taken a particular type of action does not enable us to cope with the possibility that the person wanted to take the action, but was unable to do so. Including willingness to participate in political actions provides a wider perspective on political protest in Western Europe, as it is a phenomenon dependent on the political opportunities a person has in her/his micro-context. Studying "potential" political protest allows taking into account the climate towards this form of political engagement and also including in the object of study its degree of acceptance. Therefore, the items are treated as ordinal indicators allowing us to differentiate between respondents who "would never do", those who "might do", and those who "have done" each of the five political actions (Marsh and Kaase 1979). The five indicators mentioned above can summarize the full repertory of protest activities (see Quaranta 2013).

4.2. Independent variables

All independent variables are selected to test the relevance of the individual characteristics discussed above. The models will include a series of independent variables, following the literature presented in the previous sections. First, a categorical variable

⁴ These authors, in fact, do not use the two indicators in their analysis.

measuring the waves (“Wave 1” as reference category, “Wave 2”, “Wave 3”, “Wave 4”) is included in the models to gauge time. Then, the models include the following variables: gender (reference category is “man”); age at completed education (from 1 to 10, where 1 means ≤ 12 , and 10 means ≥ 21);⁵ income in categories (“low” as reference, “medium”, “high”); age binned in three categories (“less than 36”, 36–54 as reference, more than 54); membership in political parties/groups (reference category is “No”); membership in trade unions (reference category is “No”); distrust in parliament (reference category is “Yes”); left-right scale (from 1 to 10, where 1 means extreme left, and 10 means extreme right) and a post-materialism scale (“Materialist”, “Mixed” as reference, “Post-materialist”).⁶

4.3 Model

As this study uses the four waves of the EVS across a number of countries, it is important to account for each level of analysis involved. In fact, at the lowest level there are respondents. At a higher level, respondents are nested in surveys that are repeated across time. Therefore, respondents are nested in country-waves, which is the second level of analysis. Then, another level of analysis is present: the country. In the end, the model used will be a multilevel model (see Gelman and Hill 2006) with individuals (level-1) nested in country-waves (level-2), and in countries (level-3). This modeling strategy allows for a comparative design, accounting at the same time for the changes across periods (Firebaugh 1997). It also accounts for the complexity of the data structure used, controlling for different sources of heterogeneity (see Western 1998). Being the dependent variable ordinal, the model is specified as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}P(y_i \geq j) &= \text{logit}^{-1}(\tau_j - \mu_i) \\P(y_i = J) &= 1 - \text{logit}^{-1}(\tau_j - \mu_i) \\ \mu_i &= \mathbf{x}\boldsymbol{\beta} + \mathbf{z}\boldsymbol{\gamma} + \eta_k \\ \eta_k &\sim N(\delta_c, \sigma_\eta) \\ \delta_c &\sim N(0, \sigma_\delta)\end{aligned}$$

⁵ This variable is used as it is the only one allowing full comparison across waves and countries.

⁶ The indicators used to build this scale are (1) maintaining order in the nation, (2) giving people more say is important in government decisions, (3) fighting rising prices and (4) protecting freedom of speech. When a respondent chooses (1) and (3) is classified as “materialist”; when the respondent chooses either (1) or (3) and (2) or (4) is classified as “mixed”; when a respondent chooses (2) and (4) is classified as “post-materialist”.

The term y_i represents the dependent variable which has $J = 3$ categories, where i is the respondent. The term τ_j indicates the $j - 1$ thresholds, while μ_i is a linear predictor: a linear combination of the individual-level observations \mathbf{x} and the coefficients $\boldsymbol{\beta}$, the wave fixed-effect \mathbf{z} and the coefficients $\boldsymbol{\gamma}$, and the country-wave random-effects η_k , where k indicates the country-waves. The country-wave random-effects follow a normal distribution, that has as mean the country random-effects δ_c , where c is the number of countries, and it has as standard deviation σ_η . The country random-effects δ_c follow a normal distribution with 0 as mean and σ_δ as standard deviation. This specification represents a classic random-intercepts model that allows testing whether there has been an increase in the probability of engaging in protest across countries and country-waves. Additionally, it tests how the independent variables at level-1 and at level-2 are associated with this probability. In the final step of the analysis we interact the individual-level variables with the waves. Doing so, we are able to estimate the probability of the "potential", i.e. the intention, and "actual" engagement across waves according to the individual characteristics, so to find whether there has been a change in the profile of the protester.⁷

5. Findings

Table 1 reports the estimates of the ordinal multilevel models including the waves only. Overall, it seems that as time passes by the engagement in each of the five forms of protest increases significantly. To ease the interpretation of the results Figure 1 shows the probability of signing petitions, joining in boycotts, attending lawful demonstrations, joining unofficial strikes, and occupying buildings or factories across the four waves of the EVS, distinguishing between those who "would do", i.e. the "potential" participants, from those who "have done" the actions, i.e. the "actual" participants.

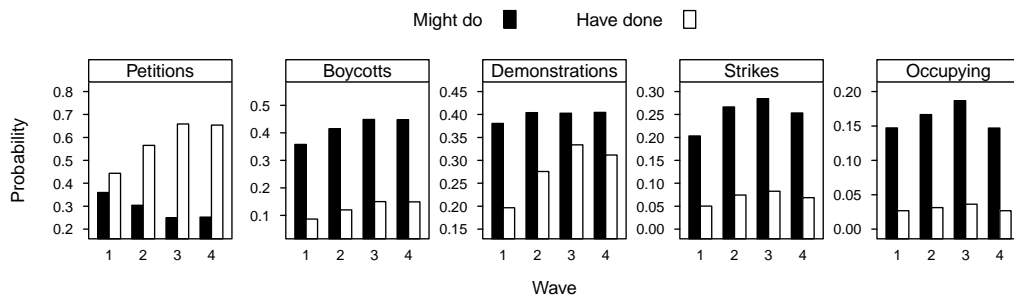
The plot indicates whether there has been a change across the waves in terms of participation in protest activities. The probability of the intention to sign a petition decreases of about 0.10 from wave 1 to wave 4, while the probability of actually having done this action increases by 0.21 over the four waves, indicating a relevant shift. Joining in boycotts seems to become more popular in Western Europe. The probability of having done this political action increases by about 0.04 between wave 1 and 2 (from 0.08 to 0.12). It grows about 0.03 between wave 2 and 3, while it does not change significantly between wave 3 and 4. Also, the probability of being available to join in boy-

⁷ We estimate one model for each independent variable/wave interaction, for each dependent variable. Due to space constraints we do not report the tables with the interaction models.

cotts increases over time. At the same time, attending lawful demonstrations follows a similar pattern. The probability of having done such form of protest increases almost 0.08 between wave 1 and 2 (from 0.19 to 0.27), and it rises between wave 2 and 3. As for petitions and boycotts, the probability does not change significantly between wave 3 and 4. Instead, the probability of thinking about attending a demonstration does not change relevantly.

The other two forms of protest, joining unofficial strikes and occupying buildings or factories, seem to follow different trends. The probability of having engaged in unofficial strikes increases 0.03 between wave 1 and 3. However, the probability of having done this action does not change significantly in the following wave. The probability of expressing the intention to join unofficial strikes increases from 0.20 (wave 1) to 0.25 (wave 4). The probability of occupying does not seem to increase over the four waves, while the intention to occupy seems to increase especially between wave 1 and 3.

Figure 1 - The probability of having expressed the intention or having signed petitions, joined in boycotts, attended lawful demonstrations, joined unofficial strikes, and occupied buildings or factories across waves.



Source: own elaboration on the EVS.

These findings provide a first indication about whether there has been an expansion of protest in Western Europe, and also a diffusion of the intention to protest. It appears clear that petitioning, boycotting and attending demonstrations are more popular in the 1990s and in the 2000s than they were in the 1980s. On the other hand, confrontational forms of protests, such as unofficial strikes and occupations, do not increase as the other forms. In general, there has been a shift towards more institutionalized forms of protest, while a small, yet not precisely supported by the data, rejection of more contentious forms of protest has also taken place. These findings may support two claims from the SMS thesis: protest has increased, but also institutionalized, as others have shown (Kriesi *et al.* 1995; Norris 2002; Inglehart and Catterberg 2002; Rucht 2003).

Figure 2 shows the probabilities of expressing the intention to do or having done either one of the actions for each country included in the analysis across the four waves, to check for the change within countries.⁸ The probability of having signed petitions seems to increase in Belgium, France, Ireland, Norway or Sweden. Moreover, it should be noted that, in some cases, this increase is not very large. In other countries, such as Germany, Spain, or Great Britain, there is a slight decrease in the probability of having signed petitions. In Denmark, Iceland, Italy, and Netherlands, there is no change in probability across the waves.

As for petitions, the probability of having joined boycotts does not show a clear pattern across the countries analyzed. In Iceland, Norway, and Sweden it is possible to detect a small increase in probability of joining boycotts. In other countries (Belgium, Denmark, France or Italy) the probability does not change relevantly, in particular between the first and the fourth wave. In Germany, Spain, or Great Britain there is even a weak decrease. Regarding having attended demonstrations, the probability increases in Germany, France, Italy and Sweden. In contrast, in Spain, Great Britain, Ireland, Iceland, and the Netherlands the probability modestly decreases. The probability of having joined unofficial strikes appears to increase in Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, and partially Norway and Sweden. In Germany, Spain, or Ireland there is basically no change, while in Great Britain there is a small decrease. Eventually, the probability of having occupied buildings or factories or of expressing an intention to increases in France, Iceland, Italy, Norway and Sweden. Instead, this probability decreases in Denmark, Spain, Great Britain, or Netherland.

Overall, it is difficult to reach clear conclusions about the patterns of actual participation in protest and of protest intention within Western European countries. It appears that often an increase in signing petitions, joining boycotts, attending demonstrations, joining unofficial strikes and occupying buildings or factories is present in such countries, but also a decrease in few of them. In general, it could be argued that there has not been an evident expansion in protest in Western Europe, while change can be detected only for some countries. Additionally, it appears that the countries are quite similar, indicating that a geographical expansion of protest has occurred (see Dodson 2011), as it can be seen in Figure 3.⁹ It should be noted that in all countries the probability of actual and potential engagement is quite high also for illegal forms.

⁸ The probabilities are calculated using the country-waves random-effects (Table 1).

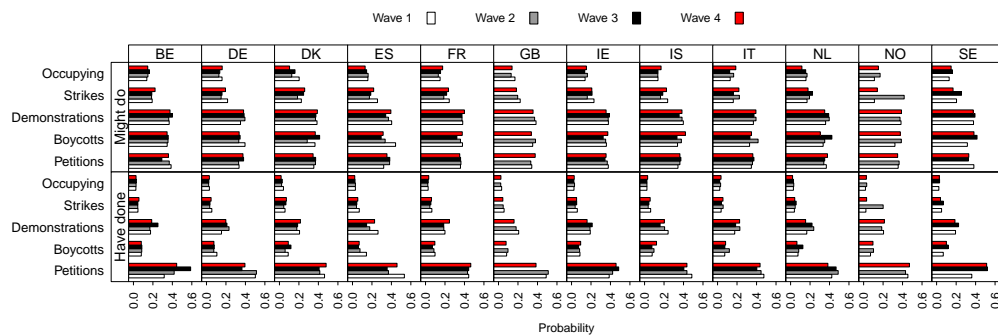
⁹ The probabilities are calculated using the countries random-effects (Table 1).

Table 1 - Estimates of the ordinal multilevel models predicting the probability of signing petitions, joining in boycotts, attending lawful demonstrations, joining unofficial strikes, and occupying buildings or factories, including the wave effect.

	Petitions	Boycotts	Demons.	Strikes	Occupy
<i>Thresholds</i>					
τ_1	-1.408*** (0.163)	0.223 (0.152)	-0.312** (0.104)	1.080*** (0.154)	1.557*** (0.171)
τ_2	0.227 (0.163)	2.356*** (0.152)	1.407*** (0.104)	2.941*** (0.155)	3.590*** (0.172)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>					
Wave (r.c. Wave 1):					
Wave 2	0.491*** (0.115)	0.363** (0.113)	0.440*** (0.094)	0.421* (0.166)	0.157 (0.100)
Wave 3	0.885*** (0.119)	0.624*** (0.117)	0.717*** (0.097)	0.535** (0.171)	0.309** (0.103)
Wave 4	0.863*** (0.112)	0.615*** (0.111)	0.615*** (0.091)	0.337* (0.162)	-0.003 (0.098)
<i>Random-effects</i>					
SD country-wave	0.263	0.259	0.211	0.386	0.215
SD country	0.493	0.449	0.281	0.355	0.539
AIC	65600	68623	76866	55057	42279
BIC	65659	68683	76926	55117	42339

Note: *** $p \leq 0.001$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; * $p \leq 0.05$. N at level-1: 36013; N at level-2: 45; N at level-3: 12. Coefficients are log-odds, standard errors in brackets. AIC = Akaike Information Criterion; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion. Source: own elaboration on the EVS.

Figure 2 - The probability of having expressed the intention or having signed petitions, joined in boycotts, attended lawful demonstrations, joined unofficial strikes, and occupied buildings or factories, across countries and waves.



Source: own elaboration on the EVS.

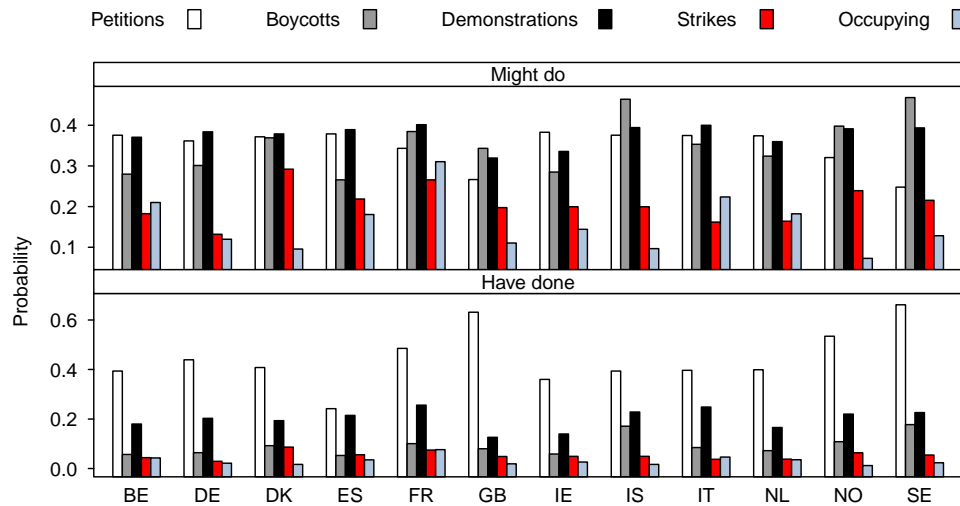
Table 2 reports the multilevel models including the individual characteristics. A first look at the table reveals that most of the predictors are associated with the five forms of action. Women tend to be less involved or less inclined to join boycott, attend

demonstrations, join strikes and occupy buildings or factories, while they do not sign petitions less than men. This result seems to be in line with the recent literature indicating that women are more interested in "private" forms of participation, rather than more "intense" ones (see Coffé and Bolzendhal 2010). Age at completed education shows, for all dependent variables, positive and strongly significant coefficients. This is not surprising, as education provides fundamental resources for participation in politics (Dalton 2008a). Income has a different association with the forms of protest. On the one hand, income has a positive association with signing petition, joining boycotts and attending demonstrations. On the other hand, income is not associated with joining unofficial strikes, while it has a negative association with occupying building or factories.

This difference is likely due to the fact that the first three forms are fully legal and do not imply dangerous actions, while the second two are more confrontational and might not be fully accepted. Thus, wealthier citizens might abstain from engaging in these forms of protest, as they are riskier. Age is also an important variable to look at. Younger respondents are more likely than older respondents to engage in protest actions. This is likely because of the shifts in participation. Older citizens are in fact more prone to engage in conventional participation, while younger citizens in unconventional ones (Dalton 2009). As expected, political parties/groups and trade unions are strong mobilizers of protest activities. Members of such organizations have higher chances to be involved or to express intention to engage in the five forms of protest. Distrust in the national parliament does not have a clear association with the dependent variables. In two cases, signing petitions and joining boycotts, being distrustful of the national parliament does not matter. In one case, attending lawful demonstrations, those who do not trust the parliament engage less.

In two cases, joining unofficial strikes and occupying buildings or factories, distrust has a positive association. It could be that mistrust in political institutions is common in citizens engaging in protest (see Della Porta and Reiter 2012). However, these results show that it is relevant only when more confrontational forms of actions are taken into account, while it seems that distrust plays a much smaller role, when legal or "easier" forms are looked at. Eventually, political orientations and values seem to be relevant predictors of protest and its potential. The left-right scale always shows a negative association with the dependent variables, meaning that those leaning on the right tend to engage less in those actions or are less interested in engaging, compared to those leaning on the left. Similarly, post-materialists have more chances to protest or of having the intention to do it. This is because leftist and post-materialist values push together towards change (Kriesi 1989; Inglehart 1990).

Figure 3 - The probability of having expressed the intention or having signed petitions, joined in boycotts, attended lawful demonstrations, joined unofficial strikes, and occupied buildings or factories, across countries.



Source: own elaboration on the EVS.

This analysis indicates that some variables discriminate among respondents. A “typical” protester is generally a man, educated, young, member of a political organization or a trade union, who leans on the left and has post-materialist values. According to the SMS thesis, this “profile” should fade over time. This implies that the protesters should be less recognizable as time passes by, i.e. the characteristics of the participant in protest acts should be more difficult to detect (see Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001).

To test whether the association between each independent variable and the forms of protest has changed over time, another set of models was estimated, where we interact the individual characteristics with the waves. Given the several estimated models, the results are provided in Figure 4, which shows the probabilities of having expressed the intention to or having signed petitions, joined in boycotts, attended lawful demonstrations, joined unofficial strikes, and occupied buildings or factories, across the four waves. If the SMS thesis is correct, participation in the forms of action should expand to new constituents and the differences between groups should be less distinct. It appears that women tend to sign petitions more likely as waves succeed, and so do men. The lower educated and lower income respondents sign petitions more often than in the past. This is similar if we look at age. Respondents belonging to the three age categories see their probability of signing petitions increasing. Also non-

members of political parties/groups and trade unions sign petitions more likely than in the past, as well as those who distrust the parliament. A small increase can be found for the respondents who position on the right of the political spectrum. Eventually, also the materialists sign petitions more likely than in the previous waves. An interesting point to highlight is that while the probability of actually having signed petitions increases over time, the probability of expressing an intention to sign petitions decreases. This may mean that the intention to engage in such action has become actual participation over time, at least as far as petitions are concerned. The second panel reports the probabilities for boycotting. We can see that the trends are quite similar to the previous panel. The respondents that are often considered "marginal" participants – women, low income, low educated, older, non-members of organizations, rightists, materialists – show higher probabilities of having joined in boycotts compared to the past.

What is interesting in this case is that also the "potential" engagement increases over time for these categories of respondents. Nevertheless, the differences between groups are still present: men boycotts more than women, highly educated more than low educated, members more than non-members, and so on. The third and the fourth panels report the probabilities for the demonstrations and for the unofficial strikes. The overall picture is not very different from the previous forms of engagement. There is a significant increase in the probability of taking part in demonstrations and joining unofficial strikes over time, in particular for those respondents who are not the "usual" demonstrators, except for the case of respondents on the right. In fact, their probability of having attended a demonstration or joined unofficial strikes, or their probability of expressing an intention, does not change across the waves.

The last panel shows the probabilities for occupying. Compared to the previous forms of engagement, the increase over time is less pronounced. Moreover, it seems that the probability of occupying buildings or factories does not increase for those respondents who are women, have low income or low education, are elder, non-members of political groups or unions, rightists, or materialists. Even the probability of expressing the intention to occupy does not change relevantly across time.

Overall, the plot shows that engagement has increased over the four waves, even across groups that are not made of "typical" protesters. However, a relevant point is that, although these individuals engage in forms of protest more likely than in the past, the gap in engagement between them and those who have more participatory resources still exists. This, of course, implies that those who have more resources engage more in protest compared to the past. Therefore, if on the one hand protest has dif-

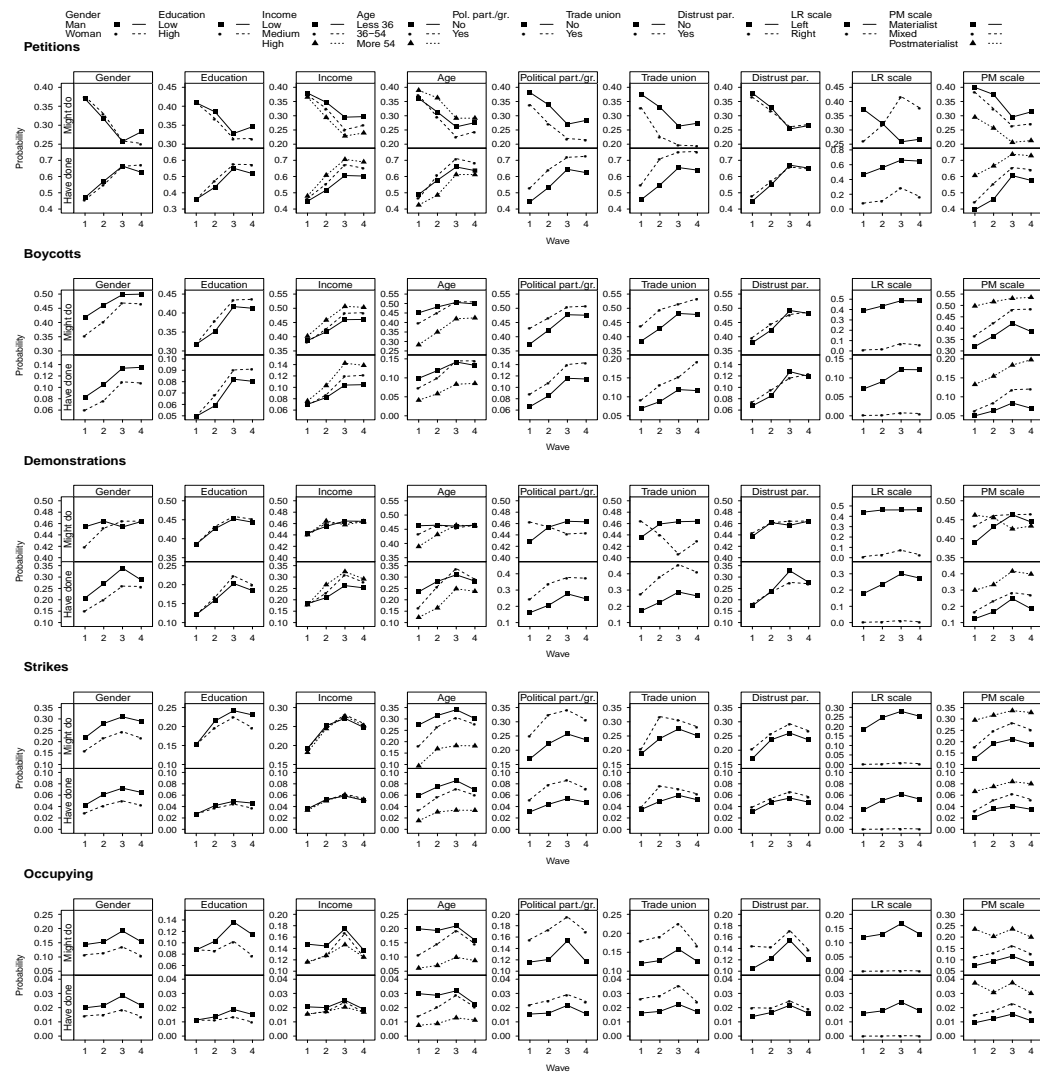
fused to groups not traditionally engaged in protest, on the other hand, differences in participation are still present across groups.

Table 2 - Estimates of the ordinal multilevel models predicting the probability of signing petitions, joining in boycotts, attending lawful demonstrations, joining unofficial strikes, and occupying buildings or factories, including the wave effect and the individual characteristics.

	Petitions	Boycotts	Demons.	Strikes	Occupy
<i>Thresholds</i>					
τ_1	-1.139*** (0.167)	0.552*** (0.146)	-0.037 (0.118)	1.616*** (0.175)	2.087*** (0.205)
τ_2	0.640*** (0.167)	2.961*** (0.147)	1.973*** (0.118)	3.685*** (0.177)	4.351*** (0.207)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>					
Woman	0.010 (0.022)	-0.293*** (0.022)	-0.319*** (0.021)	-0.419*** (0.025)	-0.404*** (0.029)
Age at completed education	0.380*** (0.013)	0.340*** (0.013)	0.385*** (0.013)	0.167*** (0.015)	0.213*** (0.017)
Income (r.c. Low):					
Medium	0.176*** (0.027)	0.094*** (0.027)	0.111*** (0.026)	0.025 (0.031)	-0.147*** (0.036)
High	0.329*** (0.030)	0.262*** (0.029)	0.204*** (0.028)	-0.009 (0.033)	-0.186*** (0.038)
Age (r.c. 36–54):					
Less than 36	-0.108*** (0.028)	0.107*** (0.026)	0.106*** (0.025)	0.303*** (0.029)	0.310*** (0.033)
More than 54	-0.355*** (0.029)	-0.590*** (0.029)	-0.391*** (0.027)	-0.679*** (0.034)	-0.707*** (0.041)
Member political party/group	0.520*** (0.046)	0.411*** (0.040)	0.687*** (0.040)	0.252*** (0.045)	0.459*** (0.051)
Member trade union	0.403*** (0.030)	0.263*** (0.027)	0.571*** (0.027)	0.526*** (0.031)	0.393*** (0.037)
Distrust parliament	0.040 (0.022)	0.040 (0.022)	-0.053* (0.021)	0.189*** (0.025)	0.200*** (0.029)
LR-scale	-0.213*** (0.012)	-0.360*** (0.012)	-0.423*** (0.011)	-0.478*** (0.013)	-0.565*** (0.016)
PM-scale (r.c. Materialist):					
Mixed	0.271*** (0.028)	0.394*** (0.030)	0.373*** (0.028)	0.418*** (0.036)	0.436*** (0.043)
Post-materialist	0.744*** (0.037)	1.034*** (0.036)	0.961*** (0.035)	0.883*** (0.042)	1.055*** (0.048)
Wave (r.c. Wave 1):					
Wave 2	0.383*** (0.104)	0.261* (0.124)	0.346** (0.111)	0.392* (0.187)	0.072 (0.102)
Wave 3	0.819*** (0.108)	0.592*** (0.128)	0.675*** (0.115)	0.572** (0.192)	0.324** (0.104)
Wave 4	0.756*** (0.102)	0.590*** (0.121)	0.550*** (0.109)	0.426* (0.182)	0.036 (0.101)
<i>Random-effects</i>					
SD country-wave	0.235	0.285	0.254	0.435	0.216
SD country	0.507	0.388	0.283	0.380	0.638
AIC	61790	62606	69637	49972	37534
BIC	61951	62767	69799	50133	37695

Note: *** $p \leq 0.001$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; * $p \leq 0.05$. N at level-1: 36013; N at level-2: 45; N at level-3: 12. Coefficients are log-odds, standard errors in brackets. AIC = Akaike Information Criterion; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion. Source: own elaboration on the EVS.

Figure 4 - The probability of having expressed the intention or having signed petitions, joined in boycotts, attended lawful demonstrations, joined unofficial strikes, and occupied buildings or factories, by individual characteristics and across waves.



Source: own elaboration on the EVS.

6. Conclusion

Forms of political protest in contemporary democracies have become alternative means to express preferences and to make claims. Citizens are able to engage in contentious actions without the intermediation of other actors and without waiting for the traditional means of political representation, i.e. the elections, to take place. Protest, therefore, occurs more frequently than in the past, more citizens seem to be involved in this type of participation, and protest events appear to be more relevant in size.¹⁰ Furthermore, political protest appears to be more institutionalized, as more moderate forms of protest have replaced the more intense ones. Eventually, citizens who engage in protest are more difficult to identify, as it is no longer a prerogative of specific social groups. If all these claims were true, contemporary democracies could be considered “social movement societies” (Meyer and Tarrow 1998b; Tarrow 1998). This article attempted to test this argument in order to evaluate whether or not Western European countries have assumed the characteristics mentioned above. Although the SMS thesis has been widely tested, in only a few instances large-N comparative approaches have been employed, and not always using a wide time span (see Meyer and Tarrow 1998b; Inglehart and Catterberg 2002; Dodson 2011). In other instances the test of the SMS thesis only focused on a single country (see Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001; Soule and Earl 2005; Caren *et al.* 2010; Quaranta 2014). Furthermore, there have not been cross-national studies about the “diffusion” of protest to new constituents (see Caren *et al.* 2010; Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001).

This article tried to build on previous work to provide additional evidence regarding the SMS thesis. Using an international survey project, the European Values Survey, spanning from 1981 to 2009, and applying multilevel models, this article found that the expansion of protest happened for some actions, i.e. petitioning, boycotting and attending demonstrations, which are the “moderate” ones, while for other forms, i.e. unofficial strikes and occupations, the more “intense” ones, this expansion is less de-

¹⁰ Of course, more research on the topic should be done, also given the limitations that survey data have when studying political protest. Survey data, although having the advantage of providing information on individuals, do not say much, for instance, on the location of the events, on the organizers of protests, or on the themes of protest events. They also do not say much about the temporal dynamics of protest. In particular, this is an issue with the data used in this article, as the items ask if the respondents have ever engaged in the five actions, and this makes the interpretation of trends problematic. Nevertheless, the data used are the only surveys that include items about engagement in forms of unconventional participation which go back further in time, and which allow testing for the claims by the SMS thesis.

fined. This might mean that protest has progressively become more institutionalized, given that the expansion of the less contentious forms has been more evident than for the more contentious ones (see Rucht 2003). If we look at the overall sample, we could state that forms of protest actions have clearly become more popular than in the past. Citizens are more likely to engage or to be willing to engage in protest in the present days than at the beginning of the data collection. Nevertheless, if we look at the trends within the Western European countries, changes in protest are present only in some countries. This means that Western Europe is not a homogenous area if engagement in protest politics is taken into account, especially if we look at the variation within and between countries.

A relevant point of the SMS thesis is that protesters have become "normal" (see Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001). The analysis showed that classical predictors of engagement in political protest still matter for those who join protest actions or express an intention to have specific characteristics, such as being man, educated, relatively young, engaged in groups, leftist and post-materialist. This implies that individuals without these characteristics are less likely to mobilize. Therefore, if protest is an alternative means of representation, the preferences and claims of those who do not engage in it could be ignored by the elected officials, given that they are more responsive to those who are engaged in politics (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001), leading to a problem of political inequality (Lijphart 1996). According to this analysis, the protester has still a recognizable appearance. However, the "normalization" of the protester is a process that should be observed over time. If the SMS thesis is correct those characteristics should be less relevant to predict protest as time passes by. Interestingly, the analysis revealed that women, those with low income or education, or non-member of unions or political organizations, or even materialists tend to engage in forms of protest more likely with each wave. This is certainly a positive finding in light of the reduction of participatory inequalities. However, there is the other side of the coin: individual characteristics still matter. Indeed, the gap in participation between, for instance, high and low educated, or materialist and post-materialists, is still present, and in some cases it even becomes larger. Therefore, protesters have not lost their typical appearance yet, although there has been a general upward shift in participation. Are Western European countries "social movement societies"? Certainly, forms of political protest are more popular than in the past in Europe. Yet, Western Europe is not a homogenous SMS: the process of normalization of political protest is still in development in many countries

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