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Contradictory Forces: Progressive Social Movements and Elite Counter-Mobilisation

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**Title: Contradictory Forces: Progressive Social Movements and
Elite Counter-Mobilisation**

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1. Introduction

The #MeToo, a feminist movement that began online, aimed to destigmatize and give voice to survivors of sexual abuse. The movement, focused on well-being and protection gained global popularity in 2017, surprisingly, it has also given a headstart for counter-activism (Grady, 2023). The anti-feminist message increases the danger of losing focus on societal issues, such as gender equality and equity, women's rights, and the importance of a sexism-free society. Consequently, I raise the following research question:

RQ: *Why did the #MeToo movement lead to the emergence of the anti-feminist countermovement?*

The topic is particularly relevant and crucial to understanding the emergence of countermovements. Countermovements are recognised as oppositional social movements limiting the effects of the initial movement (Mottl, 1980). One of the examples of such anti-women views and erasure of feminist achievements is the overturn of the legal case *Roe v. Wade*. This case led to abortion becoming illegal and limiting women's bodily autonomy in many states of the U.S. (Jackson, 2022). The movement and the countermovement in various forms have become popular and active in most countries, however, #MeToo started and has been extensively documented in the U.S. Thus, my thesis will focus on the effects of the #MeToo movement in the U.S. at the beginning of the movement (from 2006 until and including 2015) and at its culmination (from 2016 until 2022).

The research will build on prior knowledge that documented the evolution of countermovements and specifically the #MeToo movement to demonstrate the backlash. Most importantly, I will be looking for the explanations and causal mechanisms of why and what led to the formation and mobilisation of the countermovement by employing the process-tracing method. Moreover, I will build on previous arguments and theories on the mechanisms and conditions explaining the emergence and formation processes of resistance movements.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1 Literature review

2.1.1 Introduction to countermovements

Before discussing the emergence of countermovements, it is crucial to define them. When describing a countermovement, most scholars find it helpful to rely on the definition of a

social movement. For instance, Meyer and Staggenborg (1996) reformulate the classic definition of a social movement by Tarrow (1994, as cited in Meyer and Staggenborg, 1996) and state that a countermovement is a social movement with contrary claims to the initial movement. Whereas, Mottl (1980) undertook Wilson's (1973, as cited in Mottl, 1980) definition of a social movement, reversed it and interpret that a countermovement stands for a "conscious, collective, organized attempt to resist or reverse social change" (Mottl, 1980, p. 620). Lastly, McCarthy and Zald (1977) define countermovement as part of the population with perceptions and beliefs opposing the initial social movement. Thus, despite different starting points, definitions of countermovements are somewhat similar and converge on countermovements being in opposition to the goals and ideas of the primary social movement. Moreover, Mottl (1980) adds that the opposition involves established actors who make the accessibility to resources easier for the countermovement group in defending the status quo.

Scholars recognized the existence of countermovements as a phenomenon only in the 1960s (Meyer and Staggenborg, 1996). According to Useem and Zald (1987), any visible social movement is bound to have a countermovement due to forming grievances and political opportunities for a part of the population by seeking change, threatening existing rules, mobilising, and increasing costs to others. Thus, in a way, movements are contributing to the creation of countermovements, since the nature of framing and organising a countermovement is to focus on opposing anything that the movement believes or aims to achieve. Moreover, Useem and Zald (1987) believe that countermovements and their actions are highly reliant and dependent on the reactions and achievements of the initial movement.

2.1.2 Examples of countermovement emergence

Several research papers have focused on finding answers to why and how a countermovement mobilised to one or another social movement. A few examples will be discussed in this section to find patterns, similarities or differences in various cases of countermovement emergence.

To begin with, Andrews (2002) examined the Mississippi "white flight" countermovement and looked into the determinants of white resistance to ethnic and racial diversity. In the late 1960s, with the development of the Civil Rights Movement, the Supreme Court of the U.S. decided that there must be a desegregation of school districts in Mississippi. Andrews (2002) observed that as a result of the court's orders, countermobilization - the white resistance -

took the form of private segregationist academies. Andrews (2002) argues that conditions responsible for the counter-mobilisation of white resistance were: (1) a high probability of implementation of desegregation posing as a threat to whites, which would also demonstrate the success of the Civil Rights Movement, (2) the initial movement had enough resources to achieve goals, and, lastly (3) the opposition had the capacity to resist change. Whereas, the likely mechanisms could be explained by racial competition theory, such as white dominance in school control bodies, and white parents' fear of interracial contact of children in schools, which is also related to electoral threat to white political elites controlling the municipalities/counties.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning a study by Johnson (1999) about the Anti-Abortion countermovement Operation Rescue (OR) and the explanations of its formation after the women's liberation movement gained success in almost fully decriminalising abortions in the country. In the 1980s opposing groups started mobilising and blocking abortion clinics, which eventually named itself Operation Rescue and was led by five men committee. First of all, Johnson (1999) establishes that OR emerged due to the rise of the religious right and that to them, abortions meant sexual liberation for women and, simultaneously, a threat to traditional Catholic thought, which works as a mechanism in this case. Moreover, the author notes that powerful allies were crucial for the emergence such as political network in the first stages of the countermovement, and media, institutional and religious allies for resource accessibility in later stages. Furthermore, state facilitation, when resources can be gained due to the political system being favourable to the countermovement, played a big part in helping OR to rise. Lastly, a variety of effective tactics were identified as a strong determinant for the movement's emergence.

Lastly, Corredor (2019) discusses Antigenderism countermovements, which rose in opposition to feminist and LGBTQ+ movements, mostly focused against the idea that gender is a social construct. Ideas spread by feminist and queer movements concerning gendered power dynamics, sexuality as a social construct, and diversity of sexual orientation are directly threatening the conventional religious agenda. Thus, the key mechanism for the countermovement emergence was religion, more precisely, the Vatican's efforts to diminish the validity and prominence of the initial movement. Additionally, Catholic and Muslim leaders joined powers and were encouraging their audience to counter-mobilise and protect traditional beliefs. Corredor (2019) argues that conditions leading to the emergence of a countermovement were (1) the success of transnational feminist and LGBTQ+ movements in

influencing various UN conferences in the 1990s and (2) the growth of the opposition numbers and coalition-making.

Considering these cases, it is evident that they share some similarities, despite discussing different contexts, movements and countermovements. All three original movements were formed by underprivileged groups of people, aiming to challenge the power structures, which are constraining them from reaching their objectives. The discussed studies have a pattern of the original movement initiating progressive policies and the countermovement emerging due to the threat of undesirable reconstruction of the existing status quo. Furthermore, cases have nearly identical factors explaining countermovement formation, which included elements of a high probability of movement's success and resourcefulness of the initial and the opposing movement. The major mechanisms in the aforementioned countermovements' emergence were the threatened power structures, framed as ideological or religious threats to society. However, in the discussed cases, a part of society had already had deeply rooted beliefs either in the ideology of white dominance or in religious perceptions of gender roles, or the importance of giving birth to justify the resistance. That being the case, it is important to study and understand why there is resistance to movements like #MeToo, which is fighting against sexual abuse, a phenomenon that in itself is not perceived as normal or justifiable in society.

2.1.3 The #MeToo countermovements

Some men found the #MeToo movement offensive as there was a clear dominance of male perpetrators, despite the movement being gender-neutral (Ellis, 2018). Some took the initiative to resist the movement and claim that "not all men" are responsible for the rape culture and invented the #HimToo hashtag to raise attention to male victims (Maricourt and Burrell, 2022, p. 54). Eventually, the hashtag #HimToo on Twitter became associated with mocking the #MeToo and diminishing the validity of the #MeToo hashtag on social media (Ellis, 2018). Maricourt and Burrell (2022) conducted thirteen interviews about masculinity politics including two groups of men: PMAs (positive masculinity advocates, defined as pro-feminists) and the MRAs (men's rights advocates). They found that male subjects defined as PMAs saw the movement as a threat to the patriarchy and viewed it positively (pp. 59-61). Whereas, the MRAs perceived #MeToo as a declaration of war against all men, which attacked their freedom of speech, defined men as malevolent and "stripped them of their rights" (pp. 61). Most individuals with similar opinions gather in communities like the

discussed men's rights advocates or in the so-called 'manosphere', a network of misogynistic men, fighting against women's movements and promoting sexist views (Aiston, 2021).

2.2 Theoretical framework

To answer the research question, firstly, conditions and causal mechanisms affecting the emergence of the countermovement have to be identified. At the end of this section, a hypothesis will be formed relying on the discussed theories.

Reflecting upon definitions presented in the literature review, I define a countermovement as a social movement, with opposing views and beliefs, and a goal to limit the spread and influence of the initial movement.

2.2.1 Conditions for countermovement emergence

A condition in the context of process tracing could be defined as either a necessary or a sufficient component needed to observe the outcome of the analysed phenomenon (Beach and Pedersen, 2013).

Several theories will be beneficial to rely on in explaining the factors influencing the emergence of the #MeToo countermovement. Firstly, Meyer and Staggenborg (1996) were exploring the interaction between a movement and a countermovement and proposed that conditions influencing the emergence of countermovements are the following: "first, the movement shows signs of success; second, the interests of some population are threatened by movement goals; and third, political allies are available to aid oppositional mobilization" (p. 1635). Thus, certain conditions have to be met to trigger the counter-mobilisation. The first condition is crucial for a social movement to start producing resistance as its success has to be public to provoke opposition. Furthermore, the achievements of the movement and the potential change of the status quo pose a risk to somebody's interests, who, as emphasized by Useem and Zald (1982) are usually defined as the privileged part of the society. The last condition, closely tied with the second, proposes that since the opponents of the movement are elites, they are likely to have resources to sponsor and promote the agenda of the countermovement.

Secondly, Useem and Zald (1987) specify similar conditions of countermovement emergence by the use of the model of mobilization: "(1) the group's members believe that they will benefit by the achievement of a movement's goals; (2) victory is reasonably likely, and 3) an organizational infrastructure reduces costs" (p. 11). Evidently, the conditions proposed by

Useem and Zald (1987) are close to those by Meyer and Staggenborg (1996). Combining the most essential parts of theories from both articles, the theory should predict that for a countermovement to materialise there must be 1) a part of the population threatened by movement goals, or more precisely in the context of #MeToo, a group of people, who fear that #MeToo will demote their place in the society and revoke their privileges, and 2) accessibility to organizational infrastructure and allies, who make success more likely, which could be specified and explained as resistance groups' ability to exploit their members' political status and network to reach goals.

2.2.2 Causal mechanisms for countermovement emergence

Causal mechanisms can be explained as the underlying causal force of how the studied variables X and Y relate and interact with one another (Beach and Pedersen, 2013). In the context of this article, it is clear from the aforementioned theories that social movements initiate the emergence of countermovements, however, a mechanism should explain the specific force connecting the analysed social movement to the countermovement. Therefore, if a condition is a specific entity making the link from variable X to Y, the mechanism explains the activity in which the entities engage to produce the outcome (Beach, 2016).

I will collect information about the possible causes of countermovement emergence, which will be applied in testing the mechanisms that led to the countermovement for #MeToo. To begin with, Corredor (2019) researched the emergence of anti-gender mobilisation and has summarized several articles concerning countermovement emergence and made a list of several causal mechanisms: (1) "Existing social movements demonstrate potential and/or actual success in their efforts", and the (2) "driving motivation of a social movement is to challenge the status quo and disrupt entrenched power structures" and, lastly, (3) "defenders of the existing order mobilise to protect the systems that uphold their position of privilege" (pp. 617-618). These explanations are beneficial as Corredor (2019) has summarized pivotal mechanisms that are prominent in most of the core studies related to countermovement formation analysis.

It is equally important to utilize the mechanisms leading to antifeminist backlash described by Flood et al. (2021) to accommodate the context of the anti-feminist movement as there is a specific gendered dimension to the counter-mobilisation in analysis. Flood et al. (2021) looked into backlash to gender equality movements and described several dimensions of resistance and its emergence. The authors claim that the *defence of privilege* rises out of

deeply rooted sexism in society and the desire for the privileged to maintain the status quo of power structures (p. 400). This point goes in line with Mottl's (1980) and Zald's and Useem's (1982) proposition that countermovement leaders are usually the threatened elites (p. 626). Furthermore, *framing of gender roles and feminism* has allowed men to reverse the focus of the issue and shift it to seeing men as the oppressed ones and diminishing feminist ideas and achievements (p. 401). Similarly, *victimization of men* is borne out of the perception of the gender equality movement goals as attacks on masculinity (p. 402). As mentioned, the provided mechanisms are specifically directed at explaining the resistance to gender equality movements. These are essential to have in mind when explaining why various feminist movements receive backlash.

Lastly, by relying on and combining the theories provided in this section I derive several underlying mechanisms that may have led to the emergence of the #MeToo countermovement: 1) the social movement demonstrates its success in reaching its goals, and, as predicted by both presented theories, 2) elites mobilise to defend privilege and maintain the status quo.

Building on theories of causal mechanisms and conditions the following hypothesis is designed:

Hypothesis: *when the success of a social movement is visible and threatens the status of elites, they form countermovements*

Social movement $\xrightarrow{\text{shows signs of success}}$ *elites fear that power structures are at risk*
 $\xrightarrow{\text{resources accessible}}$ *elites mobilise to defend privilege and status quo* \rightarrow *countermovement*

Figure 1. Hypothesis as a causal chain

The hypothesis predicts how certain conditions lead to the formation of countermovements. However, it also entails the underlying mechanisms directly generating the emergence, as can be seen in the figure above (see [Figure 1](#)). The figure can be explained as an equation of a path leading from a social movement to the emergence of a countermovement as predicted by theory. Firstly, as noted in the hypothesis, a condition of social movement showing clear signs of success must be fulfilled, which leads to the status of the elite being threatened and forcing them to act. Moreover, if the condition, that the opposition has accessibility to resources that make mobilisation easier, is satisfied, they start mobilising to protect the

traditional power structures, which then directly leads to the emergence of a countermovement.

3. Methodology

The following research will rely on qualitative data, both primary and secondary sources. Since the aim is to explain the causal mechanism forcing counter-mobilisation, the study will employ the process-tracing method. More specifically, theory-testing process tracing should be beneficial in discovering a clear pattern, to see if the theory predicts the outcome precisely. The theories of countermovement emergence discussed in the theoretical framework will be applied to the single case study of #MeToo and its opposing movement.

3.1 Process tracing: theory-testing

Process tracing is one of the qualitative research methods, which according to Waldner (2012) is based on concatenation, or more precisely, on linking together things or actions as in a chain or a sequence. Waldner explains that this method uses a longitudinal research design and analysis of a set of related events that serve as data to draw observations from. Process tracing formulates causal claims on how a certain outcome occurred by entailing events and variables. More specifically, it uncovers the underlying force, the key mechanism, pushing the independent variable to produce the outcome of interest. Thus, according to Waldner (2012), process tracing makes claims that: “given a set of initial and scope conditions, an outcome was bound to occur” (p. 69).

There are three variants of process tracing, however, this study will only rely on one of them. As Beach and Pedersen (2013, Chapter 2) explain, theory-testing accounts for finding if the causal mechanism predicted by a theory or a set of theories is present and is responsible for the causation effect between variables X and Y in most instances of a certain phenomenon.

One of the perks of process tracing is high internal validity since it is relying on a within-case analysis, however, external validity, which usually is obtained by conducting quantitative research, is constrained (Waldner, 2012, Chapter 4). Nevertheless, when conducting a single case study to find the path from the independent to the outcome variable, a quantitative study could assist in finding correlations but would fail to explain the causality between the variables (Sambanis, 2005). Process tracing is the best option to explore in-depth what conditions and mechanisms allow social movements to generate counter-mobilisation. The investigator has to present and draw observations from evidence, analysed in a sequence of

events. The type of evidence is non-standardized and case-specific, it can range from interviews to news articles (Brady and Collier, 2004).

3.2 Case introduction: the #MeToo movement and its backlash

The #MeToo movement is a feminist movement, which started online and aimed at destigmatizing and speaking about experiences of sexual abuse. Moreover, the movement is fighting the individuals and the system allowing or perpetrating violence through various actions.

Despite having a global impact, there is no concrete explanation for why there is an opposing movement in addition to the #MeToo ideas being commonly agreed as morally right in the general society. #MeToo aims to ensure basic human rights and provide closure to sexual abuse victims. Meanwhile, the resistance demonstrates that a part of the population is discontent with the movement's beliefs or goals. Therefore, it is important to study and discover why movements, combating harmful actions and ignorance to violence and harassment, oddly might seem to give rise to a countermovement. Studying the theory of countermovement emergence by employing this case would help to see the bigger picture of the underlying cause of backlash to progressive movements. The importance of the topic is growing, especially with the rise of conservative politics in the U.S. and all the backlash to progressive movements and policies that comes with it (Tharoor, 2022).

Furthermore, most previous knowledge about countermovements was collected on specific well-organized and mobilised countermovements with concrete collective action tactics. Whereas, the case of #MeToo demonstrates a more disorganized countermovement consisting of solely elite structure, which is still active and effective in its resistance. Studying this type of case is more difficult. Nevertheless, it is essential to explore the dimensions of a more loosely structured countermovement to broaden the knowledge about various types of countermovements.

The results of the study would not only show what triggered the emergence of a countermovement, but it would also be beneficial in recognising and limiting the enabling factors for countermovements, which limit the prospects of equality and safety in society. Thus, further development of the theory is useful to the evolution and successful growth of progressive social movements by applying and adapting the knowledge of how their actions give rise to counter-mobilisation.

Previously discussed theory hints that most of the time countermovements are formed by the elites or the privileged part of the society. As Roggeband (2018) has put it, the defenders of the status quo are placed in the most privileged position of society in the patriarchal system. Therefore, this research will narrow the focus on the elite countermovement as the key opposition group. In the context of the case, men in power, whether they are powerful due to their widespread popularity in their field, wealth or being active in the political field, will be considered as the elite.

3.3 Data collection

The #MeToo movements' actions, achievements, and reactions by the elite in the U.S. will be traced from approximately 2006 until 2022, breaking the timeline into two phases: one, when backlash was not visible yet and the other, when the countermovement started to form and, eventually, emerged.

The study concentrates on the movement in the U.S. as it was most active and visible there, thus, there is more data on the movement there than other potential countries. The analysis will consist of exploring the prevalent conditions, steps and mechanisms that allowed the anti-feminist movement to emerge and become popular in the U.S.

Qualitative data should be analysed in-depth to discover the underlying forces giving rise to the opposition. To test the theory of countermovement emergence, the analysis should include documentation of the initial movements' actions, successes and visibility as well as implications of those achievements and reactions by the opposition.

To begin with, according to Gusfield (1981), there can be more "fluid" or "linear" social movements and there can be distinguished two types of gains: fluid, such as changes in a cultural sense, beliefs and morality towards the issue, and linear, more material, economic or political achievements. To assess the visibility of the success of the movement, there should be both fluid and linear gains observed: several news channels writing about the achievements of the movement and/or legal cases initiated and/or posts on social media regarding the movement gaining plenty of attention (likes on Twitter have a higher reach than 10,000).

Moreover, how powerful individuals perceived the success of the movement and if they felt threatened by the movement's achievements will be assessed. For the reaction to be deemed as negative, *opinion lexicon*, a dataset by Liu et al. (2005) containing words that list negative

opinion words, will be utilized. Over the years the authors collected data to analyse online opinions (Zhang et al., 2011). By exploring response articles, interviews of opposing individuals and public statements or social media posts, keywords will be analysed according to the *opinion lexicon* to be categorised as negative or not. Gill (2000) discussed how a sense of threat can be detected by discourse analysis, and she notes that in a feminist context threat by the opposition can be expressed through formulating contrast structures as arguments (in the context of social movements, the movements' actions are negatively portrayed in the face of their discourse), vagueness in describing the negative implications, descriptions of the movement as a political power seeking indefinite power, descriptions of feminists' values and goals using fascist discourse (pp. 181-186). Thus, by relying on these findings by Gill (2000), the detection of at least one of these: a) contrast arguments, b) vague demonisation of movements' values and beliefs, c) framing of the movement as seeking supremacy, would indicate the presence of a perceived threat for their social group.

Furthermore, by reading news articles, blogs or social media posts it is essential to determine what kind of action those, opposing the ideas of the movement initiate with resources available to them. To evaluate that, first, the opposition's accessibility to resources has to be demonstrated. Nicholls (2003, p. 882) describes organizational infrastructure as both informal and formal connections to people or institutions, that alleviate the mobilisation of a group. Thus, for this case, if an opponent a) works at a governmental organization, belongs to a political party or has close documented relations to someone who does or b) has a high reach and is influential on social or public media (posts on Twitter reach more than 10,000 likes or give statements on mainstream newspapers), or c) has a wide network of powerful individuals due to the high position in the industry, the accessibility to resources condition is fulfilled. Twitter is chosen as a measurement of influence, as the most intense discussions about the #MeToo have been happening on the social media platform and as Caliandro (2018) states, the opposition can form specific powerful online countermovement structures, which influence the general political atmosphere (p. 554)

Furthermore, it should be defined what kind of actions or traits signal the formation of the elite countermovement. Following the concept of a countermovement, if the opposition: a) has a structure of like-minded people, b) seeks to limit and block the progress of the initial movement and c) tries to achieve the shared goal with joint efforts depending on resource accessibility (influence on social media or through organisations or network), then it can be considered that the opposition has evolved to the counter-mobilisation stage.

Analysis of articles, news sections, social media posts, and reports as a sequence of events should reveal the dynamics of the formation and development of the initial movement and the countermovement at each step as depicted in the causal chain (see [Figure 1](#)).

4. Analysis

4.1 The #MeToo movement

The famous #MeToo phrase was coined and the movement was founded by Tarana Burke in 2006 and is now one of the most impactful feminist movements with widespread implications regarding the issue of sexual violence (History & Inception, 2020). The #MeToo movement and the meaning of the hashtag are recognizable by the majority of people active on social media (Gordon, 2023). The movement stands for spreading awareness about sexual violence as a human rights issue, a health crisis and a type of systemic violence, and it is also involved in assisting survivors in their journey of healing (Learn More About Sexual Violence, 2020). The movement became extremely popular online in October 2017, after actress Alyssa Milano encouraged sexual harassment survivors to speak up about their traumatic experiences on Twitter (Gordon, 2023). Since then, the message of the #MeToo movement has spread all around the globe and it is still active and influencing people to fight for a safe and sexual harassment-free environment (Devex Editor, 2018).

The #MeToo social movement can be considered to be a feminist movement, as the victims are dominantly women, that have experienced sexual abuse or harassment in the workplace or elsewhere. However, there is still a debate about what kind of feminism the movement represents (Donegan, 2018). The movement is intersectional, meaning, it includes individuals of all races, sexualities, religions, social classes, nationalities, different experiences and identities in general. #MeToo asserts that misogyny is both structural and institutional and that women can battle it by coming together (Donegan, 2018).

4.2 The countermovement

#MeToo movement rose not because the issue of sexual abuse got bigger but to demonstrate the magnitude of the problem and give closure to victims (North, 2019). The movement inspired those suffering constant sexual comments, assault, rape or misconduct in the workplace or elsewhere to step forward and share their stories. Once women started speaking out, violations were taken more seriously, and perpetrators were either scared to continue

engaging in abusive actions or were exposed, besides, multiple lawsuits were initiated (North, 2019; King, 2022). Consequently, powerful men could fear that the movement may constrain or expose their harmful activities, and, thus, ruin their reputation. Many celebrities and political figures shared their stances towards #MeToo and its values in interviews and social media. The majority of them emphasized the importance and support for the cause, however, some framed the movement as irrelevant or harmful to men (Kurtz, 2019). The resistance and fear of being involved in the #MeToo cases led to men discriminating against attractive women, being less willing to hire women or have one-on-one meetings with them (King, 2022). Overall, there was an emergence of loosely structured countermovement, consisting of powerful and privileged individuals, who were resourceful enough to resist the influence of the movement and simultaneously discredit the movement's ideas and values.

4.3 Analysis of #MeToo and tracing the emergence of its countermovement

In this section, I will begin with a chronological analysis of major #MeToo related events leading to the emergence of the countermovement. Furthermore, the second phase of the movement will be discussed, where the signs of counter-mobilisation are already visible and the opposition is interacting with #MeToo.

4.3.1 Phase 1: #MeToo movement's steps to success

The beginning

In 2006, Tarana Burke started the #MeToo movement to help women, who have experienced sexual abuse (Ohlheiser, 2017). Despite Twitter being the platform that led #MeToo to grow instantly, it initially started on MySpace social media platform. MySpace helped #MeToo to gain its first supporters in 2006, there were at least a thousand individuals interested in the movement (Ohlheiser, 2017). Later, in 2014, Burke took part as a speaker in the "March to End Rape Culture" in Philadelphia, where around a thousand people showed up to demonstrate their grievances surrounding the culture of sexual harassment, gendered discrimination and victim-blaming (Kuznits, 2014; Santiago & Criss, 2017).

Nevertheless, the movement was still not visible enough to gain country-wide attention. The only media outlets broadcasting news concerning #MeToo were *the Daily Pennsylvanian* and *CBS News*, which only mentioned the march in Philadelphia. Moreover, the search on Factiva gathered no articles in the timeframe of 2006 – 2015 mentioning the movement or the founder.

The People of the State of New York v. Strauss-Kahn

In 2011, former managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Dominique Strauss-Kahn was accused of sexually assaulting a chambermaid Nafissatou Diallo in a New York hotel (Jonas, 2011). According to public sources, another victim spoke out after the hotel maid's allegations, that 8 years earlier Strauss-Kahn had attempted to rape her (Bell, 2011). The case *New York v. Strauss-Kahn* was dismissed in 2011 as the prosecution decided that the victim's claims were not credible enough due to her changing the story about the actions after the incident and a lack of physical signs of force (Eligon et al., 2011). However, the victim turned to the civil court and Strauss-Kahn settled the case for an undisclosed financial compensation (Williams, 2012).

Around that time #MeToo was starting to slowly gain publicity through MySpace and local communities, thus, the case is presumed to be one of the #MeToo inspired allegations, even though it is not mentioned in news articles explicitly (Jonas, 2011). The persecutor did not speak about the case or mention a threat of the movement publicly, however, claimed that there was a consensual sexual act (France 24, 2020). The famous French philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy immediately responded to the implication of this case by protecting the image of the defendant. Levy claimed his friend would never commit the atrocities he was accused of and then turned to publicly blame the victims for seeking profit by employing false accusations (Bell, 2011). Moreover, Strauss-Kahn can be defined as a resourceful individual due to his political position and network of influential figures in France and high status in the IMF. The resources available to Strauss-Kahn helped him to not get persecuted and to return to the international arena a few years later after the scandal (Holland, 2013)

Harvey Weinstein accusations

In the film industry, there were rumours about a producer, who had been sexually harassing women for decades. However, only in 2015, the worldwide famous film producer Harvey Weinstein was accused of sexually harassing 22-year-old Ambra Battilana Gutierrez (Santora and Baker, 2015). Gutierrez then collaborated with the New York Police Department (NYPD) and secretly recorded a meeting with Weinstein, who unaware of being recorded admitted his wrongdoings (Connor, 2017). However, the prosecution concluded that the evidence was not sufficient and dropped the case (Connor, 2017). The NYPD were discontent with the district attorney's decision and argued that the evidence was solid to charge the

perpetrator with sexual harassment. Overall, the incident was scandalous leading to coverage by several news outlets.

Nonetheless, there was a lack of public interest in the case, not many made the connection of the case with the #MeToo movement as it was still not visible enough on public media. *The Guardian*, *The New York Times* and *New York Daily News* and celebrity news media *Page Six* wrote about the case. However, there was no mention of the movement and no country-wide coverage considering the level of visibility. Moreover, the conclusion was underwhelming as the victim signed a nondisclosure agreement and the case was closed (Connor, 2017). Furthermore, according to *Business Insider*, months after the case was dropped, Weinstein's lawyer donated \$10,000 to the DA's Cyrus Vance Jr's campaign, which also shows a pattern of attorneys donating to DA's campaign after getting their cases dropped (Sirota & Cassano, 2017). This finding is leading to the premise that Harvey Weinstein had enough financial resources to ensure that his victims and investigators of his misconduct stay silent, and if that fails, he can ensure the silence by settling the case or manipulating the positive outcome by other means. Since Harvey Weinstein did not make any public statements regarding the case and had enough resources to evade accountability in the single court case, it is not entirely clear whether Weinstein felt threatened by the movement.

Summary of Phase 1: Small wins and no clearly defined opposition

Since the beginning of the movement in 2006, it grew slowly through social media and street intervention actions. The spread of the movement's ideas helped to move from protests to encouraging women to speak up against their abusers. As discussed in the section, the small wins of the movement such as growing support on social media and initiated legal actions were not enough to rise in popularity and visibility. The opponents, even though resourceful, did not directly interact with the movement or show a perception of threat and, thus, there was no mobilisation of the countermovement at this stage.

4.3.2 Phase 2: Formation of the countermovement

Allegations against Donald Trump

Similarly to Harvey Weinstein, the former President of The U.S. Donald Trump has been accused of sexual harassment or assault by at least 26 women (Hurley, 2023). The sequence of similar allegations started in 2016, right before the presidential campaign, which he had won (Lee and Looker, 2023). The accusations did not convince Trump's supporters as he denied each victim's claims, despite the leaked audio recording in which Trump

acknowledged being a sexual abuser by implying that rich people can sexually harass women without repercussions (Tambe, 2017, Times, 2020). None of the victims won their cases, as they were either dropped, withdrawn or settled financially (Hylton 1991; Graves, 2016; Desjardins, 2019). Nevertheless, since 2019 Elizabeth Jean Carrol had been trying to get justice for Trump's misconduct and insisted that he gets charged as a sexual abuser (Weiser & Fadulu, 2023). The lawsuit against Trump filed in 2019 has never been concluded and is still 'frozen' without a verdict, however, later Carroll filed a new lawsuit regarding the same charges and only saw success in 2023 (Weiser & Fadulu, 2023).

Nonetheless, in this situation, the speeches and public statements of the accused are principal in understanding the dynamics of the countermovement's emergence through discourse targetting the original movement. In 2016, right before the presidential election, with the surge of victims speaking up about their horrifying experiences with Trump, he began to publicly shame the victims (Diamond & Scott, 2016). As stated in the article, the candidate denied all accusations and went on to blame the opponent's campaign, the Democrats and the victims themselves. Moreover, Trump framed the situation in a way that would shift the responsibility from himself to the whole country by saying that the "lying" victims speaking up are the enemies of the country, "the disrespect for the American flag", and that he and his supporters are going to change this (Beckwith, 2016, para. 38 - 56). According to the *opinion lexicon*, words like "disrespect", "enemy" and "liar" are used to form a negative opinion about the subject (Liu et al., 2005). Thus, such a discourse portrays the perceived threat by Trump and it would also result in deterring other survivors to speak up against their abusers. In 2018, he used Twitter to post about how "peoples lives are being shattered and destroyed by mere allegations" and further diminished the importance of the movement, when several men of his government were facing sexual abuse accusations (Trump, 2018; Landler, 2018).

Trump had already set the beginning of the countermovement with his actions, such as getting the cases dropped or settled, and framing the discourse against victims. However, he did not publicly mention the name of the initial movement yet, even though #MeToo had influenced the expulsion of three members of Congress by then (Cillizza, 2017). In 2018, he also stood by Brett Kavanaugh, who was accused of sexual assault, by keeping the same rhetoric that all victims are liars (Malloy, 2018). Moreover, Kavanaugh was nominated as the Supreme Court justice by Trump and is currently still holding that office. Later in 2018, Trump mentioned #MeToo in a rally by mocking the movement's values and approach (Sonmez, 2018).

Donald Trump can be considered to be one of the #MeToo countermovement founders. The details of legal cases and new allegations could be read on nearly all major news outlets and in the year 2017 #MeToo also gained popularity on Twitter. At this point, the success of #MeToo was both visible and threatening to the powerful elites. Considering Trump's audio recording about the freedom to sexually harass women, he was threatened by the limitations #MeToo would bring to his actions. As discussed, Donald Trump framed the discourse by forming a negative opinion and vaguely implying that the movement and its beliefs are ridiculous and the movement is ruining people's lives. Trump is one of the most resourceful abusers considering his wealth, political status and the wide network built over the years as a businessman. In addition, he is influential on social media as the previously mentioned Twitter post at the time of writing has over 85,900 likes and 20,200 reposts. Even at this stage, counter-mobilisation becomes visible as the accused are teaming up by defending each other and trying to diminish the seriousness of the situation and the mission of #MeToo.

The downfall of Harvey Weinstein and the rise of #MeToo

Despite the case against Harvey Weinstein in 2015 failing to result in a conviction, in 2017 allegations against Weinstein signalled the culmination of the #MeToo movement. In October 2017, journalists of *The New Yorker* published an investigation into Weinstein and his sexual misconduct (Kantor & Twohey, 2017). Another journalist, Ronan Farrow from *NBC News* came forward stating he was pressured by the channel not to publish the investigation concerning Weinstein (The Economist, 2017). Moreover, according to Farrow, with the help of his lawyer David Boies, Weinstein hired intelligence agencies and a private investigator to deter his victims and people investigating him from exposing his sexual abuse acts (Farrow, 2017).

Following the released investigation and rapid growth of accusations against Weinstein and other powerful individuals, actress Alyssa Milano posted on her social media encouraging sexual violence victims to show solidarity by using the hashtag #MeToo (The New York Times, 2023). This was the critical juncture for the #MeToo movement. It gained instant popularity on social media as the tag was used on Twitter more than 500,000 times overnight and the original post at the time of writing has roughly 45,600 likes, all major newspapers were talking about it, and, most importantly, it has reached one of its goals – to present the magnitude of the sexual abuse and harassment issue (Milano, 2017; Jarvey, 2017). Moreover, on the same date, *Women's March* tweet emphasizing the importance of #MeToo gained a

significant amount of attention with over 90,000 likes in less than a month (Women's March, 2017). Bearing in mind that Weinstein had gathered a team responsible for coercing victims into silence and decision-makers to evade negative publicity, I argue that the perpetrator had a high sense of threat regarding his reputation. Moreover, his ability to hire such a team also demonstrates resourcefulness in both finances and the network. Those, who dared to defend the abuser, were high-status figures from the film industry along with North Carolina lieutenant governor Mark Robinson (MacDonald 2017; Armstrong & Hananoki, 2023). Finally, in 2020 Weinstein received a 23-year in prison sentence as a sex offender (Ransom, 2020). The New York Times posted the news on Twitter and the tweet, which includes a reference to #MeToo, received over 35,000 likes (The New York Times, 2020).

Summary of Phase 2: Big successes bring resistance to the movement

In the second phase, the #MeToo name was prominent in most of the articles discussing sexual abuse cases and allegations, which is a huge success for the movement. Moreover, it gained huge visibility on social media. It was obvious by looking at the speeches and actions that the elite are feeling threatened by the movement's ambitions. One of the findings also emphasizes the resourcefulness of the opposition to diminish the importance of the movement and to defend themselves and others in the same boat. At this stage, the beginning of counter-mobilisation became clear as like-minded people exploited their resources to speak up against the movement and the victims that voiced their abusive experiences.

4.3.3 Conclusion of the analysis

Looking back, it is evident that #MeToo lacked recognition and was not threatening enough until roughly 2016 to give rise to a counter-mobilisation. The movement had scored several successes in the beginning, such as the spread of influence and victims speaking up, support on social media, and initiated legal cases against sexual abusers. However, as the theory predicts, success has to be visible to threaten the privileged group. Despite the opposition being resourceful, without the visibility and threat perception by the elite, there can be no mobilisation according to the theoretical causal chain (as demonstrated in [Figure 1](#)). Nonetheless, in the second phase of the movement, bigger steps towards the rising action were taken. At this point, the movement and its achievements were recognisable and appeared in most news articles addressing accusations or legal cases relating to sexual abuse or misconduct in the U.S. The mass accusations against Harvey Weinstein led to the #MeToo hashtag becoming extremely popular on Twitter, whereas Trump's discourse framed #MeToo

and its beliefs as a great threat to individuals like himself, his career and the entire country too.

As the theory predicted and the analysis demonstrated, the opponents had various resources available to resist and discredit the movement and together with #MeToo becoming highly visible and the perception of threat growing among the privileged, the conditions and the underlying mechanism led to the counter-mobilisation.

At the time of writing, the countermovement can be defined as a dispersed group of elite individuals representing various industries, who publicly voice a negative opinion about the movement or exploit their resources to evade or limit the effects of the movement (Bero, 2023; Chrisafis, 2023). Moreover, the elites have influenced a part of the general public to defend the accused (Ellis, 2018). It seems the same rhetorics of lying victims and harmful ideas of the #MeToo movement are followed (Mikulan, 2022; Cabral, 2023). However, due to the global spread of the movement's values, there is a decrease in popular individuals voicing their controversial opinions publicly.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Discussion

According to the theory formulated from the combined findings of Meyer and Staggenborg (1996), Useem and Zald (1987), Corredor (2019) and Flood et al. (2021) regarding the conditions and mechanisms leading to the emergence of a countermovement, the successes of the movement have to be visible, a sense of threat among opposition evident and resources alleviating the subsequent processes of mobilisation of the countermovement accessible. In the analysis, several most significant #MeToo events and their implications were discussed. Tracing the processes of #MeToo growth as a movement was beneficial as it assisted in discovering the way the conditions and mechanisms predicted by theory work and affect the formation of the resistance movement. The analysis of the two phases of the movement has revealed that the publicity and popularity of the movement's achievements and beliefs serve as the necessary condition to see the outcome of interest. Moreover, the resourcefulness of the opponents has helped them to shape a negative image of the movement at least for some, and undeniably reduced the costs of mobilisation due to influence being spread by high-status individuals both on public and social media.

There was no real mobilisation of the elite and no shared struggle to overturn #MeToo until the former President of the U.S started to diminish the validity of the movement and its ideas, together with raising the idea that the movement is poisonous to American society on social media, interviews and rallies. Trump was supportive of other known abusers as they were supporting his presidency as well. The speeches about #MeToo by Trump were influenced by the feeling of threat that the movement poses to his status. Moreover, due to the nature of the countermovement, there was no direct physical mobilisation, however, the dispersed countermovement of the elite structure spread influence by employing similar rhetorics. Overall, the hypothesis that the initial movement led to the emergence of the countermovement due to the original movement's successes being visible and posing a threat to the privileged elite group is supported by the findings of the analysis. Therefore, the combined and applied theories explained the outcome variable well.

5.2 Limitations and further research

Process tracing proved to be beneficial in understanding the dynamics of countermovement emergence and theory-testing allowed to apply and test previous theories. Analysis of major events leading to the formation of the countermovement allowed to discover whether conditions and mechanisms predicted by the theory apply to the #MeToo movement. Nevertheless, one of the flaws is the limited availability of data when the #MeToo movement was still nameless in the U.S. and, thus, it was problematic to demonstrate its direct influence on events that followed after it started to rise. Moreover, there may appear unconscious sample bias, where the selection of cases discussed in the analysis or movement studied may not represent the broader pool of countermovements. To overcome this limitation, future research could employ a larger and more diverse sample of both: movements and analysed events to ensure greater generalizability and multiple researchers for the objectivity of findings. Additionally, due to time constraints, the research focuses on a limited number of cases, potentially overlooking important variations and dynamics. To address this limitation, researchers could consider employing comparative case studies or mixed-methods approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of countermovement emergence. Finally, further research should analyse more loose structure countermovements as they employ different tactics and their signs of mobilisation are harder to distinguish.

By addressing the provided limitations and recommendations, further countermovement emergence to progressive movements research can make significant contributions to the field,

enhancing our understanding of loose-structured countermovements and how to limit their counter-progressive impact on modern politics and society.

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