



Nicholas Potter

Mapping the Far Right

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About this publication

From the parliaments to the streets, the far right poses a very real threat to democracy. Parties ranging from the populist to the radical right enjoy electoral success, while armed underground networks hoard weapons and plan for a "day X" – the impending demise of democratic society. Across Germany and the Nordic countries, the far right is well-connected. In particular, rock festivals and Mixed Martial Arts tournaments serve as lucrative micro-economies and networking events for the scene. The following report outlines some of the key players in Northern Europe and Germany, before making concrete policy recommendations in order to effectively combat right-wing extremism.

About the Author

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INTRODUCTION

From parliaments to the streets, Telegram groups to the dark web, the European far right is going from strength to strength. Populist parties from Germany's AfD to the Sweden Democrats and The Finnish Party espouse anti-immigrant and Islamophobic stances from the benches of democratically elected assemblies – polluting political discourse and smashing the Overton window of political acceptability in the process. Meanwhile, neo-Nazi skinheads, white power bands and far-right fighting champions are forging international networks that function as lucrative micro-economies, effective recruitment opportunities – and a breeding ground for right-wing terrorism.

Right-wing extremism is also going digital, as a new form of stochastic terrorism brews in Telegram groups and online forums, on Discord servers and Imageboards. 2021 marked the tenth anniversary of Anders Breivik's far-right attack in Oslo and Utøya that left 77 people dead – the majority under 18 years old – and injured hundreds more. The attack served as a blueprint, inspiring a new generation of right-wing terrorists connected through a shared online culture, ideology and network. From Christchurch to Poway, Halle to Hanau, the body count of this new phenomenon of far-right terrorism is increasing at an alarming rate.

In reality, the distance between parliaments and the armed underground is worryingly short. Far-right parties employ right-wing extremists as advisors and researchers. Seasoned neo-Nazis call on their followers to cast their ballots for parties whose logos are decorated with harmless flowers and ticks, rather than the established iconography of far-right militancy. From the conspiracy narrative of the "Great Replacement" to the threat of "Islamisation", the sound bites of elected representatives on the far right increasingly echo the so-called "manifestos" of right-wing terrorists from Norway to New Zealand. Across Europe, the far right is embarking upon its very own long march through the institutions – threatening the very democracy that helped it to power.

In 2020 and 2021, the FES Nordic Countries invited researchers and civil society bodies to participate in a series of online exchanges. The aim was to strengthen ties between individuals and organisations combatting right-wing extremism in the Nordic countries and Germany and, in the long-term, establish a Nordic-German expert network. This report summarises the findings of that exchange. The report also outlines some of the most prominent and dangerous movements within the Northern European and German far right, before making some concrete policy proposals to turn words into action and combat right-wing extremism. For too long, this threat has not been taken seriously enough. The time to act is now.

1 MAJOR FAR-RIGHT MOVEMENTS IN NORTHERN EUROPE

The following section contains a partial but by no means exhaustive list of some of the most important and influential groups, movements and parties within the Northern European and German far right.

Populist- to radical-right parties

Across Europe, far-right parties running on anti-immigrant, populist platforms have entered parliaments. Their success in part relies on their ability to mobilise a broader voter base than traditional neo-Nazi or white supremacist parties and movements, instead opting for a more acceptable image. They often use codes and dog whistles instead of overtly racist and antisemitic language. In some cases, these parties even remove members or politicians deemed to be too extreme in order to maintain the veneer of an ultra-conservative nationalist movement.¹

In reality, this is merely a façade. The ***Sverigedemokraterna*** (Sweden Democrats) was formed in the late 1980s by activists with roots in the Nazi movement and Swedish fascism. The party's first leader, Anders Klarström, was previously involved in the openly Nazi *Nordiska Rikspartiet* (The Nordic Realm Party) and its first auditor, Gustaf Ekström, was a veteran of the *Waffen-SS* and had been a member of the Swedish Nazi party *Svensk socialistisk samlning* (Swedish Socialist Gathering) (Widfeldt 2010: 29). Other founding members were previously active in the militant anti-immigration group *Bevara Sverige Svensk* (Keep Sweden Swedish). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the party began to distance itself from its past and underwent a rebranding, by banning uniforms, for example (Tomson 2020). Officially, the Sweden Democrats reject both fascism and Nazism (Rydgren 2006: 115). But the reality is often far more ambivalent.

"We tend to see Sweden Democrats as a harmless, anti-immigration party that organises voters that have just had enough when it comes to migration. That's the story that Sweden Democrats have effectively pushed out to the public," explains Bilan Osman, a journalist and former educator at the anti-racist Expo Foundation in Stockholm.² In 2006, under the new leader Jimmie Åkesson, the party changed its logo from a flaming torch, also used by the British National Front, to an ostensibly harmless flower. But in practice, their very radical nationalist views are still very much a threat to society, Osman continues: "The notion that they are harmless is part of their self-image. Below the surface, you still have the same racist, nationalist, misogynist party members".

The rebranding of the Sweden Democrats was successful. In 2014, the party won 12.9 per cent of the vote in national elections, increasing their share in 2018 to 17.5 per cent and

¹ The following chapter is largely based on filmed interviews made for the seminar series "Mapping the Radical Right" by the journalist Henrik Arnstad in 2020 and 2021. The interviews are available here: <https://nordics.fes.de/e/mapping-the-radical-right-in-northern-europe>

² Interview with Osman conducted in 2020.

landing them in third place for the second time running. “They are today one of the largest forces in Swedish politics,” Bilan Osman continues. “They have had a great impact on other parties as well as people”. The Sweden Democrats were initially viewed as a racist party, but have since become to an extent normalised within the political landscape, with the Christian Democrats and the conservative Moderate Party opening their doors for the Sweden Democrats, enabling cooperation – for example, regarding an alternative government budget proposal in 2021.

A similar effect can be observed in Denmark with the far-right **Dansk Folkeparti** (Danish People’s Party). “They’re textbook when it comes to Scandinavian populism,” explains Susi Meret, Associate Professor at Aalborg University.³ The Danish People’s Party first emerged in the late 1990s as an anti-immigration, anti-Islam, strongly ethnonationalist and welfare chauvinist party. “Since its inception, the party has been particularly overrepresented among what is called the ‘white working-class’, both skilled and unskilled workers”. This has pushed the Social Democrats onto the defensive, according to Meret, leading them to co-opt certain policies of the Danish People’s Party – and has strongly influenced broader public debate around immigration (Green-Pedersen and Odmalm 2013: 59).

In Finland, **Perussuomalaiset** (The Finns Party, formerly known as True Finns), has played a similar role within the political sphere. “It can be characterised as a right-radical movement,” Oula Silvennoinen, historian at the University of Helsinki, explains. “This party is influential not only because it’s the second-largest group in parliament right now, but because it is also the single available channel for even the most far-right extremists to political power”.⁴ In the 2019 Finnish election, the party came a close second behind the Social Democratic Party with just under 17.5 per cent of the vote. In the European elections in the same year, they won 13.8 per cent. “They have been able to channel the whole far right into their voters,” Silvennoinen continues. Particularly alarming is the platform *Suomen Sisu* (Finnish Resilience), a far-right association active within the Finns Party. It is limited to a small number of members. “But the fact that it is almost entirely incorporated within the Finns Party is significant,” says Silvennoinen. Several members of parliament are also members of *Suomen Sisu*. “It can be characterised as a fascist organisation” – functioning as a channel for the most extreme elements of far-right ideology into the Finns Party.

In Norway, the **Fremskrittspartiet** (The Progress Party) offers a political home for both conservatives and right-wing libertarians, as well as right-wing populists and the far right. It is currently the most right-wing party represented in the Norwegian parliament, winning 11.7 per cent of the vote in the 2021 election, down 3.6 per cent from its result in 2017. “The problem with the Progress Party is that they have a

number of politicians who have spewed conspiracy theories, Islamophobia and, to be honest, racist views,” according to the Norwegian writer and Human Rights Activist Shoaib M. Sultan.⁵ Often, their far-right rhetoric takes the form of dog whistles, falling just short of providing grounds for prosecution, Sultan continues. This has had a clear impact on Norwegian politics: “What was seen as an extremist position a few years ago is now public policy,” Sultan says. Far-right political positions have become a standard topic of debate, operating within the realm of acceptable politics. “The Progress Party has been effective in moving the boundaries on what it’s acceptable to say” – especially in relation to the topics of immigration and Islam.

Above all, Germany’s **Alternative für Deutschland** (Alternative for Germany, AfD) is emblematic of the parliamentarisation of far-right politics in Europe. Founded in 2013 as a Eurosceptic and economically liberal right-wing party, the AfD has since lurched fully and definitively to the hard right of German politics, having ousted its comparatively more moderate figures. The party has adopted an ultranationalist, anti-immigrant and anti-Islam programme and has strong ties to various movements on the far right, from the anti-Islam Pegida to the far-right Identitarian Movement and the “new right” think tank *Institut für Staatspolitik* (Institute for State Policy) to the anti-vax, Covid-denier network *Querdenken* (Nimz 2018; *Deutschlandfunk* 2020; Schulz 2021). Several leading party members, such as former co-chair and party co-founder Alexander Gauland, have continuously relativised German history and the crimes of National Socialism (*dpa* 2018).

The AfD is currently under observation by the German domestic intelligence service, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, in several federal states. In March 2020, the influential ethnonationalist wing of the party, *Der Flügel* (The Wing), was classified as a “confirmed right-wing extremist effort” against the democratic constitution of Germany. *Der Flügel* then officially disbanded, although in practice its network is still active within the party and central figures such as the fascist Björn Höcke and Hans-Thomas Tillschneider continue to hold leading positions within the party (Kabisch, Pittelkow and Riedel 2021; Schmeitzner 2021). Blanket observation of the entire party by intelligence services, which could involve the interception of communication and the use of informants, is currently the subject of a court battle.

Despite its increasing far-right radicalisation, the AfD’s share of the vote has remained relatively stable: in the 2017 federal elections it won 12.6 per cent of the vote; in 2021 it won 10.3 per cent. During the 2021 election, the party cemented its position in Saxony and Thuringia, coming in first place with around a quarter of the vote. In the state parliaments in Brandenburg, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia, the AfD is now the second strongest party. This electoral growth has come at the expense of more traditional far-right parties such as the NPD, whose neo-Nazi voters have flocked to the

³ Interview with Meret conducted in 2020.

⁴ Interview with Silvennoinen conducted in 2020. In January 2022, The Finns Party was the third-largest party in parliament.

⁵ Interview with Sultan conducted in 2020.

AfD in recent years. At the same time, the AfD has managed what the NPD never could with its unambiguously Nazi past: entering the Bundestag and normalising far-right positions on the mainstream political stage – a stage it uses to espouse the very same buzzwords as the far-right fringe or conspiracy bubble, from the anti-immigrant and antisemitic “Great Replacement” myth to the more recent “Great Reset” narrative.

However, in contrast to its Scandinavian counterparts, who have either governed or co-operated with other parties or plan to do so, the consensus among all other parties in the Bundestag and state parliaments is clear: reject any form of co-operation with the AfD. This consensus was put to the test in the state of Thuringia in March 2020, when the FDP politician Thomas Kemmerich was appointed state premier in a surprising and controversial vote with the help of the AfD. Following cross-party outcry, nationwide protests and a governmental crisis, Kemmerich promptly resigned. The episode was roundly criticised as having broken a taboo.

Far-right movements and neo-Nazi networks

NORDIC RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

Nordiska Motståndsrörelsen, commonly referred to as NMR or in English as the Nordic Resistance Movement, is a pan-Scandinavian neo-Nazi network. It was initially founded in 1997 by the Swedish neo-Nazi Klas Lund as *Svenska Motståndsrörelsen* (Swedish Resistance Movement) (Wiggen 2020). Lund was previously a leading member of the violent neo-Nazi group *Vitt Ariskt Motstånd* (White Aryan Resistance). Chapters of the NMR have since emerged in Norway, Finland, Iceland and Denmark, all of which are called the Nordic Resistance Movement in their respective languages (Potter 2021a).

The group is most active and influential in Sweden (approximately 150 to 300 members before a split in 2019) and Finland (approximately 200 to 400 members). In Norway, their support is more limited, with around just a few dozen active members as of 2017 (Hansen 2017). There are no reliable numbers for the Icelandic and Danish chapters, although their support in these countries is likely to be even more marginal. Their revolutionary goal: to establish a Nordic neo-Nazi state for “white people”. An obvious influence of the NMR is the Romanian fascist and extremely antisemitic organisation Iron Guard, led by Corneliu Zelea Codreanu in the 1930s. The NMR sports both the same green-and-white colours of Codreanu’s guard and organises itself in “nests” (Potter 2021a).

The list of violent attacks that can be traced back to the NMR is long. In 2013, three neo-Nazis stabbed a man in the Finnish university city Jyväskylä after being denied entry to an event on right-wing extremism at the city library. In 2016, two men with links to the NMR carried out bomb attacks on a left-wing information centre and two asylum centres in Gothenburg, Sweden. In 2019 in Oslo, two neo-Nazis with links to the group hijacked an ambulance with an Uzi and

shotgun, hitting passers-by. The list goes on. Since 2017, the Israeli embassy in Helsinki has been vandalised more than 20 times by neo-Nazis with swastikas, images of Hitler and NMR stickers. According to the Finnish public broadcaster Yle, two-thirds of the members of the Finnish NMR have already been sentenced for violent crimes (Jansson, Roslund and Rissanen 2018).

In Sweden, the NMR underwent a split in 2019. Several leading members, including founder Klas Lund, left to form the breakaway *Nordisk Styrka* (Nordic Strength), a self-proclaimed paramilitary “fighting organisation” that operates in a more clandestine, elitist and radical fashion than the NMR (Folkö 2019). The rest of the NMR in Sweden has turned its attention to parliamentary elections – albeit with little success. Already in 2014, two members of the movement were elected on the Sweden Democrats’ ticket to the municipal councils in Ludvika and Borlänge. In 2015, the NMR was registered as a political party. Behind this change is Simon Lindberg, head of the NMR in Sweden since 2015 and a former member of the neo-Nazi party *Nationalsocialistisk Front* (NSF). This focus on parliamentary politics is also likely to have been one reason for the split of the movement (Folkö 2019). However, the movement’s parliamentary breakthrough has so far failed to materialise. In the 2018 general election, the party received just 0.03 per cent with around 2,100 votes – less than all other splinter parties (Valmyndigheten 2018). A year later, after the founding of *Nordisk Styrka*, the party received only 644 votes in the EU election (Valmyndigheten 2019).

In Finland, the NMR was banned by the Supreme Court in 2019, a ruling that was upheld in September 2020. Despite the ban, the group has continued to organise demonstrations in their trademark green-and-white aesthetic. Several newly formed organisations such as *Suomi Herää* (Finland Wake Up), *Kohti Vapautta* (Towards Freedom) and *Kansallissradikaalia Toimintaa* (National Radical Action) function as successor organisations to circumvent the court ruling (Jääskeläinen 2019; Potter 2021a; Varis Antifasistinen Verkosto 2021).

HAMMERSKINS

The Hammerskins are among the most conspiratorial and clandestine far-right groups worldwide. Founded by white supremacists in Dallas, Texas in 1988, they have since branched out internationally, with chapters across Europe as well as in Australia and New Zealand (Reynolds 1999). The Hammerskins are tightly organised, adhere to a strict hierarchy, and consider themselves the “elite” of the neo-Nazi movement. Central to the group is their code of silence, with little about the group being publicised. The group has also written a “Hammerskin Constitution”. Their goal: to unite all white, nationalist forces to create a “racially pure” society – the “Hammerskin Nation” (Alshater 2021).

Far-right rock festivals and concerts are particularly important events in the Hammerskin calendar. They serve as important meet-ups for regional and international chapters, as

well as a vital source of income for their structures. Several Hammerskins or supporters are in bands or run far-right labels, for example Front Records, Wewelsburg Records or the groups D.S.T., Flak and Division Germania. The Hammerskins host several annual concerts, including the “Hammerfest” in both the United States and Europe (Anti-Defamation League 2022).

Above all, the Hammerskins are violent. In 1999, a young black American was attacked by six Hammerskins and severely injured. In 2012, a Hammerskin shot six people dead and seriously injured others at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin. Leading German Hammerskins Malte Redeker and Hendrik Singh had direct contact to the shooter (Alshater 2021).

According to the anti-fascist research collective *Exif*, Redeker is the European head of the Hammerskins and direct point of contact for all European chapters (*Exif* 2021). The German newspaper *taz* also names Redeker the European head of the Hammerskins (Litschko and Kaul 2015). There are also numerous links between the Hammerskins and the far-right terror group National Socialist Underground (NSU), who murdered at least ten people between 2000 and 2011, when the terror group exposed itself (Alshater 2021). The Hammerskin chapter in Saxony, for example, had close ties to the convicted NSU accomplices and neo-Nazis André Eminger and Ralf Wohlleben since the 1990s. Hammerskins also financially supported Ralf Wohlleben while he was incarcerated.

One of the first chapters in Europe was founded in Switzerland in 1990 and quickly became considered the “mother chapter”. In Germany, the first chapter emerged in Berlin in 1992, followed by Saxony a year later. Since then, the chapters Bremen, Mecklenburg, Pomerania, Saargau, Bavaria, Franconia, Westwall, Württemberg, Brandenburg, Westphalia and Rhineland have also been founded. Experts estimate that around 150 neo-Nazis are members of the Hammerskins in Germany (Alshater 2021; *Exif* 2021).

Since at least the early 2010s, there has also been a chapter called Sweden Hammerskins. According to the Swedish Expo Foundation, an anti-racist NGO, they had a clubhouse located in the Värmland region, but the group lost the premises in 2021. The Expo Foundation considers the Swedish chapter of the Hammerskins to be very small.

Crew 38, the Hammerskin support network, previously had profiles on Facebook for Finnish and Swedish members, before they were deleted. A photo uploaded in 2018 by a member of Sweden Hammerskins to the Russian social media site VK, a popular platform among neo-Nazis, shows several members in Crew 38 and Hammerskin t-shirts, who according to the photo caption belong to Crew 38 in Sweden, France and Brazil. According to the anti-fascist research collective *Exif*, a German member of Crew 38, Mirko Fritze, known in the scene by his stage name “Barney”, has previously lived in Sweden (*Exif* 2021).

Due to the clandestine nature of the organisation, it is difficult to gauge the exact size and influence of chapters in certain countries, for example in Scandinavia. However, what

the Hammerskins generally lack in membership numbers, they more than compensate for in terms of rigid discipline, international networking and a propensity for violence.

SOLDIERS OF ODIN

The Soldiers of Odin emerged as a far-right street vigilante organisation in Finland in 2015, before spreading within northern Europe to Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Estonia and Germany, but also beyond Europe to countries such as Australia, Canada and the United States. The Finnish chapter of the group, named after the king of the gods in Norse mythology, was founded by Mika Ranta, who has connections to the Nordic Resistance Movement and has repeatedly served prison sentences for violent crimes (Kauranen 2016). Oula Silvennoinen, a historian at the University of Helsinki, estimates that the group has a few hundred active members in Finland, although it appears to have been in decline in recent years. According to research by the Finnish public broadcaster *Yle*, 70 per cent of its members have already been convicted of a crime (Jansson, Roslund and Rissanen 2018). In Norway, former Norwegian Defence Alliance leader and Norwegian Pegida activist Ronny Alte was initially the group’s spokesperson and de facto leader, before leaving the Soldiers of Odin after in-fighting over the group’s direction (Laizans and Dagenborg 2016). Head of the Swedish chapter is Mikael Johansson, formerly a member of *Nationaldemokraterna* (National Democrats), a radical faction within the Sweden Democrats that was expelled from the party in 2001 (Leman, Quensel and Vergara 2016).

The group was ostensibly formed as a response to the number of refugees arriving in Europe in the summer of 2015, describing themselves as “a patriotic organisation that fights for a white Finland”. Members typically wear uniforms – black jackets or hoodies donning the group’s logo, a Viking with a horn helmet – and go on “patrols” to scare away “Islamist intruders”, which the Soldiers of Odin claim “cause insecurity and increase crime”. While the Soldiers of Odin have tried to distance themselves from neo-Nazism in the past, militant neo-Nazis, such as the Norwegian-Russian Yan Petrovskiy, who fought as a foreign soldier in Russia’s war against Ukraine from 2014 and has been accused of war crimes, have also gone on patrols. In Finland, members of the Soldiers of Odin maintain close relations with former members of the Nordic Resistance Movement, which is now officially banned (Jansson, Roslund and Rissanen 2018).

In Germany, the Soldiers of Odin has chapters in almost all federal states. It is particularly active in Bavaria, where the state domestic intelligence service, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, classified it as a far-right group in 2017 and began observation measures against members (*dpa* 2017). In 2020, Werner S., a “Sergeant at Arms” within the Soldiers of Odin Germany, was arrested along with 12 other men who conspired to carry out terrorist attacks against mosques, refugees and politicians. The so-called *Gruppe S.* (Group S.), named after its leader, sought to bring about a civil war in Germany through armed attacks. They have been on trial since April 2021 (Wöstmann 2021).

DER III. WEG AND NPD

The German neo-Nazi parties *Der III. Weg* (The Third Path) and NPD are irrelevant as parliamentary organisations, with no seats in regional or national assemblies. However, both organisations have violent neo-Nazis with strong international connections among their ranks – including with Scandinavian neo-Nazis (Potter 2021a).

The NPD – or *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschland* (National Democratic Party of Germany) – was formed in 1964. Through both its political programme and its language, the NPD draws heavily on the legacy of Hitler's NS-DAP. In the 1960s, the party entered regional parliaments in Hesse, Bavaria, Bremen, Rhineland-Palatinate, Lower Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein and Baden-Württemberg (in which it even managed to win 9.8 per cent of the vote). In subsequent decades, the party went into decline amidst factional infighting and a series of electoral defeats, and failed to enter the Bundestag. In 2004, the NPD entered a regional parliament again for the first time since 1968, in Saxony with 9.2 per cent of the vote. They were able to repeat this success two years later in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. In 2014, the long-standing party chair and neo-Nazi Udo Voigt was elected to the European Parliament with just one per cent of the vote, after Germany's top court ruled the "three per cent hurdle" for parties invalid (dpa 2013).

However, since then, the party's decline has only continued, leaving it largely a spent force on the far right. Where the party had almost 30,000 members in the 1960s, in recent years it has shrunk to just 3,500. This is due to a number of factors. There have so far been two attempts to ban the party by the Federal Constitutional Court, Germany's highest court – from 2001 to 2003, and 2013 to 2017. Both attempts failed, most recently with a ruling that found, while the party is indeed anti-constitutional, it is too small and insignificant to actually achieve its aims. However, outside the hardened far right, these ban attempts have further damaged the party's image. Furthermore, the emergence of the AfD as a more socially acceptable far-right party came at the expense of the NPD, subsuming its place as a catch-all for voters to the right of the CDU's most nationalist and conservative tendencies.

Der III. Weg was founded in 2013 with significant participation from former officials of the NPD as well as neo-Nazis from *Freies Netz Süd* (FNS, Free Network South), which was banned shortly after in 2014. Party chairman is former NPD member Klaus Armstropp, a well-connected far-right activist with links to far-right groups throughout Germany and neo-Nazis across Europe. Like the far-right fringe party *Die Rechte* (The Right), which emerged from the banned group *Nationaler Widerstand Dortmund* (National Resistance Dortmund), *Der III. Weg* was likely founded in an attempt to continue operating the far-right FNS network under the protection of party privilege (political parties are protected under the German constitution and a party can only be banned by the Constitutional Court) (Potter 2021b). The ideology of *Der III. Weg* can be described as

ethnonationalist, antisemitic and racist. The party strives for a deeply nationalistic "German socialism" and wishes to severely limit all forms of immigration and tighten asylum law.

Unlike *Die Rechte* and the NPD, whose membership rolls have been gradually declining along with their relevance for some time, *Der III. Weg* has grown slightly in recent years. German domestic intelligence estimates that the party currently has about 600 members, compared to 500 in 2017 (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2021). For its part, the party claims it has 700 members. *Der III. Weg* sees itself as the cohesive, close-knit Nazi elite: members appear at demonstrations in uniform with green party flags and placards and rarely collaborate publicly with other far-right parties, despite the high turnover rate between far-right fringe parties in Germany. Members of *Der III. Weg* are violent. Several have been implicated in ongoing arson attacks against migrant and anti-fascist activists, for example in Berlin's Neukölln district. In Autumn 2021, several party members went on vigilante patrols with night-vision goggles on the German-Polish border to "protect" it from "illegal" migrants (Ayyadi 2021).

ATOMWAFFEN DIVISION

In recent years, a succession of small, clandestine far-right terror cells predominantly organised in closed chat groups on Discord and Telegram have emerged under the banner of *Atomwaffen Division* or variations thereof. The original *Atomwaffen Division* was founded in 2015 and inspired by the US neo-Nazi and *Siege* author James Mason, pursuing an accelerationist ideology influenced by Mason's writings with the aim of catalysing societal collapse and a "race war" through armed attacks. *Atomwaffen Division* members are internet-savvy, producing far-right memes, propaganda videos and donning an aesthetic of radioactive symbols and skull masks. The group has been linked to at least five murders and has been responsible for a number of planned terrorist attacks worldwide.

The original *Atomwaffen Division* has been designated as a terrorist group by multiple governments, including in the UK and Canada. In the US, it has officially disbanded and subsequently rebranded itself as the National Socialist Order. However, offshoots have since emerged in several countries worldwide. In Britain, *Sonnenkrieg Division* emerged in 2018. In Germany, propaganda videos and flyers have been signed by *Atomwaffendivision Deutschland*. A group calling itself *Feuerkrieg Division* emerged in 2019, with links to Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia and the UK, among other countries (Dittrich and Rafael 2020). In December 2020, a 23-year-old *Feuerkrieg Division* member from Bavaria, Germany was sentenced to two years imprisonment after planning a terrorist attack against a mosque or synagogue (Balzer 2020). In January 2021, there was an attempt to form an *Atomwaffen Division Europe*, predominantly organised by German neo-Nazis with links to the NPD but with involvement from right-wing extremists across Europe (Manemann 2021).

Following the initial ban of the Nordic Resistance Movement in Finland in 2019, members formed *Atomwaffen Division Finland* “*Siitoin Squadron*” (AWDSS). AWDSS is well networked with the Estonian branch of *Feuerkrieg Division*. In December 2021, five neo-Nazis in possession of firearms and explosives were arrested in Kankaanpää in southern Finland, under suspicion of planning a far-right terrorist attack. The group appears to have been influenced by both the accelerationist ideology and aesthetic of *Atomwaffen Division* (Potter 2021c).

While the size of far-right cells linked to *Atomwaffen Division* and its offshoots worldwide is comparatively small, with most groups having approximately just 5 to 20 members, the danger they pose is considerable. The racist, antisemitic and misogynist content posted in their chat groups is marked by a particular extremity, while far-right terrorists such as the shooters in Christchurch or Utøya are celebrated as heroes or “saints” (Rafael 2019). Most alarmingly, bomb manuals and instructions for building 3D-printed weapons are shared in these groups with the explicit aim of carrying out terrorist attacks. While some chat groups have been infiltrated by researchers and intelligence services, the post-organisational structure of these groups allows them to continuously re-form, change modes of communication and evade prosecution (Mulhall and Khan-Ruf 2021).

Imageboards and the Gamification of Terror

On July 22, 2011, the far-right terrorist Anders Breivik sent his 1,500-page “manifesto” – in reality a largely plagiarised and confused collection of racist, antisemitic and misogynist conspiracy myths along with details of his preparation for the attack – to over a thousand journalists, politicians and parties and organisations worldwide. What followed is now one of the most tragic chapters of Norwegian history. In Oslo, eight people were killed and 209 injured after Breivik detonated a bomb. On the island of Utøya, 69 people – mostly minors attending the summer camp of the social democratic youth organisation *Arbeidernes Ungdomsfylking* (AUF) – were murdered. It was the single most deadly attack in Norway since the Second World War – and the blueprint for a new type of right-wing terrorism.

In the ten years since Breivik’s attack, there has been a wave of similar shootings across the globe: in Munich, Halle, Baerum, Pittsburgh, El Paso, Poway and more. In 2019 alone, a particularly tragic peak in violence, 77 people lost their lives to this form of far-right terrorism. School shootings, for example, are not new. But the spate of attacks in recent years has a new dimension that must be understood as a political phenomenon underlined by a far-right ideology.

Many of the perpetrators, who are almost exclusively young white men, write “manifestos” similar to Breivik’s which they post on imageboards such as 4chan, 8chan (now

8kun) or Kohlchan. These far-right declarations often reference one another – and of course the shooters’ hero, Breivik. After the attack in Norway in 2011, hundreds of accounts on the gaming platform Steam were named after Breivik or featured his photo (Sieber 2020). Breivik planned on filming his attack, but was unable to obtain the right camera phone. As technology develops, his copycats have had more success – as the harrowing video of the Christchurch attack in 2019 painfully shows. Many of these attacks have undergone a process of gamification, whereby killings are staged to emulate first-person-shooter video games, with scores and awards given for particular “achievements”. The Halle shooter, for example, added a list of “high-score achievements” to his “manifesto” – for example “Cultural appropriation – Stab a Muslim” or “Nailed it – Kill someone with a nail-bomb”.

This new form of far-right terrorism is often framed by the media and politicians as both the result of mental illness and as acts by so-called “lone wolves”. This classification is problematic. First of all, it de-politicises what is typically an act of killing with a clear racist, antisemitic and/or misogynist motive, inspired by a far-right, neo-Nazi ideology based on the notion of white supremacy. Second of all, such far-right terrorists may carry out attacks single-handedly, but they are not alone. Rather, they are part of a new form of far-right networks that operate within the digital realm, on imageboards and Discord servers, in Telegram groups and on the dark web. This community shares memes, codes, language – and an ideology. Within these virtual spaces, users become increasingly radicalised to the point where one finally pulls the trigger. In this sense, these communities are defined by stochastic terrorism.

2 FRIENDS ABROAD: THE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION OF FAR-RIGHT GROUPS

Nordic Resistance goes global

Within the European far right, the Nordic Resistance Movement has adopted a particularly active approach to networking. According to the Finnish broadcaster Yle, at least 20 members of the Finnish chapter were active on the international neo-Nazi internet forum Iron March between 2011 and 2017, when the site was taken down (West, Lång and Jansson 2020). Members of far-right groups across Europe, such as the Greek fascist party *Chrysi Avgi* (Golden Dawn) and the Italian *Casa Pound*, were also active on the board. Several right-wing terrorist groups also spawned from Iron March such as *Atomwaffen Division* (USA/International) and National Action (UK). In 2015, members of National Action – a group that has since been proscribed in the UK – visited the Finnish chapter of the NMR (Potter 2021a; Potter 2021d). The British-Finnish Mikko Vehvilainen, formerly a sergeant in the British Army, has also served as an important link between the two groups. He was a member of National Action and the Finnish NMR before being sentenced to eight years in prison in 2018 for his membership in National Action (Numminen 2018; Varis Antifasistinen Verkosto 2018; Potter 2021a).

The NMR also has links to the Ukrainian Avoz movement, which encompasses an ultranationalist far-right paramilitary battalion fighting against pro-Russian separatists in the Ukrainian conflict. The far-right podcast FashCast published an interview between a member of the Finnish NMR and Olena Semenyaka, the so-called “First Lady” and former international secretary of the Azov party National Corps (Balzer 2021). In the interview, Semenyaka mentions a “foreign legion” in Ukraine that international volunteers could join, as well as military training camps at the Azov camp in eastern Ukraine (Potter 2021a). A delegation of the Finnish NMR visited the Azov Regiment in Kyiv in 2019 (Colborne 2019). Paradoxically, two members of the Swedish NMR, who were responsible for the series of bombings in Gothenburg in 2016 and 2017 mentioned earlier in this report, participated in a training camp in Saint Petersburg organised by the far-right paramilitary and pro-Russian Russian Imperial Movement in 2016, which fought against Ukrainian forces – including the Azov Regiment (Clarke and Saltskog 2020).

In Germany, the neo-Nazi party *Der III. Weg* is an important partner for the NMR. Members of the NMR have visited their far-right friends in Germany several times. At a demo of *Der III. Weg* in the Berlin district of Hohenschönhausen on October 3, 2020, Fredrik Vejdeland, a leading figure of the Swedish NMR chapter, gave a speech in German. NMR leader Simon Lindberg spoke at one of the party’s demonstrations in Würzburg in 2017. The exchange has been mutual, with members of *Der III. Weg* also travelling to Finland: In 2019, party founder Klaus Armstroff visited the head of the Swedish NMR, Simon Lindberg, in Helsinki. Together with a delegation of his fellow party members, Armstroff took part in the 612 March on Finnish Independence Day (Potter 2021a). Holiday photos from their Helsinki trip were subsequently uploaded to the party’s website. There also appear to be links between the NMR and the *Junge Nationalisten* (Young Nationalists, JN), the youth organisation of the German far-right party NPD. In 2017, the JN also participated in the 612 March in Helsinki (Potter 2021a).

Rechtsrock: Far-right concerts and festivals

Far-right music, in German referred to as *Rechtsrock*, is key for both the radicalisation and networking of the extreme right. Concerts and festivals are in many respects the backbone of the neo-Nazi scene. They provide the international far right with a space to live out their ideology far from the prying eyes of civil society or authorities, through Hitler salutes or white supremacist chants. But they also serve as a lucrative micro-economy and strategic opportunity in which to meet and mingle with neo-Nazis from other regions and countries (Büchner 2021). The Blood & Honour network, which was founded by Skrewdriver frontman Ian Stuart Donaldson in the 1980s, before going global, has long been a crucial link between far-right music and activism (Counter Extremism Project 2022). In Germany, the network has officially been banned since 2000, with its armed wing Combat 18 being declared illegal only as recently as 2020. Both networks continue to operate in a secretive,

clandestine fashion in Germany, Scandinavia and beyond (Exif 2018).

Two of the most prominent festival organisers in Germany are the neo-Nazis Tommy Frenck and Thorsten Heise. Frenck joined the NPD at a young age, has sat for the party as a local councillor and has been their candidate in elections, for example in for the state parliament in Thuringia in 2014. In 2017, Frenck organised the second edition of the far-right festival *Rock gegen Überfremdung* (Rock Against Overforeignisation) on the private property of local AfD politician Bodo Dressel in the village of Themar in Thuringia. Logistics and support were provided by the neo-Nazi biker gang *Turronen / Garde 20* (Potter 2021e). At least 6,000 neo-Nazis from across Europe travelled to the festival, dwarfing the village of 3,000 inhabitants in which it was held and making it among the largest gatherings of right-wing extremists that year in Europe. Among the bands playing were the Hammerskin group Flak, but also Die Lunikoff Verschwörung, formed by the singer of the banned far-right band Landser. At the festival’s considerably smaller first edition in 2016, Hammerskin Nico Metze also gave a speech (Freires 2016).

Another central figure within not just the far-right rock scene, but also the international militant neo-Nazi scene, is Thorsten Heise. Heise was born in Göttingen and currently resides in the village of Fretterode in Thuringia, with his home serving as a hub of the German and international far right. He has been a leading NPD functionary for years, as well as having close ties to the *Kameradschaft* (comradeship) scene of far-right “brotherhoods” and banned neo-Nazi networks such as Blood & Honour or Combat 18 (Diehl 2012). Thanks to Heise, the German and Swedish Combat 18 networks were able to forge close ties. The “*Versorgungslinie Nord*” (Supply Line North) was a production and distribution network close to the Blood & Honour network, which Heise established together with Danish and Swedish neo-Nazis in the 1990s (Exif 2018). Today, it continues to be run by Lars Bergeest and other Combat 18 members from *Kameradschaft Cismar* and Combat 18 Germany. Heise has visited Sweden several times. According to the anti-fascist research collective Exif, he for example visited around 60 neo-Nazis in Sölvesborg for a meet-up and song evening in 2016 (Exif 2018).

According to the affidavit of two neighbours of AfD state party leader Björn Höcke in the village of Bornhagen in Thuringia, Heise has visited Höcke on numerous occasions over a period of years, for a time coming and going. Heise also allegedly helped Höcke move house (Vogel 2018; Kempner 2019). Höcke and Heise do not deny knowing one another, but dispute that they are close friends. According to informants of Thuringia’s intelligence service, Heise allegedly promised to help the NSU core terror trio Uwe Böhnhardt, Uwe Mundlos and Beate Zschäpe flee abroad in 1999 (Thüringer Landtag 2019).

Most notably in recent years, Thorsten Heise has been behind the far-right rock festival *Schild und Schwert* (Shield and Sword), which first took place over the weekend of April 20-21, 2018 – coinciding with Hitler’s birthday – in Os-

tritz, Saxony on the grounds of the former Hotel Neisseblick belonging to former NPD member Hans-Peter Fischer. The festival drew around 1,000 neo-Nazis in its first year (*Belltower.News* 2018). The Danish neo-Nazi Jesper Krogh Sørensen (ex-*Danmarks National Front*), as well as presumed Swedish Combat 18 members Lars Bergeest, Rickard Johansson and Martin Karlsson attended the festival (*Exif* 2018). In 2019, 700 neo-Nazis attended (Mönch 2019). In 2020, the festival was postponed due to the Covid pandemic. *Schild und Schwert* has served as an important meet-up for the international far right (*Exif* 2019).

MMA: Far-right fighting tournaments

Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) events are also a favourite pastime of the far right, drawing neo-Nazis from across Europe ringside to witness the action first-hand. The most prominent and largest far-right fighting tournament in Europe is *Kampf der Nibelungen* (Fight of the Nibelungen). Founded in 2013, it has taken place annually with the exceptions of 2019 and 2020, when authorities prevented it from happening. The tournament was initially organised in a predominantly clandestine fashion, occurring in small locations. In 2017, 500 neo-Nazis attended the event in Kirchhundem in North Rhine-Westphalia. 2018 was the breakthrough year for *Kampf der Nibelungen*, with two tournaments. The first was held at the *Schild und Schwert* Festival in April 2018. *Kampf der Nibelungen* then took place for a second time at the same location in October 2018, drawing 850 visitors from across Germany, as well as France, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Czechia and Ukraine (Verfassungsschutz 2018).

Officially, the frontman of the operation is the Dortmund neo-Nazi Alexander Deptolla, a chair of the neo-Nazi party *Die Rechte*. Deptolla is listed on *Kampf der Nibelungen*'s website in the imprint as responsible for its content. But behind the scenes, Hammerskins assume leading roles with regards to the logistics and organisation of the event (*Exif* 2021; Alshater 2021). This allows the Hammerskins to both avoid the limelight and enables a synergy among several far-right neo-Nazi and hooligan scenes, from Deptolla's own party to the networks Combat 18 or Blood & Honour to other neo-Nazi parties such as *Der III. Weg* and the NPD (*Exif* 2021). Malte Redeker, European head of the Hammerskins, held a speech at *Kampf der Nibelungen* in 2019, where he stressed the importance of far-right fighting events for the neo-Nazi scene – not just psychologically and for the confidence of the movement, but also for the coming “day X”, the collapse of democratic society popularised by the far-right novel *The Turner Diaries* and the writings of the US neo-Nazi James Mason in his *Siege* newsletters (Alshater 2021).

In Sweden, the fighting tournament King of the Streets fulfils a similar function. While the event – a brutal form of combat completely void of any rules – does not define itself as far-right or neo-Nazi, also drawing fighters and spectators from the organised hooligan and streetfighter scenes, it does not distance itself from neo-Nazi fans or fighters either (*Belltower.News* 2021). The French neo-Nazi Tomasz Szka-

tulski, head of the far-right martial arts brand Pride France who has links to the Blood & Honour network, has fought at King of the Streets (Häuptli 2020). The Dortmund neo-Nazi Tom Neubert has similarly billed as a fighter in September 2019. Neubert was linked to King of the Streets in his Instagram biography, which in turn has liked several of his posts (*Belltower.News* 2021).

Kampf der Nibelungen and King of the Streets are just two examples within a lucrative and highly aggressive scene of far-right MMA fighting tournaments. Meanwhile, the Russian neo-Nazi Denis Nikitin (real name: Kapustin), who previously lived in Cologne and forged ties with the far right in Germany, has moved to Ukraine and is well-connected with the Azov movement – presenting the battalion's volunteer regiment to European far-right movements (Kovalenko 2020; Diehl et al. 2019). Through his brand, White Rex, he organises mixed martial arts tournaments. While the pandemic has put a stop to most events within the past two years, streaming has provided the scene with a financial lifeline (Spiller 2020). Several far-right groups, for example *Der III. Weg*, also promote fighting as a community activity, offering combat classes for teenagers and adults (Potter 2021b). The rhetoric of the neo-Nazi scene makes it abundantly clear that fighting is not merely a form of entertainment. They are training for war (Alshater 2021).

3 POLICY PROPOSALS

The picture is bleak: the far right in Northern Europe and Germany is well-connected and violent, both offline and online. Politicians and security services must take the threat posed by an increasingly internationalised far right seriously. The following section is a list of concrete policy proposals, developed together with the Amadeu Antonio Foundation in Berlin for Germany following the 2021 federal election ahead of coalition negotiations (Amadeu Antonio Foundation 2021). These recommendations were presented to a panel of experts from Nordic countries at an event organised by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in December 2021, the majority of which were supported. Similar problems were identified in Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland. The policy recommendations have been adapted below for a more international context. The proposals are divided into four sections: (i) Increase pressure to prosecute right-wing extremists and protect victims, (ii) Combat antisemitism and conspiracy ideologies, (iii) Structural work on racism and (iv) Protect and promote independent civil society.

I. Prosecute right-wing extremists and protect victims

- All currently open arrest warrants against right-wing extremists must be enforced immediately. In Germany, there are currently 788 warrants against politically motivated criminals from the right-wing spectrum, according to the German government. Well-known right-wing extremists in particular should be disarmed and monitored more effectively. As of December 2020, approximately

1,200 right-wing extremists legally owned firearms in Germany – an increase of more than a third compared to the previous year.

- A zero-tolerance policy towards right-wing extremists who work in the civil service, police and armed forces is essential: they must be dismissed or discharged. A review of far-right incidents within the public sector can only be carried out credibly with the participation of independent bodies.
- Exit programmes for neo-Nazis wishing to leave the scene and change their ways must be adequately funded and developed together with civil society and social workers in order to create a credible and meaningful process of reintegration into democratic society.
- NGOs and think tanks that monitor the far right need access to better, long-term funding in order to continue their valuable work. Repeatedly, these organisations have demonstrated a far more comprehensive and analytical understanding of the far right than police and security services. At the same time, they are subject to an enormous number of threats from the far right for their work. They therefore require access to more resources and security – both financial and physical.
- Law enforcement and security services should critically re-examine their use of paid informants within far-right movements and groups. These networks of informants have been ineffective in preventing far-right attacks, such as the decade-long series of murders by the NSU in Germany, while at the same time inadvertently funding neo-Nazi structures. As these informants have been or continue to be active, ideological members of far-right movements, the value of their intelligence and its usefulness in combatting right-wing extremism must be seriously called into question.
- Law enforcement and the judiciary should move away from a state security-centred approach regarding politically motivated crime. Instead, they should adopt human rights-centred legislation on hate crime. Criminal proceedings should be guided by the prejudice-based selection of victims and the impact on those affected – not the ideology of the perpetrator(s), which is often ambivalent in reality, or the perpetrators' affiliation with a particular scene.
- Anti-feminism plays a key role in connecting various figures and movements on the far right, from the imageboard scene to the ultra-conservative family rhetoric of the AfD to the beer benches of neo-Nazi rock festivals. But it is also a gateway to anti-democratic ideologies that can also be found also within the so-called "middle" of society. Anti-feminism must therefore be taken into consideration when documenting politically motivated crime or hate crime, as well as regarding right-wing extremism prevention.
- Victims of far-right hate crime online need targeted help through support programmes and qualified advice. Platforms and networks, from Facebook to TikTok, can and must be regulated more strictly. This includes simplifying reporting procedures, creating transparency for algorithms and targeting, a monitored implementation of community standards and, in the case of Germany, expanding the Network Enforcement Act (*NetzDG*) to cover gaming communities such as Steam and messenger services such as Telegram.
- Far-right political parties must be closely monitored by intelligence services when it can be demonstrated that they are acting anti-constitutionally or anti-democratically. Specifically, the way in which these far-right parties use state funds to finance far-right infrastructure, ideological think tanks and violent right-wing extremists must be critically and transparently examined.

II. Combat antisemitism and conspiracy ideologies

- Antisemitism comes from the right, the left, from Islamism and from the supposed centre of society. Jewish life must be protected through comprehensive security measures for Jewish institutions and synagogues. Jewish communities should not be responsible for organising these themselves.
- Investigations into antisemitic offences should no longer be able to be closed without any results, as is currently the case in Germany. Such offences must be consistently and sufficiently investigated and brought to a conclusion. In order to more effectively fight antisemitism, antisemitic crimes need to be more precisely documented according to their ideological motives.
- More robust efforts are required to halt the spread of conspiracy ideologies. During the Covid pandemic, the wearing of yellow stars by the "unvaccinated" and antisemitic narratives have become rife across Europe. What were once relics of the far right have long since reached the political mainstream. Antisemitic conspiracy ideologies are a threat to democracy and must be dealt with accordingly in political education.
- Report centres for antisemitism, but also racism and other forms of discrimination, need to be fully funded nationwide in order to shed light on the dark figure of unreported incidents – especially those below the limit of criminal liability, with priority given to the perspectives of affected communities and victims.
- It is urgent that education and prevention work, as well as research on antisemitism, are expanded with the inclusion of a Jewish perspective. Antisemitism must not only be prohibited, but also analysed in terms of its forms and functions. The culture of Holocaust remem-

brance and the process of coming to terms with the Nazi genocide must be defended against attacks from the right in order to ensure a respectful future for remembrance.

III. Structural work on racism

- Security services and state administration need mandatory independent complaints offices for racist discrimination that include the perspective of victims.
- Governments should appoint independent commissioners against antisemitism, racism and antiziganism, and provide them with the necessary resources. Germany already has federal and regional commissioners for the prevention of antisemitism – this must be expanded, both within Germany to cover other forms of discrimination, and in northern Europe. The basis of their work should be a uniform definition of various forms of racism and discrimination (including institutional and structural racism).
- The legacy of colonialism has not been sufficiently addressed. Public places that commemorate colonial criminals should be renamed, and colonial monuments critically examined. Colonial history and colonial racism are often missing in school education, and discussion on it must be expanded.

IV. Protect and promote independent civil society

- Only a law promoting democracy (in German: *Demokratieförderungsgesetz*) can create the legal framework required to adequately fund democracy projects as well as tried and tested approaches in the long term. Its design must be discussed transparently with the involvement of central players in the field of democracy work and confidently describe the role of a critical and independent civil society.
- In order to protect democratically engaged people, such as activists, campaigners and researchers, from hostility and threats, we need protection concepts for civil society actors. This includes, among other things, public funds to (preventively) cover the costs of security measures, increased awareness on the part of authorities, who must actively and comprehensively inform people in the event of a threat, and a simplified procedure to de-list and protect private information such as home addresses in official registers.
- Measures for the protection of democracy and combating hate targeted towards specific groups can only be developed and implemented if political actors and civil society cooperate on an equal footing. It is time for a democracy pact between the national governments, states, local authorities and civil society.

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EUROPA

From the parliaments to the streets, the far right poses a very real threat to democracy. Parties ranging from populist to radical right, from Germany's *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) to the Sweden Democrats enjoy electoral success, shattering the Overton window of political acceptability in the process and toxifying public debate. Armed underground networks are hoarding weapons and planning for a "day X" – their term for the impending demise of democratic society.

Across Germany and the Nordic countries, the far right is well-connected. Far-right rock festivals and Mixed Martial Arts tournaments, in particular, serve as lucrative micro-economies and networking events for the scene. They offer spaces of radicalisation in which the far right can live out its hateful ideology, away from the prying eyes of the authorities or democratic society.

The following report outlines some of the key players in Northern Europe and Germany, from political parties to international networks such as the Nordic Resistance Movement, Hammerskins, the Soldiers of Odin and Combat 18. The report also details how these networks are interlinked. Finally, it makes concrete policy recommendations to effectively combat right-wing extremism.

Further information on the project can be found here:
<https://nordics.fes.de/>