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ABSTRACT

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The February 15 Worldwide Protests against the War in Iraq: An Empirical Study of Transnational Social Movement Networks

On February 15, 2003, millions of people all over the world took to the streets against an impending war on Iraq, in what seems to have been the biggest anti-war protests in history, on one single day. In recent social movement theory, these protests would be framed as being exemplary for transnational social movement network mobilization, whereby this network would be turning to account a most favourable international mobilization climate. In this paper, we will try to establish how such networks come into being, and to what extent these worldwide networks are also reflected on the micro-sociologic level of the protester. Therefore, we will assess the participant's sharing of ideological values and beliefs, their agreement on the goals of the movement, their degree of radicalism, and their socio-demographic profile.

To map these elements, we will draw on an international survey conducted at the February 15 anti-war demonstrations in eight countries (US, UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, Spain, Switzerland and Italy) (N=5500). Our central claim is that this transnational social movement network is not determined by one international mobilization context, but rather by the different national mobilization contexts, wherein intra-national mobilization takes place, and that these national contexts are primarily determined by the nation's political standpoint towards the war. As such, we question the sheer existence of these so-called transnational movements since these movements are foremost rooted in their specific and diverging national contexts.