

Agents of Change and Contentious Agents Interwoven Narratives in the Visual Representations of the Protester in News Magazine Covers

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This article examines the visual representations of the protester on the covers of *Der Spiegel* and *Time* (2010–2020). Drawing from the protest paradigm literature and literature on the role of visuals in protest, the article performs a qualitative content analysis of a corpus of 47 relevant covers. The analysis reveals the coexistence of different narratives: on the one hand, the protesting citizen appears as a powerful political agent, commanding attention with his determination and dedication to the cause. While this hopeful image can appease worries around the alleged apathy of the civic body, it also re-legitimizes Western democracies as accountable to and shaped by their citizenry. On the other hand, the protesting citizen can also be a danger to democracies, as it threatens to destabilize the political field. Two trends are noteworthy here: the individualizing and individualistic lens through which collective action is increasingly represented on news magazine covers; and the rise of the female protester as a politically significant actor.

Keywords: protest visuals, protest coverage, protest paradigm, iconicity, news magazine covers, multimodal discourse analysis

This article addresses the intersection of representation, protest, and visuals, responding to calls for a more media-sensitive analysis of protest coverage against the protest paradigm (Mattoni & Teune, 2014). It consists of a qualitative analysis of visual representations of protest (and the role of protesters therein) on the covers of *Der Spiegel* and *Time* (2010–2020). This time frame covers an intense period of civic contentious action that started with the Arab Spring and the anti-austerity movements and ended with the recent Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.

Photographs, illustrations, cartoons, and so on, render expressions of dissent visible, articulating a collective understanding of the political role of citizens in modern democracies; however, news visuals of

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protest have received limited scholarly attention. Whereas the protest paradigm has advanced our understanding of how journalistic coverage of protest can undermine and (de-)legitimize protesters (McCurdy, 2012), little is known about how visuals contribute to this. Furthermore, where others have looked at visuals accompanying news stories (Corrigall-Brown & Wilkes, 2012), we follow a novel approach by exploring a completely different news genre. Thanks to their purpose and aesthetics, magazine covers select and circulate visual symbols of current political events that often become iconic. Furthermore, given the format and purpose of such covers, there are reasons to question whether and how they differ from the protest paradigm.

Yet, news magazine covers are understudied in communication research (Tseronis, 2015). Where most research on both protest coverage and magazine covers remains confined to one single geopolitical context, our study compares a transnationally-popular magazine with a cosmopolitan audience to one of Europe's largest magazines with a more "parochial" readership (Zhang & Hellmueller, 2017, p. 471). The similar cover aesthetic and ideological orientation of the two news magazines allows us to capture the globalization of visual repertoires in the news media representation of protest in a way that remains sensitive to the importance of local values and norms in the coverage of protest.

Nevertheless, given the lack of previous research on news magazine covers' representations of protest, this article remains exploratory, seeking to describe and propose preliminary interpretations of a previously unstudied form of protest mediatization (Stebbins, 2011). Our findings show magazine covers participate in the re-production of gestures, posters, and flags as iconic symbols of protest, localizing them within national political repertoires. Second, our study suggests personalization becomes a lens for the coverage of protest, highlighting the individual and, most notably, the female protester as a powerful agent of political change. Interestingly, the personalization of protest seems accompanied by diminished attention to the symbolic force of bodies in the streets. Yet, not all protesters are legitimate agents of political change: In that sense, magazine covers reproduce a moral framework for evaluating grassroots political action as legitimate/illegitimate. While these findings confirm the ongoing relevance of the protest paradigm (Gil-Lopez, 2021; Liu, 2020; Robertson, Chiroiu, & Ceder, 2018), they also signal the necessity of adapting the protest paradigm to the medium as well as to wider transformations in political discourse.

Literature Review: The Role of Visuals in Protest

Our study is informed by a dual theoretical framework able to account for both the iconicity of visuals and the practices of news coverage of protest. Protests are known for their powerful visual symbolism. On the one hand, visuals produced by protesters can "crystaliz[e] new collective identities and circulat[e] cultural codes" (Cottle, 2008, p. 853), rendering social discontent visible (Gómez Cruz & San Cornelio, 2018; Lee, 2011). More than texts, visuals are credited with an enhanced potential to generate emotional resonance, for instance by tapping into collective memories or by relying on complex iconic signs. This affective work contributes to both amplifying the protest and mobilizing support (Casas & Williams, 2019; Mattoni & Teune, 2014).

On the other hand, the presence of protest symbols and of bodies in the streets becomes a newsworthy "message to broadcast to the rest of society" (Melucci, 1996, p. 9, as cited in Cottle, 2008, p. 854). News media amplify protest imagery, acting as conceptual prisms that mediate the protesters' own message (Cottle, 2008). Images of protest act as "visual extensions" of the protest (McGarry, Erhart, Eslen-Ziya, Henzen, & Korkut, 2019, p. 153), potentially enhancing and complementing the news stories themselves (Corrigall-Brown & Wilkes, 2012). Yet, the chosen images can also alter the message of protest communication, as mediated representations "are often semiotically aligned to editorial outlooks and the partisan 'views' of different news outlets" (Cottle, 2008, p. 866).

The Iconicity of Protests

While the role of visuals in protest coverage remains understudied, the iconicity of protest visuals has been addressed in different contexts. Hariman and Lucaites (2002) describe photographs that "acquire unusually high degrees of public response amid continued circulation" as iconic (p. 365). Instantly recognized, icons encapsulate meanings eliciting strong emotional responses.

Protest visuals can become iconic, metonymically standing in for the issue or the protest event itself. Although a "prominent front-page placement contributes, in part, to images becoming iconic" (Dahmen, Miller, & Morris, 2018, p. 132), iconicity is also linked to the ability of an image to resonate with wider social meanings and moral frameworks (Alexander, as cited in Becker, 2018), as well as its ability to evoke a strong emotional response and a sense of moral indignation (Mortensen, 2017). Importantly, the meaning of icons is neither stable nor unified; instead, iconic visuals provide "collective symbols that are in some sense empty of political prescriptions" allowing audiences to invest them with meaning specific to their socio-political experiences (Hariman & Lucaites, 2002, pp. 375–376). Yet, even when re-appropriated and re-used, iconic visuals preserve a political force by signifying a general political message (Hariman & Lucaites, 2002; Olesen, 2015; Rovisco & Veneti, 2017; Wetzstein, 2017).

Evocative of the personalization of politics argument (Bennett, 2012), protest leaders or anonymous participants often become icons of the cause or of the movement. Greta Thunberg, for instance, has grown into a "larger-than-life icon" for the Fridays for Future movement (Prestholdt, 2019). While previous movements such as the civil rights movement were dominated by a male-centered leadership (Harris, 2015), Thunberg stands out due to her age, gender, and lack of resources.

Individual citizens can also become protest or movement icons, as in the case of iconic photographs such as Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge (depicting a young woman facing off police officers in full riot gear) or Tank Man (depicting a man standing in front of a tank in the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests). The image of the anonymous protester cannot be easily divorced from wider (news) discourses casting digital media as an affordance for individualized forms of collective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Indeed, news coverage of such initiatives often emphasizes the political agency of the individual, furthering the personalization of political engagement (Dumitrica & Bakardjieva, 2018).

Material objects and gestures can also carry emotional and moral signification and facilitate symbolic projections and iconic identifications (Alexander, Giesen, & Mast, 2006). Objects such as the yellow

umbrellas in Hong Kong participate in the construction of the collective identity of a movement and become iconic by virtue of their widespread adoption and display in protests (Wetzstein, 2017). Gestures can become ritualized and immediately recognizable as symbols of protest, such as the raised fist as a token of solidarity, resiliency, and power (Alexander, 2017). More elaborate forms of non-verbal communication that entail coordination across groups—such as “die-ins” or “sit-ins”—can also come to be associated with specific movements (Alexander et al., 2006).

Today, protest visuals emerge as iconic at the intersection of mainstream and social media (Alexander, 2017; Treré, 2018). Where photojournalism and media coverage of protests once mediated the production and distribution of icons, now iconicity grows organically through the sharing of images that protesters themselves find meaningful (Becker, 2018; Hariman & Lucaites, 2002; Prestholdt, 2019). Yet, even in such instances, the mediatization of certain images—particularly their repetitive occurrence across different media channels and genres (Becker, 2018)—remains central to the production of protest icons. Traditional media such as news magazine covers remain part of this process of acquiring visibility. In fact, news magazine covers can become iconic representations in their own right. *Time* in particular prides itself with producing iconic covers encapsulating the main trends and transformations of a period (Patterson, 2019).

Visuals and the Protest Paradigm

The protest paradigm refers to routine patterns of protest coverage employed by the news media (McCurdy, 2012). These patterns have been ascribed to unintended consequences of two different organizational characteristics of the news production cycle: time constraints in news routines and the framing of protest as a mediated spectacle under the influence of commercial pressures to attract audiences (Corrigall-Brown & Wilkes, 2012; Cottle, 2008; McGarry et al., 2019).

News media tend to demonize and trivialize protest, treating it as an episodic event rather than part of a long-term cycle of dissent. This is done by framing protesters as deviants, relying on official sources for reporting on protests, giving room to counter-protest voices, suggesting protests are ineffective, and focusing on acts of violence and/or negative consequences (Coombs, Lambert, Cassilo, & Humphries, 2020). Dardis (2006) outlines 14 marginalization devices, among which are general lawlessness, confrontation of protesters/police, attention to the spectacular (freak show, Romper Room/idiots at large, and carnival), use of statistics and generalizations, the framing of protest as treason, anarchy or anti-troops, and historical comparisons. Depictions of protesters’ appearance, slogans, clothes, or even performances (e.g., dances, art, etc.) also foreground the “spectacle” lens at the expense of engagement with the (political) claims put forth.

The protest paradigm can take on different forms in specific contexts (Gil-Lopez, 2021; Liu, 2020; Robertson et al., 2018). In some cases, specific aspects of the protests lead to more empowering portrayals of protesters. For instance, young people’s innocence and vulnerability in the youth environmental movement Fridays for Future has been framed as a moral source of political demands, effectively positioning the movement as an example of political determination and agency (Olesen, 2022). In other cases, the protest issue fits the outlets’ ideological bias or even the foreign policy narrative of the countries in which

they are located. This often leads to generally supportive depictions of protest (Gil-Lopez, 2021; Liu, 2020; Robertson et al., 2018). Furthermore, in polarized (media) systems, some news outlets will disparage the protesters while others will put forth a more nuanced coverage that makes room for the protesters' voices to be heard (Kleut & Milojevic, 2021).

The protest paradigm thus needs to be addressed contextually (Robertson et al., 2018). For instance, it is unclear whether and how the protest paradigm still holds true in the case of different media genres and modalities; in the case of news magazine covers, visual symbolism is crucial and needs to both encapsulate the political event in question and the magazine's editorial/ideological orientation. However, with some exceptions (e.g., Corrigan-Brown & Wilkes, 2012; Robertson et al., 2018), scholarship on this topic tends to focus on news stories rather than visuals. Additionally, the increased transnationalization of protest and protest communication is accompanied by its glocalization (Dumitrica, 2021). As protest messages such as slogans and signs circulate from one location to another, this can catch the attention of both local and international media, as well as social networking sites. This creates a complex context for news representations of protest—and by extension for the protest paradigm—with various news outlets contributing different representations of the events. This study adds depth to the protest paradigm literature by examining (a) protest visuals in the context of a new genre, (b) the visual deployment of the protest paradigm, all while taking a (c) comparative angle to crystallize differences in the national assignment of meaning.

Methodology

Using a qualitative form of content analysis combining semiotic and discourse analysis tools, we analyzed 47 covers (*Der Spiegel*, N = 17; *Time*, N = 30) representing, explicitly or implicitly, citizen-led collective action in contention with political power structures.¹ Magazine covers employ visual and textual tools to editorialize trends deemed as significant beyond day-to-day politics, but also encapsulate the editorial policy and signal the brand identity of the magazine (Iqani, 2012; Popp & Mendelson, 2010).

The magazines chosen here, have a long-standing presence—1923 (*Time*) and 1947 (*Der Spiegel*)—and distinctive visual brands (Roessler, 2007) in their respective national media systems. While *Time* has been credited with inventing the modern genre of political news magazines and positions itself as a global news provider, *Der Spiegel* brought it to Germany by closely copying *Time*'s visual and political journalism style (Roessler, 2007). Despite the decline in readership experienced by the newspaper market, news magazines audience has remained relatively stable over the years (Oehmer, Doh, & Jarren, 2020). With a liberal ideology and a penchant for individual leaders' alleged ability to "make" history (Rosas-Moreno & Bachmann, 2013), *Time* has positioned itself as the news magazine of international economic and political elites that are "leisurely, critical reader[s]" of this "medium of instruction and interpretation" (Peterson, 1964, as cited in Johnson, 2007, p. 523). While *Der Spiegel* also takes a liberal ideological lens (Xu, 2018), it addresses a more "parochial" (i.e., national) audience (Zhang & Hellmueller, 2017). As one of Europe's

¹ Data set available at <https://doi.org/10.25397/eur.21261222>. Covers are listed alphabetically and chronologically, but not all are cited in this article. As such, the lettering of the covers in the References may appear off. The complete reference list for the covers is available in the dataset.

largest publications of this kind and among the leaders in news magazines in Germany (Roessler, 2007), *Der Spiegel* is well known for its progressivist stance among legacy media (Mylonas, 2015; Tseronis, 2015). These magazines are thus similar in scope and ideological orientation; this minimizes the number of factors that can explain similarities and differences in the findings, and increases the ability to foreground localization practices (Livingstone, 2003).

We collected the data manually via the magazines' online archives, the *Time vault*, and *Spiegel Archiv*. Protests afforded a cover are editorialized as particularly relevant for encapsulating wider political trends. We were not interested in mapping the overlap between collective action events across two geopolitical contexts but in capturing how the magazines represented such events. To be selected, a cover had to (1) explicitly or implicitly reference via (2) visual or textual elements (3) a form of collective action (4) taking place in the public sphere. Implicit references consisted of (a) symbols associated with citizen dissent (e.g., a red hat as a symbol of the U.S. Women's March); and (b) metonyms representing citizen dissent through organizers or leading figures (e.g., Greta Thunberg as leader of the Fridays for Futures movement). However, covers that merely depicted contentious social issues (e.g., LGBTQ+ rights, abortion) without a visual or textual reference to collective action were excluded. This resulted in N = 47 covers for the selected timeframe (17 for *Der Spiegel* and 30 for *Time*).

Data was qualitatively analyzed with a coding tool informed by visual discourse analysis and semiotics (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001; Machin & Mayr, 2012). We took into account the visual's contents, composition, and accompanying texts, focusing on the polysemic nature of visuals and the way text and images anchored each other's meaning. The protest paradigm guided our attention to the signification work performed by the covers. Our coding tool thus recorded vocabulary choices (including figures of speech and mode of address) in the title, subtitle, as well as any texts within the visuals (e.g., protest signs); a detailed description of all the elements with attention to their connotations and associations with the protest paradigm (including gender, signs of violence, and presence of collectives vs. individuals); the type of visual (illustration, drawing, photography, collage); and the contentious issue at stake along with the scope of the protest (local/transnational). Once the coding was complete, we discussed the signification work performed by the covers by going over connotations; the mutual anchoring of meaning between visuals and text; and the polysemy of the visuals. We also noted the covers' recurrent use of people, public spaces, and symbols associated with protests (e.g., flags, protest signs, or raised arms). Against the background of the protest paradigm, we clustered these findings with an eye to different narratives through which the protester as an ideal type and the legitimate/illegitimate protest were constructed.

Results

Visuals and the Protest Paradigm

Across both magazines, we found four types of iconic protest signs on the covers: generic gestures associated with contentious action, cultural references, national symbols, and protest symbols (Table 1). The raised fist or the arms holding poster signs and flags are recognizable visuals of dissent (Alexander, 2017), and the magazines made use of them mostly when depicting protesters as masses. Notable here

was the absence of explicitly violent gestures usually captured by photojournalism, such as stone-throwing (Becker, 2018; Faulkner, 2013).

Flags and national symbols (e.g., the Federal Eagle or the Brandenburger Tor in *Der Spiegel*) were preferred by both magazines. National symbols were present when covering protests in other countries; commemorating past protests; or, addressing the broad impact of protests on political life.

Table 1. Iconic Protest Signs Across the Covers (Frequency Count).

Outlets	Gestures	Flags and national symbols	Protest symbols	Artistic references
<i>Der Spiegel</i> (n = 17)	9	8	2	2
<i>Time</i> (n = 30)	5	5	1	1
Total	14	13	11	3

For instance, *Der Spiegel*, remembered the fall of the Berlin Wall, linking the re-unification of the nation with citizen activism (Buechner, 2014b; Mueller von Blumencron & Mascolo, 2010c). In its coverage of the BLM movement (Figure 1), *Time* tinted the U.S. flag in black and presented it as a work in progress, still being woven by an invisible hand and slowly regaining its original colors (Felsenthal, 2020b). Through its association with the national flag, the BLM movement was articulated as an atonement for lingering past injustice, marking the latter as incompatible with the very idea(l) of the U.S. nation.



Figure 1. The use of national symbols (left: Mueller von Blumencron & Mascolo, 2010b; right: Felsenthal, 2020b).

Protest symbols included both generic protest objects (e.g., megaphones, face masks) and iconic objects associated with specific movements (e.g., the knitted hat of the Women's March). Masks, in particular, remained ambiguous sites of a symbolic battleground between repressive state apparatuses (trying to criminalize their use) and protesters (trying to protect their right to dissent against the repercussions of said criminalization). In 2011, *Time* named the protester the "Person of the Year" using the drawing of a generic protester, her face covered by a bandana (Stengel, 2011c). In other *Time* covers, however, bandanas appeared in conjunction with indexes of violence (e.g., fire).

Where cultural references are often re-appropriated at the grassroots for protest communication (Milner, 2013; Wetzstein, 2017), we saw relatively little evidence of that in the magazine covers. *Der Spiegel* re-used Delacroix's famous painting "Liberty Leading the People" as a template for representing a group of young people protesting against school reforms (Mueller von Blumencron & Mascolo, 2010a). The Marvel universe also provided a source of meaning for *Time* magazine, allowing it to link together BLM, the Black Panther movement, and the superhero genre through a photo portrait of actor Chadwick Boseman titled "A Superhero Rises; The Superpower of Black Panther" (Felsenthal, 2018b).

Constructing the Protester: Interwoven Narratives

The protester was symbolically constructed through several interwoven narratives, explicitly or implicitly couched in moral evaluations of good versus bad protest. In devoting covers to specific causes and/or events, the magazines also symbolically marked the selected ones as politically significant (Figure 2).

In line with the protest paradigm, some of these covers engaged with protest causes in an episodic manner. However, there were also examples of recurrent protest causes/events in both *Der Spiegel* and *Time*, such as *Time's* ongoing attention to the BLM historicized through an explicit linkage with the Civil Rights movement.

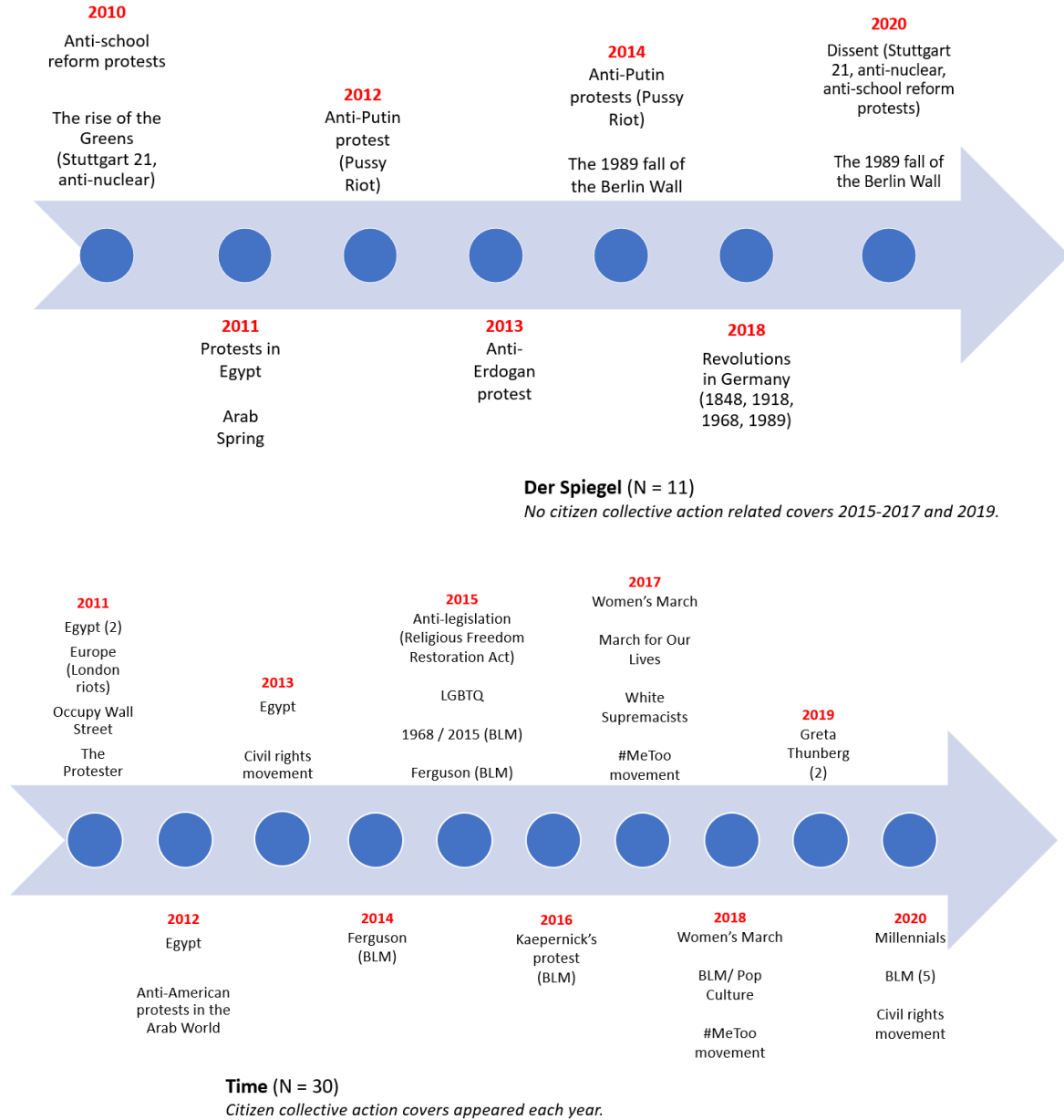


Figure 2. Cover topics: Der Spiegel (top) versus Time (bottom).

The Powerful Citizen as an Agent of (Legitimate) Change

Both magazines constructed the protester as engaged, active, and dignified. *Time* in particular semantically associated the protester with change, using words such as “revolution” (Stengel, 2011a), “change” (Stengel, 2011b), or “awakening” (Felsenthal, 2020a) in the cover titles. In 2011, the magazine crowned the protester as “The Person of the Year.” The protester’s ability to arrest attention was visually conveyed through power poses, such as raising arms or kneeling down, staring right into the camera voicing their grievances through protest posters. A few covers foregrounded individuals’ stern facial expressions and focused glances directly engaging the reader. The protester’s symbolic power was further evoked across several *Time* covers through the explicit and implicit use of megaphones (Figure 3). “The Overdue Awakening” (Felsenthal, 2020a) issue used a photograph of protesters holding megaphones, while another cover used only the image of a white megaphone against a black background anchored by the title “The Return of the Silent Majority” (Stengel, 2011c). In *Der Spiegel*, the symbolic power of protesters was conveyed by using the lyrics of the German anthem “Unity and Courage and Freedom” to title the issue (Buechner, 2014b).



Figure 3. Covers conveying the protester’s ability to arrest attention (left: Felsenthal, 2020a; right: Stengel, 2011c).

This power was further symbolized by foregrounding protesters while their opponents and targets were generally invisible. Against the protest paradigm, the confrontation device (Dardis, 2006) appeared only marginally on the magazine covers in our study. Three *Time* covers depicted, explicitly or implicitly, a confrontation between BLM protesters and the police. Only one cover explicitly linked an image of a Black protester running away from policemen to both current events and the 1968 Civil Rights movement (Gibbs, 2015b).



Figure 4. Confrontation covers (left: Gibbs, 2015a; right: Buechner, 2014b).

The confrontation angle was also suggested in one *Der Spiegel* cover about the fall of the Berlin Wall (Figure 4), depicting peaceful protesters waving flags against a wall of soldiers (Buechner, 2014b).

The Protesting Mass

The protester as a powerful political agent was also evoked with visuals of groups. Groups metaphorically invest collective grievances and demands with the idea of power in numbers. Furthermore, protesting groups taking to the streets embody the very idea of bottom-up citizen engagement in politics, participating in the production of the “image events” (DeLuca, 1999) able to attract media coverage and political attention. The protesting mass taking over the physical space of everyday life also intervenes upon the larger public opinion (Casquete, 2006), as protests disturb everyday life and politicize space, challenging the legitimacy of the given social order (Miller, 2013).

The two magazines generally depicted protesting masses as peaceful, signaling emotions such as anger or frustration primarily via gestures. While *Der Spiegel* used the image of the protesting mass more than *Time* (Table 2), on half of the relevant covers it relied on drawings rather than photographs of actual events. Such stylized images undercut the realism (or, rather, the physicality and spatiality) of protests but retain the idea of dissent as power in numbers. Only four covers of *Time* used visuals of protesting masses, with an additional one alluding to power in numbers through its title “The Return of the Silent Majority” (Stengel, 2011c) and choosing the symbol of a megaphone to illustrate it. Two covers devoted to the Arab Spring showcased the idea of power in numbers, with one of them using an aerial view of countless individuals tightly packed next to each other. A black and white cover on the BLM movement used a photograph of a “die-in,” with demonstrators lying on the pavement. The angle of the photograph created depth, constructing the illusion of a mass of bodies blanketing a never-ending street.

Finally, two covers—one in *Der Spiegel* and one in *Time*—stood out from the rest of the sample in their use of the collage technique to signal power in numbers (Figure 5). *Der Spiegel* put together dozens of individual portraits to illustrate a cover raising alarm over Putin’s authoritarian regime (Buechner, 2014a). Here, the collage was a symbol of the many citizens trying to oppose an all too powerful political elite. *Time* used the same technique to speak about the #MeToo movement, with dozens of black and white portraits brought together under the title “The Avengers” (Felsenthal, 2018a).

Whenever stylized representations of protest were preferred to photographs, the symbolic power of bodies on the streets and of the disruption of everyday spaces was erased. The protesting mass as a signifier of power in numbers can thus be seen as a visual counterpart of one of the protest paradigm devices, namely the reliance on statistics and generalizations to frame protest (Dardis, 2006).



Figure 5. Collages signaling the idea of power in numbers (left: Buechner, 2014a; right: Felsenthal, 2018a).

The Individual Protester

A second narrative through which the magazine covers constructed the protester was that of the individual agent. Echoing the wider phenomenon of the personalization of politics, the covers foregrounded either regular participants or leaders associated with protest causes (Table 2). While most of these covers depicted peaceful contexts, a few entailed signs of violence (discussed in the next section). Similar to the erasure of bodies discussed above, the presence of leaders was often disassociated from street protests as *Time* favored studio portraits (with *Der Spiegel* doing this only once; Hoeges, 2019).

The image of the individual protest participant was scarcely used—once in *Der Spiegel* in portraying the Gezi park protests in Turkey and four times across *Time* covers. In two of these cases, individual protesters were associated with violence. The remaining two dealt with racial injustice and police shootings of African Americans, framing protesters as victims kneeling down with their hands up or running away from the police (Figure 6).

Table 2. People Across the Covers (Frequency Count).

Outlets	Groups	Individuals	Other
Der Spiegel (n = 17)	10	4	1 (collage of approx. 40 photos of individuals)
Time (n = 30)	4	15	1 (collage of approx. 40 photos of individuals)
Total	14	19	2



Figure 6. The individual protester covers (left: Buechner, 2013; right: Gibbs, 2014).

The image of the protest leader was, on the other hand, a preferred approach. With few exceptions, leaders were young and casual. Furthermore, almost all were removed from actual protest situations and photographed either in a studio or in a choreographed setting. In some cases, leadership was explicitly referred to through either formulations such as “the founding father” (Stengel, 2013b, in reference to Martin Luther King) or “the silence breakers” (Felsenthal, 2017, in reference to #MeToo mobilizers); or by featuring these individuals in special issues dedicated to “the most influential people” (Felsenthal, 2018c) or “Person of the Year” (Felsenthal, 2019b). In other cases, leadership was not explicitly addressed. *Der Spiegel* dedicated one issue to historicizing “failed” revolutions from 1848 onward, cropping the images of well-known German activist Rudi Dutschke and of former politician/chancellor Friedrich Ebert (a pivotal figure of the German revolution of 1918–1919) alongside

other images evoking past protests. Neither was named, suggesting the magazine expected them to be immediately recognized by German audiences (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Covers referencing individual leadership (left: Stengel, 2013b; Brinkbaeumer, 2018).

Two other *Der Spiegel* covers were dedicated to contemporary iconic protesters—a member of the Pussy Riot group and German YouTube influencer Rezo. Where Tolokonnikova was recognizable yet not named, Rezo's name was prominently displayed across the cover, featuring him flanked on each side by two other young people. The title of the issue—"Rezoluzzer"—played on the pejorative German term for a wannabe revolutionary. The subtitle explained that Rezo and his teammates represent "The New APO" (or the new opposition), further inscribing them as "The YouTube Generation" that was disrupting German politics (Hoeges, 2019). Youth was further signaled by Rezo's blue hairdo and his teammates' casual dress and posture: donning sneakers and hoodies, the group faced the audience with hands tucked in their jeans' pockets. Their casualness stood in stark contrast with the formalism of the (implied) political elites (Figure 8).

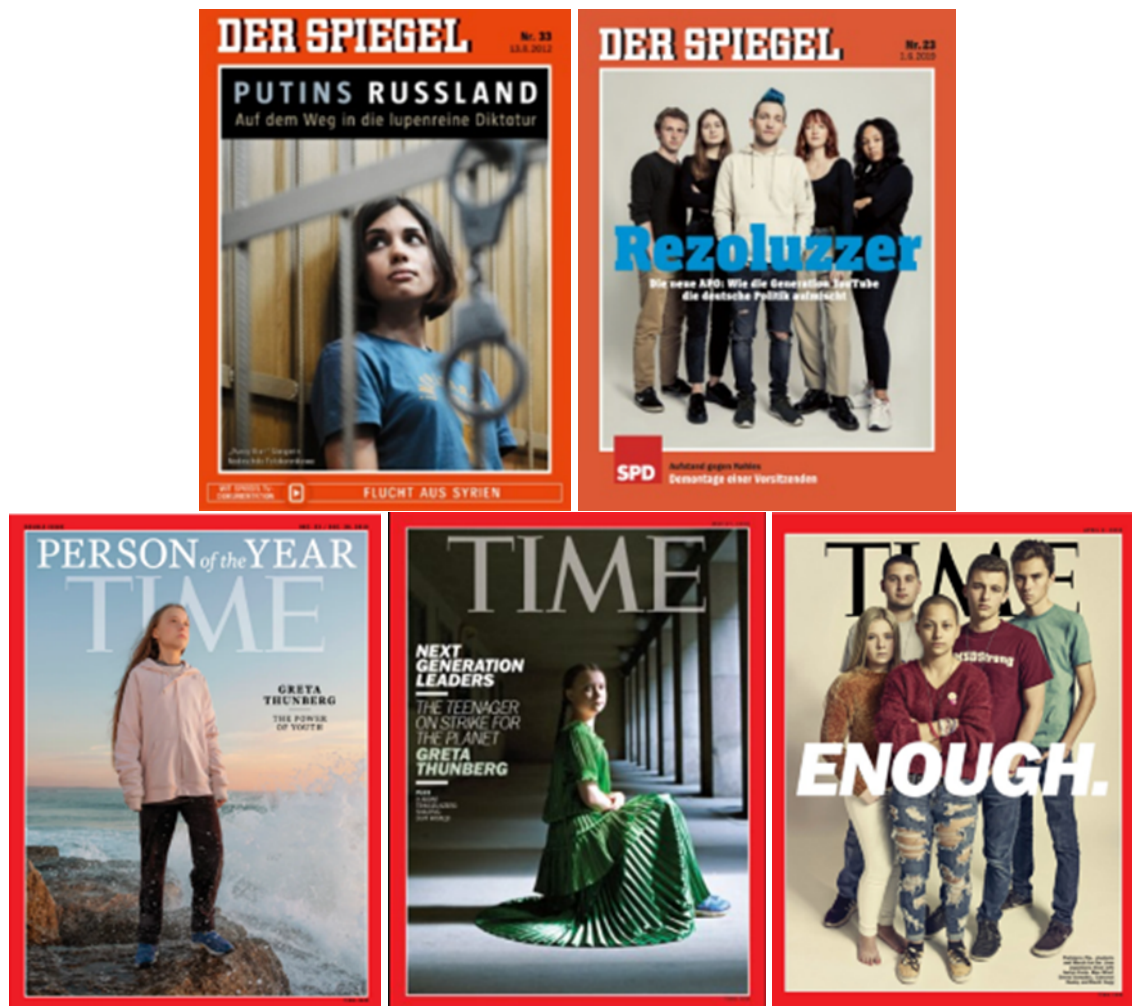


Figure 8. Iconic protesters covers (top left: Mascolo, 2012; right: Hoeges, 2019; bottom left: Felsenthal, 2019b; center: Felsenthal, 2019a; right: Felsenthal, 2018c).

Time also drew on and reinforced the recognizability of iconic movement figures, but altered their representation. Two covers featuring Greta Thunberg portrayed her in highly choreographed settings: In one, she was standing in her usual casual dressing style at the edge of a cliff (Felsenthal, 2019b), while in the other her posture and long draped dress evoked a fashion shooting (Felsenthal, 2019a). *Time* also publicized iconic representatives of the civil rights, BLM, and #MeToo movements respectively, along with the high-school students actively involved in organizing the anti-gun violence March for Our Lives. While historical figures were depicted with the help of black and white photographs, contemporary protest organizers or spokespersons were photographed in the studio, furthering their being de-contextualized from the everyday dimension of both the causes and the protests. The March for Our Lives cover strikes in its similarity with *Der Spiegel's* *Rezoluzzer* cover: a group of casually dressed young people, hands tucked in

their jeans' pockets, silently and gravely staring into the camera. Along the likes of Rezo and Greta Thunberg, they symbolize the new generation of protesters.

Female Protest Leaders

A variation of the individual protester, female leadership emerges as an important narrative in the news coverage of protest. Female protest leadership was often signaled via portraits of women with stern facial expressions and gazes interpellating the reader. Against the background of traditional representations of women on magazine covers, these photos strike through their seriousness and dignity.

Time's "Person of the Year" issue dedicated to "The Protester" (Stengel, 2011c) uses a drawing of the generic female protester to signal the symbolic power the magazine ascribes protests. As the only visible part of her face, her eyes, locking gaze with us, command attention. The same commanding visual representation of the female protester is featured in a *Der Spiegel* issue dedicated to the Gezi park protests in Turkey. The magazine chose the photograph of an anonymous female protester with a stern facial expression holding a white sign reading (in Turkish): "Don't bow down." This was anchored by the cover's title, "Turkey: The Uprising against Erdogan" (Buechner, 2013). Another cover used a photograph of Pussy Riot member Nadezhda Tolokonnikova behind bars. The title "Putin's Russia: On the Way to a Flawless Dictatorship" (Mascolo, 2012) anchored the pensive-looking young woman as powerful through the disjunction between her casual, almost innocent look and the jail bars. The latter come to represent the disproportionate reaction of the Russian ruling elite, seemingly scared enough to jail a young woman. In that sense, jailed Tolokonnikova remains a powerful agent.

Time also associates female leadership with well-known activists such as Greta Thunberg and the female leadership of #MeToo and the BLM movements. The women that emerged as "Avengers" in the #MeToo movement were described as first "marching" and then "running," presumably for office (Felsenthal, 2018a). Incidentally, this cover is also the only one in our sample where women smile directly looking into the camera. The cover also stands out in explicitly addressing the long-term impact of protest, as these women are presumably moving on to the realm of formal politics where they can effect a change. Only one other *Der Spiegel* cover also conveys the link between protests and formal political structures in an issue dedicated to the rise of the Green Party (Mueller von Blumencron & Mascolo, 2010d).

Time also awarded female leaders such as Greta Thunberg, Alicia Garza, Opal Tometti and Patrisse Cullors their own covers titled "Person of the Year" (Felsenthal, 2020c, "Next Generation Leaders" (Felsenthal, 2019a), or the "Most Influential Persons" (Felsenthal, 2018c). This feminized version of movement leadership stands in sharp contrast with Becker's (2018) discussion of the leitmotif of "images of men throwing stones and of the young faces of protesters . . ." (p. 140), possibly suggesting the rise of a new narrative depicting (young) women as determined, strong-willed, and non-violent leaders—a departure from the more traditional news media scripts of women as victims (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Female leadership covers (left: Stengel, 2011c; center: Felsenthal, 2020c; right: Mueller von Blumencron & Mascolo, 2010d).

The Protester as Social Threat

Rehearsing the frame of deviance, central to the protest paradigm, both magazines depicted some protesters as dangerous. Two sub-categories can be distinguished here: violent protests and protests undermining normative political values.

Table 3. Violence Across the Covers (Frequency Count).

	Violence
Der Spiegel (n = 17)	2
Time (n = 30)	7
Total	9

While rarely present on protest covers (Table 3), when used, explicit violence entailed the destruction of private property, signaled via fires or ransacked objects. Two *Der Spiegel* covers, for instance, used images of ransacking or buildings on fire. *Time* signaled danger through the use of a red filter and, in most cases, the frame of danger/violence was reserved for protests happening elsewhere (Figure 10), such as in the cover titled “The Decline and Fall of Europe” (Stengel, 2011b). In some of *Time*’s covers, the criminalization frame was also used in photographs bringing together masked protesters and signs of destruction.



Figure 10. Violence on covers (Stengel, 2011b).

Other covers connected protest to polarization, marking it as potentially dangerous to the social fabric. The two covers dealt with the rise of the extreme right. *Der Spiegel* used a photograph of a street demonstration, with protesters' salute and black hoodies juxtaposed to the figures of two dark-haired children wearily watching them from behind the curtains of a household window (Figure 11). In an issue titled "Hate in America" (Gibbs, 2017), *Time* illustrated the surge in White supremacy with an illustration of man's silhouette raising the American flag in a patriotic gesture reminiscent of the Nazi salute. Both covers conveyed the idea of hate against the Other as an illegitimate driver of protest.



Figure 11. Polarization in *Der Spiegel* (left: Mascolo, 2012; center: Brinkbaeumer, 2015; right: Brinkbaeumer, 2017).

Additionally, *Der Spiegel* linked polarization to dystopian political futures. One issue displayed a tomato smashed against the German imperial eagle, anchoring its meaning with the title “The ‘Against’ Republic” (Mueller von Blumencron & Mascolo, 2010b). Another one used an illustration of a tilted German flag. Within the tilted flag, groups of protesters were slipping downward (or, from left to right). The cover title framed Germany as becoming (politically) destabilized, concluding that the nation has become distraught (Brinkbaeumer, 2015). The same idea was rehearsed a few years later, with another cover using a similar visual to announce that Germany is “boiling”, thus warning of pervasive citizen anger in the political sphere (Brinkbaeumer, 2017).

Time also used polarization as a frame for specific causes, but not as a general commentary on the transformation of the realm of formal politics (Figure 12). This was the case of a cover depicting the LGBTQ movement as a fight between religious faith and human rights (Gibbs, 2015a). The historical movement for racial equality also evoked oppositions—such as protesters versus police, or White cop/Black cop—although such oppositions were positioned against the American dream of equality and justice rather than the danger of political polarization.



Figure 12. Polarization in Time (left: Gibbs, 2015a; right: Gibbs, 2015b).

Discussion

This article has examined *Time* and *Der Spiegel*'s construction of protest via covers between 2010 and 2020. The magazines offer two competing versions of the protester. The protester—and particularly the female protester—emerges as a powerful agent who can intervene in the political game. Here, intervention rather than the capacity to effect change is emphasized. Increasingly, however, the protester seems to be individualized and possibly removed from the material context of physical protest, becoming a representative figure for an implied yet invisible collective. While the unruliness of street protest and its disruption of everyday life recede into the background, individual voice is inscribed with the promise of political impact (provided it remains dignified and peaceful). This narrative, we argue, is part and parcel of

the wider personalization of politics, reflecting the spillover of an individualizing and individualistic lens into the discursive construction of citizen participation in Western democracies. This media narrative also resonates with Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) model of a connective logic underpinning contemporary forms of citizen dissent. Yet, like the connective logic argument, this narrative ideologically effaces the important role of the community/collective in spurring long-term mobilization and in the production of a shared political vision. The latter is particularly relevant in a political climate dominated by warnings of insurmountable political fragmentation and polarization. Indeed, the protester as an ideal-type gains negative valences through its association with polarization as well as the destruction of private property. In such cases, citizen participation is delegitimized as potentially destructive of the social fabric.

The boundary between the protester as a powerful political agent and the protester as destabilizing the social fabric can be elusive. Across the two magazines, the boundary seemed informed primarily by whether protest—particularly protest taking place elsewhere—ultimately promoted Western ideals of democracy. Indeed, news media often fall in line with the wider foreign policy of their country of origin (and, in spite of its claim to be a transnational media product, *Time* remains ideologically anchored in the U.S. political imaginary; Gil-Lopez, 2021; Liu, 2020; Robertson et al., 2018). In *Der Spiegel*, protests against dictatorships (Russia, Turkey, the Arab Spring) were favorably portrayed. The same pattern was visible in *Time*'s coverage of the Arab Spring. One cover in particular aptly conveyed the Western political lens: an aerial view of demonstrators in Egypt was divided in two parts, with a red filter applied to one of the sections. The caption explained the contrast as "World's Best Protesters" versus "World's Worst Democrats" (Stengel, 2013a).

An interesting aspect here is the ongoing nationalization of protest. National symbols identify and anchor protests in national (as opposed to local, regional, or transnational) contexts. The national lens is also visible in the interpretation of the political significance of protest. Where *Der Spiegel* tends to be more cautious about protest as a form of citizen engagement, framing it as potentially destabilizing political life, *Time*'s coverage of contemporary movements such as BLM and #MeToo is framed by the idea of (positive) change, while the nation serves as a discursive device to construct the legitimacy of these movements. Protests, thus, become problematic when potentially destabilizing the nation, but they are to be celebrated as an expression of agency when they fulfill the nation's (alleged) destiny. An important side note here is the question of which protests make it onto the covers of the news magazines: Our expectation that more nationally and transnationally relevant protests will make it onto the cover of the two news magazines was not met. In that sense, more research into the selection and design process for covers will shed light on how and why protests (do not) make it onto the covers.

The article also offers insight into the role of news magazines in the (re)production of protest icons. Visual markers such as non-verbal communication or cause-specific symbols are preferred by news magazine covers. Where prior research has suggested protest icons may no longer originate in visual journalism (Becker, 2018, p. 139), our data suggests non-verbal communication and the individual (especially the female) protester have become generic protest symbols for visual news media. These are localized by linking them to national symbols such as flags or monuments. The (re)production of protest icons is also interwoven with the magazine's branding practices. This is particularly visible in *Time*'s marked preference for individual protest leaders, conveying the magazine's historic mission of publicizing liberal

values and (male) leaders (Rosas-Moreno & Bachmann, 2013). Yet, with the rising visibility of female protest leadership, women also claim an important political function in protest.

Overall, our findings suggest that news magazine covers are less susceptible to being influenced by protest communication. While activists often attempt to steer media coverage by anticipating journalists' needs, news magazine covers as a genre appear less malleable in that regard. This is probably a consequence of the editorializing and branding functions of covers. Commenting on the iconicity of its covers, *Time's* creative director said:

We print more than three million issues globally each week, reimagine it for multiple platforms and the past four years we've animated the cover each week for our more than 46 million social followers. We've certainly been able to introduce Time to a whole new audience. (Patterson, 2019, n.p.)

Such strategic efforts suggest the need for more testing of the proposal that protest icons no longer originate in visual journalism, news magazine covers included (Becker, 2018, p. 139).

Local values and norms underpin the selection, amplification, and legitimation of some protests over others. While our findings show that *Time* has prominently featured gender or race-related protests, such causes did not make it onto *Der Spiegel's* covers. Yet, we cannot ignore the importance of magazines claiming a global audience (such as *Time*) in placing some causes and issues on the agenda for discussion. In that sense, the protest paradigm would be enhanced by further insight into the relation between local and transnational coverage. Caution is advised when generalizing these findings to news magazine covers in general, as magazine ideology and brand play an important role in the representation of protests.

Finally, in the case of news magazine covers, some protest paradigm devices are more relevant than others. Against the protest paradigm, the news magazines in this sample put forth empowering representations of protesters. Yet, these coexist with the frame of deviance. In line with prior research, the political values associated with the protest, its direct resonance with the national political imaginary and the news outlet's editorial vision inform the legitimation/delegitimation of the protester. Against the protest paradigm's episodic attention to protest, news magazines often cover protests as part of long-term cycles of dissent. This is likely to be a consequence of news magazines' overarching interest in capturing and explaining larger political patterns and transformations. We recommend the inclusion of multiple news genres in the research design of studies interested in mapping out the (consequences of the) protest paradigm. Given their nature, news magazine covers focus on the visual aspects of protest such as protesters' persona or protest paraphernalia, and this can come at the expense of engaging with the actual political cause/issue. Personalization, then, emerges from our sample as a possible protest paradigm device worthy of subsequent investigation. In particular, personalization that de-contextualizes the individual from the physicality of bodies in the street remains problematic in its erasure of the collective in protest. Furthermore, as the protester is no longer shown "in action," the contentious aspect of protest disappears. Future research is needed to test the applicability of these findings to other news magazines.

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