



Submission to the Parliament of Australia

Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee

Right-Wing Extremist Movements in Australia

Counter Extremism Project (CEP)

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Contents

CEP Resources on Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism	4
CEP Databases on Right-wing Extremist Groups	4
Executive Summary	5
Recommendations	5
Introduction	7
1. The Online Neo-Nazi Space in Australia.....	8
1.1 Post-Forum Organizing: Telegram	8
1.2 What's Old Is New Again: Twitter/X.....	10
1.3 Other Mainstream Social Media Platforms	11
1.4 Alternative Platforms	11
1.5 Online Fundraising.....	13
1.6 International Accelerationist Connections.....	13
2. The Next Challenge? - The Transnational Active Club Network.....	14
2.1 (Mis)Understanding the Active Club Strategy.....	14
2.2 Active Clubs: A Strategy to Fool Law Enforcement	15
2.3 Don't Get Fooled - Active Clubs Are Not About Combat Sports	16

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About CEP

The **Counter Extremism Project (CEP)** is a non-profit and non-partisan international policy organization that was founded to tackle the growing threat presented by terrorist and extremist ideologies. CEP develops strategies aimed at disrupting the financial, recruitment, and material support networks of terrorist and extremist groups and their leaders. One area of focus for CEP is the transnational violence-oriented extreme-right, and it has published several research and policy papers on the matter. For further information, please visit our [website](#).

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CEP Resources on Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism

- Hiding in Plain Sight - The Transnational Right-Wing Extremist Active Club Network (2023) - [PDF](#)
- Mapping Right-Wing Extremism in Central and Eastern Europe (2023) - [PDF](#)
- Financial Strategies Of Right-Wing Extremist Organizations And Actors In The United Kingdom And Germany (2023) – [PDF](#)
- The Transnational Nexus of Violence-Oriented Right-Wing Extremism, Terrorism, and Organized Crime (2023) – [PDF](#)
- A Year of Foreign Fighting for Ukraine: Catching Fish with Bare Hands? (2023) – [PDF](#)
- The Polish Independence March as a Contact Hub and Model for European Extremism (2023) - [PDF](#)
- Western Extremists and the Russian Invasion of Ukraine in 2022 – [PDF](#)
- Foreign Fighters in the 2022 Russia-Ukraine War: An Assessment of Extremist Volunteers – (2022) [PDF](#)
- Misuse Of Online Services By Transnational Right-Wing Extremist And Terrorist Networks – (2022) [PDF](#)
- Looks can be deceiving: Extremism meets paramilitarism in Central and Eastern Europe - (2021) [PDF](#)
- Financing patterns and networks of violence-oriented right-wing extremist actors in Germany – (2021) [PDF](#)
- Violent Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism – Transnational Connectivity, Definitions, Incidents, Structures and Countermeasures (2020) – [PDF](#)
- Career Break or a New Career? Extremist Foreign Fighters in Ukraine (2020) - [PDF](#)

CEP Databases on Right-wing Extremist Groups

[White Supremacy Groups in the United States](#)

[European Ethno-Nationalist and White Supremacy Groups](#)

Executive Summary

- The online neo-Nazi space is transnational, with ideologies and specific pieces of extremist content that are exchanged.
- Australian right-wing extremists have become leading voices in the decentralized online neo-Nazi sphere.
- While Telegram has previously been an important space for spreading propaganda and networking, a lack of effective content moderation on Twitter/X has given extremists a wider reach.
- Due to the current level of counter (violent) extremism efforts of the Australian government and civil society against right-wing extremist individuals, groups, and networks, it is possible, if not likely, that the transnational Active Club strategy will be implemented by (violent) right-wing extremist key actors in Australia, in the near future as an evasion tactic.

Recommendations

- The Australian online safety regulator should address the broad reemergence of Australian right-wing extremist individuals and groups with for-profit online platforms like Twitter/X. These individuals or groups often violate the terms of service of the platforms, which generally claim that they do not allow the presence of white supremacists/right-wing extremists on their platform. Strengthening the legal framework for platform regulation could be contemplated to ensure and enhance comparable content monitoring standards between platforms.
- Because individuals might create new accounts after they are deleted, ongoing monitoring efforts should periodically raise the topic of online presence and reach with platforms.
- Monitoring of crowdfunding efforts from members of the Australian right-wing extremist community to ensure that all applicable financial regulations and tax laws are being observed. Following the example of Canada, regulating crowdfunding platforms as reporting entities could be contemplated and relevant reporting guidelines for these platforms to AUSTRAC could be developed to ensure that their internal monitoring systems begin to operate effectively.

- Monitoring of changes in strategy of organizational models of right-wing extremist groups due to the proximity of Australian key extremist individuals to the transnational Active Club network. As the Active Club strategy was specifically developed to evade law enforcement monitoring and intervention, this could be achieved through active cooperation with law enforcement authorities in other countries, such as the United States or Canada that already deal with developing Active Club networks and the resulting societal consequences.

Introduction

The Counter Extremism Project (CEP) is honored by the request of the Parliament of Australia to provide a submission to its inquiry into right-wing extremist movements in Australia. To support the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee, this paper highlights some key findings of the extensive work of CEP on (transnational) right-wing extremist and terrorist strategies, networks, and key actors.

The creation of borderless online spaces has led to a digital world with few impediments to communication for (violent) extremists between different continents. As a result, while right-wing extremist movements have maintained strong local and national characteristics, some narratives, ideologies, trends, and strategies have become transnational. This is especially true among right-wing extremists in English-speaking countries. The rise of unregulated social media and communications platforms also gave extremists and terrorists new possibilities to connect and learn from each other, recruit new members, raise funds, and spread their propaganda to large audiences.

This paper shows the transmission and implementation of key narratives and strategies, online and offline, that can be observed both in terms of right-wing extremist groups and key individuals. It also addresses the new transnational Active Club strategy and its possible effects on parts of the Australian (violent) extreme-right.

1. The Online Neo-Nazi Space in Australia

The spread of neo-fascist accelerationism is a lens to explore the transmission of ideology on the internet. Accelerationism, in the context of the extreme right, is the belief that violence should be used or encouraged to weaken the government and society, to create beneficial outcomes for either white people as a whole or a small group of white people. The Iron March Forum, active between 2011 and 2017, was a crucial online node for the transnational spread of accelerationist ideology and the creation and growth of several groups, including Antipodean Resistance (AR), who would later have a subsection on the forum.¹ In this way, the forum promoted a violent ideology in addition to serving as a semi-anonymous site for networking. Iron March was created by a Russian-Uzbek man, who was allegedly residing in Moscow at the time of the forum's creation.² An American former Iron March user stated that "social pressure" on the forum encouraged users to outdo each other in terms of radicalism.³

Narratives on the site, primarily neo-Nazi accelerationism, extreme antisemitism, and homophobia, found an audience among a small group of Australians. According to a study of Iron March users following a data leak, the forum had approximately 1,200 regular users, of which 1,185 did not hide their IP addresses. These included 59 Australians.⁴ The forum was primarily in English with 73 percent of accounts (with exposed IP addresses) from English speaking countries.⁵ Fascist Forge, the successor to Iron March, which operated between April 2018 and February 2020, seems to have also included an unknown number of Australians among its 329 forum members.⁶

Members of AR would, with members of the Lads Society, later create the National Socialist Network (NSN), currently Australia's largest neo-Nazi group.⁷

1.1 Post-Forum Organizing: Telegram

Since 2019, the Telegram messaging app has been one of the important online organizing spaces for the international violent extreme right.⁸ Telegram allows for the anonymity of users and includes chats enabled with end-to-end encryption. Channels allow administrators to share content such as text, images, videos, and links with subscribers. Administrators can also enable comments on posts. Telegram chats allow users to interact with one another directly, which users may have to apply to join.

As with other online forms of communication, Telegram is an international space. Promotion of the great replacement conspiracy theory and other narratives, which are typically antisemitic, anti-Muslim, anti-LGBTQ, anti-immigrant, and anti-government, as well as news and tactics are discussed and shared across borders.⁹ To attract more subscribers channel administrators are often active and engaging by posting and sharing content. The transnational nature of the space also allows for individuals, such as Thomas Sewell, who leads the European Australian Movement (EAM) and NSN, to emerge as international movement leaders.

As of mid-March 2024, Sewell has over 10,100 subscribers to his main Telegram channel.¹⁰ The channel was created on February 8, 2022, after a previous channel, which Sewell claimed had over 16,000 subscribers, was removed from the platform. Additional channels exist for videos of Sewell's speeches and related news. Sewell is an aggressive white supremacist but is also articulate, often speaks from experience, and addresses an international audience, with his videos touching on topics such as organizing and current events while also promoting the NSN and EAM.

Due to his leadership role, speaking ability, and extreme right movement experience, Sewell's propaganda content is often promoted by other important Telegram channels in the extreme right space, such as the main channel for the White Lives Matter movement, a prominent Active Club channel founded by former members of the Proud Boys, and a channel that promotes an antisemitic propaganda film.¹¹

Jacob Hersant, a young NSN leader, is currently rising in prominence on extreme right social media, including Telegram, where he has over 2,100 subscribers. Starting on January 1, 2024, Hersant began releasing videos under one minute in length where he faces the camera and straightforwardly addresses basic extreme right topics; examples are "Ideological purity and unity is [sic] crucial," "There's always something in your power to do," and "Multiculturalism creates terrorism."¹² The videos are designed to be easily shared on Telegram, Instagram, Twitter/X, and TikTok.

Other Australian individuals with large numbers of Telegram subscribers include neo-Nazi streamers Joel Davis, with over 11,600 subscribers, and Blair Cottrell, with over 16,800.

Australian groups, including the NSN and EAM, maintain public Telegram channels with 5,354 and 3,384 subscribers, respectively. Both groups advertise events, post propaganda, and seek to recruit on their channels. Compared to the accounts of Sewell and Hersant, neither the NSN nor

EAM accounts are particularly active, with six or fewer posts per month. The group Tasman Forth, with 665 subscribers on their public channel, posts similarly infrequently, mostly sharing content from other Australian groups and individuals.

The existence of NSN front groups raises the likelihood that there are secret invite-only Telegram channels and other hidden social media accounts that are used to communicate or maintain a seemingly innocuous character.

Extremist manuals and texts promoting violence have also been shared on Telegram. Three texts by a loosely knit neo-Nazi entity known as Terrorgram, released in June 2021, December 2021, and July 2022, have been spread among white supremacist and neo-Nazi Telegram communities. The texts promote acts of violence, especially attacks inspired by Brenton Tarrant's terrorist attack on two Christchurch, New Zealand mosques, encourage attacks on infrastructure and law enforcement, and, in the case of one book, include instructions for making homemade explosives. A fourth text, which was created by unknown individuals but made in the style of the Terrorgram texts, was released in June 2022 and encouraged attacks on electrical infrastructure and government officials and their families, as well as the leaders of Jewish organizations. This text was shared with Australians on Telegram by Brandon Russell, the former leader of the American group Atomwaffen Division.¹³ Terrorgram also released a video in October 2022 glorifying acts of terrorism, celebrating individuals who committed white supremacist acts of violence, and encouraging future attacks.

1.2 What's Old Is New Again: Twitter/X

Since Elon Musk acquired Twitter/X in October 2022, the social media platform has loosened its content moderation efforts, allowing extremist groups and individuals to maintain accounts. Thomas Sewell previously reportedly avoided "mainstream social media sites," as quoted in a January 2021 article. By March 2024, he was encouraging fellow white supremacists to post on "Twitter [X], TikTok, [and] YouTube."¹⁴ Since creating his current, verified account in December 2023, Sewell has garnered almost 10,000 followers.¹⁵

While Twitter/X still removes some extreme content, making it riskier for extremists than posting on Telegram in terms of being suspended, it also offers a significantly larger audience. Non-extremist users are more likely to accidentally encounter extremist content on Twitter/X than on

Telegram. For individuals seeking to promote their white supremacist propaganda messages to a larger audience, Twitter/X provides more reach and potential interaction. For instance, Thomas Sewell's Telegram post on December 24, 2023, sharing a GiveSendGo fundraising link to create a white-only rural community in Victoria, received 14,500 views, while an identical post on Twitter/X received almost 150,000 views in the same amount of time and was retweeted over 215 times. A March 9, 2024, Twitter/X "Spaces" event hosted by Sewell included individuals from seven U.S. white supremacist groups (six different Active Club chapters and the National Socialist Front) and one Dutch group (Wolvenrad). Over 7,100 individuals tuned into the spaces event.

A Twitter/X account also allows Sewell and others to reply to media figures, politicians, and critics. Responding to large accounts, especially those with right-wing, but not necessarily extremist, politics, is also a strategy to gain followers. A presence on mainstream social media platforms, especially Twitter/X, allows for more interactions with potential supporters versus Telegram followers, who are likely to already be sympathetic.

Similarly, Hersant has a verified Twitter/X account, created in October 2023, with 4,773 followers. On this account, he posts short videos, engages with other white supremacists, and promotes NSN. Groups, including NSN and the EAM, also have Twitter/X accounts, created in November 2023 and December 2023, respectively.

1.3 Other Mainstream Social Media Platforms

Sewell and Hersant both have a limited presence on TikTok. Sewell's main account appears to have been suspended in February 2024. Hersant also has a limited presence on Instagram. Mirroring their overseas comrades in the U.S. and Europe, the Australian extreme right movement seems to have a limited presence on TikTok and Instagram.

1.4 Alternative Platforms

Sewell and Hersant are the only two individuals located with active accounts on the alternative social media site Gab. Cottrell and NSN have inactive accounts, and several additional accounts for groups and individuals were located that were either inactive or have not posted content.

Gab has fewer users overall than Telegram and other mainstream platforms. While Telegram serves as a point of contact and spreads propaganda, and Twitter/X provides opportunities for interacting with a more mainstream audience, Gab does not provide a larger or different audience. It is possible that due to Gab's extreme lack of content moderation, its use could become more common in response to potential future crackdowns from Telegram or Twitter/X on extremist content.

Joel Davis hosts a live-streamed show posted to the alternative video streaming platforms Rumble, Odysee, and Cozy.Tv. Davis is often either joined by Blair Cottrell or Thomas Sewell. Alternative streaming platforms generally have smaller audiences than YouTube. However, they have less content moderation, and the show's ardent viewers will follow the creator after a platform change. The Rumble and Cozy.Tv streams appear to have begun in late 2023 following a ban from YouTube in October 2023.¹⁶ The Odysee channel had its first video uploaded in 2020.

Rumble is an alternative video streaming platform based in Canada and the U.S. used by different conservative, far-right and right-wing extremist factions and groups. While the website's policies allegedly forbid content that is racist, antisemitic, or promotes violence, the site has repeatedly been criticized by journalists and watchdog groups for ignoring extreme right content.¹⁷ Davis has over 1,700 followers on Rumble, with 25 videos, averaging approximately 5,150 views per video. The show is usually live streamed weekly.

Odysee has been a video streaming platform used by the far right since 2020.¹⁸ Davis has 95 videos on the site dating back to October 2020. His videos on Odysee receive approximately a third of the views than they do on Rumble, despite Davis having over double the number of followers on Odysee, with over 3,700.

Cozy.Tv is a live-streaming website run by the American white supremacist podcaster Nick Fuentes, launched in October 2021.¹⁹ Davis has three videos on the platform, all uploaded in February or March 2024. The total view counts are unlisted, but each live-stream had less than 75 viewers in the most crowded part of the live-stream.

1.5 Online Fundraising

At least two members of the Australian neo-Nazi scene have crowdfunded money using the U.S. website GiveSendGo. The site claims to be a Christian crowdfunding platform and has been reluctant to remove campaigns from far-right and extreme-right groups and individuals.

As of March 14, 2024, Sewell has raised AU\$10,000 for a campaign initiated on December 24, 2023. The campaign claims that the money will be used to purchase rural property in Victoria to create a whites-only community. In the post, Sewell claims that the money will go towards purchasing land and livestock, constructing communal buildings, and infrastructure. Multiple Telegram channels and Twitter/X accounts shared the campaign link.

A second GiveSendGo campaign, was posted by NSN member Will Casdorfft, allegedly to pay for legal fees. The crowdfunding campaign received its first donation in September 2023 and had raised AU\$578 by March 14. The campaign used the EAM logo and the GiveSendGo URL was shared by several Telegram channels, including those belonging to Sewell and the NSN.

1.6 International Accelerationist Connections

Potential Ongoing Connection to The Base

Interest in The Base likely still exists. While the group was listed as a terrorist organization by Australian authorities in December 2021, individuals have likely sought to learn from the group and potentially mimic their organizing tactics. On January 29, 2024, Rinaldo Nazzaro, the group's founder who still plays an undefined role from St. Petersburg, Russia, posted a question on Telegram, allegedly sent to him by an Australian individual. The message asks what the subscriber can do in Australia to organize with two friends, considering that the group is illegal there and firearms are prohibited. Nazzaro responded by recommending that the individual create their own "local equivalent" of The Base, train with replica or airsoft weapons, and eventually plan to obtain firearms.²⁰ There is no way to determine whether the initial message addressed to Nazzaro is genuine, or if Nazzaro wanted to thumb his nose at Australian authorities and proclaim that even after proscription, the group still attracts people. Despite proscription of The Base, interest in violent accelerationism will likely remain.²¹

2. The next Challenge? - The Transnational Active Club Network

As mentioned above, Thomas Sewell, leader of the European Australian Movement (EAM) and the National Socialist Network (NSM), hosted a Twitter/X “Spaces” public meeting in March 2024, which included representatives from several U.S. white supremacist Active Clubs. Over 7,100 individuals attended the discussion. In January 2024, he posted on the same platform: “I am personally in touch with the leadership of almost every US Active club (sic) and can vouch for them especially.”²²

Active Clubs are arguably the largest and fastest growing violent extreme-right networks with more than 100 groups worldwide.²³ At the time of writing of this report, there are no visible groups in Australia that follow the Active Club Strategy. The Active Club strategy was developed to build up a network of dedicated and trained extremist individuals while evading law enforcement scrutiny and counter-measures. Therefore, due to ongoing counter (violent) extremism efforts of the Australian government and civil society pressuring the strategies of right-wing extremist individuals, groups, and networks, it is possible, if not likely, that the Active Club strategy will be implemented in Australia by (violent) right-wing extremist key actors like Thomas Sewell, Jacob Hersant, and Tim Lutze²⁴ in the near future.

2.1 (Mis)Understanding the Active Club Strategy

For the development of practical analysis and effective countermeasures by governments and civil society, it is important to differentiate between the Active Club strategy and extreme-right groups that do sports, sometimes called “Our Guy Activist Groups” (OGAG).²⁵ OGAG is a much broader category that reflects a long-established and broad trend of (violent) extreme-right groups in Europe, North America, and Australia to promote fitness, combat sports, and outdoor activities like hiking. Physical training activities by OGAGs are in concert with political (party) activities and community-building efforts and often include women, who might have their own groups as wives or girlfriends of the male members. Additionally, OGAGs have a classic hierarchical leadership structure with a central command. If the legal framework in the country they are operating in allows for it, they will publicly display swastikas and Hitler-salutes and make references to their admiration of the National-Socialist Germany or “The Third Reich.” The European Australian Movement (EAM) and the National Socialist Network (NSM) fall into this category.

2.2 Active Clubs: A Strategy to Fool Law Enforcement

In contrast to “Our Guy Activist Groups,” a key component of the Active Clubs strategy is to hide in plain sight. Created in the United States in 2020, Active Clubs are supposed to present a friendly face to the public with the aim to avoid, delay, mitigate, and withstand law enforcement interventions.²⁶ Consequently, Active Club members are asked to avoid threatening behavior or displaying obvious Nazi symbols in public to appear less relevant and less dangerous than other groups. This less aggressive and more mainstream strategy, also called the 3.0 model, is also meant to help grow the network, in particular by recruiting from the general public. It was developed as a response to the prosecution and sentencing of members of the Rise Above Movement (RAM), the predecessor of the Active Clubs (AC), for violent acts during political rallies in the U.S. in 2018.²⁷

For the Active Club 3.0 strategy to work, the strategy instructs members to look and behave like “regular guys.” When recruiting, Active Club members should not talk about politics, Jews, or history. Instead, the focus in public should be on brotherhood, fitness, and self-defense.²⁸ Organizationally, Active Clubs follow an open network approach that encourages individuals to start their own independent local group and operate it entirely independently. There is no central command structure. As a result, the March 2023 arrest of Robert Rundo, the co-founder and principal strategist of the Active Club network, had no negative effect on the fast growth of the network.²⁹

Key Active Club principles are “Make fascism fun,” “A group of strong white men is a fascist statement in itself,” “The best strategy is to be as unpolitical as possible to be as appealing as possible,” and “White unity at every opportunity”.³⁰ The loosely connected Active Clubs are asked to carry out combat sports training and potentially illegal political activism like banner drops, stickering, and graffiti tagging to promote a risk-taker mentality and to train operational and logistical capacities like scouting target locations and avoiding law enforcement. Creating local and national leadership figures in this process is another main objective. The Active Club strategy also promotes membership in other extreme-right organizations to overcome the infighting between different extreme-right groups. Women play no visible role in the majority of Active Clubs.

Not all groups calling themselves Active Clubs follow the 3.0 model coherently.³¹ This fact exposes a weakness of the strategy, which is the lack of (central) control and the ability to enforce the rules. At the same time, infiltrations by security agencies, arrests of leadership figures, or even the shutdown of an individual Active Club chapter, should have little, if any, effect on the Active Club network itself.

Considering the significant and relevant differences between the Active Club strategy and “Our Guy Activist Groups,” the two should not be conflated.

2.3 Don't Get Fooled - Active Clubs Are Not About Combat Sports

As shown, Active Clubs claim to simply promote political street activism, a “nationalist” lifestyle, and combat sports training for white nationalists for self-defense purposes.³² However, it appears that Active Clubs in the U.S. are not about peaceful activism and sports. There is increasing evidence suggesting that the network’s main objective is instead the creation of shadow militias that can be activated when the need for coordinated violent action on a larger scale arises.³³ In Canada, two Active Club members were arrested in December 2023 due to their alleged membership of the Canadian branch of the Atomwaffen Division (AWD), a listed terrorist entity. According to a statement of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, many former Atomwaffen Division members joined the Canadian Active Club network.³⁴ Therefore, Australian authorities should closely monitor the potential emergence of Active Club groups in the country and their transnational connections, as these could potentially lead to an increase in violent acts in the country.

Endnotes

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- ⁹ Joey Watson, “US neo-Nazi accused of sniper plot appears to have shared instructions with Australian far-right figures ,” *The Guardian*, April 16, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/apr/17/us-neo-nazi-accused-of-sniper-plot-appears-to-have-shared-instructions-with-australian-far-right-figures/>.
- ¹⁰ Please note that all social media and Telegram follower and subscriber numbers were located on March 13 or March 14 and are subject to change.
Thomas Sewell Telegram account.
10,000 subscribers are a substantial number. For comparison, the Telegram channel for Christopher Pohlhaus, the leader of the U.S. based Blood Tribe movement has slightly under 3,000 followers, the main Active Club Telegram channel has 5,000 followers, and the main U.S. Proud Boys channel has over 12,500 followers.
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¹⁵ Thomas Sewell Twitter account.

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