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What looks like a fitness group could actually be a white supremacist training cell. starush/iStock via Getty Images

Active Clubs are white supremacy's new, dangerous frontier

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Small local organizations called Active Clubs have spread widely across the U.S. and internationally, using fitness as a cover for a much more alarming mission. These groups are a new and harder-to-detect form of white supremacist organizing that merges extremist ideology with fitness and combat sports culture.

Active Clubs frame themselves as innocuous workout groups on digital platforms and decentralized networks to recruit, radicalize and prepare members for racist violence. The clubs commonly use encrypted messaging apps such as Telegram, Wire and Matrix to coordinate internally.

For broader propaganda and outreach they rely on alternative social media platforms such as Gab, Odysee, VK and sometimes BitChute. They also selectively use mainstream sites such as Instagram, Facebook, X and TikTok, until those sites ban the clubs.

Active Club members have been implicated in orchestrating and distributing neo-Nazi recruitment videos and manifestos. In late 2023, for instance, two Ontario men, Kristoffer Nippak and Matthew Althorpe, were arrested and charged with distributing materials for the neo-Nazi group Atomwaffen Division and the transnational terrorist group Terrorgram.

Following their arrests, Active Club Canada's public network went dark, Telegram pages were deleted or rebranded, and the club went virtually silent. Nippak was granted bail under strict conditions, while Althorpe remains in custody.

As a sociologist studying extremism and white supremacy since 1993, I have watched the movement shift from formal organizations to small, decentralized cells – a change embodied most clearly by Active Clubs.

Exposing fascist fight clubs training for 'race war' in Ca

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An investigation by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation tracks down two Ontario-based Active Clubs that recruit and train young men to fight.

White nationalism 3.0

According to private analysts who track far-right extremist activities, the Active Club network has a core membership of 400 to 1,200 white men globally, plus sympathizers, online supporters and passive members. The clubs mainly target young white men in their late teens and twenties.

Since 2020, Active Clubs have expanded rapidly across the United States, Canada and Europe, including the U.K., France, Sweden and Finland. Precise numbers are hard to verify, but the clubs appear to be spreading, according to The Counter Extremism Project, the Anti-Defamation League, the Southern Poverty Law Center and my own research.

The clubs reportedly operate in at least 25 U.S. states, and potentially as many as 34. Active U.S. chapters reportedly increased from 49 in 2023 to 78 in 2025.

The clubs' rise reflects a broader shift in white supremacist strategy, away from formal organizations and social movements. In 2020, American neo-Nazi Robert Rundo introduced the concept of "White Nationalism 3.0" – a decentralized, branded and fitness-based approach to extremist organizing.

Rundo previously founded the [Rise Above Movement](#), which was a violent, far-right extremist group in the U.S. known for promoting white nationalist ideology, organizing street fights and coordinating through social media. The organization carried out [attacks at protests and rallies](#) from 2016 through 2018.

Active Clubs embed their ideology within [apolitical activities such as martial arts and weightlifting](#). This model allows them to [blend in with mainstream fitness communities](#). However, their deeper purpose is to prepare members for racial conflict.

'They are beyond racist': Undercover inside a far-right g

ITV News



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An actor reconstructs how British broadcaster ITV News infiltrated and secretly filmed inside Active Club England, documenting its recruiting process, activities and goals.

'You need to learn how to fight'

Active Club messaging glorifies discipline, masculinity and strength – a “[warrior identity](#)” designed to attract young men.

“The active club is not so much a structural organization as it is a lifestyle for those willing to work, risk and sweat to embody our ideals for themselves and to promote them to others,” Rundo [explained via his Telegram channel](#).

“They never were like, ‘You need to learn how to fight so you can beat up people of color.’ It was like, ‘You need to learn how to fight because people want to kill you in the future,’” a former Active Club member [told Vice News in 2023](#).

These cells are deliberately small – often under a dozen members – and self-contained, which gives them greater operational security and flexibility. Each club operates semi-autonomously while remaining connected to the broader ideology and digital network.

Expanding globally and deepening ties

Active Clubs maintain strategic and ideological connections with formal white supremacist groups, including Patriot Front, a white nationalist and neofascist group founded in 2017 by Thomas Rousseau after the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Active Clubs share extremist beliefs with these organizations, including racial hierarchy and the “Great Replacement” theory, which claims white populations are being deliberately replaced by nonwhite immigrants. While publicly presenting as fitness groups, they may collaborate with white supremacist groups on recruitment, training, propaganda or public events.

Figures connected to accelerationist groups – organizations that seek to create social chaos and societal collapse that they believe will lead to a race war and the destruction of liberal democracy – played a role in founding the Active Club network. Along with the Rise Above Movement, they include Atomwaffen Division and another neo-Nazi group, The Base – organizations that repackage violent fascism to appeal to disaffected young white men in the U.S.



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Neo-Nazi "Active Clubs," far-right fight groups founded in the United States, have extended their reach into Finland. These extremist organisations, combining mixed martial arts (MMA) training with white supremacist ideology, now operate in Helsinki, Oulu, Tampere, Kokkola and Päijät-Häme.

Established in January 2021 by American extremist Robert Rundo, Active Clubs promote "white racial consciousness" through combat sports, street activism and youth-oriented recruitment, echoing fascist models including the Third Reich's paramilitary culture.

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Brotherhood as a cover

By downplaying explicit hate symbols and emphasizing strength and preparedness, Active Clubs appeal to a new generation of recruits who may not initially identify with overt racism but are drawn to a culture of hypermasculinity and self-improvement.

Anyone can start a local Active Club chapter with minimal oversight. This autonomy makes it hard for law enforcement agencies to monitor the groups and helps the network grow rapidly.

Shared branding and digital propaganda maintain ideological consistency. Through this approach, Active Clubs have built a transnational network of echo chambers, recruitment pipelines and paramilitary-style training in parks and gyms.

Club members engage in activities such as combat sports training, propaganda dissemination and ideological conditioning. Fight sessions are often recorded and shared online as recruitment tools.

Members distribute flyers, stickers and online content to spread white supremacist messages. Active Clubs embed themselves in local communities by hosting events, promoting physical fitness, staging public actions and sharing propaganda.



Potential members first see propaganda on encrypted apps such as Telegram or on social media. The clubs recruit in person at gyms, protests and local events, vetting new members to ensure they share the group's beliefs and can be trusted to maintain secrecy.

From fringe to functioning network

Based on current information from the [Global Project Against Hate and Extremism](#), there are 187 active chapters within the Active Club Network across 27 countries – a [25% increase from late 2023](#). The Crowd Counting Consortium documented [27 protest events involving Active Clubs](#) in 2022-2023.

However, precise membership numbers remain difficult to ascertain. Some groups call themselves “[youth clubs](#)” but share similar ideas and aesthetics and engage in similar activities.

Active Club members view themselves as defenders of Western civilization and masculine virtue. From their perspective, their activities represent noble resistance rather than hate. Members are encouraged to stay secretive, prepare for societal collapse and build a network of committed, fit men ready to act through infiltration, activism or violence.

Hiding in plain sight

Law enforcement agencies, researchers and civil society now face a new kind of domestic threat that wears workout clothes instead of uniforms.

Active Clubs work across international borders, bound by shared ideas and tactics and a common purpose. This is the new white nationalism: decentralized, modernized, more agile and disguised as self-improvement. What appears to be a harmless workout group may be a gateway to violent extremism, one pushup at a time.

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