



Antifa (United States)

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An antifa sticker

The **Antifa** ([/ænˈtiːfə, ˈæntiˌfɑː/](#))^[1] movement is a conglomeration of left wing autonomous, [militant anti-fascist](#)^[7] groups in the United States.^[11] The principal feature of antifa groups is their use of [direct action](#).^[12] They engage in varied protest tactics, which include digital activism, property damage, physical violence, and [harassment](#) against those whom they identify as fascist, racist, or on the [far-right](#).^[18] Conflicts are both online and in real life.^[14]

They tend to be [anti-capitalist](#)^[19] and they are predominantly [far-left](#) and militant left,^{[20][12]} which includes [anarchists](#), [communists](#) and [socialists](#).^[25] Their stated focus is on fighting [far-right](#) and [white supremacist](#) ideologies directly, rather than through electoral means.^[12]

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History

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Logo of *Antifaschistische Aktion*, the militant anti-fascist network in 1930s Germany that inspired the Antifa movement

When Italian dictator [Benito Mussolini](#) consolidated power under his [National Fascist Party](#) in the mid-1920s, an oppositional [anti-fascist](#) movement surfaced both in Italy and countries like the United States. Many anti-fascist leaders in the United States were syndicalist, anarchist, and socialist émigrés from Italy with experience in labor organizing and militancy.^[26]

Although there is no organizational connection, the lineage of antifa in America can be traced to [Weimar Germany](#),^[27] where the first group described as "antifa" was [Antifaschistische Aktion](#), formed in 1932 with the involvement of the [Communist Party of Germany](#).^[28]

After [World War II](#), but prior to the development of the modern antifa movement, violent confrontations with fascist elements continued sporadically.^[29]

Modern antifa politics can be traced to opposition to the infiltration of Britain's [punk](#) scene by [white power skinheads](#) in the 1970s and 1980s, and the emergence of [neo-Nazism](#) in Germany following the [fall of the Berlin Wall](#).^[20] In Germany, young leftists, including anarchists and punk fans, renewed the practice of street-level anti-fascism.^[20] Columnist [Peter Beinart](#) writes that "in the late '80s, left-wing punk fans in the United States began following suit, though they initially called their groups [Anti-Racist Action](#) (ARA) on the theory that Americans would be more familiar with fighting racism than they would be with fighting fascism."^[20]

Mark Bray, author of *Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook*, credits ARA as the precursor of the modern US antifa groups in the United States and Canada.^[30] In the late 1980s and 1990s, ARA activists toured with popular punk rock and [skinhead](#) bands in order to prevent Klansmen, neo-Nazis and other assorted white supremacists from recruiting.^{[20][31][32]} Their motto was "We go where they go" by which they meant that they would confront far-right activists in concerts and actively remove their materials from public places.^[33] In 2002, the ARA disrupted a speech in Pennsylvania by [Matthew F. Hale](#), the head of the white supremacist group [World Church of the Creator](#), resulting in a fight and twenty-five arrests.^[20]

Other antifa groups in the U.S. have other genealogies, for example in [Minneapolis](#), Minnesota, where a group called the Baldies was formed in 1987 with the intent to fight neo-Nazi groups directly.^[19]

Terminology

Although various antifascist movements have existed in the United States since the beginning of fascism, the word **antifa**, adopted from German usage,^{[27][34][35]} only came into prominence as an umbrella term in English in 2017.^{[36][37]} The [ADL](#) makes a point that the label "antifa" should be limited to "those who proactively seek physical confrontations with their perceived fascist adversaries," and not be misapplied to include all counter-protesters.^[14]

Ideology and activities

"Antifa" is an umbrella term for a loose collection of groups, networks and individuals.^[14] Since it is composed of autonomous groups, and thus has no formal organization or membership,^{[20][38]} it is impossible to know how many groups are active. Antifa groups either form loose support networks, such as NYC Antifa, or operate independently.^[39] Activists typically organize protests via social media and through [websites](#) and [email lists](#).^{[20][38]} Some activists have built peer-to-peer networks, or use encrypted-texting services like [Signal](#).^[40] According to [Salon](#), it is an organizing strategy, not a group of people.^[41] While its numbers cannot be estimated accurately, the movement has grown since the 2016 presidential election and approximately 200 groups currently exist in the US, of varying sizes and levels of engagement.^[27] The activists involved subscribe to a range of ideologies, typically on the left and they include anarchists, socialists and communists along with some liberals and social democrats.^{[42][43][44]}

According to Brian Levin, director of the Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism at the [California State University, San Bernardino](#), antifa activists participate in violent actions because "they believe that elites are controlling the government and the media. So they need to make a statement head-on against the people who they regard as racist".^[8] According to

Mark Bray, a historian at [Dartmouth College](#) sympathetic to the antifa movement's goals, the adherents "reject turning to the police or the state to halt the advance of white supremacy. Instead they advocate popular opposition to fascism as we witnessed in Charlottesville".^[43]

The idea of [direct action](#) is central to the antifa movement. Antifa organizer [Scott Crow](#) told an interviewer: "The idea in Antifa is that we go where they [right-wingers] go. That hate speech is not free speech. That if you are endangering people with what you say and the actions that are behind them, then you do not have the right to do that. And so we go to cause conflict, to shut them down where they are, because we don't believe that Nazis or fascists of any stripe should have a mouthpiece".^[8] A manual posted on *It's Going Down*, an anarchist website, warns against accepting "people who just want to fight". It furthermore notes that "physically confronting and defending against fascists is a necessary part of anti-fascist work, but is not the only or even necessarily the most important part".^[45]

According to Beinart, antifa activists "try to publicly identify white supremacists and get them fired from their jobs and evicted from their apartments", in addition to "disrupt(ing) [sic] white-supremacist rallies, including by force".^[46] According to a *Washington Post* book review, antifa tactics include "[no platforming](#)", i.e. denying their targets platforms from which to speak; obstructing their events and defacing their propaganda; and when antifa activists deem it necessary, deploying violence to deter them.^[44] According to [National Public Radio](#), "people who speak for the Antifa movement acknowledge they sometimes carry clubs and sticks" and their "approach is confrontational".^[47] [CNN](#) describes antifa as "known for causing damage to property during protests".^[8] Scott Crow, described by CNN as "a longtime Antifa organizer", argues that destroying property is not a form of violence.^[8] The groups have been associated with physical violence in public against police^[48] and against people whose political views its activists deem repugnant.^[49] Antifa activists used clubs and dyed liquids against the white supremacists in Charlottesville^[50] and caused property damage.^[8] In one incident, an apparent antifa supporter punched white supremacist [Richard Spencer](#) in the face as he was giving an impromptu street interview^{[51][52]} and on another occasion, in Berkeley, it was reported that some threw Molotov cocktails.^[8]

Apart from the other activities, antifa activists engage in [mutual aid](#), such as disaster response in the case of [Hurricane Harvey](#).^{[53][54][55]} According to [Natasha Lennard](#) in *The Nation*, antifa "collectives are working with interfaith groups and churches in cities around the country to create a New Sanctuary Movement, continuing and expanding a 40-year-old practice of providing spaces for refugees and immigrants, which entails outright refusal to cooperate with [ICE](#)".^[56]

In June 2017, the antifa movement was linked to "anarchist extremism" by the [New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness](#).^[57] In September 2017, an article in *Politico* stated that the website had obtained confidential documents and interviews indicating that in April 2016, the [U.S. Department of Homeland Security](#) and the [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) believed that "anarchist extremists" were the primary instigators of violence at public rallies against a range of targets. The Department of Homeland Security was said to have classified their activities as [domestic terrorism](#). *Politico* interviewed law enforcement officials who noted a rise in activity since the beginning of the Trump administration, particularly a rise in recruitment (and on the part of the far right as well) since the Charlottesville [Unite the Right rally](#). *Politico* stated that one internal assessment acknowledged an inability to penetrate the groups' "diffuse and decentralized organizational structure". By 2017, the FBI and DHS reported that they were monitoring suspicious Antifa

activity in relation to terrorism.^[58] In August 2017 a petition was lodged with the [White House petitioning system "We the People"](#) calling upon the government to formally classify "AntiFa" as terrorist. A response in 2018 stated that Federal Law does not have a "mechanism for formally designating domestic terrorist organizations".^[59]

In June 2018, a Nebraska antifa group published a list of names and photographs of 1,595 [U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement](#) (ICE) officials, drawn from [LinkedIn](#) profiles.^[60]

Antifa activists often use the [black bloc](#) tactic, in which people dress all in black and cover their faces, in order to thwart surveillance and create a sense of equality and solidarity among participants.^[61]

Notable street protests and violence

Antifa groups, along with [black bloc](#) activists, were among those who protested the 2016 election of [Donald Trump](#).^{[20][56]} They also participated in the [February 2017 Berkeley protests](#) against [alt-right](#)^{[62][63][64]} speaker [Milo Yiannopoulos](#), where they gained mainstream attention,^[38] with media reporting them "throwing Molotov cocktails and smashing windows"^[8] and causing \$100,000 worth of damage.^[65]

In April 2017, two groups described as "anti-fascist/anarchist", including the socialist/environmentalist Direct Action Alliance, threatened to disrupt the [82nd Avenue of Roses Parade](#) after hearing the Multnomah County Republican Party would participate. The parade organizers also received an anonymous email, saying: "You have seen how much power we have downtown and that the police cannot stop us from shutting down roads so please consider your decision wisely". The two groups denied having anything to do with the email. The parade was ultimately canceled by the organizers due to safety concerns.^{[66][67]}

On June 15, 2017, some antifa groups joined protestors at [Evergreen State College](#) to oppose [Patriot Prayer](#)'s event. Patriot Prayer was supporting biology professor [Bret Weinstein](#) who became the central figure in a controversy after he criticized changes to one of the college's events. In addition to peaceful antifa activists who held up a "community love" sign, [USA Today](#) reported that one slashed the tires of right-wing activist [Joey Gibson](#) and another was wrestled to the ground by Patriot Prayer activists after being seen with a knife.^[68]

Antifa counter-protesters at the [2017 Unite the Right rally](#) in [Charlottesville, Virginia](#) in August 2017 "certainly used clubs and dyed liquids against the white supremacists".^[50] Journalist Adele Stan interviewed an antifa protester at the rally who said the sticks carried by the protesters are a justifiable countermeasure to the fact that "the right has a goon squad".^[69] Some antifa participants at the Charlottesville rally chanted that counter-protesters should "punch a Nazi in the mouth".^[47] Antifa participants also protected [Cornel West](#) and various clergy from attack by white supremacists, with West stating he felt that antifa had "saved his life".^{[70][71]} Antifa activists also defended the First United Methodist Church, where the Charlottesville Clergy Collective provided refreshments, music and training to the counter-protesters and, according to a local rabbi, "chased [the white supremacists] off with sticks".^{[70][72]}

Groups that had been preparing to protest the [Boston Free Speech Rally](#) saw their plans become viral following the violence in Charlottesville. The event drew a largely peaceful crowd of 40,000 counter-protestors. In [The Atlantic](#), [McKay Coppins](#) stated that the 33

people arrested for violent incidents were "mostly egged on by the minority of 'Antifa' agitators in the crowd".^[73] President Trump described the protestors outside his August 2017 rally in [Phoenix, Arizona](#) as "Antifa".^[74]

During a [Berkeley protest on August 27](#), 2017, an estimated one hundred antifa protesters joined a crowd of 2,000–4,000 counter-protesters to attack a reported "handful" of alt-right demonstrators and Trump supporters who showed up for a "Say No to Marxism" rally that had been cancelled by organizers due to security concerns.^{[65][75]} Protestors threatened to smash the cameras of anyone who filmed them.^[76] [Jesse Arreguin](#), the mayor of Berkeley, suggested classifying the city's antifa as a gang.^[77] The group Patriot Prayer cancelled an event in San Francisco the same day following counter protests. Joey Gibson, the founder of Patriot Prayer, blamed antifa, along with [By Any Means Necessary](#) (BAMN), for breaking up the event.^[78]

In November 2018, a police investigation was launched into the antifa group Smash Racism D.C. following a protest outside the home of [Daily Caller](#) founder [Tucker Carlson](#). Activists of the group announced through a bullhorn that Carlson was "promoting hate" and "an ideology that has led to thousands of people dying", chanted "Tucker Carlson, we will fight, we know where you sleep at night!" and defaced the driveway of Carlsons' property by spray-painting an [anarchist symbol](#) onto it.^{[79][80]} Twitter suspended the group's account for violation of Twitter rules by posting the home addresses of Carlson along with other family members.^{[81][82][83][84][85] [86]}

Response

Antifa actions have been subject to criticism from Republicans, Democrats and political commentators in the U.S. media.^{[87][88][89]} [House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi](#) condemned the violence of antifa activists in Berkeley on August 29, 2017.^[90] Conservative talk show host and [Fox News](#) contributor [Laura Ingraham](#) suggested labeling antifa as a terrorist organization.^[91] [Noam Chomsky](#) described them as "a major gift to the right".^[92] [Dissent](#) editor [Michael Kazin](#) stated "Non-leftists often see the left as a disruptive, lawless force. Violence tends to confirm that view."^[93]

On the other hand, historian and political organizer Mark Bray has said "Given the historical and current threat that white supremacist and fascist groups pose, it's clear to me that organized, collective self-defense is not only a legitimate response, but lamentably an all-too-necessary response to this threat on too many occasions."^[94] Alexander Reid Ross, a lecturer in geography and an author on the contemporary right, has said that antifa groups represented "one of the best models for channeling the popular reflexes and spontaneous movements towards confronting fascism in organized and focused ways."^[95] Eleanor Penny, an author on fascism and the far-right, argues against Chomsky that "physical resistance has time and again protected local populations from racist violence, and prevented a gathering caucus of fascists from making further inroads into mainstream politics."^[92] [Cornel West](#), who attended a counter-protest to the [Unite the Right rally](#), said in an interview, "we would have been crushed like cockroaches if it were not for the anarchists and the anti-fascists," describing a situation where a group of 20 counter-protesters were surrounded by marchers who he described as, "neofascists."^[96]

The [Anti-Defamation League](#) stated that "All forms of antifa violence are problematic. Images of these 'free speech' protesters being beaten by black-clad and bandana-masked antifa provide right wing extremists with a powerful propaganda tool" but goes on to state "that said, it is important to reject attempts to claim equivalence between the antifa and the white supremacist groups they oppose."^[14]

Hoaxes

There have been multiple efforts to discredit antifa groups via hoaxes on social media, many of them [false flag](#) attacks originating from members of the [alt-right](#) and [4chan](#) posing as members of Antifa on [Twitter](#). Some of these hoaxes have been picked up and reported as fact by right-leaning media.^[97]

These include an August 2017 "#PunchWhiteWomen" photo hoax campaign spread by fake antifa twitter accounts.^[98] In one such instance, [Bellingcat](#) researcher [Eliot Higgins](#) discovered an image of British actress [Anna Friel](#) portraying a battered woman in a 2007 [Women's Aid](#) anti-domestic violence campaign that had been re-purposed using fake antifa Twitter accounts organized by way of [4chan](#). The image is captioned "53% of white women voted for Trump, 53% of white women should look like this" and includes an antifa flag. Another image featuring an injured woman is captioned "She chose to be a Nazi. Choices have consequences" and includes the hashtag #PunchANazi. Higgins remarked to the BBC that "[t]his was a transparent and quite pathetic attempt, but I wouldn't be surprised if white nationalist groups try to mount more sophisticated attacks in the future".^[99] A similar fake image circulated on social media after the [Unite the Right rally](#); the doctored image, actually from a 2009 riot in [Athens](#), was altered to make it look like someone wearing an antifa symbol attacking a member of the police with a flag.^[100] After the [2017 Las Vegas shooting](#), similar hoaxes falsely claimed that the shooter was an antifa "member"; another such hoax involved a fake antifa twitter account praising the shooting.^{[101][102]} Another high-profile fake antifa account was banned from Twitter after it posted with a geotag originating in Russia.^[103] Such fake antifa accounts have been repeatedly reported on as real by right-leaning media outlets.^[97]

Some of the opposition to antifa activism has also been artificial in nature; Nafeesa Syeed of *Bloomberg* reported that "[t]he most-tweeted link in the Russian-linked network followed by the researchers was a petition to declare Antifa a terrorist group".^[104]