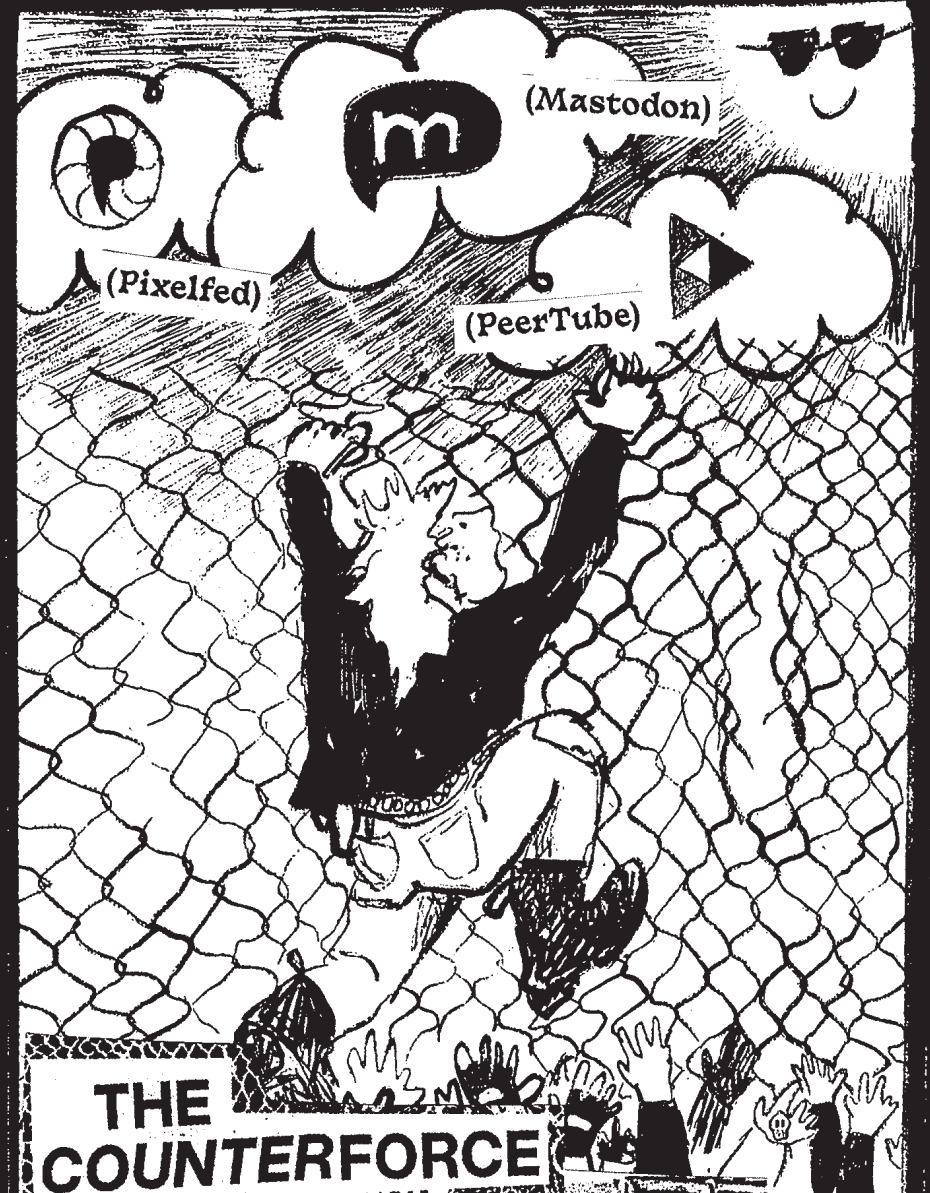


Let's grow
something
better...



**THE
COUNTERFORCE**
Guide to Mastodon &
THE FEDIVERSE





THE COUNTERFORCE IS A DISTRIBUTED AND COMMUNITY PROJECT

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CANADA

If sending us something other than a letter (like a record/tape for review) from **outside Canada** you must **indicate it has a declared value under \$20**. Otherwise, Canada will apply duties and taxes which we cannot afford to pay!

PRINT THIS ZINE

This zine is available on our website as a PDF you can print out and distribute yourself, with more coming soon.

We also started a Montreal **ASK A PUNK** show calendar using Gancio. People all over Montreal now use the calendar to find out about shows (just search "Montreal Punk Shows"), but it's *also* part of the Fediverse so punks on 438punk.house (and elsewhere on Mastodon) can follow the calendar to see new shows in their feed.

It doesn't cost much money or require much technical skill to set this up and keep it running (any Linux nerd can handle it). We got in early and established our own autonomous infrastructure for our punk scene. As more people are actively trying to ditch Instagram, Montreal punks already have somewhere to go.

The 438punk.house server is great for us, but we're kind of the only punk scene on Mastodon. We know a few other punks scattered here and there but if you read this guide and get on Mastodon, look us up! But mostly we are just waiting for another city to get on here and build the punk Fediverse.

Come join us!

Further Reading

- ***RSS How-to For Punks:** <https://the-counterforce.org/rss-how-to/>
- ***Mastodon documentation:** <https://docs.joinmastodon.org/>
- ***fedizine: an anarchist introduction to federated social media:** <https://distro.f-91w.club/fedizine/>
- ***Fedi Tips:** <https://fedi.tips>
- ***Run Your Own Social:** <https://runyourown.social>
- ***Social media needs (dumpster) fire exits:** <https://pluralistic.net/2024/12/14/fire-exits/#graceful-failure-modes>
- ***Mastodon Opsec:** <https://distro.f-91w.club/masto-opsec/>

Other Alternatives

This guide has focused on the Fediverse and Mastodon, but I don't want to pretend they are the only answer. The Counterforce is about trying and exploring many alternatives that help the hardcore punk underground escape corporate capture.

For one, there are plenty of ways to get on the Fediverse besides Mastodon. If you prefer just-photo posts, try **PixelFed**. If you prefer threaded discussions, try **Lemmy** . If you want to post long videos, get on **PeerTube**. Set up a Fediverse-connected **Gancio** calendar for local shows. No matter where you set up shop, everyone elsewhere on the Fediverse will be able to follow you.

Another option for punks to connect online is to revive the local message board. I grew up with punk and hardcore message boards, and I remember them fondly (although I also remember all the drama). I think we should be wary of huge centralized message boards, though. People can be assholes when they aren't accountable to each other, and relying on a single centralized server to build our entire online community is doomed to fail eventually. (There are also message board platforms that are part of the Fediverse).

Whatever alternatives you want to try, please just be mindful of repeating past mistakes. Many powerful players want to capture users who flee the imploding-social-media-app-of-the-week. The next shiny corporate social media app will be no better for us. Whether it's Discord, TikTok, Slack, or even a huge message board run by people you don't know, avoid any platform, new or old, run by a profit-seeking company with venture capital to burn. No good will come of it.

Finally, I will re-iterate the other obvious alternative: **do more shit offline!**

runyourown.punk

I first joined the the Fediverse in 2018 or 2019 via Kolektiva.social. After learning how Mastodon works and understanding the potential of the Fediverse, some friends and I got together in 2021 and started 438punk.house, a Mastodon server for Montreal punks.

It was slow at first, but we've steadily grown as more and more people have looked for a way to stay plugged in without using Instagram (which has otherwise dominated our scene). It wasn't easy to teach people something new, but friends teach friends. Now we have over a hundred users posting about upcoming shows, asking for advice and help, starting new bands, sharing new releases, etc. A few bands have accounts. We have our own hashtags for posting updates from shows and sharing what we're listening to. Some people are really chatty, and some people just log on when they want to to ask a question or find out what's going on this weekend.

#introduction

The hardcore punk underground has been on corporate social media since MySpace. Some resisted it, some embraced it, but mostly we have just followed mainstream culture's passive slide into digital dystopia. In 2025 every band has an Instagram account, every show needs a Facebook event and you only see a show flyer if you are lucky enough to catch it in someone's Story.

Punks are increasingly realizing how fucked corporate social media is (about time!). We hunger for better ways to check in with each other, share our music and thoughts, promote shows, connect across borders, and shit talk. What's presented here is a possible solution, an experiment, or at least a step in the right direction.

You may have heard of alternatives like Mastodon or PixelFed. These are not just reinventions of the apps we know. They are part of a decentralized, open network called the **Fediverse**. This network is totally different from corporate social media on a *structural* level, making it highly resistant to corporate capture and allowing it to evade surveillance capitalism. It's a network that we can not only join but *build ourselves*.

In this guide, I will try to explain what the Fediverse is, why it's cool for punks, give a practical how-to on getting started with Mastodon, and lay out some dreams for the future.

What Mastodon/ The Fediverse are NOT: NOT...easy

Understanding this stuff is not easy because it's so different from what we are used to. You can totally create a Mastodon account and give it a spin without any of this context, but you probably won't find it very interesting (or very punk). If you tried Mastodon already and didn't really "get" it, I hope you'll read on and give it another try!

When you first used corporate social media, there was a learning curve too. No one is born knowing how Instagram works. The big apps have spent fortunes to design a social media experience that is both frictionless (easy to start using), and sticky (hard to leave).

Mastodon and the Fediverse are neither frictionless, nor sticky. Like punk, they are built by hobbyists, non-profit initiatives and informal networks. They don't have the same addictive appeal as corporate apps. They aren't trying to

trap you, and they aren't here to entertain you. Instead, their genuine purpose is to help us connect with each other online.

So bear with me as you work through this guide. Liberation requires struggle, and knowledge is power. That might be a little dramatic, but given that corporate social media plays such a dominant role in human culture (not just our hardcore punk underground), I believe that wresting control of our lives and our culture back from fashy tech billionaires is a struggle with real stakes!

NOT...a secure and private communication tool

It's 2025. Don't use DMs on *any* social media app to talk about anything serious. Use Signal. Even if you don't think you need Signal, someone who wants to talk to you does. Signal Stories and group chats are great if you want digital spaces that are social and also very secure (maybe a topic of a future how-to).

NOT...an entertainment platform

Mastodon doesn't care about your attention or entertaining you. If you are looking to be fed a more ethical doomscroll, this probably isn't the place. You will only get out of it what you put in.

NOT...a place to go viral

It's a hard place to go viral. There's no toxic algorithm to push your content into other people's feeds. It's hard to be an influencer. Don't try. Influencers aren't really welcome anyways!

NOT...a replacement for the real world

The Internet lets us build a hardcore punk underground that is international. It facilitates connection through pandemics, harsh seasons, mental health struggles and isolation.

Even if you are a true no-phone punk, this discussion matters to you: you might not use Instagram, but your band or shows or zines are still getting shared there by your fellow punks. We are all participating in an underground that relies in large part on social media, for better or worse. It's important to meet people where they are. So, we must intervene in how punks engage online, just as we don't want to see all punk shows happen at Clear Channel or Live Nation venues.

Bluesky is not it

As I am writing this, a lot of people are leaving Twitter and Instagram for Bluesky, another social media alternative. You may have even seen Bluesky mentioned alongside Mastodon as part of the Fediverse or the "new decentralized social media".

Bluesky is currently just Twitter Jr. It was originally a Twitter spin-off! It's now in the honeymoon phase where it has lots of cash from investors, so it can develop features really fast and it hasn't started running ads. The nazis haven't taken over yet. But Bluesky isn't any different than Twitter or Instagram, it is just earlier in the lifecycle of corporate social media. Eventually it will have to *make money* (a LOT of money), and when that pressure kicks in things will get shitty.

The idea that Bluesky is "decentralized" comes from the fact that it is built using a protocol similar to (but not compatible with) what runs the Fediverse. Without getting into the technical details, here is the short explanation:

1. Currently there is only one Bluesky server. There is no decentralization. You can't join a server that is local to you, run by your friends, or aligned with your values. You can't join any other server besides bsky.social (damn, should we have chosen cforce.social).
2. You can't start your own Bluesky server. Right now there is a *fundraising campaign* to "Save [Bluesky] From Billionaire Capture" trying to raise **\$30,000,000** to start a *single additional Bluesky server*. Running Counterforce.social costs **\$100** a year, tops. Bluesky's theoretical decentralization is a way to avoid accountability for nazis and other evil actors on the platform. It has nothing to do with returning autonomy and control to us. They are playing us for complete fools.
3. Thanks to their different protocol, every Bluesky post is publicly available. By design, no privacy is possible. AI companies are already scraping every Bluesky post. Mastodon's public posts are just as public, but at least with Mastodon you have the option to keep some posts visible only to an audience you control.

Privacy

Maybe you don't want to be found. You can lock your account on Mastodon so that new followers have to be approved by you. Uncheck "Automatically accept new followers" on the "Privacy and Reach" preferences page. Remember that your future and past public posts are still visible to anyone, but any Follower-only posts you make will be private. You make Followers-only your default for new posts under "Preferences" → "Options".

In general, just remember that the Fediverse is part of the public internet. Your public posts are public. That's great if you are trying to get the word out about your project or band! But if you want some more control, lock your account and post Followers-only. If you have more concerns about this, check out Mastodon Opsec.²

Safety

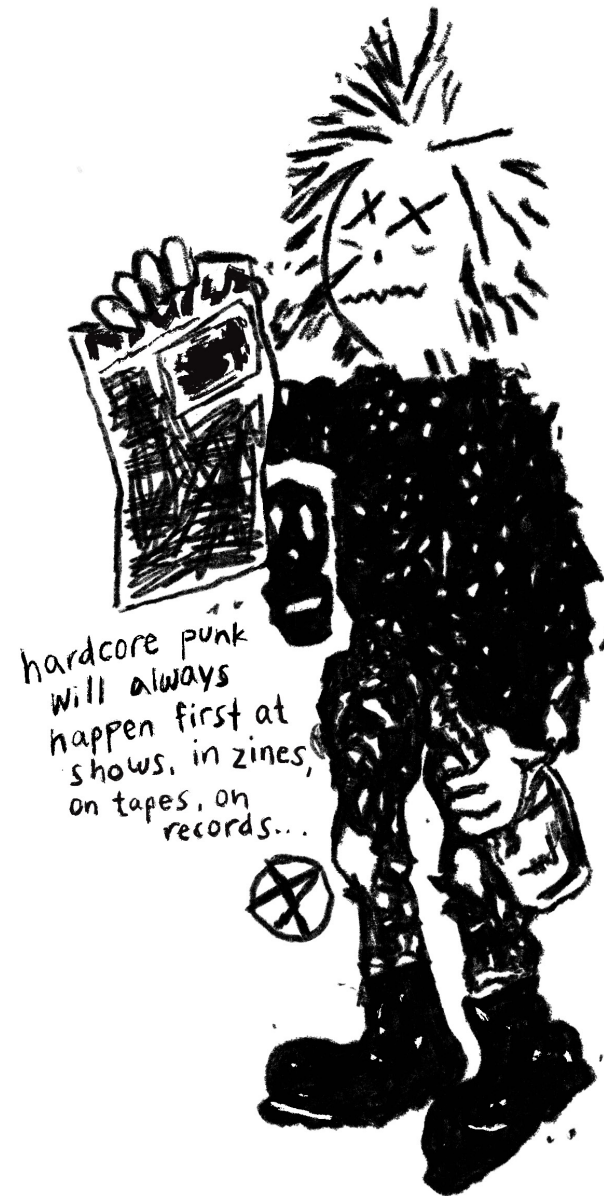
Mastodon has lots of ways to protect yourself (or just deal with annoying people). You can:

- ** Mute people forever, or with a time limit so you don't forget to un-mute them (like a timeout for someone on an annoying shitposting rampage).
- ** Block people.
- ** Block entire servers.
- ** Report users/posts on your own server that break your servers guidelines. Your local mods will deal with them.
- ** Report users/posts from other servers that might be harmful or dangerous to your fellow users.
- ** Mute words/phrases (e.g. if you don't like hearing about the ska revival, you can just mute "ska").
- ** Block notifications from people you don't follow.
- ** Hide boosts from annoying people who boost too much dumb shit.
- ** Auto-delete your posts after a certain time has passed.

If you want to learn more about Mastodon, check out the official docs.³ If you have a question, try asking it on Mastodon! Maybe with the **#AskFedi** hashtag.

2 <https://distro.f-91w.club/masto-opsec/>

3 <https://docs.joinmastodon.org/>



But the hardcore punk underground shouldn't live exclusively on the Internet. When was the last time you got a paper handbill? Make flyers, go to shows, print and distribute zines, help run a DIY venue, start a distro. The Counterforce supports all these offline strategies (have you read *the Counterforce manifesto*?). Don't let your enthusiasm and interest in these (cool and radical) online alternatives distract you from building in-person relationships and connections. Hardcore punk will always happen first at shows, in zines, on tapes, on records.

What is Mastodon?

As I've mentioned, Mastodon is part of the Fediverse. I'll get to what that means later, but let's just start with understanding Mastodon.

Superficially, it's social media akin to Twitter or Tumblr. You see a feed of posts from accounts you follow. You can like, boost (re-post) or reply to other posts. You can make your own posts with images, text and links, and you can tag other users. For the most part, there are no ads and there's no algorithm. Rather than being fed an endless scroll of suggested content, what you see in your timeline is determined entirely by what you choose to follow.



A timeline like any other?

Understanding Mastodon through E-mail

Although it looks more like Twitter, structurally Mastodon might be more similar to e-mail.

Here's the main Mastodon account for The Counterforce:

@The_Counterforce@kolektiva.social

It looks like an e-mail address with an extra @ on the front. **The_Counterforce** is our username and **kolektiva.social** is the Mastodon server that hosts our account (a large anarchist server). Just telling someone to follow "**@The_Counterforce** on Mastodon" isn't enough! The server part must be included, just as with an e-mail address.

think other people should share, boost it! And use appropriate hashtags if you want strangers to find a given post (just don't be spammy).

Also, note that liking a post doesn't do anything to contribute to it showing up in anyone's feed—it just lets the author know you liked/saw their post!

Discoverability

Mastodon lets you choose how discoverable you want your account to be. Look under "Preferences" → "Public Profile" → "Privacy and Reach" to set this up. For example, you can choose whether you want your account to be listed in your server's Profile Directory.

Your Profile On The Web

Earlier, I mentioned that a Mastodon account can be like a free website since anyone can view your profile and public posts without being logged in (or without any account at all).

Here's the link for The Counterforce's profile on the web:

https://kolektiva.social/@The_Counterforce

If you try loading that in a browser on your phone, it might load in your Mastodon app. But if someone loads it in a browser that isn't logged in to Mastodon, they will see a webpage with our profile and recent public posts. No pop-up telling them to log in to see more.

Your profile will have a similar link, like

<https://counterforce.social/@somepunk>

Punk-tip: If you read my RSS How-to For Punks¹ and are using an RSS reader, then you'll want to know that every Mastodon account also has an RSS feed of public posts. Just add **/rss** to the profile link!

Publishing Levels

Mastodon lets you control the visibility for every post. **Public** and **Quiet public** (or **Unlisted**) are essentially public. For example, posts of both type will be visible to someone not logged in who looks at the "Your Profile On The Web" link described above.

Followers posts will only go to people who follow you elsewhere on the Fediverse. You can choose who follows you if you like (see "Privacy" next).

Finally, the **Specific people** option is the equivalent of a DM. There aren't true DMs on Mastodon (use Signal). But if you want to post something only for certain people, just mention them by @ in a **Specific people** post and only they will see it.

1 <https://the-counterforce.org/rss-how-to/>

you are on a small cool server, this feed can be great—an easy way to keep up with what’s happening on your server without needing to follow everyone.

“Other Servers” or the Global Timeline shows you all kinds of public posts from all over the Fediverse. What shows up here will be somewhat curated by the other people on your server and what they follow and interact with.

Hashtags

You can follow hashtags and get any tagged posts your server sees will show up in your home feed.

Explore

The Explore page will show you a selection of hashtags, posts, and accounts from across the Fediverse that your server knows about. There’s not much of an algorithm here. In my experience it’s just kind of some random stuff from your corner of the Fediverse.

Note on finding new accounts

I’ve referenced a few times that what you see in Mastodon can depend on what your server “knows about” or has “seen already.” The Fediverse is a huge network and your little server doesn’t have a copy of the entire thing on-hand. It only grabs the data it needs. If you look up an account your server has *never* seen before, you won’t see the history of posts unless you go to look at the profile outside Mastodon (in a web browser). Mastodon usually gives you a link to do this. Look for “Browse more on the original profile” or “Open original page”.

Once you’ve followed such an account, subsequent new posts will show up in your Home feed.

Get Found

If you want people to find your Mastodon account here are some tips:

Introduction

When you are ready, make a post tagged with **#introduction** and share a bit about yourself and what kinda of stuff you want to post or see. If the account is for a band, distro, or other project or explain the purpose of the account. People will see your **#introduction** post and follow you and boost the post if they like your vibe.

Boosts and Hashtags

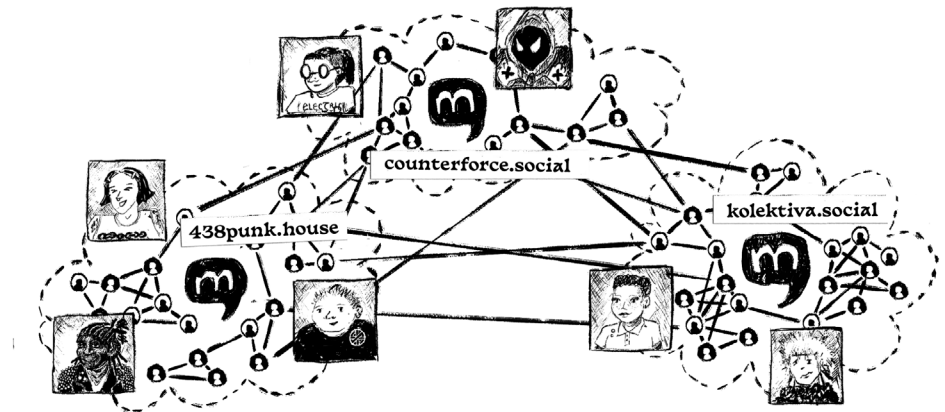
There is no recommendation algorithm on Mastodon. The primary way stuff spreads between people is through boosting and hashtags. Anything that you

Kolektiva.social is one Mastodon server, but there are thousands of others—just as there are countless different e-mail servers such as **gmail.com**, **protonmail.com** or **riseup.net**. When you sign up for a Mastodon account, you choose one server and your account lives on that server. We often refer to these different servers as different **instances**.

Here are some Mastodon accounts we like. Note that they are on **different Mastodon servers**:

- ** **@la_chaine@438punk.house** – La Chaîne, a punk newsletter in Montreal has its account on 438punk.house, a Mastodon server for the Montreal punk scene.
- ** **@somepunk@counterforce.social** – Just some punk with an account is on Counterforce.social, a server that you can use to try out Mastodon later in this guide!
- ** **@submedia@kolektiva.social** – The anarchist media collective subMedia is also on Kolektiva.social, the same server as The Counterforce!

One of the cool things about e-mail is that no matter which server hosts your e-mail account, you can still send and receive e-mails to accounts on any other server. You do it all the time! Mastodon takes this concept (called *interoperability*) and applies it to social media: users with accounts on *different* Mastodon servers **can follow and interact with each other**.



So you see? Mastodon is not just a single social media app, it’s a huge decentralized network of connected servers!

Choosing a Mastodon server

Mastodon servers are all connected, but they are not all the same. There are a few reasons why it matters which server you choose:

Discovery

It's easier to discover stuff on your own server, or on servers with a lot of connections with yours. If you're on a server with other punks, you'll probably see more punk stuff.

Moderation

Each server handles its own content moderation, so you can choose a server where you agree with the moderation policies. Large servers tend to have more spam and trolls, and in extreme cases servers will completely block each other to prevent trolling or harassment.

Autonomy and Trust

Your Mastodon server handles your data. It's where all your posts live. You have to trust the admin, but that admin can be someone you actually know instead of Mark Zuckerberg or Elon Musk.

Most Mastodon servers are just run by people. The server software is free and open source, so anyone can set up their own (DIY). Mastodon works best when servers are small, and based around common interests and affinity, e.g. a local punk scene. Communities can agree on the common goals, moderation policies, and how to pay the bills and keep the server running. You can choose a server where you fit in, or start your own if you have different needs or desires.

What is The Fediverse? **

The Fediverse is a network of interconnected social media platforms. The name comes from “federated” + “universe” (not “feds”). As you just learned, Mastodon is not a single server, but a decentralized network of autonomous interconnected servers. They make up a “federation”. Not unlike the international network of DIY punk, right?

But the Fediverse is bigger than just Mastodon. There are many other platforms that make up the Fediverse. While Mastodon looks and functions similar to Twitter or Tumblr, these other platforms are often also bootlegs of familiar corporate social media:

** **PixelFed** (photo-centric, like Instagram)

** **PeerTube** (video-centric, like YouTube)

The Search Bar

The Mastodon search bar lets you search for other users and accounts to follow. Just typing in part of an account name will work if your server has seen that account before. Sometimes you have paste full account with server name (like `@The_Counterforce@kolektiva.social`).

You can also paste links for anything in the Fediverse into the search bar. If someone sends you a link to a Mastodon post like:

`https://kolektiva.social/@The_Counterforce/113681405266044162`

...you can just paste that in to the Mastodon search bar, and you'll be able to like the post, reply, boost, or follow the account that posted it. This works for any kind of Fediverse post, not just other Mastodon posts. You can paste in links to Gancio calendar events, PeerTube videos, Bandwagon profiles, PixelFed photos, Lemmy threads, whatever, and they'll open in Mastodon. This is part of the magic of the Fediverse: you can follow and interact with all kinds of “social web” content from your one account.

Other people's follows/followers

Your friends' friends might be your friends. Check out the follows/followers of accounts you like to find other accounts to follow. Note that users can choose to hide this information, so you won't always be able to see it!

The Profile Directory

Some Mastodon servers will have a Profile Directory with a list of accounts on that server, and other accounts the server has seen. Only users that have opted-in will show up here. If you discover another server that looks cool, browse its Profile Directory and copy and paste people's accounts into your Mastodon search bar to find and follow them!



Other Feeds

Mastodon has other feeds or timelines besides the Home Feed. On the web app, these are under Live Feeds as “This Server” and “Other Servers.” Different apps might call them the Local Timeline and Global Timeline.

“This Server” or the Local Timeline shows you public posts from everyone else on your server. It's like your local neighborhood's stream of consciousness. If

Logging in

You can always access Mastodon by going to your server's homepage (e.g. <https://counterforce.social>) in a browser and logging in. This is the Mastodon web app. If you're on a phone, you can usually add the web app to your homescreen and treat it like any other app.

There are many iOS and Android apps for Mastodon as well. When logging into an app make sure you are logging into **your server**.

The official Mastodon apps (which are fine) tend to try and guide users to sign up for a new account on Mastodon.social. It's de-ranked. If you use the official Mastodon app for Android or iOS, make sure you to select **Log In** and enter your server name.

Our current favorite apps are **Tusky** for Android and **Ice Cubes** for iOS, but there are many others. One nice thing about Mastodon is you can try different apps until you find one that works for you. Again, "it's like e-mail"—to access your e-mail, you can use Apple Mail, Gmail in the browser, or Thunderbird (nerd).

The Home Feed

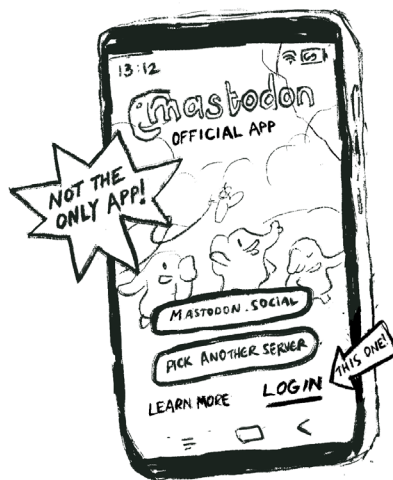
The home feed on Mastodon shows all the posts, replies and boosts from accounts you follow (from anywhere in the Fediverse!).

You just signed up and maybe you followed a few suggested accounts, but your home feed is gonna be pretty empty. There is no algorithm to feed you content. Mastodon does not give a fuck if you look at it or not.

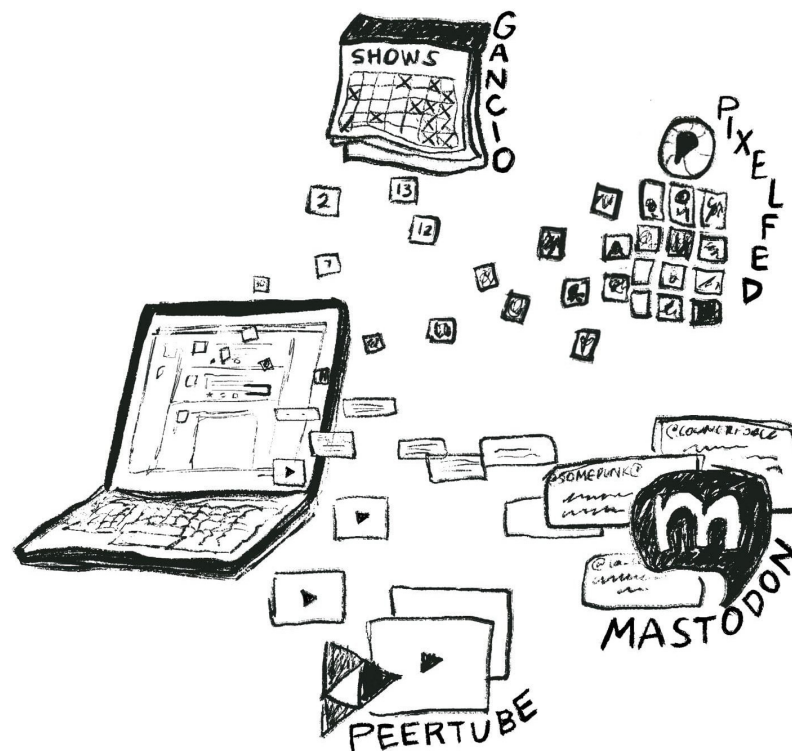
In my experience, a lot of people get stuck here. Being used to treating social media as passive entertainment, it's a real shock to suddenly have agency over what you see and follow. If you need a busy feed to stay engaged with this adventure on the Fediverse (understandable!) then try to follow early and follow often. Follow anyone who seems even remotely interesting. Their posts will start populating your feed and you'll also see things they boost. You can always unfollow the stinkers later.

Finding Each Other

To find your friends, first talk to your friends. Ask them if they have a Mastodon/Fediverse account and add them. Ask them for recommendations on who to follow!



- ** **Misskey** (like Tumblr, but anime themed)
- ** **Bookwyrn** (for tracking and reviewing books, like Goodreads)
- ** **Lemmy** (links and discussion, like Reddit)
- ** **WriteFreely** (blogs, like Wordpress)



Posts from all over the Fediverse, delivered to my Mastodon feed!

Each of these platforms have a different focus, like prioritizing photo or video content. There are many more that I didn't list. But they all have users, and profiles, and posts. You have an account, you post things, you follow other accounts and see their posts in a feed. It's all fundamentally the same.

As with Mastodon, all of these Fediverse platforms aren't just one server. There are also hundreds of different PixelFed, PeerTube, Misskey, and Lemmy servers. And as with Mastodon, users on any server can follow users on any other server.

Wait, on *any* other server? Can a user on a Mastodon server follow a user on a PixelFed server?

Yes!

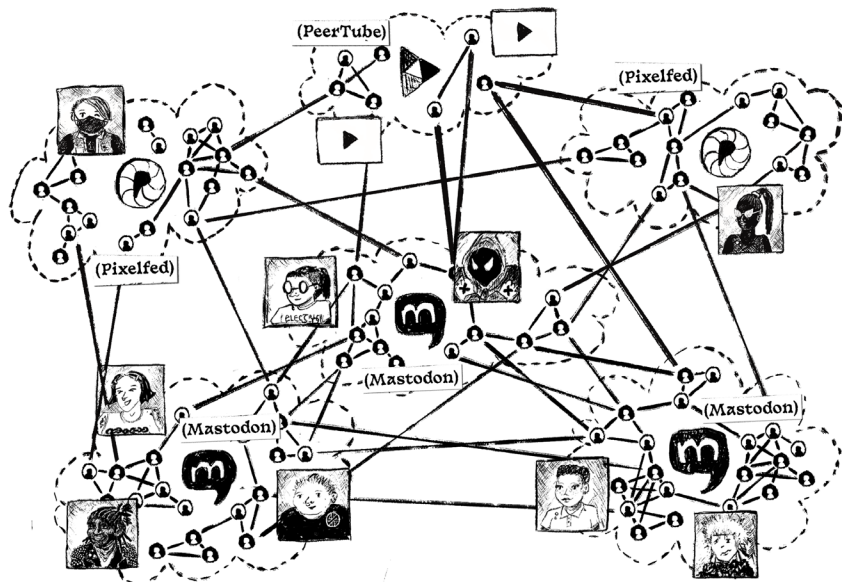
With a Mastodon account, you can follow accounts on other Mastodon servers, and you can *also* follow accounts on servers from any of these other Fediverse platforms. You are not restricted to interacting with accounts on the same server as you, or even the same *platform*. Everything in the Fediverse is fair game.

As Mastodon user **@somepunk@counterforce.social**, here are some things I can follow:

- ** **@1a_chaine@438punk.house**, another **Mastodon** account on a different server.
- ** **@submedia_channel@kolektiva.media**, a **PeerTube** account posting videos from the anarchist media collective SubMedia.
- ** **@TheFinalStrawRadio@social.ungovernav1.org**, a **Castopod** account posting podcast episodes from The Final Straw.
- ** **@shows@montreal.askapunk.net**, an online calendar website powered by **Gancio** that can also be followed from the Fediverse.

I'll see different kinds of posts from all of these accounts in my feed. Not just Mastodon posts from other Mastodon servers, but photos from an account on a PixelFed server, videos from an account on a PeerTube server, and new events from a Gancio calendar.

This is the Fediverse! A huge network of alternative platforms, each of which is made up of thousands of autonomous servers that all connect to each other. As a user, you can have an account on any server, regardless of which platform, and still follow and interact with accounts or posts anywhere else on the Fediverse.



Mastodon allows you to move your account from one server to another. So don't be too stressed: when the day comes and you start or find a better Mastodon server, you can move your account and transfer all your follows and followers.

Create your account

Some servers have open registration, some are invite-only, and some require approval for new accounts. New accounts on Counterforce.social require approval. If you sign up there, there will be a prompt to say a bit about yourself and why you want an account on Counterforce.social.

To Create an account on Counterforce.social

1. Go to <https://counterforce.social> in your web browser and click Create Account.
 2. Read the server rules.
 3. Choose a username and password. There is also a text box to fill out that refers to this guide. If you are signing up using the Mastodon app (we told you not to) this text box will say "Why do you want to join?"
- Fill out the text box by **mentioning that you're reading this guide, where you're from, and name two records: one that got you into punk, and something you listened to lately**. We probably won't approve you if you don't include this. We're not keeping score, but we gotta keep out the spammers and trolls, right?
4. Check your e-mail to confirm your e-mail address
 5. Wait for your account to be approved (you'll get an e-mail)!

Approval could take as long as a day or two—we are just a few unpaid humans! Why not read the rest of this how-to while you are waiting for your approval e-mail?

Your new Mastodon account

OK, you got your account, something like: **@somepunk@counterforce.social**. Once again, remember that it's like e-mail: your account has a user-name *and* a server.

On your first login, Mastodon will prompt you to follow some people and fill out your profile. Do us all a favor and add something to your profile. A profile pic and a bio so we know you are not a bot. No one will follow you back if your profile is blank!

Mastodon how-to

To give you a practical how-to, I'm gonna focus on Mastodon. Mastodon isn't the whole Fediverse, but it is one of the most popular platforms, with polish and nice apps. It's the easiest way to get started.

STOP! Do not just type "Mastodon" into your app store without reading this. You will probably end up with an account on Mastodon.social like a poser. We warned you!

Remember that Mastodon is decentralized: there are many servers, not just one Mastodon.com (which is actually a website for a mulcher, FYI).

You need to find or pick a server to sign up on (remember, it's like e-mail). Sure, you could create your account on Mastodon.social (the Mastodon equivalent of Gmail), but it's huge and full of normies, trolls, and occasionally spam. Your admin will be some German man named John Mastodon. And remember, the server name is the second part of your account name. So everyone sees it. It's worthwhile to have a *cool* one.

In our dreams (see above), every local scene would have a Mastodon server (or two even, because of inter-scene beef) and you could just sign up there. But for now, your options are limited. There are a lot of servers, but a lot of them suck. If you do have a local Mastodon server, or if you've heard of one from a friend please sign up there!

If not, you are welcome to try setting up an account on our Mastodon server:

COUNTERFORCE.SOCIAL

Counterforce.social is a Mastodon server for Counterforce-aligned projects or individuals, and a landing pad for Fedi-curious punks and readers of this guide. But Counterforce.social *can't* be the sole Mastodon server for punks everywhere. It is a stepping stone, but ultimately we need more punks to set up their own servers and contribute to a decentralized network.

So, feel free to sign up with us and explore how Mastodon and the Fediverse work and feel. Invite friends to read this how-to and join you. But then try to get the ball rolling on creating your own server for your community.

If you are distroing this zine and there's a particular server that you recommend that local readers check out, you can use this space to add info (URL, invite code, signup instructions, etc!)

Why does this matter?

Well first, fuck corporate social media. Its purpose is to collect your data and attention and sell both to advertisers (or worse). **YOU** are the product! The "social" aspect of social media exists solely to maximize the amount of attention and personal data that can be squeezed out of you.

Not to mention the myriad ways that these apps bolster the war machine, contribute to or cause genocides, and deepen our isolation and individual despair! These sites and the people who run them are FUCKED, and we should not be willingly supporting them by contributing to the appeal of their products by locking up our art, music, and ideas inside their walled gardens.

The hardcore punk underground has always been a federated network, when you think about it. If we are connecting online, we should be trying to do it following the same principles.

The Fediverse is inherently anti-corporate

All of the software and protocols that build the Fediverse are free and open-source. It's *impossible* for any single person or company to buy or own the entire network. It is mostly built by non-profits, foundations, collectives, and individuals. A lot of the developers are queer and trans weirdos with radical politics. Capitalists hate it because it's hard to monetize. It has many excellent accessibility features. From the ground up it was designed to be an actual social network that facilitates open connection and communication rather than extracting profit from users.

It's DIY

The Fediverse has thousands of servers because *anyone can create one*—it's relatively cheap and accessible. We can create our own Mastodon, PeerTube or PixelFed servers and grow the network. These servers can be centered around our communities and based on our needs. The Fediverse allows us to own and control our online networks instead of relying on a mainstream capitalist option to serve us (at what cost?).

It won't keep leaving us

How many show photos will be lost when Instagram dies? (Maybe their AI model will be able to generate new show photos for us?) How many demos will disappear when Bandcamp shuts down? Old heads remember MySpace—so many screamo demos lost in time, like tears in rain... Every time a corporate social media network shuts down or becomes intolerable,

we lose everything we've uploaded and all the connections we've made there.

Shit can happen on the Fediverse too: your Mastodon server admin could get hit by a bus. But at least on the Fediverse, we are the ones in control of our data, connections and network. Instead of jumping on the next shiny corporate app that is just going to turn to shit in a few years (they always do), The Fediverse allows us to invest in something that won't disappear (unless it's on our terms).

α healthier scroll

Without a profit motive driving it, the Fediverse is not an addictive doomscroll. You choose what you want to see, open your computer to get updated, scroll to the bottom and log off. It can be boring in the best way! The difference in vibe and lack of algorithm means people are generally nicer and engage on a more authentic level. You won't go viral, but you'll meet actual humans whose company you enjoy.

α safer scroll

The Fediverse is built for the users instead of for the CEOs, so the Fediverse has better safety and privacy controls. It's still the Internet, and public things are public. But the Fediverse overall has far better options for keeping some things private and having better control over your data and who has access to it. Your admin can be someone you actually know and trust. You can even be your own admin.

Not a walled garden

Apps like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter lock content behind a login wall. Those of us on the outside are forced to sell ourselves out and create an account see anything.

The Fediverse is open. Not only can accounts on the Fediverse follow each other, wherever they are (different servers, different platforms), anyone on the Internet can view a Fediverse profile and its *public* posts. You can share a link your account with people who don't know and don't care about the Fediverse and they can still see whatever you've chosen to make public. Having an account here is like having a free website!

Dreams

Hopefully by this point you are getting on board! Before we get into the practical how-to stuff, here's are some dreams for the future:

- ** Every city or region sets up their own Mastodon server for the local punks. This provides a local hub, and since servers are connected we can easily follow what's going on in other cities besides our own.
- ** Bands, distros, zines, and show promoters set up accounts on the Fediverse instead of posting their content exclusively on closed corporate platforms. Give people a better option to see your stuff!
- ** We see PixelFed servers for show photographers and PeerTube servers (PunkTube?) for live vids and video zines.
- ** There's a project in development called Bandwagon that aims to recreate Bandcamp for the Fediverse: bands can upload their music to a profile, and punks anywhere on the Fediverse can listen and follow to get updates about new releases and shows. Soon, DIY labels could host their own Bandwagon server for bands they release.

On leaving corporate social media

I won't waste more space laying out the myriad reasons you should abandon corporate platforms like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Tik Tok, Discord, YouTube, etc. Simply put, it's embarrassing how much punk culture gets shared on these apps and only on these apps. But I will recognize leaving them cold turkey can be difficult for some of you. You risk losing all the connections you have built. Why would you want to try an alternative if "nobody is there"?

You can start using Mastodon while still checking Instagram or whatever. This is especially important if you use social media as a band/distro/zine/show promoter/other project. I get that the audience on Mastodon today is small, but if you post there you'll be investing in something sustainable that we control. You'll be giving *other people* a better way to see your stuff if they want to leave corporate social media (or never sold out in the first place).

Trying Mastodon might be a slow burn, but you need to take a leap of faith and keep at it. If enough of us invest in it, then the momentum will snowball and we'll find ourselves using something far more sustainable, healthy, radical, and in our control. The reason corporate social media is hard to leave is because they intentionally trap us there. We have to actively fight to break free!