

**The repression of climate  
activism as a brake on  
ecological  
transition: the Italian case**

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# Introduction

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- Ecological movements have a key role in protecting the Planet, by putting pressure on enterprises, governments, media, other social actors and public opinion.
- The repression against ecologism and climate activism is a strategy that aims to slow down/block the ecological transition.

# Protest policing

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- “The police handling of protest events” (della Porta & Reiter, 1998).
- It can reduce or increase the willingness to protest and it can radicalize it; it shapes the tactical repertoire and the organizational forms of social movements.
- Escalated-force model vs negotiated control model (della Porta & Diani, 2020).

# Repression

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- “Attempts by individuals, groups or corporations, or state actors to control, constrain, or prevent protest”, in direct and indirect forms (Earl, 2022).
- Various forms of physical, verbal, economic, psychological, and symbolic violence, often in invisible and hidden forms.

# Climate repression

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- Climate strikes in 2018-2019: welcomed by the political establishment of the EU, they led to a growth in the consensus for green parties and the Green Deal.
- Post-COVID: growth of anti-ecological positions within the European right and rising intolerance toward climate protests (specifically civil disobedience).
- Positive radical flank effect (greater support to moderate organisations) (Simpson et al., 2022; Ostarek et al., 2024) but also negative effect in the form of repression (Ellefsen, 2016; Ellefsen & Busher, 2020).

# The Italian case

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- Val di Susa and other “territories in struggles in lotta” as laboratories of criminalization from which repressive techniques are generalised (Imperatore, 2023)
- Meloni’s government: repression against all forms of activism: student movements, housing movements, ecological movements, movements against large-scale infrastructures, unions...

# The Italian case

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- Climate repression as part of a border project of authoritarian, securitarian, neo-liberal and penal populist involution.
- The unconditional support (discursive and normative) by the government to the security apparatus legitimates institutional violence.
- The communicative goal of repression: demonstrate to have defended the “fossil machine” (Grasso & Delatin Rodrigues, 2024) and re-established public order.

# Repressive techniques

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- Legal: ad hoc created to prevent and punish the actions of climate activists, civil disobedience specifically.
- Judicial: widespread charges and trials to logorate movement, subtracting resources, time and energy.
- Police: surveillance, unproportionate force use, restriction to protest and freedom of movement (“DASPO urbano” “fogli di via”) to prevent and hinder protest actions.



# Repressive techniques

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- Economic: fines and against specific crimes to logorate movements and with consequences in the private lives of activists.
- Discursive: infantilization, criminalization, pathologization and silencing of the voices of movements; they legitimate other techniques.

# Conclusions

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- A clear affirmation of an escalated-force model of protest policing: violation of the right to protest, civil disobedience not tolerated, unproportionate use of force.
- Repression has consequences in the private lives of activists, compelled to lose job, change city, break social ties, and live with fear.

# Conclusions

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- Movements can adapt and re-elaborate their tactical-strategic perspectives.
- Repression can weaken movements but it can also be counterproductive->indignation and coalition-building (e.g. Rete nazionale A Pieno Regime) (Flesher Fominaya & Wood, 2011).

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