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## The French Identitaires' strategy: Entering politics through the media



This is the 21. article in our series *Trouble on the Far-Right*. For more information on the series, please click [here](#).

by Samuel Bouron

French far right activism experienced tremendous changes in recent years. Besides traditional far right party politics, new patterns of street-based mobilization attract especially action-oriented youths. This trend is epitomized by the growing popularity of the *Bloc Identitaire* (official name; shortened to “*Identitaires*”). Its ideology rests on the idea that there exists a struggle between different political families in order to become the legitimate representative of the people, and that the extreme right is winning this struggle. Behind the scenes, the recurring idea of the *Bloc Identitaires* is to occupy a cultural and “meta-political” territory that was once the monopoly of the left. Their aim is that they are gradually associated with the only possible alternative to change the world. They try to frame a maximum of popular needs and present themselves as substitutes for when the economy and the state will be bankrupt. So you can eat the food of the *Identitaires*, drink their beer (the “*Desouchière*”), buy their clothes, listen to their music or read their books and thus participate in financing the movement.

For **Philippe Vardon**, a cofounder of the *Bloc Identitaire* in 2003,

“

*the idea of meta-political type of project is to attract people who would never come, or only with difficulty, to political action through classic activism. The objective then is to act on the perception that individuals have of the world and the society in which they live in order to create currents of opinion favorable to the struggle between political movements or groups implementing these projects.*

Approaching this movement, one has to understand that they have nothing of an army or a small group of amateurs in the field of politics. They deploy a communication device which, despite its limitations, makes them true professional politicians. It is therefore useful to describe the contours of this professionalization process especially mobilized by the extreme right who claims of the “meta-political” ideas.

### Striving to replace the left on their traditional territories

In this way, the ideal activist should be able to speak the language of the „apolitical“ institutions (including those whose goals are not directly political) in which he or she is integrated, while diverting its objectives for

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the profit of the militant group. During their trainings, activists learn diverse communication skills: writing press releases, developing websites, realizing graphic models to create a banner or a stencil, making public speeches. The priority is to avoid appearing amateurish. The group aims at offering products whose quality should equal that of professionals which in turn should lead to being taken more seriously by media outlets and by other political groups.

The *Identitaires* took up the repertoire and aesthetics of different groups classified on the left of the political spectrum. On environmental issues, they support degrowth narratives and have participated in the creation of AMAP (Associations for maintaining a peasant agriculture, equivalent of the Community Supported Agriculture). The movement also declares itself feminist, an idea it supports by the creation of groups such as *Belle et Rebelle* (Beautiful and Rebellious) or the *Antigones* (anti-Femen), in which *Identitaires* activists are predominant. In the cultural field, they are also investing in the creation of rock bands like *Hotel Stella*, always with a view to broaden the dissemination beyond the small world of far-right activists. Greenpeace, Act Up, and even the radical anti-fascist movement constitute for them an important source of inspiration.

To raise awareness, the themes selected by managers largely draw on popular culture and sometimes are inspired by consumer films such as *Braveheart*, *300*, *Fight Club* or *The Lord of the Rings*. An *Identitaires* training camp, for example, was created devoted to Tolkien's trilogy in 2012, where a reinterpretation of the work was carried out. They asked activists to identify the character with which they felt more affinity. In the event of *Fight Club*, Parisian activists from *Jeunesses identitaires* (the youth group of the *Bloc Identitaire*), were inspired by „Project chaos“ in the film and chose the name of their section accordingly to „Apache Project“. No matter that the novel makes explicit reference to anarchism, they engaged with the film's scenario in order to learn from its style and aesthetics in the construction of political movements.

The *Identitaires* strategy is very similar to that of the Italian neo-fascist movement *CasaPound* by its investment in the associative sector. The latter occupies a squat in Rome since 2003, which serves as an anchor point for their different „metapolitics“ actions. They were able to create their own media, including radio, but also a restaurant, a theater company, sports clubs, music groups or an art gallery. The objective of this movement has been to give fascism a young and trendy image, far from cheesy and aging representation of an extreme right who do not understand today's world. It consists of activists who are mostly students or graduates in major cities and who put their cultural and artistic skills to benefit their political movement.

## A professional communication

For now, it is mainly new technologies that major *Identitaires* leaders, including Fabrice Robert, have invested in, including Fabrice Robert, one of the founders of the movement, or Damien Rieu, the main spokesman of the Lyon chapter (third biggest city in France). Several projects that have not been yet realized were discussed for the coming years, such as an *Identitaires* Wikileaks, a *Novopress* (their press agency) app for tablets and smartphones, the creation of a petition website, a survey website, a dating site to find „native French“ partners, a tutoring website or the opening of their very own online social network. The leaders attach great importance to such communication strategies. Each activist is trained to be able to speak to the press and to carry out symbolic actions in order to „make the buzz“. Even if the actions are considered wrong by the media, the key is for them to make an impression and to hold public debates. In doing so, they forsake the sultry bonehead clothing range, composed of military clothing and shaved heads

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becoming increasingly marginal in their ranks. The activists now prefer the “casual” looks that do not identify them directly with the far right. Here is again paramount: infiltrate society rather than scaring it.

Like the movement of Alain Soral (a French far right essayist, close to the comedian Dieudonné), the *Identitaires* are very active on the Internet, which is the preferred venue of their ideology. Unlike newspaper columns where they are likely to be denied and where their words are potentially presented in their political context, their own media give them the opportunity to issue propaganda aimed at blurring the political divide between the Left and the Right. Social networks also allow the broadcasting of their videos, whose fun and spectacular dimensions can hide at first their ideological flavor. It even happens that some journalists themselves fall into the trap set for them, as in 2009, when the *Bloc Identitaire* had created the character of a resident of a false neighborhood of *La Goutte d'Or* in Paris<sup>1</sup>, who claimed to have suffered the invasion of a Muslim population of the area – an area she had supposedly to lived in for generations. This was the starting point of the „buzz“ of a „cocktail sausage-plonk“. Despite the attempt of the *Identitaires* to innovate on ways to communicate, their ideological background remains quite homogeneous. It opposes „French from the roots“ activists who would be at war against the invasion of a Muslim population.

### The limits of the movement

However, this type of organization has also limitations. Activists generally find little interest in campaigning. Meeting the people of their district to defend their ideas, inventing slogans, organizing awareness campaigns, towing markets, finding a financial agent to manage finance, are all steps that are paradoxically figure of „dirty work“. Conversely, participating in the political game involves a form of submission that leads to a loss of the feeling of radicalism conquered within a limited space, staying only ever with the other activists. It is also a way for some women activists to exist away from the virile sociability. But most remain anonymous and extend the autonomy of *Identitaires* training camp experience in the “maisons de l'identité” (the so-called “identity houses”), with the nightly hanging of posters, concerts, private parties or with boxing classes. The pleasure of belonging to a community of action and belief seems to be sufficient in itself.

The efficiency of the *Identitaires* political strategy thus proves, at the moment, very limited. The will to implement itself locally to run for local elections and take control of the territories which are most favorable to them has not worked from an electoral point of view. For example, the group *Nissa Rebela's* ambition to become the third political force in Nice was a failure, and the candidates of the *Identitaires* rarely score in double figures when they are in that label. In general, the *Identitaires* have not actually recorded successes other than media agitations and, when in the political arena, it is the National Front which seems to reap the fruits of their labor. Those who would like to make a career in politics indeed see few prospects at *Bloc Identitaire*, while at the same time, the creation of “Rassemblement bleu marine” allows the integration of those that the party considers the best elements of *Identitaires*. Thus, the Front National can offer their services if they need it, taking them away from the most dominant political positions. If a part of the left does not come together against a common enemy, and especially as it has abandoned a reading of the social world in terms of class struggle, this far right has meanwhile not abandoned the old story of the struggle of races.

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Wähle den Monat



He coordinated (with Maia Drouard), *Les beaux quartiers de l'extrême-droite*, Marseille, Agone, 2014, in which he signs a chapter on the training of the activists leaders of the Bloc Identitaire and of the professionalization of their communication.

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1. La Goutte d'Or is a working-class neighbourhood in Paris where some people pray in the street because of lack of religious buildings 

 Tags: [Bloc Identitaire](#), [fascism](#), [France](#), [Identitaires](#), [media](#), [pop culture](#)

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