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**SOCCER HOOLIGANS TO MMA — THE CHANGING
FACE OF THE RADICAL RIGHT THROUGH SPORTS**

by

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**SOCCER HOOLIGANS TO MMA — THE CHANGING FACE
OF THE RADICAL RIGHT THROUGH SPORTS**

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ABSTRACT

The radical right in Europe uses sports and sports fans as a vehicle for recruitment and radicalization, as a space to refine extreme right-wing ideology, and as an arena for politically charged violence. This thesis analyzes the evolving relationship the radical right has with soccer hooligans and mixed martial arts (MMA) within Europe to determine the interplay between political ideology, popular culture, and violence from the 1980s to the present. Specifically, it evaluates how the radical right in Europe uses soccer and MMA to achieve its political objectives, while taking into account the development of regulations within the sports and of their fans. This thesis concludes that the changing political landscape in Europe, with the rise of Islamophobia, along with increased sporting and spectator regulations, a decline of violent hooliganism, and the recent popularity of MMA, have led to a refinement of radical right ideology and recruitment methods, as well as a professionalization of political violence. Fundamentally, soccer hooligans, constrained by increasing spectator regulation and limited politically legitimate support, turned to MMA and went from rioting in the streets to the brutality, refinement, and popularity of the MMA octagon.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-----------|--|
| AfD | Alternative for Germany |
| BLM | Black Lives Matter |
| DFLA | Democratic Football Lads Alliance |
| DVKE | German Association of Martial Arts Schools against Violent Extremism |
| EPAS | Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport |
| EU | European Union |
| FLA | Football Lads Alliance |
| GAISF | Global Association of International Sport Federations |
| GRIDS | German Institute for Radicalization and Deradicalization Studies |
| Ho.Ge.Sa. | Hooligans against Salafists |
| IMMAF | International Mixed Martial Arts Federation |
| KdN | Kampf der Nibelungen |
| KSW | Konfrontacja Sztuk Walki |
| MMA | Mixed Martial Arts |
| RAM | Rage against Movement |
| RAN | Radicalization Awareness Network |
| UEFA | Union of European Football Associations |
| UFC | Ultimate Fighting Championship |
| USSR | Union of Socialist Soviet Republics |
| WADA | World Anti-Doping Agency |
| WMMAA | World Mixed Martial Arts Association |

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I. INTRODUCTION

Since the late 19th century, the radical right in Europe has used sports as a recruitment front, a training center for violence, and a place to spread and refine extreme right-wing ideology. After World War II, the politicization of sport became more closely linked with the fans, not players; the former developed clubs and splinter groups separate from the sports clubs themselves which created a space for similarly minded individuals to create, refine, and propagate political ideologies. For example, the Democratic Football Lads Alliance is a far-right, anti-Islam group developed by Tottenham Hotspur supporters in the wake of the Manchester Arena terrorist attacks in 2017.¹

This trend exists outside of European soccer. Mixed martial arts (MMA) is growing in popularity in Europe, but, unlike soccer, MMA is still fairly unregulated, leaving it open to private exploitation by the radical right.² Training and events also turn a tidy profit for organizers, as a steady stream of enthusiasts seek to watch, learn, or engage in the violence that characterizes the sport. The present project traces the shift from variously politicized soccer hooligans to the rise of the mixed martial arts (MMA) scene to explore the changing nature of the European far right and its relation to sport. Specifically, it asks: What is the European radical right's relationship to sport and how has it changed over time?

The radical right, which encompasses a broad variety of populist, xenophobic and nationalist groups, has been on an upward trend in European governments for the past 30 years.³ The rise and legitimization of such right-wing political parties leads to democratic back-sliding and widespread discrimination and inequality. The growing number of individuals advocating for nationalistic, xenophobic, and radical views has increased

¹ Ben Bryant and Thomasz Frymorgen, "Football Lads Alliance: 'We Could Have a Civil War in This Country,'" *BBC Three*, 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/e5ee9e0a-18d7-49a4-a3c2-80b6b4222058>.

² Karim Zidan, "Fascist Fight Clubs: How White Nationalists Use MMA as a Recruiting Tool," *The Guardian*, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2018/sep/11/far-right-fight-clubs-mma-white-nationalists>.

³ Markus Wagner and Thomas M Meyer, "The Radical Right as Niche Parties? The Ideological Landscape of Party Systems in Western Europe, 1980–2014," *Political Studies* 65, no. 1_suppl (October 2016): pp. 84–107, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321716639065>.

within governments, and the popularity of these groups is reaching near mainstream status. One of the most important components of this topic is the radical right's complicated relationship with violence. Over time, just as the policy and ideology of the right has evolved so has their association with militant behavior. This evolution in behavior can be seen through the radical right association to sports, and how that relationship has evolved alongside radical right ideology.

A. EXPLANATION OF SCOPE

This project will look at soccer and MMA in Europe from the 1980s until the present as separate case studies to evaluate their relationship to the radical right. Soccer and MMA will be assessed as soccer is one of the most popular sports and MMA is one of the fastest growing sports in popularity in Europe. Soccer is well established with leagues, fair play regulations and a fairly transparent market economy set up connecting players, coaches and fans. Along with being well-established soccer is fundamentally a European sport which has been exported and globalized. MMA is a relative newcomer on the European stage with limited regulations, a growing fan base, and informal structures with little oversight from the sport's main body. MMA is also inherently global as it professionalized and combines fighting styles from every country, while its legitimacy as a sport within Europe is questioned.⁴ Evaluating how the radical right uses each sport to their advantage and how their relation to that sport has evolved over time will provide insight into the type of regulation that benefits the radical right, as well as what environment, the anonymity of a large fan base or the intensity of the niche market, provides the best cover for radical right ideology.

The literature on the radical right covers the creation and evolution of the political movement as a whole in great detail across the European continent. It also discusses the radical right's ongoing relationship with sports for recruitment, radicalization, and a tool for violence. That is, radicalization through sports is often overlooked, but it is an effective

⁴ Jesper Andreasson and Thomas Johansson, "Negotiating Violence: Mixed Martial Arts as a Spectacle and Sport," *Sport in Society* 22, no. 7 (2018): pp. 1183–1197, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2018.1505868>, 2.

tool for the radical right to gain supporters and an effective cover to train to militancy. I wish to add to this literature through an exploration of the interplay between the formal and informal institutions of the radical right and their utilization of and relationship to sports specifically evaluating MMA and soccer hooliganism.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

The evolving nature of the European radical right during the past fifty years is a widely covered topic in academic literature. There are many different definitions of the radical right throughout the literature however for the purposes of this thesis Wodak's definition of right-wing populism, "as a political ideology that rejects existing political consensus and usually combines laissez-faire liberalism and anti-elitism," is the most inclusive and therefore most useful.⁵ It is important to note that current right-wing parties have a strong undercurrent of ethno-nationalism, which, though absent from Wodak's definition, is also a fundamental part of the radical right.⁶ This literature review will discuss the evolution of radical right ideology, followed by the radical right's relationship to violence and end with an analysis of the radical rights relationship to sports. In the proposed project I wish to add to the literature of the radical right wing when it comes to their association with violence as seen through the lens of sports in Europe.

1. Evolving Radical Right

There is a consensus among academics that the radical right is growing in popularity and political strength.⁷ Betz, in his book *Radical Right-Wing Populism*, breaks

⁵ Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc., 2015), 7.

⁶ Joachim Kersten and Natalia Hankel, "A Comparative Look at Right-Wing Extremism, Anti-Semitism, and Xenophobic Hate Crimes in Poland, Ukraine, and Russia," in *Right-Wing Radicalism Today: Perspectives from Europe and the U.S.*, ed. Sabine Von Mering and Timothy Wyman McCarty (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 85–105, 86.

⁷ Pieter Bevelander and Ruth Wodak, "Europe at the Crossroads: Confronting Populist, Nationalist, and Global Challenges," in *Europe at the Crossroads: Confronting Populist, Nationalist, and Global Challenges* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2019), pp. 7–22, 7; Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*, x; Hans-Georg Betz, *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe* (London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1994), ix.

this growth into two out groups: Neo-liberal populism and national populism.⁸ He claims the neo-liberal populism emerged out of the economic stagnation and inflation surrounding the oil shocks of the 1970s and focuses on removing state control from the economy, reducing public welfare and promoting movement of capital and labor.⁹ National populism developed a bit later in the 1980s with the rise of immigration. It primarily focuses on anti-immigrant rhetoric focusing on the cultural threat, while neo-liberal populist groups rely on the economic issues such as rising unemployment.¹⁰ Current right-wing groups still retain both neo-liberal and nationalistic policy objectives, but more commonly focus on social and cultural issues to gain traction with the public while parsing these issues using overly-simplistic nationalist rhetoric. Essentially, there is a shift from economic policy at the forefront in the 1980s to increasingly xenophobic policy objectives at the present.

In the book *Transformations of Populism in Europe and the Americas*, John Abromeit, York Norman, Gary Marotta, and Bridget María Chesterton take a broader approach and, with a specific focus on right-wing populism, split the grouping between progressive populism and reactionary populism. They use the argument that progressive populism, as in the type that was inspired by the French revolution has turned into reactionary populism, as in the type that currently inspires such groups as the Identitarians or the Front National in France.¹¹ This continuity of right-wing populism from progressive to reactionary re-enforces the idea that right-wing ideology shifts from liberal ideals to exclusionary policies in order to protect what radicals see as the pure history, governance and culture of their country.

Today, the phenomenon that Betz called national populism has received a surge of interest on intellectual activity, with a greater focus on xenophobic and islamophobic

⁸ Betz, "Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe," 108.

⁹ Betz, 109.

¹⁰ Betz, 119.

¹¹ John Abromeit et al., "Introduction," in *Transformations of Populism in Europe and the Americas: History and Recent Tendencies* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. xi-xxxi, xvii.

policy and rhetoric.¹² Ivan Krastev in his book *After Europe*, states that the refugee crisis is the most important crisis the European Union has faced since 2008. He discusses how the rise in migration to Europe has changed European perceptions of themselves and shaped voter's political identity separate from previous class-based identities and toward "Anywheres and Somewheres, between globalists and nativists, and between open societies and closed societies."¹³ Wodak takes Krastev's assessment of European voter identity a step further in her book *The Politics of Fear* and discusses how the radical right has taken advantage of European's perceptions of themselves and created a scapegoat in foreigners for all the difficult problems.¹⁴ Wodak uses voting data to illustrate that right-wing parties that use these narratives have, generally speaking, increased their vote share.¹⁵

The radical right across Europe has also changed the methods through which it propagates its ideology such as embracing a more beneficial relationship to all types of media, specifically the use of the internet.¹⁶ Mering and McCarthy note, "...globalization and the rise of Islamophobia have provided...an increase in populist movements, while simultaneous introduction of the internet has supplied the medium."¹⁷ Zuquete in his book also discusses at length how the Identitarian movement, as the current face of Europe's far right, has benefited from its, "clean-shaven" and "appealing" form of activism with an emphasis on the utilization of vlogs, livestreams and other common social media.¹⁸

It is important to note, however that the Identitarian movement does not use toned-down rhetoric, like many political parties but instead normalizes the use of militant verbiage to attract a younger following. Matkus Willinger's manifesto *Generation Identity*

¹² Mering and McCarty, "Right-Wing Radicalism Today," in *Right-Wing Radicalism Today*, 5; Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*, 22.

¹³ Ivan Krastev, *After Europe* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 34.

¹⁴ Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*, 2.

¹⁵ Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*, 31–35.

¹⁶ Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*, 21; Mering and McCarty, "Right-Wing Radicalism Today," 6; Jose Pedro Zuquete, *The Identitarians: The Movement against Globalism and Islam in Europe* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 3.

¹⁷ Mering and McCarty, "Right-Wing Radicalism Today," 1.

¹⁸ Zuquete, *The Identitarians*, 3.

that outlines Identitarian policy openly and repeatedly calls itself a “declaration of war.”¹⁹ The anti-political and anti-elite nature of the Identitarian movement might mean that in not fitting in with more politically savvy radical right parties allows it to stand out and gain followers who act on the message rather than political supporter who vote. Daniel Stockemer, discussing the rise of France’s Front National, points out that though the party’s anti-immigrant and nationalistic policies remain the same, Marine Le Pen has shifted rhetoric to “acceptable language, condemns anti-Semitism, and situates its statements within a republican discourse,” while at the same time embracing a relationship with the media and in doing so has increased the Front National’s membership and vote share.²⁰ These shifts in rhetoric indicate that political parties gain vote shares by broadening their appeal but right-wing movements that are not directly linked to a specific political party care more for the intensity of the support. Hans-Gerd Jaschke argues that, in Germany, right-wing extremism went from being a political subculture to a social movement, with politics and behavior embedded in the younger generations day-to-day lives.²¹ The change not only in rhetoric, but in daily exposure further complicates the division between political party methods and political movements’ methods as political parties strive to gain voters, while political movements focus on the ideology.

2. Radical Right and Violence

Perhaps the most shocking change in Europe’s extreme right over the years is the open and energetic embrace of violence by the radical right. Betz, writing in 1994, indicates in his book that though violence against foreigners is growing it remains a small minority of people that are not important to the larger question of the growing predominance of the radical right in politics.²² However, Peter Simi writing about right-wing violence in the

¹⁹ Markus Willinger, *Generation Identity A Declaration of War against the ‘68ers* (London: Arktos Media Ltd., 2013).

²⁰ Daniel Stockemer, *The Front National in France Continuity and Change under Jean-Marie Le Pen and Marine Le Pen* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 4.

²¹ Hans-Gerd Jaschke, “Right-Wing Extremism and Populism in Contemporary Germany and Western Europe,” in *Right-Wing Radicalism Today: Perspectives from Europe and the U.S.*, ed. Timothy Wyman McCarty (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 22–36, 34.

²² Betz, *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe*, 1.

United States explains, “When small groups and even single individuals commits acts of violence on behalf of a larger cause, these incidents should be viewed as part of a larger strategy of violence....” He specifically discusses right-wing terrorism and the perception that right-wing extremism is not a significant threat because its individual acts of terror in the United States are not “real terrorists,” with real terrorists being Islamic Jihadi terrorists.²³ Simi’s analysis suggests that Europe, too, suffers from a dangerous tendency to underestimate politicized violence as the work a deranged minority rather than a policy objective of the radical right. Indeed, the Identitarians, for example, are careful not call for violence outright, but they claim that, “Europe has gone so far along the path of destruction that radicalism is the only available method and tool to save her.”²⁴ The reader can understand “radicalism” to mean any number of things, including righteous violence against alien “invaders” and the institutions of state and government that encourage them.

3. Radical Right’s Relationship to Sports

The relationship between sport and politics is not new, and specifically considering the radical rights’ use of sport to further their political aims and bring awareness to their agenda. Martin, in his doctoral thesis, explains how from the 1920s Italian soccer was used by the fascist government to create a sense of national identity.²⁵ Molnar and Whigham modernize this understanding of top-down nationalism through sport and the radical right in their article on the Hungarian’s right-wing government’s use of sports to reinforce a national identity. They explain that Victor Orban used football and foreign investment into football facilities, to try to rewrite the national narrative and unite the country under a Magyar identity that extends beyond its own borders.²⁶ However this top-down approach to the connection between the radical right and sports does not adequately describe the link between informal radical right groups or radical right ideology in and of itself and its use

²³ Simi, “Cycles of Right-Wing Terror in the US,” in *Right-Wing Radicalism Today*, 146, 156.

²⁴ Zuquete, *The Identitarians*, 2.

²⁵ Simon David Martin (ProQuest, 2003), pp. 1–289, <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.417950>, 252.

²⁶ Gyozo Molnar and Stuart Whigham, “Radical Right Populist Politics in Hungary: Reinventing the Magyars through Sport,” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 56, no. 1 (November 2019): pp. 133–148, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690219891656>.

of sports. The literature also includes a counterargument with Smith and Porter outlining how globalization and immigration, national minorities, and the varying importance different sports have in different countries all contributes to the loosening connection between nationalism and sport in general.²⁷ Assessing the connection between English sports and nationalism Martin Polley accepts the changes that globalization brings but also is adamant that, "...however much the idea of the nation may be under attack from migration, the media, and commercial interests, fans in many sports have maintained the links between the team and the nation."²⁸ Guinness and Besnier take the link between nation and sport one step further in their evaluation of Fijian Rugby, noting that the connections between rugby, masculinity and nationalism exclude minorities who live within the same country and indicate that the link between sports and nationalism is identity politics.²⁹ Essentially that sport can identify who is and is not a member of the nation. Looking at Russian soccer subculture Julia Glathe argues of the potential for the far-right to mobilize soccer hooligans due to their similar narratives of oppression by state policies and readiness for violence.³⁰ This narrative could also be applied to the potential mobilization of sports fans by the radical right in Western Europe that are linked by nationalistic tendencies and an inclination toward violence.

4. Mixed Martial Arts, Legitimacy, and the Radical Right

The legitimacy of MMA as a sport is commonly called into question within the academic literature, which illuminates the sports troubled history in Europe and lays out

²⁷ Dilwyn Porter and Adrian Smith, "Sport and National Identity in the Post-War World," in *Sport and National Identity in the Post-War World*, ed. Dilwyn Porter and Adrian Smith (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2013), pp. 1–9, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/reader.action?docID=200146>, 2–3.

²⁸ Martin Polley, "Sport and National Identity in England," in *Sport and National Identity in the Post-War World*, ed. Dilwyn Porter and Adrian Smith (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2013), pp. 10–30, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/reader.action?docID=200146>, 27–28.

²⁹ Daniel Guinness and Niko Besnier, "Nation, Nationalism, and Sport: Fijian Rugby in the Local–Global Nexus," *Anthropological Quarterly* 89, no. 4 (2016): pp. 1109–1141, <https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2016.0070>, 1110.

³⁰ Julia Glathe, "Football Fan Subculture in Russia: Aggressive Support, Readiness to Fight, and Far Right Links," *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 9 (2016): pp. 1506–1525, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2016.1244260>.

some surface level reasons for the radical rights attraction to MMA. The literature is firmly divided into two schools of thought. One dictates that MMA is not a real sport and is rather an uncivilized form of violence and that regulation has increased the violence of MMA rather than made it safer.³¹ Bottenburg and Hielbron go so far as to argue that the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) actively participated in de-sportification of Martial Arts, using limited regulations and pay-per-view focusing on the spectators' desire for the unconventional.³² The other states that the MMA is actually a practice in self-control and exemplifies the globalization and professionalization of sport, as it adapts fighting methods from around the world that are then perfected together in the octagon.³³ Brett characterizes MMA as an art form of which violence is simply the medium for which the spectators to admire the aesthetics of the sport.³⁴ Notably, both these perspectives rely on how the spectator perceives the sport, whether they watch it for the blood or the aesthetics of the fight. Regardless of why spectators watch, the lack of regulation in Europe, the allure of the warrior aesthetic and the space in society for legitimate violence all appeal to the radical right's core of counter-culturalism, nationalism, and conservative standards of manhood.

Focusing on ideals held primarily by the radical right, the discussion within MMA literature turns from the sport's legitimacy through the eyes of its spectators to MMA's fighters. Much of the discourse surrounding MMA fighters, outside of talks of violence and legitimization, is nationalist before all else. Jakubowska, Channon and Matthews specifically discuss the media depiction of female Polish UFC Champion Joanna

³¹ Maarten van Bottenburg and Johan Heilbron, "De-Sportization of Fighting Contests," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 41, no. 3–4 (2006): pp. 259–282, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690207078043>; Trevor Collier, John Ruggiero, and Andrew L. Johnson, "Aggression in Mixed Martial Arts: An Analysis of the Likelihood of Winning a Decision," in *Violence and Aggression in Sporting Contests: Economics, History and Policy*, ed. R. Todd Jewell, vol. 4. (New York, NY: Springer, 2011), pp. 97–109, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4419-6630-8_7#citeas.

³² Bottenburg and Heilbron, "De-Sportization of Fighting Contests," 262.

³³ Raúl Sánchez García and Dominic Malcolm, "Decivilizing, Civilizing or Informalizing? The International Development of Mixed Martial Arts," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 45, no. 1 (2010): pp. 39–58, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690209352392>; Jesper Andreasson and Thomas Johansson, "Negotiating Violence: Mixed Martial Arts as a Spectacle and Sport," *Sport in Society* 22, no. 7 (2018): pp. 1183–1197, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2018.1505868>.

³⁴ Gordon Brett, "Reframing the 'Violence' of Mixed Martial Arts: The 'Art' of the Fight," *Poetics* 62 (2017): pp. 15–28, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2017.03.002>, 1.

Jedrzejczyk, and how, despite a few outliers, on the whole the media focused on her national accomplishment of being the first Polish UFC Champion rather than engaging in gendered commentary.³⁵ This illustrates that even sexism is commonly outweighed by individual nationalism within MMA communities. Hussain takes this argument one step further discussing how Huntington's clash of civilizations can be used as a framework to describe the media's representation of the Khabib Nurmagomedov versus Conor McGregor UFC 229 fight.³⁶ Working out from Hussain's assertion it is not difficult to see how the radical right can use such a nationalist charged atmosphere to target, recruit and indoctrinate individuals that are inside of the octagon or watching ringside.

Handle and Scheuble of the Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) discuss how the radical right uses MMA to both recruit and radicalize young men and that some MMA clubs are completely open about their radical right views, "Instead of covertly attempting to influence their more susceptible members, some have turned to open recruitment"³⁷ Similarly, in 2018 Karim Zidan wrote a news article calling out the American alt-right MMA club Rise Above Movement (RAM) as openly espousing radical right ideology and using their members at protests to escalate violence and win street fights.³⁸ He goes on to say that the radical right uses MMA because of the inherent violence and the lack of regulation, citing UFC fighters sponsoring well-known radical right brands like Hoelzer Reich and White Rex.³⁹ Zidan, later in 2020, revisits the topic of radical rights involvement in MMA while talking about why QAnon ideology is increasingly prevalent in MMA fighters. In his later article, he reiterates the significance of the lack of regulations inside

³⁵ Honorata Jakubowska, Alex Channon, and Christopher R. Matthews, "Gender, Media, and Mixed Martial Arts in Poland," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 40, no. 5 (January 2016): pp. 410–431, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723516655578>, 423.

³⁶ Umer Hussain, "Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) 229: Orientalism vs. Occidentalism," *Journalism and Media* 2, no. 4 (2021): pp. 657–673, <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202109.0456.v1>, 665.

³⁷ Julia Handle and Sophie Scheuble, "The Role of Sports in Violent Right-Wing Extremist Radicalization and P/CVE" (Radicalization Awareness Network, 2021), https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/networks/radicalisation-awareness-network-ran/publications/role-sports-violent-right-wing-extremist-radicalisation-and-pcve-2021_en, 4.

³⁸ Zidan, "Fascist Fight Clubs."

³⁹ Zidan, "Fascist Fight Clubs."

and outside of the ring for fighters.⁴⁰ He then cites Luke Thomas, another veteran MMA journalist, saying that the inherent culture of MMA is one of outcasts and states, “It was the sport of outsiders who either rejected or were rejected by more mainstream interests and activities. Conspiracy theory or thinking that was conspiracy-adjacent has always been a part of the community.”⁴¹ Overall, the literature surrounding MMA, and the radical right center on its inherent violence and lack of regulations. Much of the literature paints certain parts of the MMA community as safe spaces for the radical right to train, radicalize and recruit. The more recent reporting by Zidan also indicate that radical right MMA gyms are increasingly being used to create fighters outside the ring to defend their ideology and carry out street fights against the radical rights enemies in both America and Europe.⁴²

5. Soccer, Hooliganism, and the Radical Right

Violence connected to soccer and soccer hooliganism is a frequent topic in the wider soccer literature. Braun and Vliegenthart characterize hooliganism as a social movement in and of itself and claim that the literature surrounding it only tries to explain its existence and not the conditions in which soccer hooliganism thrives.⁴³ They claim that hooliganism is a form of “us” vs. “them” collective action that can be evaluate based on diffusion theory with explanatory factors of player aggression on the pitch, hooliganism committed by other clubs of similar status, and media attention of violent hooligan behavior.⁴⁴ Essentially, hooliganism begets more hooliganism, especially if the clubs are of similar status to those that have already demonstrated this type of behavior and if the media gives hooliganism additional attention. Distilling this down, if Sunday league fans demonstrate a level of hooliganism and receive limited media attention the likelihood of hooliganism amongst Chelsea, a top premier league team, fans the next week is low, but if

⁴⁰ Karim Zidan, “Tinfoil Gloves: Why Has MMA Become a Breeding Ground for QAnon?,” *The Guardian*, December 17, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2020/dec/17/qanon-mma-ufc-tito-ortiz>.

⁴¹ Zidan, “Tinfoil Gloves.”

⁴² Zidan, “Fascist Fight Clubs.”

⁴³ Robert Braun and Rens Vliegenthart, “Violent Fan Fluctuations: A Diffusion Perspective to Explain Supporters’ Violence,” *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (January 2009): pp. 23–44, <https://doi.org/10.17813/maiq.14.1.ym98977767701322>, 24.

⁴⁴ Braun and Vliegenthart, “Violent Fan Fluctuations,” 36–37.

Chelsea fans lash out violently and its plastered all over the news then it is likely that Manchester United fans will demonstrate hooliganism the next week. Braun and Vliegthart also evaluated hooliganism as a contentious behavior that is not irrational or emotional but a collective action that, “takes place in interaction with media, significant others and political actors.... that soccer riots comprise elements of serious claims making since they derive from economic grievances between competing groups that try to humiliate each other”⁴⁵ In this article, they demonstrate that hooliganism occurs, in part, along political and socio-economic lines and that unemployment can be an indicator of violence.⁴⁶ In response, Spaaij and Anderson discuss how Braun and Vliegthart’s article over-conceptualizes the issue and takes out any level of individualism from behavior. Instead Spaaij and Anderson state that, “...the key driver of collective violence, of which soccer crowd violence is an example, is the social identification that individuals form with a collective.”⁴⁷ Spaaij and Anderson accept the correlation of factors that Braun and Vliegthart put forth, but take it a step further and focus on the importance of identity within these hooligan groups. Newson, citing Spaaij and Anderson, then explicitly links violent fan behavior with the concept of fusion identity, where one’s personal identity and social identity fuse, and how soccer and the associated fan clubs provide an environment that primes individuals for identity fusion.⁴⁸ The discussion of self and group identity then opens the door to discuss the radical right’s use of soccer and hooliganism to radicalize young men and provide a safe space for radical ideology.

Soccer and the associated soccer hooliganism is a commonly used tool of the radical right. The radical right has utilized soccer to create national identity long before the rise of

⁴⁵ Robert Braun and Rens Vliegthart, “The Contentious Fans The Impact of Repression, Media Coverage, Grievances and Aggressive Play on Supporters’ Violence,” *International Sociology* 23, no. 6 (2008): pp. 796–818, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580908095909>, 813.

⁴⁶ Braun and Vliegthart, “The Contentious Fans,” 796.

⁴⁷ Ramón Spaaij and Alastair Anderson, “Soccer Fan Violence: A Holistic Approach,” *International Sociology* 25, no. 4 (2010): pp. 561–579, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580909351328>, 568.

⁴⁸ Martha Newson, “Football, Fan Violence, and Identity Fusion,” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 54, no. 4 (2017): pp. 431–444, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690217731293>, 434–436.

hooliganism in the 1980s.⁴⁹ Testa and Armstrong discuss the prevalence of the radical right in Italian soccer culture, most notably through the Ultras. The Ultras being Italian neo-fascist soccer supporters that set themselves apart by placing their ideology over the importance of the soccer club they support.⁵⁰ They use soccer as a reason to exercise violence, with the understanding that that violence is inherently political.⁵¹ The Ultras find support of their ideology within the broad ideal of competition, courage, and masculinity that are found within soccer, and utilize the soccer stadium as a safe place to gather, share their ideology and incite, if not, engage in violence.⁵² This illustrates the importance of soccer in the radical right wing not just as a vehicle of violence but as a safe haven for radical ideology.

In England, the islamophobic Football Lads Alliance (FLA) and the Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA) were formed from soccer fan clubs across the country following the terrorist attacks of 2017. Allen talks about how ‘football lads’ refers to soccer hooligans and how these radical right groups were created out of, advertised to and subsequently recruited from soccer hooligans.⁵³ In a similar vein to the Ultras, an ideological factor trumped the usual club-level divides and allowed soccer hooligans to unite against a common cause, whether that be globalization in the case of the Ultras or Islamophobia in the case of the FLA/DFLA. Allen, however, argues that instead of creating an identity that was inherently political the FLA created an identity that was based in soccer and then created the group’s ideology after its formation.⁵⁴ Extrapolated across the radical

⁴⁹ Martin, Simon David. “Football and Fascism: Local Identities and National Integration in Mussolini’s Italy.” Thesis, ProQuest, 2003. <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.417950>.

⁵⁰ Alberto Testa and Gary Armstrong, “The Ultras: The Extreme Right in Contemporary Italian Football,” in *Varieties of Right-Wing Extremism in Europe*, ed. Andrea Mammone, Emmanuel Godin, and Brian Jenkins (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), pp. 265–279, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/detail.action?docID=1181043>, 265.

⁵¹ Testa and Armstrong, “The Ultras,” in *Varieties of Right-Wing Extremism in Europe*, ed. Mammone, et al., 266.

⁵² Testa and Armstrong, 276–277.

⁵³ Chris Allen, “The Football Lads Alliance and Democratic Football Lad’s Alliance: An Insight into the Dynamism and Diversification of Britain’s Counter-Jihad Movement,” *Social Movement Studies* 18, no. 5 (2019): pp. 639–646, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2019.1590694>, 641–642.

⁵⁴ Allen, “The Football Lads Alliance and Democratic Football Lad’s Alliance,” 642.

right soccer hooliganism literature, this becomes the argument of whether the radical right is recruiting from soccer hooligans or are soccer hooligans creating their own niche within radical right ideology. Essentially, is soccer or radical right ideology more important in the creation and sustainment of these radical right hooligan groups. Benedikter and Wojtaszyn split the difference on this question, when writing about growing anti-Europeanism and anti-globalization sentiment in Polish soccer clubs. They talk about the resistance narrative in many of the eastern European soccer clubs derived out of resistance groups in World War II, and how many Polish clubs are using this resistance narrative against the European Union, but also against the consumerism of soccer that takes away from the traditional link between town and club.⁵⁵ In this way, the importance of soccer in Poland is inextricably tied with anti-European and anti-globalist sentiments that are popular with the radical right. The common theme in the literature is the evolving nature of how the radical right relates to soccer and its supporters, and how hooliganism is both a product of and a catalyst for radical right sentiment.

C. OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The rest of the paper will break down the radical rights history with both soccer and the MMA and compare and contrast the radical right's connection with each sport. Chapter II will encompass a brief history of soccer hooliganism from their height in the 1980s to their more recent decline, and will then focus on soccer and soccer hooliganism's connection to the radical right as well as its change over time. Chapter III will lay out a history of MMA in Europe from its fight for its status as a sport to its growing popularity across the continent. It will then focus on MMA and its connection to the radical right as well as how the relationship has evolved in its limited time on the scene. Chapter IV will be the concluding chapter and will provide an analysis of these two case studies. It will evaluate how the radical right's ideology, recruitment and radicalization techniques and militancy have evolved across time. The last chapter will also propose what can be done about the prevalence of the radical right within sports and suggest areas for further study.

⁵⁵ Roland Benedikter and Dariusz Wojtaszyn, "Football Politics in Central Eastern Europe: A Symptom of Growing Anti-Europeanism and Anti-Globalization?," *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations* 10, no. 1 (2018): pp. 79–93, <https://doi.org/10.22381/ghir10120184>, 89.

II. SOCCER AND SOCCER HOOLIGANISM

This chapter examines soccer hooliganism and its connection to the radical right starting from the 1980s, finding that the radical right's use of hooliganism changed as the regulations became more stringent ultimately moving the radical right outside the stadium but not removing it from hooligan culture. It will start with a history of soccer hooliganism and of the development of the rules of soccer, with a particular focus on the legislation put in place to counter hooliganism and how the problem was dealt with at the national and international levels. Evaluating the anti-hooligan regulations will provide the context for the radical right's shift from using hooliganism as a vehicle for violence in the 1980s to its more recent use as a platform for peaceful mobilization tangentially connected to hooligan culture. The English case study evaluates how both anti-hooligan regulations and the desire for broader support eroded the National Front's, a radical right political party, relationship to hooliganism, and ultimately led to the development of the terrorist group Combat 18 and, conversely, the peaceful demonstrations of the Football Lads Alliance. The German case study demonstrates how radical right hooligans divorced from a national political party, and less punitive measures to combat hooliganism, still shift the focus outside the stadium and participated in apolitical Islamophobic demonstrations in more recent times. The Central European case study, focusing on Poland, then illustrates the connection between the rise of nationalism after the fall of the USSR and soccer hooliganism, focusing on the impact of entering the European Union on shifting the resistance culture of hooliganism from nationalism to anti-globalization. Fundamentally, the regulations that each country developed to combat hooliganism moved hooliganism outside the stadium, during this shift the radical right also moved from using hooliganism to recruit, mobilize and engage in brutal, and often times, lethal violence to a gentler hooliganism that unifies outside the stadium under the larger banner of "soccer fans," allowing for the informal radicalization of individuals who are concerned about a specific problem.

A. BRIEF HISTORY OF SOCCER AND HOOLIGANISM IN EUROPE SINCE THE 1980s

European soccer in the beginning of the 1980s was a contentious, unregulated affair both on and off the pitch. The lack of stringent rules for fouls and penalties meant that soccer in the 1980s was more aggressive than is tolerated today.⁵⁶ This aggression was reflected in soccer supporters across clubs and countries, culminating, if this term is appropriate, in soccer hooliganism. In fact, hooliganism connected to soccer is commonly attributed to English soccer supporters in the late 1800s, though it only crashed into mainstream consciousness in the 1960s when the English media popularized the term to describe any kind of soccer related violence.⁵⁷

The 1980s saw some of the worst instances of hooliganism within the European soccer environment. In May 1985, the Heysel Stadium Disaster ended in the deaths of 39 people as a result of hooliganism, compounded by poor stadium maintenance, during the European Cup Final between Liverpool, an English team, and Juventus, an Italian team.⁵⁸ Liverpool supporters broke down a fence that separated them from the neutral area where many Juventus fans were sitting.⁵⁹ The Juventus fans, in an effort to get away from the violent Liverpool supporters, ran to the other side of the stadium where the Juventus fans became trapped against a concrete wall which eventually collapsed on them.⁶⁰ In the wake of the calamity, the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) banned all English teams from European competition for five years, with Liverpool FC being banned for an additional, sixth, year.⁶¹ Moreover, more stringent regulations were put in place to prevent rioting and hooligan behavior primarily in England which then spread to the rest of Europe.

⁵⁶ *Laws of the Game and Universal Guide for Referees* (Zurich: Fédération internationale de football Association, 1990), <https://downloads.theifab.com/downloads/laws-of-the-game-1990-91?l=en>, 3.

⁵⁷ Jamie Cleland and Ellis Cashmore, "Football Fans' Views of Violence in British Football," *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 40, no. 2 (2016): pp. 124–142, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723515615177>, 125.

⁵⁸ Tom Mullen, "Heysel Disaster: English Football's Forgotten Tragedy?" *BBC News*, May 29, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-merseyside-32898612>.

⁵⁹ Mullen, "Heysel Disaster."

⁶⁰ Mullen, "Heysel Disaster."

⁶¹ Cleland and Cashmore, "Football Fans' Views of Violence in British Football," 128.

Britain, with its particular role in the spread of hooligan culture, was the first state in Europe to target violence at, or spilling over from, sports matches. Then British Prime Minister Margret Thatcher called for increased penalties for individuals arrested for hooliganism or hooliganism related activities throughout the latter half of the 1980s.⁶² The British Parliament passed the 1986 Public Order Act specifically targeting and reclassifying violence at sporting events—and banning of alcohol at British sporting matches.⁶³ Significantly, the regulations’ focus on combating hooliganism adversely affected crowd safety and led to two fatal soccer stadium disasters. One at Valley Parade in 1985, where a discarded cigarette caused a fire that killed 56 individuals, and the second at Hillsborough in 1989, where 97 individuals died in a crowd crush. Both these incidents were exacerbated, if not caused by, the introduction of perimeter fencing that separated fans from each other to prevent violence within the stadium, and first responder negligence of crowd safety in favor of anti-hooligan protocols.⁶⁴ The Hillsborough incident was originally blamed on hooliganism and it was not until 2016 that a British jury ruled the deaths at Hillsborough “unlawful,” and that the police were held accountable for the event and subsequent decades-long cover-up.⁶⁵ The original response to the Hillsborough disaster was the Football Spectators Act of 1989, which established licensing for stadiums to admit spectators and the concept of banning orders, which enable the authorities to ban individuals from soccer matches if deemed at risk for committing violence by a magistrate. It also attempted to set up an identity card system for spectators so the government could more closely regulate who was at the soccer matches.⁶⁶ This identity card system was never implemented and was ultimately amended entirely from the 1989 Act by the Violent

⁶² Neil Jones, “Football Violence & Top 10 Worst Football Riots,” SportsLens.com, January 10, 2022, <https://sportslens.com/news/football-violence-worst-football-riots/>.

⁶³ Public Order Act 1986, c. 64. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1986/64/enacted?view=plain> (Accessed: 8 April 2022).

⁶⁴ Cleland and Cashmore, “Football Fans’ Views of Violence in British Football,” 129.

⁶⁵ Judith Moritz and Clive Coleman, “Hillsborough Inquests: Fans Unlawfully Killed, Jury Concludes,” *BBC News*, April 26, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-36138337>.

⁶⁶ Football Spectators Act 1989, c. 37. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/37/introduction> (Accessed 8 April 2022).

Crime Reduction Act of 2006.⁶⁷ The Football (Offenses) Act of 1991, 1999 Football (Offences and Disorder) Act, and the 2000 Football (Disorder) Act all clarified what actions were unacceptable and further regulated soccer spectators, and their behaviors.⁶⁸ These incidents demonstrate how pervasive hooliganism was in the 1980s that anti-hooligan measure became more important than crowd safety and the regulations that were influenced by these incidents changed how soccer fans interacted with the sport and each other.

It is important to note that all the soccer regulations in place in the United Kingdom legislate around match day and the specific time before and after matches. These laws were created to stop violence prior to, during, and after soccer games and therefore crush hooligan culture. The Football (Offenses) Act 1991, for example, clearly states the timeframe of two hours prior to a soccer match to one hour after as a designated soccer match and processed to list behaviors including throwing things onto the pitch and yelling racist or indecent chants as punishable offenses.⁶⁹ This anti-hooligan legislation contributed to the dramatic decrease in hooliganism throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s in the United Kingdom and among their soccer supporters.⁷⁰

Soccer-related violence appeared later in Europe than in England.⁷¹ The first serious instances of soccer hooligan violence in Germany was in 1982, at a match between rivals Bayern Munich and FC Nuremburg; over 100 people were injured in pre-game riots.⁷² In Italy, soccer related violence started in the 1970s, escalated in the 1980s and continued through the early 2000s with violence that threatened to put the Italian league on

⁶⁷ Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006. c. 38. Part 3 s. 52. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/38/part/3/crossheading/football> (Accessed: 8 April 2022).

⁶⁸ Cleland and Cashmore, "Football Fans' Views of Violence in British Football," 128–129.

⁶⁹ Football (Offences) Act 1991. c. 19. s. 1. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1991/19> (Accessed: 9 May 2022).

⁷⁰ Cleland and Cashmore, "Football Fans' Views of Violence in British Football," 138–139.

⁷¹ Josef Smolik, "Football Hooliganism from the Standpoint of Extremism," *Central European Political Studies Review* 6, no. 4 (2004), <https://journals.muni.cz/cepsr/article/view/4052>.

⁷² Anastassia Tsoukala, *Football Hooliganism in Europe: Security and Civil Liberties in the Balance* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1057/9780230594661.pdf>, 136.

hiatus in 2007.⁷³ The Netherlands also developed soccer violence in the 1970s, and commonly cite a match between the Dutch side Feyenoord and British side Tottenham Hotspur in 1974 when a fight between the fans resulted in over 200 injuries, “the day Dutch football lost its innocence.”⁷⁴ For the most part, each European country has dealt with hooliganism in its own way and established best practices for combatting violent behavior at soccer games. In 1981, Germany tried a new approach to combatting hooliganism setting up an organization called *Fan Projekts*.⁷⁵ This organization worked as an intermediary between soccer fans and law enforcement on match day and using social workers to support and guide younger fans with day to day struggles on the non-match days, which ultimately distanced the new generation of enthusiastic soccer fan from old school violent soccer hooligans.⁷⁶ Similar organizations were adopted in the Netherlands in 1986 and in Belgium in 1988, and later gained support from the Council of Europe and the European Union (EU) in the late 1990s and the early 2000s.⁷⁷ The European-wide response primarily revolved around the international soccer tournament schedule with the 1988 European Championship being the first time that police networks officially worked together to share intelligence, identify problems, and standardize policing strategies.⁷⁸

The EU then became involved in the 1990s to try to establish a dialogue between countries on how to best counter hooliganism.⁷⁹ In 2002, the EU passed a Council Resolution that set up National Football Information Points within member states that act as information sharing nodes across member states to support law enforcement and

⁷³ Antonio Roversi, “Football Violence in Italy,” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 26, no. 4 (1991): pp. 311–331, <https://doi.org/10.1177/101269029102600406>, 329; “Violence Could Halt Italian Games,” *BBC Sport Football*, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/football/europe/6314949.stm>.

⁷⁴ Ramón Spaaij, “Football Hooliganism in the Netherlands: Patterns of Continuity and Change,” *Soccer & Society* 8, no. 2–3 (2007): pp. 316–334, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970701224566>, 318.

⁷⁵ Tsoukala, *Football Hooliganism in Europe*, 83.

⁷⁶ Tsoukala, 83–84.

⁷⁷ Tsoukala, 83.

⁷⁸ Tsoukala, 79.

⁷⁹ Tsoukala, 11.

government officials' efforts to stop hooliganism.⁸⁰ The EU also created the EU football Handbook to help law enforcement standardize control measures and cooperate across member states to combat hooliganism.⁸¹ This handbook is continuously updated as new techniques and information sharing networks are created with the latest update coming in 2016.⁸² The result of this cooperation is that hooliganism across Europe has generally decreased, but still such behavior continues. Most significantly in 2008 the UEFA Cup Tournament was rocked by two huge riots.⁸³ One followed a tie in the semi-final between Sparta Prague, a Czech team, and Dinamo Zagreb, a Croatian team; Croatian supporters clashed with police on the streets of Prague.⁸⁴ The second riot occurred after the final between Rangers Football Club, a Scottish club, and Zenit St. Petersburg, a Russian club, where the Rangers' fans upset after their loss trashed the city of Manchester.⁸⁵

Aggressive play on the pitch was a common catalyst for in-stadium, and inter-fan violence.⁸⁶ The development of additional regulations on the pitch also helped to alleviate and control, but not eradicate, the problem, of hooliganism. The 1990s was a period of significant change for soccer as a sport. In 1990 the rules for determining if an offensive player was offside changed so that the offensive player only needed to be in line with the second to last defender to be considered onside.⁸⁷ This change increased rate of play, as well as goal scoring opportunities, prioritizing technical skill over aggressive tactics. Also

⁸⁰ Anastassia Tsoukala, Geoff Pearson, and Coenen Peter T M., "Legal Responses to Football 'Hooliganism' in Europe - Introduction," in *Legal Responses to Football "Hooliganism" in Europe* (The Hague: Asser Press, 2016), pp. 1–17, 10; "Partners," Promoting and Strengthening the Council of Europe Standards on Safety, Security and Service at Football Matches and Other Sports Events (ProS4+) (Council of Europe European Union, 2022), <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/security-safety-sport/partners>.

⁸¹ *The Official Journal of the European Union*, C444/01, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2016.

⁸² *The Official Journal of the European Union*, C444/01, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2016.

⁸³ Neil Jones, "Football Violence & Top 10 Worst Football Riots," Sportslens.com, January 10, 2022, <https://sportslens.com/news/football-violence-worst-football-riots/>.

⁸⁴ Jones, "Football Violence & Top 10 Worst Football Riots."

⁸⁵ Jones, "Football Violence & Top 10 Worst Football Riots."

⁸⁶ Ramón Spaaij, "Football Hooliganism in the Netherlands," 318.

⁸⁷ Travis Yoesting, "22 Incredible Changes to Soccer Rules since 1863," The18, 2017, <https://the18.com/en/soccer-entertainment/lists/timeline-soccer-rule-changes-evolution-laws>.

to discourage increasingly aggressive defensive play the deliberate denial of a goal scoring opportunity was considered a red card offense, or an offense where the player is sent off without a substitute leaving the penalized team playing with 10, instead of 11, individuals.⁸⁸ A few years later, in 1998, the act of tackling another player from behind also became a red card offense as to limit injuries and ensure fair play.⁸⁹ These regulations helped to limit aggressive play and unnecessary fouls that riled up the players and fans and contributed to inter-fan stadium violence.

Currently, European countries continue to work together to limit hooliganism, while some countries continue to struggle with the problem; overall the frequency and level of violence continues to decrease throughout Europe.

B. CONNECTION TO THE RADICAL RIGHT

Regulations did not loosen the link between the radical right and soccer; it simply moved it somewhere else. During times of lax regulation the radical right used soccer matches as a place of recruitment, a way to mobilize ideological supporters and a violent proving ground for their fanatics. More recently, the radical right is less physically connected to the soccer matches and more closely related to hooligan or fan culture outside the stadium. It is important to note that soccer hooliganism, in the general sense, is not directly linked to any political ideology, but for the purposes of this project the discussion will focus exclusively on the right side of the political spectrum.

1. The English Case Study

In England, the radical right targeted soccer fans for recruitment at soccer matches in the period of time leading up to the most violent stretch of time for soccer hooligans. Hooliganism was well established by the time the radical right unified into the National Front political party and started looking to soccer matches as a recruiting grounds. The National Front is Britain's Fascist radical right party that was created in 1967 from the

⁸⁸ "Law 12 Fouls and Misconduct," International Football Association Board, accessed April 8, 2022, <https://www.theifab.com/laws/2020-21/fouls-and-misconduct/#disciplinary-action>.

⁸⁹ Yoesting, "22 Incredible Changes to Soccer Rules since 1863," <https://the18.com/en/soccer-entertainment/lists/timeline-soccer-rule-changes-evolution-laws>.

merger of a few different radical right parties.⁹⁰ Members were active within the soccer hooligan scene, which was growing and becoming increasingly violent throughout the 1970s leading up to its height in the 1980s. Chris Allen notes: “When I was a teenager and I was on the terraces, you know, you would see the National Front there. You could see them trying to recruit [with their] leaflets and so on.”⁹¹ Analyzing demographics of National Front voters in the 1977 Greater London Council elections, Paul Whiteley establishes that the percentage of manual workers in the area was the greatest predictor of National Front Support.⁹² He further states that, “In general these findings are consistent with Lipset’s argument that support for the extreme right can be explained in terms of working-class authoritarianism,” reinforcing the idea that working class individuals were more likely, at the time, to support extreme political views.⁹³ Moreover, before the commercialization of soccer in England in the 1990s and the creation of the Premier League, ticket prices were low and fans were localized, and therefore generally working class.⁹⁴ This observation at least suggests an anecdotal link between the radical right and the average soccer fan in the 1970s and 1980s. Allen observes, “That’s not to say to all football fans ... sympathise with the far right But I think that there’s always been a kind of resonance between the people that are drawn to the far-right and the people that are drawn to football.”

The National Front suffered an electoral setback in 1979 British general elections. Despite putting up more candidates than it had before, it still failed to gain a significant portion of the vote and were kept out of parliament.⁹⁵ Nonetheless, the National Front

⁹⁰ Paul Spoonley, “Britain’s National Front,” *New Zealand International Review* 3, no. 3 (1978): pp. 22–24, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/45232884>, 22.

⁹¹ Tim Hume, “Why the Far-Right Tries To Recruit Football Hooligans,” *VICE World News*, September 2, 2021, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/m7edqp/why-the-far-right-tries-to-recruit-football-hooligans>.

⁹² Paul Whiteley, “The National Front Vote in the 1977 GLC Elections: An Aggregate Data Analysis,” *British Journal of Political Science* 9, no. 3 (July 1979): pp. 370–380, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s000712340000185x>, 377.

⁹³ Whiteley, “The National Front Vote in the 1977 GLC Elections,” 372, 377.

⁹⁴ Cleland and Cashmore, “Football Fans’ Views of Violence in British Football,” 129.

⁹⁵ Jessica Yonwin, *Electoral performance of far-right parties in the UK*, SN/SG/1982 (London: House of Commons Library, 2004), 1–14.

continued to recruit, mobilize and enact violence at soccer matches through the 1980s. A former British Movement member, a neo-Nazi splinter group from the National Front, said that these radical right groups would, "...approach groups of skinheads and the smoothies and the guys who just look mean, and say to them 'Do you want a good ruck? If so come to a march on Sunday.' I've seen them do this on the terraces at Spurs, West Ham, Millwall, Orient, Watford and Chelsea."⁹⁶ In other words, the radical right was not trying to infiltrate hooligan groups as they were not committed to one club over the other.

Rather than the radical right was looking for individuals that had demonstrated a propensity for violence in the past, in order to radicalize and mobilize like-minded individuals on behalf of political ideology in distinct but not necessarily separate instances of violent hooliganism on match day.⁹⁷ In this way, the radical right ingratiated itself with hooligan culture making counter-hooliganism legislation focusing around match day, though effective against violent hooliganism, not effective at weeding out the radical right from soccer hooligan culture altogether.⁹⁸

One of the lasting legacies of the radical right's connection with hooliganism is the creation of the group Combat 18. Originally, the muscle that supported the British National Party, a splinter group from the National Front and the current official radical right group in British politics, Combat 18 was directly recruited from violent football hooligans and individuals from the alt-right music scene.⁹⁹ Combat 18 outgrew the soccer hooligan scene and quickly proved too radical and too violent for politics and broke from the British National Party in 1993.¹⁰⁰ After this, the group reorganized to reflect a terrorist approach, meaning no official membership, belief that violent action is the only thing that can change

⁹⁶ Evan Smith, "Did the Thatcher Government downplay fascist infiltration of football 'hooligan' scene?," *New Historical Express* (blog), January 5, 2015, <https://hatfulofhistory.wordpress.com/2015/01/05/did-the-thatcher-government-downplay-fascist-infiltration-of-football-hooligan-scene/>.

⁹⁷ "Why the Far Right Tries to Recruit Football Hooligans: Decade of Hate," August 27, 2021, VICE, video, 9:23, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzFDJOH1kcA&t=1s>.

⁹⁸ Allen, "The Football Lads Alliance and Democratic Football Lad's Alliance," 644.

⁹⁹ Nick Ryan, "Combat 18: Memoirs of a Street-Fighting Man," *Independent*, February 1, 1998, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/combat-18-memoirs-of-a-streetfighting-man-1142204.html>.

¹⁰⁰ Ryan, "Combat 18."

the political system, and authorization and encouragement of lone-wolf attacks.¹⁰¹ The last connection between organized soccer hooliganism and Combat 18, before the group completely reorganized, was the riot at the 1995 friendly soccer match between England and Ireland.¹⁰² Lax policing, careless ticket sales that placed English fans in the terraces above the Irish fans, and the limited regulations of the Dublin stadium all contributed to a fascist riot that injured 20 people.¹⁰³ It is unclear whether Combat 18 incited this riot, but the British National Criminal Intelligence Service knew that Combat 18 members were going to this match, that the Irish police did not act on this information once they received it; the public inquiry completed by Irish chief justice Thomas Finlay cited this failure as a potential contributing factor to the riot.¹⁰⁴ Either way, this incident popularized the group amongst radical right youths.¹⁰⁵ The notoriety that Combat 18 gained, allowed them to spread across Europe in its current form, operating within terror cells and lone-wolf attacks without hierarchy or established structure.¹⁰⁶ In 2018, Greek officials arrested seven individuals who were part of Combat 18 Hellas, and were suspected of over 30 counts of arson against leftist and migrant targets in Greece.¹⁰⁷ The following year, in 2019 a pro-migrant German politician was murdered; the suspect was thought to have ties to Combat 18, leading to the banning of the neo-Nazi group in Germany in 2020.¹⁰⁸ The development of Combat 18 illustrates that increasing soccer regulations on spectators did eventually push the most violent elements out of soccer stadiums but the group found other avenues

¹⁰¹ “Combat 18,” Counter Extremism Project (Counter Extremism Project), accessed April 14, 2022, <https://www.counterextremism.com/supremacy/combat-18>.

¹⁰² Stephen Fottrell and Simon Austin, “England v Republic of Ireland: Riot Marred Lansdowne Road Friendly,” *BBC Sport*, May 28, 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/22397204>.

¹⁰³ Fottrell and Austin, “England v Republic of Ireland”; Sean Inge, “Rioting, Violence and Shame – Memories of Ireland v England in 1995,” *The Guardian*, May 25, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2013/may/25/england-ireland-1995-rioting-international>.

¹⁰⁴ Fottrell and Austin, “England v Republic of Ireland.”

¹⁰⁵ Ryan, “Combat 18: Memoirs of a Street-Fighting Man.”

¹⁰⁶ Counter Extremism Project, “Combat 18.”

¹⁰⁷ “7 Charged in Greece with Belonging to Violent Neo-Nazi Group,” *FOX News*, March 7, 2018, <https://www.foxnews.com/world/7-charged-in-greece-with-belonging-to-violent-neo-nazi-group>.

¹⁰⁸ “Raids in 6 States as Germany Bans ‘Combat 18’ Neo-Nazi Group,” *Deutsche Welle*, January 23, 2020, <https://p.dw.com/p/3Wfsm>.

to inflict damage outside of sports. Ultimately, hooliganism on a whole never embraced the radical right in England.

Following the 2017 terror attacks in England and the resulting wave of Islamophobia, the radical right, once again, found their place within “football lad” or hooligan culture, but this time solidly outside of the stadium.¹⁰⁹ The Football Lads Alliance and the subsequent Democratic Football Lads Alliance (FLA/DFLA) emerged as the new radical right, focusing on street protests and calling for all soccer fans to put aside club divisions and unite against the growing Islamic threat.¹¹⁰ The FLA, in particular, sought to mobilize soccer fans in the wake of the terrorist attacks on a distinctly non-violent radical right ideology. The FLA’s early protests were known for being quiet, with John Meighan, the original founder, saying, “...we didn’t want flags, chanting, drinking on the streets – the typical things that have probably hindered [other] groups...”¹¹¹ The emphasis on being different alluding to needing to separate themselves from the violent image of hooliganism.

The radical right, in the 1980s, targeted soccer hooligans across the spectrum of teams, uniting them under the banner of political ideology, and using them to clash with other hooligan groups. The FLA attempted a new approach, to unite the entire soccer hooligan community and from that followed the Islamophobia that characterized the group’s developing ideology. Chris Allen discusses the differences in radical right mobilization saying, “In the past then, political ideology was used to construct a shared and uniting identity. For the FLA, the opposite was true: football was the means for

¹⁰⁹ Allen, “The Football Lads Alliance and Democratic Football Lad’s Alliance,” 639; Seth G Jones, *Keep Calm and Carry on: The Terrorist Threat in the United Kingdom* (Center for Strategic & International Studies, August 2018), https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/180816_Keep_Calm.pdf, 2. The 2017 terror acts in England included the Westminster bridge incident where a terrorist drove a car into a crowd killing 3 people and then stabbed a police officer, the Manchester arena incident where a terrorist detonated a bomb outside the arena as a concert had ended killing 22 people and wounding over 100, the London bridge incident where 3 terrorists drove their car into a crowd killing 2 people and then got out and stabbed 6 more people, and the Parsons Green Underground incident where a terrorist detonated an explosive akin to a flashbang wounding 30 people.

¹¹⁰ Allen, “The Football Lads Alliance and Democratic Football Lad’s Alliance,” 639.

¹¹¹ Allen, 641.

constructing a similarly shared identity from which any political ideology followed.”¹¹² The FLA civilized the idea of a soccer hooligan and used the underlying unifying culture to promote an ideology associated with the radical right.

The evolving nature of the radical right within the soccer hooligan scene is reflective of the radical right as a whole within Britain. The British National Party, in the mid-2000s, also changed their rhetoric and started relying on more superficial ideological tenets that appealed to a broader populace; a “not so much a change of course as an opportune change of clothing,” as Nigel Copsey put it.¹¹³ To this point, there is a rise of Islamophobia and associated racism across Britain that has permeated the soccer stadium. In 2020, during the height of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement fans booed when players took a knee in support of the English Football Leagues ‘not today or any day’ anti-racism initiative.¹¹⁴ Many in sports media jumped on this bandwagon and called for an end to politics in sport and made comments that until recently had been considered radical rather than mainstream.¹¹⁵ However, on the whole, the radical right has been relegated from soccer stadiums across Britain; violent hooliganism in general continues to decline and make way for a more subdued, but still intense, hooligan fan culture; and the radical right is forced to moderate their views to remain relevant both to the general public and within the political system. The radical right’s relationship with violence, soccer, and hooliganism remains strong, but continues to shift and morph to be able to achieve tangible political objectives.

¹¹² Allen, 642.

¹¹³ Nigel Copsey, “Changing Course or Changing Clothes? Reflections on the Ideological Evolution of the British National Party 1999–2006,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 41, no. 1 (2007): pp. 61–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220601118777>, 80.

¹¹⁴ Aurelien Mondon and Evan Smith, “From Football Hooligans to ‘One of Us’: A Short History of Reaction,” openDemocracy, December 9, 2020, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/from-football-hooligans-to-one-of-us-a-short-history-of-reaction/>.

¹¹⁵ Mondon and Smith, “From Football Hooligans to ‘One of Us.’”

2. German Hooliganism and the Radical Right

Soccer hooliganism in Germany appeared in the late 1970s about two decades behind the media's popularization of the phenomenon in England.¹¹⁶ The creation of the *Fan Projekts* in 1981 helped Germany avoid the worst of the "golden age of hooliganism."¹¹⁷ However, many instances of soccer hooliganism did still appear. One of the worst came at the 1982 German Cup Final between Bayern Munich and Nuremberg. Bayern's fans prior to the game started fighting and rioting, throwing Nazi salutes and yelling, "Sieg Heil."¹¹⁸ The violence was broken up by police, and by the end of the day there was 92 arrests and 138 people injured.¹¹⁹ The incident at the 1982 German Cup Final illustrates that the radical right has participated in hooliganism and created hooligan groups attached to specific teams, but they did not experience the same kind of widespread, cross-club, overt recruitment that has been documented in England. The right-wing in England had a level of political and cultural legitimacy as they were recruiting for a party that actively took part in elections, but in Germany the political system is much more restrictive to smaller, more extreme parties and so there was not a significant radical right political party on the federal level.¹²⁰ Therefore, in Germany the radical right never unified in the same way as in England.¹²¹

More recently, however, German hooligans united to form the Islamophobic group Hooligans against Salafists (Ho.Ge.Sa.). Much like the FLA and DFLA, the Ho.Ge.Sa

¹¹⁶ Tsoukala, *Football Hooliganism in Europe*, 135.

¹¹⁷ Tsoukala, *Football Hooliganism in Europe*, 83–84.

¹¹⁸ John M. Williams, Eric Dunning, and Patrick J. Murphy, *Hooligans Abroad (RLE Sports Studies): The Behaviour and Control of English Fans in Continental Europe* (Routledge Library Editions Sports Studies), 1st ed. (Routledge, 2014), https://books.google.com/books?id=HrdwAwAAQBAJ&pg=PT182&lpg=PT182&dq=German+football+riot+May+1982+at+the+Bayern%E2%80%93Nuremberg+match&source=bl&ots=B8zbDi_Qpg&sig=ACfU3U0SLYQJa45Y_6FzdQn3fnF0M3dCdg&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewjTkYC1mZn3AhWSZM0KHSp6CmsQ6AF6BAgUEAM#v=onepage&q=German%20football%20riot%20May%201982%20at%20the%20Bayern%E2%80%93Nuremberg%20match&f=false, 121–143.

¹¹⁹ Williams et al., *Hooligans Abroad*, 121–143.

¹²⁰ Manfred G Schmidt, "Germany: The Grand Coalition State," in *Political Institutions in Europe*, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/md/politik/personal/schmidt/schmidt_grand_coalition_state_4th_edition.pdf, 5.

¹²¹ Schmidt, "Germany: The Grand Coalition State," 4.

claims to be an apolitical group that is united by their love of soccer and Germany.¹²² Ho.Ge.Sa. launched a protest in Cologne in 2014 that quickly turned into a riot. Footage of the rally clearly show blatant neo-Nazi, and anti-semitic imagery, along with individuals yelling against “Salafist swine,” and the group proudly chanting, “Hooligan, Germany.”¹²³ The head of the German Police Union at the time, Rainer Wendt expressed his thoughts that Hooligans against Salafists only uses Islamophobia has a tool to attract new supporters, mobilize the old guard of the radical right, and to have an excuse to act out violently.¹²⁴ After the riot in Cologne, and in line with Wendt’s thinking, the Ho.Ge.Sa was not able to solidify any gains, or conduct further protest movements, and remained a predominately online group, though even their online presence dropped off after Cologne.¹²⁵ The group proved unable to get over its internecine divides and remain focused on Islamophobia for long enough to create a long term radical right movement.¹²⁶

Significantly, the far-right Alternative for Germany Party (AfD) worked to distance itself from radicals and hooligans when they first started in 2014.¹²⁷ This development is the opposite of the British National Party, which actively recruited hooligans from the stadiums in the 1970s. However, both countries soccer hooligans now actively engage in

¹²² Sabrina Pabst, “United against Salafism, Right-Wing Scene Surges in Germany,” DW.COM (Deutsche Welle, October 18, 2014), <https://www.dw.com/en/united-against-salafism-right-wing-scene-surges-in-germany/a-18005284>; “Pegida Die Wahrheit,” WayBack Machine (HoSeGa), accessed February 1, 2015, https://web.archive.org/web/20150206113839/http://hogesa.info/?page_id=158; “Die Wahrheit,” WayBack Machine (HoSeGa), accessed 2015, https://web.archive.org/web/20150117225137/http://hogesa.info/?page_id=131.

¹²³ “Anti-Islamist Riots in Germany: Hooligans Against Salafists,” December 17, 2014, VICE News, Video, 8:37, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRZiTReKcCk>.

¹²⁴ Nastassja Steudel, “Hooligans Against Salafists’ Demo Set to Unfold,” *DW*, October 26, 2014, <https://www.dw.com/en/hooligans-against-salafists-demo-set-to-unfold/a-18021664>.

¹²⁵ Daniel Duben, “Hooligans Gegen Salafisten: Eine Explorative Analyse,” trans. Google (Bundeskriminalamt Kriminalistisches Institut, 2015), https://www.bka.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Publikationen/Publikationsreihen/Forschungsergebnisse/2015HooligansGegenSalafisten.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=4, 44–45; HoGeSa (@ho_ge_sa), “Grade etwas schreibfaul,” Twitter, December 1, 2014, 7:37AM, https://twitter.com/ho_ge_sa/status/539443183999275008?cxt=HHwWgMDC7PetvwwOAAAA; Last tweet from their official twitter account was from December of 2014, and the rest of their social media accounts are gone.

¹²⁶ Duben, “Hooligans Gegen Salafisten,” 46.

¹²⁷ Philipp Wittrock, “The Know-It-All Party Anti-Euro ‘Alternative for Germany’ Launches,” *Spiegel International*, December 4, 2013, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/alternative-for-germany-party-to-challenge-european-common-currency-a-894081.html>.

so-called apolitical Islamophobic demonstrations that are gaining the backing of a wider range of individuals who would not classify themselves as radicals.¹²⁸ The spread of these ‘apolitical’ Islamophobic demonstrations reinforces the pattern of the evolving radical right, that as the radical right tries to gain legitimacy within the political system it starts to distance itself from the violent hooliganism, but the radical right hooligans remain as sort of the vanguard of public sentiment. They gather outside the stadiums putting aside their club-level animosities, and political violence to recruit and mobilize for the larger right-wing political picture.

3. Poland and Central Europe: History, Nationalism, and the Radical Right

Central European countries have a slightly different history, though a similar pattern, with the radical right and soccer hooliganism. The fall of Communism led to an outburst of radical right nationalist groups that used soccer hooliganism as a violent political platform to establish who was part of, and who was the “other” of the nation.¹²⁹ One byproduct is that soccer hooliganism in central Europe is widely seen as openly political—in contrast to the hooliganism in England and Western European countries, which developed out of club rivalries and was taken advantage of by the radical right.¹³⁰ One example is the use of historical narratives from the Second World War within the soccer hooligan subculture in Poland. Many local clubs in Poland take their history from Polish resistance against both the Nazis and the Soviets.¹³¹ Essentially, many radical right hooligan groups take their heritage from resistance fighters that won World War II for Poland, creating an overall theme of resistance.¹³² When the Communists began to clamp

¹²⁸ Allen, “The Football Lads Alliance and Democratic Football Lad’s Alliance,” 641; VICE News, ““Anti-Islamist Riots in Germany: Hooligans Against Salafists.”

¹²⁹ Josef Smolík and Vladimír Ďorđević, “From Repression to Prevention in Central Europe: Football Anti-Hooligan Policies in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, 2021, pp. 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2021.1918006>, 8.

¹³⁰ Roland Benedikter and Dariusz Wojtaszyn, “Football Politics in Central Eastern Europe: A Symptom of Growing Anti-Europeanism and Anti-Globalization?,” *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations* 10, no. 1 (2018): pp. 79–93, <https://doi.org/10.22381/ghir10120184>, 80.

¹³¹ Benedikter and Wojtaszyn, “Football Politics in Central Eastern Europe,” 82.

¹³² Benedikter and Wojtaszyn, “Football Politics in Central Eastern Europe,” 82.

down and heavily regulate the soccer scene in the 1980s, many hooligans turned to Nazi symbols and ideology as a way to subvert the Communist regime both domestically, in the Polish league, and internationally, during the European Championships.¹³³ To be sure, Poland was exceptional as its radical right scene emerged from, and was one in the same with, the soccer hooligan subculture. Following the fall of Communism, hooligan violence, especially nationalistic and radical right soccer hooliganism increased in both frequency and intensity.¹³⁴ At the same time Poland, along with eight other central and eastern European states, started working to join the EU.

The process for joining the EU meant democratization, but also ensuring societal safety and security. This requirement meant working with the EU to institute counter-hooligan policies, and create frameworks for intelligence-sharing.¹³⁵ Much of the work with the EU, as well as the human rights body the Council of Europe, was centered on limiting the presence of the radical right within soccer culture. The Council of Europe recommended that legislation should be developed, “banning the use of symbols, banners, and flags inciting verbal or other abusive and discriminatory behavior aimed against any racial, ethnic, or religious group,” and ratified , “Recommendations of the Council of Europe on Prevention of Racism, Xenophobia, and Intolerance.”¹³⁶ These recommendations turned into legislation, and by 2004, when Poland and the eight other former Soviet bloc countries completed their ascension into the EU, the radical right’s hold on soccer culture was significantly reduced.¹³⁷

Much like in England and Germany, the radical right was not eliminated from the soccer scene altogether and the resistance-themes and historical narratives that interweave the Polish soccer league are now being set against a new perceived problem. The decline of blatant neo-Nazi symbolism throughout Central and Eastern Europe through legislation has refocused soccer hooligans on a broader anti-Europeanization and anti-globalization

¹³³ Benedikter and Wojtaszyn, “Football Politics in Central Eastern Europe,” 88.

¹³⁴ Smolík and Đorđević, “From Repression to Prevention in Central Europe,” 4.

¹³⁵ Smolík and Đorđević, “From Repression to Prevention in Central Europe,” 5.

¹³⁶ Smolík and Đorđević, “From Repression to Prevention in Central Europe,” 6.

¹³⁷ Smolík and Đorđević, “From Repression to Prevention in Central Europe,” 8.

agenda, similar to the ability of Islamophobia to unite soccer hooligans outside the stadium in Western Europe.¹³⁸ The trajectory of Polish soccer hooliganism continues the trend of regulation decreasing the most violent elements of radical right hooliganism, followed by the ability of the radical right to then re-mobilize soccer hooligans around a tangential and poignant issue thus encouraging broader participation and therefore radicalization and recruitment.

C. CONCLUSION

Soccer hooliganism provided a safe environment for the radical right to recruit, radicalize, and mobilize followers across Europe. The introduction of counter-hooligan regulations, starting in Britain and Western Europe eventually reaching Central and Eastern Europe by way of European Union requirements, created an increasingly inclusive environment within the soccer community and relegated the radical rights influence within hooliganism to remain outside the stadium. There are many other examples of the radical right's connection with hooliganism across Europe. In Western Europe, this relationship manifested itself as fascist Neo-Nazi groups that either became increasingly violent leaving the political system altogether (i.e. Combat 18) or modernized alongside the politically legitimate far-right and used hooligan culture to spread the new broader message (i.e. Football Lads Alliance/Democratic Football Lads Alliance, and Hooligans against Salafists). In Central and Eastern Europe, the relationship between the radical right and hooliganism was closer and manifested in nationalist, albeit anti-establishment, groups that, other than dropping the blatant neo-Nazi imagery and refraining from extreme violence, remain nationalist and anti-establishment (i.e. Poland).

The most extreme example of this kind of development is in the former Yugoslavia, where during its breakup militias actively recruited from specific soccer clubs' hooligan groups, further solidifying the nationalist divides after the war ended.¹³⁹ Fundamentally, the radical right was able to adapt its relationship to hooliganism regardless of the broader

¹³⁸ Benedikter and Wojtaszyn, "Football Politics in Central Eastern Europe," 90–91.

¹³⁹ Ivan Đorđević, "The Role of Red Star Football Club in the Construction of Serbian National Identity," *Traditiones* 45, no. 01 (December 2017): pp. 117–132, <https://doi.org/10.3986/traditio2016450108>, 121–122.

counter-hooligan regulations. The radical right effectively transferred the violence and radicalization of the soccer stadium to the relatively peaceful recruitment and radicalization outside of it; making the radical right appeal to a broader spectrum of soccer fans using islamophobia and nationalism across the European continent.

III. MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

This chapter will cover the radical rights growing connection with the fast growing sport of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA). It will go over a brief history of MMA emergence in Europe and the ensuing backlash against it until MMA was able to be more widely considered a legitimate sport. The refusal of international bodies to view MMA as a legitimate sport led to the creation of a robust, but unregulated amateur MMA scene. This chapter will evaluate this development as it pertains to the creation of a transnational radical right MMA network, focusing on how the commercialization of amateur MMA by such brands as White Rex created spaces for recruitment, mobilization and militant training without regard to state borders. Fundamentally, the commodification of MMA by the fight promotion and clothing brand White Rex provided the catalyst for the creation of a pan-European radical right MMA network that linked together multiple subcultures within the radical right and allowed for open recruitment, and public displays of professionally violent radical right militancy, and led to government crackdown on neo-Nazi MMA groups. Then, the German case study will show the early development of the radical right in combat sports; the rise of the radical right in MMA and the shift from energizing the radical right to actively and openly recruiting, radicalizing and training; The Polish case study will then trace the early development of a professional MMA league, which limited the spread of the radical right within amateur MMA and severely restricted their ability to recruit and radicalize.

A. BRIEF HISTORY OF MMA IN EUROPE

The history of MMA can be characterized by the fight for legitimacy and recognition as a sport on the international stage, the struggle to create an official internationally recognized regulatory body, and the prevalence of the amateur MMA scene as opposed to professional bouts. MMA is a relatively recent import to Europe compared with the centuries old export history of soccer. The official sport of MMA, as is recognized today, first appeared in 1993 in the United States as the Ultimate Fighting Championship

(UFC).¹⁴⁰ In 1995, the first European MMA event took place in Belgium under the title “Cage Fight Tournament,” but it had limited success.¹⁴¹ However the idea generated enough interest that other countries began hosting their own MMA tournaments under various names, though without any regulatory oversight or international standardization. In 2002 the UFC came to Europe, overtaking the smaller MMA circles, and attempting to standardized play under their rules.¹⁴² However, the UFC was largely unsuccessful, in both its attempts at standardization and business. The promotion was unable to secure a broadcast contract with Sky Sports as attendance at the London Tournament, UFC 38, was less than 4,000 people, and global pay-per-view was less than 50,000.¹⁴³ The UFC then pulled out of Europe until its return to England in 2007, when the promotion had managed to develop a larger international following.¹⁴⁴

One of the main issues that stymied the growth of MMA in Europe was its perceived lack of legitimacy as a sport on a supranational legal level, meaning that regional governing bodies such as the EU, and international sporting associations such as the Global Association of International Sport Federations (GAISF) did not recognize MMA as a

¹⁴⁰ Dale C. Spencer, *Ultimate Fighting and Embodiment: Violence, Gender, and Mixed Martial Arts* (New York, NY: Taylor and Francis Group, 2011), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ebook-nps/reader.action?docID=957100&ppg=1>, 5.

¹⁴¹ Brad Wharton, “Rotterdam or Anywhere: The Octagon’s Troubled Journey to Holland,” *MMAOB: MMA Oddsbreaker*, May 6, 2016, <https://www.mmaoddsbreaker.com/news/8883-82rotterdam-or-anywhere-the-octagon-s-troubled-journey-to-holland/>; García and Malcolm, “Decivilizing, Civilizing or Informalizing?,” 45; Poor refereeing and lack of adherence to any known martial arts rules made the matches especially gruesome, with one match continuing despite a fighter waving to the referees to stop, who only stopped the match when the pummeled fighter’s team threw a towel in to the cage. The “Cage Fight Tournament” promotion only survived for one more tournament in Holland a year later before folding. The level of violence contributed to Belgium’s continued refusal to recognize MMA as a sport as well as the original ban on cage-fighting in the Netherlands.

¹⁴² Hongxin Lin and Samuel Nabors, “Mixed Martial Arts,” in *Routledge Handbook of Global Sport*, ed. John Nauright and Sarah Zipp (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), pp. 127–139, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/edit/10.4324/9781315714264/routledge-handbook-global-sport-john-nauright-sarah-zipp>, 133.

¹⁴³ Raúl Sánchez García, “The Redefinition of Legitimate Violence in Combat Sports: The Case of MMA in the USA and Europe,” *Human Figurations: Long-Term Perspectives on the Human Condition* 9, no. 1 (2021): pp. 1–21, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11217607.0009.106>, 10.

¹⁴⁴ Garcia, “The Redefinition of Legitimate Violence in Combat Sports,” 10.

sport.¹⁴⁵ Even in the United States, where the original UFC tournaments took place, many states banned the matches, with Senator John McCain (R-AZ), in 1997, calling the practice, “human cockfighting.”¹⁴⁶ Four years later, in 2001, new owners took over the UFC and created rules and regulations, including standardizing weight classes, time limits, and match conduct; this convinced the Athletic Commission of the State of Nevada to sanction MMA events, allowing MMA its first official foothold in the United States.¹⁴⁷

In contrast, the Council of Europe wrote up a recommendation in 1999 that all member states that valued human rights should prohibit the practice of free-fighting contests like cage fighting.¹⁴⁸ Tellingly, the recommendation does not mention MMA by name. The recommendation states,

Concerned by the growth of the phenomenon of so-called “sporting” violence as entertainment, as for example in the case of free fights; Noting that cage fighting is wrongly promoted by its instigators as a sport or as one of the martial arts, but that, in reality, unlike sport and the martial arts, it is not governed by proper rules...Considering that violence and barbarous and savage acts perpetrated in the name of sport have no social value in a civilised society which respects human rights, Recommends that governments of the member States undertake all necessary measures to prohibit and prevent free fighting contests such as cage fighting.¹⁴⁹

Thus, the Council of Europe did not recommend the prohibition of all MMA—only professional free fighting or cage fighting. The linguistic vagueness allowed for a loophole as amateur MMA, for example training gyms and sparring contests, was not named for prohibition. Although such recommendations by the Council of Europe are not legally binding on member states, this decision did legally prevent the EU from recognizing MMA

¹⁴⁵ García, “The Redefinition of Legitimate Violence in Combat Sports,” 7; Dane McGuire, “MMA in the Olympics Still Facing Hurdles after GAISF Ruling,” *Combat Press*, February 18, 2019, <https://combatpress.com/2019/02/mma-in-the-olympics-still-facing-hurdles-after-gaisf-ruling/>.

¹⁴⁶ Lin and Nabors, “Mixed Martial Arts,” 130.

¹⁴⁷ Raúl Sánchez García, “The Redefinition of Legitimate Violence in Combat Sports,” 5.

¹⁴⁸ García, “The Redefinition of Legitimate Violence in Combat Sports,” 6–7.

¹⁴⁹ Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, Recommendation No. R (99) 11 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the prohibition of free fighting contests, such as cage fighting (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 22 April 1999 at the 669th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies).

as a sport—at the European level.¹⁵⁰ The lack of EU recognition meant that the recognition of MMA was delegated to the member state-level, which allowed for amateur MMA to flourish, while professional MMA stalled in Europe.¹⁵¹ The lack of a professional promotion or league to file into to meant that the regulation of amateur MMA occurred tournament-by-tournament, rather than establishing an overarching set of rules further reinforcing the perception of the violent and unregulated nature of MMA and limiting the growth of the sport in the mainstream.¹⁵²

In 2017, the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS), a subcommittee within the Council of Europe, created a working group and started to conduct a study to review the prohibition of free-fighting recommendation, but it took until 2020 for a draft of a new recommendation to be approved by the EPAS and submitted for approval to the Council of Europe.¹⁵³ The following year in 2021 the new recommendation, which called for the end of the prohibition of combat sports, was adopted by the Council of Europe and overruled Recommendation R (99) 11 as it was set forth in 1999.¹⁵⁴ The adoption of the new recommendation in 2021 set the stage for professional MMA to arrive at last on the European scene, though due to the COVID-19 pandemic and various states' COVID guidelines limiting the ability to stage professional fights, the significance of this move is still being assessed.¹⁵⁵

The commercialization and in-fighting within MMA's biggest fight-promoting organizations also slowed the rate of legitimization of the MMA. The International Mixed

¹⁵⁰ García, "The Redefinition of Legitimate Violence in Combat Sports," 7.

¹⁵¹ García, 11.

¹⁵² García, 11.

¹⁵³ "Extreme Martial Arts and Combat Activities," Council of Europe: Sport (Council of Europe, 2022), <https://www.coe.int/en/web/sport/mixed-martial-arts-and-combat-practices>.

¹⁵⁴ Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, Recommendation CM/Rec(2021)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on extreme martial arts and combat activities (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 31 March 2021 at the 1400th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)

¹⁵⁵ Owen Llyod, "GAMMA World MMA Championships Facing Postponement Due to German COVID-19 Rules," *Inside the Games*, November 16, 2021, <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1115557/gamma-world-mma-champs-face-postponement>; Martin J. Meyer et al., "Martial Arts in the Pandemic," *Martial Arts Studies* 0, no. 11 (2021): pp. 7–31, <https://doi.org/10.18573/mas.134>, 30.

Martial Arts Federation (IMMAF) and the World Mixed Martial Arts Association (WMMAA) were founded in Sweden and Monaco respectively in 2012 for the purpose of “developing the sport globally and obtaining Olympic recognition,” as stated by the IMMAF.¹⁵⁶ They primarily worked at the amateur level, but both these organizations were created with the support of private professional promoter organizations. The IMMAF supported by the American-based UFC, and the WMMAF supported by the Russian-based M-1 Global.¹⁵⁷ The private organizations of the UFC and M-1 Global were pitted against each other in an argument over the sponsorship and the fight rights of Russian fighter, Fedor Emelianenko, widely thought to be the best heavyweight fighter of all time, and, “baddest man on the planet.”¹⁵⁸ So the international organizations too worked at cross-purposes despite having the same overall objective. In 2017, with both international organizations lobbying GAISF in hopes of gaining formal sport recognition as part of their goal of Olympic recognition, GAISF told the IMMAF and WMMAA that they must merge, if not unify, before any recognition could happen.¹⁵⁹ The following year, 2018, the IMMAF and the WMMAA legally merged under the banner of the IMMAF.¹⁶⁰ The infighting between the UFC and M-1 Global prevented the MMA from being accepted by the GAISF in 2017 and contributed to the continued lack of recognition as a sport by GAISF and the International Olympic Committee.¹⁶¹

The successful merger between IMMAF and WMMAA, along with the newfound partnership between the sponsor and promoter organizations of the UFC and M-1 Global,

¹⁵⁶ “History,” IMMAF (International Mixed Martial Arts Federation, March 5, 2021), <https://immaf.org/about/history/>.

¹⁵⁷ International Mixed Martial Arts Federation, “History.”

¹⁵⁸ Karim Zidan, “An Unholy Alliance: How the UFC and M-1 Global Joined Forces on Russia Venture,” *Bloody Elbow*, September 11, 2011, <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2018/9/11/17846138/unholy-alliance-how-the-ufc-m1-global-joined-forces-russia-venture-karim-zidan-mma-feature>.

¹⁵⁹ International Mixed Martial Arts Federation, “History.”

¹⁶⁰ International Mixed Martial Arts Federation, “History.” Significantly, the same year, the UFC and M-1 Global finally managed to strike a deal as M-1 Global’s local competitors were reducing their operations leaving an opening in the Russian market to for M-1 Global exploit with the financial backing and popularity of the UFC.¹⁶⁰ The UFC then would be able to break into the Russian market using M-1 Global as a local partner that would know the terrain and how to overcome the bureaucracy involved in setting up and promoting the fights. Zidan, “An Unholy Alliance.”

¹⁶¹ McGuire, “MMA in the Olympics Still Facing Hurdles after GAISF Ruling.”

did not garner much trust from the international perspective, and the history of infighting continued to contribute to MMA's lack of recognition. In 2019, the newly merged IMMAF were denied their GAISF observer status, key to the organization's Olympic aspirations.¹⁶² CEO of IMMAF, Densign White indicated that while, "no official reason had been given for the denial.... past issues include a perceived rivalry with the WMMAA, the need for a youth development program and the obtaining of signatory status from the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA.)"¹⁶³ It should be noted the current President of the IMMAF, Kerrith Brown, has a different take on the situation, stating in an interview for an article on "The Fight Library" that, "Their [GAISF] policy is not very transparent.... We are WADA compliant.... It really is just political.... We've become WADA compliant and they [WADA] turned us down anyway because they [WADA] were talking to the GAISF, which is illegal But it looks like we are going to be recognized by WADA which is a huge step."¹⁶⁴ The argument that the denial was political in nature indicates that the GAISF still does not trust the IMMAF as an organization, with one of the reasons being the unfriendly history between the sponsors of the IMMAF and the WMMAA.¹⁶⁵

Meanwhile, IMMAF worked with national-level amateur organizations to gain recognition by some national sports authorities.¹⁶⁶ The national amateur MMA scene supported by IMMAF, and indirectly by the UFC, led the way in regulating and standardizing MMA at the state and regional/European level, even as states like France, Sweden, Norway, and Ireland remained very opposed to the professionalization of

¹⁶² Dane McGuire, "MMA in the Olympics Still Facing Hurdles after GAISF Ruling," *Combat Press*, February 18, 2019, <https://combatpress.com/2019/02/mma-in-the-olympics-still-facing-hurdles-after-gaisf-ruling/>.

¹⁶³ McGuire, "MMA in the Olympics Still Facing Hurdles after GAISF Ruling."

¹⁶⁴ Blaine Henry, "The Path to the Olympics: What Must MMA DO to Become an Olympic Recognized Sport?," *The Fight Library*, October 26, 2020, <https://fight-library.com/2020/10/26/the-path-to-the-olympics-what-must-mma-do-to-become-an-olympic-recognized-sport/>.

¹⁶⁵ McGuire, "MMA in the Olympics Still Facing Hurdles after GAISF Ruling"; Zidan, "An Unholy Alliance."

¹⁶⁶ International Mixed Martial Arts Federation, "History."

MMA.¹⁶⁷ The amateur MMA scene worked with the IMMAF to create a network of training gyms and expand the market for MMA.¹⁶⁸ The IMMAF created its own set of Amateur MMA Rules, specifically to standardize practices that were acceptable for international competition and suitable to overcome safety concerns.¹⁶⁹ They also created the IMMAF World Championship Protocol, which standardizes operational protocols including weigh-ins, field of play, judge selection, tournament structure and so on.¹⁷⁰ These rules, created across national federations, have aided in the standardization and legitimization of amateur MMA.¹⁷¹ Ultimately, in 2020 France overturned its ban on professional MMA, and officially recognizing MMA as a sport, though it is now regulated under the French Boxing Federation.¹⁷² The IMMAF is still working toward Olympic recognition, and are looking to be able to participate in the Summer Olympics in Los Angeles in 2028.¹⁷³ The UFC remains the sports preeminent professional MMA promotion and continues to focus on expanding its market internationally alongside region partners like M-1 Global.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁷ France in particular rejected the professionalization of MMA saying that it is war, not a sport, and that it is a bastardization of the sophisticated martial arts, like judo. France’s continued rejection of professional MMA and anti-professional MMA lobbying, along with the corporate in-fighting, significantly influenced such organizations as the International Olympic Committee and the EU to reject recognition of MMA as an official sport. García, “The Redefinition of Legitimate Violence in Combat Sports,” 8–12.

¹⁶⁸ García, “The Redefinition of Legitimate Violence in Combat Sports,” 11–12.

¹⁶⁹ International Mixed Martial Arts Federation, *Mixed Martial Arts Unified Rules for Amateur Competition*.

(Sweden, International Mixed Martial Arts Federation, 2021), 1–14, <https://immaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IMMAF-Rules-Document-as-of-Jan-2021.pdf>.

¹⁷⁰ “What Is MMA? / Competition Rules,” IMMAF, March 18, 2021, <https://immaf.org/about/what-is-mma/#rules>.

¹⁷¹ IMMAF, “What Is MMA? / Competition Rules.”

¹⁷² García, “The Redefinition of Legitimate Violence in Combat Sports,” 12–13; Marc Raimondi, “France to Recognize MMA as a Sport in Jan. 2020,” ESPN (ESPN Internet Ventures, June 25, 2019), https://www.espn.com/mma/story/_/id/27048038/france-recognize-mma-sport-jan-2020.

¹⁷³ McGuire, “MMA in the Olympics Still Facing Hurdles after GAISF Ruling.”

¹⁷⁴ “About UFC,” UFC, March 2, 2022, <https://www.ufc.com/about>.

B. CONNECTION TO THE RADICAL RIGHT

The state-by-state legitimization of MMA and lack of recognition of the IMMAF by the GAISF forced the sport to develop and mature within underground circles and amateur fight clubs.¹⁷⁵ When reevaluating MMA in 2021, the Council of Europe specifically mentioned its concern with the potential for radicalization as a reason to legitimize the sport on a regional level and institute additional regulations.¹⁷⁶ The underground development and commercialization of MMA allowed for the infiltration of the radical right, while the violence inherent to the sport drew in, and radicalized fighters and fans alike in radical right ideology. White Rex proved to be the vehicle for the unification of the radical right within the transnational MMA community and helped to establish an ongoing legacy of pan-European radical right ideology, regulated ethnicity-based violence, and high levels of organization within the radical right MMA subculture. In this connection, the creation and development of Kampf der Nibelungen (KdN) in Germany and its public shift demonstrate the success of the radical right within the MMA community. Poland proves to be the outlier as its early creation of a professional promotion left little room for the radical right to develop their own space at the amateur level. The transnational MMA community creates a space for the radical right to unite across Europe and broaden their ideology.

1. The Development of White Rex and the Pan-European Radical Right in MMA

A prominent example of this trans-European radical right movement is the development of the Neo-Nazi combat clothing brand and MMA promotion White Rex.¹⁷⁷ White Rex was established in 2008 by a Russian soccer hooligan turned entrepreneur,

¹⁷⁵ García, “The Redefinition of Legitimate Violence in Combat Sports,” 2.

¹⁷⁶ Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, Recommendation CM/Rec(2021)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on extreme martial arts and combat activities (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 31 March 2021 at the 1400th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies).

¹⁷⁷ Tim Hume and Tom Bennett, “Neo-Nazi Fight Clubs: How the Far-Right Uses MMA to Spread Hate,” *VICE World News*, November 1, 2021, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/7kbpqxq/neo-nazi-fight-clubs-how-the-far-right-uses-mma-to-spread-hate>.

Denis Kapustin, known better by his alias, Denis Nikitin.¹⁷⁸ The official website touts: “White Rex is a Russian mixed martial arts (MMA) promotion, aggressive clothing, and sports gear company that advocates pan-European pride and traditional values. White Rex encourages all Europeans to embrace the warrior spirit of their ancestors, and fight back against the modern world.”¹⁷⁹ The name White Rex stands for “White Heterosexual Reactionary Xenophobe,” and the clothing the brand sells is full of neo-Nazi symbolism, glorification of violence, and warrior/crusader imagery.¹⁸⁰ In essence, White Rex advocates for white supremacist, radical right values and shuns what its leadership perceives as the decadence, weakness, and liberalism of the current world order, with a strong undercurrent of replacement theory.¹⁸¹

Denis Kapustin used White Rex to create a pan-European neo-Nazi movement. He does not just make shirts that have neo-Nazi slogans and advocate ethnic violence, but rather he created an all-encompassing lifestyle brand to promote to and among pan-European Neo-Nazi ideology.¹⁸² MMA fit nicely in this inventory. White Rex sponsored its first MMA tournament outside Russia in 2012 in Kyiv, Ukraine, and in 2013 hosted its first official European tournament in Rome.¹⁸³ Though the exact numbers of attendees at the tournament are unavailable due to its more secretive nature, the estimate, based on a

¹⁷⁸ Hume, “A Russian Neo-Nazi Football Hooligan Is Trying to Build an MMA Empire across Europe,”; “Russian Hooligan, Neo-Nazi and Martial Artist Denis Kapustin Barred from Schengen Area,” SchengenVisaInfo.com, September 3, 2019, <https://www.schengenvisa.info.com/news/russian-hooligan-neo-nazi-and-martial-artist-denis-kapustin-barred-from-schengen-area/>.

¹⁷⁹ Florian Neumann, “About Us,” Fighttex AG (White Rex), accessed May 14, 2022, https://whiterexstore.com/shop_content.php?coID=4&language=en.

¹⁸⁰ Karim Zidan, “White Rex: How MMA’s Most Dangerous Neo-Nazi Is Attempting to Revive His Lifestyle Brand,” *Bloody Elbow*, March 17, 2021, <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2021/3/17/22335594/white-rex-mma-dangerous-neo-nazi-lifestyle-brand-politics-azov-news/>; Florian Neumann, “T-Shirt’s,” Fighttex AG, accessed May 14, 2022, https://whiterexstore.com/index.php?cPath=5_14.

¹⁸¹ Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 96.

¹⁸² Hume, “A Russian Neo-Nazi Football Hooligan Is Trying to Build an MMA Empire across Europe.”

¹⁸³ “White Rex Pro - WRP: MMA Promoter,” Tapology, accessed May 14, 2022, <https://www.tapology.com/fightcenter/promotions/431-white-rex-wr>.

video of the event on the CasaPound Italia YouTube page that shows full stands and packed concerts, is a couple hundred attendees.¹⁸⁴

Before White Rex many amateur MMA tournaments and circuits viewed ideology as a limiting factor, but Kapustin viewed his radical right ideology as an opportunity to recruit new individuals to his White Rex lifestyle and to spread white supremacy across Europe.¹⁸⁵ White Rex working with Pride France, KdN, and Casa Pound developed the annual radical right MMA circuit going from hundreds of spectators to thousands between its start in 2013 with White Rex: Warrior Spirit 19 in Italy to the last 2018 KdN MMA tournament and Sword and Shield neo-Nazi music festival that Kapustin was involved in.¹⁸⁶

The tournament in Italy, White Rex: Warrior Spirit 19, was organized in conjunction with the Italian Neo-Fascist Identitarian political movement CasaPound.¹⁸⁷ CasaPound is known for its ultranationalism, violent student riots in an effort to give all ‘white’ Italians housing rights, and the 2011 racially motivated murder of two and wounding of three, Senegalese street vendors conducted by a Casa Pound supporter.¹⁸⁸ Kapustin also has ties to radical right groups in France, which he leveraged a year later, in 2014, to organize a MMA tournament in Lyons, France that was co-promoted with Pride

¹⁸⁴ CasaPound Italia, “Tana Tigri 2013 Fight Contest Roma - White Rex - Video Ufficiale,” June 5, 2013, Video, 6:47, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yQZUjHAoQZ0>.

¹⁸⁵ Nissen, Avramov, and Roberts, “White Rex, White Nationalism, and Combat Sport,” 25–26.

¹⁸⁶ Nissen, Avramov, and Roberts, 26; Zidan, “Battle of the Nibelung.”

¹⁸⁷ Nissen, Avramov, and Roberts, 24.

¹⁸⁸ Pietro Castelli Gattinara, Caterina Froio, and Matteo Albanese, “The Appeal of Neo-Fascism in Times of Crisis. The Experience of Casapound Italia,” *Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies* 2, no. 2 (2013): pp. 234–258, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22116257-00202007>, 244; Chris Adamczyk, in his thesis on the ideological indicators of identitarian violence, postulates that the connection between neo-Nazis and Italian neo-fascist identitarians, or ultra-nationalists, is one of survival; that they have joined together to combat growing globalization, much like Mussolini’s decision to ally Italy with the Nazi’s in World War II was to preserve the Italian state; Christopher J Adamczyk, “Homeland Security Digital Library,” *Homeland Security Digital Library* (2020), <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=847107>, 32.

France.¹⁸⁹ A video of the tournament on Pride France’s official YouTube page shows fighters with neo-Nazi tattoos and wearing the White Rex logo, as well as a commentator who explains the tournament saying, “this is about the white European unity, that we all stand together, that we all fight together, test our spirit and become stronger.”¹⁹⁰ In other words, the tournament is not primarily about MMA or entertainment but to promote the White Rex white pan-European lifestyle and create a community for recruitment, mobilization, and militancy. Fighters from across Europe were at the event including a contingent from the Czech Republic that was sponsored by the now-defunct Czech Neo-Nazi brand Hatecore Shop, along with White Rex.¹⁹¹

The following year, in 2015, both Pride France and White Rex helped sponsor the German tournament Kampf der Nibelungen.¹⁹² KdN specifically targets marginalized German youth using neo-Nazi ideology and claims, rather subtly, that they are “young Germans who unite the dedication and enthusiasm for ‘their’ sport and who do not want to be under the yoke of the prevailing mainstream.”¹⁹³ The “Nibelung” in the name refers to the Norse-Germanic clan of heroic legend, which has contested roles in German cultural history, from Wagnerian opera to Romantic poetry—and right-wing extremism.

In addition to sponsoring MMA tournaments and fighters, White Rex also started working with the organization Blood and Honour, a neo-Nazi music network, to promote white power or hatecore bands, such as Katogorie C and You Must Murder, to play after

¹⁸⁹ “White Rex: Warrior Spirit 30: Event,” Tapology, accessed May 15, 2022, <https://www.tapology.com/fightcenter/events/46241-white-rex-warrior-spirit-30>; Karim Zidan, “Pride France: the French Martial Arts Brand Connected to the Neo-Nazi Fight Scene,” *Bloody Elbow*, October 23, 2019, <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2019/10/23/20926685/pride-france-french-martial-arts-brand-neo-nazi-fight-scene-mma-crime-politics-feature>.

¹⁹⁰ “Pride France 2014,” August 3, 2017, Pride France Officiel, Video, 6:14, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-WXSiBObLI>.

¹⁹¹ Hatecore Shop, “After a successful WHTRX tournament in Rome,” Facebook, June 11, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/Hatecore-Shop-121584644701948/>.

¹⁹² Zidan, “Pride France,”; “Kampf der Nibelungen 2015,” November 20, 2015, Kampf der Nibelungen, Video, 1:06, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Whvwl2FY2c&t=31s>.

¹⁹³ Karim Zidan, “Battle of the Nibelung: the Dangerous Evolution of Neo-Nazi Fight Clubs in Germany,” *Bloody Elbow*, October 1, 2019, <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2019/10/1/20891729/dangerous-evolution-neo-nazi-fight-club-germany-far-right-mma-politics-feature>.

the tournaments.¹⁹⁴ You Must Murder, a Russian hatecore band, partnered with White Rex and played after many Warrior Spirit tournaments in Russia, and were banned in Russia for advocating violence.¹⁹⁵ Katogorie C is a German hatecore band that played at the 2014 White Rex: Warrior Spirit 30 in Lyon, and, notably, also played at the 2014 Ho.Se.Ga gathering turned riot in Cologne.¹⁹⁶ White Rex also continued to host hikes and camping expeditions under the name Vandals.¹⁹⁷ However, White Rex's prominence on the radical right MMA scene diminished in 2015 when the brand stopped promoting MMA tournaments.¹⁹⁸ White Rex had gotten into trouble for allegedly training Neo-Nazi fighters in hand to hand, no-weapon combat in unofficial boot camps in Wales.¹⁹⁹ Nonetheless, Denis Kapustin continues White Rex as a clothing brand and he supports other radical right MMA promotions, such as the Kampf der Nibelungen in 2017, which was organized by various radical right groups including the German branch of the American neo-Nazi

¹⁹⁴ Zidan, "Pride France,"; Blood and Honour was originally created in England in 1987 by Ian Stuart, the front man for the hate rock group Skrewdriver, in an attempt to break away from the increased racial tolerance of the British National, and to gain financial independence from the political party as well. Following Ian Stuart's death in 1993 Combat 18, the militant arm of Blood and Honour, took over the music network in England, but their leadership ultimately split the group and their affiliates between those that supported the white power music industry and those that supported terrorism, militancy and Combat 18. Blood and Honour and Combat 18 are both banned organizations in Germany. "Blood & Honour," Southern Poverty Law Center (Southern Poverty Law Center), accessed May 26, 2022, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/blood-honour>.

¹⁹⁵ Hardcore Wave, "You Must Murder – Interview," *OrderintDumMetuant* (blog), April 8, 2015, <http://orderintdummetuant.blogspot.com/2015/04/you-must-murder-interview.html?view=classic>.

¹⁹⁶ Tapology, "White Rex: Warrior Spirit 30: Event,"; VICE News, "Anti-Islamist Riots in Germany: Hooligans Against Salafists,"; for more on the Ho.Se.Ga. gathering in Cologne refer to Chapter II and the Germany case study on soccer hooliganism.

¹⁹⁷ Hume, "A Russian Neo-Nazi Football Hooligan Is Trying to Build an MMA Empire across Europe."

¹⁹⁸ Zidan, "White Rex."

¹⁹⁹ Karim Zidan, "Fascism in MMA: How White Rex, with Ties to Neo-Nazi Ideologies, Thrived as an MMA Promotion and Clothing Brand," *Bloody Elbow*, October 12, 2017, <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2017/10/12/16350612/white-rex-fascist-neo-nazi-groups-thrive-mma-promotions-clothing-brands-karim-zidan-mma-feature>; Anton Shekhovtsov, "Russian Extreme-Right White Rex Organisation Engaged in Training British Neo-Nazi Thugs," *The Interpreter*, November 10, 2014, <https://www.interpretermag.com/russian-extreme-right-white-rex-organisation-engaged-in-training-british-neo-nazi-thugs/>.

skinhead group the Hammerskins.²⁰⁰ Kapustin also worked with the Azov Battalion, a paramilitary group with neo-Nazi ties, in Ukraine until its fight club, the Reconquista Club shut down in 2019.²⁰¹ White Rex continued to organize and facilitate meet ups of radical right groups across Europe and the United States, illustrating that the commercialization of MMA allowed for the expansion and increased corroboration and militancy within the European radical right.²⁰²

2. German Case Study: KdN and the Rise of a Neo-Nazi Network

White Rex greatly influenced the development of the radical right MMA network within Germany as well as Germany's placement as the preeminent space for the radical right in Western Europe.²⁰³ However, more recently the German government has moved on all components of the radical right, and is working to limit the radical right's impact with the country, specifically targeting MMA groups.²⁰⁴ The expansion of and subsequent crackdown on the radical right tied to the MMA scene in Germany is indicative of the Council of Europe's shifting view on the legitimization of MMA, and its more recent 2021 recommendation that it be acknowledged and regulated like other sports, considering MMA's potential for radicalization.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁰ Zidan, "White Rex,"; Zidan, "Battle of the Nibelung,"; David Janzen, "'White Rex' martial arts training with Russian neo-Nazi," *Fault Indicator* (blog), November 23, 2017, https://blog.zeit.de/stoerungsmelder/2017/11/23/white-rex-kampfsporttraining-mit-russischem-neonazi_25081?wt_ref=https%3A%2F%2Ft.co%2FAbWre2gokm&wt_t=1652642178207.

²⁰¹ Zidan, "White Rex,"; Nissen, Avramov, and Roberts, "White Rex, White Nationalism, and Combat Sport," 36.

²⁰² The reach of Denis Kapustin was limited in 2019 when Germany issued him a Schengen Ban, or European-wide ban for "efforts against the liberal democratic constitution,"; SchengenVisaInfo.com, "Russian Hooligan, Neo-Nazi and Martial Artist Denis Kapustin Barred from Schengen Area."

²⁰³ Zidan, "Battle of the Nibelung."

²⁰⁴ "Germany Stages Country-Wide Raids against 'Neo-Nazi Networks,'" *The Local De*, April 6, 2022, <https://www.thelocal.de/20220406/germany-stages-country-wide-raids-against-neo-nazi-networks/>; SchengenVisaInfo.com, "Russian Hooligan, Neo-Nazi and Martial Artist Denis Kapustin Barred from Schengen Area."

²⁰⁵ Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, Recommendation CM/Rec(2021)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on extreme martial arts and combat activities (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 31 March 2021 at the 1400th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies); Handle and Scheuble, "The Role of Sports in Violent Right-Wing Extremist Radicalization and P/CVE," 8–9.

The use of martial arts to support radical right ideology and action is not new in Germany. In 1987, Bernd Schmitt, an enforcer and body guard for the neo-Nazi political party the Nationalist Front established the Hak Pao martial arts gym in Solingen, Germany.²⁰⁶ Cynthia Miller-Idriss states in her books that, “The Hak Pao (Black panther) gym...combined martial-arts training with plans to build a militant, nationalist, antigovernment commando unit, the Nationale Einsatzkommandos,” a clear nod to the notorious Einsatzgruppen who brought the Holocaust to East Central Europe in 1942, which would operate as the militant hand of the Nationalist Front and carry out terror attacks.²⁰⁷ The actual creation of the Nationale Einsatzkommandos was never proven, however, the gym was known to be a place of right wing radicalization for its participants.²⁰⁸ In 1993, three members of the Hak Pao gym murdered five Turkish women by breaking into their house and lighting it on fire.²⁰⁹ It was later revealed that Bernd Schmitt became an informer for the Office for the Protection of the Constitution in 1990 reporting on the radical right neo-Nazi organizations of which he was a part, and was therefore never held liable for the radicalization of the men who committed the attack.²¹⁰

Then came MMA and Kampf der Nibelungen. KdN is an annual MMA tournament, originally set up in 2013 by the Hammerskins as a ‘white only’ tournament, or, as a 2013 match referee is quoted as saying, people, “who still know their roots and stand for a white Europe of fatherlands instead of letting it degenerate into a multicultural cesspool.”²¹¹ Despite the long and important association with White Rex and Denis Kapustin, on KdN’s official website there is no mention of Kapustin or White Rex, which could be due to his

²⁰⁶ “That Would Be a Bomb,” *Der Spiegel*, May 29, 1994, <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/das-waere-eine-bombe-a-b5c411d8-0002-0001-0000-000013684942>.

²⁰⁷ Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 95; Köhler Daniel, *Right-Wing Terrorism in the 21st Century: The ‘National Socialist Underground’ and the History of Terror from the Far-Right in Germany* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2016), https://books.google.com/books?id=3iwlDwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_atb#v=onepage&q&f=false, 116.

²⁰⁸ Köhler, *Right-Wing Terrorism in the 21st Century*, 116; “That Would Be a Bomb.”

²⁰⁹ Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 95; “That Would Be a Bomb.”

²¹⁰ “That Would be a Bomb.”

²¹¹ “The Nibelungen Fighters: The Role of Martial Arts for Right-Wing Extremism,” *Nordstadt Blogger: Nachrichten Aus Dortmund*, November 7, 2021, <https://www.nordstadtblogger.de/die-nibelungenkaempfer-die-rolle-des-kampfsports-fuer-den-rechtsextremismus/>.

recent legal troubles within the EU.²¹² The sponsors that KdN does mention on their website are all radical right clothing wear, nutrition and mental fitness brands, and MMA promotions; these include Pride France, Black Legion, Sports Frei, Sonnenkreuz, and Resistend.²¹³ Notably all these brands express the same, if perhaps a mildly sanitized versus, of the pan-European unity that made White Rex successful.

KdN used MMA to solidify and energize its supporter base at first, but as they gained popularity switched to using the tournament for outright radicalization and recruitment, as well as a space to create a militant force within the radical right.²¹⁴ KdN also followed the new pan-European ideal gaining popularity among the radical right in Germany, selling merchandise with broad appeal that is not necessarily distinctly nationalist, and supporting both German and Western European brands²¹⁵ For the first five years of the tournament, the location of KdN was secret, indicating that the tournament was focused on mobilization, and organization of the already radicalized base.²¹⁶ Following the 2017 KdN tournament, which was attended by more than 500 guests, “Kampf der Nibelungen” was trademarked, signifying that the organizers felt they finally had a sufficient base attendance and population buy-in that they could go public.²¹⁷

Interestingly, 2017 was also the year that the EPAS, on behalf of the Council of Europe undertook the study of MMA that would eventually lead to the reversal of Recommendation R (99)11 that originally called for the sport to be banned.²¹⁸ The point is not to imply that one development caused the other but rather that the neo-Nazi

²¹² “Kampfsport Auf Professionellem Niveau,” Kampf der Nibelungen, accessed May 17, 2022, <https://www.kampf-der-nibelungen.com/start/>.

²¹³ Kampf der Nibelungen, “Kampfsport Auf Professionellem Niveau.”

²¹⁴ “Review and evaluation of the martial arts tournament “Battle of the Nibelungs” at the neo-Nazi festival “Shield & Sword” on April 21, 2018,” *Get Off the Mat! – No Handshake With Nazis* (blog), May 14, 2018, <https://runtervondermatte.noblogs.org/rueckblick-und-auswertung-des-kampfsportturniers-kampf-der-nibelungen-auf-dem-neonazi-festival-schild-schwert-am-21-04-2018/>.

²¹⁵ Kampf der Nibelungen, “Kampfsport Auf Professionellem Niveau.”

²¹⁶ Claus, “The ‘Battle of the Nibelungs’ serves to network and finance the neo-Nazi scene.”

²¹⁷ Claus, “The ‘Battle of the Nibelungs’ serves to network and finance the neo-Nazi scene,”; “The Nibelungen Fighters.”

²¹⁸ Council of Europe, “Extreme Martial Arts and Combat Activities.”

radicalization within the MMA was gaining attention in the public and was a consideration of the EPAS. The next year, 2018, KdN went public in Ostritz, Germany; the event was attended by thousands of neo-Nazis and radical right supporters.²¹⁹ The entire event was called “Sword and Shield” and in addition to the KdN tournament, included a music festival with multiple hatecore bands and speeches by leaders in the radical right community.²²⁰ “Sword and Shield” exemplified the move past mobilization and on to recruitment and radicalization on a grand scale. Still, the fighting at KdN is professionalized; amateur and pro fighters train for the event and compete under generally accepted rules within the boxing and MMA communities.²²¹ The tournament does not preach violence outright but provides a staging ground for the radical right’s professionalized militant force.

KdN also has strong ties to the soccer hooligan subculture in Germany; using connections with hooligan clubs to promote the tournament, recruiting fighters from hooligan clubs, and more generally to spread the pan-European ideal that is accepted within the MMA subculture.²²² White Rex, founder Denis Kapustin lived in Germany as a young adult and became heavily involved with the hooligan scene in Cologne and Dortmund.²²³ Kapustin leveraged those ties to support KdN and to introduce them to the wider radical right scene.²²⁴ Many of the fighters at KdN are either former or active soccer hooligans from across Germany. One such fighter is Christoph Drewer, a hooligan in Kaotic

²¹⁹ Claus, “The ‘Battle of the Nibelungs’ serves to network and finance the neo-Nazi scene,”; Zidan, “Battle of the Nibelung.”

²²⁰ Zidan, “Battle of the Nibelung.”

²²¹ Claus, “The ‘Battle of the Nibelungs’ serves to network and finance the neo-Nazi scene.”

²²² Claus, “The ‘Battle of the Nibelungs’ serves to network and finance the neo-Nazi scene,”; Hume, “A Russian Neo-Nazi Football Hooligan Is Trying to Build an MMA Empire across Europe,”; “The Nibelungen Fighters,”; Zidan, “Battle of the Nibelung.”

²²³ Karim Zidan, “Can Russia Stop Its Far-Right Hooligans From Ruining The World Cup?,” *Deadspin*, June 14, 2018, <https://deadspin.com/can-russia-stop-its-far-right-hooligans-from-ruining-th-1826728076>.

²²⁴ Zidan, “Battle of the Nibelung.”

Chemnitz, who is also a politician for the far-right group Die Rechte and has done jail time in Germany for assault in 2006 and inciting violence against refugees in July of 2015.²²⁵

KdN also advertised a potential team-fight in 2018 to soccer hooligan groups, where they could choose multiple fighters from within their team's hooligans to fight another soccer team's hooligans in a professional team bout, but the idea was scrapped prior to the tournament.²²⁶ However, many of the tournaments fighters in 2018 were sponsored by teams that had clear hooligan ties including team Noricum from Austria who are well connected to the right-wing hooligan groups associated with SK Rapid and FK Austria, two Viennese soccer teams, and KSSV Boxclub Zwickau from eastern Germany who are well connected to the radical right hooligan group A-Block that support the soccer club FSV Zwickau.²²⁷ The connection between the two subcultures displays both the capability and willingness to use violence, as well as the professionalization of violence that occurs within the amateur radical right MMA scene; from soccer hooligan to street fighter to trained MMA fighter.

KdN going public at the Sword and Shield festival in 2018 was the catalyst for the crackdown on the radical right MMA scene in Germany. In 2019, in a coordinated effort, the German police confiscated all the beer prior to the start of Sword and Shield, while the citizens of the town bought all the beer out of the local markets.²²⁸ In the face of a dry event, attendance that year dropped to around 500 individuals from the record high the year before, and KdN pulled out for lack of fighters.²²⁹ When KdN tried to reschedule for later

²²⁵ “More Imprisonment and Trials against Neo-Nazis – ‘The Right’ Struggles with Weak Mobilization and Bans,” *Nordstadt Blogger: Nachrichten Aus Dortmund*, November 20, 2019, <https://www.nordstadtblogger.de/weitere-haftstrafen-und-verfahren-gegen-neonazis-die-rechte-kaempft-mit-mobilisierungsschwaeche-und-verboten/>; “The Nibelungen Fighters.”

²²⁶ “The Nibelungen Fighters.”

²²⁷ “Review and evaluation of the martial arts tournament “Battle of the Nibelungs” at the neo-Nazi festival “Shield & Sword” on April 21, 2018.”

²²⁸ Jelis Castrodale, “German City Foils Neo-Nazi Festival by Confiscating All of Its Beer,” *VICE*, June 25, 2019, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/qv7abv/german-city-foils-neo-nazi-festival-by-confiscating-all-of-their-beer>.

²²⁹ Castrodale, “German City Foils Neo-Nazi Festival by Confiscating All of Its Beer,”; Karim Zidan, “Fascist Fight Clubs in the Age of COVID-19,” *Bloody Elbow*, September 24, 2020, <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2020/9/24/21453145/fascist-fight-clubs-coronavirus-white-rex-ram-mma-nazi-feature>.

that year, the city of Osritz banned KdN saying that it was a danger to public safety.²³⁰ The same year, Germany issued a Schengen ban on Denis Kapustin, demonstrating the governments increased willingness to crackdown on those they saw as radical right agitators.²³¹

Coronavirus forced KdN online in 2020 but German intelligence found where it was planning on streaming the fights from and issued a ban, KdN then changed locations but were only able to stream six fights on subpar equipment.²³² KdN now is focusing on its clothing line, and no additional information can be found on its website or YouTube page regarding a tournament in 2021 or 2022.²³³ Most recently, in April 2022, the German police conducted a country-wide raid against suspected neo-Nazi networks.²³⁴ The raids caused a significant disturbance to the radical right MMA scene, with three of the four individuals arrested being leaders of the far right MMA promotion Knockout 51.²³⁵ The suspects are also suspected of having ties to the banned neo-Nazi terror organization Combat 18 and an American based neo-Nazi terror group Atomwaffen Division.²³⁶

Germany recognizes the critical role the underground radical right MMA scene is playing in radicalization and mobilization and is set to stop further enlargement. Both the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and the Interior Minister, Nancy Faeser, pledged to fight

²³⁰ “Rechtsextremismus,” Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, November 11, 2020), <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/hintergruende/DE/rechtsextremismus/rechtsextremistische-erlebniswelt-musik-und-kampfsport.html>.

²³¹ SchengenVisaInfo.com, “Russian Hooligan, Neo-Nazi and Martial Artist Denis Kapustin Barred from Schengen Area.”

²³² Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, “Rechtsextremismus.”

²³³ Kampf der Nibelungen, “Kampfsport Auf Professionellem Niveau.”; “Kampf Der Nibelungen,” YouTube (YouTube), accessed May 18, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyOsVD6lKHb0vU1VitzwkrQ>.

²³⁴ “Germany Stages Country-Wide Raids against ‘Neo-Nazi Networks,’” *The Local De*, April 6, 2022, <https://www.thelocal.de/20220406/germany-stages-country-wide-raids-against-neo-nazi-networks/>.

²³⁵ Karim Zidan, “Germany Deals Blow to Far-Right Fight Clubs after Massive Raid on Local Neo-Nazis,” *Bloody Elbow*, April 14, 2022, <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2022/4/14/23024463/germany-far-right-fight-club-mma-massive-raid-local-neo-nazis-news>.

²³⁶ “Germany Stages Country-Wide Raids against ‘Neo-Nazi Networks,’”; Zidan, “Germany Deals Blow to Far-Right Fight Clubs after Massive Raid on Local Neo-Nazis.”

against militant radical right organizations and individuals, when they came into office in December 2021.²³⁷

3. Central Europe: Poland, Professional MMA and the Radical Right

Central Europe adopted MMA faster than most of the Western European countries and so was able to better regulate the MMA scene at the professional level and limit the development of the amateur division, so the radical right was not as pervasive or influential as in Germany.²³⁸ Poland was one of the first countries to create its own professional MMA promotion, Konfrontacja Sztuk Walki (KSW) in 2004.²³⁹ KSW helped develop fighters and ultimately aided in the introduction of the UFC in Poland in 2015.²⁴⁰ KSW fan opinion, and regulations within the UFC against certain symbols and clothing kept the radical right out of the professional MMA scene, which in turn limits the radical rights ability to recruit talented fighters on the amateur level.²⁴¹

That being said, Poland still maintains radical right MMA gyms and tournaments and sends fighters to foreign radical right tournaments and promotions.²⁴² White Rex's Warrior Spirit series was gaining popularity with both Polish and the Czech fighters in 2015 before White Rex stopped the tournament circuit.²⁴³ The larger radical right contingents in Poland are the First to Fight amateur tournament and Sportowo na Stylowo (Sport and Style) an online clothing store that caters to right-wing football hooligans and MMA fighters.²⁴⁴ Sportowo na Stylowo opened online in 2013 and sells right-wing

²³⁷ "Germany Stages Country-Wide Raids against 'Neo-Nazi Networks.'"

²³⁸ García, "The Redefinition of Legitimate Violence in Combat Sports," 10, 13; Zidan, "Battle of the Nibelung."

²³⁹ García, "The Redefinition of Legitimate Violence in Combat Sports," 10.

²⁴⁰ Karim Zidan, "Will the UFC's First Polish Champion Be a Boost for Their European Expansion?," *Bloody Elbow*, March 17, 2015, <https://www.bloodyelbow.com/2015/3/17/8231345/ufc-joanna-jedrzejczyk-polish-champion-european-mma>.

²⁴¹ Choccy, "Polish MMA Promotion Gives Neo-Nazi the Boot," libcom.org, January 10, 2012, <https://libcom.org/article/polish-mma-promotion-gives-neo-nazi-boot>; Zidan, "Fascism in MMA."

²⁴² Nissen, Avramov, and Roberts, "White Rex, White Nationalism, and Combat Sport," 26.

²⁴³ Zidan, "Fascism in MMA."

²⁴⁴ "Sportowo na Stylowo," Get Off the Mat! - No Handshake With Nazis (blog), July 10, 2017, <https://runtervondermatte.noblogs.org/sportowo-na-stylowo/>.

merchandise with such messages as GNLS—Good Night Left Side—a popular slogan in neo-Nazi circles.²⁴⁵ Sportowo na Stylowo has sponsored First to Fight from its inception in 2015 within Poland as well as the French MMA tournament Force and Honor in 2017.²⁴⁶ Just the same, Sportowo na Stylowo remains relatively small with a very limited online presence, maintaining a private Facebook page and just garnering more than 100 followers on their official Instagram account.²⁴⁷ The First to Fight MMA tournament also has a small internet footprint with a Facebook page that has not been updated since 2018; its last tournament occurred in 2016 though it continued to sponsor MMA seminars at the Fight Club Fanga gym until 2018.²⁴⁸

Following Denis Kapustin’s European ban in 2019, Poland along with Germany and the United Kingdom started programs to try to divorce combat sports from the radical right by working with trainers at amateur gyms and conducting anti-racism and radicalization awareness campaigns.²⁴⁹ In this way, Poland has been able to largely stay out of the radical right European circuit and between professional regulation of the sport, and government intervention has limited the ability for the radical right to use MMA to recruit and radicalize.

C. CONCLUSION

MMA, since its arrival in Europe in the early 2000s, has been utilized by the radical right as a way to recruit and radicalize, energize their base supporters, network with other radical right groups across Europe, and work to create a professionalized militant group motivated by far-right ideology. As individual right-wing gyms appeared across Europe,

²⁴⁵ Get Off the Mat! - No Handshake With Nazis, “Sportowo na Stylowo,”; Sportowo Na Stylowo, “Sportowo Na Stylowo,” Sportowo Na Stylowo, accessed May 19, 2022, <https://sportowonastylowo.bigcartel.com/>;

²⁴⁶ Get Off the Mat! - No Handshake With Nazis, “Sportowo na Stylowo.”

²⁴⁷ Get Off the Mat! - No Handshake With Nazis, “Sportowo na Stylowo,”; Sportowo Na Stylowo (@sportowonastylowo), instagram, 19 May, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/sportowonastylowo/>.

²⁴⁸ “First to Fight #2 ‘Duch Słowian,’” Facebook, 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/events/888444617938069/>; First to Fight (@TurniejFTF), “S.H.M Sport Hatecore Motivation,” Facebook, 18 March, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/TurniejFTF/?ref=page_internal.

²⁴⁹ Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 98.

White Rex was able to create and commodify a pan-European neo-Nazi lifestyle that he then sold to the MMA subculture and then to the radical right subculture at large. This created an intertwined network of radicals and neo-Nazis from the United States to Russia and linked MMA, soccer hooligans, and the white power music industry in a pan-European MMA tournament circuit that specialized in radicalization, mobilization and militancy. Within Germany this trend was duplicated with KdN annually creating a physical space for the radical right to gather, train, and refine their white supremacist ideology. The growth of KdN and their coming out publicly in 2018 illustrates the significance of the radical right network developed both within Germany and internationally, as well as the radical right's growing ability to recruit, radicalize and train new individuals within the MMA subculture. The creation of a professional league under European or even national-level guidance can curb the impact the radical right has on the MMA subculture. Professional leagues could restrict the ability to radical right fighters to climb from amateur to the professional ranks with regulations on sponsors, certain symbols or tattoos, or by the increased mainstream public pressure against neo-Nazi ideology that occurs in an open environment, as demonstrated in the Polish case. Recognizing MMA as a sport and allowing professional leagues to develop will not root out the radical right, but would significantly limit their influence within MMA. The radical right MMA scene in Europe has evolved from individual gyms focused on militant training, and energizing their base supporters to open recruitment and radicalization, and networking across the continent.

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IV. EVOLUTION OF THE RADICAL RIGHT'S USE OF SPORTS

The radical right has used sports to recruit youths, radicalize supporters, further their political objectives, and engage in violence for the sake of ideology. Soccer and MMA provide two cases studies that are fundamentally linked, not just by the radical right's top-down use of them, but because of the networks and connections, both formal and informal, made between hooligan groups and fight clubs across Europe. The evolution of the radical right in the last 40 years from a political afterthought to a robust pan-European movement is demonstrated in the transition from hooligan stadium brawls spilling on to the street to professionally trained fighters backed by ideologically militant right-wing sponsors. Though the two eras are distinct, supporting a local soccer team over a white pan-European lifestyle, and engaging with the political system versus staying outside of it; the fundamentals of recruitment, radicalization, mobilization, and militancy are apparent in each study in varying levels. The changing political landscape, professionalization of violence and search for community amidst regulations characterizes the developments of the radical right as seen through its relationship with both soccer and MMA.

A. IDEOLOGY: CHANGING POLITICAL LANDSCAPE OF THE RADICAL RIGHT

The radical right has evolved to survive within the political landscape of the time; from the jingoistic ideology and localized identity of radical right soccer hooligans in the 1980s to the pan-European white supremacist ideology that characterizes the current MMA radical right circuit, the radical right is willing to adjust its system of beliefs to stimulate growth. It is important here to distinguish between official national political parties, such as the British National Front and the AfD in Germany, and unofficial radical right groups who are politically motivated, but remain outside of any official political space, such as the FLA/DFLA and organizations such as the KdN or White Rex. Radical right political parties pulled out of their direct involvement in soccer and MMA when it became clear that the violence of the spectators or the sport itself prevented the growth of the party. However the space left by the retreating radical right political parties opened up the political sphere for more radical groups to take hold, as with the development of Combat 18 as hooligan

violence grew or the ability of White Rex to commodify amateur MMA when the Council of Europe did not acknowledge MMA as a sport due to its violent nature. Once the sports were divorced from the national level political parties, transnationalism began to grow within the unofficial radical right groups and the idea of pan-European white supremacy solidified.

This interpretation is limited in scope as the migration crisis in 2015 and the legislative rise in radical right parties in the latter half of the 2010s also played a role in the spread of the pan-European ideal and the changing “us versus them” mentality.²⁵⁰ However, with the anti-hooligan regulations limiting the ability of the more radical elements to gather in soccer stadiums; MMA tournaments, alongside radical-right rock concerts created the physical space for unofficial radical right groups to meet, engage in sanctioned violence and refine their ideology. Creating a growth of pan-European white supremacy, that further aided in the creation of international radical right networks of hooligans, MMA fighters, and white power bands that though are similar in political motivation remain loyal to their different sub-cultures. European governments are currently attempting to limit the growth of radical right networks through the use of raids, arrests, and legislation. However, with the interconnectedness of the MMA scene it will be telling to see how effective these recent crackdowns will be in the long term, and how the radical right ideology will shift on both the official and unofficial levels to ensure survival.

B. MILITANCY: PROFESSIONALIZATION OF VIOLENCE

Another element of the radical right’s evolving relationship to sports is the professionalization of violence. The development from rowdy stadium hooligan riots to militant lifestyle brands created around MMA gyms parallels the shift in ideology. The hooligan violence increased and the national political parties started to distance themselves from the hooligan groups leading to hooligans embracing radical right groups outside of the legitimate political sphere. The organization of these radical right groups, along with

²⁵⁰ Tarik Abou-Chadi, Denis Cohen, and Markus Wagner, “The Centre-Right versus the Radical Right: The Role of Migration Issues and Economic Grievances,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48, no. 2 (2022): pp. 366–384, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2020.1853903>, 381.

the regulations that pushed violent hooligan behavior outside of the soccer stadium, led to more regulated violence ensuring that radical right groups could grow and survive without government interference.²⁵¹

The growth of MMA in the early 2010s created a legitimate outlet for radical right violence and an environment in which to train and radicalize members that was not directly tied to a location or nationality. The focus on pan-European radical right ideology as well as the professionalization of radical right MMA contests allowed for brands like White Rex and KdN to grow until they were hosting public, professional-grade, MMA tournaments. These tournaments then provide the proving ground for the new generation of radical right militants that are willing to engage in coordinated street fighting and train for “Day X,” when they will take over their respective national governments.²⁵² Generally speaking, soccer hooligans fought for a team or a country above political ideology, but MMA allows for a fighter to focus on and fight for an ideology divorced from nationality, but tied to their identity as a white European.

C. RECRUITMENT AND RADICALIZATION: SEARCH FOR COMMUNITY AMID REGULATION

The radical right’s search for community is limited by the physical space in which members can gather for events. In the 1980s, that community was found among soccer hooligans. Organizations, like the British National Front, were able to recruit straight from the stands, but decades of anti-hooligan regulation and EU involvement limited the ability for the most violent of soccer hooligans to recruit and gather. This is not to say that hooliganism no longer occurs or that the radical right no longer finds a community among soccer fans, but rather that the most radical and violent elements of the radical right were blocked from the physical space where they could most easily recruit, radicalize, militarize, and refine their ideology. Private martial arts gyms provided a replacement for this space

²⁵¹ Claus, “The ‘Battle of the Nibelungs’ serves to network and finance the neo-Nazi scene,”; Hume and Bennett, “Neo-Nazi Fight Clubs.”

²⁵² Pia Behme and Mathias von Lieben, “Robert Claus: ‘Ihr Kampf’ Wie Europas extreme Rechte für den Umsturz trainiert,” December 13, 2020, in *Nachspiel*, Podcast, Transcript, 6:51, <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/robert-claus-ihr-kampf-wie-europas-extreme-rechte-fuer-den-100.html>.

within the radical right sphere, as with Hak Pao gym. The development of MMA as a sport, the lack of regulations governing amateur MMA, and the ability to make money off MMA and turn it into a lifestyle, as White Rex did, then created a new radical right community. One that connected the violence of hooliganism with the discipline of MMA and packaged it in a new package of fitness, fatherland, and brotherhood.

The other part of community is how the radical right radicalized individuals. The open recruitment of violent individuals and blatant nationalism and racism morphed into targeting the disenfranchised youth with coded messaging and pan-European white idealism. Even amongst the radical right that remained within the larger soccer community the focus is Islamophobic, as with the FLA/DFLA, and the new look is increasingly family friendly. MMA uses their radical right brands for outreach. White Rex and KdN have neo-Nazi symbolism on their merchandise but it is often hidden or coded. The most recent round of crackdowns in Germany will not eradicate the lifestyle brands, as they will simply change their mission statements and bury the lead, while preaching wellness, unity and a pan-European ideal. White Rex created the offshoot brand Vandals for the same reason: to entice young, active people to buy their clothes, and then subsequently their message. Fundamentally, from 1980 until present day, the radical right has reevaluated and refocused its message to find relevance within its new intended audience of disenfranchised patriotic youth who have the capability to carry on the legacy of the radical right.

D. WHAT IS THE THREAT?

The threat from the radical right is singular in purpose but divided by the means used to achieve it. The purpose of the radical right is fundamentally a political one, in the case of the neo-Nazi groups discussed, to overthrow democratic rule of law and liberal sentimentality and to embrace some level of fascism and an extreme type of nationalism.²⁵³ There are two main methods of achieve that goal: violent overthrow and democratic erosion. The radical rights hijacking of sports subculture supports both these

²⁵³ Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*, 7; Kersten and Hankel, “A Comparative Look at Right-Wing Extremism, Anti-Semitism, and Xenophobic Hate Crimes in Poland, Ukraine, and Russia,” 8; Behme and Lieben, “Robert Claus: *Ihr Kampf* Wie Europas extreme Rechte für den Umsturz trainiert.”

methods. The underground soccer hooligan scene created the terror group Combat 18 and the radical right MMA tournaments and associated rock concerts provide both financial support for Combat 18 members but also a place to gather and radicalize youth to join terror groups like Combat 18, or the Atomwaffen Division. However, the increasing publicity of radical right MMA tournaments such as KdN as well as the soccer hooligan-driven Islamophobic movements such as the FLA/DFLA all illustrate that sports can be a tool for mobilization to radicalize individuals not just in the stands, but in the streets and at the polls. The radical right uses soccer and MMA to introduce its ideology to an increasing number of unsuspecting individuals. The openly neo-Nazi groups pose less of a threat at the polls but increasingly look toward violence to solve what they perceive as the injustices of society, whereas soccer hooligans demonstrate only limited violence amidst the anti-hooligan regulation and so create a community outside the stadium to share Islamophobic or ethno-nationalist beliefs and influence right-wing political parties. In this way, regardless of whether the means used are violent terrorist acts or peaceful marches and professional MMA tournaments the fundamental issue is the threat the radical right poses to democracy.

E. WHAT CAN BE DONE?

There are three main things that can be done to limit the radical right's influence in sports and begin breaking down the most recently formed networks. They are:

- The international community, including the GAISF and the EU, must recognize MMA as a sport and work to create a regulatory structure that limits the rise of athletes sponsored by known neo-Nazi brands.
- The EU must create an European intelligence task force specifically tailored to sharing information, as well as finding and rooting out connections between violent terrorist networks like Combat 18 and radical right MMA tournaments
- National governments and local communities must reclaim spaces like soccer stadiums and MMA gyms as places of community outreach and use them to spread awareness on radicalization tactics and promote diversity.

1. International Recognition

The international recognition of MMA as a sport will bring additional international regulation and will support the creation of professional leagues rather than amateur networks that can easily be commodified and amplified by the radical right.²⁵⁴ Recognition of the IMMAF, by the GAISF, coupled with the recent Council of Europe recommendation to legitimize the sport, would set the groundwork for the introduction of MMA into the Olympics, which would require international regulation and standardization of play.²⁵⁵ The development and standardization of the sport would then either push out many of the amateur-level tournaments, or force the tournaments to comply with international regulations, which would include a ban on clothing lines and sponsors who support hateful ideologies, assuming the UFC is indicative of what regulations would be accepted.²⁵⁶ International recognition and top-down corrective measures will not eradicate the radical right within the MMA scene, but will limit the ability to recruit and radicalize new fighters, and could have a financial impact on radical-right brands that rely on the amateur tournaments to market and sell their brand.²⁵⁷

Poland exemplifies this idea as the radical right is still involved in the MMA culture despite the existence of a professional league, but they do not have the influence or the brand development that KdN exhibits in Germany, who lacks a professional league.²⁵⁸ The recognition of MMA as a sport would lead to further professionalization of the sport, which

²⁵⁴ Claus, “The ‘Battle of the Nibelungs’ serves to network and finance the neo-Nazi scene,”;

García, “The Redefinition of Legitimate Violence in Combat Sports,” 2; Hume and Bennett, “Neo-Nazi Fight Clubs.”

²⁵⁵ Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, Recommendation CM/Rec(2021)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on extreme martial arts and combat activities (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 31 March 2021 at the 1400th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies); Henry, “The Path to the Olympics.”

²⁵⁶ García, “The Redefinition of Legitimate Violence in Combat Sports,” 2; Henry, “The Path to the Olympics,”; Zidan, “Fascism in MMA.”

²⁵⁷ Claus, “The ‘Battle of the Nibelungs’ serves to network and finance the neo-Nazi scene,”; Nissen, Avramov, and Roberts, “White Rex, White Nationalism, and Combat Sport,” 28; Zidan, “Fascism in MMA.”

²⁵⁸ Get Off the Mat! - No Handshake With Nazis, “Sportowo na Stylowo,”; Zidan, “Battle of the Nibelung.”

would in turn limit the ability of the radical right to profit from, infiltrate or radicalize MMA, and would take away what was once seen as a physical “safe space” for radical right ideologies.

2. EU Intelligence Task Force

The creation of a European intelligence task force to weed out the violent elements of the radical right from MMA tournament networks would divorce the sport from the underlying criminal network of radical right terrorist groups like Combat 18 and the Atomwaffen Division, and would further serve to break up the transnational networks that link MMA, to soccer hooligans, to the white power rock scene.²⁵⁹ The success of European-wide intelligence networks is demonstrated in their implementation against violent soccer hooliganism.²⁶⁰ An EU task force that focused on the MMA scene would be beneficial for eradicating the most violent elements of the radical right across Europe, as well as keeping an eye on the development of radical right terror groups. The recent crackdown on radical right MMA groups demonstrates the ties between terror groups and radical right MMA gyms and lifestyle brands, and the importance of monitoring these entities and their activities not only in Germany but throughout Europe.²⁶¹

It is important to note that basic human rights and civil liberties must still be upheld, and a common debate with respect to the intelligence network surrounding soccer hooliganism in Europe is whether or not the average soccer fan’s civil liberties are being upheld and the extent of due process to which people who attend soccer games are entitled.²⁶² An understanding of civil liberties, particularly the rights of free expression

²⁵⁹ Tim Hume, “German Neo-Nazis Are Trying to Go Mainstream with MMA and Music Festivals,” *VICE News*, April 24, 2018, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/wj79nq/german-neo-nazis-are-trying-to-go-mainstream-with-mma-and-music-festivals>; Smolík and Đorđević, “From Repression to Prevention in Central Europe,” 5; Tsoukala, *Football Hooliganism in Europe*, 79; Zidan, “Germany Deals Blow to Far-Right Fight Clubs after Massive Raid on Local Neo-Nazis.”

²⁶⁰ Anastassia Tsoukala, Geoff Pearson, and Coenen Peter T M., “Legal Responses to Football ‘Hooliganism’ in Europe - Introduction,” in *Legal Responses to Football “Hooliganism” in Europe* (The Hague: Asser Press, 2016), pp. 1–17, 10; Tsoukala, *Football Hooliganism in Europe*, 105.

²⁶¹ Zidan, “Germany Deals Blow to Far-Right Fight Clubs after Massive Raid on Local Neo-Nazis.”

²⁶² Anastassia Tsoukala, Geoff Pearson, and Coenen Peter T M., “Conclusions: Social Control at the Expense of Civil Liberties and Human Rights,” in *Legal Responses to Football “Hooliganism” in Europe* (The Hague: Asser Press, 2016), pp. 169–178, 177–178.

and assembly, must be applied and upheld by law enforcement and other representatives of the state.²⁶³ The reasonable expectation of privacy as well as the presumption of innocence must also be taken into account when determining due process in regards to monitoring individuals suspected of violent crime and assessing whether or not certain organizations are part of radical right organized crime and/or terror groups.²⁶⁴ A process, taking these rights and privileges into account, for determining who can be monitored and for what must be put in place prior to the creation of an EU task force against radical right terror within MMA.

3. National and Localized Community Outreach

Community outreach projects are the most discussed solution to the rising influence of the radical right within sports, and are seen as the most likely to be effective at combatting radicalization at the ground level.²⁶⁵ Germany has a few programs that work to combat radicalism and recruitment including the German Institute for Radicalization and Deradicalization Studies (GRIDS), which has created the German Association of Martial Arts Schools against Violent Extremism (DVKE).²⁶⁶ DVKE works within martial arts schools in German-speaking countries to train mentors and coaches to recognize and combat violent radicalization.²⁶⁷ In England, the organization Luton Tigers created a conflict resolution curriculum that they teach in local schools, alongside a youth soccer club, Luton Tigers Football Club, which has served to prevent youth level radicalization, promote diversity and educate at-risk youths on the dangers of all types of radicalization.²⁶⁸ Communities themselves typically understand what is most needed to solve problems within the local area, so by placing power at the lowest level, and working

²⁶³ Tsoukala, Pearson, and Coenen, “Conclusions: Social Control at the Expense of Civil Liberties and Human Rights,” 176.

²⁶⁴ Tsoukala, Pearson, and Coenen, 176.

²⁶⁵ Handle and Scheuble, “The Role of Sports in Violent Right-Wing Extremist Radicalization and P/CVE,” 12–13.

²⁶⁶ Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 109.

²⁶⁷ Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 110.

²⁶⁸ Handle and Scheuble, “The Role of Sports in Violent Right-Wing Extremist Radicalization and P/CVE,” 14.

to prevent radicalization and recruitment in the first place cuts off radical right access to new members and makes it easier at the national and international level to dismantle the European radical right network.²⁶⁹

F. AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

This study has found three areas in which the radical right has evolved in its use of sports. The radical right has refined their ideology within a changing political landscape, professionalized their use of violence and found and expanded their community amidst regulations all within the transition from soccer hooliganism to MMA tournaments. Moving forward, more research should be done on the overall impact of the radical right's use of sports within the official political sphere, including the use of sports by autocrats to support regime survival. Also of significance, more research should focus on analyzing radical right networks connecting the United States, Europe, and Russia through the lens of sports and further evaluate what can be done to limit the internationalization of the radical right.

The greatest threat of the radical right is its ability to develop in the shadows and erode democracy. Assessing the radical right within government is only half the picture and is not a good predictor of its true political efficacy. To truly understand the success, mobilization, and violence of the radical right one must evaluate all its facets. By evaluating the radical right's use of sports one can see the growth and increasing legitimization of the radical right outside of lawful governing institutions as well as its impact on those governing institutions, and therefore better assess the true political efficacy of the radical right.

²⁶⁹ Handle and Scheuble, "The Role of Sports in Violent Right-Wing Extremist Radicalization and P/CVE," 17; Miller-Idriss, *Hate in the Homeland*, 109–110.

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