

# Why the Nordic Resistance Movement Restrains Its Use of Violence

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## Abstract

*The Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) is a militant National Socialist organization that in principle embraces violent strategies, including terrorism, given the “right” circumstances. However, in practice, the organization restrains its use of violence considerably. To understand why, this article examines three interrelated topics. First, when and why does the NRM leadership permit its members to use violence? Second, why and how does the current NRM leadership restrain the organization’s use of violence? Third, how does the NRM leadership respond to cases where NRM members carry out acts of severe violence that clearly overstep the boundaries set by their leaders? Our main finding is that the NRM leadership does not – at least in principle – have any moral restraints against political violence, including mass murder, and that the main reason why the NRM refrains from using terrorist methods is strategic calculation: such methods are perceived as counter-productive and likely to undermine the NRM’s prospects of gaining popular support and opportunities to propagate its political views via public and legal channels. As such, the NRM leaders are highly sensitive to the legal boundaries set by the government. However, they also continuously try to test and expand these boundaries through violent behaviour against the police and political enemies, and by honouring rather than punishing activists who overstep the limits officially drawn by the leadership.*

**Keywords:** political violence, terrorism; extreme right; restraints on violence

## Introduction

The Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) is a National Socialist organization with branches in Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark and Iceland – although its origin, core and stronghold are in Sweden. Its declared goal is to establish a pan-Nordic white state. In its official handbook for activists, the NRM states that:

*The Resistance Movement is not pacifist. We are aware that we can only be victorious through physical struggle. [...] In the future our weapons will be decisive on the battlefield, but at present, as long as we can act legally, there is no reason for the Resistance movement to arm itself with guns or explosives.[1]*

However, the NRM is definitely a militant organization. Many of the core activists of the NRM have criminal records characterized by severe violence, and, in some cases, homicide. Activists train in street fighting and knife combat in NRM settings.[2] Many activists have acquired guns – legally or illegally – as preparation for a future racial war. There have also been two cases in recent years where NRM activists have carried out acts of violence with fatal outcomes and many cases of causing more or less severe bodily harm. The NRM has organized violent attacks against counter-demonstrators as well as against the police. NRM activists have also frequently made subtle death threats against politicians, journalists and others they consider enemies. Militancy and a readiness to make use of violence are clearly part of the identity of the NRM.

At the same time, the NRM has generally shown considerable restraint in its use of violence, often balancing on the border of illegality. Terrorism is not part of the NRM’s action repertoire in the present situation – but the organization does not preclude the use of terrorist violence in the future. In order to understand this balancing act, this paper asks three questions:

1. When and why does the NRM leadership permit its members to use violence?
2. Why and how does the current NRM leadership restrain the organization’s use of violence?
3. How does the NRM leadership respond to cases where NRM members carry out acts of severe violence

that clearly overstep the boundaries set by their leaders?

Our main finding is that the NRM leadership does not – at least in principle – have any moral constraints on political violence, including mass murder, and that the main reason why the NRM refrains from using terrorist methods is strategic calculation: these are perceived as counter-productive and likely to undermine the prospects of gaining popular support and opportunities to promulgate the NRM's political views via public and legal channels. As such, the NRM leaders are highly sensitive to the legal boundaries set by the government. However, they also continuously try to test and expand these boundaries through violent behaviour against the police and political enemies, and by honouring rather than punishing activists who overstep the boundaries officially drawn by the leadership.

The article proceeds as follows. We begin by briefly describing the emergence and transnational evolution of the NRM since the organization was founded in the late 1990s. Next, we look at the record of NRM violence that has been permitted or even encouraged by its leadership. In the third section, we analyse how the NRM's current leader reacted to the mass shooting of Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019. In doing so, we identify the types of logics used by the leadership to explain and justify the organization's brakes on violence. In section four, we look at how the leadership has reacted to incidents of severe violence that clearly fall outside the boundaries set by the leadership. Finally, we briefly discuss some theoretical and practical implications of our findings.

### ***The Emergence and Transnational Evolution of the Nordic Resistance Movement***

The NRM was originally established as the Swedish Resistance Movement by a handful of activists in 1997, including Klas Lund, who headed the organization until 2015.[3] Notably, Lund and his associates wanted to create a strong, hierarchical organization of highly dedicated members whose primary aim was to carry out propaganda in the public space, a form of elite vanguard meant to enlighten the people about the need for a racial revolution. This motivation came after Lund had been part of a failed attempt by the network known as *Vitt Ariskt Motstånd* (VAM, White Aryan Resistance) to spark a revolution through the strategy of leaderless resistance and terrorism – a strategy that ultimately landed Lund and several others in prison.[4] During his six years in prison, Lund had plenty of time to contemplate the means that would be most effective in generating a revolutionary outcome. He arrived at the conclusion that terrorism carried out by loosely organized and leaderless networks might not be so effective after all. Rather, a strong hierarchical organization with the long-term ambition of radicalizing people through steadfast propaganda and street activism was a better alternative.

The NRM can be characterized as a militant and action-oriented National Socialist organization, aiming to generate revolution, mainly through extra-parliamentary struggle. According to its founding members, its National Socialist worldview has been an essential part of the organization ever since its inception. During its early years, the NRM did not use the National Socialist label – for strategic reasons – but referred to its activists as “patriots”. In 2006, however, the NRM leadership decided to “come out of the closet” and be open about its National Socialist foundations.[5]

Another characteristic of the NRM is its skilful organization (compared with similar groups in this landscape) and its relatively strict membership criteria.[6] To become a full member, you have to dedicate yourself completely to the organization and its day-to-day struggle. Accordingly, the NRM never had the ambition to grow fast but rather has been careful about recruiting what it sees as the “right” kind of people, meaning those who are fully dedicated, action-oriented, and who never question the organization's radical stance, in particular concerning questions of race and the Jews.

The NRM aims to create a Nordic nation for the Nordic people. A logical step forward was therefore to expand into the other Nordic countries. A first attempt took place in Norway in 2003, but failed. Then, in 2010, Haakon Forwald joined the Swedish branch as its only Norwegian member. He was soon promoted to leader of a resurrected Norwegian branch and given the task of rebuilding a network of Norwegian activists. During its

first years, the re-established Norwegian branch was involved in few public activities, and mostly engaged in night-time sticker raids. However, from 2016 onwards, this pattern changed and Norwegian activists started carrying out a number of public activities, such as marches through main streets and handing out flyers. This sharp increase in activity level appears to reflect a similar increase in Sweden, related to a change of leadership. Although several of the Norwegian core activists have been convicted of racist violence and other crimes in the past, the Norwegian branch of the NRM appears to have been less involved in violence and crime than is the case with the Swedish activists.[7]

The Finnish branch of the NRM *Suomen vastarintaliike* (The Finnish Resistance Movement) was founded by Esa Henrik Holappa in 2008. Holappa gradually disengaged from the organization and finally broke with it and the Nazi ideology in 2014, speaking out publicly against it. He is now considered by the NRM as a traitor and oath breaker. The Finnish branch became the second-largest branch of the NRM, but was banned as an organization by the Finnish courts, due to a violent attack on an opponent (with a fatal outcome) and the organization's response of honouring the perpetrator with an award. The temporary ban was confirmed by the Supreme Court in March 2019, and the final ban was confirmed in September 2020.[8] A new National Socialist organization "Kohti Vapautta!" (Towards Freedom!) was set up in anticipation of the ban but is also in the process of being banned, as a follow-up organization.[9]

The most recent addition to the NRM's transnational network (not counting a handful of activists in Iceland) is the Danish branch, (re-)established in 2017, after a failed earlier attempt at establishing a Danish branch had been made in 2013.[10] In October 2020, two NRM activists, one of them a regional "nest" leader, were convicted of desecrating 100 graves on a Jewish cemetery on the Crystal Night 2019. Police presented in court an encrypted Signal message on the nest leader's phone, stating:

*Important information. There is a directive from [the top NRM leader] Simon Lindberg that all the Nordic countries join a pan-Nordic action on the crystal night between 8 and 9 November. We will anonymously attack Jewish targets. We go for Jews or Jewish businesses. Not half-Jews or Zionists. Your task the coming month is to find out whether there are any Jewish targets in your areas. This is top secret information.*

In addition to the desecration of Jewish graves in Denmark, Jewish institutions and businesses were vandalised with Star of David stickers and other antisemitic slogans and graffiti in the Nordic countries as well. The order to "attack Jewish targets" seems to be interpreted as incitement to vandalism against property rather than violence against people. However, arrests led to defections among leading Danish NRM activists. In another case, a former NRM nest leader was convicted of producing a remote-controlled bomb and an illegal slam gun. [11]

In the municipal elections in Sweden in 2014, the NRM was able to get two elected representatives into local councils in the towns of Borlänge and Ludvika by giving extra-person votes to its own candidates on the Sweden Democrats' election lists – an opportunity in the election system they took full advantage of. They used this elected platform to promulgate their views and also to harass other representatives.[12] Four years later, they tried to repeat the success by running candidates on their own NRM electoral lists in three municipalities, mobilizing activists for the campaign. This turned out to be a failure, with no candidates elected and only 2106 votes received at the national level. Frustrations over the defeat led to internal disputes about the prospect or futility of going for an electoral strategy.

This dispute culminated in a split in the organization in mid-2019, when a group of activists headed by the former NRM-leader Klas Lund, and including the leader of the Norwegian division Haakon Forwald and other prominent activists, left the NRM to establish a new group known as *Nordisk Styrka* (Nordic Strength). According to members of the new group, the split was caused by internal disagreements about strategy, mainly concerning whether the group should continue to pursue mainstream types of activities, such as large public demonstrations and maintaining a political party, or operate in more of a semi-clandestine fashion, as the NRM used to do.[13] At the time of writing, it is too early to tell what to make of this new group. However, the facts that it is being led by Klas Lund and that several key activists followed him suggest that it might become a

serious contender to the NRM, competing for support among a very limited pool of national socialist activists and sympathizers. Whether the split will weaken both organizations or lead to a competition over which group is more militant remains to be seen.

### ***Permitted Violence***

Under what conditions does the NRM leadership permit its members to use violence? What does the record of violence sanctioned or even organized by the NRM leadership look like? To answer these questions, we reviewed violent incidents recorded in the RTV dataset [14], statements by the NRM leadership and the NRM's activist handbook.

A full record of NRM violence does not exist. The RTV dataset only records the most severe types of right-wing violence, thereby excluding the majority of violent attacks committed by the NRM. The RTV dataset has, however, recorded 23 events between 2007 and 2019 committed by NRM members. Of these, 16 occurred in Sweden, six in Finland and one in Norway. By manually looking into each of these 23 events, we have found that at least ten of them were either attacks planned by local NRM branches or occurred as part of public events organized by the NRM. These include a major tear gas attack on a Pride parade in Helsinki, lethal attacks against people reacting to NRM public events and targeted attacks against left-wing activists and even politicians.

The NRM leadership makes clear that more extreme forms of violence (the use of guns and explosives, etc.) are not suitable in the present situation,[15] and that such modes of violence should be put on hold for a future revolutionary situation or when the great racial war breaks out. However, there are certainly forms of violence that the NRM condones. Violent self-defence is not only acceptable but desirable. NRM activists seem to seek out situations where they can provoke opponents, to give them the opportunity to “defend themselves” aggressively, and sometimes they actively initiate such confrontations. For example, in December 2013, some 40 NRM activists launched an attack with bottles and firecrackers on an anti-racist demonstration in Kärtrorp outside Stockholm. Among the anti-racist demonstrators were many families with children and elderly people. Twenty-three extreme-right activists (mostly from NRM, including several leaders) were convicted and sentenced to 6–8 months in prison (an antifascist activist received a long sentence for attempted homicide after stabbing an NRM activist with a knife).[16] Swedish NRM activists in particular have been involved in a number of assaults and violent attacks on minorities, political opponents and the police. Discussing methods for “spectacular actions” (violence, ingenuity, size and good-will actions) the activist handbook states:

*The Resistance Movement's confrontations with the police or opponents will often result in great headlines. Distribution of pamphlets that ends in fights may then be classified as a spectacular action. However, since the use of violence is rarely or never planned, it will be difficult to classify the action as spectacular. The action becomes spectacular due to our firmness of principle and strength.[17]*

Another standard element in the NRM's action repertoire is to launch subtle threats against political opponents, national and local politicians, academics, journalists, police officers and civil servants they consider as enemies. Such individuals have been labelled “criminals” or “traitors of the people”, with names or pictures on posters. The NRM has also distributed stickers with an image of a lamp post, a noose and the text “Reserved for traitors of the people”. Activists glued these stickers outside the homes of individuals they wanted to intimidate. In doing so, the NRM practises a sort of low-scale psychological warfare, through which subtle threats and intimidation are used to scare or silence its enemies.[18] This has sometimes been effective: several local politicians and others have withdrawn from involvement in politics or the public debate as a result of such threats.[19]

Although the use of guns and explosives is (temporarily) banned by the NRM, preparations for such violence are condoned, as a future race war is considered inevitable. Many activists have acquired guns – legally or illegally. In 2018, an investigation by the Swedish police security service SÄPO found that NRM activists produced home-made pipe guns.[20] In Sweden, Norway and Finland, the police have seized legal and illegal guns from NRM members and retracted weapon licences. It turned out that many NRM members had been



active members of shooting clubs and had acquired guns and licences legally. With increased public concern about the NRM as an extremist and revolutionary movement, NRM members were excluded from shooting clubs and lost their access to legal guns.

### ***Why Does the NRM Apply Restraints on Violence?***

As explained in the introduction to this Special Issue, Busher et al. have proposed the following five logics which members of militant groups might draw upon to establish and maintain limits on their own violence:[21]

- 1) A strategic logic (violence is counterproductive in the present circumstances)
- 2) A moral logic (certain forms of violence are illegitimate)
- 3) A logic of ego maintenance (we are not a violent organization)
- 4) A logic of outgroup definition (softening views on putative outgroups)
- 5) An organizational logic (the organization evolves in ways that undermine the logics of violent escalation)

Which of these logics are typically applied by the NRM leadership to restrain the organization's use of violence? To answer this question, we conducted a textual analysis of the current NRM leader's response to the mass shooting of Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019. Shortly after these mass shootings, NRM's current leader Simon Lindberg made what must be considered an official statement on the attack, outlining the NRM's views on the use of large-scale violence.[22] While one should be careful about generalizing from one such statement only, we consider this statement to be fully in line with a number of previous statements from the NRM leadership about the organization's views on violence. Many such statements can be found in a book recently published by the NRM for its twentieth anniversary,[23] in various issues of its magazine *Nationell Motstånd*, published between 2003 and 2010, and on its website. The reason why we focus on this singular statement here is that, in a rather succinct manner, it summarizes NRM's view on mass-casualty violence in particular:

*It is hard not to feel sympathy for the two main motifs [Brenton Tarrant] states in his manifesto. [...] After all, it is really not strange that what happened today in New Zealand has happened. In fact, what is most remarkable is that this does not happen more often.*

*It is clear that the moral reasoning can be discussed. [...] some may think that it can never be justified to kill someone else. However, we whites have involuntarily been embroiled in a low-intensity extinction war across the West. In war, people die. Is it worse to kill someone physically than to lobby politically for, to enforce, and to play an active part in a policy that takes the life of a whole race? Furthermore, the assailant seems to have chosen his targets carefully to avoid hitting those that are completely innocent.*

*By all this, however, I do not mean to uncritically praise the deed, because, even though I do not see it as something strange or automatically wrong on a moral level, at the same time I mean that this alone does not improve the situation for white people in either New Zealand or the world. [...] Here in the Nordics, the civilian national struggle has momentum; the Nordic Resistance Movement is growing steadily and is gaining more and more influence. Furthermore, we are not completely banned here either, and, despite increased repression, we can still run the fight fairly effectively and legally as we wish. So we can succeed.*

*This means that such methods as those in New Zealand become counterproductive here, as they lead to increased sympathy for our opponents and to the system gaining legitimacy for even harsher reprisals. [...] This action will be used to mobilize public opinion against us in general, and to justify a ban on us. The irony [...] is that, just by banning, the system creates an environment where the risk of us seeing more such actions increases significantly.*

*If illegal methods are the only remaining way to go about making their voices heard, then it is even less strange or wrong if something illegal happens. In such a situation, I do not in any way condemn it in any case. On the other hand, I hope that any such future Nordic national partisans will aim higher and kick*

*upwards at the global elite who are moving the pieces, rather than against the pieces themselves – but that is another question.*

*The Nordic Resistance Movement does not deal with terror (however much the system would like us to do that, so that they have a good excuse to ban us). We are a revolutionary combat organization that acts civilly and legally. For that matter, we do not distance ourselves from white people who act – even though they act differently from us.*

Most strikingly, the NRM leadership does not – at least in principle – seem to have any moral constraints against mass murder (logic 2). Even the target selection in the Christchurch atrocity – killing random Muslim men, women and children – is considered morally justified in the context of defending the white race. However, the NRM leader hoped “future Nordic partisans would aim higher and kick the global elite” – an NRM euphemism for the Jews that are allegedly behind mass migration in order to destroy the white race. Moreover, there is no softening in the ways the NRM views hated outgroups such as Jews, Muslims and political enemies (logic 4). These enemy categories are considered sufficiently “guilty” to be legitimate targets of violence – at least in the context of an anticipated racial war.

The main reason why the NRM prefers to refrain from using terrorist methods in the present situation is predominantly strategic calculation (logic 1): these are seen as counter-productive. First and foremost, resorting to terrorism would undermine the NRM’s prospects of gaining popular support. In the present situation, the NRM has ample opportunities to promulgate its political views through various legal channels, such as the Internet, rallies and democratic elections. Too much violence would lead to a public backlash and undermine support – and might also lead to a ban and repression of the organization and take away its opportunities to make use of legal methods in its revolutionary struggle. In that case, terrorism and murder would be the only remaining – and in its own eyes, justified – option for the NRM.

However, terrorism is clearly not a preferred choice for the NRM leadership (although some members are pushing to go in a more militant direction). The NRM’s relative restraint in using lethal or terrorist violence might be – at least to some extent – a result of the founding leader Klas Lund’s personal experience of being incarcerated for several years due to his involvement in murder and bank robberies as part of a terrorist strategy. In crime prevention theory, this is called specific deterrence.[24] Lund experienced the consequences of punishment on his own body and may have found it too costly to repeat such crimes in the future. This lesson (and similar experiences by other militants) had in turn the effect of general deterrence to others in the NRM, who observed that the risk of punishment might be too great. Not only would the personal costs of a terrorist strategy be too painful, it would also undermine the organization’s capacity to carry out its political and revolutionary struggle.

*[Critics in rival groups] call us “fake revolutionaries” because we did not take up guns by yesterday, putting the entire organization behind bars and achieving nothing. (Handbook for Activists in the Resistance Movement)*

NRM leaders and activists are very much aware of the legal boundaries set by the government and tune many of their actions as close to the limit of illegality as possible. For example, the NRM regularly engages in street-fighting with the police and political enemies on the left, thereby pushing the limits and testing the police response. This testing of boundaries is more apparent in Sweden than in Norway, possibly because the Norwegian police tend to be more proactive and preventive, whereas the Swedish police have a more reactive style.[25] These practices indicate that both legal boundaries and police responses have an effect.

When it comes to the logic of maintaining a specific self-image (3), the NRM tries to balance the internal fostering of a militant identity as a revolutionary combat organization with a more moderate image for external consumption of being an organization that “acts civilly and legally” in order to benefit from the opportunities provided by a democratic system they despise. This balancing act is risky. If it appears too timid, it risks internal rebellion from militants lusting for action (see the Gothenburg case discussed below); if it goes too far in promoting or accepting violence, the organization might be banned or at least lose access to many public

arenas and opportunities.[26]

This balancing act is closely linked to an organizational logic (5) that also seems to impact on NRM's restraints on violence. The NRM has invested a lot of effort in building a strong, (semi-)legal organization. The NRM leader Lindberg asserted that this strategy was fairly successful and promising. Although it considers itself an elite organization, the NRM leadership clearly has a long-term ambition of gaining broader public support in order to prepare the ground for a white revolution, with Hitler's Nazi party (NSDAP) as an obvious blueprint. To move towards that goal, the NRM has made use of a broad range of channels for disseminating propaganda, ranging from night-time sticker raids, distributing pamphlets from street stands, web pages, podcasts and radio channels through to public demonstrations, gathering up to 600 activists and supporters. Many of these actions are deliberately provocative, in order to create controversy and attract attention from the news media, which provides additional publicity and may reach a broader audience. In addition, the NRM has also had moderate success in getting activists elected as representatives in two municipal councils, giving them new opportunities for promulgating their views and getting attention. However, this is also a risky strategy for a militant organization: the miserable results in the 2018 elections in Sweden were a huge disappointment for the NRM and led to internal discontent and a large break-away group called Nordic Strength, consisting of those who had lost faith in this strategy.

To sum up, two out of Busher et al.'s five logics (2 and 4) do not seem to be deployed for restraining NRM from using violence, whereas logic 1 has had a major impact and logics 3 and 5 have had some impact.

### ***Overstepping the Boundary – Reactions and Consequences***

How does the NRM leadership respond to cases where NRM members carry out acts of severe violence, clearly overstepping the boundaries set by their leaders? To answer this question, we explored three such cases.

The NRM leadership has apparently established a strict policy to maintain the organization's rules against extreme violence:

*Planning and carrying out offensive violent actions will lead to exclusion [from the NRM]. Offensive acts of violence are, in other words, not within the field of "own initiative". Violence should only be used in self-defence. (Handbook for Activists in the Resistance Movement)*

To what extent has this policy been enforced in practice when NRM activists have carried out severe offensive violent actions? Our three cases have been selected because they represent some of the most severe attacks committed by NRM members. Two of the events resulted in a fatal outcome, while the third had a clear terrorist dimension, due to the use of improvised explosive devices.

#### *Case 1: The Vallentuna Killing*

In 2012, three NRM activists got involved in a fight with a person in Vallentuna in Sweden, and kicked, beat and stabbed him to death. Two of the three perpetrators were arrested and one was convicted. However, the most active perpetrator went underground and has remained so ever since. He has figured on Europol's list of the top ten most wanted. In the aftermath of the attack, the NRM started its own investigation into the incident on "the issue of guilt", but the verdict was kept secret. Between the lines, it was clear that the NRM found the violence to be excessive but understandable. The main perpetrator remained well regarded within the NRM. In the twentieth anniversary book of the NRM, the incident and the main perpetrator are commented on:

*The victim was, as stated, an unknown drug dealer and was experienced by many as troublesome, especially when he was under the influence. He held a grudge against "racists" and was often armed, as he was this evening as well. [The perpetrator] has not been convicted, but if he actually carried out the alleged act, there are obvious reasons to believe that he did it to avoid being knifed or shot to death. This does not excuse the excessive violence, but it does at least explain it. [...] [The perpetrator] had and still has a good reputation*

*among those who know him. He was one of the most experienced and brave activists in Stockholm at the time before he disappeared, and no one has re-evaluated this assessment. [Name of the perpetrator's local NRM leader] has repeatedly expressed his regret that he is no longer in the direct vicinity of the organization and wishes him all the best for the new life he has made for himself. [...] Rumours about his death surface now and then but the Resistance Movement knows that he is alive and in good health.[27]*

Although there was apparently no evidence that the three NRM activists had acted in self-defence, the NRM leadership clearly used the claim of self-defence as an extenuating circumstance to avoid expelling the main perpetrator. The internal investigation appears to have concluded that he used excessive violence but the organization came up with sufficient reasons to excuse him and even praise him for his good qualities. Thus, he remained in good standing with the NRM, even if he had committed murder. The organization's ban on offensive violence and policy of excluding those who broke the ban did not seem to kick in in this case.

### *Case 2: The Helsinki Killing*

A similar excuse was used by the NRM in another fatal case from Finland in 2017. The victim died one week after having been brutally kicked in the chest by an NRM activist and then hitting his head against the pavement. He was allegedly attacked because he spat on one of the NRM activists.

The perpetrator was in the first trial sentenced to two years for aggravated battery in the district court but was cleared of the charge of manslaughter. On appeal, the sentence was subsequently increased to two years and three months in a higher court, because the assault was racially motivated. During the Nordic Activist Days in late January 2017, the Finnish NRM leader Antti Niemi recounted the events like this:

*2016 has obviously been strongly characterized by harassment against the organization from the media and the system, and in particular against the activist [perpetrator's name]. This was because a drug addict opponent [of NRM] died after a confrontation with [perpetrator's name] during a public activity in Helsinki. Due to this [perpetrator's name] was charged and sentenced to two years in prison, in spite of him being cleared from having anything to do with the death.*

The perpetrator was then awarded a distinction by the NRM “for his courage and his loyalty to the organization and his comrades and this was greeted by a standing ovation by all participants”.[28]

On 30 November 2017, a district court banned the NRM in Finland, as it “flagrantly violated the principles of good practice”. The aggravated assault and how the NRM awarded the perpetrator with a distinction were important arguments in this verdict. This verdict has subsequently been upheld in the higher courts. In March 2019, the Supreme Court temporarily banned the organization's activities, and it was finally confirmed by the Supreme Court in September 2020.[29] The ban has obviously had a serious impact on the activities of the Finnish branch of the NRM.

Although the perpetrator of the assault in Helsinki was honoured by the NRM, later developments demonstrated that this kind of behaviour (by the perpetrator as well as the organization) in effect led to the proscription of the NRM in Finland. The NRM tried to circumvent the ban by setting up a new organization *Kohti Vapautta!* However, the Finnish police and court considered this organization to have the same members as the banned NRM, and therefore banned the Independence Day demonstration announced by this new group. Instead, the demonstration was formally organized by Soldiers of Odin in Finland, which had become closely affiliated with the NRM.[30] It is not clear what lessons the NRM drew from this. In any case, they never withdrew the award given to the perpetrator.

There are some common features in the ways the NRM leadership either justified or found extenuating circumstances for these two assaults with fatal outcomes. The leaders claimed that the victims had allegedly done something provocative towards the activists; that the victims were opponents of the NRM; and that the victims were drug addicts. It appears that, if the victim can be blamed for the outcome, fatal violence does not necessarily lead to expulsion of the perpetrators from the NRM.



*Case 3: The Gothenburg Bombings*

In 2017, one member and two former (but recent) members of the NRM were charged with three bombing attacks in Gothenburg between November 2016 and January 2017. The first device exploded outside the premises of the left-wing Syndicalist Forum Café, causing only material damage. The second explosive device detonated outside an asylum centre, seriously injuring a cleaner. However, the defendants were not convicted of this attack, because there was insufficient evidence. The third bomb, which had been placed outside an asylum centre, failed to explode.

The police investigation showed that two of the three suspected neo-Nazis facing trial had received paramilitary training in Russia shortly before the attacks. A Skype dialogue between two of the perpetrators on a mobile phone seized by the police also showed that they had become increasingly dissatisfied with the Swedish branch of the NRM and its leadership because of their reluctance to use violence to advance the revolution.[31] The trial demonstrated that there were dissenting views within the NRM about how much violence was needed and frustrations about the leadership's current restraining strategy. At least two of the three perpetrators believed that the revolution had to be a violent one, according to the prosecutor. The three perpetrators were convicted to between one year and ten months and six and a half years in prison for two of the three attacks, and were acquitted of the third attack.

Shortly after the attack on the Syndicalist Forum, the NRM published a statement on its website:

*The Nordic Resistance Movement is not behind the attack on the Syndicalist Forum. The Nordic Resistance Movement is a political action organization and does not devote itself to this kind of activity. If we had devoted ourselves to or promoted blowing up book cafés it would have been impossible for us to continue legal political activities; we would all have been behind bars.[32]*

In another statement, the NRM leader Simon Lindberg declared that he had some understanding of these actions but they were not sanctioned by the organization. However, the NRM leaders refused to condemn members who had committed acts of crime.[33] This view is echoed in the *Handbook for Activists in the Resistance Movement*:

*[...] the Resistance Movement acts every day. Not in the world of fantasy, but within the limits of what is realistic just now.[...] However, we do fully understand those few who really consider taking up arms against the system and therefore stay away from the Resistance Movement.*

At least two of the three convicted perpetrators did exactly this – they left the NRM before they carried out their attacks. It is not clear whether the third was expelled or quit on his own.

### **Discussion and Concluding Remarks**

The NRM's restraints on violence were primarily based on highly pragmatic strategic considerations about what is seen as advantageous in the present situation, rather than on ethical concerns about what could be morally justified. The NRM leaders believe that large-scale violence will be ineffective and counter-productive in the current situation. They also want to avoid the NRM being banned as a terrorist organization or core members ending up in jail – which would jeopardize their revolutionary plans and their chance to exploit opportunities to recruit members and promulgate their views legally.

The NRM leadership therefore strive to maintain some distance from (former) members who carry out terrorist attacks or fatal violence. This distance has to be sufficient to avoid the organization being directly implicated in violent acts, which might jeopardize their opportunities to operate within the legal realm. However, the claimed policy that “planning and carrying out of offensive violent actions will lead to exclusion” does not seem to have been implemented. In the two fatal cases examined here, the NRM leaders emphasized the mitigating circumstances and praised the perpetrators for their courage rather than condemning them.

The NRM leadership is certainly not opposed to large-scale violence and terrorism in principle; external factors and strategic considerations put a limit on their use of violence for now. However, they state quite openly that this might be reconsidered if the strategic situation changes, for example if the organization were to be banned and opportunities to act legally closed. Political opponents and other “traitors to the people” as well as racial minorities would then be considered legitimate targets of violence.

Such statements of conditional restraint might be considered as a veiled threat from the NRM directed at the Nordic governments: “If you ban us, we will turn to terrorism!” However, the ban against the Finnish branch of the NRM has already been implemented and a terrorist response has not yet materialized. Whether the warning about a possible turn to terrorism is empty words remains to be seen.

Concerning Busher et al.’s five logics for restraining violence, our analysis of the NRM case shows that these logics seem to combine into two separate clusters, at least in this specific case. One set works as restraints: a strategic logic primarily, but also an organizational logic and to some extent a logic of ego maintenance restrained the NRM from using large-scale violence. The other set of logics did not have any restraining impact: neither a moral logic nor a logic of (a softening) outgroup definition served as moral restraints against mass-murder.

This clustering may result from the degree of militancy and cognitive closure in any given group. A more militant and cognitively closed group may be less likely to apply brakes such as a humanist morality or softening of views about their enemies that could have a restraining impact on their willingness to use violence. This does not mean that such groups do not consider themselves as upholding a high morality. Militant and cognitively closed groups typically believe that they subscribe to a higher morality than most others – a morality that justifies illegal and violent acts for the sake of creating something new and better.

As such, moral logics may also work to accelerate the use of violence,[34] and the same is likely to be true for the other mechanisms identified by Busher et al. For instance, strategic reasoning could serve to accelerate violence, if the reasoning found violence to be more advantageous than non-violence. A related question is whether the NRM should be considered as a barrier or as a conveyor belt to terrorism. Similar questions have been asked regarding radical Islamist organizations, and the answers have not been conclusive. Both mechanisms may be active simultaneously, and different groups have played opposite roles in this regard. [35] Up until now, the NRM has probably served more as a barrier to terrorist violence by reining in its more violence-prone activists. On the other hand, the NRM does prepare its members for large-scale violence in what they consider to be an inevitable racial war in the future.

Maintaining the NRM’s boundaries against excessive violence is not only a task for the NRM’s leadership but is even more so for governmental authorities, the police, the security services and the courts. The efforts of the NRM to test and expand the boundaries on violence should be pushed firmly back by enforcing the rule of law. Equally important, intimidating politicians and others into silence – even if this is done by subtle threats – is challenging democracy just as much as actual violence. The police and lawmakers should draw – and maintain – clear boundaries against such attacks on democracy.

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## Notes

[1] *Handbook for Activists in the Resistance Movement* (Nordfront förlag, 2016) has been openly for sale from the NRM homepages, but is currently not available (apparently). Cited and translated from the Norwegian edition.

[2] See the NRK documentary *Rasekrigerne* (Racial Warriors) in which participants at an NRM camp train by fighting with (fake) knives in tournaments where the winner manages to give his opponent a “fatal” stab. URL: <https://tv.nrk.no/serie/brennpunkt/MDDP11001717/06-12-2017>

[3] Although the organization only changed its name to the Nordic Resistance Movement in 2016, it will be referred to as the NRM throughout this article for the sake of simplicity.

[4] For more details about VAM's early history, see Helene Löw (2009), *Nazismen i Sverige 1980-1999*. Stockholm: Ordfront.

[5] The Nordic Resistance Movement (2018), *Motståndsrörelsen: 20 År Av Revolutionär Kamp*. Grängesberg: Nordfront Förlag, 68–73.

[6] *The Handbook for Activists in the Nordic Resistance Movement*. See also an article from 2019 by the NRM leader Simon Lindberg: “New Organizational Structure in the Nordic Resistance Movement”, *Nordfront*, 4 February 2019. URL: <https://www.nordfront.se/ny-organisationsstruktur-inom-nordiska-motstandsrorelsen.smr>

[7] Concerning the criminal records of Swedish NRM activists, see Magnus Ranstorp and Filip Ahlin (2020), *Från Nordiska motståndsrörelsen till alternativhögern – en studie om radikalnationalistiska miljöer i Sverige*. Stockholm: CATS/Försvarshögskolan, 185–188. URL: <https://www.fhs.se/arkiv/nyheter/2020-08-25-ny-studie-beskriver-radikalnationalistiska-miljon-i-sverige.html>

[8] Yle, “Banned Neo-Nazi Group Assembles, Nine Detained”, Yle Uutiset, 21 October 2018. URL: [https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/banned\\_neo-nazi\\_group\\_assembles\\_nine\\_detained/10467826](https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/banned_neo-nazi_group_assembles_nine_detained/10467826); Yle, “Nordiska motståndsrörelsen fick besvärstillstånd – men föreningens verksamhet förbjuds”, Yle Uutiset, 28 March 2019, URL: <https://svenska.yle.fi/artikel/2019/03/28/nordiska-motstands-rorelsen-fick-besvarstillstand-men-foreningens-verksamhet>; Yle, “Finnish Neo-Nazi groups's appeal rejected, ban on organization confirmed», Yle Uutiset, 22 September 2020, URL: [https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/finnish\\_neo-nazi\\_groups\\_appeal\\_rejected\\_ban\\_on\\_organisation\\_confirmed/11556969](https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/finnish_neo-nazi_groups_appeal_rejected_ban_on_organisation_confirmed/11556969)

[9] Yle “Supreme Court: The Police Suspect that the NRM has broken proscription”, Svenska.yle.fi, 12 May 2019, URL: <https://svenska.yle.fi/artikel/2019/05/12/hs-polisen-misstanker-att-nordiska-motstandsrorelsen-brutit-mot-verksamhetsforbud>

[10] Nordfront, “Nu er det på høje tid at få startet Den Nordiske Modstandsbevægelse i Danmark!”, Nordfront.dk, 28 October 2017, URL: <https://www.nordfront.dk/paa-hoeje-tid-faa-startet-nordisk-modstandsbevaegelses-danmark/>; Simon Lindberg, “Intervju Med En Representant För Motståndsrörelsen i Danmark”, Nordfront.se, 8 June 2013, <https://www.nordfront.se/intervju-med-en-representant-for-motstandsrorelsen-i-danmark.smr>.

[11] “Svensk nazistledare pekas ut: Beordrade stor attack”, Kvällsposten, 22 October 2020, URL: <https://www.expressen.se/kvalls-posten/krim/svensk-nazistledare-pekast-ut-gav-order-om-den-stora-attacken/>; “Svensk nazileder gav ordre til krystalnattaktion”, Redox, 11 October 2020, URL: <https://redox.dk/nyheder/svensk-nazileder-gav-ordrer-til-krystalnatsaktion/>; “Den nazistiske bombemager fra Hundested” Arbejderen, 29 May 2020, URL: <https://arbejderen.dk/inland/den-nazistiske-bombemager-fra-hundested>

[12] For details, see Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, “What is the problem with the Nordic Resistance Movement?” Right-Now!, 7 June 2018, URL: <https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/news-and-events/right-now/2018/the-nordic-resistance-movement.html>. In municipal elections in Sweden, the parties provide a ranked electoral list of candidates. The voters may mark a preferred candidate on the list, and a candidate with many personal votes may move up from a low to a higher rank and end up being elected.

[13] Nordisk Styrke, NS Radio #1, URL: <https://nordiskstyrke.org/ns-radio-1-nordisk-styrke/>. An article by Håkon Forwald, former leader of NRM Norway and now one of the leaders of Nordic Strength, argued that demonstrations, public meetings and handing out leaflets was ineffective in the present situation and that more spectacular and targeted online and offline activities were more effective. URL: <https://nordiskstyrke.org/propaganda-og-kampmetoder/>. The NRM leader Simon Lindberg claimed that an attempted coup by a group around the previous NRM leader Klas Lund to take over leadership of the organization had been stopped. URL: <https://www.spreaker.com/user/nordiskradio/ledarperspektiv-51-vi-aer-tillbaka-kuppf>

[14] Jacob Aasland Ravndal (2016), “Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe: Introducing the RTV Dataset”, *Per-*

*spectives on Terrorism* 10(3), 2-15.

[15] See e.g. this article by the editor-in-chief of the NRM homepage (English edition), Martin Saxlind, “Political soldiers”, The Nordic Resistance Movement, 17 July 2020, URL: <https://nordicresistancemovement.org/political-soldiers/>

[16] “NRM leaders speak out regarding the attack in Kärntorp”, Aftonbladet, 9 November 2017, URL: <https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/m7oVq/nmr-ledare-talar-ut-om-attacken-i-karntorp>

[17] *Handbook for Activists in the Resistance Movement*, op. cit., p. 42, translated from the Norwegian edition, 2016.

[18] Jacob Aasland Ravndal (2018), “Right-Wing Terrorism and Militancy in the Nordic Countries: A Comparative Case Study”, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 30(5), 772–792.

[19] See Tore Bjørgo and Jacob Aasland Ravndal, “What is the problem with the Nordic Resistance Movement?”, RightNow!, June 7 2018, URL: <https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/news-and-events/right-now/2018/the-nordic-resistance-movement.html>

[20] Often called “slam guns”. One leading activist, in charge of the NRM homepage, had constructed a briefcase with a built-in concealed pistol that could be fired from the briefcase handle. Harald S. Klungtveit (2020), *Nazister blant oss: På innsiden av den nye høyreekstremismen*. Oslo: Kagge forlag, 129–135.

[21] Joel Busher, Donald Holbrook and Graham Macklin (2019), “The Internal Brakes on Violent Escalation: A Typology”, *Behavioural Science of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 11(1), 3–25.

[22] Simon Lindberg (2019), “Thoughts on the mosque shootings in New Zealand and any parallels to the Nordic struggle”, *Nordfront.se*, 16 March 2019, (translated from the slightly condensed Norwegian version), URL: <https://www.nordfront.se/tankar-om-moskeskjutningarna-i-nya-zeeland.smr>

[23] *Motståndsrörelsen – 20 År Av Revolutionär Kamp*, op. cit.

[24] Tore Bjørgo (2016), *Preventing Crime: A Holistic Approach*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 16.

[25] Jennie Sivenbring and Robin Andersson Malmros (2019), *Mixing Logics: Multiagency Approaches for Countering Violent Extremism*. Gothenburg: Segerstedtinstitutet, University of Gothenburg, 62.

[26] This balancing act between legal activism and illegal militancy is a classic dilemma for extreme-right movements. For a discussion about this “adaption problem”, see Jaap van Donselaar (1993a), “Post-war Fascism in the Netherlands”, *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 19, 87–100; and J. van Donselaar (1993b), “The Extreme Right and Racist Violence in the Netherlands”, in Tore Bjørgo and Rob Witte (1993), *Racist Violence in Europe*. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan.

[27] *Motståndsrörelsen: 20 år i kamp*, op. cit., 137–139 [our translation].

[28] Editors of Frihetskamp, “Our potential – Activist days 2017”, *Frihetskamp*, 31 January 2017, <https://www.frihetskamp.net/vart-potensial-aktivistdagene-2017/>

[29] See note 8.

[30] Tommi Kotonen (2019), “The Soldiers of Odin Finland: From a local movement to an international franchise”, in Tore Bjørgo and Miroslav Mareš (eds.), *Vigilantism against Migrants and Minorities*. Oxon: Routledge.

[31] Göteborgs TR B 618–17 Aktbil 207, Förundersökningsprotokoll (23), 202–204 (Investigation protocol, acquired from Gothenburg District Court).

[32] Editors of Nordfront, “Comments regarding explosion against leftist premises”, *Nordfront*, 20 January 2017, URL: <https://www.nordfront.se/kommentar-angaende-explosion-mot-vansterlokal.smr>

[33] *Motståndsrörelsen: 20 år i kamp*, op. cit., 287.

[34] Alan Page Fiske and Tage Shakti Rai (2014), *Virtuous Violence: Hurting and Killing to Create, Sustain, End, and Honor Social Relationships*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[35] Lorenzo Vidino (2010), “The Role of Non-Violent Islamists in Europe”, *CTC Centennial*, 3(11), URL: <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/the-role-of-non-violent-islamists-in-europe/>; Michael Kenney, “Al-Muhajiroun may be appalling, but it is not a conveyor belt to terrorism”, *Political Violence at a Glance*, 5 October 2018, URL: <https://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2018/10/05/al-muhajiroun-may-be-appalling-but-it-is-not-a-conveyor-belt-to-terrorism/>