

Class 9: Movements

Counter-mobilisation

Dr. Michael C. Zeller

Agenda for the day

- Opening notes
- Counter-mobilisation in general
- Antifa ... in the United States
- Further examples of counter-mobilisation against far-right movements
- Any questions, concerns, feedback for this class?

Opening notes



Presentation groups

June

July

May

Date	Presenters	Method
5 June:	Rasmus B., Andre D., Josefine E., Ioanna L., Santiago C.	surveys
12 June:	Omar B., Lela E., Niclas W.	network analysis
19 June:	NO CLASS MEETING	
26 June:	Colombe I., Konstantin S., Jakob W., Veronika L.	ethnography
26 June:	Maksim K., Felix S., Jon L.D., Damir S., Korbinian M.	case study

Counter-mobilisation in general

- countermovements, opposing movements characteristics
 - far-right and opposing movement examples



Countermovement/Opposing movement characteristics



polarisation
dependency

Manicheism
imitation

dependency

Manicheism

imitation

polarisation

- most CM activities will be directed against the target movement and vice versa, aimed at “neutralizing, confronting or discrediting its corresponding countermovement” (Zald and Useem 1987, 148)
- e.g., anti-immigration vs. migrant rights movements: rhetoric from both focused on the ‘threats’ posed by the other side

Countermovement/Opposing movement characteristics



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- mobilisation, and success on one side needing to be triggered by success and mobilisation on the other side, each movement thriving paradoxically on the good health of its opponent
- e.g., climate change denial/resistance vs. climate protection movements: demonstrations, policy influence by one has typically spurred on responsive activity

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Countermovement/Opposing movement characteristics



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- tendency to adopt elements of the other side's programme, tactics, etc.
- e.g., 'autonomist' nationalists vs. left-wing/anarchist movements: C. Worch tries to import 'black bloc' tactic into German extreme right in 2000s; CasaPound Italia uses 'squatting' tactic in activism in Rome

Countermovement/Opposing movement characteristics



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Countermovement/Opposing movement characteristics

polarisation - *most CM activities will be directed against the target movement and vice versa, aimed at “neutralizing, confronting or discrediting its corresponding countermovement” (Zald and Useem 1987, 148)*

dependency - *mobilisation, and success on one side needing to be triggered by success and mobilisation on the other side, each movement thriving paradoxically on the good health of its opponent*

Manicheism - *us-them dynamic between opposed movements*

imitation - *tendency to adopt elements of the other side’s programme, tactics, etc.*

- Mayer (1995) examines these features in the case of Front National vs. SCALP, Ras l’Front, SOS, Le Manifeste contre le FN

Antifa ... in the United States

- Antifa origins
- Contemporary case of antifa in Germany
- Copsey and Merrill (2020) on antifa activity in the U.S.
- debates about how (state) actors should deal with antifa



Antifa origins and modern incarnations

- Emerged in Germany in 1930s among many initiatives to oppose SA and NSDAP (e.g., Sewell 2020)



Antifa origins and modern incarnations

- Emerged in Germany in 1930s among many initiatives to oppose SA and NSDAP (e.g., Sewell 2020)
- Re-emerged in post-war era
 - institutionalised forms, e.g., *Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes – Bund der Antifaschistinnen und Antifaschisten* (VVN-BdA), *Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia* (ANPI)
 - state endorsement, e.g., 2024: Italian President Sergio Mattarella states that Italian constitution is 'anti-fascist'



Antifa origins and modern incarnations

- Today:
 - organised antifascist activism is widespread (Bray 2017; Copsey 2017)
 - Opposed to '*fascist*' forces with varying tightness/looseness of defining that
 - Commonly, loose organisations (anarchist tendencies)
 - Repertoire of actions: counter-protest, low-level violence, property damage, doxxing



Contemporary antifa in Germany case

ARD series (in German): <https://www.ardaudiothek.de/sendung/die-fascho-jaegerin-der-fall-lina-e-und-seine-folgen/94838298/>

- 28-year-old antifa activist, Lina E., and three accomplices jailed for either membership of or support for a criminal organisation.
 - politicised/radicalised by revelations about NSU in 2011
- attacks on (assumed) right-wing extremists in Thüringen and Sachsen between 2018 and 2020
- judge: (i) acknowledged deficiency of criminal punishment of neo-Nazis

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Contemporary antifa in Germany case

recent article: Jones, A. & Schuhmacher, N. (2023). 'Ghostly Militanz: the Loss of Discursive Infrastructures and German Antifascist Radical Counterpublics.' *PArtecipazione e COnflitto* 17(3):
<https://pureportal.coventry.ac.uk/en/publications/ghostly-militanz-the-loss-of-discursive-infrastructures-and-germa>

Copsey and Merrill (2020) - Antifa in the U.S.

- Context:
 - The U.S. federal government does not hold the necessary executive authority to designate a domestic group a “terrorist organisation” (it can only declare foreign groups “terrorist”)
 - Since 2011 in the U.S., 110 deaths through far-right violence, 0 (possibly 1, a *Patriot Prayer* activist) through Antifa violence

In putting their “bodies on the line,” militant anti-fascists aspire to defeat fascist organizing, to de-stabilize it, and ultimately de-mobilize it. At its root, anti-fascist militancy is the promise to effect intimidation, humiliation and de-moralization upon fascists. This involves a physical commitment to “no platforming” (p. 124)

Copsey and Merrill (2020) - research design

Copsey and Merrill (2020) - findings/points raised



Antifa as 'extremist/terrorist organisation'?

Pyrooz and Densley (2018, 233): “the history of antifa reads like a history of violence”

vs.

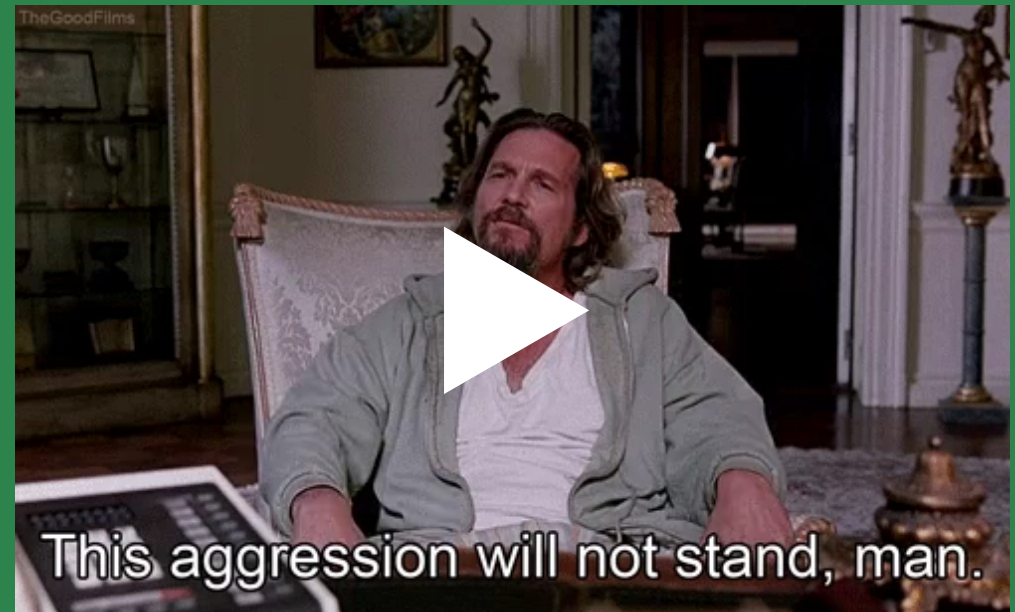
Bray (2017, 169): “In truth, violence represents a small though vital sliver of anti-fascist activity.”

Should state security (in Germany, elsewhere) monitor/designate antifa as *extremist/terrorist*?

what even is *antifa*? a 'gang' (Pyrooz and Densley 2018); a 'group' (LaFree 2018) (see also GTF database: <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>); a networked collective identity; a 'tradition' (Copsey 2017)

Further examples of counter-mobilisation against far-right movements

- the Sticker War! (Bray 2017)
- other, less visible examples of counter-mobilisation



The Sticker War



A Serbian antifa named Stefan waged a similar campaign in 2012: When he came upon wheat-pasted posters for Serbian Action in his neighborhood of Belgrade, he immediately tore them down ... and noticed them back up again an hour later. He retaliated by plastering antifa stickers all over the Serbian Action posters ... only to find Serbian Action stickers in favor of “Traditional courtship in marriage” and other conservative slogans plastered on top of his stickers in response. Every day for six months Stefan battled with an anonymous fascist for control of his neighborhood. About four months into the conflict Stefan saw a guy putting up a sticker down the street as he got off the bus. The two locked eyes but Stefan wasn’t sure if this was his nemesis. In any event, Stefan persisted, and eventually the Serbian Action propaganda ceased to appear. He simply outlasted them.

p121: The street art campaigns, whether posters or graffiti, ultimately serve to designate space as antifascist (Creasap 2016; Gerbaudo 2013; Waldner and Dobratz 2013). An antifascist tag or sticker in a dive bar signifies the space as welcoming to activists and hostile to fascists. Antifa posters or stickers on lamp posts or walls in a community show that at minimum there is an active militant antifascist group operating in the area.

Vysotsky, S. (2020). *American Antifa: The tactics, culture, and practice of militant antifascism*. Routledge.

Less visible counter-mobilisation examples

Any questions, concerns, feedback for this class?

Anonymous feedback here:

<https://forms.gle/pisUmtmWdE13zMD58>

Alternatively, send me an email: m.zeller@lmu.de

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