

The Active Club Milieu in Sweden

**How secret fight clubs became the
new recruiting tool of the extreme right**

Contents

- 1. Summary.....4**
- 2. Introduction.....6**
- 3. Background8**
- 4. Active Clubs in Sweden.....11**
- 5. A new generation23**
- 6. Violence and criminality.....28**
- 7. Conclusions.....31**
- 8. Notes.....34**

EDITOR: Daniel Poohl

TEXTS: My Vingren

TRANSLATION:

Myra Åhbeck Öhrman

DESIGN: Matilda Flodmark

LAYOUT: Agnes Florin

© Expo & contributing authors

Stockholm, January 2024

Updated July 2024

ISBN: 978-91-986464-5-0

Stiftelsen Expo

Box 12119

102 23 Stockholm

08-400 219 60

info@expo.se

This report is produced by the Expo Foundation, as part of the report series Expo Insight.

For more reports and publications, see www.expo.se

ABOUT EXPO INSIGHT

Expo Insight is the Expo Foundation's report series on trends and phenomena within Swedish and international right-wing extremist and anti-democratic political milieus. Its aim is to dive deeper than traditional journalism and be faster than academic research. Our reports include unique original research, analysis and recommended actions for agencies, civil society and other stakeholders.

Expo Insight is a subscription service and is published three times per year. As a subscriber, you receive exclusive access to the reports and the ability to take part in exclusive webinars.

The report series is aimed primarily at actors who want up-to-date insights and who may find our recommendations useful, such as agencies tasked with preventing violent extremism, local governments, civil society actors and academic institutions.

ABOUT THE EXPO FOUNDATION

The Expo Foundation was founded in 1995 and is religiously and politically unaffiliated. Our vision is a living democracy where racist ideas and organisations lack influence. Through investigative research, public communication, education and monitoring, we build awareness about the threat from racist groups and ideas, and support the public servants, NGOs and anti-racists who are the backbone of democracy so that they may counter the threat more effectively.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

My Vingren is an investigative journalist and speaker. In 2014 she won Guldspaden, the prize of the Swedish Association of Investigative Journalism, for having exposed anonymous online hate. The same year she was nominated for the Swedish Grand Prize of Journalism. She has previously worked for Kalla Fakta, Swedish Radio and Expressen and contributed to several major investigations. In 2023 and 2024 My Vingren has worked as researcher and educator for the Expo Foundation.

1. Summary

- Active Club is a transnational right-wing extremist network of so-called “clubs” that focus on physical training to build their capacity for violence. Since the network was initiated in 2020 by Robert Rundo it has grown rapidly and spread from the US to Canada and to at least 14 countries in Europe, with more than 100 Active Club groups formed world-wide.
- In just a few years, the Active Club milieu has established itself as a part of the Swedish right-wing extremist landscape. The milieu attracts activists from other extremist groups, but also succeeds in recruiting youths with no prior group affiliations. It has found a way to connect with a new generation of men who are attracted by violence and sympathise with right-wing extremist ideas.
- The Active Club milieu positions itself as a counterweight to what it denigrates as passive digital activism. It repackages violent white supremacy into a subculture focusing on training, personal development and health combined with hypermasculinity and the glorification of violence. It operates as a network structure that rewards social relationships, rather than as a hierarchical organisation.
- The Swedish Active Club milieu is inspired by and sees itself as a part of the transnational Active Club network. The milieu includes a group of actors of a higher average age acting as “sponsors”. These have contributed systematically to building the Aktivklubb Sverige (AKS) network, which attracts younger activists. Today there are a number of local Swedish groups that conduct, have conducted or have expressed their intention to conduct activities inspired by the Active Club concept. The milieu has also contributed to the formation of offshoots in Denmark and Norway.
- In 2024 there are upwards of a hundred individuals active in the Swedish Active Club milieu. The propaganda output from their social media accounts has a wide reach and has attracted the interest of numerous additional youths.
- The Swedish Active Club milieu is characterised by a revolutionary ideology and by a high capacity for violence. Almost half of the activists have been convicted of crimes, of which a significant proportion are violent crimes. Our research shows that several activists connected to the Active Clubs have committed

both weapon-related crimes and ideologically motivated violent crimes against minority groups after becoming involved in the milieu. If the Active Club milieu continues to grow there is a high probability that it will lead to an increase in political violence, particularly against LGBTQ+ and religious minorities.

- Aktivklubb Sverige recruits new sympathisers and activists through strategic use of the platforms Telegram and TikTok. TikTok, especially, has been crucial for Aktivklubb Sverige to spark interest among boys and young men.
- The Active Club milieu works strategically to infiltrate existing structures within the established Swedish martial arts scene. There is a stated ambition to gain experience from traditional martial arts clubs to spread within their own local Active Club groups. Martial arts clubs are also an arena for activists to recruit new sympathisers.
- Activists from Aktivklubb Sverige have connections to other criminally active milieus such as soccer ultras and networks with a focus on violence against suspected paedophiles.

2. Introduction

IN RECENT YEARS, the Active Club concept has become the fastest-growing phenomenon in the right-wing extremist milieu in the US and Europe. In 2023, the milieu established itself in earnest in Sweden. This report aims to provide an overview of the Swedish Active Club milieu's emergence, strategy and concept, type of activity, level of activity and international networks. The report also examines who are active in the milieu, to what extent they commit crimes and how they recruit new supporters both online and offline.

Previous research

The Active Club phenomenon is new, and as of yet virtually unexplored. The only comprehensive report to date on the transnational network of extreme right-wing martial arts clubs was published by the think tank Counter Extremism Project in September 2023.¹ In addition, the Center on Terrorism, Extremism, and Counterterrorism at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies² and the American organisation Anti-Defamation League (ADL) have published shorter profiles on Active Club.³ In December, the Global Network on Extremism & Technology published an analysis of the role of women in Active Club.⁴

When it comes to the Swedish Active Club milieu, there is no research, reports or in-depth review on the subject. This report is therefore the first review of how the phenomenon manifests in Sweden. Through its unique compilation of data linked to the individuals we have been able to identify as active in the milieu, the report also provides a unique insight into age structures, criminal records and previous political backgrounds. No such data has been published in any previous report on the subject, in Sweden or internationally. From this perspective, the report provides the most comprehensive analysis to date of what the Active Club milieu looks like at the level of the individual. We hope that it will provide clues and suggestions for further research on the subject.

Method

The Expo Foundation's methods are those of investigative journalism. Our data on individuals has been collected and verified using traditional journalistic methods and sources, such as obtaining preliminary investigations and police incident reports, other public documents and information, reviews of materials produced by the Active Club milieu itself (such as, for example, podcasts, articles, videos and social media posts) and monitoring public meetings. The data has been supplemented by reviewing

indictments and convictions in order to examine individuals' links to crime. Information on involvement in other groups within the Swedish extreme right is also available for some individuals. That data has been produced using the same methods.

In this report, we account for the number of activities carried out within the Active Club milieu during the period from January to December 2023. The data is produced using the same method as in Expo's annual compilation of activities within the white supremacist milieu. Documentation of activities is mainly based on what the Active Club milieu itself has chosen to publicize. In a few cases, we have been able to confirm that activities have taken place that the groups in the milieu have not publicized. The documented material is quantified using several variables, such as time, county, municipality, locality, type of activity, and so on. The activities presented in this report are sorted into the following categories:

Combat training

Organised forms of physical or close-quarters combat training under the premise that violence is an inevitable part of political struggle.

Social activities

Organised gatherings mainly to build or strengthen community around an actor.

Propaganda dissemination

Occasions when actors systematically, over a significant stretch of time and in one or more specific areas, spread physical propaganda such as posters, stickers, banners or similar in public spaces.

The use of activity data has its inherent limitations. There are unrecorded activities that we fail to document. The choice of any particular method for documenting and coding activities also entails the risk that the capacities of a given actor may be over- or under-estimated. Nevertheless, our assessment is that the data provides a relevant indicator of the focus and the level of mobilisation of the milieu.

3. Background

CHARLOTTESVILLE, 2017. The American far right has gathered for a rally under the slogan ‘Unite the Right’. Among the activists are athletic men with nazi tattoos, their hands wrapped like boxers and their faces hidden by skull masks. They are activists from the nazi organization Rise Above Movement (RAM) preparing to attack anti-Trump protesters. One of the co-founders of the organisation is Robert Rundo, a then 27-year-old rightwing extremist, previously imprisoned for stabbing a man of Latin American background. In a video clip from the event he is seen attacking a protester and repeatedly hitting a police officer in the head.

This wasn’t the first time RAM had targeted human rights activists or anti-racist demonstrations. On the contrary, violently attacking ideological enemies was part of Rundo’s strategy when he founded the movement in 2017. In that spirit, RAM had established ties with the Hammerskins, an international network of nazi skinheads whose members have been implicated in at least nine murders in four U.S. states.

In the aftermath of the violence in Charlottesville, the judicial pressure on Rundo and RAM increased. Several activists were sentenced to long prison terms after significant efforts from law enforcement. In 2019, Robert Rundo fled the United States for Europe to avoid the legal consequences of the riots.

In Europe, Rundo founded a new movement. It was to be as violent as RAM, but able to operate under the radar of the legal system. Or as Rundo himself described it: ‘hiding in plain sight’.

Revolutionary Mini-Militias

In late 2020 Rundo launched his new concept: Active Club. Instead of a traditional hierarchical organisation with a central leadership, he wanted smaller, decentralised groups. He was inspired by the idea of leaderless resistance,⁵ where local, independent cells engage in the same type of activism, pursue similar goals and create a united front — without an official leader. In a podcast, Rundo likens the tactic to militias during the early American Revolution, where a number of independent groups in different states acted in concert.⁶

With this form of organisation there are no leaders who can be held responsible for the actions and possible crimes committed by the smaller groups, nor does the movement depend on a leader to survive. In early January 2021, Rundo and Denis Kapustin — also known as Denis Nikitin, a Russian-German nazi and founder of the White Rex clothing brand — started recording the Active Club Podcast together. The two men focused on encouraging young men to leave behind “keyboard warfare” and instead get involved in or start up their own Active Club groups.

White Nationalism 3.0

In contrast to the openly aggressive RAM, Rundo wanted the new concept to be a more inviting alternative. Activists were asked to avoid threatening behaviour and overt nazi symbols, and should preferably have children and an established role in society. Outwardly, Active Club was to be perceived as a positive force with a focus on health and community. Rundo sought to repackage right-wing extremism and make it more appealing by linking the movement to martial arts, self-development and hypermasculinity.

The followers were urged to focus on fraternity, community, health and self-defence when establishing new contacts. Only later, when members have become more rooted in the club, should nazi ideas be introduced. Ultimately, the goal was to train for future violence. Rundo encourages his followers to target boxing and MMA tournaments, gyms and motocross tracks for recruitment. Recruitment has also taken place outside schools.

According to Rundo, the Active Club concept will spearhead what he calls White Nationalism 3.0 – where 1.0 is the racist skinhead culture that created groups like RAM and 2.0 is the alt-right: right-wing extremism dressed up in a suit and tie.

Active Club embraces neo-fascist and accelerationist ideas, with the promotion of violence as a key theme in its communication and propaganda. In order to prevent ideological schisms, Active Club comes together under the slogan “White Unite”. Active Club does not demand exclusivity, as activists are allowed to join other organisations while participating in the local group’s training and meetings.

In Sweden, however, Active Clubs operate somewhat differently. In 2023, Aktivklubb Sverige’s leaders demanded that activists not train together with the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM), something which has caused bad blood with the NRM and made it more difficult for the clubs to recruit right-wing extremists who live far away from the nearest group. The clubs’ rigid line and the uneasy relationship with the Nordic Resistance Movement are mainly due to the fact that several leaders in the milieu have a background in the NRM.

A contingency force

Even though Active Club describes itself in recruitment and public communication merely as independent nationalists training together, the network of local groups is preparing for a militant uprising. Internally, Active Club in the U.S. calls itself a militia, which can be mobilised for orchestrated violence if necessary. The overarching goal is to create a contingency force of well-trained and capable individuals with ties to violent right-wing extremism or nazism that can be deployed when the need for coordinated violence on a larger scale arises.

Preparing for such future actions, for example the storming of government buildings, doesn’t only require an increased capacity for violence, but also being able to solve logistical difficulties

such as travel, accommodation, finances and internal communication. These are “all skills that you learn within the Active Club on a very local level, and when that time comes for a mass movement — right there you got a solid base that’s all over”, Rundo says in his podcast.⁷

Those who get involved in a local Active Club group will not only learn how to fight, they will also learn coordination, planning, leadership and recruitment.

In the less than four years that the concept has existed, the movement has grown rapidly. It has spread from the United States to Canada and at least 14 countries in Europe. In total, over 100 Active Clubs have been formed around the world since the end of 2020.⁸

4. Active Clubs in Sweden

The Actors

IN THE SUMMER of 2023, Aktivklubb Sverige (“Active Club Sweden”) was officially announced. However, Expo’s research shows that the phenomenon has a longer history in the country.

The groups that today call themselves Active Clubs have fully adopted Robert Rundo’s concept, but have also been supported and inspired by forerunners who have organized in the spirit of Rundo in recent years.

To understand the Swedish Active Club milieu, we have therefore chosen to categorize the actors in two overlapping groups: the “sponsors” and the official Aktivklubb Sverige with its network of local groups. Together, they form what we in this report refer to as the Active Club milieu. In addition to these, on the periphery, there are clusters of individuals in different parts of Sweden who have expressed an interest in joining or starting their own Active Clubs but who have not yet shown any significant activity.

The Sponsors

In addition to Aktivklubb Sverige, there are four groups influenced by Rundo’s ideas and strategy. Group membership is fluid, and many activists are also involved in other organisations. These groups have played an essential role in building the Active Club scene in the Nordic countries, not least by leveraging the experience of leading activists who have been involved in organized right-wing extremism for many years.

Gym XIV, which is the most active group among the four, has served as a hub for the emergence of the AKS network. It was after Gym XIV’s conference, Kontrakultur, in February 2023 that Aktivklubb Hälsingland was founded, Sweden’s first official Active Club. Gym XIV has helped disseminate organizational know-how, built a country-wide community and educated a new generation of activists by means of lectures, conferences, boot camps, illegal martial arts fights, and not least with the help of its Telegram propaganda channel.

Gym XIV

The organisation Gym XIV was started in mid-2022 as a gym for right-wing extremists in Värmland County. From the start, the intention was that it would be more than a local gym. The initiators wanted to create a meeting place for a network of white supremacist groups around the country. Their ambition is to “be a school for a new kind of man”.⁹ The founder of the organisation has extensive experience from involvement with the white supremacist groups Det Fria Sverige and Svenskarnas Parti.

Tvåsaxe

Tvåsaxe is a nazi network formed in 2022, where individuals with a background in the 1990s neo-nazi skinhead movement are influential. The group focuses on social events, outdoor activities and training in the Sjuhärad region around Borås. Tvåsaxe uses nazi slogans and symbols in its propaganda, and members have posed with weapons in pictures shared on its social media channels.

Vigridsvallen

Under the slogan “Become strong, become dangerous, build community”, Vigridsvallen offers martial arts, bodybuilding and chess tournaments at a gym in Gothenburg. Several of the organisers have a background in the Nordic Resistance Movement and Det Fria Sverige. Since 2021, Vigridsvallen has had a gym, an office space and a café. Former NRM member Anton Thulin, convicted of bombings in Gothenburg 2017 after weapons training in Russia and classified as a terrorist by the United States in 2022, has been part of the circle tied to Vigridsvallen in recent years.

Granskogsfolket

Granskogsfolket was started in the summer of 2022 under the slogan “Join your local tribe. Stop being a loner and feel the power of brotherhood!”. The group is characterised by eco-fascist ideas and focuses on wilderness activities, survival techniques and prepping. Granskogsfolket consists mainly of people who are also organised in the Active Clubs and should therefore be considered a side project of these, rather than an independent organisation.

Aktivklubb Sverige

On Sweden’s National Day 2023, some twenty young men climbed atop the mouth of the Fredhäll Tunnel in Stockholm. Carrying Swedish flags, burning flares and wearing t-shirts that read “Drug-free youth” and “Active Club”, the men lined up over the highway, unfurling a banner that read “Congratulations Sweden”. Aktivklubb Sverige was now officially founded.

Aktivklubb Sverige acts as an umbrella organisation that includes the local clubs around the country. Internationally this kind of national superstructure is unusual, as for the most part Active Club consists of local groups only. The fact that Sweden has established a national group shows a high level of ambition, which increases the likelihood that the Active Club network will be better organised, both in terms of recruiting new activists and access to facilities.

- **Aktivklubb Hälsingland** Sweden’s first official Active Club. The club was formed in January 2023 in connection to Gym XIV’s network conference Kontrakultur. Aktivklubb Hälsingland is one of the most active groups, both in terms of number of participants and the amount of activities carried out.

- **White Boys Stockholm** Formed after a loose-knit network organised an illegal martial arts tournament under the name “White Boys Fight Club” in the autumn of 2020. In the summer of 2023, White Boys Stockholm joined Aktivklubb Sverige and is today one of the most active groups in the milieu. The group has attacked local Pride celebrations and has links to the ultras milieu. In a police check of several supporters in the fall of 2023, one of them was found to be armed with a knife and pepper spray in a public space.

The following groups started up in 2023, but as they have not shown any significant documented activity in 2024 they are considered presently inactive.

- **Aktivklubb Skåne** Founded in the summer of 2023. The club consists of a small group of activists that meets regularly to work out at a commercial gym in Lund. In connection with the Pride celebration in Lund 2023, Aktivklubb Skåne stole rainbow flags from the public swimming pool Högevallsbadet. The group closely collaborates with Aktivklubb Småland, with whom they have practised close combat and carried out political actions.
- **Aktivklubb Småland** Active in Växjö and Jönköping. A subgroup has been formed in Kalmar, “Kalmar Offender”.⁹ Several of the activists have a long background in the right-wing extremist milieu. During the summer of 2023, the group attacked several Pride celebrations. The club works closely with Aktivklubb Skåne.
- **Aktivklubb Södermanland** Operating in Eskilstuna. The group was planned for as early as January 2023, when a Telegram channel for it was created. Although the group shares little information on social media about its activities, Aktivklubb Södermanland regularly holds training sessions in Mälardalen.
- **Aktivklubb Östergötland** Aktivklubb Östergötland started after an unusually high demand in social media for a local group in Linköping, where it is based. A smaller group has met to train in the area. During the summer of 2023, followers arranged sparring sessions in Norrköping.

Hangaround groups

Through both closed and open sources we have been able to identify another eight groupuscules. These groups lack their own channels or social media accounts. For this reason, we have chosen not to list them as official groups in this compilation. They are instead to be considered as a form of hangaround groups. The analysis is based on Morgan Moon of the Center on Extremism at the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and her review of the international Active Club milieu. Moon compares the loosely linked Active Clubs without channels of their own with the motorcycle club community’s tradition of hangaround clubs.¹¹

Activists encourage each other to set up additional local groups. They help each other recruit, set up member chats and social media accounts, and share knowledge on how to avoid being identified by journalists and anti-fascists.

A new Active Club is often started by three to four people. There are a few examples of local initiatives started by groups of friends where no one has a previously documented background in the right-wing extremist milieu. Not all groups necessarily become part of the official AKS network, either — some continue to operate independently or disband. In October, for example, a 14-year-old boy commented on an official TikTok account for Aktivklubb Sverige. He tagged three friends his age who live in the same town and play on the same soccer team. The group seems to have started training together in the spirit of Active Club shortly afterwards, but for reasons that are unclear they have yet to establish an official club.

In 2023 such hangaround groups were noted in Borås, Göteborg, Uppsala, Kalmar, Västerås, Blekinge, Halland and Dalarna. After first emerging, they have not shown any steady activity that we have been able to document. We have however noted that a few individuals from these areas have participated in national Active Club gatherings.

Potential clubs

Following the launch of Aktivklubb Sverige, there was an interest in starting up additional local Active Clubs. Expo noted requests from at least two, but usually more, independent individuals in 13 different locations. The inquiries were mainly made in comments sections on social media that Expo had access to, which means that there are likely unrecorded cases and that the interest was in fact even greater. The most notable demand was in Karlstad, where 14 individuals showed interest in joining. However, this interest has not yet led to any substantial documented activities in any of the locations.

Strategy and ideas

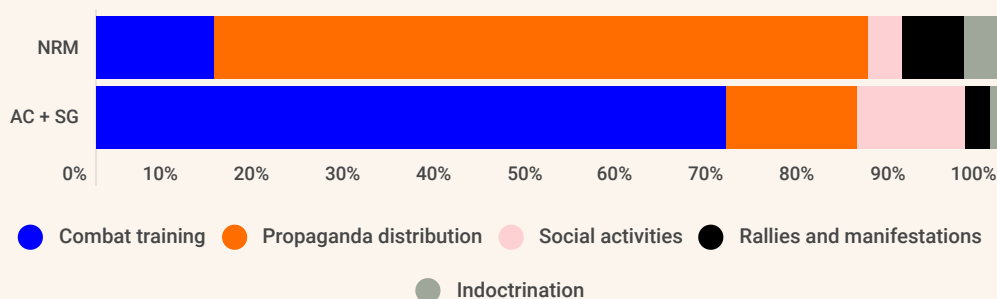
IN A RELATIVELY short time, the Aktivklubb Sverige network has managed to establish itself as a new option within the Swedish far right. “It’s time to stop counting members and start counting warriors”, the club declared on social media, directing criticism at the organisations Nordic Resistance Movement, Det Fria Sverige and Alternativ för Sverige.¹² Other actors in the right-wing extremist milieu are accused of being preoccupied with propaganda and overly focused on party politics, or as AKS themselves put it: “In the midst of all the advocacy and playing at being a political party, they forgot the most essential thing. To raise a youth of steel.”¹³

The Aktivklubb Sverige network says it wants to act as a counterweight to digital activism, where people passively consume podcasts, chat and share memes. Putting on your workout clothes, getting away from the computer and going to the gym with your friends is described as the first step in forming a resistance movement.

In this regard, their concept is not that dissimilar to other right-wing extremist groups. Although they have become fewer since the 2022 election, Alternativ för Sverige has activists who attend meetings or distribute flyers with party information. Det Fria Sverige regularly organises meetings and gatherings and has an activity that is specifically based around activism in the company of like-minded people. The Nordic Resistance Movement also has a strong focus on street activism and collective training. What makes the Active Club milieu stand out is its straightforward concept, which offers freedom from some of the duties and obligations that are a feature of the more traditional groups, such as handing out flyers or rallying in town squares.

Graph 4.1

Ratio of types of activities carried out in Sweden in 2023 by the NRM and Active Clubs + “Sponsors”



Personal development

In an Active Club, you focus on your personal development as part of a broader political struggle. Becoming an activist is meant to be easy, all you need to do is to transform yourself and socialise with like-minded people. “There are many of us out there. We are organising. We are an army. We are soldiers for an idea”, writes Gym XIV.¹⁴

The Active Club community has lofty ambitions. Through bodybuilding, MMA (mixed martial arts) and other martial arts, they are building not just muscle but a resistance movement that promises to ultimately secure the future of white people. The movement offers young men a sense of motivation and purpose, in an environment of positive reinforcement and support. At the same time, it fosters a culture where confrontations and violence are not only legitimate, but necessary.

Gym XIV, which has taken on the role of ideological guide in the Swedish milieu, posts daily ideological reflections and calls for self-improvement, content that is then disseminated both in national and international Active Club channels. The message is simple: The modern world is falling apart as a result of liberalism, immigration and a global Jewish elite actively seeking the destruction of whites and European culture. The international Active Club network is a global community for digital activism and local organising.

The Active Club milieu repackages ideological race-based violence into a subculture focused on exercise and health. It

operates as a network structure that rewards social relationships, rather than as a hierarchical organisation. It seems to attract a new generation of young men.

Building a capacity for violence in the shadows

So what is the purpose of the Active Clubs? The founder of Gym XIV says in a podcast that the goal of such groupings is to “create a couple of thousand beefy men” who, if necessary, will “take charge of things”, and in parallel build a number of stable local networks that will benefit from each other in a future scenario.¹⁵ This is also how other actors in the right-wing extremist milieu have perceived the role of Active Clubs. In a closed group chat that Expo has accessed, Carl Lundström, a multi-millionaire who finances a number of far-right projects and groups, offers his view of martial arts gyms. Lundström explains that he believes it is important to build alliances with conspiracist groups. In that partnership, the extreme-right must have something to offer in return. Lundström writes:

*That’s where the Active Clubs come in. We should be able to offer physical protection /.../ to actors we want to work with.*¹⁶

Unlike many other extreme right-wing groups, Active Clubs do not want to show who they are or what kind of political activism they engage in. On social media, participants’ faces and tattoos are often masked to reduce the risk of them being identified. By acting covertly, they want to reduce the risk of being excluded from martial arts organisations, being targeted by anti-fascists or facing other personal consequences. “The channel is just a channel on Telegram. And that’s not why we exist. The real cool stuff happens in real life”, writes Gym XIV at the end of March 2023.¹⁷ In this way, the milieu builds a mystique around its activities that helps increase the appeal to young sympathisers.

Clothing and aesthetics

A central feature of the Active Club milieu’s approach is to build an aesthetically pleasing brand, with a well thought-out and appealing visual identity. This is in keeping with Robert Rundo’s strategy: Alongside the launch of the Active Club network, Rundo started building a brand empire that would allow him to raise funds for his activities abroad, while unifying the network around a uniform aesthetic. In Sweden, the online store Asgard brand has been operating for a couple of years, run by a seasoned nazi activist born in 1986. His shop sells workout clothes and shirts, and claims to want to encourage physical and mental self-improvement among nationalists in line with the Active Club philosophy.¹⁸ He previously sold Rob Rundo’s German-Russian colleague Denis Nikitin’s White Rex clothing brand to Swedish far-right consumers.

The man behind the online store is closely connected to the

Estonian citizen born in 2001 who was deported from Sweden on grounds of national security in early 2021. Together they organised a manifestation in Stockholm in August 2020. The brand's Telegram channel regularly shares pictures, videos and propaganda from Gym XIV, Aktivklubb Sverige and Tvåsaxe. Gym XIV also regularly advertises for the brand on its own Telegram account.

Infiltration of the MMA scene and martial arts clubs

Although the activities of the Active Club milieu are mainly based on supporters meeting to train together, their activists are encouraged to simultaneously get training in established martial arts environments. Martial arts are considered ideal because they require strength, fitness, speed and strategic thinking. Swedish far-right influencer “The Golden One” writes in a post about Active Club that it is important to train both with ideologically like-minded people and at a regular MMA club.

“The philosophy is beautiful in its simplicity: get good training and experience in the regular clubs — then share that experience when you train with your guys”, he writes in a mid-November post, adding that it's also very rewarding to share your knowledge with younger guys on your own team.¹⁹

Through continued training in established martial arts clubs, activists in the Active Club milieu build skills for both their local and national networks. Since the supporters are not speaking openly about their involvement, martial arts groups risk unwittingly training white supremacists groups of men who bring the skills they are taught with them back to extremist gyms and onto the streets.

Hooliganism

The Active Club network is also forging a relationship with the ultras scene, where Active Clubs garner attention and admiration. In an international ultras chat group, a series of links to Active Clubs around Europe were shared during the summer of 2023, including a link to Aktivklubb Sverige. Followers were urged to join during the summer soccer offseason. It was described as “a perfect opportunity to join your brothers in the fight for our Europe”.²⁰

These are not the first links to have emerged between Swedish ultras and Active Club. White Boys, formerly a loose-knit network focusing on martial arts and violence, and now a local Active Club, met the Stockholm-based ultras group Djurgårdens Yngsta in a pitched battle as early as 2021. According to Expo sources, the ultras group Västerås Rudeboys met a group calling itself Anonymous Resistance in October 2023. Among the anonymous, black-clad ultras you can spot the logo for Will2Rise, which is Robert Rundo's clothing brand. Some comments on video from the event that was uploaded to ultras groups on social media, were cheering on “Aktivklubb”.

A prominent figurehead in Aktivklubb Sverige and Active Club Estonia has encouraged like-minded people to seek out spaces such as illegal fight clubs and the ultras scene, milieus where violence can be practised to develop both psyche and physique. As early as the end of 2020, the then 20-year-old man posted on social media to elaborate on his views on political violence.

I myself fight to become more dangerous, mentally stronger, harder to kill, etc. In that sense, football has been extremely rewarding for my personal development. So if you get the chance, I think it's worth setting yourself up and testing yourself in the gravel pit²¹

The ultras' culture of glorification of violence and hypermasculine ideals is easy to combine with the right-wing extremist message about the importance of preparing for an impending race war. A number of those identified in the Active Club milieu have a background as ultras. According to Expo sources, activists from the Active Club milieu have also trained at a gym linked to the major Stockholm team Hammarby's ultras group. They were reportedly thrown out of the gym on the first occasion, which suggests that the mixing of traditionally politically independent Swedish ultras groups and Active Clubs is controversial.

Links to paedophile hunting

In 2023, several independent vigilante groups were formed, consisting of young boys who threatened and assaulted alleged paedophiles. The acts were filmed and then shared on social media. Expo has identified several individuals who have applied to join Aktivklubb Sverige and then instead, or simultaneously, become involved in this type of vigilante group. One individual is a member of Aktivklubb and at the same time leader of an independent vigilante group. The group not only incites violence against child abusers but also against the LGBTQ+ community, especially transgender people. The same individual has used the group's internal channels to recruit for Active Club.

Active Club activity

FROM JANUARY TO December 2023, Expo has been able to confirm that the Active Club milieu as a whole carried out 145 activities. The vast majority, 86 percent, were combat training activities. Aktivklubb Sverige groups were involved in a total of 110 activities. 80 of those were carried out by the groups on their own, i.e. without collaboration with any of the groups we refer to as sponsors. Most of Aktivklubb Sverige's activities, 54 of them, can be classified as combat training, i.e. organised forms of physical training or close-quarters combat training under the premise that it is necessary to use violence as part of the political struggle.

19 activities consisted of the groups disseminating physical propaganda such as posters, stickers or banners in public spaces. Seven activities consisted of social activities, mostly gatherings to drink beer. The activities also included isolated cases of ideological education in the form of film screenings.

Staying under the radar is part of the Active Club strategy. At the same time, the groups want to convey an image of an active, powerful and vital organisation. We have therefore investigated how many actually participate in the activities. In the case of Aktivklubb Sverige, 35 of the activities had three or more participants. On 19 occasions, five or more people participated. In six of the activities, more than ten people were present.

Aside from a celebration of Hitler's birthday, the organised meetings with many participants have mainly involved combat training activities where supporters meet to train and exercise violence. The activity that involved the most people was the banner drop in Stockholm in connection with the launch of Aktivklubb Sverige, in which twenty people took part.

Access to gyms and martial arts facilities

During 2023, the Active Club network has had access to several gyms and training clubs, where young activists have regularly met to train with other members. 46 out of the 145 identified activities have been carried out in premises owned or rented by actors within the network. Aktivklubb Hälsingland has had its own facilities, and Gym XIV in Deje (Värmland County) has also been a central meeting place. In addition, several individual supporters have built home gyms for working out in. Most common, however, has been to use municipal and commercial gyms for their regular activities.

In late August, an estimated ten activists from Aktivklubb Skåne and Aktivklubb Småland met in a municipal wrestling room housed in a Växjö public bath house to practise close-quarters combat together. The person who booked the venue is one of the most driven actors in the Aktivklubb Sverige network. He had a pending request for additional training in the same hall for early October, which the municipality cancelled after they discovered that violent right-wing extremists were behind the booking.²²

Anti-Pride activism

The Activist Club network portrays the celebration of Pride as proof of the decadence and decay of modern society. In propaganda spread across Telegram and other social media, this narrative is used to legitimise threats, hatred and violence directed at LGTBQ+ people.²³ At the end of August, a video was posted in which a number of supporters hang up posters with anti-Pride messages. In the same video, Pride flags are stolen from municipal flagpoles. The flags are then placed on the ground in a forest grove, where two masked men symbolically set them on fire in front of Aktivklubb Skåne's official banner reading "Defend

Skåne”. The video was posted on Telegram with the text “Gay month in Skåne = CANCELLED”.²⁴ The day before Wermland Pride, two activists took down the municipality’s rainbow flag.²⁵ This action was also filmed and posted on Telegram and TikTok.

Training camps and illegal martial arts matches

One way to gather and unite the Active Club community is to organise training camps and illegal martial arts matches. During the year, Gym XIV organised at least two major so-called boot-camps, i. e. training camps to which the group invited people who were already supporters of the Active Club concept, but also others who they believed could benefit the movement. When Gym XIV organised an arm wrestling competition in the summer of 2022, representatives of the organisation claimed that some attendants usually compete on a national level.²⁶

In the spring of 2023, Gym XIV organised several events that brought together young activists from all over the country. At the end of March, a training weekend was organised where at least 14 people gathered to work out, network and attend lectures with nazi and fascist content. The weekend ended with an illegal martial arts fight. A similar gathering with at least 24 participants was organised in September. The training and fights were edited into propaganda material that was shared on Telegram, TikTok and other social media as part of the recruitment for Aktivklubb Sverige.

Following this, an investigation into illegal martial arts activities was initiated by the Örebro County Administrative Board. The investigation was later dropped for lacking sufficient evidence.²⁷ Six months later, after Gym XIV’s second boot camp also had ended with an outdoor martial arts match, a new preliminary investigation was opened. This time the fight was filmed by a neighbour, from a distance. The video shows two men fighting in an organised martial arts match, with one of Gym XIV’s profiles acting as referee. Cheers are heard from the twenty or so men, women and children watching. At the time of writing, the investigation is still ongoing.

In October 2023, another unlicensed martial arts match was arranged. This time somewhere around Borås, by the independent network Tvåsaxe which is part of the Active Club milieu. Under the title Sjuhäradskampen, 18 activists from Active Clubs, including Aktivklubb Småland and Hälsingland as well as White Boys Stockholm, faced off in a violent MMA match where Gym XIV acted as a referee.

National meetups

Another reason for bringing the local groups together for national meetings is to train the activists of the Active Club milieu to be mobile and responsive, in line with Robert Rundo’s vision for a “contingency force”. Expo has been able to verify 19 large-scale activities carried out within the Active Club milieu, ten of which

were organised by the Aktivklubb Sverige groups themselves. In November, at least 17 supporters came to the Aktivklubb Hälsingland facilities to, among other things, listen to music.

The Active Club community has also participated in political manifestations. On November 30th, 2023, the anniversary of the death of Charles XII of Sweden was commemorated by several right-wing extremists, including Aktivklubb Sverige. Twenty-three black-clad and masked supporters carrying flares marched through the streets of Stockholm, and gathered around the statue of Charles XII in Kungsträdgården. Aktivklubb Sverige later posted a picture of them posing with a flag stolen from a syndicalist youth association.

International connections

IN A RELATIVELY short period of time, Active Club has become an international community of violent white supremacists, supporting and assisting each other in spreading propaganda to build an ever-wider network. According to researchers who have studied Active Club, there are Telegram channels with leading activists from several, perhaps even all, of the countries where Active Clubs exist.²⁸ Long-term strategies and goals are discussed there. Members of Active Clubs meet in person at events such as larger demonstrations, in-house training weekends or competitions. Groups also share their materials with each other on social media, for inspiration and support.

In this interplay, the Swedish Active Club milieu plays an important role. Besides being closely linked to several international networks and groups, Swedes have also played key roles in the formation of Active Club branches in other countries. Both Aktivklubb Sverige and Gym XIV, which acts as a hub for the Active Club milieu in Sweden, are viewed as important actors internationally. Active Clubs in Lithuania, Estonia and the US describe the Swedes as brothers and friends. Propaganda material from Sweden is regularly disseminated in Active Club's official and international Telegram channels and receives appreciation on TikTok.²⁹ Aktivklubb Sverige, the most prominent local groups in Sweden and Gym XIV, have many times more followers on social media than most of their international counterparts (with Active Club France being a notable exception).

An international digital network

Aktivklubb Sverige is part of several international networks that aim to bring Active Clubs in different parts of the world closer together. One of those is The Nordic Network, an initiative to increase collaboration between clubs in the Baltic States, the Nordic countries, Poland and northern Germany. They are also part of The Baltic Sea Community, a partnership between clubs from Germany, Russia, Latvia, Poland, Belarus and Russia.

Social media posts from the Swedish Active Club milieu are also widely shared in unofficial and official Active Club channels. The posts often show illegal martial arts matches between different clubs in Sweden and clips from training weekends at Gym XIV and Aktivklubb Hälsingland. The posts, consisting of professionally produced content, are shared with high levels of interaction from activists across Europe and North America, but also other far-right groups such as those supporting the Azov Battalion in Ukraine. The Swedish engagement inspires other groups. In a clip from a training weekend shared on a major international Telegram channel, Sturm Trooper14 comments: “Wish we had this in Illinois, Hail Victory brothers!”³⁰

Real-life contacts

Alongside the frequent digital interactions between Active Club groups, the international network is also being expanded through physical meetings where activists from Sweden participate. On November 11th, 2023, the official Telegram account of Aktivklubb Sverige joined a closed group on Telegram that coordinated far-right and nazi actors who participated in the independence march in Warsaw on the same day. Shortly after six in the morning, Aktivklubb Sverige posted a request to get in touch with organisers of the far right bloc to obtain the permission to fly a flag during the demonstration. One of the organisers replied that this would be doable.³¹

Pictures and video material from the march show a 22-year-old activist from Skåne, who is a driving force behind Active Club Denmark. He poses with their flag alongside the violent Active Club France, Active Club Netherlands and a number of other violent and fascist groups such as the Italian CasaPound.³² Afterwards, the organisers stated that the march was an important platform for strengthening ties between nationalist groups from different countries.³³

The Swedish Active Club milieu has also played a key role in the creation of clubs in other countries. When Active Club Norway was launched on August 6th, 2023, they thanked their Swedish contacts for their support.³⁴ The Norwegian branch started its Telegram channel only a few days after a so-called bootcamp was held in Deje, Värmland County, where Norwegian citizens participated. The key individual in Active Club Estonia previously lived in Sweden, where he played an important role in spreading the ideas and strategies of Robert Rundo in Sweden. Active Club Denmark, too, has connections to Sweden, particularly in the form of a 22-year-old who was first involved in Aktivklubb Skåne, before becoming a driving force behind the creation of the Danish branch.

5. A new generation

IT IS DIFFICULT to discern who exactly are involved in the Active Club milieu. It is a new and rapidly evolving network, with names of local groups regularly changing and new constellations emerging. As a rule, activists try to remain anonymous. There is also considerable overlap and collaboration between Aktivklubb Sverige and the rest of the broader Active Club milieu. In total, Expo has identified 77 individuals who have participated in the broader milieu during 2023.

The Sponsors

Out of these 77, just over half (46 people) are involved in the group we have labelled as sponsors, actors such as Gym XIV, Tvåaxe and Vigridsvallen. This group of individuals is older, with an average age of 38 and a median of 34.

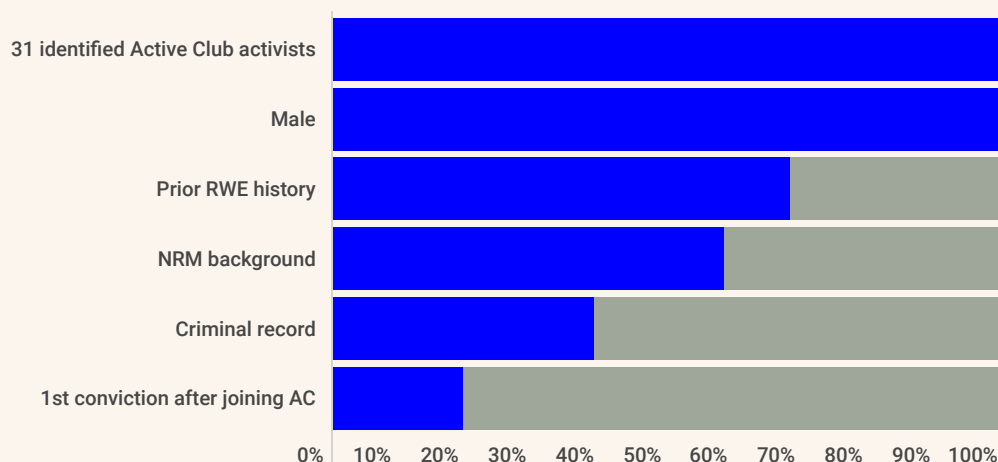
38 of these 46 people have a history in other radical right-wing or nazi groups. Four have a background in the Sweden Democrats party, three in the party Alternativ för Sverige, 13 have been involved in Det Fria Sverige and at least 20 in the Nordic Resistance Movement. In addition, 13 of the activists have been involved in other, independent groups, often hopping between several different ones. Many of the prominent individuals have been expelled from these groups, which indicates that this network should primarily be understood as a regrouping within the right-wing extremist milieu.

Aktivklubb Sverige

We have identified 31 individuals who can be linked to the distinct network of Aktivklubb Sverige and its local groups. They are people who during 2023 trained, participated in activism, propaganda dissemination or otherwise represented Aktivklubb Sverige. In addition to these 31 individuals, there are more than ten individuals who have not yet been identified. These include individuals who have posed for propaganda photos, participated in events and shared exclusive material on social media. Of the individuals identified in Aktivklubb Sverige, the average age is 22 and the median age is 21. The vast majority are in their early 20s and the youngest person identified is 19.

Graph 5.1

Statistics on identified individuals in the Swedish Active Clubs in 2023



With a few exceptions, there is no female presence in the Active Club milieu in Sweden. We have identified three women who have attended individual events and manifestations, all of whom are related to men in the community.

In 2023, the Swedish Active Club milieu published and shared a total of 2 331 photos and videos on Telegram. Women appear in less than 1.5 percent of these. The few images where women are visible are mainly propaganda images with the underlying message that activists will attract beautiful women. In October 2023, for example, a picture was posted on Gym XIV's Telegram channel of a woman wearing only a pair of panties, with a sticker reading Aktivklubb Sverige covering her nipples. "Activism is sexy. An inactive guy is unsexy. I don't want a couch potato. I want a fighter", she is quoted in the same post.³⁵ In addition, women appear as background participants in a total of five pictures, as well as a picture where a female activist lays down flowers during a manifestation on Gustav II Adolf's death anniversary.³⁶

Interested users

Through a review of Aktivklubb Sverige's social media, Expo has found an additional 143 users who have commented on recruitment videos on TikTok. 75 of these have received a direct reply with instructions to contact a representative via direct message or on a different platform. Most have outright stated that they want to join, others have asked if there is a local group close to where they live. Beyond that, many have also tagged their friends. According to the comment sections, there are quite a few people interested in joining established groups, such as in Karlstad, where 14 people expressed their desire to join a local group.

It appears to be mainly young men from smaller towns who seek out Aktivklubb Sverige on social media. Most seem to still be in school and many post clips of trucks and tractors, redesigned Volvo cars and goofing around with their friends. Several of them share racist content, anti-immigration posts and Islamophobic comments.

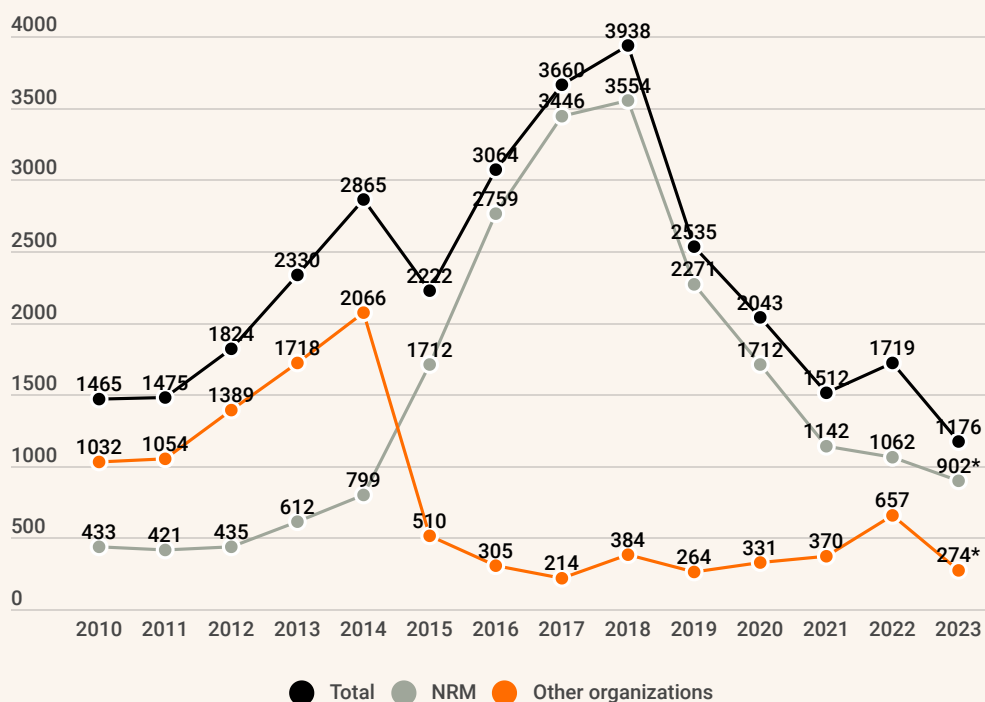
History in other organisations

21 (65 percent) of those identified in Aktivklubb Sverige have previously been affiliated with at least one other extreme right-wing group. 18 (58 percent) have been active in the Nordic Resistance Movement and 13 (34 percent) have been active in other right-wing extremist circles. 10 individuals (32 percent) do not have a previous background in the far right.

The relatively rapid growth of Aktivklubb Sverige thus seems to be explained by two parallel processes. On the one hand, the concept attracts people who have previously been involved in other extreme right-wing groups. Since 2018, when the Swedish far-right scene was dominated by the Nordic Resistance Movement, the white supremacist movement's rate of traditional activism has decreased. The NRM has suffered internal schisms, lost members and activists, and gradually declined from its hegemonic position. The other prominent extremist groups have a focus on political advocacy, propaganda production or social activities. Aktivklubb Sverige can thus step into the empty space that has opened up in an increasingly fragmented landscape and establish itself as a fresh alternative for those who are fed up with other white supremacist groups.

Graph 5.2

Number of activities carried out in Sweden by the white supremacist milieu, 2010–2023: NRM vs all other organizations



Aktivklubb Sverige has found a new and successful way to attract young followers without prior ties to the extreme right. For the first time in years, there is a clear trend of young people joining up with active, violent right-wing extremist groups offline.

Recruitment on TikTok

Gym XIV has played an important role in this development. In early September 2023, the group organised its second bootcamp. The event attracted young activists from all over Sweden and Norway to train, fight, network and attend lectures. Afterwards, Gym XIV released part two of the film series they call “A New School”. The aim of the series is to inspire primarily young people to get involved in Active Club by deliberately using short clips and “a youthful attitude” designed for TikTok, which is the most effective channel to attract new activists to the milieu.³⁷

On TikTok, Active Club appeals to a young audience using an aesthetic borrowed from the world of soccer ultras and martial arts. Active Club has recognised the platform’s potential to reach more people and, together with Telegram, it has become their most important tool for recruitment. Unlike Instagram and Facebook, accounts are rarely suspended on TikTok.

An analysis of the most commonly used hashtags within the milieu shows that Aktivklubb Sverige has a large reach on TikTok. The hashtag #aktivklubb has 2.6 million views, #aktivklubbsverige has 1.6 million views. The international hashtag #activeclub, used by clubs across the US, Canada and Europe, has 3.7 million views.

Old and new accounts feature violent clips of masked young men training together and engaging in bloody illegal martial arts fights. The content is intermingled with nazi symbols, flags and messaging. Comments sections, meanwhile, are used as a recruitment channel for new members.

Aktivklubb Sverige has actively tried to attract members from other right-wing extremist groups, such as the Nordic Resistance Movement and Det Fria Sverige. For instance, they have used the NRM’s supporter and member chats on the Telegram platform, including the youth chat “Proud White Youth” and the supporter chat of Nordfront, the website serving as the NRM’s main propaganda platform, to spread information about local events and training opportunities.

Low thresholds

One of the reasons why Aktivklubb Sverige succeeds in attracting young people could be that they have tried to lower the thresholds for entry into the milieu. A leading actor in Aktivklubb Sverige has said in a closed setting that they have deliberately used an attractive aesthetic that is both not repugnant to ordinary people and still attractive for those already involved.³⁸ On social media, they spread the message of a youthful movement focused on training and self-realisation.

There also seems to be no clear age limit. When a 14-year-old on TikTok asks if his age is a barrier to joining, he is quickly told no by a representative and is encouraged to contact the recruitment team on Telegram.³⁹

There also seems to be no clear age limit. When a 14-year-old on TikTok asks if his age is a barrier to joining, he is quickly told

no by a representative and is encouraged to contact the recruitment team on Telegram.⁴⁰ Applicants are encouraged to contact a specific Telegram channel, which is not necessarily administered locally, but by the umbrella group Aktivklubb Sverige. This shows that the organisation is concerned with assessing and evaluating new potential members.

A number of the young people who show interest in the Active Club phenomenon ask where they can buy flags, shirts, t-shirts and other clothing worn by activists in recruitment and propaganda videos shared on TikTok and Telegram. Aktivklubb Sverige takes advantage of this interest and encourages people to join the nearest local club in order to buy the organisation's promotional products.⁴¹ Many of the prints on Aktivklubb Sverige's merchandise consist of symbols and expressions that are not known to be extremist or racist. In this way, the garments function as vehicles for a coded message or dogwhistle. The initiated understand the meaning, but schools, guardians, martial arts clubs and the judicial system might fail to see an ongoing radicalisation process.

6. Violence and criminality

THE ACTIVE CLUB MILIEU trains its activists for violence. The focus on physical training is directly rooted in what they perceive as both a physical and cultural battle against its enemies. It is at the gym and in the martial arts hall that one – according to the Active Clubs’ view – awakens the dormant warrior spirit that is said to be the basis of one’s true capacity for violence. Or as Gym XIV succinctly puts it in one of many posts glorifying violence: “Train for power, not flexing”.⁴²

On Telegram, Aktivklubb Sverige, Gym XIV and other independent groups spread the same kind of violent propaganda. According to a speaker at one of the national meetings, you have to learn that the worst thing is not to face conflict or death, but to live in fear and oppression.⁴³ The propaganda presents Aktivklubb Sverige as a resistance movement for young people living in increasingly challenging times. It is portrayed as a thriving group that helps its members build resilience and physical strength, while having fun. “Meeting up and punching your comrade in the face, afterwards sharing a meal and, if necessary, beating up an attacker together, builds eternal camaraderie”, writes the above-mentioned lecturer after a national meeting.⁴⁴

Expo’s research shows that many of the activists within the Active Club milieu have a history of violence and criminal convictions. There are several examples of activists, after joining an Active Club, carrying out acts of violence against groups that are portrayed as threats to the nation. In other words, the constant calls for violence also lead to concrete actions.

Of the 77 people identified in the entire Active Club milieu, 40 individuals (52 percent) have been convicted of crimes.

Sponsors with criminal convictions

Out of the 46 people involved in sponsor groups such as Gym XIV and Tvåsaxe, 28 individuals (61 percent) have been convicted of crimes. 5 individuals (11 percent) have been convicted of weapons offences, 11 individuals (23 percent) of violent crimes, both in connection with their right-wing extremist involvement – such as violent riots or assaults on political opponents – and domestic crime such as spousal abuse. Four people have been convicted or charged with unlawful threats, including interference in a judicial matter. 13 people are convicted of drug offences or drunk driving and seven people for other types of crime. Three people are convicted of incitement against an ethnic group.

Activists with criminal convictions

Out of the 31 people identified as active in Aktivklubb Sverige and its member groups, 12 (38 percent) people have been convicted of crimes. Six (19 percent) have been convicted of violent crimes, most commonly against political opponents or defectors from the Nordic Resistance Movement, or threats of violence. One of the leading figures in Aktivklubb Sverige has been convicted of several cases of unlawful threats for, among other things, threatening to kill a person who had defected from the NRM.

Ten (32 percent) of those identified have been convicted of weapons offences – the vast majority for carrying knives or pepper spray in public spaces, for example in connection to demonstrations. However, there are identified supporters with more serious weapons offences. In 2022, a 21-year-old was convicted of, among other things, manufacturing an explosive device that he later detonated in a schoolyard.

In addition to the above, five (16 percent) have been convicted and charged with other crimes such as money laundering, trespassing and agitation against an ethnic group. Several supporters have also been convicted of the possession or sale of drugs.

Threw eggs at pride participants

To avoid the attention of the judicial system, the Active Club milieu wants the violence perpetrated by activists to look like random incidents rather than the political actions they actually are.

One example is Eslöv Pride 2023, where participants in the municipality's first Pride parade were subjected to harassment, threats and abuse by a small group of right-wing extremists. Based on witnesses statements from the day, we can establish that at least two of those accused of harassing the participants are active in the Active Club milieu, and a third is a supporter. A 24-year-old man with a long history of extremist organising, including in the radical Nordic Resistance Movement, and a 22-year-old, the driving activist behind Aktivklubb Danmark, allegedly threw eggs and foul-smelling liquids at participants in the Pride parade. They also allegedly tried to set fire to rainbow flags, and threatened companies that collaborated with the organisers of the celebration with – among other things – arson. Police were called to the scene but no one was arrested.

This was not the first time Pride celebrations were targeted by the Active Club milieu. Several of them, all around the country, were attacked during the summer of 2023. Posts shared on Telegram show activists stealing Pride flags in, among other areas, Skåne, Småland and Värmland. In a number of videos published by official Active Club accounts, members are shown first stealing rainbow flags from a number of Swedish locations and then symbolically drenching the flags in lighter fluid and setting them on fire.

An example of a racially and politically motivated assault, which could easily be mistaken for a bar fight, is from June 2023.

Police were called to a bar in central Linköping after an assault. The victim, a Slovakian national, had been hanging out with a larger group when a 19-year-old — who is an influential and active member of Aktivklubb Sverige — started making racist and offensive remarks, including that they were not equals because of their ethnicity and skin colour. Without further provocation, the 19-year-old then punched one of the group straight in the face, resulting in a black eye. When authorities arrived on the scene the 19-year-old continued to make racist and offensive remarks about immigrants, as noted by police in the preliminary investigation.

Armed with knives

In Aktivklubb Sverige’s Telegram channel, which is their primary means of communication, followers are encouraged to practise martial arts and learn how to fight against people wielding knives.⁴⁵ Some of the individuals convicted of weapons offences have carried weapons during political rallies, such as a 20-year-old who was in possession of a folding knife at a protest against the COVID-19 vaccine in central Stockholm. The police noticed several masked individuals leaving the scene together and decided to conduct a pat-down search of the group. The 20-year-old was convicted of illegal possession of a weapon.

In another example from September 2023, a 20-year-old man was arrested in connection with a football derby in Stockholm. Police felt that the man was behaving suspiciously and stopped him. During the search they found a can of pepper spray, and a stiletto knife which he carried easily accessible in his sock. The 20-year-old and several of his companions were also carrying stickers marked “White Boys Stockholm” — the local group of Aktivklubb Sverige. One person in the group stated in police interviews that they regularly met up for self-defence training. The 20-year-old was later convicted by the Stockholm District Court for aggravated criminal possession of a weapon.

During the Finnish Independence Day celebrations in Helsinki on December 6th, 2023, Finnish, French and Swedish Active Club activists were arrested. Six Swedish citizens, who are linked to White Boys Stockholm, were taken into custody as a preventive measure by the police. During their search, police reportedly found pyrotechnics, mouth guards and knives.⁴⁶ Others from the Active Club milieu were also present, including from Gym XIV.⁴⁷

7. Conclusions

BASED ON OUR gathered information about actors, individuals and activities, we can draw a number of conclusions and identify strategic challenges and threats posed by the Active Club milieu. They are presented here in a concise format.

A fluid milieu with common strategies

In order to understand the workings of the Swedish milieu of Active Clubs operating according to Robert Rundo's principles, we have divided them into two groups. A group of older activists, the majority of whom have a history of right-wing extremist organising, and the dedicated Aktivklubb Sverige with its local groups, which consists of young men. It is a fluid environment with new initiatives, dynamic constellations and overlapping memberships. Activists are united around nazi and fascist ideology, as well as an interest in training, martial arts and violence. This whole spectrum should be regarded as one distinct political milieu, as they are united behind a common explicit strategy, idea and method.

New recruitment of young people

In 2023, Active Club succeeded in establishing itself as a new alternative in the Swedish right-wing extremist scene. The milieu focuses on hypermasculinity, self-improvement and social community, and has an organisational model with low thresholds for entry. It attracts activists from other extremist groups, but also appeals to boys and young men with no previous political involvement. As many as 32 percent of the people identified in Aktivklubb Sverige and its local groups have no previously documented involvement in right-wing extremist groups. We believe that the milieu has found a format that will allow it to potentially continue to expand in the coming years, and thus recruit more young people into a violent extremist milieu.

A criminal milieu encouraging young people to commit crimes

The Active Club milieu considers violence a legitimate, and to some degree the only, way to achieve political goals. The milieu also has a significant capacity for violence. More than half, 52 percent, of activists have been convicted of crimes, most for weapons-related and violent crimes. Our compilation also shows that young people, after joining the Active Club milieu, have been convicted of violent crimes against politically motivated targets such as religious minorities and LGBTQ+ people.

The Active Club groups constitute a criminal milieu and there is a very high risk that activists in it will continue, or start, along a criminal trajectory. There is also an imminent risk that the milieu will continue to commit crimes against minorities. As the Active Club milieu has created low thresholds into the movement, there is also an imminent risk that they will be able to attract individuals with a strong preference for violence, which could further strengthen the milieu as a violent threat.

Local impact

One element of the Active Club concept is to encourage young activists to engage in local activism. Local groups will not only train for violence – by carrying out high-risk activism, the idea is that activists will also develop leadership and operational skills. This means that there is a high risk that a locally rooted activist group will make an impact that negatively affects the local community. This could be in the form of, for example, banner drops with criminal hate speech, attacks against Pride celebrations, rallies or attacks on individuals.

Benefitting from TikTok

Aktivklubb Sverige recruits new sympathisers and activists by strategically using the Telegram and TikTok platforms. TikTok has been crucial for Aktivklubb Sverige when it comes to recruiting young boys and men. Through the platform, the milieu reaches out to a young audience with professionally edited clips filmed in connection with national meetings and illegal martial arts fights. Although the content violates TikTok's terms of use, posts or accounts are rarely taken down; on the contrary, TikTok's algorithms seem to favour Active Club.

The most effective way to stop the growth of the Active Club milieu is probably to compel TikTok to moderate or take down their violent content in cases where it violates the terms of use.

The social media app Telegram performs another important function for the Active Club milieu. This is where they regularly post reflections and political appeals. The posts contain an accelerationist and revolutionary message, encouraging white men to use violence for political purposes. There is a risk that the Telegram channels where pro-violence content is disseminated could inspire lone-actor terrorist acts, such as school shootings or attacks on synagogues.

Transnational phenomenon

The Active Club milieu in Sweden is part of an international phenomenon and connected to several major international networks, where the Swedish milieu has recently gained a prominent position, for instance by assisting in the formation of Active Clubs in Denmark and Norway. The Active Club phenomenon in Sweden should therefore not be regarded as an exclusively Swedish affair. Authorities, municipalities, academia and NGOs who, for various reasons, need or want to increase their knowledge of the milieu need to consider it as a transnational phenomenon.

New challenges

The emergence of the Swedish Active Club milieu poses new challenges for the preventive work against violent right-wing extremism. The fluid network structure of the milieu and the activists' ambition not to reveal their identity on social media make it difficult for authorities to know whether there is a group established in the area, and if so who is part of it. It is conceivable that young people who are attracted by the concept will start and run an Active Club-inspired operation on their own without even leaving a clear digital trail. There is a risk that local groups will use municipal and private gyms and training facilities to conduct training. Detailed insight into the digital communication between activists and groups is needed to get a picture of the extent to which a group is active locally and where they operate.

Professionals in schools and social services need to update their knowledge to be aware of the aesthetics and symbolic language of the Active Club milieu.

Infiltration of the martial arts scene

The Active Club milieu works strategically to infiltrate existing structures within the established Swedish martial arts scene. There is a stated ambition to gather knowledge and experience from traditional martial arts clubs and spread it within their local club. Consequently, it carries the risk that any training activists get from established martial arts associations is later used to carry out politically motivated violence against minorities or political opponents. Martial arts clubs are also an arena for club activists to recruit new sympathisers. The emergence of the Active Club milieu will therefore pose a strategic challenge to the Swedish martial arts movement.

8. Notes

1. Ritzmann, Alexander. *Hiding in Plain Sight: The Transnational Right-Wing Extremist Active Club Network*. Counter Extremism Project (CEP). September 2023. <https://t.co/bTwmnoxdWo>
2. CTEC. *Dangerous Organizations and Bad Actors: The Active Club Network*. Center on Terrorism, Extremism, and Counterterrorism. 2023-03-15. <https://www.middlebury.edu/institute/academics/centers-initiatives/ctec/ctec-publications/dangerous-organizations-and-bad-actors-active>
3. ADL. *Active Club Network*. Center on Extremism, Anti-Defamation League (ADL). 2023-01-10. <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/active-clubnetwork>
4. O'Luanaigh, Alexander. Ritchey, Hannah. Breidenstein, Frances. *The Right Fit: How Active Club Propaganda Attracts Women to the Far-Right*. The Global Network on Extremism and Technology (GNET). 2023-12-05. <https://gnet-research.org/2023/12/05/the-right-fit-how-active-club-propaganda-attracts-women-to-the-far-right/>
5. For more on leaderless resistance: Center mot våldsbejakande extremism (CVE). *Våldsbejakande högerextrem accelerationism – PM Januari 2021*. Stockholm: CVE, 2021. https://cve.se/download/18.843740f184cc4e52fa1183/1669904389411/Accelerationism_CVE2021.pdf; Stiftelsen Expo, Ledarlöst motstånd. Expo.se. 2018-04-17. <https://expo.se/fakta/wiki/ledarlöst-motstånd>
6. Robert Rundo. "Starting an active club", 3.0 FM, 230303, Odysse-video. 2023-03-03. <https://odysee.com/@will2rise:2/3.0-FM---About-and-starting-an-active-club:0>
7. Ibid.
8. Ritzmann, *op. cit.*
9. Christoffer Dulny and Ludvig Delin (guest), "265 Gruppterapistaten", Vita Pillret. 2023-11-10. <https://www.spreaker.com/episode/vita-pillret-265-gruppterapistaten-gast-ludvig--57586127>
10. Kalmaroffender. TikTok post. 2023-12-18.
11. Ritzmann, Alexander. Lewis, Jon. Moon, Morgan Lynn. *CEP-PoE Webinar: Hiding in Plain Sight – The Transnational Right-Wing Extremist Active Club Network*. YouTube. 2023-09-22. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cAETniwR2GU>
12. Gym XIV. Telegram post. 2023-03-23.
13. Gym XIV. Telegram post. 2023-07-18.
14. Gym XIV. Telegram post. 2023-03-24.
15. Dulny and Delin, *op. cit.*
16. Closed Telegram group. 2023-11-18.
17. Gym XIV. Telegram post. 2023-03-24.
18. Asgard Brand. *About Asgard Brand*. 2023. <https://asgardbrand.com/about/>
19. The Golden One. Telegram post. 2023-03-23.
20. Ultras Not Reds. Telegram post. 2023-06-18.
21. Leman, Jonathan. Dalsbro, Anders. *Högerextrem grupp och fotbollsfirma i slagsmål*. Expo.se. 2021-03-02. <https://expo.se/2021/03/h%C3%B6gerextrem-grupp-och-fotbollsfirma-i-slagsm%C3%A5l>
22. Glaad, Erik. *Här tränar nazisterna närstrid i kommunlokal*. Expo.se. 2023-09-13. <https://expo.se/2023/09/har-tranar-nazisterna-i-kommunens-traningshall>
23. Gym XIV. Telegram posts 2023-07-22 and 2023-10-03.
24. Aktivklubb Sverige. Telegram post. 2023-08-29.
25. Aktivklubb Sverige. Telegram post. 2023-09-11.
26. Dulny and Delin, *op. cit.*
27. Dalsbro, Anders. *Högerextrem kampsportsaktivitet utreds*. Expo.se. 2023-10-09. <https://expo.se/2023/10/hogerextrem-kampsportsaktivitet-utreds>
28. Ritzmann, Lewis and Moon, *op. cit.*
29. Data gathered from <https://tgstat.com/channel/@GymXIV/stat/posts-views>
30. Active Club. Telegram post. 2023-06-04.
31. AutonomPLdyskusja. Telegram post. 2023-11-11
32. Active Club Denmark. Telegram post. 2023-11-14.
33. Active Club Poland. Telegram post. 2023-11-17.

34. Active Club Norway. Telegram post. 2023-08-06.
35. Gym XIV. Telegram post. 2023-10-21.
36. White Boys Stockholm. Telegram post.
37. Björkqvist, Björn. Filmer från Gym XIV:s evenemang. Substack. 2023-10-07. <https://bjornbjorkqvist.substack.com/p/filmer-fran-gym-xivs-evenemang>
38. Gym XIV. Telegram post. 2023-10-21.
39. White Boys Stockholm. Telegram post.
40. Dulny and Delin, *op. cit.*
41. Aktivklubb Sverige. Comment on TikTok post.
42. Gym XIV. Telegram post. 2022-10-08.
43. Björkqvist, Björn. Kraft, kamratskap, kunskap. Substack. 2023-09-18. <https://bjornbjorkqvist.substack.com/p/kraft-kamratskap-kunskap>
44. Ibid.
45. Aktivklubb Sverige. TikTok post. 2023-08-31.
46. Svartström, Anna. *Polisen bröt upp antifascistisk demonstration i Tölö – ny högerextrem rörelse på plats i Helsingfors*. Hufvudstadsbladet. 2023-12-07. <https://www.hbl.fi/artikel/3e08ee0c-4282-555c-8455-675f8e5cb145>
47. Gym XIV. Telegram post. 2023-12-06.

EXPO