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Far right participation in the Ukrainian Maidan protests: an attempt of systematic estimation

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ABSTRACT

This is an attempt of a systematic estimation of the far right participation in Maidan protests based on a unique dataset of protest events in Ukraine during President Viktor Yanukovych's rule. The data presented contradict the thesis supported by most of the experts on Ukrainian far right that the far right did not play any crucial or even significant role in Maidan protests. The data indicate that the far right *Svoboda* party was the most active collective agent in Maidan protest events, while the Right Sector was the most active group in Maidan confrontation and violence. Protests with the participation of the far right were not isolated events on the margins of larger 'peaceful and democratic' protest. The data indicate the timing and location of the most intense far right activity, which has previously not received much attention. In general, it highlights the importance of the underestimated, but highly intense and large-scale, Maidan protests in Ukrainian regions beyond the events in Kiev city centre. Finally, it points to how far right participation in Maidan grew from the moderate opposition parties' increasing cooperation with *Svoboda*.

How significant was the far right participation in Ukrainian Maidan protests? The question is crucial for understanding not only Maidan protests themselves but also the causes of the war in Donbass region, the nature of the war itself (to what extent it had 'civil war' component and was a consequence of internal for Ukraine processes and not just instigated from Russia), and what solutions might work to end the war. However, the question quickly fell victim to extreme politicization. The opponents and sceptics of Maidan and post-Maidan government pointed to a significant role of the far right party *Svoboda* and the Right Sector, a notorious coalition of previously marginal far right and neo-Nazi organizations and groups that became famous after mass violence started in Kiev centre on 19 January 2014. On the other hand, Maidan supporters from (left-)liberal and moderate nationalist camps pointed to the ideological diversity of Maidan movement, where the far right was only a tiny minority which role was strategically exaggerated by hostile Russian media and pro-Russian experts, and later used to legitimate Russian

annexation of Crimea and support for separatists in Donbass against the 'fascist junta' in Kiev.

It is astonishing how little systematic research have been involved in the discussion of the problem. A thorough analysis of all the arguments used in the debate from both sides that included not just academic but no less important public and political components requires a separate research project. Below I will concentrate only on systematic, not just anecdotal evidence on the scale and significance of far right involvement into Maidan protests usually referred to by the most active scholars participating in the debate.

The dominant position among established experts on Ukrainian far right has been that both *Svoboda* party, and the Right Sector were not dominant in Maidan protests and did not play any crucial, not even significant role (Likhachev, 2014 ; Shekhovtsov, 2014; Umland & Shekhovtsov, 2014). At most, the far right's provocative and violent actions were only destructive for Maidan movement. These authors usually refer to rough self-esti-mations of Right Sector membership in January and February 2014, counting only from 300 to 500 people in Kiev. Then they compare it to the Maidan Self-Defence constituency estimated to be around 12,000 by Andriy Parubiy, the Self-Defence commander, where the far right controlled only two 'companies' (*sotni*) (Likhachev, 2014, p. 108). This is combined with the survey results conducted among participants of the Kiev Euromaidan camp by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology and the Democratic Initiatives Foundation, which showed that only a small minority of the protesters were members of any political party at all (14.9% in December 2013 and 7.7% in January 2014) (Kiev International Institute of Soci-ology, 2014a). Finally, those who deny the significance of far right involvement in Maidan point to their low support in post-Maidan Ukraine: far right leaders – Oleh Tyahnybok and Dmytro Yarosh – mobilized both less than 2% of the voters in the presidential elections. Later in the parliamentary elections both far right parties – *Svoboda* and the Right Sector – fell below 5% threshold to get into the parliament, a sharp contrast with 10% success of *Svoboda* in 2012 elections (Shekhovtsov, 2014).

What these arguments fail to consider is that mass protest dynamics is very different from electoral competition and that small organized minorities may play a role in the protest movements disproportionate to their percentage among the protesters, or support among the population in general. Besides, both membership estimations and surveys of Maidan protesters focused on Kiev only, leaving open generalizations about their impact nationwide.

Those few authors who tried to prove significance of far right involvement in Maidan protests were usually doing meticulous reconstruction of the most important events of mass violence based on publicly available evidence. Probably, the best example is the work of Ivan Katchanovski who worked through vast amount of published videos, audio-records, witness accounts about 20 February 2014 events known as 'snipers mass-care' and pointed to involvement of *Svoboda* and Right Sector activists in a possible false flag operation aimed at escalating the violence and guaranteeing against a compromise with the president Viktor Yanukovych (Katchanovski, 2015). This kind of detailed recon-struction, however, by necessity focuses on the most notorious singular events, again mostly in Kiev (with rare exceptions like Odessa May 2 tragedy), leaving aside most of 'everyday' far right activities outside of the capital.

Meanwhile, there is data that can provide some estimate for the participation of far right parties, organizations, initiatives in Maidan protests for its whole duration and on

the whole territory of Ukraine. For the past six years Ukrainian Protest and Coercion Data (UPCD) team has been systematically collecting data on protest events following a well-established methodology in social movements and contentious politics research, creating a database of all protest events taking place in Ukraine and coding a set of variables for each event, including all the identified participants mentioned in local news reports about these events. These data indicate a highly significant far right participation in the Maidan protests. I will first explain our data collection methodology and then present statistics on the far right participation in Maidan protests that focus on the dynamics of confrontational and violent protests as well as their variation by region. I will end with a discussion of possible interpretations of these data and their contribution to the debates about the Maidan uprising, the political consequences of the far right's involvement in Maidan, and their current prospects in Ukraine.

Although this paper focuses mainly on the *Svoboda* party and the Right Sector, two major far right participants in Maidan protests, our working definition of 'far right' includes all Ukrainian ultranationalist parties, organizations and informal groups committed to the ideology of radical (or 'integral') Ukrainian nationalism; that is, who see the nation as the absolute value and the nation-state as a tool to realize the nation's will. Contrary to moderate national-democrats, the far right sees liberal-democratic values as a danger to Ukraine rather than embracing them.

Ukrainian protest and Coercion data collection

Protest event analysis based on data derived from media sources is a long-established methodology in social movements studies (Hutter, 2014; Koopmans & Rucht, 2002). Unlike other methods, it allows a systematic estimation of an array of important dynamic parameters typically reported about protest events in media news (tactics of protest, issues, targets, participants, etc.) over a long period of time and in large geographical areas that are difficult or impossible to cover with direct observations, in-depth interviews or opinion surveys.

Like all methods, media-derived data have both benefits and deficiencies. One of the most obvious deficiency is the selection bias of the media. Media do not report 100% of protest events and those that are reported more frequently are usually more sensationalist (involving large number of people or violence), more significant from the media perspective (involving recognized and established organizations, celebrities), and geographically close to media headquarters' location (Davenport, Soule, & Armstrong, 2011, p. 157; Earl, Martin, McCarthy, & Soule, 2004, p. 69; Hutter, 2014).[1]

There are ways to counter the selection bias. Our data are superior in this respect to those that have been typically used in traditional protest event analysis as the latter frequently was based on several or even one national newspaper when sometimes not even the entire paper issues were read but only their index or even a random sample from the issues. First our team in the Centre for Society Research, then in the Centre for Social and Labour Research (CSLR), both independent non-commercial centres for social problems and collective protests research based in Kiev, started collecting UPCD under my supervision in September 2009. The result is a systematically coded database of all real-time protest events (regardless of issues or number of protesters) that took place on the territory of Ukraine since October 2009, as well as negative and

positive reactions to them (repressions and concessions). It is based on daily systematic reading of almost 200 regularly rotated web newsfeeds that cover local news in all Ukrainian provinces (*oblasts*) as well as major Ukrainian national and activist media.[2] Online media have much less cost for publishing news messages then paper-based media as they at least technically do not have limits on the number of messages and words to publish. Adding extensive coverage of local events from province-level news, tends to balance against sensationalist, significance, and geographical sources for selection bias. Regular rotation and the addition of some activist media tends to balance against political biases in covering protest events.

We began by monitoring our sources manually. Since April 2013, however, we use a semi-automatic system that filters these news feeds, using an extensive dictionary of keywords in Ukrainian and Russian. Project coders then check the filtered news feeds manually. The data collection coordinator checks 100% of the coding and randomly checks the selection of relevant messages by coders to ensure consistency among different coders.

The data include the date and location of the events, their agents and targets, forms of protest and repression, conflict issues, number of protesters and state forces involved, as well as full-text media reports about each event in a separate database linked via the event ID. The database and codebooks with details on methodology and the sample of sources can be accessed online from the Center for Social and Labor Research page: http://cslr.org.ua/en/protests-2/. The basic unit of coding – the *protest event* – is defined by the following criteria:

(1) the presence of political or social claims or criticism;
(2) a practical action involving physical mobilization (it should not be only verbal);
(3) the action is by a person or persons who are not part of the central government;
(4) the action took place on the territory of Ukraine and we know at least the approximate date of the event.

Each event is coded separately, even if it is connected to a previous event. The only exceptions are certain events that typically occur in sequence. For example, a rally that results in a fight, followed by the police arresting the protesters would be coded as three events. On the other hand, a march ending with a rally would be coded as one event because it is a typical sequence. There is also a rule for aggregating certain event types that take place in a single day and have one outcome based on same issue. Thus, all arrests in one city in one day for the same cause are coded as one event. Only those events are coded which *have already happened* according to mass media reports; announcements for protests are not included. However, *unsuccessful protest attempts* which were prevented by law-enforcement bodies are coded, while protest activities that were cancelled by protestors because of a court order are not included into the database. A continuous multi-day event, like strike or tent camp, is considered a single event regardless of its duration. However, if multi-day protests have a discrete nature, for example, each evening people gather at Maidan for a rally, each discrete rally is coded as a separate event.

Currently the UPCD database contains over 35,000 events covering the period from October 2009 until December 2014 Our database thus covers all protest and repression events during the whole period of Viktor Yanukovych rule, including over 6000 events for the Maidan period.

Maidan: a general look from the perspective of protest event data

For this article I will define the Maidan period as starting on 21 November 2013, when the first Euromaidan camp appeared in the evening, and ending on 21 February 2014 the evening Viktor Yanukovych fled from Kiev. Not surprisingly, we see a huge upsurge of protest events during this period (Figure 1).

Not all protest events during 'Maidan period' were connected to the Maidan. During primary coding UPCD team marked all protest events that were done by 'Maidan activists' (or similar descriptions in the media reports) or in support of Maidan issues (for EU association, against Yanukovych, the government, and the Party of Regions, against police abuse and for civil liberties, etc.).[3] As a result 3721 protest events were coded as specifically 'Maidan protests', 402 can be attributed to Anti-Maidan mobilizations, and 300 protests were not related to either Maidan, or Anti-Maidan meaning that most of protest activity in the period were quickly politicized and absorbed by Maidan.

One fact meriting further exploration is the regional distribution of Maidan protests (Figure 2).[4] Only 14% of all Maidan protest events were registered in Kiev, despite much higher media attention to the Maidan camp and surrounding events in the capital's centre. Compared to the protest events in previous years, Maidan protests were strongly
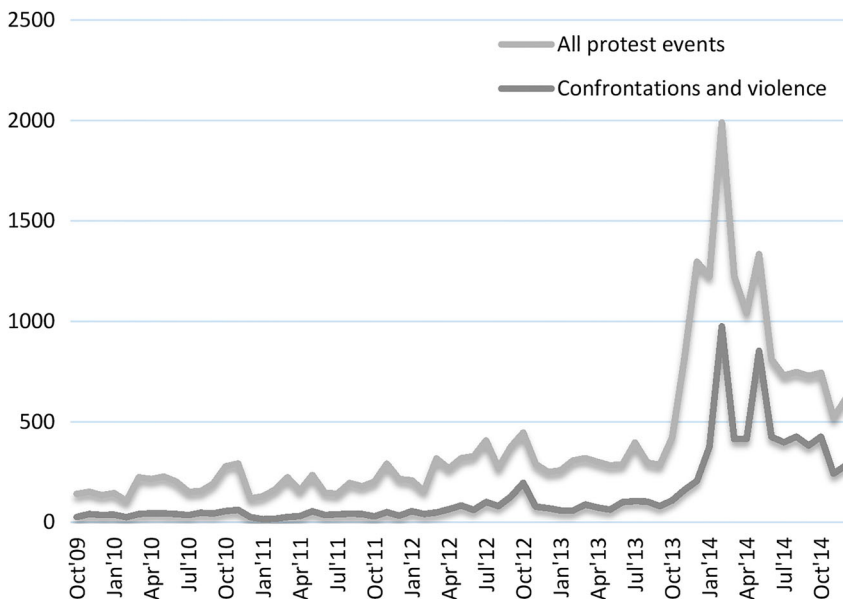

Figure 1. Monthly number of protest events in Ukraine. Source: CSLR.
Note: Data for 2014 include annexed Crimea and areas under separatists control but exclude organized fighting actions events.
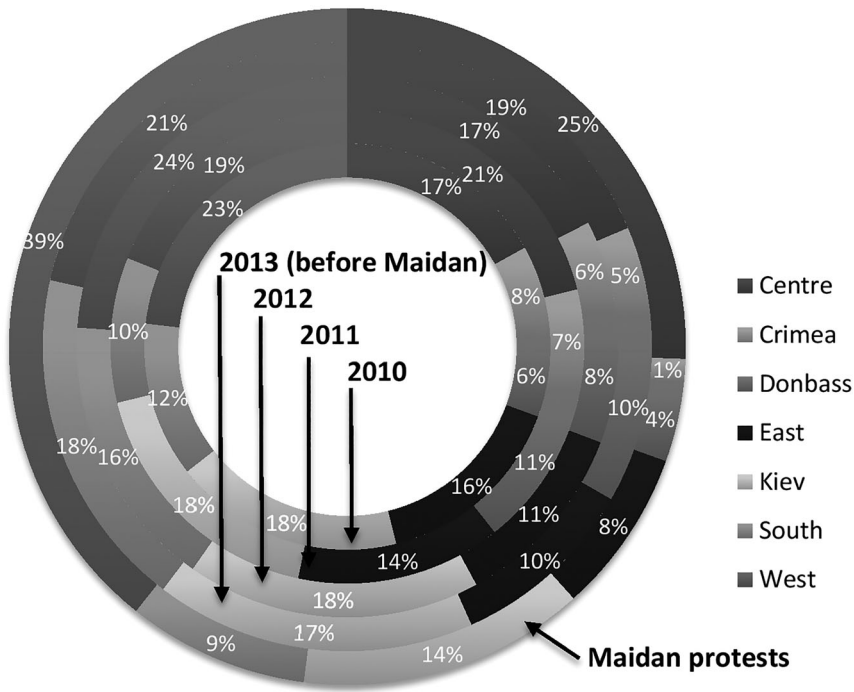
Figure 2. Regional distribution protest events in Ukraine per year compared to Maidan protests. Source: CSLR.
Note: The 'nationwide' events (i.e. those that were impossible to locate in a particular settlement) are not included in the regional distribution.

skewed to the Western and Central Ukraine. Almost two thirds of all Maidan protest events were reported there. Moreover, Maidan protests in Western Ukraine were almost as massive as in Kiev (Table 1). Although the largest rallies with hundreds thousand participants happened only in Kiev, protests with participation between 10,000 and 100,000 people were reported almost evenly in Kiev and in Western region – 20 and 17 cases respectively.

Almost two thirds of all protest events with participation between 1000 and 10,000 people happened in Western and Central regions. Moreover, 70% of all confrontational

Table 1. Number of Maidan protest events of different sizes across Ukrainian regions.

No. of participants	Centre	Crimea	Donbass	East	Kiev	South	West	Total
<10	53	4	16	23	43	32	99	270
<100	234	17	71	105	104	128	312	971
<1000	300	5	29	84	96	83	319	916
<10,000	76	2	–	36	90	7	163	374
<100,000	–	–	–	–	20	–	17	37
>100,000	–	–	–	–	7	–	–	7
Unknown	287	12	26	44	149	72	548	1138
Total	950	40	142	292	509	322	1458	3713

Source: CSLR.
Note: The 'nationwide' events (i.e. those that were impossible to locate in a particular settlement) are not included in the regional distribution.
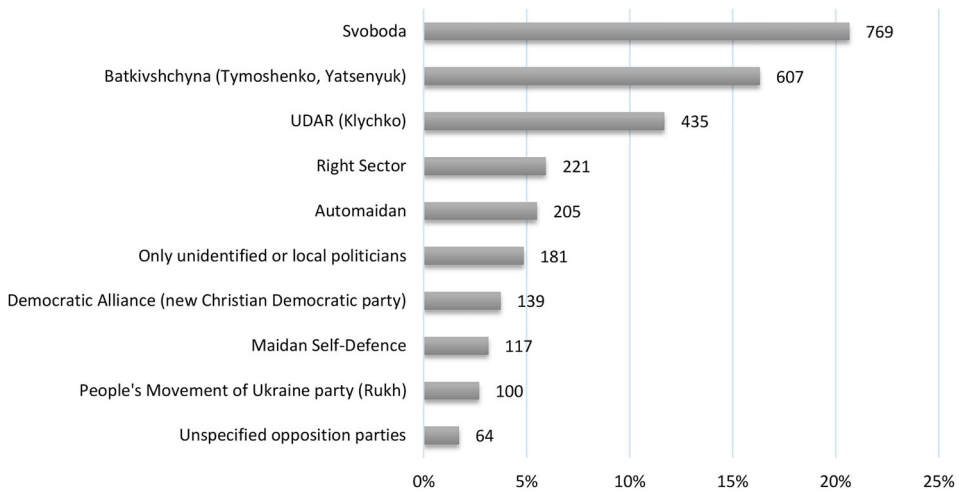
["

Figure 3. Most reported collective agents in the Maidan protests (% from the total number of Maidan protest events). Source: CSLR.
Note: Mentions of affiliated groups, for example, youth organizations of the parties were added to the respective parties figures.

Maidan. Other parties participated in a smaller number of Maidan protests. In 5% of the Maidan protests only unidentified politicians or local officials were reported (though some of these might also be members of the opposition parties, including *Svoboda*). *Svoboda* participation was also very much likely when unspecified 'opposition parties' were reported in 2% of the Maidan protests. In general, the participation of political parties, individual politicians, and local authorities was reported in 38% of all Maidan protest events. Among non-party participants and initiatives, Automaidan (6%), Right Sector (6%) and Maidan Self-Defence (4%) were the most notable. Participation of the entire Ukrainian far right sector including, in addition to *Svoboda* and the Right Sector, minor ultranationalist political parties, organizations and informal initiatives, was mentioned in 27% of all Maidan protests. In 2011–2013 before Maidan started, the percentage of Ukrainian far right participation in the protest events was significantly less, hovering around 19–20% each year.

Most protest actions of the far right were not small events on the fringes of the large 'peaceful and democratic' protest. On the contrary, the events with the far right participation were typically larger than events where far right participation was not reported (Table 2).

In addition, *Svoboda* party and the Right Sector were more frequently mentioned than other identified organizations/initiatives in Maidan confrontations and violence (Figure 4). Overall, the absolute number of confrontational and violent protests increased drastically over the course of the Maidan (Figure 1). Still, the relative share of violent events compared to the total number of Maidan protests was not high. Only 9% of all Maidan protests were violent, 20% were confrontational and 71% of Maidan protests used conventional tactics. For comparison, in 2013 before the Maidan started, the rate of violence in the protest events was 8% and rate of confrontations 19%, in 2012 – 9% and 18% respectively, in 2011 – 4% and 14%, in 2010 – 7% and 14%. But this should not lead us to accept the

Table 2. Size of Maidan protests with and without far right participation.

| Tactics	Far right mentioned				Far right not mentioned				Total
	Conventional	Confrontational	Violent	Total	Conventional	Confrontational	Violent	Total	
<10	2%	10%	5%	3%	6%	17%	8%	9%	7%
<100	23%	18%	13%	22%	35%	14%	9%	28%	26%
<1000	37%	24%	23%	34%	25%	12%	12%	21%	25%
<10,000	19%	11%	20%	18%	8%	5%	7%	7%	10%
<100,000	3%	1%	1%	3%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%
>100,000	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Unknown	15%	37%	38%	20%	25%	53%	65%	35%	31%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	781	113	100	994	1,862	618	247	2,727	3,721

Source: CSLR.
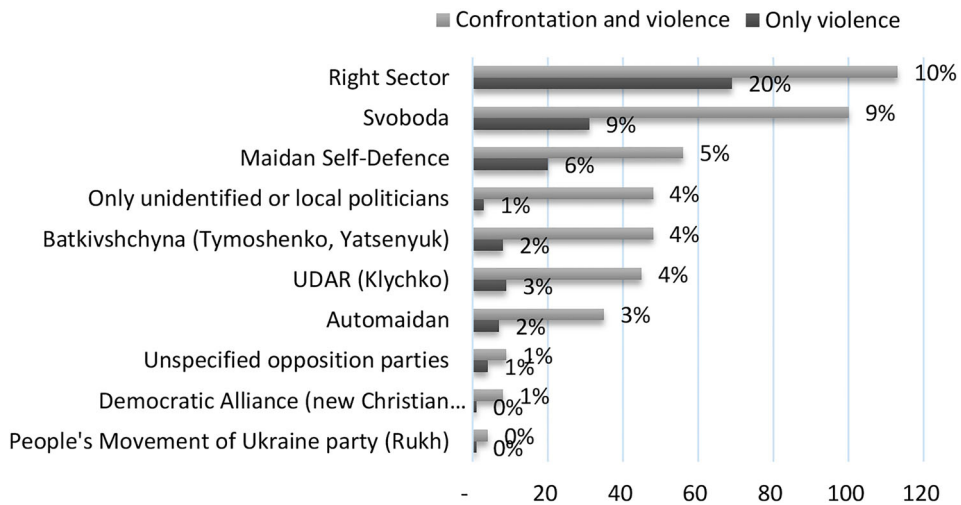
Figure 4. Participation in Maidan confrontations and violence (% from total number of Maidan confrontational and violent protest events). Source: CSLR.
Note: Mentions of affiliated groups, for example, youth organizations of the parties were added to the respective parties figures.

popular cliché of the Maidan protest being peaceful. The Maidan confrontations and violence were on a scale larger than anything Ukraine had experienced since the last operations of the remnants of the nationalist Ukrainian Insurgent Army in 1950s. Large masses of people participated in Maidan confrontations and violence. For example, if over the course of the 4 years before Maidan started, only 29 confrontational or violent events with participation of over 1000 people were registered, during just 3 months between 21 November 2013 and 21 February 2014 at least 80 confrontational or violent events happened involving more than 1000 people. Confrontations and violence were crucial to its success in removing president Yanukovych and, as Serhiy Kudelia argues, one of the crucial factors leading to the civil war in Donbass (Kudelia, 2015).

Among identified collective agents the Right Sector and *Svoboda* were the most active in confrontations and violence. Their participation was reported in 10% of confrontational and violent events. In specifically violent Maidan protests the Right Sector was mentioned even twice as frequently (in 20%). Surprisingly, Maidan Self-Defence groups was reported in only 6% of violent protests and in just 5% of confrontations and violence together, which might be because they were not recognized by the media as a separate entity from generic 'Maidan activists' until they became loosely institutionalized in the late stages of Maidan uprising (see also Figure 5).

All told, Ukrainian far right parties and groups were mentioned in 20% of confrontational and violent Maidan protest events, and in 29% of specifically violent events. The scale of far right confrontations and violence increased both in terms of their intensity (absolute number of events) and in terms of their size. Far right radical actions were not small isolated events but a part of the overall radicalization of Maidan. Confrontations and violence where far right participation was mentioned were typically even larger than events where far right participation was not mentioned (Table 2).
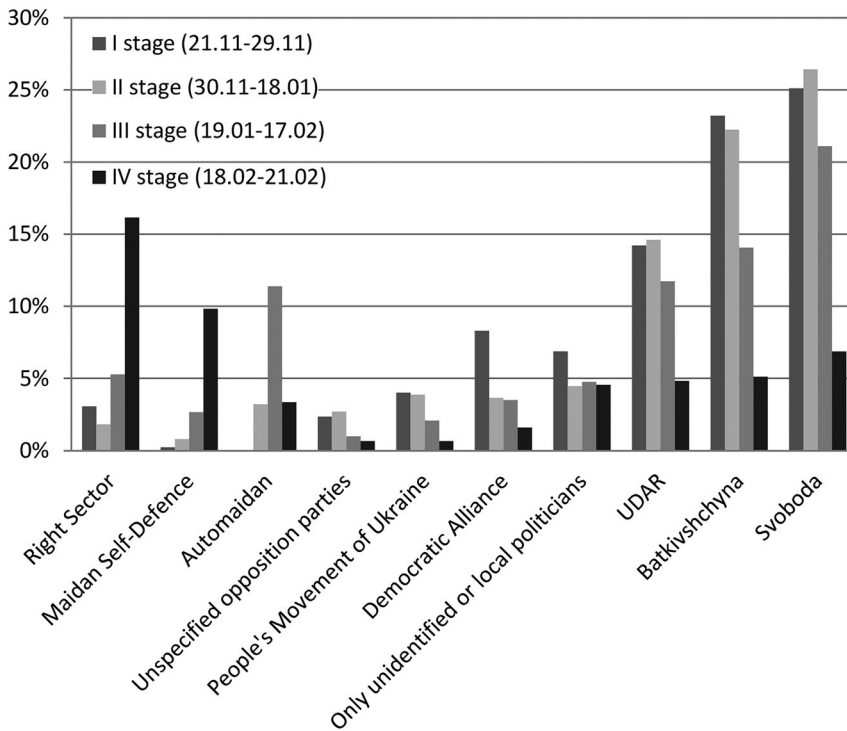
Figure 5. Participation in Maidan protests by Maidan stages (% from the total number of events on specific Maidan stage). Source: CSLR.
Note: Mentions of affiliated groups, for example, youth organizations of the parties were added to the respective parties figures.

A closer look at the locations and timing of far right confrontations and violence allows us to identify specific spots of especially intense far right radical involvement. For *Svoboda*, for example, this was Kiev in December 2013 and the first half of January 2014 where *Svoboda* participation was mentioned in 39% (28 events) of all confrontations and violence. Their activists were mentioned in virtually all major events of violent escalations in Kiev in that period including attacks of the presidential administration, breaking into and occupations of the governmental buildings on 1 December, dismantling Lenin's monument on 8 December, defending Maidan camp against Berkut riot police attempt to disperse it on 11 December, blocking Kiev-Svyatoshynskyi court protesting against neo-Nazi 'Vasylkiv terrorists' imprisonment on 10 January.

After mass violence started in Kiev on 19 January mentions of *Svoboda* drastically decreased, confirming Shekhovtsov's point (2014) that the party failed to capitalize on radicalizing situation and failed as the revolutionary vanguard. As Figure 5 shows, political parties, including *Svoboda*, were clearly losing their dominance in the protest as it was becoming more and more radical. [6] The average percentage of protests with the participation of political parties and politicians was higher during the early stages of Maidan before 19 January (45%) but plummeted during the last stage to 21%. In the same time, participation of the Right Sector and the Self-Defence became much more visible precisely during the last stage of Maidan. However, at the end of January 2014 *Svoboda* actively

participated in the occupations of the regional state administration buildings in Western and Central regions (particularly, in Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Rivne, Ternopil, Chernivtsi, Khmelnytskyi, Vinnytsya, Zhytomyr, Sumy, Chernihiv).

On the contrary, the finest hour of the Right Sector's radical actions was not so much in Kiev, but after 18 February in Western and Central regions – more than half (59 out of 113 events) of Right Sector's confrontations and violence was concentrated there and in the last days of Maidan. In the West the Right Sector was reported in 18% of all confrontation and violent protest events. In all Western regions except Zakarpattya the Right Sector was mentioned in the assaults of the state administration buildings, the Ministry of Interior and security service headquarters, arsons of the Party of Regions offices. At the same time in the central regions (Vinnytsya, Zhytomyr, Sumy, Chernihiv) attacks on the Communist Party of Ukraine offices and Lenin monuments were also frequently mentioned among Right Sector radical actions. The data thus indicate the important role that the Right Sector played in violent dismantling of Yanukovych's power in Western Ukraine, changing the balance of forces between the government and Maidan protesters.

However, it was not in the Western and Central region where the Ukrainian far right played its most unexpected role. Counterintuitively, after Kiev, the highest rate of far right participation in Maidan protests was registered in the South (32%), East (28%) and Donbass (26%), not in the Centre or in the West. As Figure 6 reveals, this regional difference reflects not the local support for the parties, but rather lack of local support for Maidan.[7] Local maidans had more grassroots character where the Kievan Maidan had the support of the local population, but where the local majority opposed the Kievan Maidan, typical local maidan events usually gathered less than 100 people (Table 1) and were more dependent on the organized structures of the opposition parties, including *Svoboda*. The participation of the opposition parties and the far right, which already had a very low level of support from the residents of the Southern and Eastern regions, might have actually pushed those people even further away from Maidan, making a truly nation-wide movement against Yanukovych and the approval of Maidan almost impossible.

Discussion

Before coming to our conclusions it is necessary to discuss methodological limits of the presented data. They show participation in *protest* events (as we define them) that were *reported* by Ukrainian (mostly local, *oblast*-level) media. The data are specifically and only about protest participation. For example, humanitarian initiatives events, which were not oriented to protest activity, like Euromaidan-SOS or Hospital Guards, were not included into the data. In addition, our data does not differentiate between various scale and types of participation in particular events. We cannot tell the number of participants from each identified collective agent, or what precisely was their role in the protest events. Foremost, this is a problem of the media's *description bias*. Media not just selectively report about protest events but also describe them with variable quality. Participants of the protest events are usually considered to be 'hard news' that are generally accurately described by the media (Davenport et al., 2011, p. 157; Earl et al., 2004, pp. 72–73; Hutter, 2014). [8] Nevertheless, 'hard news' information can often be simply missing in media reports. Specifically collective agents participating in the protests may not be mentioned, or described in generic terms because they were not noticed or recognized by the
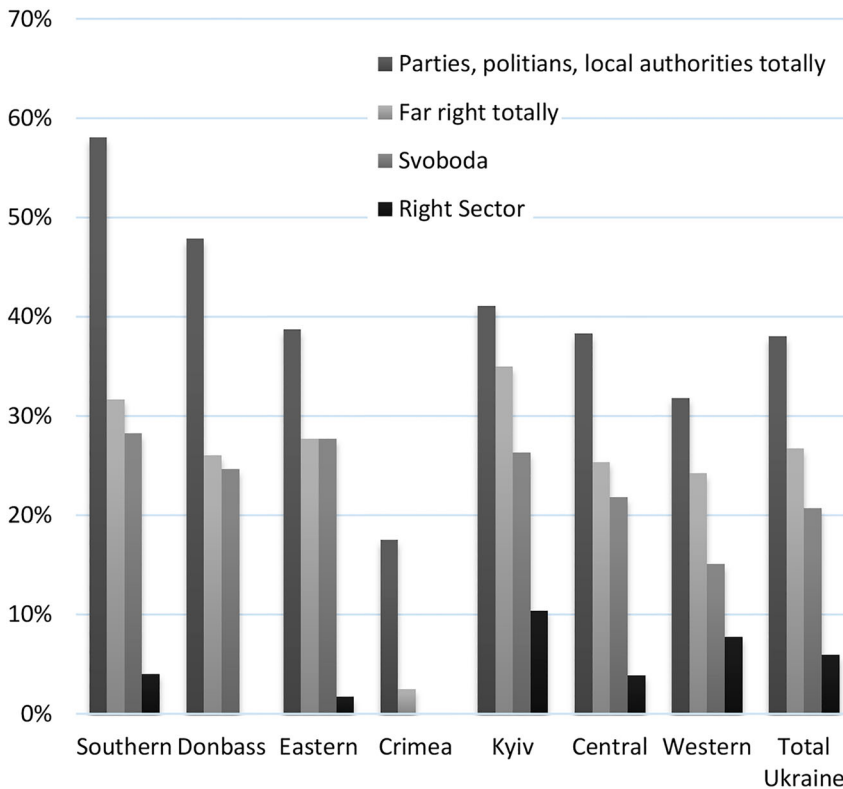
Figure 6. Participation in the Maidan protest events in the regions (% from total number of protests in the region). Source: CSLR.
Notes: Mentions of affiliated groups, for example, youth organizations of the parties were added to the respective parties figures. The 'nationwide' events (i.e. those that were impossible to locate in a particular.

journalist, or because their participation was not considered important to mention, or because of political predisposition of the journalist or editor.

So, to what extent are these data anything more than an estimation of how visible and recognizable the specific participation was for the local Ukrainian web-media? Although it would be the most conservative way to interpret our data, there are several reasons to think that the data generally accurately reflects trends in real participation in Maidan protests.

First of all, CSLR data are based on untypically high for protest event analysis number of local-level sources that help to counter both selective and descriptive biases. The information missing due to ignorance or irrelevance in one source may be mentioned in other sources. To some extent, we also controlled for politically motivated descriptive distortions as the local events in some *oblast* were coded only from this *oblast* news and from national media but not from the sources in other *oblasts*. So, for example, the Crimean or Donbass media, even if hostile to the Maidan, could not inflate in our data the Right Sector's participation in Western Ukrainian regions.

Second, specific collective agents are mentioned in the news with higher probability when they do something noteworthy; that is, something different from what the mass

of the event participants are doing. For example, if the known representatives of a collective agent are participating in a rally emphasizing their distinct identity with flags, other symbolic, specific slogans, etc., they will be more likely noticed. It is reasonable to argue that the more publicly leading and organized participation in the protest event is, the more probably it will be visible for journalists. Our data, therefore, may over-represent *significant* participation in the protest while underestimating the participation of far right activists when they behaving like everyone else in the protests.

In the same time the high visibility of the far right in Maidan protest event data cannot be attributed solely to the fact that radicals are more frequently provocative and violent, thus attract media looking for sensations. To some extent this may be true for the Right Sector, as 51% of the protests with its participation were either confrontational or violent, compared to 29% for Maidan protests in average. After mass violence started in the middle of January 2014 the Right Sector was so attractive to many Maidan supporters precisely because of its readiness to radical actions that were necessary in the quickly escalating situation (Likhachev, 2014, p. 107; Shekhovtsov, 2014). However, the sensationalism effect does not explain the very high media visibility of the *Svoboda* party, as only 13% of the protests with its participation were confrontational or violent, much less than the average rate for Maidan protests.

Svoboda's visibility benefited from its general recognisability as one of the major opposition parties in Ukraine represented in the parliament with all corresponding benefits for publicity compared to less resourceful non-parliamentary parties or civic initiatives. However, other opposition parties, *Batkivshchyna* and *UDAR*, that were more popular, less extreme and acceptable for more Ukrainians, and led by one of the most recognizable celebrities in Ukraine – Yulia Tymoshenko and Vitaliy Klychko were less reported in protest events both before and during Maidan. Moreover, as Figure 7 shows, *Svoboda* was the most frequently mentioned political party in the protest events in 2010–2012, even before it got into the parliament. After 2010, it increased its protest activity both in absolute numbers and as a relative share of the total number of protest events (from 12% in 2010 to 19% in 2013).[9]

All this suggests that the figures presented here are not simply a media artefact. Despite the inevitable selection and description biases, they reflect real trends in protest activity, and point to an explanation for high far right participation in Maidan protests. *Svoboda*
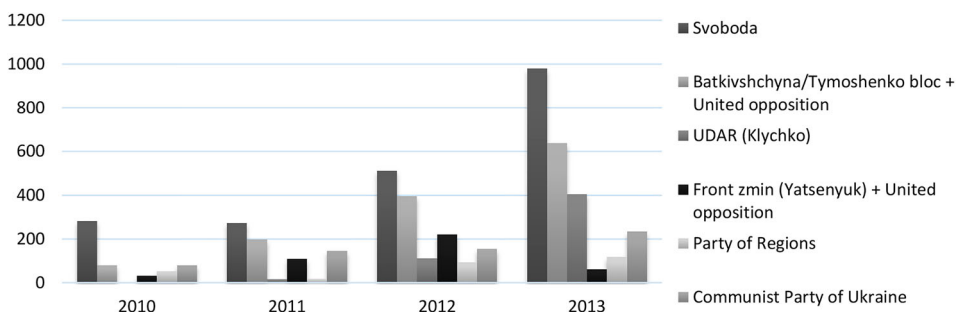

Figure 7. Number of protest events with the major Ukrainian parties participation. Source: CSLR. Note: Mentions of affiliated groups, for example, youth organizations of the parties were added to the respective parties figures.

was indeed structurally different from a typical Ukrainian party. It had an objectively higher potential to participate in a number of local protests all around Ukraine, and it realized this potential during Maidan as well as before its start. Unlike most of the major parties in Ukraine (with the exception of the Communist Party of Ukraine), which are little more than electoral machines built around charismatic leaders and business interests (Kudelia & Kuzio, 2014), *Svoboda* was a mobilization party with a nation-wide network of ideologically committed activists and grassroots support.

Besides *Svoboda* had the highest protest capacity in the country, the moderate opposition parties – *Batkivshchyna*, *UDAR*, *Front Zmin* – helped *Svoboda* gain entrance to the Maidan. Political alliance between *Svoboda* and the moderate opposition parties in the Resistance to Dictatorship Committee in 2011 and later official agreement to coordinate electoral campaign before parliamentary elections in 2012 legitimated far right as part of 'normal' politics in Ukraine, without any serious challenge to its reactionary and anti-democratic ideology (Shekhovtsov, 2013, pp. 200–202).[10] Andreas Umland has highlighted the lack of a typical *cordon sanitaire* between the centrist parties and the far right in Ukraine (Umland, 2013b, p. 146). Our data shows that the protest coalition of far right and moderate opposition parties had formed well before the beginning of Maidan. In fact, each year from 2010 on the number of protest events where *Svoboda* participated alongside another major opposition party grew both in absolute numbers and as a relative share of all major opposition party protests (Figure 8).[11] Oppositional electoral machines had little scale of mobilization of committed activists and widely used simulation of the mass support with paid-for mobilization. They might have been interested in a higher protest potential of *Svoboda* party which had more ideological activists and wider
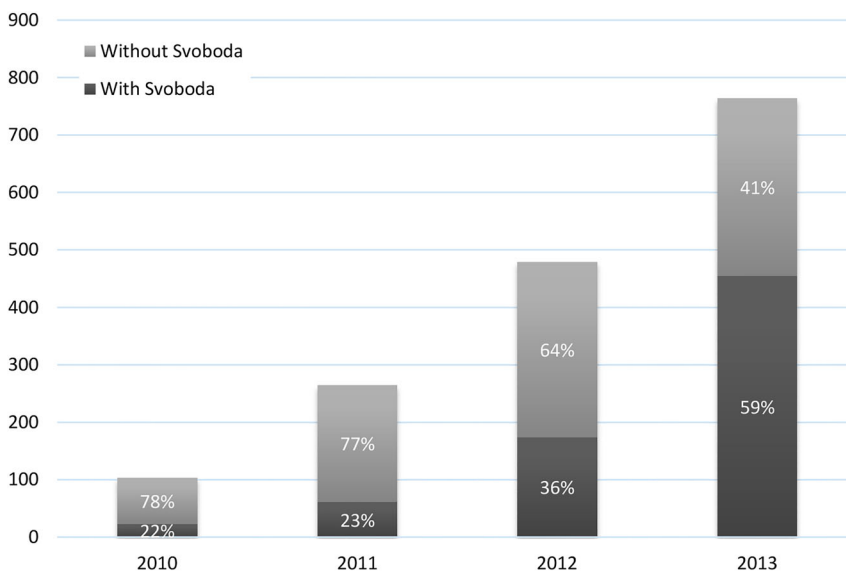

Figure 8. Number of moderate opposition parties protest events together or separately from *Svoboda*. Source: CSLR.
Notes: Mentions of affiliated groups, for example, youth organizations of the parties were added to the respective parties figures. 'Moderate opposition parties' means *Batkivshchyna/BYT*, *Front Zmin*, *UDAR*, the United Opposition.

network of local cells with committed activists which were able to intervene into the protest activity at the grassroots level almost all around the country.

Svoboda's easy integration into the Maidan protests with its high activist capacity and ability to shape the rhetoric and symbols of the protest was only a logical and hardly avoidable consequence of the pre-existing political and protest coalition with the moderate opposition parties. When Svoboda failed to rise to the challenge of the more radicalized struggle in the middle of January 2014, it opened the way for the previously marginal but more radical Right Sector.

Conclusions

Our systematic protest event data contradict the thesis, supported by most of the experts of the Ukrainian far right, that the latter did not play any crucial or even significant role in Maidan protests. In fact, the far right were the most active collective agents among Maidan participants, and had the largest share of reported participation in Maidan protest events and specifically in confrontational and violent events, exceeding any other political party or non-partisan initiative. Neither confrontations and violence with far right participation, nor far right protests in general, were isolated events on the margins of the mass 'peaceful and democratic' protest. Indeed, they were larger than protest events without far right participation. The far right were the most frequently mentioned identified collective agents at all stages of Maidan. Despite the fact that Svoboda's participation (together with other oppositional parties) declined in the last days of the armed uprising, the Right Sector replaced it at the first position.

The data also indicate some locations and timing of possible crucial involvement of far right activists that have not received enough attention. More research is needed on Svoboda's efforts to radicalize the Maidan in Kiev before mass violence started in the middle of January 2014, and on the Right Sector's role in helping the opposition to take power in Western and Central regions before Yanukovych was overthrown in Kiev.

Contrary to expectations, the percentage of Maidan protests with the far right (as well as oppositional parties or politicians in general) participation in the Eastern and in the Southern regions, the regions where they had the lowest support among the local residents, was higher than in the Western and Central regions. Finally, our data point to a large number of large and radical Maidan protests in Western and Central regions that were no less crucial than the events in Kiev. Any Kiev-focused analysis of Maidan may ignore the bigger picture.

Obviously one must be careful about making inferences from the data derived from media reports because of the inevitable selection and description biases that can be controlled and to some extent balanced but never eliminated fully. However, even being as conservative as possible, the data indicates that the Svoboda party was the most visible collective agent in Maidan protests and the Right Sector was the most visible collective agent in Maidan confrontations and violence. Their high visibility by its own might have significantly influenced the perception of Maidan, particularly among people who were already hostile towards it. The fact that local maidans in the Eastern and Southern regions (except Crimea) had more party and far right participation might explain why the Maidan did not grow into an all-national uprising – a danger pointed out by some scholars at the early stages of Maidan (Umland, 2013a), before they started to downplay

significance and danger of the far right. The data also points to the crucial importance of internal to Ukraine factors, particularly fear of the far right threat to Russian and Russian-speaking population in Ukraine, as contributing to the civil war in Donbass beyond the role of Russia in instigating and supporting the armed conflict (Kudelia, 2015).

Russian media clearly exaggerate the role of the far right role, using clichés about a 'fascist coup', but they did not invent them nor their strong presence in Maidan protests. In fact, we see rather a smooth continuation of the previously formed political and protest coalition between the moderate opposition parties and *Svoboda*. This protest coalition was formed well before the Maidan, when moderate opposition parties began to cooperate more and more openly with *Svoboda* legitimating it as a part of 'normal' Ukrainian politics. This tolerance to the far right in the face of a 'greater evil' of Yanukovych allowed *Svoboda* to play such an active role in Maidan protests, and helped to discredit them for the majority of the population in South-Eastern Ukrainian provinces, thus forming the grounds for the civil war.

What consequences did this have for Ukrainian far right? Indeed, it did not succeed in the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2014, but why would they necessarily be able to? If we compare the results of the recent parliamentary elections (Tsentralna vyborcha komisiia, 2015) with the graph on Figure 3, we see very little correlation. The most active parties on the Maidan were among the losers of the electoral competition, which was won by parties that did not play any significant role in the Maidan as either mobilizing structures or violent agents. Protest activity and electoral campaigns are driven by different logics and require different resources. The former needs a strong network of committed activist collectives. This is helpful for elections as well, but what is even more important in elections is money and sympathetic media. The far right apparently lost these after the victory over Yanukovych.

Perhaps more importantly, electoral support is only one dimension of the far right's political influence and only one possible way it might achieve power. Electoral results show only mass support of particular parties at the particular moment of competition with other parties. They tell us nothing about the strength of far right's party structures, the dynamics of the local cells networks and membership, enforcement power of affiliated paramilitary and military units, and various non-parliamentary ways in which they can influence decision-making. Electoral support for the parties of the far right does not tell us much, on its own, even about the distribution of the far right attitudes among Ukrainians. In fact, estimating the far right's electorate on the basis of support for nominally far right parties is quite ironic in Ukraine, as even centrist 'pro-European' parties supported some overt neo-Nazi candidates and included them in their electoral lists (Ishchenko, 2014). Nevertheless, at the local elections in October 2015 *Svoboda* improved its support to 6.7% (Kiev International Institute of Sociology, 2015). Later, the notorious Ukrainian oligarch Igor Kolomoisky confirmed that the nationalist party he is funding, *UKROP*, which took 7.3% in local elections, is considering forming a coalition in the parliament with *Svoboda* (Lb.ua, 2015).

A preliminary analysis of CSLR protest event data after Maidan shows that in the end of 2014 the far right were still the most active participants in Ukrainian protests, although now the Right Sector took the first place from *Svoboda* (Centre for Social and Labour Research, 2014). It means that the far right still possesses the biggest activist resources in Ukraine. That year they also started to penetrate state repressive apparatus, taking

important law-enforcement positions (Ishchenko, 2014), to form affiliated armed units with political loyalty like the *Azov* regiment, the Right Sector's Volunteer Ukrainian Corpse, Svoboda's Ukrainian Legion, and the *Sich* battalion. The Right Sector's bloody confrontation with law enforcement in Mukachevo in July 2015 proves that they can attempt to challenge the state's monopoly on violence, and even call for an open mutiny against the state in the war situation with almost no repercussions (Petro, 2015).

We need more systematic research on other dimensions of the far right's influence on Ukrainian politics beyond electoral results: the mainstreaming of slogans previously used only in the nationalist subculture, the popularizing of radical figures of the past and their ideologies, the impact of radical nationalist rhetoric on centrist political actors, and of the political impact of their paramilitary and military affiliated structures. What we can say for now, however, is that the far right has become more significant in Ukraine than at any time since the 1950s.

Notes

1. See Ortiz, Myers, Walls, and Diaz (2005) for an extensive discussion of various sources of media biases and their impact on protest event data.
2. In 2009–2011 we monitored 150–170 web media. National media were selected and regularly rotated on the basis of their Internet-audience size and the number of relevant messages they reported (estimated in special experiments), that is, trying to select those with the least selection bias. Over 80% of the sources are local *oblast*-level news; each *oblast* was covered by at least five and at most seven sources. Two of them at least once per year were rotated based on the number of relevant messages they reported in order to include the promising new local media and exclude those with the highest selection bias. Our sample also included several activist web-sites that were presenting not particular organizations' activities but attempting to cover some major social–political spectrum of protest activity, like leftist, rightist, environmentalist, feminist, etc.
3. As a general rule we exclude from the analysis all events coded as 'dubious'; that is, where reports from different sources were too contradicting each other or where presence of social or political claims were doubtful, for example, in attacks of unknown people with unknown goals. Only 84 Maidan protest events were coded as dubious, slightly more than 2%.
4. We define Ukrainian macro-regions as follows: *Centre*: Zhytomyrska, Kievska, Chernihivska, Sumska, Vinnytska, Cherkaska, Kirovohradska, Poltavska oblasts; *Crimea*: Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol; *Donbas:* Donetska, Luhanska; *East*: Kharkivska, Dnipropetrovska, Zaporizka oblasts; *Kiev*: the city of Kiev; *South*: Odeska, Mykolaivska, Khersonska oblasts; *West*: Volynska, Rivnenska, Lvivska, Ternopilska, Ivano-Frankivska, Chernivetska, Zakarpatska oblasts.
5. We usually classify all protest events into three categories, based on their tactics: conventional, confrontational and violent. Violent tactics are protest actions causing (or threatening to cause) damage to people or property. Conventional protests refer to commonly accepted forms of protest that do not impose direct pressure on the protest targets, such as pickets, rallies, demonstrations, street performances, etc. By confrontational protests we mean actions involving direct pressure ('direct action') to achieve the goals of a protest, such as blocking roads, strikes, hunger strikes, but not causing direct damage to people or property. List of specific actions assigned to each category can be accessed in Ukrainian Protest and Coercion Data codebook: http://cslr.org.ua/ukrainian-protest-and-coercion-data-opis-ta-metodologiya/metodologiya/.
6. Maidan stages are defined following the key events in Kiev. So, the first stage covers the first mostly peaceful and conventional Euromaidan tent camp from the start on 21 November until 29 November 2013. The second stage starts with the dispersal of the first camp in Kiev on 30

November. The third stage starts on 19 January 2014 with the beginning of mass violence on the streets of Kiev. And the final, fourth stage starts on 18 February after the truce between the protesters and law-enforcement was broken in Kiev and the state forces made an unsuccessful attempt to crack down Maidan leading to the 'snipers massacre' and overthrow of Yanukovych. The stages cover the following numbers of Maidan protest events: I stage – 422, II stage – 1,362, III stage – 1194, IV stage – 743.

7. On regional divergence of Ukrainian public opinion on the support for Maidan protests and the opposition parties during Maidan period, see Kiev International Institute of Sociology polls (2013, 2014b).

8. However, the tests of description bias were usually done on the major Western newspapers leaving a question about accurateness of event descriptions in local web-media in a non-Western country.

9. 'United Opposition' was a united electoral list by *Batkivshchyna*, *Front Zmin* and several minor parties for 2012 parliamentary elections. The name was publicized during the protest participation as well and picked up by the media. Protests with the United Opposition participation (almost exclusively in 2012) were assigned to both *Batkivshchyna* and *Front Zmin*.

10. *Svoboda* was invited to join the United Opposition electoral bloc together with *Batkivshchyna* and *Front Zmin*, but declined.

11. Figure 8 may even underestimate the protest cooperation between the moderate opposition parties and *Svoboda*. For consistency with other figures in the article I did not include to Figure 8 the protest events where participants were described only generically as 'opposition parties' or as the Resistance to Dictatorship Committee without mentioning specific parties. Although it is highly probable that such wordings described precisely the cases of moderate opposition and *Svoboda* cooperation and their inclusion into the figure would only strengthen the trend. The yearly distribution of such protest events: 2010 – 7, 2011 – 12, 2012 – 27, 2013 – 56.

Acknowledgements

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