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## Proscribing the Nordic Resistance Movement in Finland: Analyzing the Process and its Outcome

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### **Abstract**

The Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) was banned in Finland in 2020 after a court process lasting more than two and half years. This article details how effective the ban has been and how the organization has adapted to the ban, both during the process and after the verdict. The NRM has followed strategies similar to previous proscription cases, especially National Action in the UK in 2016, with whom NRM members discussed and shared experiences before the banning process began. Adaptation has meant new organizational forms and the founding of new associations. Before the ban, some commentators argued that it would only radicalize NRM members and that they might move to clandestine actions. Based on court records, police investigation files, and materials gathered from registries for trade and associations, this article covers these and other concerns as well as explores whether the goals set for the ban by the authorities have been realized. Along with perspectives on radicalization and adaptation within and around the NRM, a short analysis of the financial activities of the NRM before and after the ban has also been conducted.

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### **Introduction**

The Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM) is a pan-Nordic neo-Nazi movement with a history of activism in all the Nordic countries. The Finnish chapter of the movement was founded in 2008. In 2016, the Finnish security police described the NRM as a revolutionary and militant organization posing the most serious threat of extreme right organizations in Finland. At that time, they had around 70 active and 200 supporting members (Suojelupoliisi 2016). The average age of the members was around 30 years and 85 percent were male. Although the group has been described as violent, security police estimated that their violence was mostly

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reactive by nature, targeting people protesting against them, but often stretching the concept of self-defence (Suojelupoliisi 2017; cf. NRM 2004; Bjørge and Ravndal 2020).

The Nordic Resistance Movement was banned in Finland by Supreme Court decision in 2020. The banning process started in March 2017, when the National Police Board sued the NRM on grounds of the group breaching the Associations Act (503/1989), which stipulates that an association may be banned if it acts “against law or good practice”. The Birkaland District Court decided in favor of the National Police Board in November 2017 with the Turku Court of Appeals passing a similar verdict in September 2018. While the Supreme Court decided to process the NRM’s appeal in March 2019, it also issued a temporary ban on the organization. This ban became permanent with the court’s decision on 22nd September 2020 (Sallamaa and Kotonen 2020a) but did not cover the NRM’s charity organization, Suomalaisapu (Finn Aid), which was only registered after the start of the banning process and is still active. This type of case is very rare in Finland; the last time an association was proscribed in Finland was 1977, when several associations of national socialist Pekka Siitoin were banned (Kotonen 2018).

Bans of extreme right organizations are often reactive (Zeller 2020; Gerlach 2013; see also Macklin 2019; cf. Bleich and Lambert 2013) following violent outbreaks. The NRM ban in Finland was likewise preceded by a violent event which gained a lot of publicity, after which pressure to ban the movement increased. The key event in this case was a brutal assault in Helsinki in the context of an NRM event and the fact that the attacker was a longstanding activist of the movement. The victim of the attack died a few days later and a large demonstration was organized in Helsinki. Politicians, as well as some authorities, called for the NRM to be banned, pointing specifically to the long history of violent attacks by the organization. In the court rulings, the use or legitimization of violence, and especially the aforementioned assault case, was one of the key elements used to justify the decision.

This article will address concerns raised against the NRM during the court process which have also been discussed in previous studies: the possible violent radicalization of the movement members due to repression, the adaptation and reorganizing to avoid future bans, and the reactions and changes within the far-right scene in general caused by the ban

(Minkenberg 2006; Botsch et. al. 2013). Besides these aspects, this article also briefly explores the financial consequences of the ban.

Considering the outcome of the process, the possible deradicalization effects will also be discussed along with an empirical analysis. The deradicalization effects, caused by the government repressions either at the individual or collective level (Koehler 2017, 28), are, however, not easy to estimate. In literature on the topic of banning parties or organizations, the deradicalization aspect is mostly absent. Rather than discussing deradicalization, scholars have often referred to backfire mechanisms leading to increased collective radicalization (Minkenberg 2006; Gerlach 2013). Nevertheless, directly or indirectly affecting push and pull factors which may lead to deradicalization (Koehler 2017, 15), one could assume some aspects of the bans are also relevant in this sense. Proscription can be seen as an external event which changes the environment of the movement and as such can also “assist in creating a cognitive opening for alternatives” (Koehler 2017, 81). Regarding the outcome of the process, two different aspects must also be considered: the behavioral changes and the ideological changes (ibid., 83).

### **Previous studies on association bans and their effects**

Although associations are banned more often in Germany in particular, previous studies have largely focused on party bans because of their arguably broader consequences on the political system (Brieger 2018, 55; see also Bleich and Lambert 2013). The study of the contemporary far right, as has been pointed out by Castelli Gattinara (2020, 321), is also a “predominantly party-centred discipline”. Especially the attempts to proscribe the National Democratic Party (NPD) in Germany have been analysed in several studies (see e.g., Meier 2015; Leggewie & Meier 2002).

The associations have, however, been the focus in some German studies as well (see e.g., Gerlach 2013; Gerlach 2007; Botsch et al. 2013; Brieger 2018; Laue 2009). It is notable that the party bans may also affect the associations sector. A study by Julia Gerlach (2007) focuses on the effects of the association bans in Germany on the party sector, arguing that the banning of the associations in the 1990s benefited the growth of the far-right NPD and

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radicalized the party as it had been more open to accepting neo-Nazi actors among its ranks. During the late 1990s, the party almost doubled its number of members (ibid., 245).

Recently, the proscription of National Action in the UK in 2016 has raised scholarly attention, with studies ranging from a more speculative exploration right after the ban (Allen 2017) to more detailed empirical analyses conducted at a later phase (see e.g., Macklin 2019; Macklin 2020; Allen 2019). As will be discussed in more detail below, these studies are especially relevant for this analysis as well, not least because they follow the banning of a single far-right group in detail.

Some studies simultaneously address both forms of bans (see e.g., Minkenberg 2006; Pedahzur 2001), focusing in general on state repressions targeting far-right organizations or racists groups in several countries and providing more contextual analyses regarding the processes as well. Parties are often subject to different legislation than associations, as is the case, for example, in Germany (Michael and Minkenberg 2007) and therefore, the processes and general dynamics may also differ depending on whether parties or associations are banned. According to Bleich and Lambert (2013, 124), “when a government dismantles a racist group, it limits important freedoms, but when it bans a political party, it strikes at the foundations of democracy itself”. Finnish law does not however differentiate between parties and associations in this respect; a party may be banned via banning the association it was founded upon (see Finnish Associations Act 503/1989; Act on Political Parties 10/1969, 6§).

Whether bans are effective or not is difficult to prove. Botsch, Kopke and Virchow (2013, 274, cf. also Minkenberg 2006) go as far as claiming that “there is no way empirically to confirm or refute the frequently-expressed opinion that bans are legally ineffective and unimplementable in a regulative context.” Despite this reservation, they seem to agree that the effects still could be estimated to some extent. Banning organizations, which is a focus of this article, is of course only one tool for tackling extremism and there are “other means of repression” in repertoires, which are, according to Michael Minkenberg (2006, 26), actually “applied on a more regular basis and that they, too, are deemed legitimate and effective” (see also Husbands 2002). Furthermore, the focus on organizations is nowadays perhaps misleading. “The responses need to take into account that the most severe terrorist threats from the extreme right do not come from traditional organisations” but increasingly “from

individuals operating alone, finding their ideological justifications, tactical inspiration, and social support in extremist communities online” (Bjørge and Ravndal 2019; cf. also Suojelupoliisi 2021).

In comparison, for example with Germany, the tradition of “militant democracy” is not as strong in Finland and a more integrative approach has been preferred (see Minkenberg 2006, 32; cf. Bourne and Bértoa 2017; Downs 2012; Capoccia 2001) even though “self-defence of democracy” as a principle was introduced in Finland already in the 1930s (Kekkonen 1934; on the models of democratic self-defence, see also Malkopoulou and Norman 2018). Unlike several other countries such as Germany, Austria and Italy (Backes 2019), in Finland, banning or repressing extremism is not included in the constitution either, although in the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty, Finland committed to “dissolving all organizations of a fascist-type” and not permitting “in the future the existence and activities of organizations of that nature which have as their aim denial to the people of their democratic rights” (Kotonen 2020b). The treaty was still relevant when extreme right groups were banned in 1977 (Sisäministeriö 1977) but was not even mentioned when proscribing the NRM. Instead, the courts relied on the European Convention on Human Rights, among others, in their judgements.

This article will not focus on the legal process itself or on the legal prerequisites for banning the NRM, which have been outlined to some extent previously (see e.g., Meri and Muukkonen 2020; Sallamaa and Kotonen 2020a), but on its consequences for the organization and the extreme right scene in general. The legal ramifications do, however, obviously affect how the banned movement reacts to the banning process and how they act after the ban is ordered. To further explore this point, a short comparison between the cases against the NRM and National Action in the UK is presented.

### **Research data and methods**

Some court processes concerning the possible illegal continuation of NRM activities are still pending and therefore, not all relevant records are available. Nevertheless, more than one year after the ban, the most relevant changes or effects have most likely already taken place,

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especially considering that the NRM started to adjust to the ban a long time before it was confirmed by the Supreme Court.

In this article, the banning process and its effects will be analysed empirically, primarily based on court records, police investigation files, media accounts and records of the Finnish registers of associations and trade. The court files and police investigation files are free to access by order from the authorities in Finland and do not require a research permit. The Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999) stipulates, however, that the information is provided in such format that sensitive data, including information on health or annual income, is masked. As per the Data Protection Act (1050/2018), non-sensitive personal data may be processed if it is “necessary for scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes and it is proportionate to the aim of public interest pursued”.

Limited online observations were also conducted of public webpages and social media pages of extreme right groups and members during the court process. The observations were conducted during critical events in the process, such as raising charges and court judgements. Along with media accounts, the observation process has also benefitted data gathering on public records, as online statements and postings may give leads to new projects former NRM members have started or joined. Typically, the new NRM-related projects were announced and marketed on their own webpages, and the link to the NRM was further confirmed by analysing the related public records, such as the register of associations. As in the case of police and court records, the ethical guidelines by the Data Protection Ombudsman require that the data has been stored and handled in anonymized format. In this case, the focus has been on organizations and their leading members, not on individual, rank-and-file members, and no sensitive personal data has been collected. The analysis of public sources and webpages and social media postings has been conducted thematically, focusing on actions and statements reflecting attitudes and reactions to the ban or anticipating the ban.

### **Proscribing National Action as a benchmark case?**

In the UK, National Action (NA) was banned as a terrorist organization (Allen 2017) and attempts to continue its activities have been sanctioned accordingly. Also, unlike in Finland,

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membership itself may constitute a crime (Macklin 2019). In Finland, the ban of the NRM was based on the Associations Act and breaching the ban would lead only to fines.

The actual banning processes in the UK and Finland were also quite different. NA was banned by an order from the Home Secretary which came into force four days after it was put to parliament (Home Office 2016), whereas court process against the NRM lasted two and half years. The long process gave the members time to prepare for the ban and experiences from the NA case possibly helped them as the organizations were quite closely linked (see Kotonen 2020a). It is known that the NRM members chatted about the prospect of activism after the ban on the Iron March Forum (West, Lång and Jansson 2020), where NA leader Benjamin Raymond acted as an administrator (Keen 2019) and one Finnish NRM member held a position as the head moderator (Kotonen 2020a). One NRM member had also previously moved to the UK and joined NA, for which he was later convicted (Macklin 2019).

There is also a certain chronological overlap between the two cases. Demands for banning the NRM were made publicly, for example by a representative of the Finnish Security Police (Kettunen 2016) when the proscription of National Action was still being debated in the UK parliament. The Finnish National Police Board announced that it would start the process against the NRM on 22nd December 2016, less than a week after the ban on NA (Passi 2016).

Macklin (2018, 110) makes an interesting argument about the necessity of the NA ban, writing that “even without the ban, which forced NA activists to start from scratch organizationally, legal action had already degraded its broader activist base”. This was clearly not the case in Finland, although a few individual members were waiting for the prosecution when the banning process started. Most of the leading members have not been convicted after the ban either and the criminal law approach would have thus not dissolved the NRM, as was the case, for example, with the Golden Dawn (cf. Malkopoulou 2021). The courts, however, ruled during the proscribing process that the NRM acted substantially against the law – as an association – when, for example, publishing inciting material (Meri and Muukkonen 2020).

Analyzing National Action in the UK soon after the ban, Chris Allen argued that the ban will be more or less symbolic (cf. also Gerlach 2013) and “will ban little more than its mere name”, noting also that the ban is easy to work around. The ban could also “make the



far-right in all its manifestations ever more appealing”. Regarding effects on the far right in general, Allen anticipates it “will become increasingly autonomous, connected and organised online in preference to any offline equivalent”. A shift to online environments and the lack of street activism is also evident in Finland, although this could also be related to Covid-19.

Two years later however, Allen (2019) noted that there was little evidence that the ban would have increased the appeal of the far right, and he concluded that the “proscription convictions have caused some – potentially significant – damage to the group, its infrastructure and importantly, its ability to function”. Regarding the group’s legacy, Allen agrees with Macklin (2019) in that it may last more at the transnational level, as it had close contacts with, for example, the NRM in Finland, with mutual displays of support (see also Kotonen 2020a).

Similar concerns about the effectiveness of the ban were also raised in Finland after the process against the NRM started and as will be shown below, some fears became reality in the NRM case. This is not to say that the process did not achieve some of its goals.

### **Adaptation and fragmentation: new associations and new organizational forms**

Repressive measures may start a process that Michael Minkenberg (2006, 39) has called “ritualized chain reaction”, meaning that targeted organizations adapt to new situations and measures become increasingly ineffective. In the context of the bans, a similar kind of adaptation has happened in Finland as well. Before the lawsuit was filed in 2017, the chair of the NRM in Finland emphasized that they had thought out different strategies beforehand and had “a plan b, a plan c, and a plan d” (Nordfront 2017). The NRM has been succeeded by a series of new associations, with former NRM activists continuously founding new ones for different purposes.

The first follow up group, Kohti Vapautta! (Towards Freedom!), founded in spring 2019 after a temporary ban of the NRM, has already been charged for illegally continuing the NRM’s activities. According to the police, NRM and Kohti Vapautta! “have the same active members, same visual image and they are, based on shared ideology, seeking the same goals using the same slogans. Common features may also be found from their webpages...” which

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“...publish the same material” (Helsinki Police Station 2019). Kohti Vapautta! has been silent since December 2020 and new groups, such as Pohjanvartio (Northern Guard), with a slightly different profile, have already been founded. Currently, nine members of Kohti Vapautta! are awaiting trial for illegally continuing the activities of a terminated association (Gustafsson 2021). Some of the accused are previously known from their activism in the NRM.

At the same time as Kohti Vapautta!, the former leader of the NRM in Finland founded an association called Pohjoismaiset kansallissosialistit (Nordic National Socialists). This was, however, not accepted by the Finnish Register of Associations (2021a) and the rules and name of the association had to be changed. After several rounds of corrections, the association was finally accepted into the registry in January 2020 with a slightly modified name Pohjoismaiset Kansansosialistit (Nordic People’s Socialists). The process seemingly irritated NRM members, as it was also mentioned by Swedish NRM leader Simon Lindberg in Helsinki in his Independence Day speech in December 2019. Along with these new groups, new associations were also founded for financial purposes, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

In early 2020, a separate organization was founded for nationalist and national socialist women which took the name Berkano (Vkontakte 8.3.2020), and, although it does not appear to have many public activities, the group has garnered just over 100 members in their private Facebook group. Continuing their previous collaboration, the new women’s organization seems to be a joint project by Kohti Vapautta! and the Soldiers of Odin (see Soldiers of Odin at Vkontakte 13.3.2020). The NRM also used to have a few female activists, although not in a separate organization and they mostly followed traditional gender roles. Some female Finnish NRM members had, however, simultaneously acted in leading positions within the Women for Aryan Unity, an international female-only white supremacist group (see ADL, n.d.).

After the ban, a youth organization was also founded in 2019 which was aimed at 13–25 years old national socialists and had members who were previously active in NRM among their ranks. The youth group, Kansallissosialistinuoret (National Socialist Youth), shared some very radical propaganda on their now defunct website, including books published by the NRM and material by so-called accelerationist groups and ecofascists, along with “The

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Turner Diaries” and the manifesto of New Zealand terrorist Brenton Tarrant (Kansallissosialistinuoret 2020a). A similar youth group is still active on Telegram. The group emphasized that they are not a membership organization but a network. After their first public appearance, a counterdemonstration against left-wing activists in Turku in 2019, the group claimed that the “political police” took their banderols, arrested them, and made a child welfare notification to the social welfare authorities (Kansallissosialistinuoret 2020b).

Along with the women’s group and youth organization, there have been projects linked to the NRM on a more general level. These include, for example, the group Veren Laki (Law of the Blood) which practices martial arts (Sallamaa and Kotonen 2020b). Most such projects, often only having a Telegram group, have been rather clandestine by nature. A curious case is Suomalaisapu (Finnish Register of Associations 2019), which was originally a part of the NRM, founded in 2013 as an internal activist group for animal welfare (Kansallinen Vastarinta 2013) and which has since acted as a charity organization as well as a front for NRM street patrols. The organization was not banned and is still active and led by former NRM activists, now seemingly focusing only on charity work, although “security patrols” are also mentioned in their official rules. The inspiration for charity work came from Golden Dawn, as well as from CasaPound, and their logo also bears some striking similarities to the logo of the CasaPound volunteer organization ONLUS Solidarité-Identites (Kotonen 2020a).

Although former NRM members in Finland currently act in several different groups, it is not clear how much the repression contributed to this or how much of it is strategic choice. Discussion on the new website, Partisaani, which visually and content-wise follows the format of NRM publications, shows that, although possibly still in development, the decentralized structure could be a strategic choice (Partisaani 2021a; cf. also Botsch et al. 2013, 270–271). As a possible indication of a new strategy, another new group, Pohjanvartio (2021), founded in spring 2021, emphasizes a loose network-type of organizing based on independent, local activist groups, as well as “street-level metapolitics”. Pohjanvartio appears both visually and in their forms of activism very similar to the NRM, but they have chosen a more clandestine approach than previous groups. The activists do not show their names or faces and their street activism only consists of spreading propaganda posters and stickers.

Although Pohjanvartio has not officially declared itself to be a national socialist group, their activism has been presented, among others, on the NRM web pages (NRM 2021).

It is worth emphasizing that the NRM in Finland has also had previous sub-projects or splits, especially when under external pressure and decentralization is thus not necessarily a new idea. This was notably visible after a riot in Jyväskylä in 2015 during which the police detained 30 NRM members or supporters and arrested 22 of them (Jyväskylä Police Station 2016). After these events, the NRM leader stepped down, the group leader of the Turku chapter left the movement and focused on building his own group Ukonvasama (Kotonen 2019) and some other members directed their focus towards international activism, such as the Solidarity Front for Kosovo (see Kotonen 2020a).

The ban has, unsurprisingly, affected transnational collaboration too. It is, however, notable that links to foreign organizations still exist, at least on individual levels and sometimes former Finnish NRM members also attend events abroad. Simultaneous Kristallnacht anniversary attacks in November 2019 in all the Nordic countries against synagogues and Jewish cemeteries have been, as some sources suggest, coordinated by the NRM (Sisäministeriö 2020b, 32; Kotonen 2020a, 67). Currently, one former NRM member is awaiting trial suspected of an attack in January 2020 in which a synagogue in Turku was vandalized (Piippo 2021).

The ban has deprived the group of their logos and symbols and creating a new brand has been a difficult task. Also notable in this respect is that the NRM is very much present in Finnish media discussions as a point of reference and the background in the movement is something journalists still find newsworthy and, to some extent, stigmatizing (see e.g., Reinboth 2021; Lindholm 2021). New organizations also try to link themselves to the NRM via similar symbols and colours, which also shows the importance of the brand.

### **Effects of the ban on financial activities**

The banning processes in Finland do not enable household searches and therefore, unlike for example in Germany, have less relevance for gathering intelligence (cf. Laumond 2020, 208; German Associations Act 1964 § 4). Despite the limitations, the court process against the

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NRM has, for example, produced interesting insights on financial aspects of the movement, which will enable estimations of the potential losses and harm caused to the movement by the ban.

The web shop and other financial activities of the NRM in Finland were managed by the registered association Pohjoinen Perinne (Northern Heritage), founded in 2010, which also supported the NRM charity organization Suomalaisapu and published the magazine Magneettimedia. The board of the association was comprised of leading NRM members. The court considered the association an essential part of the NRM and it was therefore also dissolved and its funds frozen.

The main source of income for the NRM was their web shop, but books and other items published by the NRM were also sold in a few traditional physical stores and at concerts (Kotonen 2020a). In some cases, funds were also collected to support their jailed activists. Apparently, record sales also provided some income for the movement (*ibid.*), although the NRM web shop never sold far-right music and focused on other items.

The balance sheet and income statement of Pohjoinen Perinne were presented as evidence in court by the NRM members. They claimed the documents proved that Pohjoinen Perinne was independent of NRM, an explanation which the court did not accept. According to the court, the funds of the association were used for NRM activities. The income statement showed that gross sales of products, especially books and clothing, amounted to over 10 000 euros in 2014 (Turku Court of Appeals 2018). Alongside selling products, additional income was generated from fundraising and membership fees (see also Kotonen 2020a, 62–63). In some years, the donations played a very substantial role and even surpassed sales from the web shop in 2015. Donations were also basically cost-free, making them especially important. It is therefore no surprise to see NRM activists engage in product sales and creating a Bitcoin account for anonymous donations as soon as possible after the ban.

Although the Finnish NRM's follow-up organization Kohti Vapautta! never established its own web shop, they too accepted donations in Bitcoin and Monero. These offered practical benefits for the organization as collecting donations in virtual currencies was not regulated by laws on fundraising until March 2020 (Kohti Vapautta 2019a; cf. Finnish Fundraising Act 863/2019; Partisaani 2021b).

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A registered background association called Kansallinen Kehitys (National Progress) was founded in 2020 by three former NRM activists (Finnish Register of Associations 2021b) to manage the funds gathered via selling old NRM books and other items. The association has also published some new books or reprints, which have been sold at far-right events and concerts and also at some mainstream bookstores.

A new web shop, No Compromise Clothing, selling typical white power labels, was registered in February 2020 with a well-known NRM member as a registered sole trader (Finnish Trade Register 2020). According to the Finnish trade register, it was terminated later in 2020. The web shop itself is, however, still active online, likely under some new association.

As per the Finnish Associations Act (8§), the rules of associations should include a clause on how funds will be used if the association is dissolved. Taking that mandatory clause further, the official rules of the new association Kansallinen Kehitys also explicitly mention a possible ban, in which case the rest of their funds will be allocated to similar activities (Finnish Register of Associations 2021b). Their bookstore, Kielletyt Kirjat (Forbidden Books), also uses the slogan “read before banned”, reflecting both the questionable nature of items they are selling and their understanding of their precarious position after the NRM ban. Despite these fears, there is apparently however no pending cases against these new web stores as they are not directly connected to the NRM and thus, cannot be judged as illegally continuing the activities of a banned association.

### **Political violence and radicalization**

Despite the fact that the NRM, according to Bjørge and Ravndal (2020), considerably restrained its use of violence and was highly sensible regarding the legal boundaries, the continuous use and legitimization of violence was one of the key reasons the NRM was banned in Finland. In the lawsuit, the police listed eight convictions of violent crimes committed by key members of the movement (Turku Court of Appeals 2018). The subsequent organizations, like Kohti Vapautta!, have however not resorted to violence, at least not in similar amounts and as publicly (see Sisäministeriö 2020b; cf. also RTV Dataset, Ravndal 2016), even though

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the organizations are quite similar otherwise. In addition, the statistics on hate crimes produced by the Police University College (2021) in Finland show a general downward trend since 2017.

As Kohti Vapautta! was active during the court process and the NRM ban was thus still open to decision, it can be assumed that they acted in a more reserved way as not to give the court any additional reasons to ban the NRM. There are of course several possible reasons for a less confrontational approach, the threat of a ban being only one of them. For example, full-scale street activism, in the context of which most violent acts of the NRM were perpetrated, has not been possible during Covid-19 restrictions. The less confrontational approach was visible, however, already before the pandemic.

The website Partisaani has published several articles also emphasizing the importance of metapolitics, suggesting perhaps a more permanent shift in strategy (see also Pohjanvirtio 2021). Analyzing the strategic shifts within revolutionary right-wing extremism, Ravndal (2021) argued that during the 2000s a general trend towards metapolitics is indeed visible, which is also shown by statistics in lower levels of lethal violence compared to the 1990s. Open, violent confrontations are not as desirable in this strategy as in, for example, vanguardism or leaderless resistance.

Further stressing the more mainstream type of activism, the NRM had already previously tried to form a political front in Sweden taking part in elections, although with very modest outcomes (Bjørge and Ravndal 2020). The Finnish NRM chapter followed the same route, trying to collect names and establish a party called Kansan Yhtenäisyys (People's Unity). This project was, however, abandoned when the process against the NRM started (see Registry of Associations, reg. nro. 221.605).

In 2021, a group of former Finns Party members and other radical nationalists started a new party project, Sinimusta Liike (Blue-Black Movement). The party program (Sinimusta Liike 2021) emphasizes certain key features of the NRM, including “the importance of soul and blood in the birth of national identity”, references to the idea of *Volksgemeinschaft*, and economic third positionism. Based on online observation, it has been possible to note former NRM members having an interest in the movement, also sharing their propaganda, although so far former NRM members have not assumed any leading positions within the party. The



party has been promoted, among others, on the still existing NRM Telegram channel and on the Partisaani website.

As Botsch et al. (2013, 274) argue, one cannot say for sure whether bans “tend to radicalize the far-right camp and drive it underground.” Following Ehud Sprinzak’s theory of split delegitimization, the disillusionment with the government may arguably accelerate the radicalization process (Kerodal et al. 2015; cf. also Michael and Minkenberg 2007). These fears were also raised in Finland after the NRM ban and by the NRM itself (see Bjørgo and Ravndal 2020). Disillusionment was visible in their rhetoric and outside observers also warned of this prospect. For example, the founder and former leader of the Finnish chapter, who later left the movement, thought members would continue underground and radicalize further (see e.g., Kettunen 2016). The NRM itself also wanted to emphasize this interpretation (Kansallinen Vastarinta 2018; Eklund 2017; see also Bjørgo and Ravndal 2020), although there are no clear indications whether such a turn ever happened within the NRM itself. Some NRM supporters also thought their countermeasures during the process were too soft (West, Lång and Jansson 2020).

Possible indications of a shift towards more radical attitudes can mostly be found in online groups, including the so-called accelerationist terrorism online networks, where Finnish NRM members have also been active. Accelerationism has been described as a “strategy which aims to speed up society’s collapse through race war and chaotic violence” (Ware 2020, 85), inspired by national socialist activist James Mason and his book *Siege*. Some Finnish NRM members saw accelerationism as the only option after the ban (Sallamaa and Kotonen 2020b; cf. Macklin 2018). There is currently no evidence of any actual attacks in Finland which would have been inspired by accelerationist ideas (Kotonen 2020a). In November 2021, Southwest Finland police detained five men on suspicion of preparing for a terror attack (Collin et al. 2021). The suspects were influenced by accelerationist ideas. Any links to NRM or other far-right groups were however not uncovered.

As Busher, Holbrook and Macklin (2021, 8) have observed, “it does not follow automatically that activists will reach for more violent strategies of action” when new state repressions are introduced and opportunities for non-violent activism are reduced, although it may strengthen the position of the more radical elements within the movement. Critically

analyzing Sprinzak's theory of split delegitimization and suggesting typology built upon that theory, Ravndal (2015, 13) also noted an "apparent lack of consistency" between his theory and empirical evidence presented to support it. Evidence presented by Sprinzak does not thus show inconclusively that a perceived external threat, by the government or other actors, would lead to violent counter-reaction. As mentioned above, and despite the rhetoric by some members, there is no clear evidence of a violent counter-reaction in the case of the NRM either (see also Bjørge and Ravndal 2020).

During the court process, the NRM gained some new members (Aamulehti 2017; cf. Suojelupoliisi 2016), possibly because they chose a less sectarian approach and became open to collaboration with other groups. It is evident, on the other hand, that some older members disappeared from public events, even though apparently only a few left the movement entirely and migrated to a more passive role (cf. Koehler 2017, 20). Some of them have spent their entire adult lives in radical milieus and total distancing is thus not very likely. For comparison, in Germany "70% of leaders and 40% of members of organizations banned in the 1990s" were still active in the early 2000s in a right-wing extremist context (Botsch et al. 2013, 271). Furthermore, disengagement obviously does not equate with deradicalization; members may become inactive or prefer non-violent means but still subscribe to the same ideology (see e.g., Koehler 2017, 3).

Possible ideological radicalization may concern the far-right scene in a more general fashion, especially the Soldiers of Odin. Unlike when National Action was proscribed (see Allen 2019), there was quite a lot of public sympathy for the NRM after the banning process started. Among those were the Soldiers of Odin (Soldiers of Odin 2018), which had its own fears to be banned next (Roslund, Jansson and Rissanen 2018) and such suggestions have indeed been made by politicians (see e.g., Suomenmaa 2019). The NRM itself also raised fears that other groups would subsequently be targeted (Kansallinen Vastarinta 2018). The leader and founder of the Soldiers of Odin, on the other hand, said that a ban would only radicalize them (Mika Ranta, Vkontakte, 22.10.2019). In 2018, Ranta (Vkontakte 9.10.2018) made a similar statement, writing that "we can act without logos. Activism just changes radically at that stage".

Within the Soldiers of Odin, a certain level of radicalization was visible during the banning process in their rhetoric, although, like in the case of the NRM, no violent reaction has been identified. The harder rhetoric was, at least partly, perhaps due to them being banned from Facebook and shifting to V Kontakte, where they have been able to express radical views more openly. They also became closer to the NRM, organizing joint events for example (Sallamaa and Kotonen 2020b.) In this sense, the banning process may also unite the typically rather fragmented right-wing extremist scene (cf. Gerlach 2013, 547).

### **Outcome of the process**

A prolonged legal process may help the far-right groups claim victim status and gather sympathy, as was argued in the case of the NPD (Botsch et al. 2013). This status was also claimed by the NRM as they framed the legal process as a freedom of speech issue and alleged that the police had been politicized. From a legal perspective, it is worth considering whether banning follow up organizations should be made easier, whether court processes in general should be shorter, and whether sanctions for illegally continuing proscribed organization are at a suitable level. Any possible reform needs, however, must carefully consider the balance of the basic rights and liberties of the citizens along with maintaining the rule of law.

On the other hand, a thorough process guarantees that a group may present its case comprehensively and strengthens the rule of law. The final verdict in the NRM case was given by the Supreme Court, which also became a legal precedent. The process and the verdict arguably set the bar for future bans relatively high, as the court referred to, for example, the continuous and exceptional level of violence of the NRM and also the fact that an association has to act “substantially against law or good practice” (Finnish Association Act, § 43; see also Meri and Muukkonen 2000). The ban issued was also quite limited as it focused only on the NRM and one additional association directly linked to its activities and did not even cover their charity organization (cf. Gerlach 2013, 532 on bans targeting whole association sectors).

When presenting their claims against the NRM to the court, the police argued that the organization should be banned for acting against the law or good practice. To support the claim, they provided the court with a summary of violent activities of the NRM and examples of acts against “good practice”, including racism and Holocaust denial promoted on their webpages. Regarding violence, the ban has mostly fulfilled the goals of the ruling and the extreme right scene has pacified. The NRM or its successor organizations have not resorted to violence in a similar manner as before the ban yet.

Whether the ban succeeded in ending “bad practices” is questionable, however. Holocaust denial, for example, which is not technically illegal in Finland, is still clearly present on the Partisaani website and was also propagated by Kohti Vapautta! and in the NRM Telegram group. As there is currently no formal organization behind these activities, and activity often happens within anonymous online messaging platforms and abroad, it is also difficult to prevent the spread of propaganda via domestic legislative means (cf. Macklin 2019; Jackson 2019). At least one NRM supporting member who later became a Kohti Vapautta! activist has been convicted for messages spread via the Russian website Vkontakte (Kanta-Häme District Court 2019). As noted above, former NRM members also continue to sell radical literature. The continued dissemination of propaganda suggests that if there has been certain level of pacification within the movement, the possible deradicalization has affected only the violent behaviour and not the ideological component of the movement.

In conclusion, one may agree with the statement that “people tend to overestimate both the negative and the positive effects of bans” (Botsch et al, 2013, 275). How effective the bans are obviously depends on context. A ban can temporarily prevent a movement from developing in a more violent direction, at least if there are other political opportunities open to present relatively radical opinions (cf. Ravndal 2018). On the other hand, it does not in itself increase the plurality of options but deprives the actors one alternative platform for activism (cf. Koehler 2017, 80-83).

In Finland, it appears that the police has been satisfied with the outcome but is also cautious about starting any new processes against, for example, the Soldiers of Odin (Kantola 2020). This suggests that Finland is not on its way towards more militant self-defence of

democracy, but earlier integrative models will be upheld. Governmental strategies for tackling violent extremism continue to emphasize preventive measures (Sisäministeriö 2020a).

Although some patterns seem to be repeated in every country where right-wing extremist organizations have been banned, partly due to them learning from each other, there is certainly still a need for more comparative analysis of the effects of the bans, especially at the sub-party level and from a long-term perspective, as well as the policies and politics behind them (see Laumond 2020; Malkopoulou and Norman 2018). State responses are affected by differing legislation and strategies are adjusted to the type and orientation of a movement, group or party repressed (see Husbands 2002). Bans are also, to a large extent, symbolic acts and have a communicative function (Gerlach 2013, 530; Allen 2017), showing that authorities take the threat of extremism seriously.

In light of the studies referenced above, there seems to be consensus among researchers that the bans do not provide any kind of permanent solution for the dangers caused by the extreme right or extremism in general. Some, like Gerlach (2013), see them as almost entirely counter-productive. The Finnish extreme right scene has, more or less, already healed from the process and has somewhat managed to rebuild its networks and fundraising. Tackling the phenomena is a broader societal and political issue (Minkenberg 2006); the bans are a “medicine” and getting to the root causes an “immunized approach” (Pedahzur 2001; Michael and Minkenberg 2007).

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