

Fraternity, Fitness, and Fascism: Active Clubs in Germany

June 19, 2024

- [Home](#)
- [About CeMAS](#)
- [Team](#)
- [Projects](#)
- [Press Center](#)
- [Blog](#)
- [Publications](#)
- [Jobs](#)
- [Contact](#)

[de](#) [en](#)

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In the past several months, the Active Club Network, an international network of white supremacist groups that emphasize combat sport training and fitness to prevent so-called “white genocide” has established itself in Germany. At least twelve German groups are already active on social media, and the movement has plans to grow rapidly. Take a look to find out the strategy of the Active Club Network and why it has the potential to escalate in the German context.

Active Clubs (ACs) present themselves as a new brand of far-right extremist group, with clear, effective, and comparatively less overtly political messaging that aims to attract as many members as possible. Their tactics draw from and iterate on the strategies of current and historic far-right extremist movements, such as leaderless resistance.

Background on Active Clubs

Active Clubs were founded in their current form in California [in 2021](#) by Robert Rundo, who previously organized with the âRise Above Movement,â a white supremacist fight club. The original strategy of the movement was to covertly build a militia ready to [mobilize to violence](#) to defend the white race without attracting attention from law enforcement. The movement was conceived as an iteration on previous attempts to bring together far-right extremist movements, such as [Unite the Right](#), and a shift away from â[keyboard warriors](#)â toward in-person action. Active Clubs have also been havens for members of banned extremist groups; several members of âAtomwaffen Divisionâ reportedly [joined Active Club Canada](#) after the former was listed as a terrorist entity in Canada.

Rundo established Active Clubs as a brand, which supporters could participate in by creating their own chapter within the AC network. Rundo produced podcasts and essays detailing how to create an Active Club and strategies to promote it. These podcasts recommend drawing in new members with the promise of community before discussing ideology and emphasize the need to produce high quality propaganda to attract good recruits.

The movementâs ideology draws heavily from [neo-fascist and accelerationist circles](#), however, the strategy laid out by Rundo advises against forefronting ideological points in propaganda material. Rundo emphasizes not alienating potential members by starting recruitment efforts with politics, encouraging members to begin by finding common ground with recruits or bringing them to fitness training sessions before talking about ideology. Rundoâs recruitment tactics, both online and offline, attempt to disguise, or at least minimize, overt white supremacy at first glance in order to slowly draw potential members into the AC belief system. While many ACs use far-right symbols in their logos, groups predominantly use images of club members, often in combat sport training, to promote the Active Club brand of white masculinity and fraternal community, or in their words, their mission to âmake fascism fun.â Though all Active Clubs attempt to capitalize on the âBad Boys, Good Habitsâ nationalist culture that defines the movement, not all strictly adhere to Rundoâs initial tactics and include far-right extremist symbols and rhetoric in their public posts on Telegram and other platforms

The AC network is now active across North America and Europe, as well as parts of South America, with more than 120 groups worldwide. Many ACs are affiliated or in close contact with other far-right extremist groups, such as âPatriot Frontâ and the âWhite Lives Matterâ movement in the US. Other far-right extremist movements have also adopted elements of the Active Club strategy, such as the neo-Nazi âNational Socialist Network,â which has chapters throughout Australia. CeMAS identified 126 Active Clubs, 89 of which are active on Telegram across 113 channels, as well as 37 Active Clubs without a Telegram presence:

Statistics about the online presence of Active Clubs: 113 Telegram channels associated with Active Clubs, 89 Active Clubs with an

active Telegram presence, and 37 Active Clubs without Telegram channels.

Groups without a Telegram presence are active on other platforms or have sent photos of their group members, logos, or other information about their group to existing AC Telegram channels. The scale and level of activity of many of these groups has not been determined.

Active Clubs in Germany

The Active Club Network was recently established in Germany, with a national channel, 11 regional chapters on Telegram or TikTok, and two logos of chapters without a social media presence. CeMAS also identified seven Instagram and two TikTok accounts associated with German ACs.

Active Clubs without a Telegram channel were assigned a value of 100 subscribers. For ACs with multiple channels, the channel with the larger number of subscribers was used.

The digital presence of the network expanded rapidly; the national channel garnered more than 1,200 subscribers in the first two weeks. The exact scope of the Active Club network, both within Germany and globally, is difficult to calculate. In Germany, some ACs have created propaganda material with generative AI, making their groups appear larger than they likely are.

A group of about 20 men wearing hoodies and balaclavas, standing in the street, and holding a large flag with the logo of an Active Club. The image has multiple inconsistencies with facial features, lighting, text, and scaling, indicating it was likely AI-generated. AI-generated image sent in an Active Club Telegram channel.

German Active Clubs appear to be following a centralized, organized strategy to build up chapters in the country. The national channel recently posted that the group was moving on from its "Startphase" to a recruiting phase, in which members should advertise the groups to people who are already part of the far-right extremist milieu. The ultimate goal of this plan, the post said, was to create an appealing, counter-culture reputation. Individuals already in far-right groups would join the Active Club movement, creating a subculture that would then appeal to people beyond the far-right scene and inspire them to join Active Clubs.

German Active Clubs are attempting to embed themselves as a broadly far-right campaign within the far-right extremist milieu that is open to any far-right extremist. Their professed aim is to avoid in-fighting and splinter groups, emphasizing that the network is non-partisan and that individuals can join an Active Club while maintaining their membership in "Junge Nationalisten," "III. Weg," "Junge Alternative," or the "Identitarian Movement." This open-arms attitude aligns with Active Clubs' recruitment strategy, namely, to expand their numbers with already radicalized individuals to gain popularity among the mainstream.

So far, their tactics appear to be successful. Active Club channels have reposted propaganda videos promoting regional ACs that include references to other far-right movements, including â III. Weg,â â Junge Nationalistenâ /â Die Heimat,â and â Verteidigenâ Groups (aligned with â Die Heimatâ):

Five men, whose faces are pixelated, doing fitness training outdoors.

Two Active Clubs training together in front of a III. Weg flag. Blur original.

German Active Clubs openly use Nazi symbols in their propaganda materials. Members have posted videos of themselves placing stickers around their region with the phrase â Nazi Kiezâ (Nazi neighborhood) and Black Suns¹:

A sticker with the text â Nazi Kiezâ and a Black Sun being placed on a pole.

One German AC chapter is closely connected with a stalwart of the neo-Nazi scene, Patrick Schr der. Schr der has repeatedly attempted to modernize and popularize far-right extremism and appears to be using Active Clubs as his newest recruitment tactic. The latest issue of â N.S. Heute,â a neo-Nazi magazine, includes an article written by Schr der espousing Active Clubs as a new organizing strategy. Most recently, Schr der represented ACs at the â Junge Nationalistenâ -organized K mpfen f r Europa convention, where he networked with far-right extremist organizations from at least eight European countries

Schr der is affiliated with a far-right extremist media collective based in Bautzen that also promotes Active Clubs. The collective produces racist stickers, banners, and promotional material for a variety of extremist groups and is run by Benjamin Moses, a recently elected [district council member](#) with neo-Nazi â Freie Sachsenâ party.

Potential Threats

The possible impact of Active Clubs in Germany should not be underestimated, particularly given the existing extremist context the AC network is entering. The German far-right extremist milieu provides fertile ground for the rapid growth of Active Clubsâ which German ACs are taking full advantage of. Not only are German Active Clubs tactically recruiting from established groups, but ACs also structure their recruitment efforts around activities that are already popular amongst extremist groups in Germany. Hiking and camping are frequently used as community-building activities by far-right [extremist groups](#) in Germany, with roots that trace back to the nationalist [German youth movements](#) of the interwar era and the Second World War.

Likewise, MMA and combat sport competitions have long been locales for far-right extremist [networking and recruiting](#) in Germany. The so-called â Kampf der Nibelungen,â a martial arts competition that brought

together far-right extremists from across Germany and the rest of Europe, was held in Saxony for six years before it was [banned in 2018](#). German ACs have the potential to tap into this existing network of extremists engaged in martial arts, both for recruits and cross-group cooperation.

Nevertheless, members of groups that espouse an ideology that fosters hate towards marginalized groups and who are trained in combat techniques will likely lead to an uptick of seemingly random violent incidents. Violent attacks perpetrated by members of far-right extremist organizations without the sanction of or planning by the group areprecedented. The recent attack on politician Matthias Ecke and a campaign volunteer was committed by [at least one individual](#) with ties to â Elbland Revolte,â a far-right extremist youth movement affiliated with â Junge Nationalisten.â Members of neo-Nazi combat sports network â [Knockout51](#)â stalked, attacked, and in some cases allegedly attempted to kill, leftist activists, police officers, and protestors. Despite tens of attacks, the motives of the attack [were not recognized](#) or prosecuted as hate-motivated attacks for years. Active Clubs in Germany have already openly conducted coordinated propaganda distribution, such as stickering and banner drops, intended to intimidate immigrants, leftists, and the LGBTQ+ community. It is crucial that security agencies take note of this growing movement within Germany and its strategies to disguise its threat potential.

¹ The Black Sun is a far-right extremist symbol, originally used by the SS. After World War II, the symbol became popular in the neo-Nazi scene and has remained a common element of logos and propaganda across the far-right extremist milieu.

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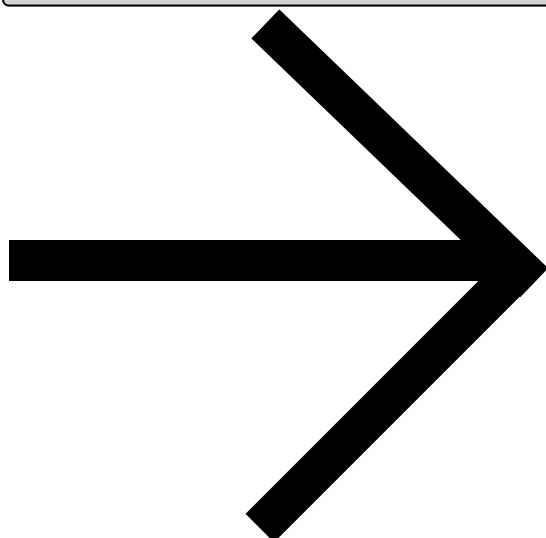
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