

Representative Bynum, Senator Manning, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me this opportunity to share my research on antifa activism. As a sociologist, I have conducted interviews, fieldwork, and observation of antifascist activism. I would like to briefly present a history of antifa activism, the forms that the activism takes, and the tactics that it employs. Antifa is a shortened version of anti-fascism or anti-fascist. Antifascist activists oppose social movements driven by an ideology that ascribes innate biological and social differences between people and enforces them through violence. Antifa, therefore, represents an orientation as well as a distinct social movement. In this respect, the antifascist movement represents what is referred to as a countermovement because it is exclusively focused on opposition to another social movement in the form of fascist activism.

The antifascist movement has its origins in the opposition to Benito Mussolini's and Adolph Hitler's rise to power in the interwar period, as well as nascent fascist movements throughout Europe and the United States. Its contemporary manifestation originated in the opposition to white supremacist recruitment and organizing within subcultures from the late 1970s into the 1990s. As supremacist organizations sought out vulnerable populations for recruitment, they turned to punk and skinhead subcultures for pools of potential members. These efforts, however, were met with resistance inside these subcultures by groups of individuals opposed fascism. In the late 1980s, this opposition coalesced into the Anti-Racist Action network that linked activists from across the country and served as a model for contemporary antifascist organizing. This network not only challenged supremacists within subcultures, but mobilized public demonstrations against Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi organizations. Anti-Racist Action was successful in demobilizing these supremacist groups. While these activists did not use the antifascist label, their activity clearly aligns with it. The first American group to explicitly identify as antifascist was Northeast Antifascists, which was founded in 2002 in Boston. Portland's Rose City Antifa, which was founded in 2007 was the first to use the shortened version in its name and has the distinction of being the oldest formal antifascist group in the United States. In 2013, the Anti-Racist Action network dissolved, but some of its member groups formed the Torch Antifa Network, which is active to this day, in its place.

Although I have discussed formal groups and networks, there is no centralized, coordinated antifa organization. Antifascism is a distinctly decentralized social movement that can roughly be categorized into two distinct forms: informal and formal. Informal, or everyday antifascism consists of relatively spontaneous activity performed by people who confront fascism in the course of their routine activities. This can take the form of everything from removing fascist propaganda flyers and stickers to challenging public expressions of bigotry as Ricky Best, Taliesin Namkai-Meche, and Micah Fletcher had when Jeremy Christian harassed two young women of color on a Portland Max train in 2017. As alluded to earlier in my remarks, these informal actions frequently reflect the sentiments of the people who carry them out more so than formal group membership or ideological commitment. By contrast, formal antifascism is conducted by individuals and groups that specifically take on sustained activism against the fascist movement. When this formal activism is undertaken by a collective of people, it takes the form of an affinity group of like-minded individuals who share analytical and tactical

agreement. These groups may be short-lived such as coalitions that oppose a fascist rally or sustained over time when long-term opposition to fascist activity and organizing is necessary.

As a countermovement, the strategic goal of antifascist activism is the demobilization of the fascist movement in the form a cessation of its activities. In order to achieve this, activists utilize a variety of tactics that I classify as non-militant and militant. Non-militant tactics consist of those types of activities that are considered to be conventional and acceptable forms of social movement behavior. By contrast, militant activities are intentionally confrontational and frequently fall outside the bounds of what is deemed acceptable. These provocative, and at times violent, tactics are frequently associated with the antifa label. However, the vast majority of the tactics that antifascists engage in, including those who consider themselves militants, are in fact non-militant activities. The bulk of antifascist activism consists of information gathering and dissemination through education or public shaming campaigns. Antifa activists spend countless hours gathering information about the fascist groups and activists that they oppose. This is then made public through educational events, flyering campaigns, and online doxing. These types of activities are undertaken by a range of organizations ranging from mainstream watchdog groups like the Anti-Defamation League and Southern Poverty Law Center to the militant affinity groups of the Torch Antifa network. Another key component of antifascist activism is cultural. Because the fascist movement frequently recruits within subcultures and through cultural activities, antifascists produce their own music, art, and even clothing. Antifascists organize social events such as movie screenings, concerts, and even art shows in order to network, spread their message, or fundraise. The general distinction between non-militant and militant antifascists is one of sentiment and style with militants supporting or engaging in confrontational tactics and bringing a provocative style to their dissemination of information and cultural activity.

The militancy of antifa activists is driven by a distinct sense of threat posed by the fascist movement and its activists. Participants in my research consistently described experiencing verbal harassment and physical violence at the hands of fascists. For some, this was a function of proximity as participants in subcultures where fascists were active, others were targeted because of their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or sexual orientation, and others for their left-wing or social justice activism. Because fascists impose their political ideology through violence, antifa activists had little recourse but to turn to militancy to ensure their safety.

As you can see, antifa activism is a complex social movement phenomenon. It takes on many forms and a variety of approaches. However, there is one consistency – the opposition to fascist activity. Antifascist activism increases in conjunction with increased mobilization and activism by fascists, and similarly decreases when that movement demobilizes. If one is interested in decreasing antifascist activism, then the surest means to achieve that is to ensure that the fascist movement is unable to mobilize.