

Violence and Restraint within Antifa: A View from the United States

by Nigel Copsey and Samuel Merrill

Abstract

In recent months recurrent calls have been made by conservative right-wing politicians to designate Antifa a “domestic terrorist organization” in the United States. Fixated on the spectacle of its Black Bloc tactics they have equated Antifa, what is essentially an ad-hoc, non-hierarchical, geographically dispersed social movement comprised of local autonomous activist groups, with organized violent extremists. And yet, the evidence for such an equation has been mostly limited to a handful of instances that usually bare the hallmarks of political exaggeration or are alternatively attributable to individuals loosely associated with the Antifa movement. Why is this so? How do militant anti-fascists in the US understand violence and exercise restraint in their use of it? This article seeks an answer to these questions based on interviews with activists from Portland’s Rose City Antifa, one of the United States’ most well-known Antifa groups, and an analysis of a collection of the group’s Tweets. It reveals that Antifa exercises considerable restraint, internally and externally, with regards to both the literal and rhetorical use of violence within its street and digital activism. In turn it calls upon others to exercise reciprocal levels of restraint by ceasing their labelling of Antifa as a “domestic terrorist” organization.

Keywords: Antifa, anti-fascism, restraint, violence, terrorism, street activism, digital activism

I would say if we describe violence as being like, you know, a Richard Spencer face punch, I would say based on simply being a fascist, all fascists deserve, at a minimum, a Richard Spencer face punch.[1]

I don’t think that people necessarily will go off the handle. Like I don’t really see a huge risk of like anti-fascists becoming like bloodthirsty maniacs or something.[2]

Introduction

On 31 May 2020, in the wake of the mass protest that followed the death of African American George Floyd, Donald Trump tweeted that the US Government will be designating Antifa a “terrorist” organization.[3] This threat was neither sudden nor unexpected. Trump’s inauguration in January 2017 had emboldened the US far right (also known as the “Alt-Right”), and Antifa - the countermovement comprised of militant anti-fascist activists - had pushed back. Before long, Antifa had shot to both national and international prominence. Oxford Languages shortlisted the word “Antifa” as its “Word of the Year 2017”,[4] with usage frequency having peaked in August 2017 when, at a “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, a white supremacist murdered 32-year-old anti-fascist Heather Heyer. Trump’s response to Charlottesville was to apportion blame to both sides, a deliberate exercise in “false equivalency” according to his critics. Sensing an opportunity, right-wing provocateur “MicroChip”, dubbed “Trumpbot overlord,”[5] initiated an online petition calling on the Federal Government to formally declare Antifa a “terror group - on the grounds of principle, integrity, morality and safety.” The petition’s popularity - 368,423 signed it - occasioned significant media coverage from conservative media outlets such as Fox News.[6] The aim, according to “MicroChip,” was to shift the post-Charlottesville narrative, to re-unite conservative opinion, “and prop up antifa as a punching bag.”[7]

Antifa has been a recipient of numerous “punches” from conservative right-wingers ever since. A Republican-sponsored Congressional Bill (H.R. 6054), cited as the “Unmasking Antifa Act of 2018,” called for an amendment to title 18 of the United States Code to provide for enhanced penalties for committing an offence while wearing “a disguise, including a mask.”[8] The following year, two Republican senators, Ted Cruz (R-Texas) and Bill

Cassidy (R-Louisiana) introduced Senate Resolution 279 calling for “groups and organizations across the country who act under the banner of Antifa to be designated as domestic terrorist organizations”.[9] Cruz had written to the US Department of Justice and FBI on 23 July 2019 requesting that Antifa be subject to criminal investigation. He penned the following:

Antifa’s violence is widespread and well-known. Earlier this month, the “Rose City” chapter of the domestic terrorist organization “Antifa” rampaged through Portland, Oregon, stealing and destroying property, disrupting traffic, and assaulting civilians. One journalist, Andy Ngo, was attacked so severely that he was hospitalized for a brain hemorrhage. This weekend, Willem Van Spronsen, an Antifa terrorist, attacked a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement center in Tacoma, Washington, igniting a vehicle and attempting to ignite a propane tank. This mayhem follows previous armed attacks and rioting by Antifa in Portland, as well as the arsons, destruction of property, batteries, and related crimes by Antifa following President Trump’s inauguration.[10]

Two days later, in the House of Representatives Rep. Brian K. Fitzpatrick (Pennsylvania, 1st Congressional District) introduced House Resolution 525 calling on the House to strongly condemn the violent actions of Antifa; to recognize that Antifa engages in “domestic terrorism”; and to urge the President and the President’s Cabinet to use all available resources to address the Antifa threat.[11] On 27 July 2019 Trump tweeted:

Consideration is being given to declaring ANTIFA, the gutless Radical Left Wack Jobs who go around hitting (only non-fighters) people over the heads with baseball bats, a major Organization of Terror.
[12]

There is much here, of course, that is bravado, bluster and bogeyman caricature. The US Federal government does not hold the necessary executive authority to designate a domestic group a “terrorist organization” (it can only declare foreign groups “terrorist”). Such a move would also run counter to the First Amendment’s guarantee of freedom of association. It would be unconstitutional to criminalize on the basis of membership of a domestic ideological organization. What is more, Antifa is not even a formal organization as such – a fact noted by FBI Director, Christopher Wray, in his response to Ted Cruz at a Senate Committee hearing in July 2019.[13]

This brings us to the essential point of our article. It is, for sure, merely stating the obvious that Antifa is not a “major organization of terror.” Applying the guidelines of the Global Terrorism Database, Gary LaFree has already demonstrated that Antifa neither constitutes a single highly organized group, nor does it engage in terrorism.[14] Since 9/11, right-wing extremists in the US have been responsible for the politically motivated deaths of 110 people while those affiliated to Antifa have killed no one.[15] This “zero” statistic has been recently challenged, however, by the killing of a Patriot Prayer supporter, Aaron J. Danielson, in Portland on 29 August 2020. During a pro-Trump caravan demonstration, an altercation led to a fatal shooting. The suspect, Michael Reinoehl, declared himself “100% anti-fascist”. Reinoehl, who several days later was shot by a federal fugitive task force, had given an interview to *Vice News* in which he claimed that he had acted in self-defence. Yet Reinoehl, although a self-declared Antifa supporter, was not, it seems, a Rose City Antifa (RCA) member. “I’m not a member of anything” Reinoehl revealed in his *Vice* interview.[16]

Yet, *stricto sensu*, according to US legal definitions, Antifa does engage in domestic “terrorist violence”. Section 802 of the USA PATRIOT Act (2001) defines “domestic terrorism”, *inter alia*, as acts “dangerous to human life”, which is so broad that it can include relatively minor civil disobedience actions associated with street protest. [17] So in the wake of the riots following Floyd’s death, the US Attorney General William Barr considered it legitimate to declare that the “violence instigated and carried out by Antifa and other similar groups in connection with the rioting is domestic terrorism and will be treated accordingly.”[18] On 4 June 2020, the FBI Director remarked that “We’re seeing people who are exploiting this situation to pursue violent, extremist agendas - anarchists like Antifa and other agitators.”[19]

Despite this claim, federal prosecutors could not link any Floyd protest arrests to Antifa. The only links found were to an “accelerationist” far right encouraging others to infiltrate the protest, and use “cocktails, chainsaws and firearms” against the police in order to start the “boogaloo” (a second Civil War). By early September 2020 around 300 arrests had been made across the US in relation to the Floyd protest. Of those arrested, around one third had been in Portland. However, none of the court documents from federal cases in the city referenced Antifa or the wider anti-fascist movement; and more than 70 per cent were for minor citations and misdemeanours, not felonies.[20]

Yet it is undoubtedly true that militant anti-fascists do engage in political violence, which they could, in theory, escalate to more lethal acts. In Greece, for example, in November 2013, two members of Golden Dawn were shot dead by suspected anti-fascists. So, it is not only in a narrow US technical-legal sense that an article on Antifa speaks to terrorism studies. The Antifa slogan “by any means necessary” carries a commitment to leave open all available tactics, including, hypothetically, the intensification of violence should the need arise. “One primary factor correlated with the demand for anti-fascists is the supply of fascism and racism,” as one observer noted, so if the supply escalates then logic dictates that demand for more militant anti-fascist responses should escalate too.[21] In the literature on movement-counter-movement dynamics, this relationship has been described as “curvilinear” (a pattern of correspondence where the success of the former generates more demand for the latter).[22] Through elaboration of our case study, Portland, in the Pacific Northwest, we will consider the use violence in the context of the tactics and strategies that social movement scholars term “repertoires of contention”, that is to say, “distinctive constellations of tactics and strategies developed over time and used by protest groups to act collectively in order to make claims on individuals and groups”.[23]

Prior to Trump’s election, in April 2016, the US Department for Homeland Security and FBI had already projected that, should “Fascist, nationalist, racist, or anti-immigrant parties obtain greater prominence or local political power in the United States”, this could trigger a violent, and potentially lethal, anti-racist backlash from “anarchist extremists”.[24] According to a joint intelligence assessment across an approximate four-year period, January 2010-July 2014, criminal acts by US “anarchist extremists” had “tended to be low-level, non-violent incidents, such as vandalisms — and when US-based anarchist extremists commit violent acts they are generally aimed at [symbolic] property.” When militant anti-fascist activity did occur – of all reported US anarchist extremist violent incidents during this period only 7 per cent was related to “anti-racism” – activists had “sought out violent confrontations with white supremacists at public locations such as at rallies, concerts, or meetings”.[25] In other words, in such confrontational encounters, persons – bodies – rather than property become the target of oppositional 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” (preventing a person or persons, or organisation(s), regarded as having fascist or fascistic views from expressing those views). This physical commitment, in the form of “direct action”, is distinct from more liberal forms of anti-fascism, which are less confrontational, and often make appeals to institutionalized political actors and to the state. Stanislav Vysotsky is right to point out, “It is this willingness to engage in direct confrontation and violence that defines this movement as militant as opposed to other movements that choose to oppose white supremacists through non-confrontational demonstrative actions and juridical cooperation with the state”.[26]

When asked what he understood by the term “militant anti-fascism”, one Portland-based Antifa activist told us:

I mean anti-fascism based in direct action that is not beholden to the state [...] So one that is not afraid of engaging in violence or aggression against fascism that understands [...] no platforming as probably one of the most effective tactics in fighting fascism, that no platforming means denying fascists the street, denying them speaking.[27]

For anti-fascist militants, since quasi-militaristic tactics are deemed historically effective, the anti-fascist struggle demands their periodic deployment. “The idea”, as one Portland activist said, “that you could engage in a successful and effective anti-fascism in the face of like true, like, fascist organizing that was non-militant and could also be that successful is simply historically inaccurate”.[28] Yet, as we shall see, there are definite limits to their fight against fascism. In other words, their violence is not so open-ended or unlimited as the slogan “by any means necessary” implies. Why is this so? How do militant anti-fascists in the US understand violence and exercise *restraint* in their use of it?

Antifa: Our Subject

Antifa, short for “anti-fascist”, is a self-designation. Its etymological provenance is German, a derivation of the militant Communist Party-sponsored organization, *Antifaschistische Aktion*, active during 1932-33. Yet today’s “Antifa” groups have no direct historical lineage to this Communist-sponsored organization. In fact, there is no political party affiliation, no central organization, no central leadership, and no prescribed doctrine beyond a shared belief that “fascism” must be defeated. Antifa is thus *reactive* (in the sense of reacting to a perceived “fascist” threat) and might be best understood as “essentially an ad hoc sociopolitical movement designed to address a specific problem”.[29]

For the purposes of this study, Antifa is considered a militant, non-hierarchical, geographically dispersed social movement comprised of local autonomous activist groups.[30] It is also a transnational movement not spatially restricted to the US, although the US is obviously our concern here. In 2017 it was estimated that some two hundred local Antifa groups operated within the US.[31] However, due to their “closed” nature, activist numbers are impossible to quantify, and certain groups are more active and established than others.

Some Antifa groups operate within the loose structure of a peer-to-peer national network, the “Torch Network”, and share common “Points of Unity”. There are others, however, that remain outside this network. The Torch Points of Unity are as follows:

1. We disrupt fascist and far right organizing and activity.
2. We don’t rely on the cops or courts to do our work for us. [...]
3. We oppose all forms of oppression and exploitation. [...]
4. We hold ourselves accountable personally and collectively to live up to our ideals and values.
5. We not only support each other within the network, but we also support people outside the network who we believe have similar aims of principles. [...][32]

Core activists are typically drawn from the radical left eco-system of autonomous anarchists and left libertarians, but Antifa also draws participation from communists and socialists. Antifa does not operate in a vacuum but as part of a wider coalition of forces, which comprises both militant and non-militant anti-fascists. Notwithstanding outliers, the majority of Antifa activists fall within the age range of 25-35. There is evidence of gender parity; an over-representation of those identifying as Queer; and a predominantly white ethnicity.[33]

In the public imagination, Antifa’s notoriety is derived from the spectacle of the Black Bloc, an anarchist tactic in which groups of protestors don black clothing and masks in order to conceal their identities. In the US context, adoption of this tactic, which had its origins in the European autonomist scene, occurred largely as a consequence of the coming together of the militant anti-fascist movement with the anti-globalization movement in the wake of the WTO Seattle protests in 1999. Taking inspiration from the anarchist Black Bloc tactic of “N30”, on 12 January 2002, at the so-called “Battle of York” in Pennsylvania, militant anti-fascists from Anti-Racist Action (the precursor to Antifa) formed an anti-fascist Black Bloc for the first time in order to confront a white supremacist demonstration. This “battle”, where one white supremacist fired a handgun and another ran over a female anti-racist, would set the precedent for subsequent direct action against fascists.

Bloc members typically carry both “defensive” (banners, shields, gas masks, goggles, helmets, bandannas, etc.) and “offensive” gear (spray paint, smoke bomb projectiles, Molotov cocktails, slingshots etc.). Tactically, the Bloc is deemed particularly useful when engaging in illegal activity, such as physically confronting the far right or the police (through obscuring the identity of protestors it offers anonymity, making it harder for the police to identify individuals for future prosecution, or target specific individuals during the action itself). The Bloc is also intended to send a message of defiance to the police, and a message of intimidation to the opposition. For those in the wider anti-fascist coalition who might be present, whether allies or potential allies, it offers security and reassurance. Bloc advocates draw a clear distinction between this type of militant activity and clandestine terrorism: “One of the many objectionable qualities of clandestine terrorism is that, at best, it is still a spectator sport; a bloc, on the other hand, can be a participatory and contagious radicalizing experience”. [34] For conservative right-wing detractors, however, the Bloc has become an object of fixation: the symbol of subversive, insurrectionary terror.

Our Methods

Although shaped by locality, Antifa will typically deploy a mix of street protest and digital activism with the latter and not the former, accounting for the vast majority of everyday activity. The focus of this “everyday anti-fascism” is cyber-shaming, or “doxing” (revealing personal information about a far-right activist to the public, sometimes rendered as “doxxing”). This article therefore uses a mixed-methods approach in order to capture both offline and online activity. In the first place, it draws from qualitative, semi-structured interviews with activists from RCA in Portland, and the city’s broader anti-fascist coalition. Interviews were carried out in October 2019 and February 2020 under conditions of strict anonymity.

Space precludes a history of the contestation between anti-fascists and the far right in Portland, but RCA is one of, if not the most active, and well-established Antifa group in the US. Originally founded in 2007, RCA has been subject to significant national and international media attention. A right-wing conservative social media “provocateur,” Andy Ngo, who was physically assaulted at one of its counterdemonstrations, is credited with having done much to publicize and demonize the group amongst mainstream opinion in the United States.[35]

Additionally, the article makes use of a sample of 3971 tweets (including 2484 retweets) shared by RCA’s Twitter account (@RoseCityAntifa) between 13 March 2018 and 28 August 2019 and collected using Tweepy (2019) in accordance with Twitter’s regulations.[36] Specifically, the 648 tweets (including 279 retweets) from within this sample which featured variants of “violence,” “attack,” “assault,” “fight,” and “terror” were subject to close reading.[37] These more “militant” tweets were then analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively according to the traditions of techno-culturally orientated critical discourse analysis.[38] Particular attention was paid to whom RCA attributed these words and in turn how they exercised rhetorical restraint when using this public facing social media platform in order to engage new audiences. While consent to carry out the analysis of these tweets was not legally required given Twitter regulations, RCA activists were informed of this element of the research prior to participating in the qualitative interviews.[39]

Locating the Place of Violence: our Point of Departure

Needless to say, the violent disruption of “fascist” assembly is an axiom of movement praxis. As one RCA activist put it, “it’s not just about punching a Nazi in the face. It’s also punching a Nazi in the face and making sure they don’t come back again. And you don’t have to do it every year”.[40] Yet even if violence is so deeply ingrained in praxis, it is also moderated through reference to how Antifa defines “fascism” as its primary antagonist.

Antifa do not hold fast to a narrowly agreed definition of fascism. While many in Antifa would agree that a core ideological tenet of fascism is ultra-nationalism, in practice “fascism,” a “slippery animal,” tends to

be approached more in terms of everyday “reactionary” social forces and tendencies, such as racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, the scapegoating and marginalizing of oppressed groups, and police brutality. That said, militant anti-fascists in the US have generally kept their focus on the political space that is commonly viewed as “far right”.[41] The problem today, of course, is the blurring of boundaries between the far right and the Trump-supporting conservative right: groups such as the Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer, which claim not to be racist or fascist. For Antifa, it would be “obviously amiss for anti-fascist activists to ignore such auxiliaries and attempts at obfuscation,” but what this means is that Antifa does “nevertheless struggle with intellectually dishonest conflation”.[42] Inevitably, (and with some justification) this invites accusations that Antifa is “notoriously generous in distributing the fascist label”.[43]

Antifa, as an anti-fascist oppositional movement, defines its violence in relative terms and so its violence is necessarily tempered by the movement’s relationship to “fascism” (by what it is struggling against). The legitimacy of anti-fascist action is thus drawn from the illegitimacy of its opponent. So, for Antifa, a key, if not *the* key, unique defining feature of “fascism” is an overwhelming predilection for violence: “Fascists are gonna do what fascists do, which is try to kill all proponents of freedom”.[44] As the website of Portland’s RCA had stated,

Fascism is marked by its reliance on violence or threats of violence to impose views on others, and its propensity to create compliance through terror.[45]

As one RCA activist told us, fascism is “a political movement that feels that it gains power through violence and power through intimidation [...] that’s kind of the core of what I would call a fascist politics”.[46] “Without physical force,” so the Antifa argument runs, “fascism will come to power, and the aggressive violence that will occur both on its way to power and after that power is acquired will be so world-historically horrific that aggression is justified”.[47]

Yet, and this is an important consideration, if anti-fascists were to fetishize their violence, the danger is that it would undermine their ethical and ideological challenge to fascism, give credibility to the idea of the unity of the radical extremes (“false equivalency”), only attract those interested in violence, and encourage male hegemony and chauvinism (a problem that has traditionally beset militant anti-fascism). As one RCA respondent said, “You can’t just have violence for the sake of violence or whatever”.[48] There is also the further concern that a serious escalation in violence will invite overwhelming governmental repression. Hence, as one RCA activist predicted, this would lead to “a very concerted state effort to identify and repress and then imprison, and I think it would very quickly lead to the dissolution of militant anti-fascist groups as organized and as activist groups”.[49]

When rationalizing their recourse to violence, Antifa will view it as *pre-emptive*, to protect the marginalized and the oppressed from the violence inherent to fascist organizing. This counter-violence is understood primarily as a form of community *self-defense*, deploying physical force to counter or forestall an immediate threat of violence to marginalized communities: people of color, immigrants, Muslims, Jews, LGBTQ+, and so on.[50] However, what is also clear is this defensive response does not preclude the initiation of physical force and so “It’s fairly, fairly simple [...] ‘proactive self-defense’ is what we do”.[51]

Anti-fascist writer Natasha Lennard puts it this way:

Anti-fascist violence is thus a counterviolence, not an instigation of violence onto a terrain of existing peace. A situation in which fascists can gather to preach hate and chant “blood and soil” - this is a background state of violence. The problem we face, then, is not so much that of *necessary violence* as it is one of *impossible non-violence*. [52]

So, if non-violence is *impossible*, it does beg the question: what are its limits?

At this point, it is worth considering how anti-fascists understand respective intent. As one anti-fascist writer explained:

Fascists, by being Fascists, have announced their affiliation with many of the worst crimes in human history. In some ways, they are *worse* than the average member of the actual nazi party was, because they look back at Hitler's crimes and revere it in *full knowledge* of what it wrought.[53]

In other words, "Nazis tell us their intent: they want genocide. And when they get the chance, they act on this intent".[54] Advocates of anti-fascist violence understand their violence differently: "Now let's look at the intention of anti-fascist violence. There are two goals: to protect people and to show force and strength in an attempt to discourage the nazis".[55] In this sense, the intent behind anti-fascist violence is to *reduce* overall harm (as seen through a communitarian ethical lens). This suggests a limiting principle at work here: fascism is an inherently violent ideology; it is *exceptional*; violence against the makers of that ideology is justified in the context of the protection of the vulnerable. It follows that lethal conflict escalation would eliminate the qualitative difference between anti-fascism and fascism. Simply put, it would undermine the normative basis for Antifa's argument that fascism is truly *exceptional* in its use of violence.

Conflict dynamics are not static, of course, and militant anti-fascists scale their *reaction* to the perceived threat from their adversaries. In the words of one militant anti-fascist activist:

You fight them by writing letters and making phone calls so you don't have to fight them with fists. You fight them with fists so you don't have to fight them with knives. You fight them with knives so you don't have to fight them with guns. You fight them with guns so you don't have to fight them with tanks.[56]

We are told that the weapons of choice for fascists are pipes and guns, whereas anti-fascists only carry sticks, shields, smoke-bombs and fireworks. Yet, as one writer put it, the "fairly obvious reality" is that "firearms are a fact of life when it comes to social movements in the US."[57]

Anti-fascists do carry (concealed) firearms (and there have been cases of open carry too). RCA's praxis is to carry concealed firearms and its "direct action" group do train activists in firearm use. Moreover, the radical left is not minded to support gun control, which is often associated with reinforcing white supremacy: "rather than reducing violence in communities of color, such [gun control] laws give racist cops one more thing with which to harass, detain, arrest and brutalize people of color."[58] The anarchist milieu generally supports the principle of community armed self-defense, and "see guns as part of a community armed self-defense to be used at appropriate times and places, just like other tools and tactics."[59] Indeed for some radical-left groups, such as Redneck Revolt, firearms culture is critical to building cross-racial solidarity amongst the working class.[60] Even so, there is little indication that Antifa subscribes to the insurrectionary notion that it should now use guns offensively, to build and sustain counter-power, and "rise up in arms". Tellingly, in 2017, when there was a case of activists in Great Lakes Antifa (GLA) engaging in "aesthetic militancy," and "needlessly escalating dynamics" by "offering weapons, body armor and training" to new recruits, GLA found itself ostracized.[61]

But what of the relationship between militant anti-fascism and wider revolutionary or insurrectionary struggle? As one critic put it "anti-fascism without revolution guarantees capitalism's continuing misery and devastation". [62] In the context of the right's upswing under Trump, there are those who might well seek a shift from a purely defensive to a more *offensive*, system-oppositional approach. Influenced by the work of radical French political theorist Gilles Dauve (pen-name: Jean Barrot), those radical-leftists who remain critical of Antifa claim that "everyday anti-fascism" has become a distraction from revolution so that "anti-fascism" is, in Dauve's words, "the worst product of fascism."[63] Tellingly, however, as Antifa activists from Philadelphia and New York have responded, Antifa sees itself a subset of the anarchist movement, and as such it is "a piece of, but not replacement for the larger radical vision." This means that Antifa's focus of intent still remains overwhelmingly *defensive*, "a bulwark against the most ideologically reactionary forms of the Far Right".[64] For sure, Antifa

activists would agree that violence is inherent to the logic of capitalism and so the struggle is “three-way” (against fascism and the capitalist state), but fascism (as the most reactionary form) exposes that violence to an exceptional degree.

Revolution, as one RCA activist put it, “is not really what we’re here to talk about. What we’re here to talk about is how can we disrupt these groups. How can we basically pull the wheels off their cart”.[65] So “if we were worried about, you know, the intricacies of what, you know, a revolutionary party should look like for example, then we’d get kind go off into the weeds and we wouldn’t be focused on the actual thing that we’re doing”.[66] This is not some popularity struggle, “We’re not here to get the majority of people in the country behind us. We’re not here to elect candidates. We’re not here to build a lasting political organization. What we’re here to do is prevent groups like the Proud Boys from beating up people in the street”.[67]

Internal Culture

When thinking about restraint, we also need to factor-in group internal movement dynamics. There is shared recognition that Antifa should not initiate violence for the sake of it, and that amongst the anarchist and anti-authoritarian libertarian left, humanism rather than hate, is a core tenet.[68] This speaks to what social movement scholars call anarchist “prefiguration” (the use of value-appropriate means to pursue value-based goals).[69] In other words, tactical means should reflect the future society being sought.

The internal culture is also one that encourages discussion of the moral and strategic limits of violence. Criminologist Stanislav Vysotsky offers an apt summary of this culture, which is worth quoting here:

Antifa activists do not make tactical decisions lightly. Militant groups are organized around an affinity group model that stresses direct democracy and accountability. Tactical decisions are made collectively by group members in meetings where their relative merits and disadvantages are thoroughly discussed. Group members vote on potential actions striving for consensus in decision-making in order to maintain maximum tactical unity. The internal processes of antifa groups reflect more than a desire for collective reinforcement, but are driven by a commitment to decentralizing power and avoiding hierarchical control. In this sense, the very process of tactical choice is fundamentally antifascist. [70]

Significantly, an internal culture of horizontal consensus gives space for the expression of a variety of concerns regarding the use of violence, but it also means that no single individual can dictate tactical decisions (in this case, violent escalation).

Specifically, in relation to RCA, there are also structural mechanisms in place to mitigate the possibility that one or more of its activists might venture off-piste and deviate from group norms. There is a lengthy, six-month membership process, and

[...] a pretty intense screening process [...] Making sure they’re not a loose cannon. They don’t have like a lot of mental health stuff going on. How they can act in a group, like are they able to make decisions collectively? [...] And then there’s you know, you go through a program, the program last six months, you have a mentor. There are classes twice a month that are two hours long. And there’s like reading. It’s also to see if people can work.[71]

All this suggests that the potential for the escalation of violence is limited. But what if state repression were intensified?

Like there’s a tendency to want to hide and be like, OK, well, we’ll just go further underground and be more militant. But most groups with that approach are more heavily targeted because then you’re, you don’t have any solidarity. You don’t have any community support.[72]

Retaining local anti-fascist solidarities is an important strategic consideration. As a spokesperson for PopMob (Popular Mobilization), an ostensibly non-violent anti-fascist organization that is part of the wider anti-fascist coalition in Portland, told us:

[...] we support the Black Bloc. And they are oftentimes they are our frontlines. They put their bodies between us and the fascists, whether we're talking civilian fascists or the fascists in uniform. So basically, we feel like we would not be safe out there demonstrating if not for the frontlines [...] We don't see it as a separation between like us and them.[73]

Part of the PopMob message is to de-stigmatize (militant) anti-fascism. Any serious escalation of violence from RCA would undermine this message. PopMob did not start out,

[...] working specifically with RCA, for instance. RC[A] would have their event and we would have our event and we would meet like once beforehand, just be like, here's what we're doing, here's what we're doing. But we didn't like, have a close relationship. But I was really invested from the beginning and trying to build that relationship because of this historic, like, separation between the militant and like, quote, 'non-militant' anti-fascists.[74]

Where Antifa is depicted by the conservative right as a synonym for terrorist violence, it is also incumbent on activists not to lionize their violence lest it give exaggerated representations of the movement further credibility. For sure, as many an activist will tell you, "It feels good to punch a Nazi" and expressive violence is not a brake but an accelerator. To one critic, "It's not propaganda by the right that's ostracized Antifa. It's their own actions. It's the webzines that call for slitting the throats of fascists that make Antifa a synonym for violence".[75] And yet, as we will reveal below, the RCA does not seek rhetorical glory. As one RCA activist explained,

Yeah, like we don't apologize, and we let it be known that we're OK with that stuff, but we never bragged about it. We had a very much an internal culture, kind of like, you know, security, modesty. We're here for the cause, not like to blow our own horn. And also, we didn't want that kind of overly macho public image.[76]

Rhetorical Restraint, Militant Language and the Politics of Naming

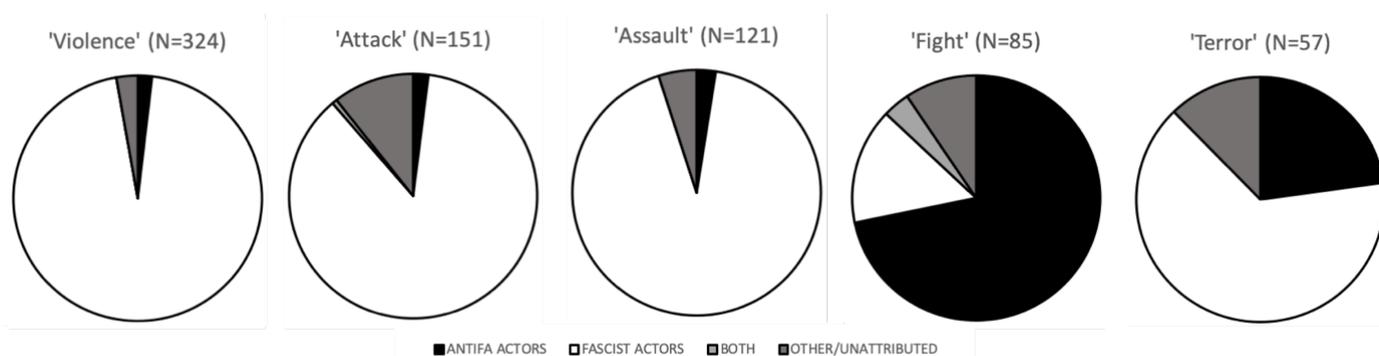
The rhetorical restraint that RCA employs publicly is conveyed in the militant language that they use on Twitter and the manner by which this contributes to a politics of naming. Our sub-sample of 648 RCA tweets and retweets reveals the breadth of actors they consider to be Antifa's main adversaries, in other words, their understanding of what contemporary fascism is, including actors considered both explicitly "fascist" and/or complicit in "fascist" causes and ideologies. Among these adversaries were: fascist, far right, right-wing, white supremacist, white nationalist, Nazi and neo-Nazi groups in general; specific activist movements falling under the umbrella of these groupings; individuals active or associated with these movements; as well as Republican politicians like Donald Trump and Ted Cruz, and police forces including most prevalently the Portland Police Bureau (PPB).[77]

Overall, the ten most frequent key words to appear across the 648 tweets were: "violent" (192), "proud" (154), "patriot" (146), "violence" (141), "right" (138), "prayer" (131), "joey" (91), "far" (91), "boys" (89), and "fascist" (84), suggesting how violence was rhetorically attributed most to the locally active far-right Proud Boys and Patriot Prayer movements and the latter's founder Joey Gibson.[78] Significantly, in 95 per cent (309) of the tweets containing variants of the word "violence," violence was attributed to Antifa's "fascist" adversaries (Figure 1).

The rhetorical connection between violence and these "fascist" actors was so strong that even in some tweets where the violent perpetrator was not explicitly identified as, or associated with, a "fascist" adversary, it could

be assumed that the intention was that this perpetrator be understood as “fascist” due to their use of violence. [79] In many other instances, “fascist” adversaries were described using the violent adjective but with no further explanation of their acts of violence. Elsewhere, evidence of specific “fascist” acts of violence was foregrounded including physical and sexual assaults which led to individuals being criminally prosecuted and an attack on a Portland bar, Cider Riot, known to be an anti-fascist gathering place. Similar patterns were conveyed by the use of variants of the word “attack” and “assault,” where 87 per cent (131) and 93 per cent (112) of tweets respectively linked these to “fascist” actors (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Militant word variants and their use in connection to Antifa and “Fascist” Actors



In just 12 tweets were variants of “violence,” “attack,” and “assault” connected solely to Antifa actors or their allies. As the examples below illustrate, in these instances RCA primarily contested accusations that they were part of a violent movement, and thus anti-fascist violence mainly appeared in inverted commas.

A Patriot Prayer follower was caught in the leaked planning logs for the Unite the Right II rally on the anniversary of the murder of Heather Heyer, but he’s making up stories about “the escalation of violence we saw this week from the left.”[80]

The idea that antifascists are mindless thugs who attack random people is a beloved trope of the right which sadly many liberals parrot. The “both sides” idea that antifascists are the moral equivalent of fascists is another common fallacy. These have to be countered rigorously.

This is not the only such recent inaccuracy by Ngo: to get his followers worked up in the days prior to June 29th, he also falsely claimed on Twitter that RCA’s public call-to-action “singled [him] out to be assaulted.”

In fact, within the sub-sample, RCA’s militancy never led to any explicit incitements to enact physical violence, the result no doubt of a combination of both internal and external breaks on escalation, insofar as this might not only have led to the group’s alienation but also to Twitter suspending their account.[81]

The actions that RCA did encourage were in most instances related to sharing information that might support doxing efforts and participating in call-ins designed to get known “fascists” fired from their jobs. There were also rare references to punching and “milkshaking” adversaries.[82] These reflected the now widely circulating rallying cries to punch or “milkshake” a Nazi along with their associated hashtags and memes, but again there were no concrete incitements to actually punch or milkshake adversaries.[83] Thus, those in charge of @RoseCityAntifa may have been sensitive to the possibility that their adversaries might report their content to Twitter moderators and call for the account’s suspension.

Clearly, RCA exercise *restraint* in their rhetoric when others around them are not necessarily doing the same. Equally, it should be noted that the restraint that the group displays when using Twitter – a publicly accessible

social media platform – may not be mirrored in any of the more private and secure social media platforms that they may use for coordinating direct action. The aforementioned doxing and call-in actions could be said to partly constitute RCA's militancy – their forms of “violence” – although these were also most often couched in the more restrained rhetoric of a predominantly symbolic “fight” against fascism and its violence as the example below illustrates:

We all need to take a role in the fight against the far right & its violence. This requires antifa activists doxxing & pressuring fascist propagandists & everyday people speaking against the stoking of fear & resentment against scapegoated groups.

As Figure 1 shows, the pattern in the attribution of violence is reversed when it comes to variants of the word “fight”. In this case 72% (61) of the tweets identified Antifa actors and allies as the “fighters”. These tweets stressed the *reactive* nature of anti-fascism – its fight *against* fascism – often under the discursive banner of “our community”.

On June 30th, antifascists in Portland defended our community from Proud Boys intent on wiping the left from the streets. Help support those injured in the fight, either by donating or buying a t-shirt on our webstore.

Our biggest strength is our solidarity. We have it and the nazis and fascists don't. When we stand together and support each other, we make our community stronger for the next fight. If you can't be out in the street, this is a way to show solidarity with those who are.

Even if some of these tweets subtly implied the use of physical force, this force was always framed as reactive and connected to discourses of self-defense in order to be justified.[84] By extension, RCA argued that any attempt to designate it and its allies' fight against fascism as “terrorism” should also necessitate the labelling of whole communities as “terrorists.” This is most clearly indicated by the tweet below, which repeated part of the statement released by RCA and its allies in response to the July 2018 resolution to designate Antifa a “domestic terrorist organization”.[85]

Fighting against the oppression, bigotry, and violence that we call fascism requires ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Stopping fascist activity is a goal common to all people of conscience. These Senators would call us all domestic terrorists.

Statements like these also characterized all of the tweets (13) within which variants of the word “terror” were used in connection to Antifa actors, namely to refer to, or refute, the labelling of Antifa as a “terrorist” organization (Figure 1). Attempts to designate Antifa a “domestic terrorist organization” are clear examples of the “politics of naming” and its associated discursive conflicts.[86] Highlighted by the adage that “one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter,” *naming* is political because it helps recruit support via discursively creating in- and out-groups and because it can justify action and “the legitimacy of violent acts”.[87]

There are of course two sides to this particular discursive battle. On one side, attempts to label Antifa “terrorists” have taken advantage of the Bush administration's open declaration of a “war on terror” without specifying the source of that terror in order to deny the legality of Antifa and relegate the movement to lawlessness.[88] On the other, RCA's framing of its militancy in terms of a moral struggle and self-defense is more reminiscent of the “freedom fighter” label.

Interestingly, while refuting accusations of terrorism, RCA did not appropriate the “terrorist” designation to any large degree within the discursive arsenals that they trained upon their “fascist” adversaries, opting instead to emphasize these adversaries' illegitimate use of violence. While 65% (37) of the tweets containing variants of the word “terror” attributed this terror to fascist actors, overall terror was invoked less frequently than the other

militant words. Variants of “terror” were used not only sparingly but also with sensitivity. While occasionally used in a more general sense to highlight how far-right groups “terrorize” communities, overall the use of the word was mostly reserved for those far-right groups already officially designated as domestic terror groups or for those instances of high-profile, extreme far-right violence popularly understood as terrorist attacks. For example,

Yesterday’s terrorist attack was awful. We need to recognize the threat that people espousing ideas of anti-Semitism and genocide pose to our communities. We need to stop them before they cause harm.

RCA’s moderated use of variants of the word “terror,” their seeming reluctance to discursively weaponize it against their adversaries, can be interpreted as further evidence of their rhetorical restraint.

Conclusion

Drawing this article to its close, let us return to the “domestic terrorism” that Ted Cruz referenced: the first is the physical attack on right-wing provocateur Andy Ngo in Portland – the “unofficial PR spokesperson” for the far-right Proud Boys, according to Rose City Antifa (RCA). In June 2020, Ngo filed a lawsuit against the RCA and five named defendants. As a result of the defendants’ actions, Ngo alleged that he had “suffered harm to his person, causing injuries to his head and body, including bruising [...] suffered severe pain, discomfort, and emotional distress, as well as inconvenience and interference with everyday activities”. This “required medical care and ongoing medical treatment.”[89] RCA demurred from responding on social media to breaking news of this \$900,000 lawsuit. Neither was the “martyrdom” of Willem Van Spronsen lauded after he had attempted to set fire to several vehicles, outbuildings and a propane tank outside the Northwest Immigrant Detention Center in Tacoma, Washington. What is more, RCA’s website was also silent on the killing of Aaron Danielson by self-declared anti-fascist, Michael Reinhoehl.

This is not to deny that there may be some belligerent voices within Antifa who are less restrained and are prepared to support an escalation of violence. Further research is needed on comparing attitudes to violence (and restraints on it) amongst other Antifa-affiliated groups in the US. But there is no sense at the moment of this writing of any inexorable slide toward mass casualty terrorism. During the George Floyd protests, Twitter shut down multiple *fake* Antifa accounts that were inciting violence, and which originated with the far right, not the far left.[90]

Significantly, our analysis shows that militant anti-fascist responses are not going unchecked and that groups like RCA regularly exercise restraint internally and publicly, both in a literal and rhetorical sense. For sure, even if most of their “everyday anti-fascism” is non-violent, militant anti-fascists use violence in confronting targets. Indeed, this commitment to a combative response is absolutely essential to group identity because it signifies “the core distinction between them and other militant anti-fascists,” as Vysotsky says. [91] It is surely impossible to imagine a militant anti-fascism without a willingness to use physical force. Yet at the same time, the claim that their oppositional target – the “fascists” – are defined by an ultra-violent credo imposes a value-based, prefigurative boundary on militant anti-fascists in both their use, and rhetorical representation, of violence (as do value-based concerns over the fetishization of violence and hyper-masculinity). Strategic concerns factor too, such as the risk that violent escalation will lead either to group isolation from the wider anti-fascist coalition, or to dissolution as a result of increasing state repression. Internal cultures of decision-making and recruitment structures (which in the case of RCA are elaborate) function as further dynamics of restraint. So, let us acknowledge the exercise of restraint here and call on others to exercise some restraint in their labelling of Antifa as a “domestic terrorist” organization.

This brings us to some very final reflections on the broader relevance of our case for existing research on political violence and social movement activism. What we have discussed here is the significance of *restraint* in Antifa’s protest repertoire. “Movement organizations,” as one sociologist reflects, “are inclined to adopt tactics

that express or reflect their shared identity, beliefs, and experience”.[92] The collective identity of Antifa as an anarchist and left-libertarian radical social movement is clearly setting boundaries when it comes to escalating violence (particularly to lethal violence). This underscores the importance of collective identities in defining tactical choices in social movements. As Dana Williams points out, “Repertoires enable and often limit what people can do”.[93] The emphasis of our discussion has been on how *internal* tactical and rhetorical strategies *limit* violence.

In their recent article on the use of restraint in violent escalation, Joel Busher, Donald Holbrook and Graham Macklin, identified a series of internal brakes on violent escalation. Our research confirms the applicability of their functional typology, especially with regard to strategic and value-based concerns.[94] Looking ahead, significant changes in the *external* socio-political environment (the impact of the global pandemic; ecological crisis; the outcome of 2020 presidential election) might still radicalize the future repertoires of militant anti-fascists. Even so, it is always worth bearing in mind that repertoires, as Williams qualifies, “do not guarantee any kind of action”; they are at best “probabilistic not deterministic”.[95]

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About the Authors:

Nigel Copsey is Professor (Research) of Modern History, at Teesside University, UK. His first monograph was a history of anti-fascism in Britain, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (2000; 2016) and he has co-edited a series of books examining anti-fascism in both a domestic and transnational context. His most recent publication is *Anti-Fascism in a Global Perspective: Transnational Networks, Exile Communities, and Radical Internationalism* (co-edited with Kasper Braskén and David Featherstone, 2020). Forthcoming projects include the monograph, *Anti-Fascism: A Global History* (with Kasper Braskén).

Samuel Merrill is a senior researcher at Umeå University’s Sociology Department and Centre for Digital Social Research, Sweden. His research focuses on the interfaces between social movements, cultural memory and digital media with respect to a broadly conceived underground (spatial, political, creative and technological). He has published articles on these interfaces in relation to contemporary anti-fascist and far-right movements in academic journals including *Antipode*, *Social Movements Studies*, *The Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* and *First Monday*, as well as in a volume entitled *Social Movements, Cultural Memory and Digital Media* (2020), which he co-edited with Emily Keightley and Priska Daphi.

Notes

[1] Interview with Rose City Antifa (RCA) activist, RCA02, 17 October 2019.

[2] Interview with RCA activist, RCA05, 15 February 2020.

[3] Trump, Donald, J. Twitter, 31 May 2020, URL: https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1267129644228247552&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.tweetbinder.com%2Fblog%2Ftrump-twitter%2F. According to a Tweet Binder report, to date, this was the most liked and retweeted tweet that Trump shared in 2020.

[4] See ‘Word of the Year Shortlist 2017’, URL: <https://languages.oup.com/2017-shortlist/>.

[5] Described as such by a Republican strategist, see Jesse Singal, ‘The Alt-Right Took Over Twitter Through the Sheer Force of its Obsessiveness’, *New York Intelligencer*, 5 April 2017, see URL: <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/04/the-alt-right-took-over->

[twitter-through-sheer-obsession.html](#).

[6] The petition declared that “Terrorism is defined as “the use of violence and intimidation in pursuit of political aims”. This definition is the same definition used to declare ISIS and other groups, as terrorist organizations. AntiFa has earned this title due to its violent actions in multiple cities and their influence in the killings of multiple police officers throughout the United States. It is time for the pentagon to be consistent in its actions – and just as they rightfully declared ISIS a terror group, they must declare AntiFa a terror group – on the grounds of principle, integrity, morality, and safety’, see URL: <https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/petition/formally-recognize-antifa-terrorist-organization-0> (created by M.A. on 17 August 2017).

[7] See Shawn Musgrave, ‘White House ‘antifa’ petition written by pro-Trump troll’, politico.com, 24 August 2017, URL: <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/08/24/antifa-white-house-petition-trump-troll-241990>.

[8] 115th Congress, 2D Session, H.R. 6054, URL: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/6054/text>.

[9] ‘S.Res.279 - A resolution calling for the designation of Antifa as a domestic terrorist organization’, URL: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-resolution/279>.

[10] ‘Cruz asks DoJ to pursue Antifa and local authorities for RICO violations’, URL: <http://hardnoxandfriends.com/2019/07/24/cruz-asks-doj-to-pursue-antifa-and-local-authorities-for-rico-violations/>.

[11] H.Res.525. Calling for the designation of Antifa as a domestic terrorist organization, URL: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-resolution/525>.

[12] Trump, Donald. J. Twitter, 27 July 2019, URL: https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1267129644228247552&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.tweetbinder.com%2Fblog%2Ftrump-twitter%2F.

[13] Response by Wray to Cruz, 23 July 2019, see URL: https://www.cruz.senate.gov/?p=press_release&id=4600.

[14] See Gary LaFree, ‘Is Antifa a Terrorist Group?’, *Society*, 55:3, May/June 2018, pp. 248-252.

[15] See Peter Bergen, ‘Trumps crazy designation of Antifa as terrorist organization’, CNN Opinion 1 June 2020, URL: <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/31/opinions/trump-antifa-domestic-terrorist-bergen/index.html>.

[16] See ‘Man Linked to Killing at a Portland Protest Says He Acted in Self-Defense’, URL: https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/v7g8vb/man-linked-to-killing-at-a-portland-protest-says-he-acted-in-self-defense.

[17] Cruz had also urged the FBI to open an investigation into Antifa under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO).

[18] Office of the Attorney General, Press Release Number: 20-500: 31 May 2020, URL: <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/attorney-general-william-p-barrs-statement-riots-and-domestic-terrorism>.

[19] See ‘FBI Director Christopher Wray’s Remarks at Press Conference Regarding Civil Unrest in Wake of George Floyd’s Death’, FBI Press Release, 4 June 2020, URL: <https://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-director-christopher-wrays-remarks-at-press-conference-regarding-civil-unrest-in-wake-of-george-floyds-death>.

[20] See Ryan Lucas, Review Of Federal Charges In Portland Unrest Shows Most Are Misdemeanors’, 5 September 2020, URL: <https://www.npr.org/2020/09/05/909245646/review-of-federal-charges-in-portland-unrest-show-most-are-misdemeanors?t=1600423612805>.

[21] Matthew Knouff, *An Outsider’s Guide to Antifa, Volume Two: Politics, Philosophy and History* (Conscious Cluckery, 2012), p. 65.

[22] See David S. Meyer and Suzanne Staggenborg, ‘Movements, Countermovements, and the Structure of Political Opportunity’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 101:6, 1996, pp. 1682-1660.

[23] Verta Taylor and Nella Van Dyke, “Get Up, Stand Up” Tactical Repertoires of Social Movements’, in David A. Snow, Sarah. A. Soule & Hanspeter Kriesi (Eds.) *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), pp. 262-293.

[24] See Homeland Security/FBI, U//FOUO, Baseline Comparison of US and Foreign Anarchist Extremist Movements, 4 April 2016, URL: https://www.oodaloop.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Comparison_of_US_and_Foreign_Anarchist_Extremists_Movements.pdf, p. 14.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 2 & p. 12.

[26] Stanislav Vysotsky, ‘The Influence of Threat on Tactical Choices of Militant Anti-Fascist Activists’, *Interface: A Journal for and about Social Movements*, 5: 2, 2013, pp. 263-294.

- [27] Interview with RCA03.
- [28] Interview with RCA02.
- [29] Matthew Knouff, *op. cit.*, p.19.
- [30] Some take Antifa to refer to 'anti-fascists' in a broader sense and do not necessarily discriminate between militant and non-militant forms.
- [31] See 'What you need to know about antifa', Jewish Telegraphic Agency 25 August 2017, URL: <https://www.jta.org/2017/08/16/united-states/what-you-need-to-know-about-antifa-the-group-that-fought-white-supremacists-in-charlottesville>.
- [32] See Torch Points of Unity, emphasis as original, URL: <https://torchantifa.org/points-of-unity/>.
- [33] See Stanislav Vysotsky, *American Antifa: The Tactics, Culture & Practice of Militant Antifascism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).
- [34] See Crimethinc. *Action Faction, Recipes for Disaster: An Anarchist Cookbook* (Salem OR: Crimeth Inc Workers' Collective, 2017) p. 90.
- [35] See EJ Dickson, 'How a Right-Wing Troll Managed to Manipulate the Mainstream Media', *Rolling Stone* September 2019, URL: <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/andy-ngo-right-wing-troll-antifa-877914/>.
- [36] These regulations permit the collection of approximately 3200 of an account's most recent tweets. Collections were run on 14th June 2019, 25th July 2019, and 28th August 2019 and then compiled. Collecting data from Twitter in this way is subject to a number of general limitations (see Stine Lomborg and Anja Bechmann, 'Using APIs for Data Collection on Social Media', *The Information Society*, 30:4, 2014, pp. 256-265) related to their inherent dynamism. As it was not possible to run continuous collections, tweets may have been posted and then deleted during the sample period without entering the data sample.
- [37] 324 tweets contained variants of "violence"; 151 tweets contained variants of "attack"; 121 contained variants of "assault"; 85 tweets contained variants of "fight"; 57 tweets contained variants of "terror". Variants of these different words could co-occur explaining why their sum exceeds the sample size.
- [38] Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London: Longman, 1989); Andre Brock, 'Critical technocultural discourse analysis', *New Media & Society*, 20:3, 2016, pp. 1012-1030.
- [39] The ethical consequences of analysing tweets were taken seriously even if these were partially mitigated by the anonymity afforded to the @RoseCityAntifa account. While the case-study design of the article prevented the anonymisation of this account, efforts were taken to anonymise those individuals that were retweeted or mentioned besides public figures. This occasionally necessitated the adaption of some of the tweets reproduced in this article's analysis – in order to complicate the identification of those tweets via the Twitter's search function.
- [40] Interview with RCA01, 17 October 2019.
- [41] William Gilles, 'Antifa Activists as the Truest Defenders of Free Speech', in James Tuttle (Ed.) *Fighting Fascism; Anti-fascism, Free Speech and Political Violence* (Center for a Stateless Society: Kindle Direct Publishing, 2019), pp. 185-254.
- [42] *Ibid.*, p. 220.
- [43] Diana Johnstone, 'The United States is Experiencing a Major Political Crisis and Antifa is Making Things Worse', in Eamon Doyle (Ed.) *Antifa and the Radical Left* (New York: Greenhaven Publishing, 2019), pp. 103-109.
- [44] William Gilles, *op. cit.*, p. 240.
- [45] See 'FAQ', URL: <http://rosecityantifa.org/faq/> ([available through web.archive.org](#)).
- [46] Interview with RCA01.
- [47] Jason Lee Byas (2019), 'Holding our Ground: A Critique of the Ethics & Strategy of Violence against Fascist Assembly', in James Tuttle, *op. cit.*, p. 262.
- [48] Interview with RCA05.
- [49] Interview with RCA03.
- [50] For further discussion of militant anti-fascism as community self-defense, see Devin Zane Shaw, *Philosophy of Antifascism* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).
- [51] Interview with RCA01.

- [52] Natasha Lennard, *Being Numerous: Essays on Non-Fascist Life* (New York: Verso, 2019) p. 22.
- [53] Jason Lee Byas (2019), 'Fighting Fascism in A Complex World', in James Tuttle, op cit., p. 445.
- [54] Alex McHugh, 'A Meditation on Violence', in James Tuttle, op. cit., p. 355.
- [55] Ibid.
- [56] Murray, Baltimore ARA activist, cited in Mark Bray, *Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook* (New York: Melville House, 2017) p. 169.
- [57] Neal Shirley/North Carolina Piece Corps, 'Politicians Love Gun Control: Reframing the Debate around Gun Ownership', in Scott Crow (ed.) *Setting Sights: Histories and Reflections on Community and Armed Self-Defense* (Oakland, CA; PM Press, 2018) p. 24.
- [58] Ibid., p. 26.
- [59] Scott Crow, 'On Violence, Disasters, Defense, and Transformation: Setting Sights for the Future' in Scott Crow, op. cit., p. 228
- [60] See Dave Strano, 'Toward a Redneck Revolt', in Scott Crow, op. cit., pp. 263-267.
- [61] See 'Great Lakes Antifa can fuck right off', URL: <https://greatlakesantifa.com>; see also 'Beware Great Lakes Antifa: Greatly Lack Accountability', URL: <https://greatlylackingaccountability.blackblogs.org>.
- [62] Michael Staudenmaier cited in J. Clark, *Three-Way Fight: Revolutionary Anti-fascism and Armed Self-Defense* (2016), pp. 14-15.
- [63] Jean Barrot, *Fascism/Anti-Fascism* (BM Active: London, 2001), p. 4.
- [64] "What do U.S. Anti-Fascists Really Believe? A Reply to "On Antifa: Some Critical Notes", URL: <https://itsgoingdown.org/u-s-antifascists-actually-believe-reply-antifa-critical-notes/>.
- [65] Interview with RCA03.
- [66] Interview with RCA01.
- [67] Ibid.
- [68] The Southern Poverty Law Center refuse to designate Antifa a hate group: 'groups that engage in anti-fascist violence such as Antifa, for example, differ from hate groups in that they are not typically organized around bigotry against people'; see URL: <https://www.splcenter.org/20200318/frequently-asked-questions-about-hate-groups#antifa>.
- [69] Dana M. Williams, 'Tactics: Conceptions of Social Change, Revolution, and Anarchist Organisation', in C. Levy and M.S. Adams (eds.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism* (New York: Palgrave, 2019) pp. 107-123.
- [70] Stanislav Vysotsky, *American Antifa*, op.cit., p. 97.
- [71] Interview with RCA05.
- [72] Ibid.
- [73] Interview PopMOB activist, PopMOB01, 14 October 2019.
- [74] Ibid.
- [75] Sean Sullivan (2019), 'Like the Radicals of the 1960s, Antifa Groups will fade into irrelevancy', in Eamon Doyle, op. cit., p. 165.
- [76] Interview with RCA05.
- [77] Other actors are also linked to violence. For example, in one retweet Bitcoin is presented as violence itself.
- [78] The ten most frequent key words across the full sample of 3971 tweets were: "right" (494), "patriot" (446), "proud" (432), "prayer" (386), "neo" (377), "nazi" (377), "white" (377), "boys" (297), "news" (289), "far" (284). This suggests similar content to the 648 militant sub-sample but without its tighter focus on discourses of violence.
- [79] Instances such as these were still categorised as unattributed.
- [80] This tweet has been adapted in order to anonymise the Patriot Prayer follower in question.
- [81] Chicago Antifascist Action's Twitter account was suspended between June and August 2019 potentially for glorifying Willem Van Spronsen's Molotov cocktail attack on an ICE Facility in Washington.

[82] 14 tweets in the main sample featured variants of the word “punch”, 17 tweets featured variants of “milkshake”.

[83] The first of these can be traced to the punching of Richard Spencer in January 2017 during Trump’s presidential inauguration. The second started in the UK in May 2019 when a number of far-right figures including “Tommy Robinson”, Carl Benjamin and Nigel Farage were “milkshaked” by counter-protestors while campaigning for the European elections. In June 2019 the repertoire moved to the USA (indicating the transnationality of the Antifa movement), and in Portland during a demonstration on 30 June 2019 Andy Ngo was “milkshaked” after being punched and covered in silly string by Antifa activists. In the immediate aftermath of the latter event, and in an attempt to exaggerate the perceived violence of “milkshaking”, far-right actors claimed that the milkshake had contained quick drying cement. Although these claims were initially amplified by the PPB they were later proven to be a hoax.

[84] This sentiment is echoed by RCA’s email address, which contains the phrase “fight them back” and appeared in 17 of the “fight” tweets.

[85] ‘Statement on the Far-Right’s Attempt to Criminalize Protest of Concentration Camp Deaths and Hate Groups’, 25 July 2019. The full statement is available at URL: <https://rosecityantifa.org/articles/statement-against-criminalizing-protest/> (available on web.archive.org).

[86] Michael V Bhatia, ‘Fighting words: Naming terrorists, bandits, rebels and other violent actors’, *Third World Quarterly*, 26:1, 2005, pp.5-22.

[87] *Ibid.*, p.13.

[88] *Ibid.*

[89] A copy of the lawsuit ‘Ngo V. Rose City Antifa Lawsuit’, 4 July 2019, URL: https://libertycenter.org/pf/justice-for-andy-ngo/?fbclid=IwAR3zNLUmbBnPP9-AiXyAo0k8Y2pN_6uZLruWZGqtmXlTkzA24I0MGBbWtoY_.

[90] See Graham Kates, ‘Twitter says fake “Antifa” account was run by white supremacists’, *CBS News* 2 June 2020, URL: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/twitter-fake-antifa-account-white-supremacists-removal/>.

[91] Stanislav Vysotsky, *American Antifa*, op.cit., p. 95.

[92] Lee Smithey, ‘Social Movement Strategy, Tactics and Collective Identity’, *Sociology Compass*, 3:4, 2009, pp. 658-671.

[93] Dana Williams, op cit., p. 107.

[94] See Joel Busher, Donald Holbrook and Graham Macklin, ‘The internal brakes on violent escalation: a typology’, *Behavioural Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 11:1, 2019, pp. 3-25.

[95] Dana Williams, op. cit., p. 107.