

THE CONVERSATION

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A police officer pushes an antifa demonstrator out of the way during a 2019 protest in Washington, D.C. Evelyn Hockstein/For The Washington Post via Getty Images

What – or who – is antifa?

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The movement called “antifa” gets its name from a short form of “anti-fascist,” which is about the only thing its members agree on.

President Donald Trump and some far-right activists and militants have claimed antifa is allegedly conspiring to foment violence amid the protests sweeping the U.S. In my forthcoming book, “*American Antifa: The Tactics, Culture, and Practice of Militant Antifascism*,” I describe antifa as a decentralized collection of individual activists who mostly use nonviolent methods to achieve their ends.

Their goal is to resist the spread of fascism. That word can be an inexact term, but generally antifa activists see fascism as the **violent enactment and enforcement** of biological and social inequalities between people.

Opposed to violent supremacy

Fascists go beyond viewing particular categories of people as inferior, based on gender identity, race and ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation. They believe it is imperative to use violence to oppress and ultimately eliminate those groups. In addition, they use violence to oppose their ideological enemies, even if they are from groups they believe are not inferior, such as heterosexual white men.

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The **initial anti-fascist movements** were founded in Europe and North America between the world wars, and were primarily organized by anarchists, communists and socialists – three groups that were frequently targets of fascist violence.

The modern-day anti-fascist movement in the United States, including antifa, grew out of the **Anti-Racist Action Network**, a decentralized activist movement resisting racist skinhead subcultures and public demonstrations by neo-Nazi and Ku Klux Klan organizations in the 1980s and 1990s.

Anti-fascists' objections aren't simply that they disagree with fascists. Their problems with fascism are much more fundamental.

Personal and collective self-defense

My own research has found that a **significant proportion** of anti-fascists are women, people of color, members of LGBTQ communities, or otherwise have some characteristics fascists seek to control or eliminate.

These anti-fascists, therefore, often see fascists as a threat to their personal existence, and their physical and emotional well-being – as well as presenting threats of violence or vandalism to their communities and shared gathering spaces. They perceive their opposition as very much in personal and collective self-defense.

Because opposing fascism is a viewpoint rather than a formal organization, people's actions vary widely. Informal or everyday anti-fascism can include speaking out against bigotry, standing up for victims of fascist harassment or confronting fascists in public places. Generally, these are relatively spontaneous actions that happen when anti-fascists encounter fascism in the normal course of their regular lives.

More formal anti-fascism can include large, well-funded mainstream organizations like the **Anti-Defamation League** and the **Southern Poverty Law Center**, who monitor fascist activity and provide the public information on its scope.

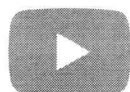


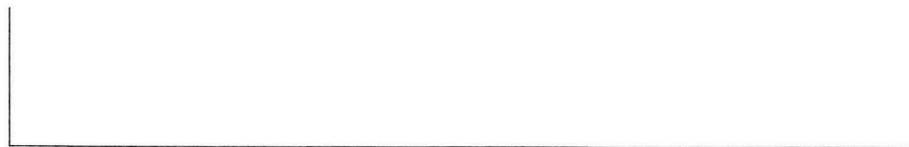
An anti-fascist protest in Berlin, 1928. Bundesarchiv, Bild 102-05976/Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA



have long been a part of anti-fascist efforts, by American singer-songwriter Woody Guthrie in Al Aumuller/New York World-Telegram and of Congress/Wikimedia Commons

Behind the mask: The people in Antifa





A CNN report on antifa participants.

Local action

But the antifa label is most often applied to smaller-scale groups of like-minded people who live in the same community, working to prevent fascists from threatening their targets and from attracting new followers.

These groups are rarely militant or violent. Most of them engage in commonly accepted forms of political activism. For instance, anti-fascists often work to find out where fascist groups and people are active in an area, and then share that information with the wider community, bringing that activity to public attention.

Anti-fascist activists also take advantage of the general social stigma associated with being a fascist, and identify people who participate in fascist events or post fascist messages online.

Culture is another part of anti-fascist work, including art and music. By creating T-shirts and stickers with inclusive messages, and hosting concerts, film screening and art shows, anti-fascists work to create an environment of inclusion and equality that doesn't directly attack fascism but simply exists in opposition to it.



Antifa members have taken part in the anti-racist marches that have emerged in cities nationwide. Matthew J. Lee/The Boston Globe via Getty Images

Some direct confrontation

There are more militant anti-fascists, too, who mostly engage in non-militant activism but are willing, at times, to use more confrontational tactics. These people are more open to counterprotesting, sabotage and the use of force, which includes acts of violence.

The varied and decentralized nature of anti-fascist efforts means it includes virtually anyone who opposes violent enforcement of social inequalities to engage in activism. A diverse range of participants and tactics falls under the umbrella of a broad effort to stop fascism.

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Racism Fascism Donald Trump Ku Klux Klan anti-fascism Southern Poverty Law Center Antifa Neo-Nazis
Antifascists anti-racism

Website Link Exhibit

Date: July 8, 2020

Committee: Joint Interim Committee on Transparent Policing and Use of Force Reform

Bill Number/topic title: Distinguishing Constitutional Freedoms from Violence - Anatomy of a Protest

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