

What Lies in the Shadows: The Rise of Extremism in Germany

Ben Johnson

12/13/2022



German police car

Ben Johnson -Earlier this week, 25 people suspected of plotting to overthrow the German government were [arrested in a series of 150 raids across Germany](#). The alleged conspirators have ties to QAnon and a right-wing conspiracy group based in Germany called Reichsbürger. Their arrests highlight the growing extremism in Germany and globally. Geopolitical codes can help us better understand the goals and viewpoints of these non-state actors.

The way that a country orients and presents itself domestically and globally is its [geopolitical code](#). These codes are constantly changing and depend on determining current and future allies, enemies, and threats while justifying its actions. For example, Germany has taken a firmer stance on [hate speech](#), particularly in its online format, by passing laws allowing criminal prosecution for those spreading antisemitism, racism, misinformation, etc. Justification for this change in its geopolitical code resulted from Walter Lübke, a local German politician, being shot in 2019 by a neo-Nazi following his vocal support for refugees. Many of these far-right extremist groups have identified the German government and other governments abroad as enemies controlled by members of a “deep state.” A list of specific “enemies” was discovered in one raided home. The names included Chancellor Olaf Shultz as well as other German politicians and journalists. Currently, the goal of this particular organization appears to be the takeover of the German government and its replacement with members of its own organization. The

group sought to make Prince Heinrich XIII of Reuss, a descendent of a former line of nobility, the new head of state. He, along with a former judge, members of the military and police forces, and a former parliament member, was among those arrested. QAnons’ influence and spread to Germany has exasperated an already growing problem in the European nation, linking scattered groups of conspirators into a more potent force.

According to estimates, Reichsbürger itself has seen its membership grow from about 2,000 followers pre-pandemic to over 21,000 members. This increase in membership points to the growing [material power](#) of the group, or the things that traditionally define power, such as wealth, population, or capacity for physical violence. Guns, military equipment, and considerable cash reserves were among the items found in the raided homes. This enhanced ability to carry out violence illustrates an intentional stockpiling of resources and a willingness to use force. It is becoming evident that rising extremism is challenging Germany and others’ dominant geopolitical codes.

Picture Credit: Photograph by Till Krech, distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic [Link](#)