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NMR: A Nordic neo-Nazi organization with aims of establishing totalitarian rule across Scandinavia



## NMR: A Nordic neo-Nazi organization with aims of establishing totalitarian rule across Scandinavia

**BY BULENT KENES** 

#### **ABSTRACT**

Right-wing extremism and national socialism (Nazism) are not a new phenomenon in Sweden. White supremacists or neo-Nazis have a long history in the country. Nordic Resistance Movement (Nordiska motståndsrörelsen, NMR) rests on this century-long history of Swedish Nazi and Neonazi activism. Including racism, antisemitism, anti-immigration, and anti-globalisation stances with violent tendencies, NMR which aims to overthrow the democratic order in the Nordic region and establish a national socialist state, has become the primary force of white power in Sweden and other Nordic countries

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#### INTRODUCTION

Since the recent re-emergence of radical right-wing ideas across Europe (Mudde, 2007: 1), increasing numbers of security authorities warn of increased threats from the radical nationalist milieu. Terrorist attacks by radical nationalist lone wolves have been carried out in Christchurch (New Zealand), Poway and El Paso (USA), Baerum (Norway), and Halle (Germany), along with other attacks, have created a sense of urgency around this growing threat. In August 2019, the Swedish Security Service (Säpo) warned of an increased threat from violent right-wing extremists (Ranstorp & Ahlin, 2020). According to Säpo, extreme right-wing organisations are the second biggest threat to Sweden after Islamist terrorism (Swedish Security Service, 2018). This warning brought attention to the most dominant extremist actor in Sweden, the national socialist Nordic Resistance Movement (Nordiska motståndsrörelsen, NMR) (Ranstorp & Ahlin, 2020: 7).

Right-wing extremism and national socialism (Nazism) are not a new phenomenon in Sweden. White supremacists or neo-Nazis have a long history in the country. Sweden has had organized Nazi movements since 1924, when the Furugård brothers founded the first Nazi party (Lööw, 2004). During the interwar period, and until the end of World War II (WWII), various Swedish Nazi organizations developed in accordance with their conflicting attitudes toward the German Nazi party. According to Helene Lööw (1999), this led to a state of constant fragmentation of the Swedish Nazi movement, which partly explains why there was never a strong united movement during that time period. In the wake of WWII, the Swedish Nazi movement might have faded away but for the Nordic National Party (Nordiska rikspartiet, NRP), which was founded in 1956. NRP became the institution that restructured the ideas, experiences, and aims of the pre-war and wartime Nazi movements to create contemporary Nazi movements, generally in the form of subcultural groups and parties (Lööw, 1999; 2004; 2015).

By the end of the 1970s, the NRP had adopted right-wing populist ideas. This led to a portion of the movement taking a less radical position on the white race and focusing instead on a culturally racist view aimed at criticizing immigration policy and immigrants. When the group split, a new organization emerged, called Keep Sweden Swedish (Bevara Sverige Svenskt, BSS) (Lööw, 1999). This created more polarization within the milieu and contributed to the construction of two fractions: one that remained faithful to the Nazi ideology and another that looked for support by addressing immigration issues. During the 1980s and 1990s, the right-wing movement was formed through both parliamentary aspirations and more violent revolutionary logic, as well as formal and informal groups, parties, and subcultural milieus (Lööw, 2015).

From the early 1990s onwards, older national socialist organizations such as NRP, the New Swedish Movement (Nysvenska Rörelsen), and Sweden's

Nationalist Federation (Sveriges Nationella Förbund) started dissolving and were ultimately replaced by smaller underground groups and networks such as Vitt Arisk Motstånd (White Aryan Resistance, VAM), Nationalist Alliance (Nationella Alliansen), Aryan Brotherhood (Ariska Brödraskapet), and Combat 18 (Lööw, 1995). These groups differed from the NRP, which had roots back to the Swedish National Socialist Workers' Party (Nationalsocialistiska abetarepartiet) of the 1930s (Kølvraa, 2019). Despite the dissolution of the NRP, during the 1980s it became the link between interwar National Socialism and a new generation of activists influenced by British and American White Power movements (Lundström, 2016; Hirvonen, 2013).



Klas Lund.

## The Founders of NMR Came from Three Nazi Groups

Historically, Sweden has long been a global epicentre for White Supremacist activism and "intellectualism," fuelled by an once world-leading White Power music industry in the 1990s (Teitelbaum & Lundström, 2017) and an extensive publishing industry (Lööw, 1999). With the recent rise in the visibility of extreme and openly violent groups and activities, Sweden offers a particularly interesting window into the media the media strategies and practices of violent extremists within liberal democracies—and why we should take this media seriously (Askanius, 2021a).

During the 1990s, the Nazi movement reconstructed itself and developed new exchange forums by adapting to the Internet and social media—moves that benefited a movement that struggled to gain visibility in more traditional public forums (Lööw, 2015). To attract members and sympathizers, the movement has used public demonstrations and local town rallies but also an intensified presence on social media (Kaati, 2017). By the beginning of 2010—and until 2013—there was small but significant growth in the Nazi move-

ment's followers, activities, and visibility. Two Nazi parties dominated the scene: The Party of the Swedes (Svenskarnas parti) and the NMR. Since 2015, the NMR, the only party remaining, has been the main hub for Nordic Nazi ideas (Lööw, 2015).

The founders of NMR came from three Nazi groups—VAM, the newspaper Folktribunen (The People's Tribune), and the National Youth (Mattsson, 2018). The establishment of the NMR (then known as the Swedish Resistance Movement, or the Svensk motståndsrörelsen, SMR) was announced in the third issue of the Folktribunen in December 1997. The Nazi network Nordland, which has since closed down, was also included under the SMR (Harne, 2002). Folktribunen's editor-in-chief, and one of NMR's founders, was Klas Lund, who headed the organization for 18 years, between 1997 and 2015 (Ravndal, 2019). From 1997 to 2002, the Folktribunen was SMR's communication channel, a place to communicate the organization's positions and activities (Mattsson, 2018).

Apart from his lengthy leadership term, Lund's played a role a series of dramatic events that preceded NMR's establishment. Lund began his activist career as a militant skinhead, a form of militancy the NMR normally distances itself from because in an effort to emphasize political struggle over subcultural practices.

In 1986, when Lund was 18 years old, he and a group of fellow skinheads beat and kicked to death a young man who had allegedly attempted to stop them from harassing young immigrants at a beach in southern Stockholm. Lund and two other skinheads were convicted of murder and received eight-year prison sentences. Lund's sentence was later reduced to four years, and he was released after only two years (Ravndal, 2019). When he served his sentence, he became a leading figure in VAM which took its name from the American organization White Aryan Resistance, a group that carried out robberies and hoped to fund a "white revolution" (Hjälte & Kenny, 2011). (Expo, 2019).

Lund and his associates carried out several bank robberies to finance their activities and to prepare for an armed revolution. In this endeavour, Lund's VAM was inspired by another American group, The Order (Brüder Schweigen). While amateurish, VAM was certainly violent (Hjälte & Kenny,2011); however, one of these robberies landed the perpetrators in prison (Lööw, 2009; Strømmen, 2017) again. While in prison, Lund had plenty of time to contemplate the means that would be most effective at generating a revolutionary outcome. He arrived at the conclusion that terrorism carried out by loosely organized leaderless networks might not be so effective. Rather, a strong hierarchical organization with the long-term ambition of radicalizing people through steadfast propaganda and street activism was a better alternative. These thoughts were further developed in Folktribunen, which Lund created after his second release from prison (Ravndal, 2019).

Folktribunen included material on Corneliu Codreanu, the founder and charismatic leader of the Iron Guard, an ultra-nationalist and violently antisemitic organization established in Romania in 1927. During the interwar period, Codreanu ran the violent underground fascist terrorist group, St. Michael's Legionnaires—better known as the Iron Guard. As a Christian fanatic, Codreanu hated democracy and dreamed of a nation ruled by an elite—a country like a religious sect. The new society required a "new man," and the Iron Guard would take the lead in the revolution. Codreanu's organization

was guilty of political assassinations and pogroms against, above all, Jews. Codreanu was imprisoned and executed in 1938 after his organization responded to his prison sentence with more assassinations (Poohl, 2014).

In 1995, a group of young people in Bromma, an upscale Stockholm suburb, founded an organization called Independent Young Nationalists (Oberoende Unga Nationalister) (Poohl, 2014). At the time, racist skinheads and white power music dominated the Swedish extreme right. As Daniel Poohl of the Swedish anti-extremist magazine Expo writes, the young ultranationalists from Bromma wanted to be something different. They didn't allow drugs. They didn't welcome skinhead hooligans. They wanted to be more serious (Strømmen, 2017). In 1997, Erik Hägglund was chosen to lead the organization, which had already changed its name to National Youth (Nationell Ungdom). Hägglund had previously been active in a fascist group called Riksfronten and under his leadership, Nationell Ungdom quickly radicalized. Ideas on "democratic nationalism" were replaced by revolutionary racism (Poohl, 2014; Expo/ Svartvitt, 1999).

Out of Folktribunen, the new organization SMR was born. It was meant to be an elitist organization, with a strong focus on loyalty, discipline, and courage. The ethos was: "Weaklings and cowards have no place with us. No one shall avoid his manly duties." Nationell Ungdom was to continue as the youth organization of the SMR (Poohl, 2014). This strategic shift has been overlooked by several observers who portray SMR as terrorists (Gudmundson, 2008). One reason could be that SMR does not reject extreme measures, including terrorism, in some distant future. A key element of their strategy is thus to use propaganda to prepare themselves and the Nordic people for a future racial war that is, in their minds, inevitable (SRM, 2009).

The extreme right-wing propaganda changed character over time; in 2009, the SMR launched an online campaign against paedophiles and rapists (Lööw, 2015: 66). At the same time, SMR members practised a sort of low-scale psychological warfare, where subtle threats were used

to scare or silence their enemies. They also actively prepared for and sought out violent confrontations with the police and political opponents (Ravndal, 2018).

In 2003, the organization started publishing a new magazine, Nationelt Motstånd (National Resistance). Cooperation with Norwegian neo-Nazis led to a Norwegian branch of the organization, called Nasjonal Ungdom, being established the same year (Kragh & Lindberg, 2003; Expo, 2003). However, the Norwegian group faltered within a couple of years. In an article in Nationelt Motstånd, Klas Lund made it clear that the organization did not seek to recruit "as many as possible," but rather wanted to build "an inner core of fanatic activists who can increasingly bring the national message out to the masses" (Poohl, 2014). Since 2003, the SMR has developed as an openly National Socialist organization following an "elitist" approach to membership. In addition to a traditional antisemitic focus, the organization based its ideology on openly racist anti-immigrant views (Strømmen, 2017).

In 2016, the organisation changed its name to NMR and declared, together with associate organisations in Norway, Finland, and Denmark, that now addresses matters concerning all of Scandinavia—specifically protecting the Aryan race (Mattson, 2018).

In its current shape, NMR rests on an almost century-long history of Swedish Nazi and Neonazi activism (Lööw, 2015).Including racism, antisemitism, anti-immigration, and anti-globalisation stances with violent tendencies, NMR has become the primary force of white power in Sweden (Mattsson, 2018). However, "white power" is not a term that the NMR uses to denote their movement—that is a term used by their enemies. Therefore, representatives of the NMR categorically claim in interviews that they do not belong to any "white power world" nor are they "Nazis" (Öberg, 2016).

The relatively civil discourse in NMR's cultural productions also aims to seed elements of neo-Nazi ideology into the more acceptable anti-immigration rhetoric successfully used in the public domain by right-wing populist parties (Krzyżanowski,

2020). Thus, NMR have become co-producers of what Krzyżanowski (2020: 505) has dubbed "borderline discourse," which merges uncivil (hate speech, antisemitism, and unmitigated racism) with civil discourse borrowed from the ideas of right-wing populism. In a sense, neo-Nazi groups today, and extremist actors more generally, dovetail on a broader cultural trend of an increasing symbiosis of popular media, political punditry, and persuasion. Part of this hybridity is about the convergence of the mainstream and extreme at the level of actual content on the platform (Askanius, 2021a).



## NMR Aims to Overthrow the Democratic Order in the Nordic Region

NMR's own cultural productions are also characterised by hybridity and a play with genre conventions. A convergence of popular culture and entertainment with political and news discourse is apparent. At the level of content and aesthetics, the extreme blends with the mainstream, the mundane and ordinary with the spectacular and provocative, and the serious with the silly. These strategies continue the long history of "political mash-up" in protest movements' media practices (Askanius, 2013) and of fascist movements aestheticizing politics (Ekman, 2014). To illustrate how neo-Nazis attempt to package their ideology in ways that shield it from immediate public condemnation, Kølvraa (2019) describes how NMR replaced swastikas and World War II imagery with symbols from Norse paganism

and Viking iconography to make the ideology more palatable in a Swedish and wider Nordic context. The tactic served to construct a two-faced dynamic to Nazism, where a seemingly civil, respectable, and serious side masked a violent and uncivil side, much like the dissonance we see in NMR's communication strategies seeking to normalise neo-Nazi discourse in Sweden (Askanius, 2021a).

Thus, the cultural expressions of NMR reinforce a value system that harmonises with the neo-Nazi programme. In their attempts to create a new and distinctly Nordic "Nazism light," entertainment and culture work as key vehicles in conveying the story of "white genocide" and the impending race wars in a persuasive and entertaining manner (Askanius, 2021a). In this sense, NMR adopted some of the same normalisation strategies that seem to have worked for more mainstream far-right populist parties across Europe: re-packaging, softening rhetoric, and getting rid of or toning down overt hate speech and symbols associated with traditional fascism (Wodak, 2013). Therefore, to understand its contemporary reality, NMR's Nazism must be recognized as something more than simply brutality, genocide, destruction, and war (Darwish, 2018: 4).

In Sweden, recent years have seen the National Socialist right mount public demonstrations and other "offline" activities with increasing numbers. Whereas earlier it was often noted that the extreme right secured media attention and impact through violence (Kimmel, 2007), and that such organizations usually preferred the relative anonymity of online propaganda (Askanius & Mylonas, 2015: 58); now the NMR's membership—and their willingness to demonstrate in public—is increasing. Indeed, recent years saw a noticeable rise in activities (Eastman, 2017), and a third of active members in 2015 were new recruits (Kølvraa, 2019). At one march in Stockholm, in November 2016, some reports counted 600 NMR participants (Pasha-Robinson, 2016). As such, the NMR and its online media outlet Nordfront.se are today the central National Socialist voice on the Swedish extreme right—and possibly the dominant platform for such ideas in Scandinavia as a whole (Laclau,

2005, 1990).

As a neo-Nazi organization, NMR aims to overthrow the democratic order in the Nordic region and establish a national socialist state (Sallamaa & Kotonen, 2020; Bjørgo & Ravndal, 2018). In October 2014, Lund declared that a parliamentary branch of the movement would be formed, although this did not mean that the (then) SMR would become less radical. Nor did it mean that the SMR had transformed into a democratic party. Choosing to operate within the parliamentary system does not necessarily mean accepting it (Lööw, 2020: 86). The NMR has not entered the national level of government, but they entered several local governments around Sweden from 2014-2018 (Skoglund, 2017; Thomsen, 2018). The organization also made an attempt at a parliamentary breakthrough; however, it only received several municipal mandates after being added to Sweden Democrats' (SD) lists. Despite this, the 2018 election saw an increase in both the NMR's level of activity and their visibility in the Swedish political discourse (Blomberg & Stier, 2019).

After the 2018 election, the breakaway organization Nordic Strength (Nordisk styrka) was formed in August 2019, partly as a reaction to the failed parliamentary initiative (Lodenius, 2020: 129). Leading NMR activists, including Klas Lund, founded Nordic Strength (Askanius, 2021a), which is a distinctly elite organization, a return to the form of organization that was dominant before the NMR was created—that is, a group that does not accept everyone as a member (Lööw, 2020: 85). The purpose of Nordic Strength is stated as: "To create a new generation of strong and conscious Nordic people, and our ambition to create a strong and combative ideology, culture, community and organization." Nordic Strength is also present in Norway and Denmark (Forwald, 2019).

## NMR As a Fully-fledged National Socialist Organization

The NMR explicitly rejects democratic rule and envisions a more authoritarian system, headed by strong and competent National Socialist "senators" (Lund, 2010). It also promotes a racist and antisemitic doctrine. This is a neo-Nazi organization aimed at establishing a national revolution and totalitarian rule (Mattson & Johansson, 2018). While many emergent neo-fascist organizations across Europe distance themselves from National Socialism, the NMR remains a fully-fledged national socialist organization. Race theory is thus an inherent part of their ideology and the alleged international Jewish elite remains their main enemy (Ravndal, 2018).

National Socialist and racist groups are sometimes introduced under the broader term "right-wing extremists." National socialism's main ideological components are nationalism, racism, "xenophobia," a strong state, and anti-democratic notions (Lööw, 2020: 87-88). Although NMR can be characterized as a National Socialist organization, it did not use this label during its early years, for strategic reasons, and referred to its activists as "patriots." In 2006, however, the NMR leadership decided to "come out of the closet" and be open about their National Socialist foundations. Behind this toxic ideology lay deeper ideas such as anti-modernism, anti-liberalism, collectivism, communitarianism, and the idea that people's identities and meanings are closely tied to the territories, peoples, and cultures to which they naturally "belong" (Ravndal, 2019).

Meanwhile, in addition to Adolf Hitler, the NMR cites the Danish Nazi ideologue Povl Riis-Knudsen as an important source of inspiration. Biological racism is the explicit foundation of the party's policy. Conspiracy theories and antisemitism are also central to their ideology. NMR praises Hitler and Nazi Germany but believes that their own ideology is a "new policy for a

new era." It agitates against the democratic state, immigration, and multiculturalism, as well as against "Zionism" and "globalism" (a code for Jews), capitalism, communism, feminism, and the LGBTQ movement. One of the party's explicit goals is to deport "the majority of all those who are not ethnic northern Europeans or of closely related peoples" from the Nordic countries. NMR also directs propaganda against trade unions, whose members they want to attract as sympathizers (Expo, 2019).

Since NMR believes that the Nordic peoples are racially and ethnically related (Ravndal, 2018), it has merged the core National Socialist values with a political strategy of a united Nordic region under authoritarian leadership, all in an effort to conserve the Nordic race and culture (Ranstorp & Ahlin, 2020: 7). The concept of "ethnopluralism" is sometimes used to describe this idea—that people of different ethnic and territorial backgrounds should co-exist separately rather than being mixed, in order to preserve their unique qualities and collective identities (Ravndal, 2019). It seeks to preserve national identities by repatriating all or most people of foreign descent. Finally, they seek to replace the European Union—which they see as a liberal/capitalist/globalist/technocratic threat to the authentic European identity—with an autonomous European geopolitical alliance. Notably, this alliance should be detached from the current economic, cultural, and military grip of the US, and perhaps seek alliances with Russia (Ravndal, 2019).



#### Reinventing Vikings For Nordic Consumption

Besides an obsession with Jews and Muslims, religion does not occupy much space in the ideological view of the NMR. The party does not claim to support religious freedom in their political manifesto. They also draw on pagan myths and symbols in some of their propaganda—specifically, on Norse mythology. For example, their main symbol is constituted by an overlay of the Tiwaz/Tyr rune, named after the warrior god Tyr, and the Yngvi/Ing rune, named after the Yngling lineage, the oldest known Scandinavian dynasty (Ravndal, 2019). However, in much of the NMR's more recent cultural productions, the Vikings have gone soft (Askanius, 2021a). At the core of this practice, through which boundaries are increasingly blurred, is an aspiration to make uncivil discourse and ideology appear more civil and the spectacular more mundane—and to tell the story of a new "sanitised version of Nazism that would normalise the Hitler state in the minds of contemporaries" (Blee, 2007: 15). Vikings are no novelty in the National Socialist imagination. They were extensively present in Third Reich

propaganda (Lauridsen, 1995). The image of the Viking serves as the lynchpin of a distinctly Nordic reiteration of National Socialist ideology as articulated by NMR (Kølvraa, 2019).

Christoffer Kølvraa argues that the Viking becomes an "empty signifier" (Laclau, 1996), serving three distinct purposes in the construction of a cultural imaginary suitable for a Nordic National Socialism. First, it serves to signify the National Socialist idea of a "Nordic race" and, in that sense, implicitly links this ideology to a specifically Nordic historical-cultural space. Second, it serves to differentiate the pan-Nordic racial project of the NMR from a wider European far-right populist agenda of defending European Christian civilization. Third, it serves to symbolize a classic National Socialist body ideal of hyper-masculinity and homo-social community in a distinctly Nordic code (Kølvraa, 2019).

Perhaps the most obvious function of Viking heritage in the cultural imagination of the NMR is simply as a way of making National Socialism less of a "German" ideology and reorientating it towards a Nordic cultural-historical context. Indeed, the NMR certainly addresses its audience as modern-day Vikings (Kølvraa, 2019). The Nordfront.se site sees it as a core task to keep the audience updated on "all things"

Viking." It offers lists of events with Viking or mediaeval themes, including Viking markets, re-enactments of Viking battles, and upcoming Viking rituals, festivals, and commemorative dates (Holmqvist, 2017; Editorial, 2017).

At the textual level, Viking heritage is often only alluded to in passing, such as when it is claimed: "Our forefathers knew the secret of the blood. They understood it so well, both regarding animals and people, that they did what they could to prevent mixing the Nordic-Germanic (Aryan) race with the other races of the earth" (Söderman, 2007). The NMR also distances itself from the far and populist right by adopting a severely critical attitude towards Christianity (Gardell, 2014: 131).) The popularity of notions of "Christian Europe" can be linked to the fact that it easily supports the construction of a violent antagonism towards Islam or a "clash" between Islam and European/western civilization. Furthermore, the NMR indulaes itself at times by imagining the danger of what has been called "Eurabia": the supposed grand strategy behind a Muslim takeover of the European continent (Carr, 2006). However, as a rule, the organization rejects the valorisation of Christian values and heritage. In fact, in most cases, the NMR's attitude toward Christianity is to view it as a foreign, southern, and ultimately Jewish idea, unduly and forcibly imposed on their Viking ancestors with vast, ever-present detrimental consequences (Söderman, 2008).

"The religion of the Norse or German gods and associated forms of paganism are particularly popular among skinheads, precisely because of their violent, warrior ethos. Skinzines, and especially the Blood & Honour magazine, frequently point out that Odinism is a religion of warriors, whereas despised Christianity is presented in Nietzschean terms as a religion of slaves" (Pollard, 2016: 409). NMR rejects Christianity, which is considered "a kind of spiritual AIDS that has destroyed our natural immunity to non-biological thinking (Lodenius, 2020). It is a contagious mental illness that must be fought by all means" (Nationalsocialismen, 2011). With regard to the NMR's view of religious freedom, all religions must adapt to National Socialism and must not run counter to its ideology

and thus religious practice should be relegated to the private sphere (Redaktionen, 2016).

According to Kølvraa (2019), even when the Vikings are used as a means to mark religious difference, they function more as an empty signifier than as an actual counterpoint or alternative. It is not about becoming Vikings but about establishing a cultural imaginary in which National Socialism is linked, juxtaposed, and repackaged in Viking iconography for Nordic consumption. Viking heritage is central to the cultural imaginary of these modern Scandinavian National Socialists due to its ability to link the internal elements of their communal ideal: an ideal of a pure Nordic racial community undisturbed by foreign influences, Christian weakness, and degenerate modernity; a community shaped by an embedded hyper-masculinity lived out in homosocial interactions saturated with struggle, aggression, and the will to supremacy (Kølvraa, 2019).

NMR has used propaganda and direct action to "awaken" the people and prepare them for the upcoming "race war." This is in line with the general National Socialist emphasis on action rather than on intellectualism (Ravndal, 2019). In many ways, NMR and the alt-right share the same destructive narrative. Common messages from both feature racial separatism, ethnopluralism, and conspiratorial notions of an impending societal collapse, stoking fears that "the people" and "culture" are about to be exterminated by external enemies. The external enemy is embodied by overseas immigration, which is supposedly orchestrated by an "elite" consisting of politicians, the media, and globalists (Jews). Not infrequently, antisemitic conspiracy theories also occur in connection with this notion. NMR actors also consider themselves to be waging "a cultural war" in order to preserve Swedish identity (Ranstorp & Ahlin, 2020: 8). NMR is anti-democratic and rejects global humanitarian rights. The party believes violence is necessary and legitimate to achieve its goals. In such a case, "racial traitors" and people of the "wrong race" will be exterminated, brought to justice, or deported (Ranstorp & Ahlin, 2020: 20).

NMR has hopes to start a revolution

through an extra-parliamentary struggle. They are opposed to the ruling government but do not engage in elections (Ravndal, 2019: 11-12). On NMR's official website, Nordfront, the party claims a National Socialist stance in the "Nine Points" that make up their policy (Hellenstierna, 2019). These points are essential to their struggle and will be dictate the changes they make when they supposedly seize power from "the hostile forces that now rule the Nordic peoples" (Nordfront Policy A, 2015). The nine points include:

Immediately stopping mass immigration;

As soon as possible, initiating the repatriation of the majority of all non-Northern Europeans or closely related peoples; By all means available, seek to regain power from "the global Zionist elite which economically and militarily occupy most of our world";

Jointly with the other Nordic countries create a Nordic self-sufficient state with a common defence force, common currency and central bank, and common horizontal laws and regulations. This also means immediate withdrawal from the European Union and any similar hostile associations;

The media should be owned by citizens of the new Nordic region. Foreign as well as domestic media acting against people in a hostile manner will be prohibited; and

A public tribunal must be established with the aim of examining the difficult cases of treason (Redaktionen Nordfront, 2015).

NMR's primary goal is to overthrow the Scandinavian democracies and create a Nazi state under NMR leadership. Three core themes in NMR's ideology are, 1) the competition between the races; 2) antisemitism, with Jewish conspiracies at the centre (Immigration to Sweden and other Nordic countries will not be the main problem for NMR, but a by-product of the Jewish conspiracy); and 3) gender roles: for the battle ahead, men and women must have their strict gender roles. Men are supposed to be warriors and provide physical protection while women

are supposed to stay home and reproduce and raise children. Less strict gender roles have resulted in "mixed races" and thus the "end of the race." Feminist and LGBTQ movements are, therefore, not accepted and often threatened by NMR (Blomgren, 2020; Mattsson, 2018; Ranstorp, Ahlin, & Normark, 2020).

In NMR's ideological narrative, thus, the central problem at the core of the conflict is construed as mass immigration and multiculturalism, spearheaded by Zionism and a feminised, degenerated Western culture. This problem poses a threat to a community—an "us," meaning the white race, true Swedes, and the Nordic people—by a perpetrator, a "them" consisting of caricatured enemies including "racial strangers," Jews, enemies of the people, or alternatively, Sweden-haters, which includes politicians, journalists, certain public intellectuals, feminists, and so forth. Against this backdrop, NMR proposes a "final solution"— namely, the deportation of all "racial strangers" and a race war, with the end result being Sweden as "white sanctuary," enforced by a future pan-Nordic state founded on national socialism (Askanius, 2021a).

Moreover, the NMR propagates the superiority of the white race, fights for the "survival of the Nordic race," and wants to bring about a revolution through an armed takeover (Edsenius & Jönsson, 2018). The party wants democracy to be "replaced by an elitist government with a strong leader at the top" (TT, 2017). In connection with this, parties must be abolished and citizenship in Sweden must be based on racial biology. A racial biology institute will "racially assess" the population of individuals born after 1975 and those who do not belong to the Aryan race will be forcibly repatriated to their countries of origin. Those born before 1975 could lose their citizenship if they were "convicted of anti-popular activities." NMR's leaders estimate that approximately 2 million "racial strangers" in Sweden would be sent back to their countries of origin, as well as another million people from the other Nordic countries (Lodenius, 2020).

According to the NMR, the entire survival and existence of the "white race" is at stake due to low birth rates combined

with mass immigration of non-whites in "a low-intensity war of extermination against whites." The Nordic countries are portrayed as occupied and the survival of the people a battle for life and death in a race war. The very image of the enemy being painted is dark and dystopian and is often described in dehumanizing terms as the "System." The System includes the government and authorities, while politicians are referred to as "criminals." The System has a vicious plan against the "people," who are brainwashed and repressed by constant reprisals from the government and authorities. The System's repression of NMR is enormous. NMR repeatedly uses enemy terms such as "racial stranger," "criminal," "traitor," etc. NMR often weaves together a conspiratorial worldview of a "Jewish-controlled" elite of "globalists," "big banks," and "capitalists" who oppose and oppress the "people" (Lodenius, 2020).

NMR wants to establish a "people's court" that will "try the difficult cases of treason" (Redaktionen, 2015). "Traitors" will be brought before the people's court and hung from lampposts. NMR also advocates the reintroduction of the death penalty to be imposed for serious crimes (Lodenius, 2020). Media must be banned if they go against NMR's ideals. NMR's idea of freedom of expression is to tear up laws against incitement against ethnic groups and instead ban "anti-popular propaganda" which includes media that spreads "subversive and anti-popular messages" (Redaktionen, 2018a).



#### NMR Views World Through Prism of Antisemitism

The NMR's worldview is based on antisemitic conspiracy theories, including that Jews promote immigration, egalitarianism, and racial mixing in order to destroy the white race (Ranstorp & Ahlin, 2020: 20). According to this world view, no political achievements have any real value until the alleged Jewish world conspiracy is crushed. While the rest of the far-right is inspired by new ideological influences, the NMR has chosen to stick to its Nazi convictions and Hitler's principles, including all the elements of antisemitism. The party claims it wants to "take back power over our country from the globalists who rule us." "Globalists" is one of many code words for the alleged Jewish international conspiracy (Poohl, 2018).

Antisemitism is at the heart of the National Socialist ideology. Without antisemitism, National Socialism does not exist. According to Nazis, the notion of history is a struggle between Jews and "Aryans." National Socialists often use terms such as "Jewish mentality" and "spiritual Jews." These terms were synonymous with the Nazis' political enemies, who were considered poisoned by the "Jewish mentality and morality" and who "sold their souls to the Jews" (Lööw, 2020: 89). Jews are at the top of the NMR's enemy list; Nazis hate Jews more than they hate Muslims—they believe Jews invented the Muslims (Pascalidou, 2017).

Although the NMR is concerned with challenges posed by growing Muslim populations in Europe, they always make sure to remind themselves and others that the real cause of this "Muslim invasion" is the Jews, who have deliberately masterminded it in order to weaken the European peoples and nations for their own benefit (Lund, 2004). According to NMR, "the tentacles of Zionism" are everywhere, seen in a culture war which seeks to "destroy the indigenous European cultures and replace them with Americanized anti-culture" (Lund, 2008).

Nevertheless, NMR has recently changed its rhetoric and started use some indirect or coded words. In that rhetoric, individuals who are said to represent the imagined Jewish power are transformed into traitors. The previous terms, like "racial traitors" and "Jewish lackeys," have been replaced simply with "traitors" (Lööw, 2019). NMR sees "our people" as being betrayed and replaced through marriage and migration—and sees these as conscious strategies to replace the "Nordic race" with a new people. According to this conspiracy theory, Europe's population will be replaced through the migration of Muslims, which is actually a Jewish plot (Lööw, 2020). Immigration to Sweden and the Nordic countries is by-product of the Jewish conspiracy—a conspiracy that is manifested in the form of, among other things, socialism, capitalism, and humanism (Ranstorp & Ahlin, 2020: 46). According to the NMR, Jews are even behind recent terrorist attacks—and the police are supposedly "Zionist slaves" (Pascalidou, 2017).

The NMR also practises Holocaust denialism. In connection with memorial days linked to the Holocaust, NMR has organized demonstrations and various actions, in an effort to burden these dates with a different meaning (Lööw, 2020: 93). Nordfront's editor-in-chief Fredrik Vejdelands denied the Holocaust during his closing speech in the Göta Court of Appeal (Redaktionen, 2015).

In accordance with the NMR's worldview, Israel is the centre of a Zionist world power that exercises a destructive influence on much of the world, including Sweden. According to the NMR, Israel can be seen as the exact opposite of a National Socialist state: unnaturally created through mass immigration; built on a national,

historical and religious lie and economic parasitism; a centre for espionage and global organized crime; etc. According to the NMR, Israel is, in practice, an extremist nationalist military base under the control of "international financial Judaism," and, as such, it poses a threat to the rest of humanity. Naturally, the NMR sympathizes with the Palestinians and their struggle for a free Palestinian state (Editorial, 2012). With a focus on historical revisionism about the Holocaust (Lööw, 2019), NMR's antisemitism is so strong that they congratulated radical Islamist HAMAS in 2006, just because the organisation stated in its statutes that it wants to destroy Israel (Redaktionen, 2006).



NMR's May 1 demonstrations in Ludvika and Kungälv on May 1, 2019.

#### Hierarchically Organized with Militant and Fanatic Members

NMR is hierarchically organized and militant (Ravndal, 2018). Its colours are green, white and black. Its main symbol is the tyrruna, which was used Nazi Germany during WWII (Expo, 2020; Blomgren, 2020). NMR's model was inspired by the Romanian Iron Guard and has become a collection of fanatics (Poohl, 2014).

The organization is divided into so-called "nests" (nästen, a term borrowed from the Iron Guard), each with its own leadership and structure (Ravndal, 2018). Sweden is divided into seven nests, and they are controlled by operational chiefs directly handling the local activist groups—named fighting groups—each with no more than ten members. One nest can have several combat groups (Expo, 2020; Mattson & Johansson, 2018). In addition, there is a national council (Riksrådet) as well as a Nordic council (Nordenrådet) comprising members from the various national branches (Ravndal, 2019).

According to its Handbook for Activists, the NMR is "not a democratic organiza-

tion where individuals gain positions of responsibility through elections or majority rule. Instead, it is a strictly hierarchically structured organization where all positions of responsibility are filled according to competence, loyalty and willingness to sacrifice" (Bjørgo, 2018). For the people who are part of the combat groups, NMR requires "regular activism, physical training and demonstration of willingness to sacrifice, and that members must be public with who they are" (Lindberg, 2019).

At the top of the hierarchy is the leader of the entire organization, currently Simon Lindberg. Besides these top positions, there are several other prestigious positions, such as operational leader, parliamentary leader, media spokesperson, editor-in-chief, news editor, head of radio broadcasting etc (Ravndal, 2019). Because the NMR envisions an actual take-over of the government, it needs a hierarchical organization on stand-by for when this critical moment arrives (Ravndal, 2019).

Between October 2016 and December 2018, NMR underwent a reorganisation under new leadership and changed its name from the SMR to the NMR, following the establishment of associated divisions in Norway, Finland, and Denmark. NMR refers to this period as the "coming out party' of national socialism" in Scandinavia and to Sweden as the new adminis-

trative centre and power hub of a future pan-Nordic state (Askanius, 2021a). Thus, NMR has shifted from being a closed subcultural group to trying to reach a wider audience. The organization has moved away from its subcultural roots and developed into movement focused more on political outreach (Mattson & Johansson, 2018).

The NMR has three levels of membership and strict criteria for joining. Full membership is restricted to activists willing to be publicly associated with the organization; affiliates are formal members whose involvement is on a more voluntary basis; supporting members provide financial support only and may remain anonymous. To become a full member, one has to dedicate him/herself fully to the organization and its day-to-day struggle (Ravndal, 2019). NMR recruits, educates, and trains activists in a hierarchical system, with the hope that violence and advocacy will create a spiritual and physical elite (Expo, 2020). Members practice martial arts in order to stay healthy, build confidence, and prepare physically and mentally for any type of threat (Holm, 2005).

Some NMR members have a military past (Sveriges Radio, 2014) while others arm themselves with weapons when they move outdoors (Nerikes Allehanda, 2014). According to former NMR leader Lund, activists should be prepared to use force. "The practice of martial arts fulfils several tasks, it helps to maintain discipline within the organization while it [provides] physical education ... It creates a powerful cadre of members who grow powerful and aggressive ... This is necessary to create a fighting organization" (Poohl, 2014).

On the other hand, external activities constitute the groups' interaction with the public, and their primary function is to convey the group's political message to larger audiences, sometimes but not always through spectacular and creative stunts, or through shocking behaviour. By tracing these actions, one can see that the NMR creates a pattern in which the same types of activity are repeated over and over again (Ravndal, 2019). The members are secular and do not engage in religion per se (Expo, 2020; Blomgren, 2020).

Members at the highest level of activism are the ones that create the so-called "combat groups" (Mattsson, 2018).

As an "elite" organisation, the NMR has never aspired to fast growth but rather has been careful about recruiting what it sees as the "right" kind of person, meaning those who are fully dedicated, action oriented, and never question the organization's radical stances. Thus, NMR members are expected to embrace everything the organization stands for, including conspiracy theories about Jewish elites and homosexuality being an unnatural and confused state of mind. This form of militancy borders on fanaticism, i.e., on an uncritical ideological devotion. In fact, NMR activists proudly present themselves as fanatics in the vein of prominent National Socialists from the Third Reich, such as SS troops (Ravndal, 2019).

NMR members are provided with detailed routines and instructions for how to live life as a member. Each activity is given points according to an incomprehensible logic. The points must then be reported to the superior and become an effective control mechanism for the group's management. There are rules for how members should address each other depending on rank, instructions for who should sit where during lectures, how to present a case during a meeting, and how to eat, sleep, and march (Poohl, 2014). Tattoos on the hands and head, piercings, alcohol and drug abuse, or mental illness are not accepted. There is also a strict duty of confidentiality within the organization and all information that is not public is classified. Revealing this type of information counts as a "betrayal" (Lodenius, 2020).

In terms of clothing and lifestyle, members are encouraged not to wear flashy or expensive clothes but rather clothes that signal their political views. They are also encouraged to wear comfortable clothes appropriate for street fighting. NMR's code of honour requires members to keep silent about the organization's inner life, to remain loyal and humble, to show good camaraderie, to be disciplined and truthful, and to exercise and be prepared for fighting (Lund, 2010).

While the Swedish NMR branch cur-

rently claims a few hundred members, there are fewer than a hundred members in Finland—and fewer than 50 in Norway (Ravndal, 2019). In recent years, NMR has tried to attract more supporters and for a while, more people joined each new demonstration. However, the trend has reversed recently. In 2018, 350 people gathered at a Nazi demonstration in Ludvika. At the same time, 140 people marched in Boden—around 500 people in total. In 2019, similar marches only featured around 400 people in total (Poohl et al, 2019). According to Lööw (2015), NMR remains a relatively small organization, with estimates suggesting it has fewer than 1000 members.

An alleged coup attempt led to a split in the NMR in 2019. Former leader Lund left NMR and started a new group, Nordic Strength, which demands a higher degree of radicalism and fanaticism. More hard-line activists believe that NMR has become less radical during recent years, in attempts to broaden and attract more members. Before the 2018 elections, NMR described its ambition to become a popular movement. After the fiasco of the election, dissatisfaction has simmered in parts of the party, a group often described as NMR's "spearhead" or "core activists" (Fröjd, 2019).

Though Nordic Strength appears to be a somewhat more radical organization (Leman, 2018; Fröjd, 2019), so far, it has not made any major imprints. Although Nordic Strength can carry out individual acts of violence, the organization is actually restrained, as they have an aging leadership, a small number of members, and limited financial resources (Ranstorp & Ahlin, 2020: 481).

As with other far-right extremist organisations, NMR is more attractive to men and boys. The ideological background is conservative and against equality, gender equality and liberalism, thereby making it harder for women and girls to identify with the organisation (Kimmel 2007; Ekman 2014). NMR members also tend to have similar backgrounds. Some had parents who drank, others had parents who fought at home (Pascalidou, 2017).

The organization was built on the idea

of the trinity of people, family, and the homeland. It is based on the heterosexual core family, and if the core family is threatened, so is the future of the motherland (Blomgren, 2020). According to the NMR and other National Socialists, man and woman have different biological and spiritual conditions. These pre-given conditions form the basis for a division of society into a male and a female sphere. The man and the woman must complement but not replace each other. NMR members see women as wives and mothers (Lööw, 2020: 96).

NMR is against feminism and for strong traditional gender roles that idealize the woman's role, including giving birth, raising children and taking care of household chores (Lodenius, 2020). At the same time, they are very strongly against homosexuality—or the "homosexual lobby," as they call it. NMR members have participated in violent protests aimed at Pride parades, where NMR members hold up banners with messages such as, "Crush the gay lobby" (Lodenius, 2020).

#### NMR's International Links

The leadership within NMR has been inspired by various international and ideological role models. SMR/NMR's founder Lund was previously the leader of the VAM, which was inspired by the American neo-Nazi organization White Aryan Resistance (WAR) and Robert Mathews, the founder of the white power group The Order. Richard Scutari of The Order (Bruders Schweigen) was also linked to NMR via Esa Henrik Holappa, the founder of the Finnish Resistance Movement (FRM) (Redaktionen, 2011).

Other NMR leaders have also had close contact with American role models. Magnus Söderman was a member of the Aryan Nations under the leadership of its founder Richard Butler (Redaktionen, 2009). The Aryan Resistance Movement leader David Lane also knew Söderman, who worked to translate and disseminate Lane's ideas. According to his own statement, Söderman also lived with The Order

in the US (Söderman, 2007a). NMR/SMR was also inspired by William Pierce, leader of the National Alliance and author of the books The Turner Diaries and Hunter (Lodenius, 2020).

Over the years, SMR/NMR have developed extensive international connections outside the Nordic region. On the website patriot.nu, in 2002, SMR linked to its foreign organizations: the National Alliance, the German NPD, the Russian National Unity, and the Italian Forza Nuova (Lodenius, 2020). A very active exchange is taking place, including study visits to Germany and Hungary and participation in National Socialist demonstrations. For example, the NMR regularly participates in the annual Lukov March in Bulgaria, along with other foreign National Socialists. In 2013, information was published that members of the SMR had undergone paramilitary training with a Nazi group in Hungary (Holmberg, 2017). NMR has developed particularly good relations with the German Die Dritte Weg, the Italian Casa Pound, the Hungarian Legio Hungaria, the Greek Golden Dawn, and the American Patriot Front.

In March 2015, the NMR participated in the far-right "International Conservative Forum" in St. Petersburg, which was organized by the Russian party Rodina (Motherland) (Vergara, 2015). On behalf of the NMR, Peter Jusztin participated, and, after the conference, the NMR visited one of the headquarters of the Russian Imperial Movement (RIM), in a suburb of St. Petersburg (Redaktionen, 2015b). Stanislav Vorobjev, the leader of RIM, visited the NMR during their Nordic Days and donated money to the NMR (Redaktionen, 2015c). The paramilitary branch of the RIM, Partizan, organized a training camp for rightwing extremists and, alongside groups from all over the world, NMR members Viktor Melin and Anton Thulin received eleven days of training in August 2016 (Wiman et al, 2017). In April 2020, RIM was branded as a terrorist organization by the US State Department (Kasurinen, 2020).

The connections between NMR and the RIM go back to 2012, when Vorobjev handed out diplomas to Nordfrontemployees Robert Eklund and Henrik Pihlström for "their objective and correct description"

of the political situation in Russia in the Swedish media" (Redaktionen, 2012). In October 2016, RIM donated an unknown amount of money to the NMR, and the contacts were described at the end of that year by Simon Lindberg as "good" (Expo. 2019).

The importance of NMR's non-Nordic contacts is clear—NMR's program is also published in English and Russian (Lodenius, 2020). In addition, NMR has a presence on Russian social media, with a significant number of followers (Ranstorp & Ahlin, 2020: 9). There is also an extensive digital exchange between the NMR and representatives of the American alt-right. This exchange seems to be primarily individual-based and not formalized. For NMR, the exchange offers an arena for new potential sympathizers abroad and creates opportunities to reach a new audience in Sweden (Ranstorp & Ahlin, 2020: 481).



## A Pan-Nordic Utopia: A Nordic Nation for Nordic People

Nationalist groups, in particular those with a militant or revolutionary outlook, usually emerge within nation-states (Ravndal, 2019); despite this, NMR seeks to expand its presence in other Nordic countries to establish a "Nordic nation for Nordic people" (Ravndal, 2019: 12). This goal is not new. Swedish National Socialist parties of the 1930s were also expansionist and intended to include all groups they defined as "Aryan." The motherland was to be conquered by the workers, who were to be mobilized for the national idea and become part of the national community.

NMR's party program is permeated by the idea of a united Nordic region (Lööw, 2020: 92). In 2008, a branch of NMR was founded in Finland, while a renewed Norwegian branch was established in 2011. In 2013, a Danish-language site, nordfront. dk, was established, and an attempt was made to set up an NMR branch in Denmark, via Henrik Jarsbo (Lindberg, 2013). An Icelandic web site, nordurvigi.is, exist and does contain some general information about the organization (Strømmen, 2017).

Following the establishment of sister divisions in Norway, Finland, and Denmark, the SMR changed its name to the Nordic Resistance Movement (NMR). However, the organization has yet to mobilize nearly as many dedicated activists in the other Nordic countries as it has in Sweden (Ravndal, 2018). Sweden remains the country with most dedicated and active members (Ravndal, 2018: 15-16). Sweden is a special case in Scandinavia, at least in terms of the country's historical experience of WWII and its subsequent attitude toward National Socialist ideas and symbols. While both Denmark and Norway endured German occupation, Sweden managed to avoid occupation by remaining neutral. This meant that Sweden did not experience the same post-war legal trials of Nationalist Socialist sympathizers that Demark and Norway did (Fangen, 1998).

Indeed, in Denmark and Norway a strong collective memory of national resistance was established; anyone designated as a "Nazi" was effectively excluded from the national community (Bryld & Warring, 1998). Finland also undertook a legal purge of sorts as the Finnish-Soviet armistice of 1944 required Helsinki to dismantle all fascist organizations. Here again, Sweden never went through the same post-WWII legal purge against Nazi sympathisers (Ravndal, 2018). Thus, in Sweden, the lack of memory of national resistance against Nazi Germany has meant that the extreme right is more prone to identify itself as National Socialist and to use the symbols and iconography of the Third Reich (Fangen, 1998). Sweden thus has a larger and better-organized national socialist movement than the other Nordic countries (Ravndal, 2018).

Moreover, youth unemployment rates have been considerably higher in Sweden than in Denmark and Norway. Sweden has also received far more immigrants than the other Nordic countries and has experienced more problems related to segregated suburbs and crimes allegedly committed by people of immigrant backgrounds. In combination, these two conditions may have fuelled grievances among segments of the Swedish population that can be exploited by the extreme right to recruit new followers (Ravndal, 2018). In fact, the most successful far-right populist party in Sweden, the Sweden Democrats (SD), has undeniable roots in the neo-fascist milieux (Hellström & Nilsson, 2010) unlike its equivalent in Denmark, the Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti, DF) (Meret, 2011).

Nevertheless, in Sweden, too, National Socialists must attempt to package or frame their ideology in ways that might shield it from immediate public condemnation (Kølvraa, 2019). Since the Party of the Swedes (Svenskarnas parti) was dissolved in May 2015, the NMR has been the most important neo-Nazi organization in Sweden. The Norwegian and Finnish branches of the organization are also central parts of the neo-Nazi environment in those countries. The NMR fights, in the words of its former leader Klas Lund, for "a Nordic national socialist republic including the Nordic countries of Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Iceland and optionally the Baltic states" (Strømmen, 2017). In addition to antisemitism, "Nordic-ness" is something that binds the Nordic countries together and is central to NMR's ideology (Lööw, 2020: 86). The party hopes to preserve the Nordic people as they are today, ensuring that the Nordic racial type remains dominant in the Nordic gene pool (Nordiska Motståndsrörelsens, 2015).

#### Norway

In 2003, former members of the Norwegian skinhead group Boot Boys became sworn members of the NMR's first Norwegian branch. Shortly thereafter, a Norwegian version of the NMR's website, Patriot. nu, was launched, and the first issue of the Norwegian version of the NMR's publication Nasjonal Motstand was published. However, finding dedicated activists in Norway proved harder than in Sweden. The timing may also have been unfortunate. The Norwegian militant movement had receded considerably following the murder of Benjamin Hermansen in 2001 by two Boot Boys members. Another complicating factor was that leading figurers within the Norwegian branch had to serve prison sentences for various criminal activities, including a bank robbery. Thus, after a couple of years of activities, the first Norwegian branch of NMR largely ceased to be active (Ravndal, 2019).

It took several years before a second attempt was made to re-establish the NMR's Norwegian branch. In 2010, Haakon Forwald, mostly known as a former member of the Swedish black metal band Dissection (Lindberg, 2014), joined the Swedish branch as NMR's only Norwegian member. This followed several attempts to reach out to the defunct Norwegian branch. Forwald was soon promoted to leader of a resurrected Norwegian branch and given the task of rebuilding it. Later that year, a Norwegian version of NMR's website, Nordfront, went online, mainly containing articles from the Swedish site translated into Norwegian. However, slowly but surely, activism reports began appearing on the Norwegian website as well, usually about night-time sticker raids (Ravndal, 2019).

Save its first years, the resurrected Norwegian branch was involved in few public activities, especially. This pattern changed post-2016, and Norwegian activists started carrying out more public activities (Martinsen et al, 2017). However, NMR's Norwegian membership is much smaller than the Swedish and Finnish divisions. The Norwegian NMR also appears to be largely dependent on its Swedish mother organization. More Swedish than Norwe-

gian activists have been involved in the few public events NMR has organized in Norway (Ravndal, 2018). Still, NMR has grown, however slightly, and counts several "nests" in Norway (Lindberg, 2014).

#### **Finland**

The Finnish Resistance Movement (Suomen vastarintaliike, SVL) was founded in 2008 by Esa Henrik Holappa (Hietikko, 2016b) following approval by the NMR (Wiman & Svensson, 2018). It immediately became the most militant Finnish Nazi organization. From its inception in 2008 until Holappa stepped down in 2012, he served as the official leader of the SVL and was one of the few members who operated openly under his own name (Strømmen, 2017).

Holappa's decision to establish a Finnish branch of NMR was highly influenced by the American veteran activist Richard Scutari, who is currently serving a 60-year prison sentence for his involvement in the American terrorist organization The Order, and was pen pals with Holappa. At the age of 17, Holappa started writing letters to Scutari. Holappa and Magnus Söderman—another of Scutari's pen pals—have published their correspondences as a tribute to Scutari. (Söderman & Holappa, 2011). The book shows how Scutari put Holappa and Söderman in contact with each other, and how he advised Holappa to establish a Finnish version of NMR under the auspices of Söderman and the larger NMR (Ravndal, 2019).

When Holappa landed in trouble for crimes related to hate speech in 2008, he became increasingly convinced that he would be convicted. When his American neo-Nazi contacts heard about his problems, they encouraged him to travel to the US. In August 2008, he followed their recommendation (Strømmen, 2017). Holappa left the SVL in 2012 and has been considered by the NMR as a traitor and oath breaker (Ravndal, 2019).

During its early phase, SVL tried to keep a low profile; this changed after a stabbing at the city library in Jyväskylä in January 2013 (Lodenius, 2020). SVL

members were involved in several violent attacks in the 2010s, including several assaults on leftist politicians, and the stabbing of a security guard at a book launch event in 2013 (the book was about the Finnish extreme right) (Hietikko, 2016). In 2014, the SVL also latched onto news about a multi-ethnic, suburban gang assaulting other youth in Helsinki and organized vigilantes to patrol the city. These vigilante marches have continued sporadically throughout the country. SVL and its activists were real threats to those it sees as political opponents or unwelcome in the country—or to outsiders who just happen to be in the wrong place or have the "wrong opinions." Most violent crimes attributed to SVL members have fallen into the category of street violence (Strømmen, 2017).

SVL has several features worrying to the authorities: good organizational skills, a long-term approach to developing its activities, and an ideology that embraces violence. Like the NMR, the SVL is strictly hierarchical, with clear manuals for its activism and group structure. It is working to build a subculture through social activities intended to draw in new members, including lectures, martial arts training, sports events, forest walks, and outdoor survival training (Strømmen, 2017).

Following the refugee crisis in 2015, there had been a surge of interest in racist and xenophobic organizations in Finland. To exploit the situation and boost recruitment, SVL attempted to soften its image. Members began to call themselves nationalists and patriots; part of their work was carried out under the banner of Suomalaisapu, or Finnish Aid (Strømmen, 2017). At the same time. SVL has tried to be the gathering umbrella for various National Socialist (Hietikko, 2016a), rightwing extremist, and nationalist and racist groups in Finland. An example is the "612" nationalist torchlight procession, arranged December 6 (or "6/12"), which is the Finnish Independence Day. Despite the group's efforts to become the umbrella for all extreme right organizations in Finland, the SVL has had little success achieving this goal (Strømmen, 2017).

Moreover, there were strong internal contradictions between the old Nazi line

and those who advocate for neo-fascism (Hietikko, 2016a). Ideological differences between the NMR and SVL also exist and occasionally cause friction. While the Swedish branch is representative of an old-fashioned Hitlerian variant of neo-Nazism, the Finnish branch is more diverse. Some members support a "Third Position" neo-fascism and have contacts with the Italian movement Casa Pound (Strømmen, 2017).

Considering these schisms, SVL member Mika Ranta decided to form a separate vigilante group. Ranta is a self-declared neo-Nazi who has been convicted of violent crimes. He chose to call his organization Soldiers of Odin (SOO) (Rosendahl & Forsell, 2016). Despite some differences, SOO is modelled on the SVL, and Ranta sought SVL's permission to from SOO. Lately, the SVL and SOO have openly referenced each other (Strømmen, 2017).

While Finnish authorities have kept the SVL under close watch for years, pressure to take legal action against the group began to mount in late 2016 after one of its members assaulted and seriously injured a passer-by in Helsinki. The victim died a week later. Although the assailant was ultimately found guilty of aggravated assault with a racist motive instead of homicide, Finland's National Police Board sued the SVL in March 2017, on the grounds that the group contravened Finnish association law. The SVL was forbidden to operate in Finland, but the verdict did not cover every single association registered as members of the NMR. The group's charity organization, Suomalaisapu (Finn Aid), remains active and its party project, Kansan Yhtenäisyys (The People's Unity), was left similarly untouched by the ban (Sallamaa & Kotonen, 2020).

The ban came into effect at the end of November 2018. At the end of 2019, Finnish law enforcement agencies also conducted an investigation into information that the SVL continued its activity under the pseudonym Kohti vaputta! (Towards Freedom!) (Teivainen, 2019). Kohti Vapautta! has arranged street activism, training sessions and other similar activities.

Eventually, the Supreme Court of Finland issued a ban on the SVL on Septem-

ber 22, 2020. The historic decision follows the case that had been ongoing for several years. The Court decreed that the SVL and Pohjoinen Perinne ry (Northern Tradition), a registered association facilitating the group's activities, were to be disbanded as they contravene Finnish association law. The verdict brought a close to nearly three years of legal deliberations and represents the first time since 1977 that an extreme right-wing group has been disbanded in Finland by court order (Sallamaa & Kotonen, 2020).

#### Denmark & Iceland

Since 2007, the SMR/NMR has developed its contacts with the Danish National Socialist Movement (DNSB). In the same year, NMR representatives participated in a DNSB demonstration in Kolding in memory of Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess, where participants attacked counter-protesters. In 2013, Henrik Jarsbo, a former member of the DNSP (Lindberg, 2013), attempted to found a Danish branch of SMR/NMR, and Nordfront.dk was launched in July of the same year (Lodenius, 2020). Despite the website becoming the most developed of the non-Swedish Nordfront sites, the Danish NMR-branch soon became inactive (Rayndal, 2019); in 2016, the website was shut down (Kimmel, 2007: 206). Other groups with similar profiles are currently active in Denmark, most notably Denmark's National Front (Ravndal, 2018).

In 2017, after consulting with NMR, a new organizational structure was formed in Denmark and divided into three nests. The new leader of the Danish NMR was Martin Durvad. The organization is better known as Nordfront. In the autumn of 2019, a coordinated action was taken against 84 Jewish cemeteries, which were desecrated with green paint. One of Nordfront's members was arrested on suspicion of involvement in the act. The Danish NMR has about 50 members, with around 20 "hardcore" activists. Tommy Olsen assumed leadership after Forwald left to join Klas Lund's Nordic Strength in 2019 (Lodenius, 2020; Nordisk Styrke, 2019).

Since 2017, NMR also has a branch and

a website, nordurvigi.is, in Iceland. Led by Ríkharður Leó Magnússon, NMR Iceland held its first demonstration in Reykjavik in September 2019.

# NMR Is Pro-violence and Uncompromising

NMR is pro-violence and uncompromising (Lodenius, 2020). In addition to spreading their political agenda, NMR members have used different kinds of violence, threats, and harassment to hinder individuals from participating in political debates and meetings (Swedish Security Service, 2018). While the NMR claims to resort to violence only in self-defence. both its national socialist ideology and its blood-stained history say otherwise (Stormark, 2017). Moreover, according to the organization's Handbook for Activists, "The NMR is not pacifist. We are aware that we can only win through physical struggle and that ideas and beautiful ideals mean nothing and can never blossom if these ideas lack aggressive fanatical champions" (Delin & Carlsson, 2017; Lodenius, 2020: 115).

SMR/NMR's former ideologue, Magnus Söderman, also highlighted David Lane's clarification in his book Revolution: "You adults know very well that war is the only answer. ZOG's (a term for Jews) henchmen will not voluntarily relinquish power. ... because, they know that we will execute them for breaking the highest law of nature" (Söderman, 2007)." It is not a secret that the NMR is willing to use physical force to achieve a racially pure Nordic nation. The group makes no effort to distance itself from the use of violence. Instead, its members actively speak and write about the race war that, in their minds, is inevitable. Thus, NMR has been specialising in pushing the limits of democracy and the rule of law through harassment, threats, and violence against opponents and the police (Bjørgo & Ravndal, 2018).

In order to analyse the contents and the various attacks perpetuated by the NMR, it is important to define NMR as a terrorist organization. It is a militant group with

a hierarchical structure of nests, some of which consist of "combat groups" (Ravndal, 2019: 23). The groups use militaristic ways of training (Hellenstierna, 2019). Violent confrontation is something the activists train for regularly—for example in the form of single combat, where the winner is whoever is able to strike a deadly blow with a replica knife. But this is not just a game (Bjørgo & Ravndal, 2018). In Finland, one person who expressed opposition to the NMR was brutally assaulted and died a week later of complications that, to all appearances, resulted from the attack (Yle, 2016).

To date, the NMR—which is still a legal organization in Sweden—is generally not dangerous, assuming you don't oppose them. However, should you be tempted to confront them, stand in their way, or refuse to let yourself be harassed, you are no longer safe. During several of the NMR's demonstrations, there have been violent clashes between NMR activists and the police. One of these examples is a demonstration that occurred outside of a Book Fair in Gothenburg in 2017. NMR has also repeatedly clashed with civilians. They actively seek out these violent engagements to foster and attract internal group cohesion (Bjørgo & Ravndal, 2018).

Politicians that step out of line and criticize the movement are quickly confronted by the NMR's members. These intimidation tactics have also consisted of NMR activists following politicians to their parked cars. Council workers and opponents of the movement have also received subtle threats such as "Nice house you got there..." Some have also found stickers on their front doors or on the streetlamps outside their homes. These stickers feature a gallows with the slogan, "Reserved for traitors of the people." By using such methods, the NMR spreads fear and gains influence far beyond its extremely limited public support (Bjørgo, Ravndal, 2017).

From time to time, NMR members have been involved in illegal activities, including violent attacks using weapons such as knives and explosives. Such activities are dismissed by the NMR leadership as something these activists have carried out on their own initiative. Interestingly, after some of these illegal actions, the NMR

receives "exclusive" interviews from members of the self-titled "action groups" that claim to be behind them. One could speculate that the existence of such clandestine "action groups" may serve as a tool for the NMR to carry out illegal activities without compromising the organization (Bjørgo, Ravndal, 2017).

Between the 2014 and 2018 elections, NMR perpetrated high levels of violence across Scandinavia. As mentioned, in Finland, a young man was beaten to death by NMR members. The Swedish branch of NMR also displayed violent tendencies. In 2013, approximately 30 NMR members attacked an anti-racist demonstration in Kärrtorp Stockholm (Vergara, 2013). During 2016 and 2017 several members of NMR were convicted of bombings in Gothenburg. In the north of Sweden, in Umeå, the Jewish association had to close down due to threats and harassment (Expo NMR, 2019).

Despite its denials, NMR has been part of a Swedish far right that produced more right-wing terrorism and violence (RTV) between 1990 and 2015 than Denmark, Finland, and Norway combined. Zooming in on the Nordic countries, the RTV dataset covers 141 events. The most frequently targeted victims are immigrants (70 events), leftists (38 events), and homosexuals (9 events). Other target groups include government representatives, police, Muslims, Jews, Gypsies/Roma, the homeless, and media institutions (Ravndal, 2018). Moreover, Expo has identified 111 people who for the first time participated in NMR activism in 2017. Of these, 64 already have a background in the racial ideological environment (Dalsbro et al, 2018). Expo has also mapped 159 of the most active members of the NMR and, in 2015 alone, just over a quarter were convicted of violent or gun crimes (Dalsbro & Färnbo, 2016). If all crimes are included, one-third (33 percent) were convicted or prosecuted for some form of crime. In total, more than half (56 percent) of the activists have been convicted of some form of crime. In almost a quarter of the cases, the penalty was imprisonment, which indicates that they were serious crimes. For a period, the NMR sold knives emblazoned with the slogan, "The struggle requires more than just words" (Dalsbro &

Färnbo, 2016; Pascalidou, 2017).

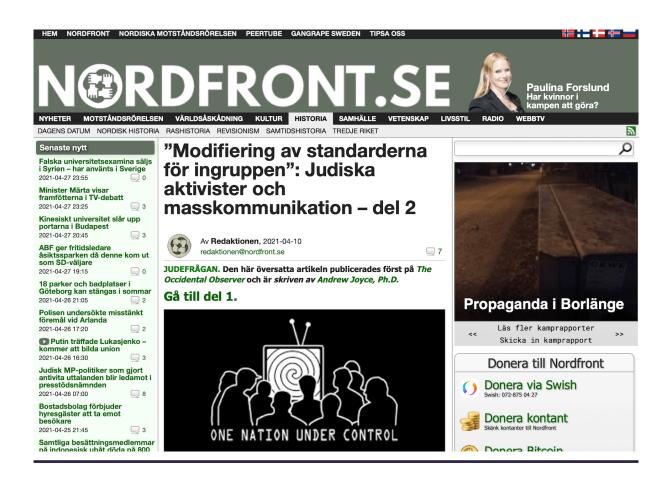
In 2018, Swedish Radio also mapped 178 people who were judged to be the most active in NMR (Lodenius, 2020) and at least 90 of them were convicted of crimes—and about one in four were convicted of violent crimes such as murder, assault, or violent riot (Jönsson, 2018). The year before, the Aftonbladet and Svenska Dagbladet newspapers examined 84 NMR members, and the results showed that 58 of them were convicted of crimes (Folkö & Leman, 2019). According to another investigation, of NMR's approximately 160 Swedish members, several have been convicted of crimes, including bombings, aggravated weapons offenses, aggravated violent crimes, and incitement against ethnic groups (Wierup, 2020).

The same pattern is evident in NMR's leadership. Its first leader, Klas Lund, was convicted of murder in 1987, and for aggravated robbery in the early 1990s (Lodenius, 2020). Since September 2015, the NMR has been led by Simon Lindberg, who was convicted of vandalism, threats, and aiding and abetting assault. Lindberg is joined by a leadership group that includes Emil Hagberg, Fredrik Vejdeland and Per Öberg. While Vejdeland has been convicted of hate speech-related crimes, Hagberg was also convicted on weapons-related charges and for rioting (Baas, 2015).

With regard to any terrorist threats from NMR, the Security Police (Säpo) stated that NMR has a large capacity for violence. Säpo also stated that "our assessment is that this is an organization that has the ability to commit serious crimes that could be classified as a terrorist attack" (Jönsson, 2018a). Since NMR has violent tendencies, it has been classified by Säpo as the second biggest threat in Sweden after Islamist terrorism. Säpo and The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) use the term White Power to describe groups like NMR (Blomgren, 2020).

As previously mentioned, in 2019, several core members of NMR decided to leave and create Nordic Strength (NS) which is considered to be more violent. However, there has been no evidence of an escala-

tion of violence since the split (Expo Annual Report, 2019).



#### Another Battlefield for the NMR: the Media, Internet & Social Media

In 2000, SMR/NMR established a web portal called patriot.nu (Vejdeland, 2012) which provided various magazines, an online store with publications and white power music, and more. In the early 2000s, the SMR also printed newspapers Folktribunen and Nationellt Motstand. With the development of social media, SMR's propaganda strategy and range of channels changed. The most influential online magazine Nordfront, NMR's digital communication channel (Vejdeland, 2012), was started in 2011. Between October 2016 and December 2018, NMR launched a number of new media and produced extensive online content in a strategic move running up to the general elections in September 2018 (Askanius, 2021a).

The NMR also established its own pub-

lishing house and bookstore, originally called Nationellt Motstånd förlag, but later changing its name to Nordfront förlag. Based in the small rural village of Grängesberg, it sells various National Socialist and antisemitic literature via its online bookstore, including a Swedish translation of The Turner Diaries, plus books by Hermann Göring and Joseph Goebbels, and a collection of letters written by Richard Scutari, member of the US white supremacist terrorist group The Order. (Strømmen, 2017). In addition to Nordfront, NMR produces a whole battery of different radio and web TV initiatives (Sundkvist, 2017).

NMR has developed its presence on the Internet and greatly increased its involvement on social media (Blomberg & Stier, 2019); today, the organization has almost 20 different podcasts and TV channels. The purpose of this has been to reach out politically to normalize the organization and to project its reputation internationally. Through such outreach, NMR hopes to create closer relationships within the Nordic region and make contact with like-minded people across the world (Ranstorp & Ahlin, 2020: 7). In order to

normalise National Socialism, NMR increasingly seeks to appeal to an audience beyond their own core members. Part of this strategy involves a shift in the tone of their online content—from militant propaganda to softer, less orchestrated and rehearsed political rhetoric packaged and presented in the form of infotainment and cultural content (Askanius, 2021a).

Nevertheless, images of violence and violent rhetoric have always been an intrinsic part of NMR's propaganda and key to telling the story of being at war with both Swedish "traitors" and "racial strangers." Increasingly, however, NMR's media narratives are saturated by other, less explicitly political and militant registers in which violence, violent rhetoric, and openly racist hate speech reside in the background to give way to "lighter," more civil discourse and seemingly more harmless forms of propaganda. This is particularly present and potent in NMR's cultural productions and online entertainment, which includes. for example, television and talk shows, music videos, memes, poems, and podcasts intended to amuse and entertain (Askanius, 2021b).

In the online universe, NMR mixes the extreme with the mainstream, the mundane and ordinary with the spectacular and provocative, and the serious with the silly. In this manner, NMR seeks to soften, trivialise, and normalise neo-Nazi discourse using the power and appeal of culture and entertainment (Askanius, 2021). Discourse in these spaces represents what Blee (2007: 15) has referred to as "a sanitized version of Nazism." NMR's content has been polished and tailored to dodge allegations of illegal hate speech, and its shows are carefully edited to avoid being censored and removed (Askanius, 2019). However, images of violent confrontations between police and activists, street fights, hate speech, rallies, uniformed men marching in line, combat training, white-pride music, and beatings of "racial strangers" to the sound of the Waffen SS Choir are also present in the growing repertoire of online media produced by and for the NMR (Expo, 2018, 2020; Mattsson, 2018).

The use of extremist discourse, which characterizes the online conversations be-

tween members and sympathizers, comprises narratives about personal experiences, rumours of criminal refugees (often accused of rape), or claims that refugees "do not belong here." These conversations "construct them as others" (Ekman, 2018; Kreis, 2017). These discursive strategies do not merely justify and legitimatize the exclusion of or racism toward these "others," but create a sense of "we-ness" and identity among members and sympathizers as well as the movement they represent (Blomberg & Stier, 2019; Campbell, 2006; Ekman, 2018; Kreis, 2017; Wodak & Reisigl, 2015).

With Simon Lindberg as leader of the NMR, the organization has developed its propaganda network and massively developed its various media channels on social media. In a very short time, 19 Swedish-language podcasts and web TV channels were created alongside Radio Nordfront, Radio Regeringen, the English-language Nordic Frontier, the activist podcast More Than Words (Saxlind, 2018), Ledarperspektiv (ideological focus), Radio Ludvika, Radio Kungälv. Some of the TV content includes Studio Nordfront, Studio Bothnia, Studio Kungälv, Studio Skåne, NTV Live and Norwegian Frontlinjen and Finnish Studio 204 (Lindberg, 2018). According to Lindberg, the ambition is to create more radio and TV broadcasts that will be broadcast around the clock (Lodenius, 2020), creating a "Nordic unity mindset." This initiative aims to eventually broadcast in all the Nordic languages (Nordisk Radio, ...)

The NMR's website appears to have a considerable readership—between 300,000 and 400,000 unique visitors per month. To compensate for their lack of numbers, one important tactic is therefore to carry out spectacular stunts to draw the public eye, often aiming at national media coverage, and then spreading footage and videos from these stunts through the internet and social media, allowing NMR to reach an even larger audience (Ravndal, 2019).

#### CONCLUSION

The 2018 general election results in Sweden have shown that the NMR should not be exaggerated, despite concerns about it as a neo-Nazi extremist violent organisation. The organization is still relatively small. Despite its small size, one shouldn't ignore the threats the NMR poses. The party's major investment before the 2018 election resulted in only 2,106 votes in the parliamentary election (0.03%). The result was a great disappointment for the NMR; following this failure, the party's seems to have hosted fewer events and engaged in fewer physical activities. Whether this is a temporary decline or not is difficult to assess, but according to the NMR's strategic plan, the organization is investing in increasing its local influence, its geographical spread, the number of political seats at all levels, and its channels on social media and international contacts (Ranstorp & Ahlin, 2020: 7). According to observers, there is a low probability that NMR as an organization will develop in a more violent direction. Nevertheless, Sweden is currently following Finland's footsteps and started a government investigation regarding a potential ban of the organisation (Regeringskansliet, 2019; Ranstorp & Ahlin, 2020: 480; Directive, 2019: 39).

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