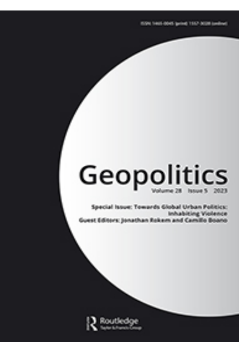

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Julia Rone & Maik Fielitz

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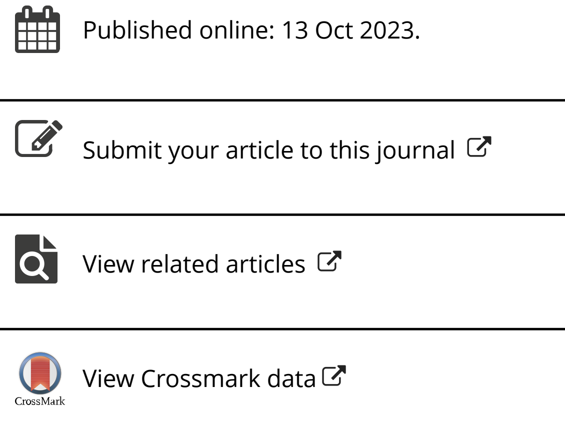

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

'Stop the Pact'! The Foreign Policy Impact of the Far-Right Campaigning Against the Global Compact for Migration

Julia Rone [a] and Maik Fielitz [b]

[a]Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, United Kingdom; [b]Research Unit on Right-Wing Extremism Research, Institute for Democracy and Civil Society, Jena, Germany

ABSTRACT

In 2018, the UN Global Compact for Migration (GCM) was signed by a majority of countries. The GCM was the first intergovernmentally negotiated agreement, prepared under the auspices of the United Nations, to cover all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner. Seventeen countries, among them Italy, Austria, Hungary and Poland, abstained or voted against this non-binding agreement as they feared interference in their national sovereignty. The polarising potential of the GCM, that supposedly sets global regulations against national policies, has been fuelled by far-right actors throughout Europe. Framing the decision on the GCM as a referendum against the allegedly liberal governance of migration in the European Union, movements and parties launched a multi-faceted campaign that generated protest and spurred advocacy networks transnationally. In this paper, we analyse the extent to which the campaign against the GCM influenced foreign policy in the narrow sense of countries signing or not signing the pact (short-term impact), but also in terms of discourse and policy on immigration (long-term impact), more broadly. We explore the relative role of campaigning against the GCM by contrasting four country cases – Austria, Belgium, Germany, and Italy, each of which had different governmental constellations and previous extra-parliamentary mobilisation on migration. Our work offers a first in-depth comparative study of this key campaign that has otherwise remained understudied in the field of protest, media and extremism studies. By providing a comparative analysis of the same campaign in four European countries, we aim to offer important insights on how the far right is attempting to impact decision making in foreign policy contexts and what factors might explain its mobilisation and influence capacity.

Introduction

The Global Compact for Migration (GCM) has been the first intergovernmentally negotiated agreement, prepared under the auspices of the United Nations, covering all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and

CONTACT Maik Fielitz maik.fielitz@idz-jena.de Research Unit on Right-Wing Extremism, Institute for Democracy and Civil Society, Tatzendpromenade 2A, Jena 07745, Germany

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comprehensive manner. Preparing the GCM started in April 2017 and comprised 18 months of negotiations and consultations. The agreement was signed at a conference in Marrakesh, Morocco on December 10, 2018. The United States clarified already in December 2017 that it would not participate since the global approach 'was not compatible' with U.S. sovereignty (Wintour 2017). Hungary pulled out of the agreement several months later in July 2018. Yet, the agreement remained broadly uncontroversial until the fall of 2018, when the leader of the Austrian Identitarian Movement Martin Sellner initiated a campaign coordinated via social media platforms and instant messaging apps.

Sellner saw in the GCM an opportunity for a transnational cycle of protest against the European migration policy and a way to connect to racist clamour of 2015 in the context of the so-called refugee crisis (Fernholz and Fielitz, 2022). In fact, the GCM has been framed as a compact that materialises the 'great replacement', a conspiratorial theory that European elites would deliberately exchange the national population with ethnicities of different cultural descent (Ebner and Davey 2019). What followed was a remarkable mobilisation across a number of European countries that aimed to influence the decision of governments to sign this supranational agreement. Via chat groups, counter information and mass protests a far-right campaign was initiated to impact the foreign policy of European countries through politicisation of migration issues.

Despite the importance of the anti-GCM campaign, there has been little research on the case itself. This reflects a broader trend: campaigning has received surprisingly little attention in the study of the far right (but see: Forchtner, Krzyżanowski, and Wodak 2013). This is in stark contrast to research on left-Green alter-globalisation campaigns and actors, whose transnational knowledge diffusion and interactions among each other and with institutions have long attracted the attention of researchers (Anderl 2022; Pleyers 2010). When it comes to the far right, the long-term fascination of researchers with political parties has started giving way only recently to new research agendas that include non-institutional far-right politics, especially street and digital activism (Gattinara and Bouron 2019; Gattinara and Pirro 2019; Weisskircher and Berntzen, 2019). What studying campaigning, in particular, allows us though is to go beyond simply replacing parties with movements as the focus of analysis. In order to understand far-right campaigns, one needs to pay attention to the *interaction* between parties and movements (see Weisskircher, Hutter, and Borbáth 2023), but also between a number of other players that strategically navigate various arenas in order to spread their message and organise their supporters (Jasper and Duyvendak 2015).

In this paper, we analyse the extent to which the campaign against the GCM influenced foreign policy in the narrow sense of countries

signing or not signing the pact (what we label the short-term impact), but also in terms of discourse and networking on immigration (the long-term impact), more broadly. Crucially, we argue that looking at public opinion alone (Banai, Votta, and Seitz 2022) cannot explain why some countries signed the agreement, while others did not. For example, the percentage of people perceiving immigration as a problem was similar in Austria and Belgium (Tabaud, 2023). Still Belgium did sign the GCM and Austria did not. Instead, to explain the far right's impact on foreign policy, and more specifically the impact of far-right campaigning, in this paper we look at the role of political parties and social movements as well as the interactions between them.

We explore the campaign against the GCM by contrasting country cases with different governmental constellations and previous extra-parliamentary mobilisation on migration in order to discuss the relative role of campaigning. Our work offers a first in-depth comparative study of this key campaign that has otherwise remained understudied in the field of protest, media and extremism studies (with few important exceptions such as: Knüpfer, Hoffmann, and Voskresenskii 2022; Rone 2021a, 2021b). By providing a comparative analysis of the same campaign in four European countries, we aim to offer important insights how the far right is attempting to impact decision making in foreign policy contexts.

The paper proceeds as follows: in the next section, we outline the theoretical framework of the paper, discussing literature on the far right in IR research, far-right campaigning, as well as pathways of campaign impact. We then outline, in the third section of the paper, the key research question, as well as the rationale behind choosing our cases and methods. In the fourth section, we discuss the campaign against the GCM in Austria, Germany, Italy and Belgium. We conclude by outlining the contributions of the paper as well as avenues for future research.

Theoretical Framework: Far-Right Campaigning and IR Studies

The existing research on far-right influence on policy had for a long time focused overwhelmingly on political *parties* as key players, as well as on their influence on discourses, policy and party competition in domestic politics (Mudde 2019). This paper, in contrast, outlines how and under what conditions *far-right campaigns* as *hybrid organisational forms* (Fielitz and Thurston 2019; Winter 2019) influence *foreign policy* (Varga and Buzogány 2021; Worth 2017). In the following sections, we discuss each of these elements before showing how they come together in the novel theoretical framework we propose.

Policy Impacts and the New Interest in the Far Right in IR Studies

As far-right political discourse and players have moved from the fringes to the mainstream (Brown, Mondon, and Winter 2023; Minkenberg 2017; Mudde 2019), the question of how the far right impacts policy has become of primary importance. Existing research has explored the impact (and extent of this impact) of far-right parties in parliament and/or government on citizenship policy (Howard 2010), immigration and integration policy (Akkerman 2012; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015; Lutz 2019; Muis and Immerzeel 2017), welfare (Krause and Giebler 2020) and cultural policy (Minkenberg 2001). Indirect effects on policy through influencing other parties have also been explored in detail (Immerzeel, Lubbers, and Coffé 2016; van Spanje 2010). Furthermore, the effects of the mainstreaming of far-right ideology, more generally, on immigration policy have been explored in various contexts (Yılmaz 2012; Zaslove 2004). What is common between all these studies of far-right impact is their focus on *domestic* politics and policy making, above all.

Nevertheless, in the wake of the 2016 election of Donald Trump, the Brexit referendum and the continuing rise of illiberalism in Central and Eastern Europe, a number of studies have started exploring the impact of far-right parties on *foreign* policy as well, wondering whether rising nationalism would present a challenge to regionalism and globalism as cornerstones of contemporary governance (Worth 2017). Talking more generally about 'far-right forces', Varga and Buzogány (2021) explore how established far-right networks of political players and intellectuals in Poland and Hungary have increasingly put forward foreign policy conceptions that challenge contemporary liberal democracy. And focusing specifically on how far-right parties in government opposed the Global Compact for Migration, Himmrich (2019) shows how governments with far-right participation succeeded in their campaign to 'target the EU's actorness at the UN (. . .), thereby undermining its credibility as a broker for member states at the multilateral level' (ibid., 2).

Focusing more on structural factors, Badell (2020) explores why the EU, a unitary actor, managed to constrain dissent on the margins at the initial stages of negotiation of the GCM (from early 2016 to early 2018), while it failed to do so in the run up to signing the agreement in late 2018. Badell analyses the domino effect of Austria's withdrawal from the GCM and argues it was due not only to the increased salience of the agreement in the public sphere and far-right mobilisation but also to the key role of Austria, which held the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU at the time (Badell 2020).

While these interventions have focused on the role of predominantly far-right parties and the impact of their decisions on EU multilateralism, there is still scarce literature on far-right bottom-up mobilisations or campaigns understood as complex hybrid actors. This is not a surprise. In contrast to the alter-globalisation movement, far-right bottom-up activism has been said

largely to ignore transnationally organised challenges to international organisations, besides all attempts of transnational contact-making (Mudde 2019, 64–68). However, with far-right parties and figures in leading positions, movements from below have now powerful allies in office to undermine the liberal world order and to mainstream foreign policy positions that have been rather marginal before (Liang 2007).

Far-Right Campaigning as a Hybrid Organizational Form

Far-right street politics has seen a remarkable resurgence in the last decade (Gattinara and Pirro 2019). This has gone hand in hand with skilful and innovative uses of traditional social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook but also alternative media websites and blogs, which the far right has used not only to spread its message and foster indignation but also to build a community ready to act given the right occasion (Froio and Ganesh 2019; Gattinara and Bouron 2019; Rone 2021b). This organisational practice has been met with an increased academic interest in non-institutional forms of far-right mobilisation, including social movements (Berntzen and Weisskircher 2016; Gattinara, Froio, and Pirro 2022) but also subcultures online and offline (Fielitz and Thurston 2019). Still, most of these studies have focused on specific actors (movements or subcultures), rather than exploring the dynamic interactions between different types of actors (but see Zeller 2022).

Only recently have scholars started focusing on the interaction between parties and movements over time (Minkenberg 2019; Weisskircher and Berntzen 2019) or have explored coordinated online campaigns (Knüpfer, Hoffmann, and Voskresenskii 2022). Our research on the GCM campaign follows in the footsteps of these advances and puts emphasis on *campaigns* as hybrid organisational forms that allow to bridge offline and online mobilisation by parties, movements, subcultures, media and other non-conventional actors (Rone 2021a) cooperating in a short period of time around a common goal. While protest remains a central activity in campaigning contexts, they are today only influential in combination with a comprehensive digital media strategy that puts political action in a discursive framework and mobilises indignation that spills over from digital platforms to the streets and parliaments – and back. This convergence of arenas thrives as burgeoning far-right parties engage increasingly in the protest activities trying to pool right-wing forces and to recruit activists. Then again, far-right parties play a key role in staging campaigns as they bring in knowledge, resources, and media attention.

The far right has been clearly one beneficiary of the increased importance of social media for political mobilisation (Winter 2019). Its tech-savvy activism contributed to the enormous reach of its messages compared to pre-digital conditions. Hence, a variety of far-right players embraced social media as

a central arena to disseminate their narratives and political visions. The invitation to a Do-It-Yourself activism is probably best symptomised by the increasing number of far-right political influencers (Leidig 2021; Maly 2020) who attract a younger generation to far-right messages. Through the abundant user chains, far-right messaging is transported by social media multipliers and leaves the original source beyond recognition (King 2018). Hence, campaigning has become a key mode of operation not only for bottom-up campaigners but also increasingly for politicians and for alternative media that provide the connection between these two types of actors but also act as mobilising players themselves (Rone 2021a). These artificial grassroots movements (so-called astroturfing) are intended to infiltrate the discourse with political content, identifiable via keyword hashtags, across platforms and to drive the public in front of them (Keller et al. 2020). Still, not every campaign is equally successful and campaigns can achieve impact in a variety of possible ways.

Pathways of Campaign Impact

The question of impact or, put otherwise, consequences of social movements has long drawn the attention of scholars (Bosi, Giugni, and Uba 2016; Giugni 1998; Kolb 2007). Movements can have multiple direct and indirect impacts, including biographical effects on movement participants themselves (Blee 2016; Giugni and Grasso 2016), effects on institutions (Peterson 2016), policy decisions (Giugni 1998; Kolb 2007, Luders 2016), cultural norms (Rochon 1998), and even effects on technological change (Weisskircher 2019). Focusing on the political outcomes of social movements, in particular, Kolb argues that we still have little systematic knowledge on why some movements succeed and others fail to achieve policy impact due to 'theoretical incoherence, lack of comparability across studies and the limited scope of the research' (Kolb 2007, 7). An important problem in the study of social movements' outcomes has also been the lack of in-depth studies of failed social movements or protest campaigns (ibid, 10).

When talking about the impact of campaigning against the GCM, three important caveats must be made:

First of all, when it comes to the impact of campaigning (or the lack of it), it is important to distinguish between short-term and long-term impacts. In our analysis, we expect there will not be a complete overlap between short-term and long-term impacts. In some countries (such as Germany or Belgium), the GCM was not signed but campaigning still had an important impact in consolidating far-right networks, mainstreaming far-right discourses, and influencing other parties positioning on the issue (Brown, Mondon, and Winter 2023; Klinger et al. 2023; Tipaldou and Uba 2014), thus narrowing the space for action of governments.

Second, by focusing on campaigns as hybrid forms comprising social movements, but also parties, subcultures and media, we can focus on the relations between different types of players interacting with each other. Rather than being naturally opposed to each other, or to the contrary, being natural allies, parties and movements on the same side of the ideological spectrum often compete in terms of representing grievances and demands of their respective constituencies (Weisskircher and Berntzen 2019; Zeller 2022). In the Central and Eastern European context, authors have shown that 'the stronger a specific master-issue dimension is in party politics, the less salient that issue dimension is in protest politics' (Cisar and Vrablikova 2019). That is, whenever an issue, for example immigration, is prominently taken up in party politics competition, it tends to be less prominent in protest politics. Campaigning thus represents an interesting case of the complex relations between different types of actors that both attempt to own the same issue and thus end up entangled in a mixture between cooperation and competition (Gheyle and Rone 2023). This became particularly clear in cases such as Italy or Belgium, where competing nationalist parties were present both in the government and in parliament, with parliamentary-represented far-right parties cooperating with social movements to criticise and pushnationalist parties in government to take a stronger stance against the GCM.

Finally, in terms of pathways of impact, we follow Fishman and Everson's differentiation between preconditions and mechanisms, borrowing their metaphor of firefighting: 'the mechanisms employed by firefighters to extinguish fires include the use of water delivered by fire hoses and various other approaches, but the conditions that make possible the successful use of such mechanisms are infrastructural, organisational and in many cases budgetary ones which permit firefighters to do their jobs successfully' (Fishman and Everson 2016, 3). Thus, in our analysis we focus both on conditions, as well as on mechanisms. In terms of *conditions*, we argue that the two most important precondition to explain the impact of far-right campaigning against the GCM were (1) the presence of previous anti-immigration bottom-up mobilisations and (2) the *relative* strength of far-right parties in parliament and/or government. Sometimes anti-immigration movements from below had not appeared because of lack of demand of action on the issue (e.g. in countries such as Portugal or Spain at the time). In other cases, anti-immigration movements from below had not appeared because the issue had been taken up by political parties in government (e.g. Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, etc.). In the latter types of countries, there was no need to campaign, since the government already supported opposing the GCM without pressure from below. But the presence of pre-existing campaigning against immigration was not a sufficient condition for the presence and impact of an anti-GCM campaign (both in the short term and in the long term). In countries such as the UK that had strong bottom-up mobilisation on the immigration issue, the anti-GCM campaign

still did not take off. Thus, we argue that a second important precondition for the presence and impact of anti-GCM campaigns was the presence of a strong far-right party in parliament and/or government. It is important to note that we look at the *relative* strength of far-right parties in parliament and/or government and not simply at whether they are represented or not. Germany, for example, had both strong pre-existing movements against immigration in the face of PEGIDA, and a well-represented far-right party in parliament. And Belgium, while less prominent in terms of pre-exisiting anti-migrant social movements, had a nationalist party in government holding the biggest number of seats and the far-right Vlaams Belang with three seats in the Federal Parliament. Yet, even though both countries witnessed strong anti-GCM campaigns, in both cases the GCM was signed. This was due to the strong support for the GCM by other parties in parliament in both Germany and Belgium that clearly outnumbered the anti-migration right-wing parties.

Moving to the exact *mechanisms* of campaign impact, we borrow from Fishman and Everson's (2016) categorisation of mechanisms of social movements outcomes the mechanisms of conversation and displacement (Fishman and Everson 2016, 4). Nevertheless, we argue they should be complicated to include the various types of actors engaging in these activities, but also different modes of conversation and disruption including more ambiguous and less-clear cut mechanisms such as conflictual cooperation. We show that far-right parties can be seen as competing with each other and with social movements as active conversation setters and amplifiers rather than being simply the passive addressees of active social movements.

Opposing the GCM: Research Question, Case Selection and Methods

We focus on one single campaign – the mobilisation against the GCM, that made the agreement salient and brought it forward as an issue for public discussion. Our main research question is: *How did far-right campaigns against the GCM influence the foreign policy on the GCM in the countries we analyze?* We break the question of 'how' into two parts and ask first, *what were the pathways of impact* (conditions and mechanisms), and second, *what was the type of impact*, distinguishing between the immediate act of (not) signing the agreement (short-term impact), as well as in the influence of the campaign on broader discourses and networks of actors opposing migration (long-term impact).

We have chosen the case of GCM not only because of its prominence but also because it allows us, theoretically, to move beyond the excessive focus on party politics in far-right research and explore the interaction between far-right parties and social movements. Considering that the EU had been the catalyst for initiating the GCM, it was ironic that the controversy around the agreement flared brightest precisely in the EU (Kainz and Le Coz 2019).

Countries opposed the GCM for a variety of reasons – from not wanting to seem too lenient on the topic of migration to worrying about the potential use of the GCM as a guiding political framework or the references to human rights in the agreement (Vera-Espinoza et al. 2018.). The EU countries that ultimately did not sign were: Hungary – announcing its decision early on (in July 2018) – followed by Austria (October 31), Czechia (November 13), Poland (November 20), Slovakia (November 25), Italy (November 28), Bulgaria (December 5) and Latvia (December 6). Croatia had stated it would not sign the GCM but ultimately did, while Romania abstained.

As discussed above, the key factors to explain the presence and impact of far-right campaigns were, first, the strength of previous anti-immigration bottom-up mobilisation and, second, the relative strength of far-right actors in parliament and government. Starting from this premise, we try to identify in Table 1 how different EU countries related to the GCM campaign.

Countries which had neither bottom-up mobilisations, nor (relatively strong) far-right parties in government (bottom right) at the time signed the agreement without much controversy (e.g. Portugal and Spain). Therefore they did not witness campaigning against GCM. Countries with strong far-right parties in parliament and/or government and weak social movements on the topic (top right) also did not witness campaigns against the GCM since they rather swiftly took the decision not to sign (e.g. Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria). These were predominantly Central and Eastern European countries, where far-right populist parties were part of the government or government coalitions and where even socialist parties also often adopted anti-immigration views and public opinion towards immigration had switched to more unfavourable attitudes during the 2010s (Banai, Votta, and Seitz 2022; Mesežnikov 2016). Authoritarian parties such as Fidesz in Hungary or PiS in Poland had monopolised critique of immigration, precluding the necessity to politicise the issue in protest politics, to begin with.

To the contrary, campaigns against the GCM took place where immigration was an important topic for bottom-up politics. Importantly, campaigns against the GCM were weaker where far-right parties were relatively stronger (top left). Finally, anti-GCM campaigns were stronger where far-right parties were in fact relatively weaker than other parties in parliament and had little parliamentary support for their goal to prevent signing the agreement (bottom left). Considering that in this paper we want to study the effect of far-right

Table 1. Conditions for the presence and impact of far-right campaigns against the GCM.

	Strong bottom-up social movements on immigration	Weak bottom-up social movements on immigration
Relatively strong far-right in parliament and/or government	e.g. Italy, Austria [weak anti-GCM campaigns]	e.g. Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria [no anti-GCM campaigns]
Relatively weak far-right in parliament and/or government	e.g. Germany, Belgium [strong anti-GCM campaigns]	e.g. Portugal, Spain [no anti-GCM campaigns]

campaigning, we have narrowed our case selection to four cases where campaigns against the GCM took place: Italy, Austria, Germany and Belgium. In the first two cases, campaigning was relatively weak and quickly achieved its short-term impact (non-signature of the GCM agreement). In the latter two cases, anti-GCM campaigns were stronger and while not managing to prevent the signing of the agreement, they did lead to long-term impact on far-right discourses and networks. In both Germany and Belgium, far-right parties in parliament were a natural ally for bottom-up movements, entering in conversation with them, translating and mainstreaming their messages for wider audiences (Klinger et al. 2023). It was precisely the conflictual cooperation between movements and ally-parties that allowed them to stage together different forms of disruption in order to challenge government policy.

In what follows, we explore the effect of far-right campaigns on foreign policy by comparing these four distinct country cases. This choice of cases allows us to take into account not only the role of anti-immigration parties in government and parliament, but also the role of pre-existing mobilisations, including PEGIDA in Germany, the Identitarian movement in Austria, Casa Pound in Italy and a variety of bottom-up far right organisations in Belgium such as nationalist student organisations and youth movements, including Schild & Vrienden. Taking four cases which have witnessed different levels of far-right mobilisation on the streets and far-right representation in parliament allows us to show better that in the cases we explore, it is neither social movements nor parties alone, but the complex interaction between them that explains far-right campaigns' influence on foreign policy.

We have adopted a qualitative inductive approach to identify far-right mobilisation on the GCM. We started with a targeted analysis of far-right politicians and activists' websites, media, and Twitter statements. Second, we analysed the top YouTube videos associated with the words 'Global Compact for Migration' or 'Global Migration Pact' in all relevant languages (German, Italian, Flemish and French). Finally, we explored coverage of the GCM in mainstream media focusing in particular on the role of far-right mobilisation. We triangulated these different sources of data to identify key moments in the process of mobilisation as well as the role of conversation (and its more ambiguous modes such as conflictual cooperation) and disruption for impacting foreign policy in each national context. We present our findings for the German, Austrian, Italian and Belgian campaigns below.

Campaigning Against the GCM: A Cross-Country Comparison

Italy

Due to the significant number of migrants arriving to Italy, especially via the sea, the country had been one of the ardent promoters of a transnational

approach to regulating migration. The Italian Institute for Research on Innovation and Services for Development 'was one of the academic institutions admitted to attend the preparatory process of the Global Compact, showing that regular pathways to Italy would significantly increase the successful integration of migrants' (Scissa 2020, 158). In September 2018, however, there was a change in government in Italy with a new ruling coalition composed by The Five Star Movement and the far-right Lega Nord. The new Prime Minister from the Five Star Movement, Guiseppe Conti, reiterated his support for the GCM. Still, only two months later, with a wave of countries refusing to sign the agreement, including Austria, Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia, the Italian government coalition faced pressure from the parliamentary represented far-right party Fratelli d'Italia (FdI), led by Giorgia Meloni. In late November 2018, Matteo Salvini from Lega argued that the decision on the Global Compact was too comprehensive and affected many citizens, therefore the government preferred to follow the example of Switzerland and leave it to the Parliament. This approach effectively meant that Italy abstained from going to Marrakesh and signing the agreement. On December 8, the FdI published on YouTube a speech in which the party's leader Giorgia Meloni vehemently argued against the GCM, arguing it infringed national sovereignty and quoting the example of numerous countries that had not signed the agreement (Cassius 2018).

FdI were supported in their opposition against the GCM by bottom-up mobilisation, driven by far-right organisations, including the alternative media Il Primato Nazionale, founded by far-right Casa Pound movement. Furthermore, the Italian Generazione Identitaria started a petition against the Global Compact signed by 16,580 people (Generazione Identitaria 2018). The petition argued that the Pact would mean that Europe should open its borders to the world, intensifying the influx of migrants and augmenting the migration flow towards Italy. The petition stated, in addition, that the Compact would legitimise economic migration and bring about demands on the welfare state. Ultimately, Generazione Identitaria argued the Compact was brought about by big banks and companies to create an infinite flow of human resources to serve their plans of globalist expansion at the expense of national sovereignty. As such, it was declared anti-democratic (ibid.).

The image used on the webpage of the petition was the same used by UKIP in their infamous 'Breaking Point' poster, which had stirred heated debates over racism. It also demonstrates the transnational diffusion of (visual) narratives in the whole campaign. Generazione Identitaria insisted their opposition to the GCM had to do with their opposition to Islamic terrorism, which according to them was imported into Europe through migration (Grimolizzi 2018). Online influencers such as Dentro la Notizia – RobyMaster provided further 'alternative' information on the GCM with highly critical interpretations of the Compact. The YouTube channel of

Dentro la Notizia operated in parallel with FdI's own channel in providing content against the agreement. In all these instances, previous actors mobilising against immigration in Italy picked up the issue and used their networks to promote it and to drive conversation within the far-right party and movement circles in Italy.

Still, bottom-up mobilisation remained rather weak. Apart from the petition signed by only around 16,000 people, there were no massive protests or attempts for disruption. We argue that this was due to the fact that bottom-up activists had natural allies in parliament and government – the far-right Fratelli d'Italia and the Lega, not to mention parties such as Forza Italia which also had a tough stance on immigration. Still, this was far from a clear case of cooperation between bottom-up movements and far-right parties in parliament and government. Fdl and Lega were in fact competing over the issue, with FdI pressuring Lega to take a stance at the danger of losing voters over its inaction. Indicatively, after a motion by FdI, the Italian parliament decided in February 2019 not to sign the agreement, with notable abstentions on the vote from Lega and the Five Star Movement – the two governing parties. All in all, disruption on the streets was not needed since conversation (dominated by conflictual cooperation and competition) between the far-right party in parliament, FdI, and the far-right party in government, Lega, did the job. All far-right actors taken together were relatively stronger than pro-immigration actors. Thus, the campaign against GCM swiftly achieved its short-term impact, but arguably also a long-term one. Not only was the GCM not signed, causing Italy, one of the initial promoters of the GCM, to make a U-turn, but in debates around the GCM far-right views were further mainstreamed and opposition to immigration normalised.

Austria

In Austria, the coalition between the conservative ÖVP and the far-right FPÖ decided in October 2018 to abstain from the GCM arguing that the sovereignty of Austria would be compromised by this international treaty and that it would welcome illegal migration. This decision did not come as a surprise. Since the so-called migration crisis of 2015/16, the conservative ÖVP had adopted a harsher position on migration. In fact, the ÖVP's handling of the GCM has been symptomatic of a larger anti-migration turn (Wodak 2018): in his position as Foreign Minister in the previous government, Chancellor Sebastian Kurz (ÖVP) had been negotiating the terms of the GCM on behalf of the Austrian government. However, Kurz backed down in September after the FPÖ demanded to leave the agreement – even though his own Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl already gave green light for the proceedings to the signature of the GCM in July 2018. One reason was that Vice Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache (FPÖ) intervened and stated on September 10 that he

was 'absolutely critical and negative' against the GCM (Kronenzeitung 2018). Both parties participating in the coalition were relatively stronger than pro-immigration actors in parliament and government.

The decision of the FPÖ to oppose the GCM was praised as an Identitarian campaign success by far-right activist Martin Sellner. In fact, Sellner began early to mobilise with an 'information campaign' through digital channels (Baumann 2018). He sensed potential for political conflict on the foreign policy terrain and saw the opposition against the GCM in a broader campaign against the European migration policy. Nevertheless, the campaign could hardly build on strong anti-migration protests that have emerged in other countries like Germany. Hence, the GCM was an opportunity for mobilising (extant) anti-migration sentiments in Austria. The main hub for the far-right bottom-up opposition against the GCM was the website migrationspakt-stoppen.info, which went online on September 13, 2018 and was supplemented by social media channels on various platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Telegram. The website hosted a petition that collected over 30,000 signatures by the end of September arguing that the pact would constitute the 'last act of the globalists' in undermining national identity. It furthermore provided materials that targeted individual diplomats who were responsible for brokering and (potentially) signing the GCM claiming that they were acting without a mandate from the people.

The culmination of the campaign against the GCM was a demonstration in front of the UN offices in Vienna on November 4 organised by the Identitarian Movement – and with participation by the FPÖ youth section – with several hundred participants. At this moment, the government had already pulled out of the agreement. This shows that pressure from the street did not necessarily tip the scales. Rather, the governing coalition had opposed the GCM from the beginning and was strenghtened by central talking points of the Identitarian campaign (Müller and Gebauer 2021). Hence, we see conversation between the conservative and far-right parties in government as the main mechanism. However, that the FPÖ was so persistent on the GCM is also evidence of the bottom-up campaign that brought the topic into the news.

Germany

Since the beginning of the PEGIDA demonstrations in 2014 – and lately since the various protests against Islam and immigration in 2015 – far-right street mobilisation had gained prominence and influence on the public discourse in Germany (Virchow 2016; Weisskircher and Berntzen 2019). In parallel, the AfD entered the state parliaments since 2014 and finally the Bundestag in 2017 with 12.6% bringing anti-migration positions into the public debate while being tightly connected to extra-parliamentary movements and alternative news outlets (Rensmann 2018). Since the refugee debate largely receded in

2017, the campaign against the GCM represented an opportunity to reinvigorate racist mobilisation under a common framework of action with the aim to forestall the signature under the non-binding agreement through a combination of online and offline repertoires (Klinger et al. 2023).

Starting with a social media campaign under the name 'Stop the Pact' in summer 2018, activists of the German Identitarian Movement began politicising the GCM as a fateful instrument of 'a global elite' to suppress national identity by 'weaponising migration' and 'replacing populations' (Guhl 2018). These dramatic and radical narratives tailored for diffusion in social media were used to mobilise broader masses against the ratification of the pact and aimed to influence the discourse on immigration and integration more generally (Marcks and Pawelz 2020). At the same time, the refusal of other countries to sign the GCM strengthened Germany's opposition. According to CrowdTangle data, the most popular German post about the 'Migrationspakt' was a shared picture by AfD leader Alice Weidel with the appeal to follow suit the Austrians.

While Facebook has been a major tool for the AfD, the most potent mobilisation platform for propagating opposition against the GCM has been YouTube. The platform that enjoys prominence in German far-right circles (see also Rauchfleisch and Kaiser 2020) has been used to pack flawed information on the GCM into dramatic narratives that demand its immediate rejection. 12 of the 20 videos with the most viewers on the GCM can be clearly defined as far-right. At the same time, Telegram for the first time established itself as a coordinating tool in far-right campaigns, while the alternative media websites and journals received a strong boost in this period.

The breakthrough moment of the campaign was reached when the AfD brought the issue of the GCM to the German Bundestag on November 8th, 2018. In an incendiary speech, party leader Alexander Gauland blamed the government for transforming 'a national state into an area of settlement' (WuD-News 2018). In a clear example of efficient movement-party conversation on the far-right, he seized the arguments of the campaigners and reiterated them to confront the 'political establishment' with the demands of the campaign against the GCM, thereby addressing a largely online audience. The media took up the debate on the GCM and gave it a mainstream platform. Politicians felt compelled to take positions in this debate and the AfD appeared as the agenda-setter and as the mouthpiece of the Stop the Pact campaign. The AfD also initiated a petition against the GCM which managed to collect about 107,000 signatures in order to disrupt the German government's intention to sign the GCM.

In the following weeks, prior to the Marrakesh summit, at least 15 larger demonstrations took place nationwide under the slogan 'Stop the Pact' again using domestic disruption as a mechanism to influence foreign policy. The street mobilisations built upon a network of activists and protest groups that

formed in the early PEGIDA mobilisation period and operate under different names. Strong previous mobilisation and network-building against immigration in the German case facilitated both conversations within the far right and common action to disrupt opposing political parties. Protests against the GCM have been organised under the leadership of different movement organisations like local PEGIDA branches, 'Wir für Deutschland', 'Zukunft Heimat' or 'Merkel muss weg'. The strength and continuity of PEGIDA largely contributed to the normalisation of racist discourse and the activation of existing structures (Önnerfors 2018). Additionally, the AfD itself organised demonstrations against the GCM, thereby consciously blurring the lines between party and street politics.

Despite the strong mobilisation that included various subversive protest actions, online repertoires, and parliamentary provocations, Germany's signature of the GCM was never truly jeopardised. The governing coalition of SPD and CDU had a stable majority and the overarching isolation of the AfD in the Bundestag ensured that other parties in the opposition would not support the opposition against the government's decision. This, however, explains why street protests against the GCM have been so strong in Germany compared to others: as institutional channels have been blocked, the extra-parliamentary resistance found prolonged expressions, yet faded quickly away once the agreement had been signed by the majority of UN member states. Thus, the impact of far-right campaigning on foreign policy can be said to have been negligible in the short term. Nevertheless, for actors like the Identitarian Movement the campaign has been regarded as a success as they set the agenda with a topic that would have been largely insignificant without its politicisation.

Belgium

In Belgium, the Global Compact for Migration had not been problematised up until November 2018. In fact, in late September 2018, Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel argued in front of the UN General Assembly that as the importance of the migration issue had taken an unprecedented scale, there was a need to 'remove migration out of the hands of human traffickers, who are modern day slave traders' (Michel 2018). But things started to change in November. To begin with, the nationalist New Flemish Alliance (N-VA), which was part of the Belgian Federal Government, under-performed in the October 2018 Belgian local elections (Debecker 2018). N-VA maintained its dominance in Flanders but lost seats, while the far-right Vlaams Belang (VB) managed to gain seats. At the same time, the international campaign against the GCM was gaining pace, with Austria declaring on October 31 that it would not sign the agreement.

Then, on November 14, the Belgian secretary of State for Asylum and Migration Theo Francken from N-VA announced his party would not back the agreement since it was not compatible with their migration policy (Debecker 2018). The N-VA sent an ultimatum to PM Michel: If he did not abstain from signing the GCM, N-VA would leave the multi-party coalition. In the tense political situation that followed, on December 5, Michel gained approval from the parliament for signing the GCM: only the N-VA in government (33 seats) and the far-right Vlaams Belang in parliament (with 3 seats) voted against signing the agreement, while all other parties supported it. On Saturday, December 8, the N-VA formally quit the government forcing Michel to reshuffle the cabinet and continue as a minority government until the next federal elections that were to take place in May 2019 (Cerulus and Wheaton 2018). Coincidentally, December 8 was also the date of a visit by Steve Bannon to Brussels during which Donald Trump's former advisor claimed the GCM was 'dead even before it is signed' (King 2018). Bannon had been invited to Brussels by the far-right Vlaams Belang.

In the end, Belgium did sign the GCM, but December 2018 was marked by protest and violence during the so-called 'March Against Marrakesh' (Anderson 2018), organised on December 16 by far-right organisations such as the Nationalist Student Organization (NSV), the Catholic Flemish Student Association (KVHV), the youth wing of Vlaams Belang, the ethno-nationalist Voorpost organisation and the youth extremist organisation Schild & Vrienden (Verreyt 2018). One of the main organisers of these protests was Dries Van Langenhove, a once active member of the KVHV and founder of Schild & Vrienden, an organisation with clear ideological ties with the Identitarian Movement. Langenhove used the 'March Against Marrakesh' to further raise his public profile and held strongly-worded speeches against the agreement (Boem 2019). Around 5,500 people marched in Brussels during the December 16 'March Against Marrakesh', with around 90 people arrested, as some of the protesters threw rocks at windows and tried to storm the EU Commission's Berlaymont quarters (Anderson 2018).

Looking at the conditions and mechanisms of the campaign's impact, we can clearly see the complex interactions between the N-VA in government, Vlaams Belang in parliament and the numerous far-right youth organisations in Belgium, and Flanders in particular. Vlaams Belang's good electoral performance in the 2018 Belgian local elections was definitely a consideration for N-VA when deciding to oppose the GCM. N-VA thus entered into conversation and competitive collaboration with the far-right Vlaams Belang. The ensuing N-VA opposition to the GCM led to a major disruption of the Belgian government. Still, unlike in Italy, where pressure from Fratelli d'Italia in parliament and Lega in government prevented signing the agreement, the N-VA and Vlaams Belang could not prevent Belgium from signing the agreement. The reason for this was the relative

weakness of these two parties combined, when compared to all other parties in parliament that did vote in favour of the agreement. This was very different from Italy where Lega and Fratelli d'Italia's discourse on immigration encountered favourable reception by the coalition partners of Movimento 5 Stelle, but also by parties such as Berlusconi's Forza Italia, which would have made any vote in parliament on the issue highly contested.

The disruption of the Belgian government by N-VA's decision to leave the coalition was then followed by disruption on the streets during the March against Marrakesh. This march was a clear example of cooperation between political parties, such as Vlaams Belang and N-VA, and movement organisations, such as Schild & Vrienden, and student organisations, such as NSV and KVHV. The importance of the youth branches of far-right parties cannot be overstated in terms of maintaining dialogue between party members and street politics in Belgium. Ultimately, Belgium did sign the GCM due to the unanimous support of the agreement by all other parties in parliament with the exception of N-VA and Vlaams Belang. Thus, the anti-GCM campaign had a limited impact in the short-term. The campaign however did consolidate far-right networks across the country, achieving a substantial long-term impact as evidenced by the impressive success of Vlaams Belang in the 2019 federal and regional elections.

Conclusion

In this paper, we show that the campaign against the GCM was particularly strong in Germany and Belgium – two countries where previous mobilisations against immigration (e.g. the PEGIDA movement in Germany and Schild & Vrienden in Belgium) assured that campaigners could count on strong networks as well as alternative media to spread their message and influence party politics as well. In Germany, the parliamentary-represented AfD entered in complex interactions with a variety of bottom-up players and media, and delivered a campaign, seen as a hybrid, complex form of organisation by multiple actors on multiple media. The campaign sought to raise the salience of the agreement through disruption in the form of protests and petitions, but also through conversation between far-right movements and parties, and at a later stage also with a fraction of the Conservatives. Crucially, the Identitarian Movement in Germany built close ties with the AfD youth organisation Junge Alternative. In Belgium, various nationalist youth organisations drew attention to the GCM and collaborated with the far-right Vlaams Belang in parliament to pressure the N-VA in government not to sign the agreement. In both cases, however, nationalist and far-right parties however were relatively weaker than actors supporting the GCM in parliament. Thus, the campaign failed to achieve its immediate short-term demand – not signing

the GCM. Still, it had potentially long-term impacts on foreign policy decisions, due to the further consolidation of far-right networks, the mainstreaming of far-right discourses, and the normalisation of critiques of immigration.

In Italy, previous mobilisations against immigration facilitated the activation of alternative media and movement groups to oppose the agreement. The strong presence of far-right parties in both government (Lega) and opposition (FdI, Forza Italia) and their relative strength as compared to pro-GCM actors meant there was no need for a substantial campaign. The decision on the GCM in Italy was taken above all as the result of the competitive collaboration between the represented-in-government Lega, and the parliamentary-represented FdI, which pressured its competitor far-right party into not signing. Finally, in Austria we find agreement in the governing coalition of the conservative ÖVP and the far-right FPÖ whose decision making has been strengthened rather than challenged by street mobilisation. To sum up, the four country cases we compare show how the same transnational campaign played out differently, depending on the relative strength of far-right parties in government or parliament and on previous far-right mobilisations. At the same time, a common element of the campaign (be it weak or strong) in all four cases was the rising importance of alternative media outlets as well as social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Discord in mobilising a relatively young audience that was socialised in alternative right-wing politics online.

Still, while in this paper we assess the foreign policy impact of the anti-GCM campaigns at the national level, one of our key avenues for future research is to assess first, to what extent was the campaign truly transnational beyond the hype created by alternative media? Which transnational connections were imagined, and which real? To what extent did activists from different countries share (dis)information, (visual) narratives, repertoires and resources? Did they organise events together? Second and related, could imagined or real transnational pressure be included as a third precondition for successful foreign policy impact of far-right campaigns? Our analysis in this paper points to the importance of other countries' examples to raise the issue of the GCM and start a campaign. Still, we outline as key conditions for campaign *impact* mainly factors at the national level – that is, protest traditions and far-right parties' relative strength and support in national parliaments. For a more detailed analysis, process tracing across numerous countries and interviews with key actors would be needed to uncover the role of the transnational dimension (if any) for campaign impact on foreign policy. As such, this question remains beyond the remits of the current paper and an exciting avenue for future research on the topic.

What we have tried to show here instead, on the basis of analysis of original campaign data, is under what conditions and through what mechanisms far-right campaigns managed to (or failed to) influence foreign policy in four

country contexts. While far-right media presented the campaign against the GCM as a breakthrough moment to challenge open societies and to establish a playbook for campaigning in the digital age, our analysis brought nuance to such claims showing that the campaign had very different resonance and impact depending on the context, and depending on whether we conceive impact only in the short term, or also in the long-term in terms of mainstreaming far-right positions.

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ORCID

Julia Rone http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0937-0270
Maik Fielitz http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8257-5777

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