

# Strikes, assemblies and blockades: The dynamics of repertoire change in grassroots climate action in Italy (2018-2023)

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## Abstract

The years since 2018 have seen an unprecedented wave of mobilisation around climate change in Europe, particularly among young people. Within this context, the Italian case has been characterised by a sudden explosion of participation, triggered by the first Global Climate Strike of 15 March 2019, followed by massive politicisation, with a generation of young people taking to the streets, often for the first time. Climate school strikes have been this movement's main form of action, although other patterns have also emerged, based on civil disobedience and disruptive forms of action. Our article aims to reconstruct the trajectory of this wave of climate action in Italy, focusing on the evolution of the movement, and in particular of its constituent actors and their main tactics. Which forms of action has the climate movement adopted? How do climate activists evaluate and adjust their tactics according to the opportunities arising from the Italian political space? Our article aims to answer these questions by relying on a wide variety of data sources, including a protest event analysis and qualitative interviews with activists from three main organisations: Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, and Ultima Generazione.

## 1. Introduction

The years since 2018 have seen an unprecedented wave of mobilisation around climate change in Europe, particularly among young people. The massive participation in climate action of a previously not politicised youth has transformed the landscape of environmental campaigning, bringing new and diverse actors to the fore (Fisher 2019). Together, these actors have helped transform the framing of climate change into one of climate emergency (Almeida 2019) while envisioning alternative, post-carbon ways of life. Such processes have taken place in a political context in which, on the one hand, the issue of climate change has been increasingly discussed in national and global governance arenas and on the other, grassroots alternative ecological practices have developed in a variety of fields and economic sectors. Such a significant and widespread movement, of international characteristics, with a specific generational character and a clear focus on the issue of climate change, is an exceptional and exciting case for scholars interested in collective action. Research has shown the emergence of a new generation of climate activists and the possible development of a broader, grassroots movement, with a strong female presence and reliance on social media and peer networks (de Moor et al. 2021), highlighting limited commitment to established

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environmental organisations, with varying interpretations of the importance of lifestyle politics (Zamponi et al. 2022), and a hopeful attitude towards the future (Stuart 2020).

Within this context, our article focuses empirically on the Italian case and theoretically on the dynamics of the repertoire of action. Our goal is twofold: first, relying on a protest event analysis (PEA) conducted on the digital archive of the Italian news agency ANSA, we reconstruct the dynamics of climate protest in Italy from 2018 to 2023, focusing in particular on the evolution of actors, targets and forms of action across time; then, using qualitative interviews conducted with representatives of the main actors identified in the PEA, we aim to make sense of the evolution of the repertoire of action, explaining it through the strategies of collective actors vis-à-vis representative institutions.

The literature has already pointed out the extent to which this cycle of protest has been characterised by claim-making addressed to national governments (de Moor et al. 2021). Our analysis confirms this observation in the Italian case, while adding two elements: on the one hand, addressing the government has consequences for the repertoire of action, in particular when the government is far from responsive; on the other hand, the continuity of target does not imply continuity in the forms of action. Rather, we show how the lack of responsiveness of the Italian government has pushed the movement to change and adapt its repertoire of action, with climate strikes and other demonstrative forms of action remaining dominant but declining in time, while forms of civil disobedience such as street blockades and art ‘pseudo-vandalism’<sup>1</sup> have increasingly gained ground. Furthermore, our article shows how the temporal rhythm of the different forms of action and their reliance on media coverage as a measure of success have played a very relevant role in the strategic elaboration of activists.

## **2. Theoretical framework: climate protest and repertoire change**

This wave of climate action is a significant innovation in a long trajectory of activism, rooted in the emergence of the ‘climate justice’ framework within different contexts, from radical environmentalist milieus (Schlosberg and Collins 2014) to protest events on the occasion of global climate summits like the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in 2009 (Wahlström, Wennerhag, and Rootes 2013; Chatterton, Featherstone, and Routledge 2012), to the spill-over from the Global Justice Movements (Hadden 2014). Within a tradition that was long characterised by visible cleavages between claim making and direct action, reform and radicalism, politicisation and post-politics (Saunders 2012; Kenis 2019), the last five years have seen the emergence of actors such as Fridays For Future (Wahlström et al. 2019; de Moor et al. 2020), Extinction Rebellion (Doherty, Saunders, and Hayes 2020) and the A22 Network (Kinyon, Dolšák, and Prakash 2023). Not only have these actors been innovating the tactics of climate activism but they have also reclaimed centrality for the state in climate matters, reshaping the discourse of climate activism within a context characterised by the long shadow of

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<sup>1</sup> We use this concept to identify a form of action, often adopted by Ultima Generazione, that gives the appearance of damaging a piece of art or a monument but in reality, thanks to the use of specific materials (washable paint and non-permanent glue), does not cause any material damage.

the Great Recession. This new wave of climate action has already caught the attention of scholarly research, focusing on the relationship with past episodes of climate protest (de Moor et al. 2021), framing (von Zabern and Tulloch 2021; Svensson and Wahlström 2021; Buzogány and Scherhauser 2022), the determinants of participation (Cologna, Hoogendoorn, and Brick 2021), the relationship with the party system (Berker and Pollex 2021), the use of social media (Martí, Ferrer-Fons, and Terren 2020), and politicisation (Kenis 2021), among others.

Much of the literature on the current climate protest cycle has shown that a peculiar relationship between the movement and the government exists (de Moor et al. 2021). While contentious politics is generally aimed at negotiating with the government or other actors to obtain a certain right or realise a certain claim (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001), in the case of the climate movement, especially in its earlier phase, the main objective was to force the government to publicly acknowledge the climate emergency and adopt the solutions proposed by science (Rödder and Pavenstädt 2023; Evensen 2019). As has been observed (Imperatore and Leonardi 2023), from this point of view Greta Thunberg's speech at the COP in Katowice in 2018 marks a turning point: demands and claims were put forward with the goal of influencing policy, but this did not entail a negotiation. Rather, claims and demands, in that phase, were seen as almost automatically deriving from climate science, and politicians were asked to execute them without questioning.

Many things have changed since then: the centrality of 'science' and 'emergency' in the framing proposed respectively by Fridays For Future and Extinction Rebellion has declined, while climate actors have increasingly advanced partial claims, related to specific local issues or policy proposals. Still, in 2021 Thunberg commented on the COP26 negotiations, demanding 'no more 'blah blah blah', [...] no more whatever the fuck they're doing in there' and the slogan was vastly reproduced by the movement. The lack of faith in governmental negotiations, while still considering governments the main actors of decarbonisation, seems to be a structural characteristic of the movement, and movement actors have, over time, proposed different ways to address this paradox, from demands for a citizens' assembly to lists of non-negotiable proposals addressed to governments. The paradox seems to persist, and it has, evidently, consequences for the perception of political opportunities by the actors in the movement.

The aim of this research is to understand how the forms of action adopted by the climate movement in Italy have varied as the cycle of protest progresses, in relation to the perceived lack of responsiveness by the government. This research question lies at the intersection of different strands of research, tackling two conceptual nexuses: what happens when cycles of protest decline, and how the political opportunity structure (POS) influences the repertoire of action.

Interestingly enough, while focusing significantly on the forms of action (Taylor and Van Dyke 2004; Doherty and Hayes 2018), research on contentious politics has not often analysed how and why the repertoire of action of a social movement changes. A significant exception is the literature on tactical innovation (McAdam 1983; McCammon 2012; Morris 1984, 1993; Soule 1997, 1999; Tarrow 1993, 1994; Tilly 1993). However, its ambiguous definition, pointed out by Wang and Soule (2016), between the invention of new tactics and their re-emergence, in a different context and with different

characteristics, makes it more difficult to apply this concept to a case like ours, in which some of the tactics used are strongly rooted in the history of social movements (demonstration, blockades) while others are actually innovative ('pseudo-vandalism' of art and monuments). Still, coherently with what we argue in this article, tactical innovation has been shown to take place within two contexts: on the one hand, in the early phase of a cycle of protest, especially if the characteristics of the innovative forms of action facilitate their modularisation (Tarrow 1993a)<sup>2</sup>; on the other hand, in later stages of a cycle, as a response to the behaviour of authorities, or as a reaction to political defeat (McAdam 1983; McCammon 2003).

Based on the seminal works by Tarrow (1989), Koopmans (1993) and Kriesi et al. (1995), Taylor and Van Dyke (2004) summarise the cycle of protest thesis as the observation that 'as a protest wave develops, interaction between protestors and authorities stimulates the use of increasingly disruptive tactics' (Taylor and Van Dyke 2004: 273) and 'frustration with the limited effectiveness of routine tactics, as well as competition for members and media attention between different movement organizations, leads to the increasing use of disruptive tactics and even violence over the course of a protest cycle' (Taylor and Van Dyke 2004: 274). Examining the cycle of protest in Italy between 1966 and 1973, della Porta and Tarrow (1986) theorise an evolutionary model of the cycle according to which, after reaching the peak of the protest, two mechanisms are activated: on the one hand, institutionalisation, which means that a segment of the movement comes into contact with established actors and enters the institutional arena, and on the other, radicalisation – that is, the more rebellious groups radicalise their repertoires of action and violent actions intensify. Protesters who do not fit into these two poles move away and the movement generally loses weight. Della Porta and Tarrow observe that radicalisation occurs mainly in cases where there is a lack of space to negotiate the demands of the movement. Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou (2015), through a relational approach, show how the dynamics of radicalisation depend on the interaction between movement actors and other actors in the field, in particular the state. Radicalisation, in this view, can be attributed to the decline of the organisation and the evolving position of the other actors in the field. Yet other studies show how the decline of the cycle of protest does not necessarily lead to radicalisation. Portos (2019) focuses on the case of the 15M movement protests in Spain between 2011 and 2015, arguing that the traditional institutionalisation-radicalisation dichotomy did not occur. In particular, radicalisation did not take place, and instead protesters increasingly moved to the peripheries (decentralisation), focused on more specific issues than the general struggle against austerity (compartmentalisation), and created coalitions with established actors. What these examples of research have in common is a focus on radicalisation, meant as the emergence

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of modularity, building on Charles Tilly's conceptualization of repertoire of contention (Tilly 1977; 1979), was theorised by Sidney Tarrow (1993a; 1993b; 1994) to address how the flexibility of tactics made them easy to adopt by different groups in a variety of settings. The concept is central to the study of protest diffusion, in particular within a cycle of protest (Soule 1997; McAdam 1995). More recently, Wada (2012) has proposed an operationalisation of modularity through four dimensions (transferability across actors, targets, issues, and locations). Though some of the tactics analysed in this article, in particular the climate strike, are characterised by the flexibility and replicability that often identify modular forms of action, and though different sets of actors took part in the climate strike within our timeframe, we chose not to use this concept, based on the fact that climate strikes remained mainly linked to one specific actor (FFF) and were not transferred to others.

or intensification of violent forms of action as the change of repertoire on which the analysis focuses. Can the same be tried for the analysis of repertoire changes that do not involve violence<sup>3</sup>? Do the dynamics of the cycle of protest affect repertoire change outside the realm of violent radicalisation?

The choice of forms of action is not understood by the literature as entirely strategic: they cannot be interpreted without referring to movement ideas, cultures, and traditions (Doherty and Hayes 2012; Doherty and Hayes 2014). Often, they are expressive of identity claims (Smithey 2009; Taylor and Van Dyke 2004) and their choice becomes a metonymy for the actors' identity (Polletta 2006; Zamponi 2018). Still, most of the scholarship has focused on the contextual factors shaping tactical choices, and this article is placed in the latter debate. In particular, the literature based on the concept of POS and, more in general, on the political process model, tends to stress the relation between the political context and movement strategies, with open contexts inviting moderate strategies on the part of movement actors and closed contexts fostering radicalisation (Kriesi et al. 1995; Kitschelt 1986). How this relation takes place is far from clear, since 'conceptualisations of political opportunities vary greatly, and scholars disagree on basic theories of how political opportunities affect movements' (Meyer 2004: 125).

We are particularly interested in research that has used the POS dynamically, throughout a cycle of protest, as in the case of the literature on radicalisation, which highlights how the closure of political opportunities favours the shift from nonviolent to violent repertoires of action (della Porta 1995; Bosi, della Porta, and Malthaner 2019). Many of these studies identify the closure of political opportunities with protest-policing and protest-control strategies. In other cases, the POS is identified not so much in 'objective' conditions of dialogue or closure with institutions, but in the perception that actors have opportunities for success or failure within the political space. Diani (1996) outlines a framework for understanding how the perception of openness or closure of POS generates different 'masterframes'. In particular, starting from the combination of two dimensions of the POS, namely the 'opportunities created by the crisis of dominant cleavages' and the 'opportunities for autonomous action within the polity', Bosi (2006) applies the framework introduced by Diani to the case of the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) in Northern Ireland between 1960 and 1969 and broadens the reflection from the POS to masterframes and consequently to forms of action. Bosi shows how the closure of the POS changed the masterframes and consequently generated a radicalisation of the forms adopted by the movement. The central argument is that political immobility in the face of the reformist demands brought about by the CRM generated a closure of the POS for the movement's autonomous actions within the system. The movement decided to abandon conventional forms (petitions, public letters, assemblies) and implement

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<sup>3</sup> We follow Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou (2015) in their definitions of radicalisation as 'the process through which a social movement organization (SMO) shifts from predominantly nonviolent tactics of contention to tactics that include violent means, as well as the subsequent process of contention maintaining and possibly intensifying the newly introduced violence' and political violence as 'the infliction of physical harm to individuals or damage to property in connection to political claims' (Alimi, Bosi, and Demetriou 2015: 11). None of the acts of civil disobedience we have coded would fall within the latter category, since no physical harm ever occurred, and no property was ever permanently damaged by activists. This is why we call 'pseudo-vandalism' the tactic, developed by Ultima Generazione, of appearing to damage art and monuments, while using materials that cause no permanent harm. This tactic was long discussed by activists who explicitly exclude violence from their repertoire (UG1, UG2).

first non-conventional nonviolent forms (street protests, marches) and then, following repression, violent forms.

This analysis suggests that, indeed, the tenets of this literature might be applied also to repertoire shifts that do not always include violence. In its study of the role of social movement organisations within new social movements in Western Europe, Kriesi (1996) identifies four different pathways, adding to institutionalisation and radicalisation also commercialisation and involution, pointing out how movement actors, reacting to both internal and external dynamics, can move towards the direction of service provision or volunteering, switching from an orientation towards authorities to one addressing their own social constituencies. Remaining within the realm of contentious claim making, Kriesi points out the role of the political context in the ‘transformation of action repertoires’ (Kriesi 1996: 179). Still, this strand of research tends to understand the POS as a series of structural characteristics of the political context (and, in fact, often consists of a comparison of national cases), while our goal is different.

As McAdam has suggested, researchers should be ‘explicit about which dependent variable we are seeking to explain and which dimensions of political opportunity are germane to that explanation’ (McAdam 1996: 31). For the purposes of this article, we are mostly interested in the role of political responsiveness, or lack thereof, by public authorities, in the transformation of action repertoires. Research has often focused on the policy outcomes of movements (Giugni, McAdam, and Tilly 1999; Bosi, Giugni, and Uba 2016) and on their role in fostering or thwarting further mobilisation (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; McAdam and Su 2002; McAdam 1995), although rarely focusing on repertoire change. This is true also of the recent research on contentious episodes (Kriesi, Hutter, and Bojar 2019), which adopts a processual and relational approach to the study of movement-government dynamics, going beyond the static conceptualisations of the POS, but mostly focusing on interactions started by governmental policy proposals while not yet addressing the effect of frustrated movement demands (Bojar et al. 2021). This is particularly relevant for our case which, as we have described above, focuses on a movement that does not react to a specific policy proposal but rather poses general and radical demands. Furthermore, we are focusing on a case in which the movement has a plural and coalitional structure, in which, according to the literature on so-called ‘radical flank effect’, the differentiation of protest strategies that follows internal conflict vis-à-vis closing political opportunities might foster political success (McCammon, Bergner, and Arch 2015).

Added to this, the most recent literature on the issue has pointed out the role of perceptions and narratives in mediating between the POS and social movement strategies. In particular, de Moor and Wahlström (2019) argue that social movements gain knowledge of threats and opportunities through interactions with the political context. This generates experience which, in a second stage, is stored in the collective memory of the movement in the form of narrated experience. Movements then draw on these previous, narrated experiences to make their strategic choices. Therefore, although there is evidence that perceived POS influences the strategic choices of actors (especially those who have already experienced defeat), how perceived POS determines the adoption of a specific repertoire remains an understudied issue.

Building on attempts to analyse repertoire changes, and the impact that the dynamics of a protest cycle and the perceived closure of political opportunities has on them (Bosi 2006, Portos 2019, de Moor and Wahlström 2019), our article analyses the changes in the repertoire of action that have taken place within the climate protest cycle in Italy between 2018 and 2023. This is an ideal ground for testing these questions, as the cycle of protest seems to have already passed its peak and its demands have faced increasing non-response from the state. Unlike the studies we have examined (mostly conducted when mobilisation was already over, sometimes even decades later), our investigation examines a cycle of protest that has not definitively ended. Although this entails the disadvantage of not knowing how future events will unfold, observing the actors in the very act in which they make decisions on strategic and tactical choices allows us to finely grasp certain features of the decision-making process; for instance: how do the actors make decisions on the repertoires to be adopted? To what extent does the dynamic of the cycle of protest and perceived POS influence these choices? Are there moments of hesitation? How are forms of action adopted in the past evaluated?

### 3. Case study: the Italian climate movement

Building on a history of political ecology rooted in the 1970s and 1980s (Diani 1988), environmental protest in Italy witnessed a significant change around the turn of the century. The last two decades have seen the gradual loss of centrality of traditional actors (including Legambiente, WWF, Italia Nostra), while the greatest contribution to mobilisation has come from informal groups, citizens' committees, and self-managed social centres (Andretta and Imperatore 2023), often involved in LULU campaigns against the construction of large infrastructures resulting in the exploitation and devastation of territories and natural areas (della Porta and Piazza 2007). Territorial mobilisation formed the backbone of the Italian environmental movement in the 2010s. The number of conflicts against contested infrastructures increased from 130 in 2004 to 359 in 2017 (Imperatore 2018). Partially breaking with a tradition that in previous decades marginalised the repertoire of protest (della Porta and Diani 2004), environmental protest actions in Italy at the beginning of the twenty-first century have been predominantly local, demonstrative and on average more disruptive than other types of protest, while suffering higher repression (Andretta and Imperatore 2023).

The emergence of the new wave<sup>4</sup> of climate mobilization in 2019, following Greta Thunberg's school strikes, represented a significant step forward in the history of the

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<sup>4</sup> The emergence of a 'wave' or 'cycle' of climate mobilisation following Greta Thunberg's school strike in 2018 has already been acknowledged by the extant literature at an international level (de Moor et al. 2021; Svensson and Wahlström 2021; de Moor and Wahlström 2022; Nulman 2022; Buzogány and Scherhauser 2022; Jasny and Fisher 2023; della Porta and Portos 2023) and our data, as the following section will illustrate, confirms the presence of 'a phase of heightened conflict and contention across the social system' (Tarrow 1994: 153). Ruud Koopmans (2004) mentions three features of waves of mobilisation: expansion, transformation and contraction. While expansion and transformation will be described in the following section, our data does not show contraction yet, and thus we consider the wave of mobilisation ongoing. The break characterised by the COVID-19 pandemic makes this wave of mobilisation definitely peculiar, due to the long interruption. Still, continuities in terms of issue, actors, claims, targets and forms of action between the pre-pandemic and the post-pandemic phases are such as to convince us to treat them as one wave. Nevertheless, in the following section, we also address differences between the different phases.

Italian climate movement. New groups emerged in the Italian ecological sphere with the aim of putting pressure on politicians owing to climate inaction (Wahlström et al. 2019). The main leading actor in the early phase of the new cycle of protest was Fridays for Future Italia (FFF)<sup>5</sup>. Born as a convergence of local groups that organised the first Italian climate strike on 15 March 2019, FFF was characterised by a horizontal structure and by a universalistic frame which was adopted and adapted to the different contexts. These characteristics allowed it to become a broad umbrella for different types of participants, both individual and collective, including newcomers with no prior experience, student unions and social centres. Massive participation in the global strikes of March and September 2019 (de Moor et al. 2020) and the first visible campaigns of civil disobedience organised by Extinction Rebellion Italia (XR) were followed by an unavoidable decline of visible protest during the COVID-19 pandemic (Priano 2021). The movement regained momentum on the occasion of the pre-COP counter-summit in Milan in October 2021 (Cugnata et al. 2024). Since 2021 FFF has significantly invested in convergence with other movement actors, including the feminist movement, local committees and the factory collective of GKN, culminating in the demonstration against the G20 in Rome in October 2021, in the joint FFF-GKN strike of March 2022 in Florence, in a march in Bologna in October 2022, and in the climate and feminist strikes of March 2023. Meanwhile, in December 2021, a campaign called *Ultima Generazione* ('Last Generation', UG) was launched by XR activists, structured as a permanent civil disobedience campaign. UG split from XR in May 2022, became the Italian chapter of the A22 network, and has been, since then, the protagonist of a series of very visible civil disobedience actions, including street blockades and 'pseudo-vandalism' with washable paint on monuments such as Palazzo Vecchio in Florence and the Senate building in Rome.

This development took place in a political context characterised by frequent changes of the parliamentary majority and government. In the 2018-2022 parliamentary term, an alliance between populist Five Star Movement (M5S) and the radical right League was first followed by an alliance between the same M5S and the centre-left Democratic Party (PD) (Cotta 2020) and finally by a grand-coalition government led by former ECB president Mario Draghi (Marangoni and Kreppel 2022). The only actor to remain in government was the M5S, the largest party in the 2018-2022 parliament, and traditionally characterised by an environmentalist agenda (Mosca and Tronconi 2021). While both the preeminent role of the M5S and the plural character of governmental coalitions would suggest open political opportunities for climate protest, research has pointed out the gradual moderation of the M5S's stances on environmental issues during their stay in power (Biancalana 2020). In particular, the decision by the M5S to join the technocrat-led grand-coalition Draghi cabinet was justified by the party's founder Beppe Grillo by Draghi's decision to create a new 'Ministry Of Ecological Transition'. Nevertheless, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan passed by the Draghi cabinet was prepared under the significant influence of fossil fuel companies' interests (Lizzi and Prontera 2024). As will be shown in the empirical analysis, the lack of responsiveness to climate issues by the different governments was interpreted by activists as a significant

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<sup>5</sup> The acronym 'FFF' does not refer to the global organisation spread over several countries, but only to the Italian level named Fridays for Future Italia. The same applies also to XR.



shift in terms of political opportunities, a perception that, as we will see, was strengthened by the victory in the September 2022 general elections of the right-wing coalition led by radical-right leader Giorgia Meloni.

#### 4. Data and methods

The study is based on a mixed-methods design, combining Protest Event Analysis (PEA) and in-depth semi-structured interviews with climate activists. PEA is a type of quantitative content analysis that helps to systematically map, assess the amount, occurrence, and features of protest performances cross-spatially, over time and across issues, and claims put forward by challengers (Koopmans and Rucht 2002; Hutter 2014). In social movement studies, PEA has been widely used to study cycles of protest and the rhythms of contentious actions, using as the unit of analysis single protest events reported from news sources. We considered climate protest events that took place in Italy between November 2018 and October 2023, reported in the digital archive of the Italian news agency ANSA (further details on the building of the PEA dataset are presented in the Appendix). A total of 749 protest events were identified. The characteristics of each event (including date, place, number of participants, repertoires of contention, claims) were then coded as variables (see Table A1 in the Appendix). Some protest events (e.g. climate strikes) took place on the same day in several locations and were often reported by a single article. Therefore, following Fillieule and Jiménez (2003), we coded them as separate protest events.

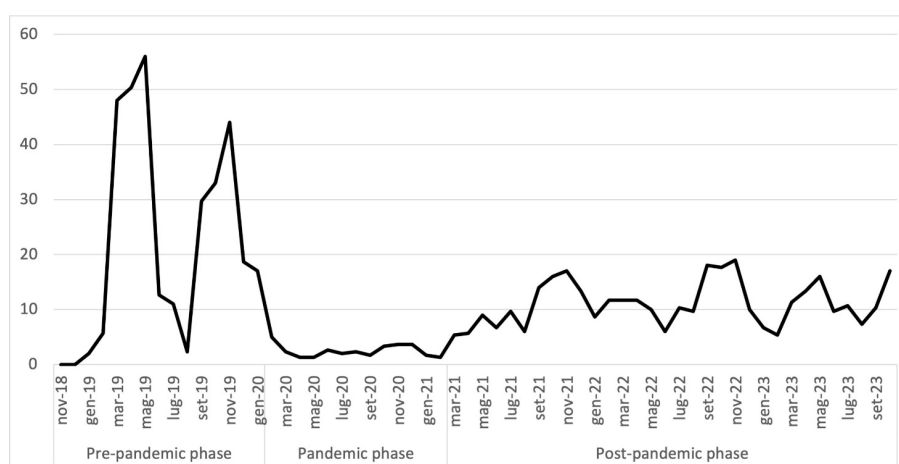
We also conducted six semi-structured in-depth interviews (Blee and Taylor 2002) with representatives of the three organisations that appeared most in the protest events: Fridays for Future Italia, Extinction Rebellion Italia and Ultima Generazione. The interviews lasted, on average, one hour. Interviewees were selected as representatives of their own organisation: the three interviewees belonging to FFF hold, or have held the office of national spokesperson, while the interviewees participating in XR and UG take part in the national bodies of the organisations and were indicated by the respective organisations as representative (additional details can be found in the Appendix). At the outset of each interview, the nature and purpose of the study were explained and respondents were given the opportunity to ask questions about the research. We then asked a series of broad and open questions aimed at reconstructing the dynamics of the cycle of protest through their own experience. In particular, interviewees were asked to elaborate on the following: the initial decision to join the movement; different phases of mobilisation; forms of protest used at different stages; the strategic logic behind the choice of forms of action; relationship with institutional politics; organisational structure of the actor. Two out of six interviews were conducted online. All the transcripts and notes were stored in password-security devices. Anonymity was granted to individual activists, while acknowledging the role of collective actors. The timeframe of processes discussed in the interviews was from the beginning of the cycle of protest (late 2018/early 2019) to the date of the interview. Furthermore, the interviews were supplemented with documentary sources (print and digital material produced by the actors), providing background material that informed the analysis.

## **5. The dynamics of climate protest in Italy (2018-2023)**

The cycle of climate protest we are analysing is still ongoing and far from being exhausted. Nevertheless, there are already visible trends and dynamics that emerge clearly from the PEA. First of all, the cycle seems, indeed, to be characterised by heightened conflict, with an average of 12.5 protest events a month in the period we considered, including the COVID-19 pandemic. A first look at the distribution of protest events across time on a monthly basis clearly shows three phases (Figure 1). First, there was a massive eruption of collective action between March 2019 and January 2020, corresponding to the first global climate strikes organised under the label 'Fridays For Future' (in particular, the global strikes of March and September 2019 managed to catalyse 132 and 84 protest events respectively). Then came the pandemic, with low levels of mobilisation, from February 2020 to February 2021 and finally, a renewed phase of post-pandemic contention, characterised by smaller peaks but also by the persistent presence of climate-related protest.

The characteristics of these three phases are quite interesting to analyse: in the pre-pandemic eruption phase we witness the highest average of protest events per month (27.8), a number that declines in the pandemic phase (2.2) and increases without ever going back to the previous peaks after the pandemic (11.9). Still, while in the first phase only 6 months out of 12 saw at least 10 protest events (50%), (and these never occurred in the pandemic period), the post-pandemic phase saw at least 10 protest events in 17 months out of 32 (53%). After the pandemic, there was less intense mobilisation with the capacity to produce massive peaks of protest on the occasion of the global climate strikes, but even more capacity than before in generating frequent protest events every month. This change of rhythm strongly resonates with some of the reflections we propose in the qualitative section.

It should also be noted that mobilisation evolved with a certain level of rituality in the post-pandemic phase, with a higher frequency of protest events in March and September each year, corresponding to the dates of the FFF global strikes. Some of these peaks also correspond to relevant sequences in international and Italian politics (the September 2021 peak coincides with the pre-COP negotiations in Milan, and the September 2022 peak with the Italian legislative elections).

**Figure 1** – Protest events across time with three-month moving average

Source: ANSA. Own elaboration.

**Table 1** – Forms of action

Repertoires	Pre-pandemic phase		Pandemic phase		Post-pandemic phase		Total	
	Freq.	Col. %	Freq.	Col. %	Freq.	Col. %	Freq.	Col. %
Conventional								
Petitions/Public letter	1	0.29	1	3.85	4	1.05	6	0.80
Leafleting	2	0.59	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	0.27
Legal action	2	0.59	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	0.27
Mail or tweet-bombing	2	0.59	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	0.27
Total conventional	7	2.06	1	3.85	4	1.05	12	1.61
Demonstrative								
Public Assembly, Press Conference, etc.	21	6.18	0	0.00	17	4.46	38	5.09
Symbolic Action	38	11.18	4	15.38	53	13.91	95	12.72
Rally	6	1.76	0	0.00	8	2.10	14	1.87
Demonstration, march	13	3.82	2	7.69	40	10.50	55	7.36
Strike	230	67.65	13	50.00	125	32.81	368	49.26
Sit-in	6	1.76	2	7.69	19	4.99	27	3.61
Teach-in	1	0.29	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.13
Total Demonstrative	315	92.65	21	80.77	262	68.77	598	80.05
Civil Disobedience								
Hunger Strike	2	0.59	0	0.00	5	1.31	7	0.94
Critical mass	2	0.59	0	0.00	1	0.26	3	0.40
Public events interruption/disturb/blitz	3	0.88	1	3.85	4	1.05	8	1.07
Occupation of buildings or similar	8	2.35	3	11.54	16	4.20	27	3.61
Occupation of squares	2	0.59	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	0.27
Street blockade	0	0.00	0	0.00	59	15.49	59	7.90
Attacking art without damaging	0	0.00	0	0.00	23	6.04	23	3.08
Total Civil Disobedience	17	5.00	4	15.38	108	28.35	129	17.27
Violent								
Violent actions against things	1	0.29	0	0.00	4	1.05	5	0.67
Violent actions against people	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total Violent	1	0.29	0	0.00	4	1.05	5	0.67
Other	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	0.79	3	0.40
Total	340	100.00	26	100.00	381	100.00	747	100.00

Source: ANSA. Own elaboration.

Regarding the repertoires of action, as shown in Table 1, the climate protest wave is, as expected, mainly demonstrative, with a significant presence of civil disobedience

action (17.3%) and a marginal presence of both conventional (1.6%) and violent forms of action (0.7%). The results are coherent with the findings of the research by Andretta and Imperatore (2023) conducted with a similar method of analysis on environmentalist protest events in Italy in a previous phase (1994-2020). The predominant demonstrative repertoires are school strikes, usually associated with other secondary demonstrative repertoires such as demonstrations and marches or, less often, rallies, symbolic actions, sit-ins. The civil disobedience actions adopted most are street blockades, mostly not associated with other secondary repertoires.

Particularly interesting for the purposes of this article are the dynamics of protest events across time. As shown in Figure 2, while demonstrative forms of action tend to prevail throughout the cycle, there is a visible increase in civil disobedience, which emerges in the autumn of 2019 (with the first ‘rebellion’ organised by XR in Italy) and gains consistently more ground after the pandemic, especially after the emergence of UG in December 2021. Once again, the rhythm of civil disobedience seems to be different from the one characterising demonstrative protest: less prone to high peaks, more focused on frequent and consistent mobilisation.

However, it should be noted that a change also occurred with regard to civil disobedience actions. Leaving aside the pandemic phase, civil disobedience actions between October 2018 and January 2020 and then between March 2021 and November 2021 were characterised by a very volatile trend (with peaks in October 2019, June and September 2021). After December 2021, with the launch of the ‘Ultima Generazione’ campaign (initially promoted by XR and then becoming a separate organisation), the frequency of civil disobedience actions became more constant over time (with slight fluctuations and steady growth).

If we take a step back and look at the composition of the repertoire of action on a yearly basis (Figure 3A), the trend is clear. Between November 2018 and October 2019 demonstrative forms accounted for 94.1% of the coded events while between October 2022 and November 2023 they represented 60.8%, while the relative significance of civil disobedience went from 5% in 2018-2019 to 37.8% in 2022-23: a steady and regular decline vis-à-vis a steady and regular increase.

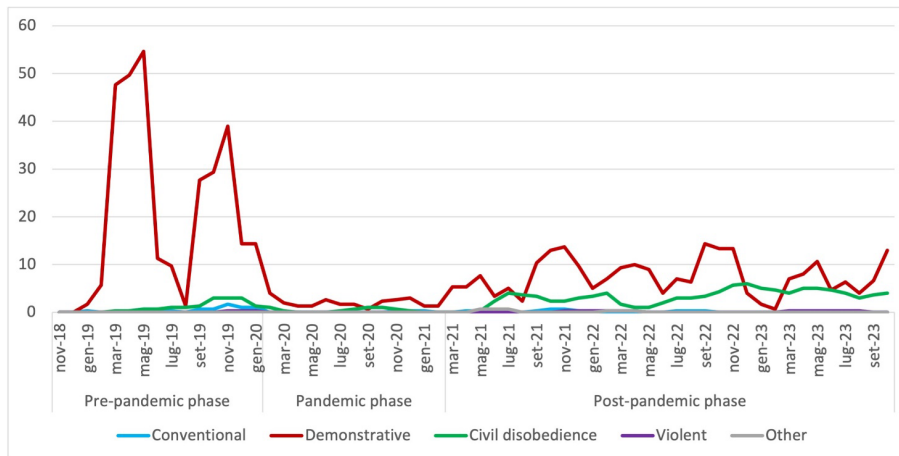
This trend confirms several findings in the literature: on the one hand, there is a ‘radicalisation’ of the movement over time, in the sense of an increasing use of disruptive and high-risk repertoires, in accordance with the theories that observe a correspondence between the passing of the peak of the protest wave and radicalisation (della Porta and Tarrow 1986); on the other hand, however, this process still takes place within a nonviolent framework (Portos 2019). These findings also echo Andretta and Imperatore’s study on the cycle of environmental protest in Italy between 1994 and 2020, according to which environmental protest events have gradually become more disruptive over the years. Furthermore, the findings confirm the shift within the Italian environmental milieu: from an institutionalisation dynamic of the late ‘90s and early 2000s (della Porta and Diani, 2004) to the current disruptive protest one.

The repertoire of action of the movement evolves vis-à-vis the emergence of new actors. As Figure 4 shows, the main protagonists of Italian climate protest are three actors that emerged after 2019: FFF, XR and UG. FFF was the central actor in the first phase of mobilisation (in 2019 it was involved in more than 70% of the protest events).

Afterwards, its presence gradually decreased, although it still remains the most present actor in the events that were coded. XR was the second most prominent actor between 2020 and 2021, after being overtaken by UG in November 2022. Participation in the protest cycle by environmental organisations (including Legambiente, Greenpeace Italia, WWF Italia and other local organisations) and territorial committees (i.e., No TAV, no TAP) is not prominent. Furthermore, we note the presence of other actors not primarily focusing on ecological claims, such as student organisations, political parties, self-managed social centres and other movement groups that often join strikes and demonstrations and have participated in FFF.

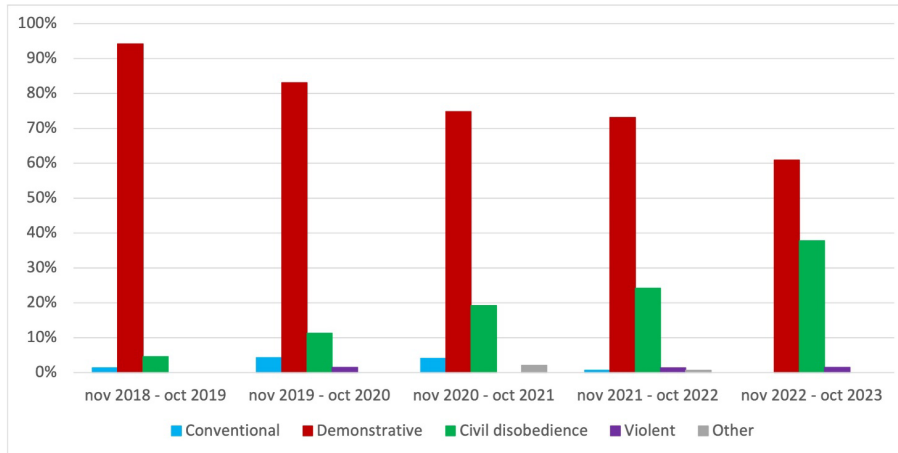
As Table 2 shows, the prevalence of demonstrative action is associated with the prevailing role of FFF, which is present in 419 out of the 749 coded protest events. FFF mainly participates in demonstrative actions (95.2%), often in alliance with environmental organisations, student organisations, territorial committees, parties and social centres and other movement groups. XR, which has participated in 93 of the total events, is involved in both civil disobedience (50.6%) actions and demonstrative actions (47.3%), while UG is almost exclusively involved in civil disobedience actions (88%). Conventional and violent actions are marginal for all the actors involved in the cycle of protest.

**Figure 2.** Forms of protest across time with three-month moving average

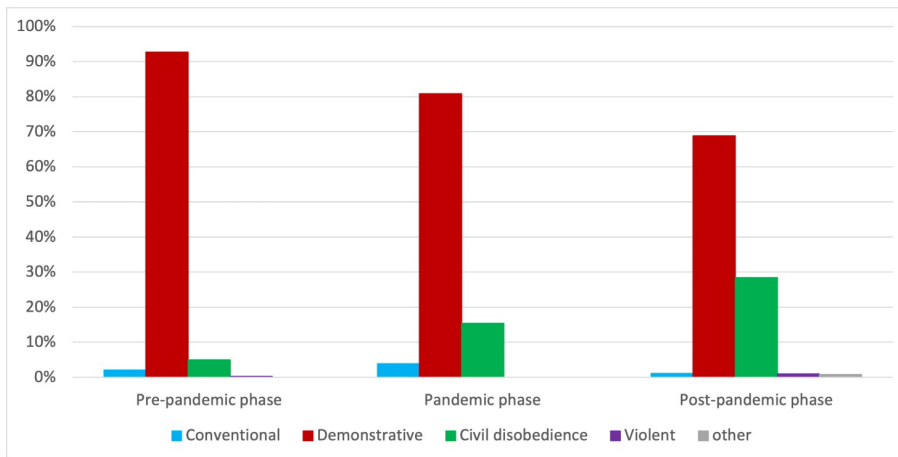


Source: ANSA. Own elaboration.

Figures 3A and 3B. Forms of protest across time: 2018-2023



Source: ANSA. Own elaboration.



Source: ANSA. Own elaboration.

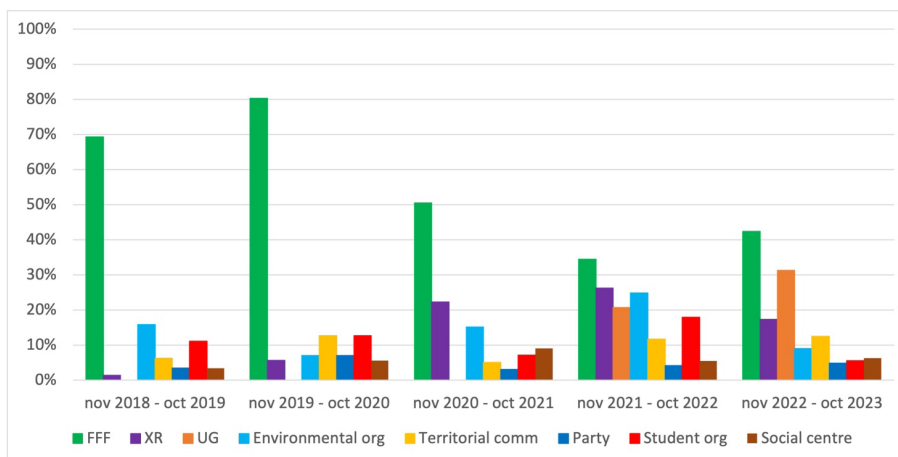
These descriptive statistics show us a change in the repertoire of action of the movement, which becomes gradually more internally diverse, hand in hand with the increasing diversity of actors within the movement. As the qualitative section will illustrate, this change of composition takes place at the meso level, with the emergence of new collective actors such as FFF, XR and later UG, while at the micro level there are clear continuities: the same individuals are joining new collectives. This process of diversification of the repertoire of action, correspond, as we point out above, to a decline in the number of protest events, even after the pandemic and, as Figure 5 shows, to a decline in the number of participants reported in the protest events. While in 2019 more than half of the protest events saw the participation of at least 1000 people, these numbers would never resurface after the pandemic, with large and average-sized demonstrations declining and small demonstrations steadily increasing.

**Table 2.** Actors' participation in protest events and actors' repertoire of action

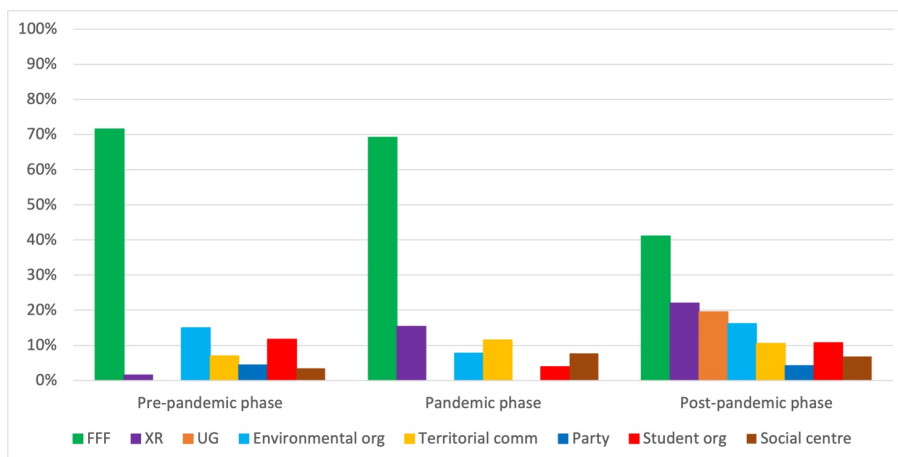
Actors	Conventional		Demonstrative		Civil disobedience		Violent		Other		Total	
	F	R %	F	R %	F	R %	F	R %	F	R %	F	R %
Friday For Future	4	0.95	399	95.23	15	3.58	0	0.00	1	0.24	419	100
Extinction Rebellion	0	0.00	44	47.31	47	50.54	1	1.08	1	1.08	93	100
Ultima Generazione	0	0.00	8	10.67	66	88.00	1	1.33	0	0.00	75	100
Envir. organisationn	3	2.61	105	91.30	5	4.35	1	0.87	1	0,87	115	100
Territorial committees	1	1.49	60	89.55	5	7.46	1	1.49	0	0.00	67	100
Parties	2	6.67	27	90	1	3.33	0	0.00	0	0.00	30	100
Student organisations	2	2.44	79	96.34	1	1.22	0	0.00	0	0.00	82	100
Social centres/movements	0	0.00	36	90.00	4	10.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	40	100

Source: ANSA. Own elaboration. Note: F=Frequencies; R %= Row percentage

**Figures 4A and 4B.** Actors across forms of action

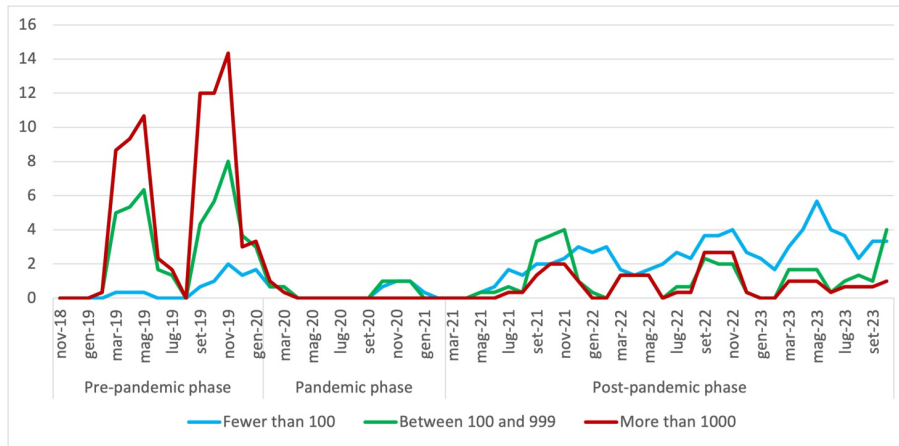


Source: ANSA. Own elaboration.



Source: ANSA. Own elaboration.

**Figure 5.** Size of event across time with three-month moving average



Source: ANSA. Own elaboration.

The number of participants is also linked to the different forms of action, with almost half of demonstrative events seeing the participation of at least 1000 people and no civil disobedience action ever reaching this threshold. As Table 3 shows, the large majority of civil disobedience actions involved fewer than 100 people (in more than half of the cases there were actually fewer than 10), while demonstrative actions mobilised a varying number of participants.

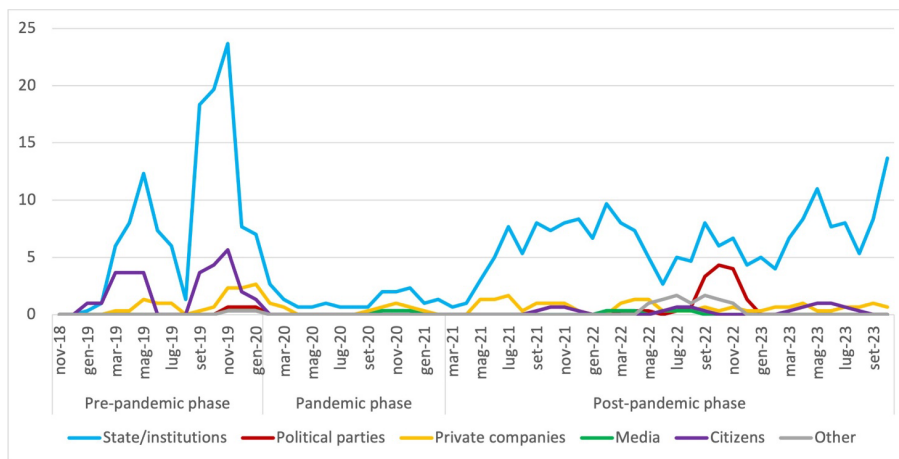
Despite the variety of forms of action, the plurality of actors involved and the different dimensions of protest, the protest cycle has one main goal: to push the state and institutions to act against climate collapse. As Figure 6 shows, institutional actors are the main target of the protest, regardless of the time period, and among them the state emerges as the first target in half of the cases. This result is congruent with the literature on the ‘statalisation’ of the demands of new climate activism after COP21 (de Moor et al. 2021). Putting pressure on the state is therefore the main strategic goal of all actors in the movement. However, Figure 6 shows the presence of other secondary goals that fluctuate over time: citizens were considered a relevant goal in the first phase, mainly characterised by global strikes, but lost importance after the first few months. Private companies also appear among the secondary targets. The most frequently mentioned is ENI, Italy’s (partially state-owned) largest hydrocarbon company. Political parties emerge as secondary targets in coincidence with the legislative elections in September 2022. Finally, the media are hardly ever recognised as targets of protest. This last result is interesting because, as we will see in the next qualitative section, most of the criteria used by groups to assess their repertoires of action are based on the media relevance of the protest.



**Table 3.** Size of event across forms of action

Actions	Fewer than 100		Between 100 and 999		1000 or more		Total	
	Freq.	Row %	Freq.	Row %	Freq.	Row %	Freq.	Row %
Conventional	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	100.00	1	100.00
Demonstrative	33	14.73	85	37.95	106	47.32	224	100.00
Civil disobedience	59	85.51	10	14.49	0	0.00	69	100.00
Violent	2	100	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	100.00

Source: ANSA. Own elaboration.

**Figure 6.** Object/target across time with three-month moving average

Source: ANSA. Own elaboration.

## 6. Strategies and rhythms: articulating the repertoire

In this section, relying on qualitative interviews, we analyse the dynamics of the cycle of protest described in the previous section, revealing the explanations proposed by the actors for the changes in the repertoire of action, and in particular the relevance of the lack of political responsiveness in these changes. The analysis is developed combining a chronological and a logical order. First, we focus on the emergence of the climate strike as the prevailing form of action within the Italian climate movement, and on its peak. Secondly, we reconstruct the emergence of civil disobedience within the movement's repertoire, by initiative of XR, and the difficulties it met. Thirdly, we assess the role of the COVID-19 pandemic in reshaping the movement's tactics. Fourthly, we describe and analyse a second phase of civil disobedience, promoted by UG. We then address the recent state of the movement and the ongoing discussions around participation in elections vis-à-vis a further growth of civil disobedience tactics. Finally, we point out the peculiar role of media coverage and of the temporal rhythm of protest.

### 6.1. Emergence and peak of the climate strike

The months preceding the first global climate strike opened the protest cycle and were characterised by the diffusion process of FFF. Initially, the label identified the protest events, while later it was taken up as a name by the newly formed grassroots groups. The widespread feeling among early activists was that of 'one of those things you felt was historical, it was mounting, it was growing, it was impossible to stay out' (FFF1). What was

spreading as much as the repertoire of protest was the news. In fact, Greta Thunberg's protest action was as resonating for its message as it was easy to reproduce as a form of climate action. Local groups emerged, scaling up together with the form of action:

In many cities there were already some local groups that were blossoming, then they started networking and then they merged into the national and international strike, into the first global strike. (FFF2)

The main goal, at this stage, was to 'throw the climate issue into the agenda' (FFF2), to 'impose the topic on the public debate' (FFF1). Soon after, the global climate strikes focused specifically on political institutions. As we have seen through the PEA, the four global strikes of 2019 (corresponding to the March, May, September and November peaks in Figure 2) constituted the apex of mobilisation, during which the movement addressed political institutions with a stepwise tactic:

We had had the popular reaction, but the popular reaction had to then stimulate a political response. And the political response initially was not one of policy, but of declarations. (FFF1)

Thus, at the beginning of the cycle, FFF focused on 'climate emergency declarations' as symbolic acts of political responsiveness by institutions. Such declarations were framed as instruments to directly impact the policy process, pushing local and national institutions to recognise not only the scientific reality of climate change, but also its nature of emergency and the need to act accordingly. The actors' perception of an opening of the political institutions to their claims favoured the adoption of a strategy that addressed political institutions directly. Following the example of Greta Thunberg's 2018 Katowice speech, the movement pressured public authorities but did not negotiate with them, demanding, instead, they take on the whole package that went with acknowledging the scientific reality of the climate emergency:

It was in the form of a motion in the city council that commits the mayor and the council to consider the consequences for the climate and the environment in the city in every action that this administration does, with a series of points and commitments to make [...] therefore, by accepting and voting on this motion the council would not only commit to doing these practical things, but would also recognise the – let's say 'ideological' – package. (FFF1)

In retrospect, the political goal was evaluated as an ambition coming from 'that mentality of wanting to change everything with a single action, a single strike, a single election' (FFF3). In hindsight, activists reported a misperception of the declaration's impact in shaping policy outcomes (FF2. FF3).

## **6.2. Experiments with civil disobedience**

The first year of the protest cycle was further characterised by the emergence of XR as an international social movement organisation with national and local chapters. Since the beginning, its focus on the climate emergency was accompanied by a specific organisational structure and culture, thus resulting in a sort of 'package' for mobilisation. Differently from FFF, in fact, XR emerged from the beginning as a structured organisation with specific goals and tactics, not permeable to pre-existing groups or political cultures:

I was fascinated by this very structured movement [...] They have what is called a very clear mandate in which they describe quite precisely what the long-term objective of the group is and what the different responsibilities are, and so the group within its mandate has full autonomy. (XR1)

The ‘package’ also comprised the strategic reasoning concerning mass civil disobedience, the main and foundational repertoire of action of the organisation: ‘hundreds of thousands of people who get out and sit in the middle of a street. At that point clearly you’ve won’. (XR1) Reasoning on the diffusion of the ‘package’ in the Italian context, XR activists recall the importance as well as the constraints that the context provided. The difficulties mainly concerned the repertoire of action. The adoption of civil disobedience in the form developed by the British founders clashed both with the widespread political culture among Italian protesters and with the domestic judiciary system:

And what we did at the beginning was to apply what we saw the English doing and then little by little, clashing with the Italian reality, we understood that that strategy obviously doesn’t work in Italy for a series of reasons and that there is a need to develop our own. [...] The thousands of arrests they have had in London - not only have we not had them but we cannot even imagine having them - because there is a lot of fear and because the situation is very different anyway. We have done two or three things that are a little close to disobedience. [...] There is a whole legal context in which it was more difficult to act. (XR1)

These comments are consistent with what emerged in the previous quantitative section concerning a significant fluctuation in the frequency of civil disobedience actions during the first phase of the protest cycle.

### 6.3. The impact of the pandemic

The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown measures led FFF and XR to move the protest online and dedicate time to maintaining their organisations. FFF’s actions kept targeting the political institution and public opinion using ICT tools, transposing the actions carried out during 2019 within the online sphere, while maintaining a strategic reasoning focused on pursuing a logic of mass participation (FFF1, FFF2). Similarly, XR carried out its protest and recruitment actions by means of digital communication tools, reporting different evaluations of their effectiveness. The prolonged effects of the pandemic are identified by activists mainly in terms of recruitment:

Little by little people got a little tired, forgot a little about the environmental issue, so some people that we had gathered during the pandemic, and who were becoming active in the groups, at a certain point they gave up. (FFF2)

Once the pandemic phase was over and mobilisation was at its lowest in terms of volume, the two movement organisations went through two distinct phases. FFF regained momentum through the protest on the occasion of the pre-COP in Milan and started investing in the creation of coalitions with other actors, something activists appreciated politically but that did not mobilise vast numbers of people (FFF2). In general, a clear politicisation process was occurring, which also comprised the development of policy proposals, collected in the so-called ‘Climate Agenda’:

A document of a series of points which are also very structured, very studied, very scientifically accurate, made with a number of people from the scientific world

who also gave us a hand in making sense of the finances and finding, in short, a series of policies that would be nice, that I would like to be carried out by a government. (FFF1)

The organisation further stressed that political institutions and parties were the main target of their actions, which was strictly connected to the perceived window of opportunity on the occasion of an electoral cycle.

#### **6.4. Civil disobedience strikes back**

XR, instead, went through an internal discussion which led to the emergence of a new organisation, Ultima Generazione. UG activists recall, as the main reason for starting something new, ‘the frustration of many people in XR who really felt the need to return to the original idea with which XR was born in England’ (UG2). There was the feeling that the original idea of XR had not been pursued completely: a strategy focusing on raising awareness had been privileged instead of one based entirely on civil disobedience. The main difference, in concrete terms, was the idea of organising small but radical – and, above all, continuous in time – civil disobedience actions, instead of waiting to be strong enough for mass civil disobedience. For UG the mass character of an action is less relevant than the frequency of the action:

UG, starting with small numbers, said ‘well, we are few, we start by doing actions of a certain type, they also bring us a certain visibility and instead of aiming to be many and then doing one thing, we do many smaller actions, but daily’. (UG1)

The flows of activists between one organization and another were not limited to XR and UG. In fact, most activists involved in civil disobedience had participated in FFF before, and when feeling frustrated by the type of action pursued, began to look to other tactics and organisations. They joined XR, and later UG, mainly looking for a way to raise the intensity of protest:

I did two years of activism in FFF [...] I saw the horizontal structure of FFF and I saw the climate crisis go deeper and deeper, and this affected me the most. [...] At a certain point in 2021 [...], I was starting to feel frustration with the methods that were being carried out, because I felt it wasn’t possible to have a real political impact. (UG2)

The sense of frustration combined with strategic reasoning on the importance of keeping multiple modes of protest active:

Obviously mass demonstrations are something that have always been crucial, fundamental to historical changes but not sufficient. And as far as the fight for the climate and the environment, for ecology was concerned, a movement that brought civil disobedience, that raised the bar to a different level of conflict with the current system, was completely missing. And so XR was born from this, right? [...] And UG actually doesn’t deviate that much from the initial XR theory, but applies it more faithfully in Italy. (UG2)

The split from XR that generated UG was part of a broader international process, based on the assessment of the efficacy of the specific type of civil disobedience that XR had been conducting:

These people (those who started UG) were speaking with Roger Hallam, who was one of the founders of XR in 2018 and that had left XR to develop his own

projects, because also in England and elsewhere the same stuff was happening. [...] Roger Hallam in that period was creating Insulate Britain. [...] So, in many countries these campaigns emerged, each with a name in their own language and addressing their own government. [...] This thing was formalised in April 2022 with the birth of the A22 network: these campaigns left XR and started their own international coordination. (UG2)

Interestingly enough, although this split took place within an international context, relying on the international networks in which activists are placed, political opportunities were mostly discussed at the national level. Furthermore, the XR-UG shift was also described as a further move from the international to the national context, as testified by the choice to avoid using English in the campaign's name.

The repertoire developed and adopted by UG has specific criteria that are seen as strategically important: visibility, non-excessive risk for participants, and a level of disruptiveness that does not antagonise public opinion (UG1). In concrete terms, two main forms of action have been used: the street blockade and the (temporary) smearing of monuments and works of art. These forms follow different strategic logics:

We distinguish between horizontal and vertical conflict. [...] Street blockades are horizontal conflict. It is a conflict that we act out within our own social class. We act indiscriminately with ordinary people like us, and this allows us to get out of the bubble and to make clear the existing conflict between the daily interest of arriving at work on time and the existential interest of doing something for the climate crisis and for the ongoing social crisis. [...] Vertical conflict is against power, against institutions or in any case against their symbols. Therefore, a typical vertical conflict is the smearing of the Ministry of Economy or the Senate. A variation on the theme is the smearing of works of art. [...] There you have a slight mix between horizontal and vertical conflict, because you are striking a symbol of the Italian artistic heritage. And this creates outrage and conversations. But, it also creates very strong emotional reactions from people. I mean, I did the action where we jumped into the Trevi fountain and it was worse than being in a blockade. (UG2)

In the strategic reasoning of UG activists, civil disobedience actions are, furthermore, characterised by nonviolence. The use of nonviolence is a tactical choice aimed at searching for and maintaining the popular consensus, in particular vis-à-vis state repression. The logic they pursue is that when repression is used against nonviolent actions, public opinion is more likely to support mobilisation.

Nonviolence, so the concept of doing actions that can be read in a certain way, not in that extreme way of the terrorist, of the vandal who wants to destroy everything [...] the intent is to create this, a type, a model of action that has good visibility, has a certain margin of risk which is not excessive for those who carry it out, and can perhaps be read not so destructively by those who observe it directly. [...] In our opinion, there is another tactical reason, which is that it can mobilise more, because it creates much more of a rift between power and the citizens who rebel. [...] I think you see it much more if you see nonviolent people getting arrested, getting taken away than if you see a group of people who have torches in their hands and start setting fire to the city. (UG1)

The tactical choices on repertoires therefore play on the ambivalence of relations with institutions: on the one hand, actions must not totally close off the possibilities of

dialogue with institutions, on the other hand, they must generate a vigorous response from the state in order to gain public sympathy.

### **6.5. Political institutions' non-responsiveness and repertoire change**

The logic of the activists' repertoire is intrinsically relational: the adoption of civil disobedience is consequent upon the lack of responsiveness by the national political institutions.

It was immediately clear how absurd it was, wasn't it? That people would have to make complaints, take to the streets, create inconvenience for people, for what is fundamentally a failure of our country's media and political apparatus to communicate the climate crisis and act accordingly. (UG2)

The need to raise the level of conflict, through civil disobedience, is justified by the lack of action of the state. For the activist the fact that the state is not respecting the social contract allows the citizen in turn to withdraw from presumed obedient behaviour:

There is a state that, in addition to violating any existing international agreement on climate, is actually violating the social pact with its citizens and this has really made me realise how much we actually don't owe our obedience to anyone. [...] But these laws are subordinate to the fact that we give up a piece of freedom to receive some protection of assistance from the state. This is not there and the future is completely mortgaged by the government's actions, but the present is also completely ignored. (UG2)

The (in)action of the current national government is seen to be a continuation of the governments who were in power during the previous parliamentary term, which coincides with most of the years under investigation. For the activists, governmental discontinuity is not followed by a discontinuity of institutional action regarding the climate crisis: 'it was hard even when there was no centre-right (in power) (FFF1). From the perspective of activists involved in civil disobedience, the lack of political responsiveness is structural. The sense of frustration and the need to raise the level of conflict are framed as continuities with previous environmental mobilisations. Widening the considered time span of mobilisation gives the activists further motivation to adopt civil disobedience: not only is the state ignoring the current wave's protesters, but it has been doing it for a long time.

We have been asking for something for 20 years: politicians are not listening to us, we will continue to ask for something. Yes, maybe after twenty years of a person ignoring you, it's also appropriate to start saying 'Well, I'm not asking you now. Now I'm going to go and get it'. [...] And it is not that I have to be the perfect one to find solutions, me as a citizen. It is the state that has to give me the solutions because otherwise there is no point in it being there. (UG2)

Therefore, along with the diagnosis of the state not currently respecting the social contract, the perception of growing anger and dissatisfaction motivates a willingness to 'go and get it' using more radical repertoires. The opposing views of the national government are perceived not only as opportunities for keeping the climate strike as the repertoire to be adopted (FFF 2), but even for the adoption of 'civil disobedience [...] especially at a time where there is a centre-right government and a certain narrative, a certain media and social approach' (FFF 1). According to activists that chose to shift

from demonstrative protest to civil disobedience, the goal is to achieve the political impact that climate strikes did not produce.

The strategy is to create enough disruption [...] which, either because the police don't manage to handle the situation anymore, or because the situation becomes embarrassing for the government, you are called to negotiate. This is the first step, because [...] you achieve a partial victory and this, in theory, galvanises the movement and increases its numbers. And then you have the numbers to produce systemic changes of a wider scope. (UG2)

UG activists were not particularly impressed by the meetings they were able to get with ministers Roberto Cingolani in 2022 and Gilberto Pichetto Fratin in 2023 (UG2), ending up reporting the same feeling of 'frustration' (FFF1) that characterises institutional contacts attempted by FFF.

## 6.6. What is to be done? Pseudo-institutionalisation and pseudo-radicalisation

The same lack of response by political institutions, translating into a sense of low efficacy of mass demonstrative protest, is also shared by FFF activists. The main difference is that for FFF the relationship with large masses of people is still central to its own identity (FFF1), as is the international nature of mobilisation (FFF2). Thus, FFF activists discuss the need to change strategies and tactics, including civil disobedience, but without renouncing the grassroots characterisation of the movement:

It is important to continue to carry out strikes but always see them as a moment of building from below that leads you to maintain political pressure for longer and longer. Which perhaps may lead to mass civil disobedience. Maybe that would already be an interesting thing to elaborate on, we are still very far away in my opinion, in Italy there isn't really the cultural background to do what they are doing in the Netherlands. (FFF2)

The idea of mass civil disobedience is a new element within FFF. This gives an indication of the process that we could call 'pseudo-radicalisation' of a part of the Italian climate movement; that is, the idea that demonstrative repertoires are unable to push the government to act and that therefore new strategies are needed without escalating into violence. Interestingly enough, while the sense of urgency triggered by the climate emergency and fostered by frustration with the lack of policy response justifies, in some, the move towards civil disobedience, it pushes others to entertain the idea of an electoral strategy:

A segment of FFF, frustrated by inaction, frustrated by the fact of being there, doing things with the same method for more or less four years, proposes civil disobedience – doing things against the law, that defy the law, that challenge people's perception that stimulate, that provoke people's reactions. It is frustration, the urgency to do something different that has not yet been attempted, in people who in four years have given everything following FFF's strategy [...] There is a significant part of the movement which instead wants to give a lot of importance to institutional dynamics and wants to think about how to occupy that political space that up until now we have tried to occupy by influencing it. [...] They want to replace the people we have so far tried to influence and who have not listened to us, or at least not with the necessary speed or urgency. (FFF1)

This discussion is not abstract. In the last few years, well-known FFF activists have been elected in the city councils of Turin<sup>6</sup>, Genoa<sup>7</sup>, Brescia<sup>8</sup> and Taranto, among others. And in the summer of 2023, the Left-Green Alliance (AVS) published an article in the leftist newspaper *Il Manifesto*<sup>9</sup> in which they proposed to ‘movements, associations, and the best civic organizations, as well as to the interested individual, [...] the building of a new agreement, an eco-social Alliance for climate, democracy, and equality’, looking towards the European Elections of 2024.

FFF spokespersons engaged in the discussion declared: ‘After more than four years of climate strikes, it is right for political parties to look to our movement. There are multiple ways to do politics. There are those who want to keep pushing from below and those who want to enter institutional dynamics, aiming to change them from within and change the parties. [...] We do not want to be affiliated with, or take positions toward an individual political force. The political forces must be open to our issue and translate this openness into our involvement in the electoral lists. [...] AVS’s openness towards social movements is positive. It is an interesting process that we hope other parties will do’<sup>10</sup>.

Again, as in the case of pseudo-radicalisation, it is not possible to refer to an accomplished institutionalisation process, since the electoral path remains confined to individual activists rather than groups, as was decided by the FFF national assembly in Bari in 2023 (personally witnessed by one of the authors). Still, the ‘pseudo-institutionalisation’ of a sector of the movement, which aims to open the doors of the political opportunity structure from within, is taking place, as is testified by the choice of two former FFF national spokespersons to run in the 2024 European elections, one in the AVS<sup>11</sup> list and another in the M5S list<sup>12</sup>.

Pseudo-institutionalisation and pseudo-radicalisation are considered to be in opposition to each other. Even if FFF activists acknowledge the legitimacy of small-group civil disobediences just as UG activists respect the choice to engage in electoral action, each actor feels rather strongly about their own path. On the one hand, for the FFF activists, protest and political actions that are not within the boundaries of the organisation’s repertoire need to be individually pursued, protecting FFF’s name (FFF2). In general, FFF activists reject the metonymy between disruptive repertoire and radical politics,

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<sup>6</sup> See: [www.sinistraecologista.it/sara-diena/](http://www.sinistraecologista.it/sara-diena/)

<sup>7</sup> See: [www.fivedabliu.it/2022/04/30/amministrative-2022-la-prima-volta-dei-fridays-for-future-amministrative-2022-la-prima-volta-dei-friday-for-future/](http://www.fivedabliu.it/2022/04/30/amministrative-2022-la-prima-volta-dei-fridays-for-future-amministrative-2022-la-prima-volta-dei-friday-for-future/)

<sup>8</sup> Colucci, G. (2023). Il consiglio comunale è uno strumento, ma Fridays non diventa un partito politico: parla l’ecoattivista eletta a Brescia col centrosinistra. *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, May 30. Retrieved from [www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2023/05/30/il-consiglio-comunale-e-uno-strumento-ma-fridays-non-diventa-un-partito-politico-parla-lecoattivista-eletta-a-brescia-col-centrosinistra/7174677/](http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2023/05/30/il-consiglio-comunale-e-uno-strumento-ma-fridays-non-diventa-un-partito-politico-parla-lecoattivista-eletta-a-brescia-col-centrosinistra/7174677/)

<sup>9</sup> Bonelli, A. and Fratoianni, N. (2023). Venite con noi, l’invito ai giovani movimenti di Alleanza Verdi Sinistra. *Il Manifesto*. Retrieved from <https://ilmanifesto.it/venite-con-noi-linvito-ai-giovani-movimenti-di-alleanza-verdi-sinistra>

<sup>10</sup> Merli, G. (2023). I Fridays for Future rispondono all’appello dei rosso-verdi. *Il Manifesto*. Retrieved from <https://ilmanifesto.it/i-fridays-for-future-rispondono-allappello-dei-rosso-verdi>

<sup>11</sup> Bendinelli, T. (2024). Mori, il volto dei Fridays punta all’Europarlamento: “L’auto elettrica è bella, ma non è la soluzione”. *Corriere della Sera*, April 16. Retrieved from [https://brescia.corriere.it/notizie/politica/24\\_aprile\\_16/mori-il-volto-dei-fridays-punta-all-europarlamento-l-auto-elettrica-bella-ma-non-e-la-soluzione-5ecca507-2ac5-4aa8-af94-0421d4bc5xlk.shtml](https://brescia.corriere.it/notizie/politica/24_aprile_16/mori-il-volto-dei-fridays-punta-all-europarlamento-l-auto-elettrica-bella-ma-non-e-la-soluzione-5ecca507-2ac5-4aa8-af94-0421d4bc5xlk.shtml)

<sup>12</sup> Bondi, M. (2024). Dai Fridays for Future al sogno europeo: Giacomo Zattini in corsa. *Il Resto del Carlino*. 21 April. Retrieved from [www.ilrestodelcarlino.it/forli/cronaca/dai-fridays-for-future-al-sogno-europeo-giacomo-zattini-in-corsa-9c528787?live](http://www.ilrestodelcarlino.it/forli/cronaca/dai-fridays-for-future-al-sogno-europeo-giacomo-zattini-in-corsa-9c528787?live)



reporting that ‘MAPA<sup>13</sup> activists from Mexico said that being radical means going to the roots of things, so not necessarily blowing up oil pipelines or things like that, but first of all to be radical in the way of seeing things, of positioning ourselves, of going to the root of the problems and, yes, going deeper’ (FFF3). On the other hand, the UG activists’ view of an electoral strategy is ‘super critical’, because ‘there is little time left and therefore if I start from the idea that I will form a party, run for election, people will then vote for me, then I will make the legislative proposals... Maybe we don’t have all this time anymore’ (UG1).

### 6.7. Protest efficacy: between media coverage, social roots and temporality

We have seen that activists justify the choice of their repertoire of action in terms of efficacy, theoretically presented as the capacity to influence policy choices. Still, when they concretely measure the efficacy of their action, they refer to other criteria. Some of them are shared: media coverage and visibility are used as an index of the success of both climate strikes and civil disobedience:

It was a demonstration that really shook the city because it had never been seen before, even in the newspapers, such gigantic resonance and pages, and throughout Italy and throughout the world in the media there was only talk of FFF. (FFF1)

We are in a period in which the traditional FFF phase is waning, in any case in terms of mass participation, in terms of impact, in terms of media attention. (FFF1)

In reality the street blockade is losing some effectiveness in terms of media coverage. It doesn’t matter much lately, from what we’ve noticed. But it still causes the most sensation, because it actually creates enormous inconvenience for those who are there and well, perhaps it is mentioned less than the smearing on TV, but it is a topic that then creates debate, because whoever gets stuck there, then talks about it, even if only badly, saying, ‘yesterday I got stuck, the damned people who made me waste half an hour’, and so it becomes a topic of discussion. And then you always find that minimal percentage of people who have a bit of a voice that support you. And so then this creates debate, conflict... and then it goes on TV. (UG1)

The reasoning concerning the inconvenience that the street blockade creates for the public is particularly interesting. This inconvenience is acknowledged, but it is considered secondary to media exposure because it creates a debate.

While actors agree on seeing media coverage as an index of efficacy, their analyses differ on their direct relationship with people. For actors engaging in civil disobedience, a direct relationship with the public exists only in the moment of action:

Even though we are criminalised and the narrative in the national media is of a certain type, for the people who actually see the action it’s different. It doesn’t make much sense to them that I act like a corpse and I am taken away by the police [...], so for those who see, yes, it works. (UG1)

Climate strikes, instead, are seen as a moment that shows the capillarity of the FFF social presence, an indicator of the persistence of collective action in spite of decreasing

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<sup>13</sup> Most Affected People and Areas

media coverage. There is the idea of building long-term change through the development of deep roots in Italian society:

In reality FFF still has very large numbers within local groups and in the number of local groups that are present in the areas. Last time we held strikes in 40 cities, and only the CGIL<sup>14</sup> [...] did better than us, mobilising in 58 cities [...]. We are demonstrating in 40 cities, we are university boys and girls, a few years of organisation, no funds, everything self-managed, self-financed, that's what we're talking about. So in my opinion FFF is still very present, it still has important numbers. (FFF2)

Behind this, there is probably a different temporality of protest and of the political process necessary to address climate change. For UG activists, the rhythm of mobilisation in itself provides a sense of efficacy:

These campaigns are based on disturbing the public in a serial, repeated way, with periods in which you stay in the same city for an entire month or two months and create discomfort in that city, generally the capital. (UG2)

For FFF activists, instead, the rhythm of mobilisation follows a medium- to long-term perspective, while still being influenced by the time pressure of the 'doomsday clock' of the climate emergency:

In five years it will be 2028, in a further five years, more or less, we'll have run out of time for the bigger things to do, and therefore we need five years more in which new people are gathered. Whoever's there already does different things to support the movement, continues in some way to be in the movement – the movement changes and also integrates new people, further committees, networks, movements, but there are also just more collaborations with things that are already there. [...] We must continue to carry out strikes, they are important for involving collectives, students, [...] it is always important to carry out demonstrations, to build mobilisation in the area and with all the pieces of student protest together, and committees, networks and territorial problems and we are trying do focus more on workers. (FFF2)

As the PEA has already shown, different forms of action have a different rhythm of frequency and intensity, corresponding to a different logic of action and a different idea of the temporality of the change pursued by actors. This qualitative section has highlighted how the adoption of a specific repertoire and the changes that have been made during the cycle have been significantly affected by the activists' perception of the closing of political opportunities due to a lack of political responsiveness.

## **7. Discussion and conclusions**

The combination of the PEA and the qualitative interviews allows us to reconstruct the development of the latest (and ongoing) wave of climate protest in Italy. We have identified the main actors, their targets (mainly, state institutions), their forms of action (mostly demonstrative and almost exclusively nonviolent), and the ebbs and flows of mobilisation, focusing in particular on the gradual change within the movement's repertoire of protest. The two different methodologies converge in proposing a possible periodisation of this wave. A first phase of explosion, with the emergence of the climate

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<sup>14</sup> Largest trade union confederation in Italy.

strike as the main form of action and of its characteristic peaks of mobilisation, was followed by the pandemic, with the obvious ellipsis of most forms of action. Then came the post-2020 phase, with a lower-intensity but more frequent rhythm of mobilisation, and the relative decline of the climate strike, which remains, however, the prevailing form of action (as much as FFF remains the prevailing actor) vis-à-vis the emergence of significant episodes of civil disobedience and possible attempts at electoral participation. In this section we propose six reflections based on this analysis.

First, we observe a change in the repertoire of action in response to a perceived closure in political opportunities, determined by the non-response of the state to the claims put forward. Nevertheless, this change, at least for the moment, is partial and relative, concerning only a minority (though a significant minority) of the protest events. Climate strikes are still the most frequent form of action, though with lower participation than in the previous phase, while at the same time civil disobedience actions occur and intensify, and electoral opportunities are considered. We do not witness, at the moment, the institutionalisation-radicalisation dichotomy (the choice to run for office is still limited to individuals and no significant violent action is visible), but we do witness a rearticulation of the repertoire of action of the movement, including both more radical (though nonviolent) forms of action and a discussion on the merits of participating in institutional representation.

Secondly, we should never forget that movements are, more often than not, internally plural and coalition-based. We do observe a case of strategic adaptation, but the agency of this strategic adaptation is far from unitary. Instead, different trajectories develop within the movement, with different strategic logics and different ways to respond to political opportunities. In the case of the climate movement, all the actors share the same objective of pushing against public inaction. However, they differ when it comes to choosing the strategies for achieving the objective.

Our third point regards political opportunities. While the literature has pointed out that it is the presence or absence of opportunities for mobilisation that affects collective action, rather than the concrete implementation of policy responses to movement claims, movement actors can interpret the latter as a case of the former. Our interviewees engaged in civil disobedience have clearly pointed out that the necessity to raise the level of conflict, and the justification for doing so in forms that go beyond the limits of the law, derive in their eyes from the state's inaction on climate. This has an impact also on the discussion on the extent to which the climate movement is pursuing, in practice, a reformist strategy: our analysis shows that, even if the movement does not negotiate with the government, instead demanding that the government implements the changes dictated by science and by the movement itself, the choice by the government to respond or not significantly affects the trajectory of the cycle of protest and the movement's strategic choices.

Furthermore, our analysis shows that the motivations of repertoire change are both internal and external to actors. Movement actors do plan strategically how to respond to the closure of political opportunities, but they are also motivated individually by the necessity to 'do something more' in order to feel at ease with their conscience vis-à-vis the threat of climate catastrophe, and collectively by the need to propose forms of action that fulfil individual activists' moral urge. Interestingly, individual motivations also limit the

adoption of certain actions that are too risky or cross moral boundaries. This contributes to keeping tactical choices within the framework of nonviolence. Particularly in the case of civil disobedience actions, the interviews revealed that there is significant attention to psychological support from other group members when performing certain actions.

Our fifth point concerns forms of action. Building on Portos (2019), we question the alternatives of institutionalisation and radicalisation as a response to the closure of political opportunities in the declining phase of a cycle of protest. Though we do witness a transformation of the repertoire towards the inclusion of more radical forms, this process takes place well within the limits of nonviolence. Although a significant number of political and media actors try to represent civil disobedience as something bordering terrorism, with clear consequences in terms of repression (and the recent legislation introduced by Parliament goes in this direction)<sup>15</sup>, there is no violent radicalisation taking place in Italy on the issue of climate, at the moment. Interestingly enough, we also witness cases of the two alternatives to radicalisation Portos observed within the Spanish 15M (decentralisation and compartmentalisation). While ‘pseudo-radicalisation’ takes place without the emergence of armed violence, ‘pseudo-institutionalisation’ is also developing through the crescent tendency of FFF activists to participate in electoral processes, while the organisation remains adamant in refusing to collectively choose this strategic path.

Finally, we point out that, indeed, strategic adaptation is influenced by the perception of political opportunities by movement actors but, in turn, such perception is affected by the long-term strategic logics of movement actors (that pre-exist strategic choices and partially shape them, just as they shape the perception of opportunities) and by the eventual dealignment between the outcome they claim to pursue (in our case, affecting state policy) and how to effectively measure success or failure (in our case, almost always media coverage and visibility).

All in all, we have illustrated the Italian climate movement’s extraordinary trajectory, in a cycle of protest that has no precedent in the history of Italian environmentalism, and its capacity to change and adapt, through the interaction of a plurality of actors, goals and motivations, in response to changing contexts and opportunities.

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<sup>15</sup> On 18 January 2024, the Italian Parliament passed a law that punishes anyone who defaces cultural or landscape assets with fines of up to 60,000 euro and up to five years in prison for anyone who destroys property during public demonstrations.

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## 8. Appendix

**Table A1.** The PEA Dataset: codebook and description

Vaname	Description	Measurement
<b>ID</b>	Identification Number	Progressive number starting from 1
<b>DATE</b>	Date of report	Range: 01/11/2018 - 31/10/2023
<b>DESCR</b>	Description of the protest event in a row	String
<b>TIMEVEN</b>	Duration of the protest event	Categories: 1=One day; 2= Multiday; 3= Other
<b>LEVEVEN</b>	Level of the protest event	Categories: 1= District; 2= Town; 3= Province; 4= Region; 5= Country; 6= EU; 7= International; 99= Other
<b>PLACE</b>	Place of the protest event	Nominal (ex. Rome)
<b>POSITPRO</b>	Type of protest in relation to climate change	Categories: 1= To stop climate change; 2= Neutral/ambivalent; 3= Climate denialist; 99= Other
<b>PARTICIPREP</b>	Whether the number of participants in the protest event is reported or not	Dummy: 0= Not reported; 1= Reported
<b>PARTICPPOL</b>	The exact number of participants taking part in the event, as reported or estimated by the police	Continuous
<b>PARTICIPNEWS</b>	The exact number of participants taking part in the event, as reported or estimated by the newspaper	Continuous
<b>PARTICIPORG</b>	The exact number of participants taking part in the event, as reported or estimated by the organisers	Continuous
<b>NORMORG</b>	The names of the organisations staging the protest event	Nominal (ex. Legambiente)
<b>FFF</b>	Was 'Fridays for Future' among the organisers?	Dummy: 0= No; 1= Yes
<b>XR</b>	Was 'Extinction Rebellion' among the organisers?	Dummy: 0= No; 1= Yes
<b>UG</b>	Was 'Ultima Generazione' among the organisers?	Dummy: 0= No; 1= Yes
<b>ENVORG</b>	Were environmental organisations among the organisers?	Dummy: 0= No; 1= Yes
<b>TERRCOM</b>	Were territorial committees among the organisers?	Dummy: 0= No; 1= Yes
<b>PARTY</b>	Were political parties among the organisers?	Dummy: 0= No; 1= Yes
<b>STUDORG</b>	Were student organisations among the organisers?	Dummy: 0= No; 1= Yes
<b>SOCCENT</b>	Were social centres among the organisers?	Dummy: 0= No; 1= Yes
<b>PROTFORM1- PROTFORM3</b>	The repertoire(s) of action adopted during the protest event (1 to 3 repertoires selected)	Categories: 1= Petitions/Public letter; 2= Leafletting; 3= Legal action; 4= Mail or tweet-bombing; 5= Public Assembly, Press Conference or other Meetings; 6= Symbolic Action (street theatre, masks, other performances etc.); 7= Rally; 8= Demonstration, march; 9= Strike; 10= Hunger Strike; 11= Sit-in; 12= Teach-in; 13= Critical mass; 14= Public events interruption/disturb/ blitz; 15= Occupation of buildings or similar; 16= Occupation of squares; 17= Street blockade; 18= Attacking art without damaging; 19= Violent action against things; 20= Violent action against people; 99= Other
<b>DEMANDS</b>	Description of the demands of the protest	String
<b>DEMANDSCOPE</b>	The scope of the demands	Categories: 1= District; 2= Town; 3= Province; 4= Region; 5= Country; 6= EU; 7= International; 99= Other
<b>OBJECT1</b>	- The objects or targets of the protest (1 to 3 objects selected)	Categories: 1= State/Institutions; 2= Political parties; 3= Private companies; 4= Media; 5= Citizens; 99=Other
<b>OBJECT3</b>		
<b>OBJECTSCOPE1</b>	- The scope of the objects or targets of the protest	Categories: 1= District; 2= Town; 3= Province; 4= Region; 5= Country; 6= EU; 7= International; 99= Other
<b>OBJECTSCOPE3</b>		
<b>POLINT</b>	Did the police intervene during the protest event?	Dummy: 0= No; 1= Yes
<b>INSTSUPPORT</b>	Was the protest event supported by any institution?	Categories: 1= International institutions; 2= State institutions; 3= Local institutions; 4= Political parties; 5= Schools/Universities; 6= Social organisations; 7= Media figures, celebrities; 8= Private companies; 99= Other
<b>TITLE</b>	Title of the article reporting the protest event	string
<b>LINK</b>	Link to the article reporting the protest event	string
<b>COMMENTS</b>	Any other comment on the protest event	string

Source: own elaboration.

To build the PEA dataset, we decided to use ANSA's archives. ANSA is the leading Italian news agency. We accessed the archives through the media aggregator Factiva. We selected two archives, the 'General News' and the 'Regional News' archives. The timeframe we analysed was from 2 November 2018 (three months before the first Italian climate strike in February 2019) and 31 October 2023. We searched for articles

containing any variation of the word ‘clima’ (climate) appearing together with any variations of the words ‘protesta’ (protest), ‘manifestazione’ (demonstration), ‘corteo’ (march), ‘sciopero’ (strike), ‘blocco’ (blockade), ‘sit-in’, ‘die-in’, ‘disobbedienza’ (disobedience), ‘blitz’, ‘marcia’ (march) and ‘strike’. The keywords were chosen based on the most common forms of climate protest according to previous research on the topic. Our choice of keywords, like any such choice, may have produced a bias in the sample (i.e., the non-appearance of protest events that used other forms of action). Still, the word ‘protest’ covers such a wide area that it was used in the past as a lone keyword in works similar to ours (Andretta 2017; Andretta and Pavan 2018; Andretta and Imperatore 2023). In our view, adding other keywords reduced the risk of missing events.

The search generated a total of 7738 news articles. The same word search in major Italian newspapers generated fewer articles (*Il Corriere della Sera*, 4233 articles; *La Repubblica*, 7111 articles; *La Stampa*, 2009 articles). Moreover, among the aforementioned archives, only the archive of *La Repubblica* includes local editions, but only for the cities of Bari, Bologna, Florence, Genoa, Milan, Naples, Palermo, and Rome. ANSA’s regional archives, instead, cover all Italian regional editions. We therefore chose ANSA in order to have the widest possible news coverage throughout the whole of Italy.

To select protest events, we started from the definition offered by Fillieule and Jiménez (2003, 273), who define an Environmental Protest Event as ‘a collective, public action regarding issues in which explicit concerns about the environment are expressed as a central dimension, organized by non-state instigators with the explicit purpose of critique or dissent together with societal and/or political demands’. Therefore, purely informative or cultural events were excluded from the selection. We more narrowly focused on events that regarded climate issues. We systematically analysed all 7738 news articles, removing those that did not contain any reference to protest actions. A total of 749 protest events were identified. We manually coded each event using the codebook presented in Table A1. Following other studies (Fillieule and Jiménez 2003; Hutter 2014; Oliver, Hanna, and Lim 2023), in the case of multicity coordinated protests we created separate events for each city<sup>16</sup>. In the case of information about the same event scattered across multiple articles, we systematically coded all information and reported the different sources in the form.

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<sup>16</sup> The choice to code multicity events into single protest events was derived from what we found in the literature. In addition to the aforementioned work by Fillieule and Jiménez (2003), Hutter (2014: 347) argues that: ‘the standard solution is to code the duration of an event as a separate variable, as well as taking the timing and the locality of events as basic criteria for delimitation. For example, our updated Kriesi et al. data is based on the instruction to treat each action of a series of actions as a single event if we know that they are separated in time (different days or clearly separated periods of one day) and/or space (different cities or clearly separated parts of one city). Similarly, the US dynamics of collective mobilization project’s brief event guide (available on their website) states, “An event is coded as one event if (a) it includes action that is mostly continuous—no gaps of more than 24 hours in time (. . .), (b) it is located within the same city or same part of the city, and (c) it includes the same (or a subset of the same) participants, whose goals are the same”’. While it is true that in some cases Kriesi and colleagues coded events in multiple cities as one single event, this was done only in exceptional circumstances where the article reported no information other than the name of the city. In all other cases, events that took place on the same day in multiple cities were coded as separate events from each other. Finally, Oliver et al. (2023), after pointing out that: ‘Deciding whether and how to parse these complex gatherings into distinct events is one of the difficult parts of coding protest events, and there are no universally agreed-upon rules’, then affirm that: ‘Reports of multicity coordinated protests typically state that there were protests in, for example, twenty-five cities, but name only a few cities. We create separate events for each named city plus an aggregate for the unnamed cities and link them all via an umbrella’. Therefore, also Oliver and colleagues suggest coding separate events for each city that is explicitly mentioned in an article. Overall, there is no agreed rule, but coding multicity events into individual protest events for each city mentioned seemed to us the method closest to other studies in the literature. Furthermore, we consider the capacity of a movement to organise tens of local events throughout the country on the same day as a relevant variable, which would have been lost if climate strikes were coded as one national event.

**Table A2.** Size of protest events across repertoires

		Size of protest events			Total
Repertoires		Fewer than 100	Between 100 and 999	More than 1000	
<b>Conventional</b>	Petitions/Public letter	0	0	1	1
		0.00	0.00	0.93	0.34
	Leafleting	0	0	0	0
		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Legal action	0	0	0	0
		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Mail or tweet-bombing	0	0	0	0
		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Total conventional	0	0	1	1
		0.00	0.00	0.93	0.34
<b>Demonstrative</b>	Public Assembly, Press Conference or other Meetings	0	3	0	0
		0.00	3.16	0.00	0.00
	Symbolic Action (street theatre, masks, other performances)	18	0	0	18
		19.15	0.00	0.00	6.08
	Rally	3	0	1	4
		3.19	0.00	0.93	1.35
	Demonstration, march	2	6	12	20
		2.13	6.32	11.21	6.76
	Strike	7	74	93	174
		7.45	77.89	86.92	58.78
	Sit-in	3	2	0	5
		3.19	2.11	0.00	1.69
	Teach-in	0	0	0	0
		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Total Demonstrative	33	85	106	224
		35.11	89.47	99.07	75.68
<b>Civil Disobedience</b>	Hunger Strike	5	0	0	5
		5.32	0.00	0.00	1.69
	Critical mass	0	1	0	1
		0.00	1.05	0.00	0.34
	Public events interruption/disturb/ blitz	2	0	0	2
		2.13	0.00	0.00	0.68
	Occupation of buildings or similar	7	6	0	13
		7.45	6.32	0.00	4.39
	Occupation of squares	1	1	0	2
		1.06	1.06	0.00	0.68
	Street blockade	30	2	0	32
		31.91	2.11	0.00	10.81
	Attacking art without damaging	14	0	0	14
		14.89	0.00	0.00	4.73
	Total Civil Disobedience	59	10	0	69
		62.77	10.54	0.00	23.31
<b>Violent</b>	Violent actions against things	2	0	0	2
		2.13	0.00	0.00	0.68
	Violent actions against people	0	0	0	0
		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	Total Violent	2	0	0	2
		2.13	0.00	0.00	0.68
<b>Other</b>		0	0	0	0
		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Total</b>		94	95	107	296
		100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: own elaboration.

**Table A3.** List of interviews and sample description

ID	Interviewee	Modalities	Date
FFF1	Fridays for Future activist	Conducted in person	16 November 2023
FFF2	Fridays for Future activist	Conducted online (via Google Meet)	17 November 2023
FFF3	Fridays for Future activist	Conducted in person	3 December 2023
XR1	Extinction Rebellion activist	Conducted online (via Google Meet)	8 April 2021
UG1	Ultima Generazione activists	Conducted in person	2 December 2023
UG2	Ultima Generazione activists	Conducted in person	11 December 2023

Source: own elaboration.

Furthermore, we conducted six in-depth semi-structured interviews with activists from three organisations (three activists from Fridays for Future, one activist from Extinction Rebellion, two activists from Ultima Generazione). Due to the fact that the organisational structure of the three actors is far from homogeneous, with FFF acting more as a network of local groups and XR and UG being characterised by a high level of centralisation, we used different strategies to select interviewees. With XR and UG we contacted the national organisations and were directed by them to activists that could be interviewed, while with FFF we selected, on our own, activists that had a representative role at the national level and were representative of different socio-geographic areas and political strands within the network. Four interviewees were men and two were women. The youngest was 22 and the oldest 50, with an average age of 30. Two activists came from the north-west of Italy, one from the north-east, two from the centre, and one from the south. The average length of the interviews was one and a half hours and all were conducted between 16 November and 11 December 2023, except for the Extinction Rebellion activist interview conducted on 8 April 2021. Two interviews were conducted online via Google Meet, while the others were conducted on-site.