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Bulgaria and Slovenia Protest Event Dataset (2009–2017): Protest cycles and protest patterns in Southeast Europe

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Abstract

This article aims to present findings from an original dataset on collective action in the protest arenas of Bulgaria and Slovenia in the aftermath of the global economic crisis, 2009–2017. Unlike other empirical studies which focus either on particular social movements or individual-level measurements, this dataset consists of all reports of collective action in the form of protests demonstrations, strikes, blockades, occupations, sit-ins, marches, petitions etc., derived from the national Bulgarian and Slovenian press agencies, including information about claims and actors. Along with a description of the data collection, techniques, and coding, the article identifies the phases of protest cycles and explores general protest patterns. The findings depict three distinct periods of activity in Bulgaria and Slovenia: the ascending phase of protest cycle involving immediate protest responses against austerity measures (2009–2011), massive anti-establishment discontent involving the dominant role of new informal protest movements (2012–2013), and the de-mobilization phase of mass protest and the rise of contention about cultural issues (since 2014).

Keywords: protest arena, protest event analysis, social movements, Southeast Europe, anti-austerity

1 Introduction

Mass mobilizations that targeted the democratic deficit, the spread of corruption, and economic austerity measures have occurred since 2008 in most of the post-socialist Southeast European countries. These new waves of contention have challenged the previous negative vision of the (un)civil societies of the region concerning their lack of capacity to organize and mobilize large-scale discontent, and to defend citizens' rights and interests through collective political action. Following the new waves of mobilization, the social movement literature recognized part of these new forms, claims, social groups, and movements by referring to a 'second' generation of movements (Pleyers & Sava, 2015) and focused more on new, moderate civil-society groups such as environmental, urban, and civil-rights movements than on more contentious and radical ones (Jacobsson & Saxonberg, 2013).

Following the recent research interest in the rise of new protest mobilizations, the main research question of this article is what characterizes the recent waves of protest in post-socialist Southeast Europe? Previous case-study research in the region has involved the deep investigation of particular social movements or protest waves, but there is still a need for a more complex, longitudinal, and nuanced approach to the long-term dynamics of mobilization and the interaction of multiple actors. In going beyond the presentist notion of individual-level participation and the movement-centric approach of recent social movement literature, this work aims to explore the long-term dynamics of protest mobilizations, including multiple claims and repertoires, through the perspective of protest event analysis of two paradigmatic cases of mass protest mobilization in SEE: namely, in Bulgaria and Slovenia. In filling the gap in our understanding of the protest dynamics in SEE in the aftermath of the 'Global Recession', the dataset provides new empirical evidence about the characteristics and patterns of recent mass mobilizations.

This work draws on two similar cases involving recent anti-establishment cycles of protest. The discontent in Bulgaria and Slovenia in the period between 2012 and 2014 expanded into the most massive and widespread protest wave since the 1990s, with high levels of public support and citizen participation. The street demonstrations provoked government resignations and party system innovation due to the emergence of new political projects or the consolidation of traditional alliances. The two cases are also similar in terms of their historical trajectories as both countries were ruled by communist parties until the late 1980s and then experienced rapid political and socio-economic transformation. In recent decades, Bulgaria and Slovenia were severely affected by the Global Recession, and the political system was challenged by a rise in electoral instability.

In the next section, the paper introduces the methodology and techniques associated with the protest event analysis and compares the dataset with previous work. The following section explores the case studies and the diverse trajectories of the protest demonstrations. Afterwards, the paper examines initial empirical findings from the dataset, identifying the different phases of protest cycle in Bulgaria and Slovenia, and the patterns of actors, claim-making, and economic contention.

2 Methodology

In the examination of protest arena dynamics, the work employs protest event analysis (PEA). This method helps to make a diachronic and cross-sectional comparison of dynamics and trends in the protest arena through quantitative content analysis of news generated about protest events. The method provides the researcher with a birds-eye view of contentious politics-driving forces, the circulation of demands, types of social groups, organizations that have evolved, repertoires of actions, and other relevant information. As defined by Koopmans and Rucht (Koopmans & Rucht, 2002, p. 231), protest event analysis 'is a method that allows for quantification of many properties of protest, such as frequencies, timing and duration, location, claims, size, forms, carriers, and targets, as well as immediate consequences and reactions.'

2.1 Concepts, data, and variables

Preliminary observations of Bulgaria and Slovenia showed that the associated mobilizations were driven by a variety of social movements and new forms of protest actors based on fragile informal collectives and initiatives. To understand the whole array of protest activities, including diverse sets of actors, claims, and repertoires, the building of the dataset was driven by the aim of analyzing the whole protest arena and its characteristics rather than specific social movements. Hence, the work follows the conception of Swen Hutter of the protest arena as a place with distinct modes of participation, degrees of institutionalization, sites of mobilization, and organizations (Hutter, 2014). In contrast to the electoral arena, Hutter defined the protest arena as the place in which participation is expressed by a protest repertoire that includes demonstrations, strikes, sit-ins, etc., just as voting characterizes the electoral arena. With regard to the degree of institutionalization, the protest arena is defined by a low level of predictability and high variation in volume, initiatives, and resources. In terms of main sites of mobilization, Hutter evokes the street in a literal and metaphorical sense by capturing as many different protest tactics as possible. Organizations typical of the protest arena are social movement organizations and civil society actors who regularly mobilize their constituencies for political goals, while political parties mobilize voters mainly in electoral campaigns and elections.

The protest arena is above all characterized by the related definition of the modes of participation: protest events. Following the tradition of the social movement literature on protest-event analysis (Andretta, 2018; Hutter, 2014; Koopmans & Rucht, 2002), I define protest events as every form of collective action which expresses discontent and disagreement staged by any kind of organization or group of individuals, whether institutional or non-institutional, formally organized, or informal.

In examining the protest arena as a specific place for mobilization, I look further into the concept of the cycle of contention, which helps to delineate large-scale mobilizations with similar characteristics (actors, claims, issues) with long-lasting effects from other protest events. Tarrow defined the cycle of contention as an 'increasing and then decreasing wave of interrelated collective actions and reactions to them whose aggregate frequency, intensity, and forms increase and then decline in rough chronological proximity' (Tarrow, 1993). According to Tarrow, to identify a cycle of contention, five features are needed: 1. heightened conflict, 2. broad sectoral and geographic extension, 3. the appearance of new social movement organizations and the empowerment of old ones, 4. the creation of new 'master frames' of meaning, 5. and the invention of new forms of collective action (Tarrow, 1993). All these features characterized the cases of Bulgaria and Slovenia, where during the period of intense conflict within the protest arena mass mobilizations with new repertoires and frames questioned the path taken since 1989.

In terms of collection techniques, data were collected from the Bulgarian press agency (*Balgarska Telegrafna Agentsia* – BTA) and the Slovenian news agency (*Slovenska tiskovna agencija* – STA) through their search engines using the term 'protest' and terms with the same root (protestors, protesting, etc.) as key words to be found in the title or the description of news. Following other work in the field (Carvalho, 2018; Císař, 2013; Portos, 2019), the codebook of the protest events dataset was organized into 43 variables, including the date of

the event, number of protest participants, characteristics of the organization, the claims made, the target, the reactions of police, the forms of action, and the intensity of violence. Regarding the data collection technique, I chose to collect details of protest events systematically on daily basis instead of event sampling on a particular day of the week.

2.2 Potential biases

Two potential biases of PEA have already been underlined by other scholars: the protest type, and the type of newspaper (Andretta, 2018). Newspapers usually report on events located in big cities, with strong protest participation, or characterized by violence. Some newspapers are more interested in reporting protest events than others, as those sympathetic to the government are less liable to report on demonstrations and in many cases underestimate the number of protesters in order to delegitimize particular protest groups and demands. In the political and media context of Southeastern Europe, media freedom is questioned by independent observers, who point to the clientelism-based relations between media and political elites. From this follows my methodological choice of using state press agencies as sources. On the one hand, the latter are not dependent on particular economic interests and have a long tradition of reporting news. On the other, press agencies have built regional networks of reporters that cover the whole area, which allows for events in small towns and events to be reported. Finally, while newspaper journalists aim to interpret protest events, in state news agencies information is briefly reported, and focused on facts such as place, organizers, demands and number of protesters, etc. In this way, I tried to overcome some of the potential biases reported in the PEA literature.

2.3 Comparing the Bulgaria and Slovenia Protest Event Dataset to other studies

Several datasets about protest mobilizations in Bulgaria and Slovenia have already been published. Table 1 shows the characteristics of other studies in terms of sources, scope, and time period. Two types of preexisting datasets can be mentioned: multi-country datasets, covering a large number of cases, and single-country datasets, specifying a particular case. The first type includes Beissinger and Sasse's (2013) & Kriesi et al.'s (2020) PEA datasets, based on news of protest events from international newswires such as BBC, Reuters, and the Associated Press. While these data provide an opportunity for researchers to make large-N quantitative examinations of protest dynamics, their main disadvantage is the source of information. Usually, international newswires generate news about large and significant mobilizations, or those that involve extreme violence, excluding local-based events. Another bias of such sources is the scope of their information. International newswires tend to report protest events in Northwestern European countries comparably more than often those in Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Whereas these large-N datasets contribute to our understanding of general trends in protest arenas across European countries, they have their own limits concerning the potential for a context-sensitive detailed examination of protest mobilizations.

Table 1 Characteristics of PEA datasets

Dataset	Source	Time-period	Cases
Kriesi et al. (2020)	International newswires	2000–2015	30 European countries; includes Bulgaria and Slovenia
Beissinger and Sasse (2013)	International newswires	2007–2010	18 East European countries; includes Bulgaria and Slovenia
O'Brien (2019)	English version of Bulgarian Press Agency in Factiva	2010–2016	Bulgaria
Rak (2019)	Slovenian National Police reports and media sources	November 2, 2012, and December 31, 2013	Slovenia

Case studies datasets such as O'Brien's (2019) work on Bulgaria, and Rak's (2019) on Slovenia, which provide richer details for within-case analysis, are based on either the international section of the Bulgarian Press Agency or police reports of contention and various media reports. Second, these datasets focus entirely on one country, making cross-case analysis impossible.

Following the comparison with other work, it can be said that the Bulgarian and Slovenian protest-event dataset is the first to collect comparative longitudinal data on protest mobilizations in these countries based on news retrieved from original sources by national press agencies. Table 2 compares the coded number of protest events across the aforementioned works, highlighting the scope and depth of our PEA data.

Table 2 Comparison between Bulgaria and Slovenia PEA dataset and other datasets according to average number of protest events per year

Country	Bulgaria and Slovenia Protest Event Dataset	Kriesi et al., (2020)	Beissinger and Sasse (2014)	O'Brien (2019)	Rak (2019)
Bulgaria	180 (9 years)	40 (16 years)	17 (4 years)	64 (7 years)	
Slovenia	45 (9 years)	16 (16 years)	2 (4 years)		87 (1 year)

In sum, the Bulgaria and Slovenia PEA dataset has several advantages compared to previous work. First and foremost, the dataset is based on news retrieved from national press agencies, which helps with identifying a large share of protest events at the local level which are usually absent in international newswires. Second, the dataset covers nine years, which allows for a long-term comparison of protest dynamics before, during, and after the financial crisis. Third, since this dataset was built on the basis of daily observations it captures all protest events reported in the national press agencies in the investigated period, instead of sampling a particular day of the week.

3 The cases

3.1 The political and socio-economic context

During the protest cycle, the party systems in Bulgaria and Slovenia were undergoing a process of fragmentation, characterized by unstable governments, declining support for traditional forces, and the rise of new political projects. The initial effects of the crisis came about in Bulgaria during the time of the government of the centre-right GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria), led by Boyko Borisov. The first Borisov cabinet (2009–2013) was at the beginning extremely popular, but the negative social effects of austerity measures and several cases of corruption produced increasing dissatisfaction. According to Eurobarometer, trust in the government dropped from 37.9 per cent in November 2011 to 16 per cent in May 2013, and satisfaction with democracy declined from 26.8 per cent to 14.9 per cent in the same period.[1] After early elections in May 2013, BSP (the Bulgarian Socialist Party) and the Turkish minority party DPS (Movement for Rights and Freedoms), supported by the nationalist Ataka (Attack), formed a coalition for a new government. The former ruling party GERB was isolated as the only oppositional force in parliament, while the traditional right-wing parties failed to surpass the 4 per cent threshold. New early elections at the end of 2014 were won by GERB, which constituted the second cabinet of Borisov (2014–2017) with the support of the coalition of traditional right-wing parties the Reformist block, the nationalists Patriotic Front, and the new centre-left ABV (Alternative for Bulgarian Revival).

The protest cycle in Slovenia unfolded with similar political dynamics. The first government during this period was led by Barut Pahor as prime-minister of the centre-left coalition of SD (Social Democrats) and LDS (Liberal Democracy of Slovenia), and lasted from November 2008 until the end of 2011. The coalition proposed unpopular economic measures and in September 2011 Pahor resigned, which provoked early elections at the end of 2011. The newcomer centre-left PS (Positive Slovenia) won 28.5 per cent of the votes but failed to find support from other parties in parliament to form a government. The right-wing Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), though coming in second with 26.2 per cent, reached an agreement with four small parties to form a government, and their leader Janez Janša became prime minister. The government lasted only one year (February 2012–February 2013) after investigations revealed that Janša and the leader of Positive Slovenia Zoran Janković had broken the law by failing to report their assets. Trust in the government and satisfaction with democracy dropped from 21.8 per cent and 29.2 per cent (May 2012) to 10.3 per cent and 19.7 per cent accordingly (May 2013). The political parties decided to remain in the same configuration and constituted a new government from the oppositional centre-left parties, headed by Positive Slovenia's member of parliament Alenka Bratušek. The government of Bratušek lasted from 20 March 2013 to 18 September 2014, and in addition to ministers from PS the new cabinet included members from three other parties – the traditional centre-left SD, the single-issue Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DeSUS), and the new liberal party of Gregor Virant's Civic List (DL). Trust and satisfaction remained low until May 2014, when it started to increase slowly following the new parliamentary elections.

[1] Data retrieved from the interactive web portal of Eurobarometer: https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys

In terms of socioeconomic threats, during the Global Recession Bulgaria and Slovenia experienced an economic crisis characterized by the collapse of the construction sector, services and manufacturing, and a negative rate of GDP growth (see Guardiancich, 2012; 2016; Lakwijk, 2013; Tzanov, 2011). The fiscal austerity measures that were implemented, such as budget cuts in the public sector, took place mainly through unilateral decisions by governments without taking into consideration interest groups and trade unions (Kirov, 2012; Stanojević & Poje, 2019). In total, the unemployment rate of the active population increased substantially in both countries, from 5.6 per cent (2008) to 13.0 per cent (2013) in Bulgaria, and from 4.4 per cent to 10.1 per cent in Slovenia during the same period. This trend was accompanied by a notable rise in unemployment among the youth from 11.9 per cent (2008) to 28.4 per cent (2013) in Bulgaria, and from 10.4 per cent (2008) to 20.1 per cent (2013) in Slovenia.[2] In general, the crisis affected youth and vulnerable social groups more negatively, but in the case of Bulgaria the economic model before the crisis had already led to weak social protection, a high poverty rate, and increasing income inequality between the top 10 and the bottom 50 per cent. Thus, the recession only strengthened these negative trends (Stoilova 2016), while in Slovenia the financial crisis had comparatively stronger effects on increasing deprivation in a well-developed economy with a strong welfare system (Bohle & Greskovits, 2012; Stanojević, 2014).

The overview of the general political and socio-economic context in Bulgaria and Slovenia suggests that in both cases during the cycle of protest the political context was generally favorable for challengers who wanted to attract bystanders for anti-systemic and anti-governmental action, as well as for protest actors and political entrepreneurs, as the period was characterized by the declining legitimacy of national governments and democracy, the rise of political instability, and the negative effects of the global economic crisis.

3.2 The mass anti-establishment protest waves

At the end of 2012, several hundred citizens held a spontaneous demonstration in Maribor against the introduction of a new speed-camera radar system. Only one month later, across the country, several thousand people demonstrated in the first 'All-Slovenian People's Uprising' against the whole political elite associated with the transition and austerity measures, and demanded the resignation of the conservative right-wing government of SDS (Kirn, 2012; Korsika & Mesec, 2014; Toplišek & Thomassen, 2017). At the end of February, the cabinet resigned after a vote of no confidence, and a new centre-left parliamentary coalition was formed to support a new government. One year later, in the pre-term parliamentary elections, the four-month-old anti-system political party United Left won 6 per cent of the vote share and became the fifth strongest political force in the National Assembly in Slovenia.

The mass protest wave in Slovenia was named by the activists and the media as the All-Slovenian Uprising and the Maribor Uprising, after the city where the mass mobilization started. The country experienced the longest and the largest protest wave since the regime change. The increase in demonstrational activism was also captured by other sources such

[2] Data retrieved and coded from the web portal of Eurostat: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database

as the Slovenian Public Opinion Survey, which showed a significant rise in individual participation in demonstrations from 2.7 per cent in 2003 to 7.7 per cent in 2013 (Toš & Vovk, 2014).

In the meanwhile, in the small Bulgarian city of Sandanski, several hundred citizens expressed their frustration with unexpectedly high electricity bills at the end of January 2013. After two weeks, the demonstrations spread to 35 cities, with more than 100,000 participants demanding radical change in the political system and the end of poverty. The resignation of the GERB government at the end of February deepened the ongoing political crisis. The new government of BSP and DPS, headed by Plamen Oresharski, took what turned out to be the unpopular decision to nominate the suspicious media mogul Delyan Peevski as director of the State Agency of National Security (DANS). After only several hours, ten thousand people went out to the streets of Sofia and protested for 404 consecutive days, demanding the resignation of the government.

The mass protest generated significant media attention and numerous analyses and several pieces of analytical work (Vaysova & Smilov, 2014; Ganev, 2014; Gueorguieva 2017; Nikolova, Tsoneva & Medarov, 2014; Dinev, 2016; Rone, 2017; Krasteva, 2016; Stoyanova, 2018; Tachev, 2019). From the beginning of the year until the end of 2013, the media, as well as analysts and researchers, characterized the protests as a significant event in national history due to the high level of contention and public involvement which could only be compared to the demonstrations that had taken place during the regime change in the 1990s.

The increase in public participation in demonstrations in Bulgaria was reported in other sources such as the European Social Survey (ESS), as well as in national surveys collected by sociological agencies. The ESS data show that while in 2006 only 2.3 per cent of respondents reported participating in public demonstrations, the proportion had doubled by 2013, reaching about 6 per cent (ESS 2006; ESS 2012). Also, findings from Gallup showed that during 2013 between 10 and 16 per cent of all respondents reported that they had participated in at least one of the protest demonstrations (Gallup International, 2014).

Although there were general similarities in the protest mobilizations, they differed in their trajectories. In Slovenia, the actors in the protest arena successfully developed a strong political project, United Left (Toplišek, 2019), soon after the end of the peak of mobilization, while in Bulgaria none of the numerous attempts to build a protest party resulted in successful electoral performance. Actually, in Bulgaria, protest actors were either co-opted from external political entrepreneurs or induced the consolidation of political alliances with traditional parties (Rone, 2017). Further, while in Slovenia protest actors introduced strong leftist and progressive messages in line with an anti-capitalist and libertarian frame, in Bulgaria the new-leftist actors remained a marginal voice within the protest arena and did not play a role in party system innovation. Looking at the distinct trajectories after the mass mobilizations, the building of protest event datasets will shed light on patterns of protest throughout the period of investigation.

4 Main characteristics of the protest arenas in Bulgaria and Slovenia: 2009–2017

The scope and depth of the PEA dataset enables an investigation of contentious politics within case and across cases. To illustrate the dataset's potential for case study or comparative analysis, the next part of the paper provides an overview of the main characteristics of the protest arenas in Bulgaria and Slovenia, and discusses the different phases of the protest cycles.

Based on the protest event data, the long-term dynamics of contention during the period can be identified. Table 3 describes the total number of protest events per year from 2009 to the end of 2017. The number of protest events is significantly higher in Bulgaria with 1624 in total compared to 409 in Slovenia, but when these numbers are weighted for population size, the level of contention in both cases is similar. When we divide the average number of events per year with the population size, the result shows 2.49 protest events per 100,000 people in Bulgaria compared to 2.21 in Slovenia. Table 3 also helps with identifying the rhythms of contention in the observed period: the protest-event data depicts that the cycle of protest in both countries follows three phases of mobilization. The *ascending phase* captures the period associated with rising contention from 2009 to 2012 in Bulgaria, and from 2009 to 2011 in Slovenia. The *peak* of the cycle unfolds with a significant rise in events in 2013 for Bulgaria, and in 2012/2013 for Slovenia. Afterwards follows the *de-mobilization* phase with declining contention from 2014.

The timing of the protest cycle can be examined from several perspectives. The initial findings suggest that the trends of contention are related to socioeconomic threats (Almeida, 2019) and changes in the political environment. The austerity measures and the general deterioration in socioeconomic conditions were not met with silence, as previous works have stated (Beissinger & Sasse, 2013). On the contrary, in both countries a rise in economic contention from 2009 to 2013 may be observed. Other interpretations might focus on the factors for mobilizations related to the specific national political context, such as the configuration of the political opportunity structure. After provoking early elections, mass protest demonstrations declined substantially and other issues appeared in the protest arena (refugees). This trend was accompanied by the process of the institutionalization of protest actors in the declining phase of the cycle, which resulted in the formation of the United Left in Slovenia (2014) and the new liberal party Yes, Bulgaria (2016).

Table 3 Distribution of protest events per year in Bulgaria and Slovenia, 2009–2017

Year	*Bulgaria*	*Slovenia*
2009	143	33
2010	181	28
2011	225	55
2012	149	93
2013	565	72
2014	128	25
2015	106	47
2016	72	30
2017	55	26
Total	*1624*	*409*

Source: Author's dataset based on news retrieved from Bulgarian Press Agency (*Balgarska Telegrafna Agentsia* – BTA) and the Slovenian Press Agency (*Slovenska tiskovna agencija* – STA)

In terms of the characteristics of organizations, Table 4 presents the distribution of protest actors in the observed period according to the frequency of protest events (total number of events). This indicator includes all types of public and collective protest event, such as street demonstrations, manifestations, strikes (including general strikes and hunger strikes), petitions, riots, confrontational demonstrations, street blockades, etc.[3] The overall picture suggests that new protest actors – formal civil society organizations (FCSOs) and informal groups and radicals – were more present in the protest arena compared to traditional actors such as trade unions, interest groups, and political parties.

In Bulgaria, new protest actors mobilized 56.7 per cent of all protest events and involved many more protest participants than traditional actors, the latter who mobilized 42.8 per cent of events. Among the new protest actors, informal groups and radicals accounted for 46.1 per cent of all events with the highest concentration of such actors in the eventful wave of 2013 (n = 427), while FCSOs mobilized only in 10.6 per cent of events. Within informal groups, radical leftist organizations were responsible for only 0.3 per cent of events (n = 5), while far-right nationalist groups mobilized in 2.4 per cent (n = 39). The largest share of contentious action was related to groups organized through Facebook, accounting for 24.7 per cent of all events (n = 403), with local groups and inhabitants responsible for 9 per cent (n = 160) and informal student groups 4.6 per cent (n = 74). Within the sample of FCSOs, green and environmental organizations were reported as organizers in 5.0 per cent (n = 81) of cases, and other civil organizations dealing with human rights and minorities 2.2 per cent (n = 70). Among the traditional actors, trade unions organized 17.8 per cent of events (n = 289) and compared to the previous actors their contention was almost equally distributed across the years. The interest groups of farmers, professional associations, employees, etc. organized 14.8 per cent of the protest events (n = 233). Last, political parties were present in 10.7 per cent of the cases (n = 174). In sum, during these nine years new protest actors such as informal groups and FCSOs were a significant part of the protest arena as they were responsible for more than half of all events.

In Slovenia, the driving force of protest escalation was somewhat similar to in Bulgaria, as the movements that mobilized thousands of people across the country during the peak were mainly informal social movements and informal groups who extensively used Facebook for protest coordination and propaganda. Informal groups and radicals were reported to be involved in 47.3 per cent of all protest events (n = 193). In addition, more formal civil society organizations (FCSOs) focusing on environmental issues, human rights, consumers' rights, women's rights, ethnic or religious groups' rights, democracy, transparency, etc., mobilized 16 per cent of all events (n = 66). Thus, in sum, 63.8 per cent of all events were directly connected to new protest actors in the observed period. Among the informal groups, leftist collectives such as occupy movements, social centers, and squatters led 10.1 per cent of the protest events (n = 41), and radical students were reported as organizers of 2.9 per cent of all events (n = 12). Less active in the protest arena were radical right-wing groups, which were reported in 2.9 per cent (conservative groups) and 1.5 per cent of the protest events (nationalist groups). The largest share of contention was related to mobilizations of informal initiatives coordinated through Facebook and local initiatives of inhabitants, which were reported

[3] Following classical work in the field (Kriesi et al., 1995), reports of press conferences, letters and warnings about protest were excluded from the calculations.

in 17.4 and 7.6 per cent of all protest events accordingly. Among the traditional actors, trade unions mobilized about 20 per cent of the events (n = 82), interest groups, including farmers and professional associations, were reported in around 8 per cent events (n = 33), and a similar number of actions were connected to the involvement of political parties (n = 30).

Table 4 Distribution of protest events and participants in Bulgaria and Slovenia by type of protest actor during the cycle of protest (2009–2017)

Protest actors	**% of protest events**	**% of protest events**
	Bulgaria	**Slovenia**
1. Trade unions	17.8	19.8
2. Interest groups	14.3	8.1
– Agricultural groups and farmers	7.5	2.9
– Professional associations and chambers	3.9	3.2
– Pensioners' organizations	0.3	0.7
– Religious organizations	1.1	0.5
– Employees' organizations and private companies	1.5	0.7
3. Political parties	10.7	7.3
– Main left-wing	1.8	0
– Main right-wing	0.3	1.7
– Nationalists	6.1	0.7
– New left	0	3.7
– Other	2.5	1.0
Total traditional actors	*42.8*	*35.2*
4. Formal social movements and civil society organizations	10.6	16.1
– Consumer rights	1.1	0.5
– Human-rights organizations and specific groups' rights	2.2	4.7
– Environmental organizations	5.0	4.4
– Organizations focused on the rule of law and democracy	0.7	3.9
– Student and youth organizations	1.2	2.2
– Cultural and leisure organizations	0.4	0.5
5. Informal groups and radicals	46.1	47.7

Table 4 *(continued)*

Protest actors	**% of protest events**	**% of protest events**
	Bulgaria	**Slovenia**
– Informal workers' groups	3.0	3.7
– Informal interest groups (farmers, professionals)	1.0	0.5
– Informal student groups and radical students	4.6	2.9
– Informal minorities (Roma, refugees, etc.)	0.7	0.7
– Groups organized via social media platforms	24.7	17.4
– Local initiatives of inhabitants and informal groups	9.0	7.6
– Radical conservative groups and organizations	0.4	2.9
– Radical right, nationalist, far-right hooligans	2.4	1.5
– Radical left-wing, anarchist, autonomist	0.3	10.5
Total new actors	*56.7*	*63.8*
6. Other groups	0.6	1.0
All mobilizations	100.0%	100.0%
Total	(1624)	(409)

Sources: Author's dataset based on news retrieved from Bulgarian Press Agency (*Balgarska Telegrafna Agentsia* – BTA) and the Slovenian Press Agency (*Slovenska tiskovna agencija* – STA)

The greater distribution of new actors in Bulgaria and Slovenia reveals the comparatively weaker role of traditional organizations; fewer formal initiatives were better represented in the dataset. In both cases, across traditional actors trade unions had the greater mobilization capacity, followed by interest groups and political parties. In comparison, with new protest actors informal groups and radicals were the main protest actors – they were reported in almost half of all protest events in the dataset. Within these groups, is interesting to note the weak role of radical-left actors in Bulgaria and the significant role of the radical left in Slovenia and the significant portion of protest events related to local initiatives in both countries.

However, these quantitative measures can be misleading, as the number of protests driven by Facebook and local initiatives is strongly related to the eventful protest waves in 2012/2013, whereas both before and afterwards more formal actors such as trade unions, interest groups, and political parties mobilized a large part of the contention. Thus, looking from the diachronic perspective, the dataset can tell us more about the dynamics within the protest arenas. Figure 1 depicts the distribution of events according to five categories of actors: trade unions, interest groups, political parties, FCSOs, and informal groups. It shows that in the ascending phase traditional actors were better represented in the protest arenas in Bulgaria and Slovenia, while the participation of informal groups increased significantly at the peak of the protest cycle, but in the de-mobilization phase declined compared to that of traditional actors.

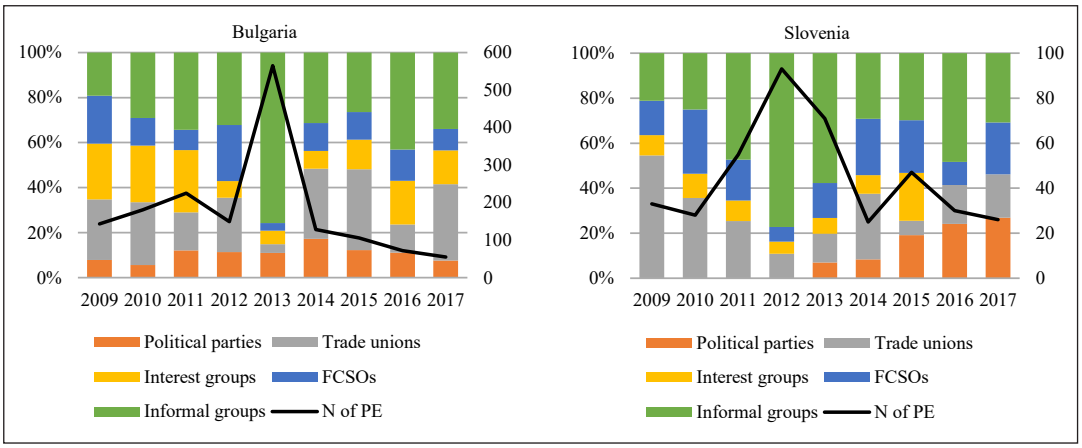

Figure 1 Types of actor per year in Bulgaria and Slovenia, 2009–2017 (total number)

Source: Author's dataset based on news retrieved from Bulgarian Press Agency (*Balgarska Telegrafna Agentsia* – BTA) and the Slovenian Press Agency (*Slovenska tiskovna agencija* – STA)

With regard to the different claims in the protest arenas in Bulgaria and Slovenia, the two countries shared some similarities, but also important differences. Economic claims associated with anti-austerity policies, budget cuts and privatization were reported in almost half of all protest events – 43.1 per cent in Bulgaria and 44.6 in Slovenia, but more anti-systemic contention was observed in Slovenia, where, along with the counter-mobilizations against unpaid salaries, some protest actors, including the radical left and trade unions, challenged neoliberal reforms and free-market capitalism. On the other hand, in Bulgaria trade unions, civil organizations and informal groups reacted to utility and energy prices, poverty and labor conditions, and farmers in favor of economic protectionism. Concerning protests about political issues such as corruption, the state of democracy, the political elite, political parties and governments, these were reported in 33.4 per cent (n = 543) of all events for Bulgaria and 29.7 per cent (n = 121) in Slovenia. Cultural protests that shared claims about issues such as refugees, the environment, Roma issues, family values, and women's rights were 14.8 per cent (n = 241) of protest events in Bulgaria but significantly better represented in Slovenia at 25.2 per cent (n = 103).

Figure 2 shows the long-term dynamic of protest claims by comparing the three main claim clusters per year: economic, political, and cultural protest. The patterns depict the large share of economic protests throughout the whole period and the high concentration of political protests during the peak (2012–2013). The distribution of protest claims displays how protests about political issues were concentrated in the ascending phase and characterized the peak of the cycle.

After the mass protest waves, economic protests increased in proportion together with protests about cultural issues, while political protest declined substantially. These changing trends suggest the need for a closer look at the claim-making practices and perceptions of protest actors during this period.

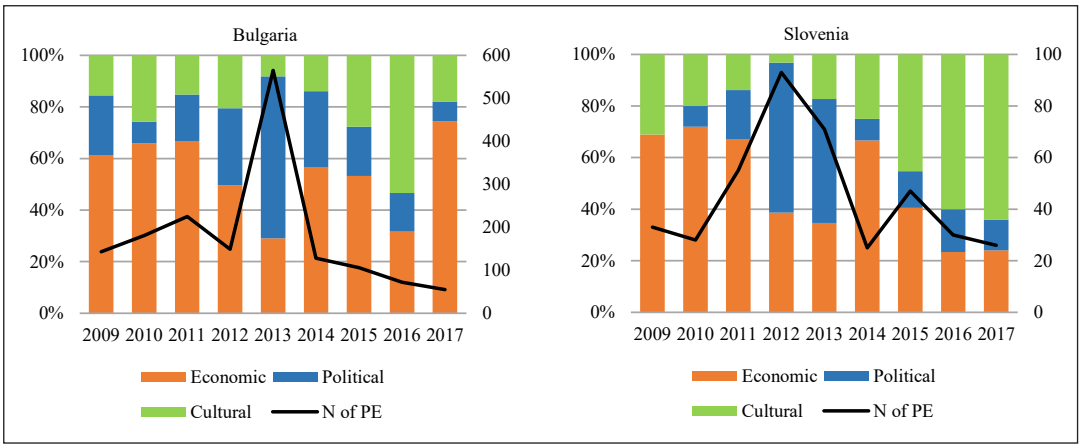

Figure 2 Types of claim per year in Bulgaria and Slovenia, 2009–2017 (total number)

Source: Author's dataset based on news retrieved from Bulgarian Press Agency (*Balgarska Telegrafna Agentsia* – BTA) and the Slovenian Press Agency (*Slovenska tiskovna agencija* – STA)

The PEA dataset suggests rejection of the claim of proverbial patience during the Great Recession (Beissinger & Sasse, 2013). Similarly to what Almeida noted in his work on Latin American's protest arena (Almeida, 2007) the erosion of social and economic benefits, budget cuts, and attempts at structural reforms of the pension system, healthcare and education induced popular reactions by a diverse set of actors. Table 5 summarizes the distribution of economic contention, showing that trade unions mobilized a large portion of the anti-austerity protests, followed by informal groups. Next to them, farmers and agricultural producers regularly mobilized protest events, mainly in Bulgaria, and the lowest rate of economic contention was observed among political parties and formal civil society groups. The largest events that focused entirely on socioeconomic issues were held in the ascending phase (2009–2011), whereas mass protest waves mixed claims about poverty, prices, and austerity measures with general anti-establishment demands.

Most of the largest events during the ascending phase in Bulgaria and Slovenia were organized by trade unions against the privatization of formerly state-owned companies, pension reforms that increased retirement age, austerity measures in the public sector (specifically budget cuts in education and healthcare), and in favor of increasing salaries and for economic justice. In the same period, farmers and agricultural producers in Bulgaria mobilized blockades against budget cuts in the agricultural sector and informal groups held nationwide demonstrations against fuel prices, while academics and students challenged reforms in higher education. From 2011 onwards, in Slovenia protest responses came from radical leftist collectives against global capitalism and the neoliberal reforms of education in the form of street demonstrations and sit-ins. During the peak of the cycle, in Slovenia the mass protest wave challenged austerity measures and involved anti-establishment rhetoric against all political parties. Social movements and horizontal networks organized massive demonstrations across the country, and at the end of January 2013, around 100,000 employees were involved in a general strike. The peak of the cycle in Bulgaria was driven by politi-

cal claims, as only the first protest wave questioned economic injustice and poverty, while the second and third protest waves included demands for the resignation of the socialist-led government and new elections.

Table 5 Distribution of economic contention according to protest actors in Bulgaria and Slovenia, 2009-2017 (total number)

Actor	Bulgaria	Slovenia
Trade unions	264 (37.7%)	75 (40.5%)
Informal groups	214 (30.5%)	75 (40.5%)
Interest groups	165 (23.5%)	19 (10.3%)
Political parties	43 (6.1%)	6 (3.2%)
FCSOs	28 (4.0%)	9 (4.9%)

Source: Author's dataset based on news retrieved from Bulgarian Press Agency (*Balgarska Telegrafna Agentsia* – BTA) and the Slovenian Press Agency (*Slovenska tiskovna agencija* – STA)

Following the early elections and the institutionalization of protest groups, the third phase of the cycle was shaped by regular and small economic protests, but this trend developed on account of the declining contention in general.

5 Conclusion

This article has introduced original datasets about protest events in Bulgaria and Slovenia between 2009 and 2017, described the methodology and techniques used in the analytical approach, and explored initial findings by identifying the phases of protest cycles and the dynamics of actors and claims. The Bulgaria and Slovenia Protest-Event Dataset permits an examination of the dynamics and patterns of protest in two post-socialist countries in South-east Europe, both of which recently experienced political and economic crises and the rise of new protest mobilizations. The initial findings from the protest event analysis are that in both cases protest cycles against the political establishment and socio-economic reforms unfolded in three distinct phases: an ascending phase with immediate protest responses against austerity and budget cuts, massive anti-establishment discontent with the dominant role of new informal movements, and the de-mobilization phase of mass protest and the rise of anti-migrant demonstrations. In terms of protest actors, the findings showed that in both cases new types of protest organizations increased their impact on the protest arena, while tradi-

tional actors such as political parties, trade unions and interest groups declined during mass demonstrations but became again the main protest actors in the aftermath of the mass protest waves. The initial findings contribute to the long-term empirical observation of protest arenas in Bulgaria and Slovenia.

While previous work focuses on emerging new informal protest groups or particular social movements, the current analysis of the PEA data is the first to compare mobilizations across multiple actors in the long term. The PEA illustrated that the austerity-driven economic reforms since 2008 were not met with silence in Bulgaria and Slovenia, as previous literature has suggested. On the contrary, a large share of economic-based contention and trade unions mobilization can be identified in the period between 2009 and 2012. Second, comparing the protest cycles in both cases, the paper identified that even in the ascending phase political protest was on the rise, driven by informal groups organized through social media, but this peaked during the turning point in 2012–2013, characterizing the eventful protest waves. In the phase of de-mobilization an increase in cultural contention was identified which coincided with the migration crisis in Europe.

Through these initial findings, the dataset shed light on the diverse protest arena in Southeast Europe by providing arguments to refute the claim of the backwardness of the civil society sector and 'proverbial patience'. Along with this, the examination of the phases of the protest cycles suggests that the changing of political configurations and socioeconomic conditions played a role in the dynamics of contention. The peak of the cycle was followed by both the restructuring of the party system and institutionalization characterized by the formation of protest parties or traditional alliances.

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