The Emergence of Transnational Street Militancy: A Comparative Case Study of the Nordic Resistance Movement and Generation Identity

Jacob Aasland Ravndal[a][1]

[a]Postdoctoral Fellow, Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX) / Department of Political Science, University of Oslo, Norway

Abstract

Street-based militant groups on the far right usually emerge within nation-states and only rarely operate transnationally. However, over the past decade, there have been two notable exceptions to this rule in Europe: The Nordic Resistance Movement, originating in Sweden; and Generation Identity, originating in France. Both groups are regularly described as some of the most influential of their kind but have received limited academic attention and are often portrayed rather crudely by the media. Thus, to inform future research, policy-making, and preventive work, this article outlines the ideological foundation of each group, traces their national origins and transnational evolution, compares their ideologies, strategies, organization, and types of action, and discusses how government and local authorities can deal with militant protest groups in a way that discourages violence and extremism, while at the same time safeguarding liberal democratic principles.

Introduction

Street-based militant groups on the far right, in particular those with a revolutionary outlook, usually emerge within nation-states and only rarely operate transnationally. However, over the past decade, there have been two notable exceptions to this rule in Europe: *The Nordic Resistance Movement* (NRM), originating in Sweden; and *Generation Identity* (GI), originating in France. Both groups are regularly described by experts and journalists as some

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of the most influential of their kind. However, the NRM and GI have received limited academic attention to date and are often portrayed rather crudely by the media. Therefore, this article offers a thorough introduction of both groups to inform future research, policy-making, and preventive work.

Transnational street militancy refers here to militant groups and organizations whose political activism is predominantly street-based and who operate in multiple countries simultaneously within the same organizational framework. Studying transnational street militancy can be rewarding for several reasons. First, unlike more conventional forms of transnational activism, such as transnational exchanges of ideas and practices (Macklin, 2013), or the development of transnational online networks (Caiani & Kröll, 2015), transnational street militancy implies a physical presence aiming to disturb or disrupt the prevailing political system, thereby compelling a governmental response of some kind. Second, unlike non-militant protest movements operating transnationally, such as PEGIDA (Berntzen & Weisskircher, 2016), militant groups are far more confrontational, position themselves in legal grey zones, and actively seek out situations that from a governmental perspective can be highly demanding not only legally but also tactically and politically. Finally, by operating in multiple countries simultaneously, these groups are in a good position to become more influential both locally, nationally and transnationally than they otherwise would have been. They also benefit from having access to resources, expertise and skill-sets from a wide range of people in different countries working toward the same goal and within the same organizational framework. Therefore, transnational street militancy presents unique challenges to anyone tasked to prevent political violence and extremism.

There are also good reasons for studying the NRM and GI in particular. First, both groups are amongst the most prominent examples of street-based militant groups operating at the transnational level. Second, both groups have drawn considerable international attention recently. However, with such increased attention comes an increase in misguided descriptions and threat assessments. Therefore, a comprehensive introduction to both groups is needed, also to illustrate why and how they are different. Finally, both groups have recently been

associated with terrorism. In 2017, one member and two former (but recent) members of the NRM were charged with three bombing attacks in Gothenburg (Bjørgo & Ravndal, 2020). These and other events led high ranking officials in the United States to suggest including the NRM on the official US list of foreign terrorist organizations (Garza, 2019). Then, in 2019, a lone actor who drew ideological inspiration from GI and had donated money to several GI divisions brutally attacked two mosques in the city of Christchurch in New Zealand (Macklin, 2019). Although the perpetrator was never a member of GI, the attacks led both social media platforms and governments to impose severe repressive measures against the organisation. For example, many public GI profiles on Facebook and Twitter were removed, and the German government has gradually changed its view of GI from initially not being seen as extreme-right at all, to being included in official intelligence reports as a potential case of right-wing extremism, to being fully classified as an extreme-right organization with permanent monitoring by the intelligence apparatus. However, considering the ostensibly non-violent profile of GI, one may question whether such repressive measures are in line with fundamental liberal democratic principles, such as freedom of speech and freedom of association, and whether the long-term effects of these measures will be more or less extremism and violence?

To contribute to more informed assessments of such difficult yet important questions, this article provides answers to the following questions: First, what characterizes the transnational evolution, ideology, strategy, organization and action repertoires of the NRM and GI? Second, how do these elements compare between the two organizations? And third, how can governments and local authorities deal with militant protest groups in a way that discourages extremism and violence, while at the same time safeguarding liberal democratic principles?

To answer these questions, the article is divided into five parts. I begin by briefly outlining key concepts and methods used in this study. Part two outlines the ideological foundation of each group: *National Socialism* in the case of the NRM; and *Identitarianism* in the case of GI. Part three traces these groups' national origins and transnational evolution.

Part four compares their ideologies, strategies, organization, and types of action. Finally, in part five, I draw on these findings to offer six concrete advice for those tasked to prevent violence and extremism.

Concepts and methods

Two key concepts used in this article warrants a clarification because their meanings vary across different countries: militancy and extremism. I use the term militant in this study because both the NRM and GI describe themselves as militants. Militancy is therefore an important feature of these groups' self-perception and self-styled public appearances. However, one should be aware that militancy has somewhat different connotations in their countries of origin. In Sweden and Northern Europe more broadly, militants are usually understood as activists demonstrating a willingness to use violence in pursuit of their political goals. In France, the term militant is used more generally and may refer to anyone involved in some form non-conventional political activism with a passionate slant. These differences notwithstanding, the NRM and GI appear to attach quite similar meanings to their self-styled militancy; an understanding that falls somewhere in between these two interpretations. Here, I propose four shared elements of these groups' self-styled militancy.

First, it appears that being a militant in the eyes of the NRM and GI entails a considerable degree of *personal devotion*, part of which is to accept the ideological platform or general worldview of the group. In practise, this means that group members are expected to adhere to a given ideological script developed by the group leadership or other ideological authorities, and that questioning this script is generally not appreciated, at least not publicly. A second element of militancy is *organization*, meaning that the term "militant" usually refers to activists with a formal membership to a militant group. Third, there appears to be an element of *confrontational direct action* in the ways the NRM and GI depict their militancy. In other words, they seek political change directly though provocative public acts rather than appealing to others via more conventional democratic procedures such as lobbying or writing

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petitions. Finally, militancy entails more for the NRM and GI than personal devotion, organization, and confrontational direct action. It is also seen as a *way of life* that may close some doors, but open others. By choosing the militant way, you may lose access to a comfortable "normie" life and perhaps also to material goods, including your job. In return, you get to know your true self, to experience emotions and pursue instincts that have been suppressed and denounced by modern societies, to fight for a just cause, to be part of a strong and unified collective, to make a difference, to matter.

Just like militancy, extremism is a contested term that carry different meanings in different countries. Because of its contested nature, I generally avoid using the term in this article, except for in my final discussion of how government and local authorities can deal with militant protest groups in a way that discourages violence and extremism. When referring to extremism here, I rely on the most established conceptualization from the literature on extremism and democracy more broadly, seeing extremism as being essentially anti-democratic, as opposed to other forms of radical protest that nevertheless follow democratic rules and procedures (Mudde, 2007, pp. 24–26). In addition, I distinguish between extremist (anti-democratic) ideas, which in most Western democracies is considered legal as long as they do not breach specific laws such as hate crime legislation, and extremist (anti-democratic) behavior, such as illegal use of violence or other types of unlawful or anti-democratic behavior.

The chosen method for this article is the comparative case study by way of Structured Focused Comparison as proposed by George (1979). This method "is 'structured' in that the researcher writes general questions that reflect the research objective and that each question is asked of each case under study to guide and standardize data collection, thereby making systematic comparison and cumulation of the findings possible. The method is 'focused' in that it deals only with certain aspects of the historical cases examined" (George & Bennett, 2005: 67).

The questions asked for this study concerns the ideology, transnational evolution, strategy, organization and action repertoires of the NRM and GI. To answer these questions,

data have been collected from multiple sources. First and foremost, the study relies on primary sources such as documents and propaganda produced by the groups themselves, including manifestos, books, magazines, pamphlets, manuals, online webpages, and videos. Second, a handful of interviews and informal talks have been conducted with people who know either one of these organizations particularly well, including former activists, anti-fascist activists, journalists and police officers. Third, the author has on several occasions been doing participant observation of the NRMs public protest events and demonstrations in Norway and Sweden. While immersing myself with or nearby the activists during such public events, I never pretend to be one of them, and most likely looked like a journalist taking photographs. I was also open about my background and reasons for being there if asked by the police or the activists themselves. Finally, the study also relies on secondary sources such as existing academic research and media reporting on both groups.

Ideological foundations

Before comparing the ideological platforms of the NRM and GI, it is useful to look at the broader ideological traditions they draw upon. While the NRM presents itself as a fully-fledged National Socialist organization, GI adheres to a newer ideological current, generally referred to as Identitarianism. The following outline briefly presents key features of each of these two ideological traditions.

National Socialism

National Socialism is generally understood as the ideology developed and practiced by the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) founded in 1920, a development that culminated in NSDAP's rise to power in 1933, and ended in the closing days of WWII in 1945.

Arguably the most influential account of National Socialism is laid out in the two-volume *Mein Kampf*, which Adolf Hitler began to write while imprisoned for a failed coup attempt in 1923. *Mein Kampf* is partly an autobiographical account, and partly an ideological

manifesto. In the beginning, Hitler describes how, as a young adult, he went from having a generally positive attitude towards the Jews to becoming fiercely anti-Semitic. This anti-Semitism was premised on a biological form of racism, i.e. the idea that humans can be divided into races with substantively different physical and mental qualities, and then ranked according to their value. For example, Hitler regarded the Jews as an intellectually resourceful but inherently selfish and devilish people, seeking to dominate the world. According to Hitler, Jews therefore constituted the greatest threat to the survival of other races, including his own "Aryan master race".

The supposed superiority of the Aryan master race is another key feature of National Socialism. Hitler saw Aryans first and foremost as morally and culturally superior, and therefore believed other races would benefit from being ruled by them. But Hitler also feared that the clever Jews might deceive credulous and good-hearted Aryans into suppressing their own superiority through political constructs promoting egalitarianism, most notably *Marxism*. Hitler's fear of Jews and Marxism, and the racially biological thinking these fears are premised upon, constitute the ideological foundation for how "nationalism" and "socialism" are understood in National Socialism. Importantly, National Socialists reject conventional nationalism as being too conservative and backward leaning, as opposed to the progressive race-based nationalism promoted by Hitler and NSDAP. National Socialists also reject conventional socialism for being too internationally oriented (or anti-nationalist) and for discrediting racial differences. The socialist element of National Socialism relates mainly to the ambition of serving the (German) people – which at that time comprised many industrial workers – before anyone else.

This juxtaposition of race, people, and nation – blood and soil – ties into a final key feature of National Socialism that has more to do with its philosophical foundations than with politics. National Socialism can also be understood as a form of (political) religion, that is, a holistic worldview offering answers to existential questions about the meaning of life, the human condition, divinity, and nature. As such, National Socialism generally rejects the notion of a transcendent God or a divine world beyond our own. Instead, it argues that

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divinity is found in the present world, in nature. Humans are seen as a small but integral part of a much larger *organic* whole, a divine nature with its own rules and dynamics. It is only by accepting the laws of nature that humans can fulfill their potential through a mythical connection between people and nature. These laws of nature are in turn interpreted through a Darwinian lens in which principles such as natural selection, survival of the fittest, and a biological understanding of race and organic evolution rule. As a result, meaning in life is achieved by contributing to the survival of your race, which is in harsh competition with other enemy races. This eternal life struggle implies an appreciation of values such as vitalism, personal sacrifice, affection, virtue, aggression, instinct, death, and force, and of violent destruction for the sake of creating something new and better.

Identitarianism

Although GI activists call themselves Identitarians, they are skeptical about the term "Identitarianism" because they consider being an Identitarian to be more about following a (militant) way of life than about subscribing to a specific political ideology. When people speak of Identitarians today, they often trace their intellectual heritage back to the French *Nouvelle Droite* or New Right school of thought.

Several key features characterize the New Right school of thought, and therefore also the Identitarian mindset. First, New Right thinkers emphasize the importance of *collective identities* and communitarian bonds for human well-being. Such collective identities are in turn perceived as closely tied to ethnic and territorial belonging, or to being "rooted" as the Identitarians like to say. Because identity is seen as inseparable from ethnicity and territory, people from different places are, by definition, different. This diversity, however, is celebrated by New Right thinkers and portrayed as a value that should be *preserved*. 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.

The New Right community sees *liberalism* as their main enemy. One reason is liberal individualism, which conflicts with the collectivist or communitarian ideas and values

celebrated by the New Right. A second reason relates to liberal universalism, which conflicts with the ethnopluralist conception of healthy societies that the New Right wants to preserve. A third reason is economic, and concerns neo-liberal ideas about free markets and a competition-based economy. On this issue, the New Right places itself more to the left than to the right. For example, the New Right is against the capitalist logic of everlasting growth and productivity, and seeks to reduce the importance of capital, money, and work "in order to have some time for oneself and enjoy life" (de Benoist & Champetier, 2012, p. 42).

While it is true that contemporary Identitarians are deeply inspired by New Right ideas, it is also true that Identitarians in many ways represent a break with the original New Right community (Zúquete, 2018, p. 12). Because Identitarian ideas have recently been appropriated by a range of actors across the world, including the Alt-right movement in the United States, it is perhaps more difficult now than before to give a precise description of Identitarianism. However, a handful of ideas can still be found among most self-identifying Identitarians, often revolving around a set of concepts used to promote these ideas. One such concept is "The Great Replacement", which refers to the prospect of ethnic European populations (or white Americans) being outnumbered in their "own" countries by people with non-Western immigrant backgrounds.

To reverse this replacement, Identitarians have introduced the concept "Remigration", referring to the idea of introducing a series of non-violent incentives to stimulate a "voluntary" departure of non-Western immigrants back to their homelands. Although most Identitarians agree that remigration is necessary, there is less agreement about how exactly this is to be achieved. Proposed incentives range from giving immigrants money to facilitate their return, to making life so miserable for Muslims that they ultimately decide to leave the country (in-person interview with former GI activist, Oslo, 14 May 2018).

A related concept is *"Reconquista"*, referring to the confrontational idea of retaking territory from Muslim invaders. The term has its historical roots in the period between 711 and 1491, when Arab and Berber forces gained control over large parts of the Spanish peninsula. This occupation was countered when Christian kingdoms in today's northern Spain

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united forces and started fighting back, ultimately regaining the entire peninsula. For the Identitarians, this territorial metaphor is also associated with the establishment of so-called Identity houses, which are occupied buildings serving as "safe spaces" or "rebel zones", where Identitarian patriots can live out their white ethnic identities (Zúquete, 2018, pp. 61–62).

These cultural practices tie into a final key feature of Identitarianism, which has to do with the lived experience of being a militant, and, relatedly, the aestheticization of the revolutionary struggle. Doing *something*, but also doing it elegantly and provocatively, has become a trademark of the Identitarians. Much like militant anarchist groups, they seek a form of personal emancipation and empowerment through militant activism (see Zúquete, 2018, pp. 42–47 for a longer exposé of this element of Identitarian militancy).

National origins and transnational evolution

The Nordic Resistance Movement

The establishment of the NRM (then known as the Swedish Resistance Movement) was announced in the third issue of the newspaper *Folktribunen* (The People's Tribune) in December 1997. *Folktribunen*'s editor-in-chief and one of NRM's founders was Klas Lund, who headed the organization for 18 years between 1997 and 2015, a rare achievement in these circles.

Lund has become something of a mythic figure within the organization. Apart from his lengthy leadership, Lund's status ties into a series of dramatic events that preceded NRM's establishment. Lund began his activist career as a skinhead, a form of activism the NRM normally distances itself from because it wants 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 for murder and received eight-year prison sentences. Lund's sentence was later reduced to four years, and he was released after only two.

Upon his release from prison, Lund was eager to leave behind his skinhead misdemeanors and get involved in true revolutionary struggle. Together with a handful of other activists, he established the network *Vitt Ariskt Motstånd* (VAM, White Aryan Resistance), deeply inspired by revolutionary and terrorism-inciting publications and groups from the United States, such as *The Turner Diaries*, *Hunter*, and The Order. To prepare for this armed revolution, and in line with *The Turner Diaries* script, Lund and his associates robbed banks to finance their activities. However, one of these robberies landed them in prison and ended the revolution before it had even begun.

While in prison, Lund had plenty of time (six years, only interrupted by a short prison escape to Norway) to contemplate the means that would be most effective in generating a revolutionary outcome. Rather than promoting a loosely organized network of leaderless resistance fighters, Lund decided that a strong hierarchical elite-organization was needed. These thoughts were further developed in the newspaper *Folktribunen,* which Lund created after his second release from prison. *Folktribunen* thus became the NRM's first official media outlet, following the announcement of NRM's establishment in December 1997.

The NRM is a militant National Socialist organization, aiming to create a Nordic nation for the Nordic people. Today, the organization has active divisions in Sweden, Finland, Norway and Denmark. In Norway, a first attempt to establish the organization took place in Norway in 2003, when former members of the Norwegian skinhead group Boot Boys became sworn members of NRM's first Norwegian branch. A photo from this symbolic event is on the cover of the second issue of *Nationell Motsånd*, the second official publication of the NRM, which replaced *Folktribunen* in 2003. However, recruiting dedicated activists in Norway proved harder than in Sweden, and after a couple of years the first Norwegian branch of NRM ceased its activities.

It was to take several years before a second attempt was made to re-establish the NRM's Norwegian branch. In 2010, Haakon Forwald joined the Swedish branch as their only

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Norwegian member. He was soon promoted to leader of a resurrected Norwegian branch and given the task of rebuilding a Norwegian activist network. Later that year, a Norwegian version of NRM'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. From 2016 onwards, Norwegian activists started carrying out a number of public activities, including a relatively large demonstration in Kristiansand in July 2017. This sharp increase in activity level appears to reflect a similar increase in Sweden, following the leadership change in 2015. At the same time, the number of activists involved in the Norwegian division has been kept well under 50 and does not seem to be growing.

In Finland, the NRM's Finnish branch, *Suomen vastarintaliike* (The Finnish Resistance Movement), was established by Esa Henrik Holappa in 2008. Holappa has today left the organization and is considered by the NRM as a traitor and oath breaker. Compared to the Norwegian division, the Finnish branch has been more active publicly and also involved in several severe violent episodes including knife stabbings, tear gas attacks and severe beatings. In 2018, the Finnish branch was prohibited following an episode where a person who verbally confronted NRM activists was brutally kicked to the ground and died one week later, most likely of injuries relating to this attack. Before being prohibited, the Finnish branch counted less than a hundred active members, but appeared to be growing and was active in at least five different locations (in-person interviews with a local anti-racist activist in Helsinki, June 2014, and with Holappa in Oslo, May 2016).

The most recent addition to the NRM's transnational network (not counting a handful of activists in Iceland) is the Danish branch, (re)established in 2017 (Nordfront, 2017). Just as in Norway in 2003, an earlier attempt at establishing a Danish branch was made in 2013, headed by a former member of *Danmarks Nationalsocialistiske Bevægelse* (Denmark's Nationalist Socialist Movement, DNSB). However, apart from a few sticker raids suspiciously close to the Swedish border, few activities followed, and the Danish NRM-branch soon became inactive.

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The re-establishment of the Danish branch in 2017 appears to be more promising for the NRM. One reason why the 2013-attempt failed might have been the presence of a somewhat similar organization in Denmark at that time: *Danmarks Nationale Front* (Denmark's National Front, DNF). Since then, however, the activities of DNF have receded considerably, reaching a historical low in 2018 (Redox, 2018). In addition, *Danskernes parti* (The Party of the Danes), initially founded by former DNSB members and regularly accused for harboring National Socialist sympathies, dissolved in 2017, leaving some of its members in search for a new activist platform.

A final critical development occurred in 2019, when a group of activists headed by Klas Lund, including the leader of the Norwegian division Haakon Forwald, left the Swedish and Norwegian divisions to establish a new group known as *Nordisk Styrke* (Nordic Strength). The split was according to members of the new group based on internal disagreements about strategy, mainly concerning whether the group should continue pursuing mainstream types of activities such as large public demonstrations and maintaining a political party, or rather focus on operating in a semi-clandestine fashion, as the NRM used to do. It is too early to tell what to make of this new group at the time of writing. However, the fact that it is being headed by Klas Lund and that several key activists followed him suggests that it could become a potent contender to the NRM.

Generation Identity

On July 14, 2002, 25-year-old Maxime Brunerie attempted to assassinate the French President Jacques Chirac, firing two shots with a .22 rifle towards Chirac, who was approaching in a motorcade parade during the French national day (Bastille Day). Brunerie was at the time a member of the revolutionary nationalist group *Unité Radicale*, subsequently banned by French authorities for promoting discrimination, violent threats against foreigners, and anti-Semitism.

In the wake of *Unité Radicale*'s dissolution, several new groups were established by former members. One of these was *Bloc Identitaire – Mouvement social européen* (Identity

Bloc – European Social Movement). This new group self-identifying as Identitarian drew much of its ideological inspiration from the writings of New Right dissidents such as Guillaume Faye and Dominique Venner. Before the establishment of *Bloc Identitaire,* the revolutionary nationalist scene in France had been characterized by an ever-changing conglomerate of small grouplets, or *groupuscules*, continually changing names, alliances, and outlooks, and never really managing to unite forces or develop a strong unifying organization (Bale, 2002; Griffin, 1999, 2003). In several ways, *Bloc Identitaire* changed this pattern, as the organization and its network have continued to expand and develop over the years. According to a founding member, "the goal was to break away from a sectarian logic and outmoded models and create both a new language of activism and a renovated strategy of propaganda" (quoted in Zúquete, 2018, p. 29). Today, the movement is simply known as *Les Identitaires* (The Identitarians) and claims at least two thousand members in France (Les Identitaires, 2016). However, its youth organization *Generation Identitaire* (Generation Identity) is currently making the most notable impact on the international scene.

Initially called *Jeunesses Idenitaire* (Identitarian Youths) and then *Une Autre Jenuesse* (Another Youth), this youth organization was founded in 2002 and then fused with *Bloc Identitaire*. However, it was only when they relaunched the organization in 2012 under the new label *Generation Identitaire* and published a video-manifesto on YouTube entitled "A Declaration of War" that the group gained international attention. Shortly thereafter, GI activists "occupied" the rooftop of a mosque construction site in Poitiers (where Charles Martel had defeated an invading Muslim Moorish force in 732) and published several dramatized videos of this publicity stunt. Together with the initial YouTube manifesto, these videos quickly went viral and introduced the Identitarian label and its stylish form of militancy to audiences far beyond France.

As a result of these successful media stunts, new GI-divisions began to pop up all across Europe, the first ones being formed in Austria and Germany in 2012 under the label *Identitäre Bewegung* (Identitarian Movement). Today, GI has active divisions in many European countries, including the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Italy, Belgium,

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Poland, Denmark and the United Kingdom. Unlike the NRM's transnational evolution, which seems to have been under the auspices of the Swedish leadership, GI's transnational evolution follows a *franchise* logic, where basically anyone can set up their own local GI division by drawing on GI's original label, style, and ideology. Yet all divisions must be formally approved by GI's central organization.

Comparative analysis

Ideology

Ideologically, the NRM belongs to what one might call the Old Right and GI to the New Right. The Old Right is here understood as the ideological currents that underpinned the Fascist and National Socialist regimes during the interwar period, most notably in Italy and Germany. Following the Allies' victory in WWII and growing public awareness about the Holocaust, ideas and values associated with these Old Right regimes, such as ultra-nationalism, anti-Semitism, and racism, became sacrilege and entirely impossible to promote politically in Europe.

However, behind toxic concepts such as Fascism, National Socialism, and anti-Semitism, lay deeper, more general, but also less controversial ideas and values such as anti-modernism, anti-liberalism, collectivism, communitarianism, and the idea that people's identities and life-meanings are closely tied to the territories, peoples, and cultures to which they naturally "belong". The self-given mandate of the New Right is to reinvigorate such ideas and values, while at the same time maintaining a safe distance to the toxic elements of the Old Right. Accordingly, a number of fundamental ideas and values are shared by the NRM and GI, and they also share many of the same political enemies. One should therefore not be surprised that three of the most high-profile GI leaders – Fabrice Robert and Phillippe Vardon from France, and Martin Sellner from Austria – all share a past in groups and milieu associated with Old Right ideas.

That said, there are of course a number of important ideological differences between the NRM and GI. First and foremost, there is "the Jewish question" and that of race. While the NRM insists on maintaining these two controversial elements at their ideological core, GI is desperate to rid itself of such associations. However, this is easier said than done. For example, while GI considers racism and ethnocentric patriotism as fundamentally different, others see the two as different expressions of the same idea: that some people should have precedence over others in certain territories, simply because of their racial or ethnic descent. Turning to "the Jewish question", the ideological differences between the NRM and GI are clearer. GI's rejection of anti-Semitism comes across as credible, and is also backed up by publications from ideological authorities. One example is Guillaume Faye's book *La nouvelle question juive* (The new Jewish question), in which Faye argues that, rather than obsessing about the Jews, the defenders of Europe must now turn their attention towards Islam (Faye, 2007).

This brings us to another ideological difference between the NRM and GI, which is how they relate to Islam and Muslims. For GI, the so-called Islamization of Europe represents a primary challenge to be dealt with, and while they may not be obsessed with Jews, they do seem to be obsessed with Muslims. In contrast, although the NRM 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 European peoples and nations for their own benefit (Lund, 2004).

Besides obsessions with Jews and Muslims, religion does not occupy much space in the ideological production of the NRM and GI. The NRM do claim to support religious freedom in their political manifesto. They also draw on pagan myths and symbols in some of their propaganda, in particular 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. GI do in some cases draw on Christian symbols and history, but are generally skeptical to

modern expression of Christianity and seem equally or more interested in Paganism. Their main symbol is the Greek letter Lambda, which figured on the shields of the warrior Spartans, and symbolizes a determination never to give up when defending one's people.

When it comes to family and gender, the NRM embody a traditional view where women are expected to take care of children and other womanly duties while men are expected to be frontline activists and warriors. For example, during participatory field work at NRM protests and demonstrations, the author has on several occasions observed that when violent confrontations are about to erupt, the leaders command the women to step back, and the women subsequently function as nurses taking care of wounded frontline activists, even bringing their own nursing kits. By contrast, GI has in most countries a more progressive view on family and gender, and female activists usually operate in tandem with male activists.

Another ideological difference worth noting is how the NRM and GI relate to democracy. While the NRM explicitly rejects democratic rule and envisions a more authoritarian system, headed by strong and competent National Socialist "senators" (Lund, 2010), GI tends to portray themselves as even *more* democratic than current Western democracies. However, GI's conception of democracy is quite shallow and differs considerably from dominant conceptions among democracy theorists. As stated in one of the most widely distributed leaflets on GI's ideological platform:

> Superficially it would appear that both our generations stand for at least one common cause. At least on one point we agree: in our passionate commitment to the principle of the rule of the people, democracy. In the end, however, we agree on nothing more than a word. It becomes clear soon enough that we understand something entirely different by the word democracy. When we think of democracy, the image of Athens and the right to participate in the community's decisions come to mind. We strongly believe that the people have a right not only to participate in these decisions, but to make them entirely on their own accord. Direct democracy and referenda are our ideals. When we say democracy, we *really* mean democracy.
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> (Willinger, 2013, p. 41)

A core theme in normative democratic theory is how to avoid majoritarian mob rule, considering that the aim of democracy is balancing liberty and equality for *all* law-abiding members of society (Christiano, 2018). In contrast to this perspective, GI's conception of democracy contains one principle only – majoritarian rule, operationalized as a system of direct democracy.

A final ideological difference concerns the extent to which activists are expected to adhere to a given ideological script. As a member of the NRM, you are expected to embrace everything the organization stands for, including conspiracy theories about Jewish elites trying to control the world 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, NRM activists regularly and proudly present themselves as fanatics, much in line with prominent National Socialists from the Third Reich, such as the SS-troops. GI does not promote such fanaticism, and their ideological script comes across as less rigid and more open for discussion and individual interpretation.

Strategy

The political goals of the NRM and GI are quite similar: the establishment and preservation of ethno-societies. In the case of the NRM, the main ambition is to create a Nordic nation for the Nordic people. GI's dream society is somewhat less pronounced and more complex, because they operate with triple identities at the local, national, and regional or pan-European levels, and wish to cater for all of these simultaneously. To simplify, GI seeks more local autonomy, in accordance with local customs, culture, and needs. At the same time, they seek 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-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 United States, and perhaps rather seek alliances with Russia (Zúquete, 2018, pp. 253–257).

If we look at the strategies used by the NRM and GI to reach these stated goals, they are in fact surprisingly similar, although with slightly different configurations. Both groups operate mainly in the extra-parliamentary space, and they aim to influence how people *think*. Furthermore, this influence is to be achieved mainly through two types of activism: *metapolitics* and *direct action*. Which one of these two strategies has primacy over the other is not entirely clear for either group.

As explained above, the establishment of the NRM can be seen as a reaction to a poorly organized "leaderless" movement with little direction, whose actions and terrorist ambitions did not really cater to its states political goals. At present, the NRM's core task is to use propaganda and (mostly legal) direct action to "awaken" the people and prepare them for the upcoming "race war". As such, one could see the present NRM as quite metapolitical in its orientation. However, an internal conflict about the primacy of metapolitics vs. direct action led to an organizational split in 2001, in which those oriented toward intellectual or metapolitical struggle left the organization, while those oriented towards direct action remained. Much in line with the general National Socialist emphasis on action rather than intellectualism, the NRM sees itself as an action-oriented vanguard in which ideology is meant to serve the struggle, and not the other way around (The Nordic Resistance Movement, 2018, p. 41).

GI's point of departure is in a way the opposite: GI and the Identitarian movement more broadly can be seen as a reaction to an intellectual form of metapolitics which involves a lot of thinking and talking, but not much doing. For many prominent GI activists, it appears that action and life as a militant are equally or more important than the ideology itself, which is why they see themselves first and foremost as a "fighting community". As one of GI's founders Philippe Vardon stated: "We are more loyal to attitudes than to ideas" (quoted in Zúquete, 2018, p. 38). At the same time, metapolitics remains GI's main strategy, and their "fight" is primarily a cultural, not a physical, one. All activities are streamlined towards the development of an alternative counterculture, that is, the establishment of a new cultural hegemony.

Organization

Because the NRM envisions an actual take-over of the government, it needs a hierarchical organization on stand-by when this critical moment arrives. In the case of GI, a less rigid, less hierarchical, and more network-centric organizational structure makes sense, considering that their metapolitical struggle is meant to take place at many different places, over long stretches of time, through many different channels, and involving many different types of actors. Therefore, GI is designed as an open and inclusive network of locally based groups with horizontal structures. To be sure, GI divisions also have their leaders, both locally and nationally. However, they are nowhere close to the hierarchical logic that permeates the NRM, in which advances in the hierarchy are important rewards for personal sacrifice and dedication to the struggle.

In Sweden, the NRM currently consists of seven sub-divisions – or nests (*nästen* – a term borrowed from the Romanian Iron Guard) – covering different regions of Sweden. In addition, they have a national council (*Riksrådet*) as well as a Nordic council (*Nordenrådet*) comprising members from the various national branches. The entire structure is organized hierarchically. For example, each nest has a nest leader and deputy. Some nests consist of so-called "combat groups" (*kampgrupp*), with their own respective leaders. 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 within the organization, such as operational leader, parliamentary leader, media spokesperson, editor-in-chief, news editor, head of radio broadcasting, etc.

By contrast, GI draws inspiration from leftist anarchist and autonomous movements, characterized by fundamentally different organizational principles, in which hierarchical, and thereby authoritarian, structures are seen as anathema. Here, an essential idea is to "live now the world you want to create", for example by squatting in empty houses and establishing autonomous free zones, or "Identity houses". It is up to each individual to enter this revolutionary do-it-yourself mode, and to form local groups and societies using horizontal

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structures. As such, GI is relatively unique compared to most contemporary far-right groups (Richards, 2019). The result is a network-centric organization, comprising local autonomous groups with their own particular styles, outlooks, and modes of operation, all within, of course, a broad Identitarian frame.

Another organizational difference between the NRM and GI can be found in the types of people they recruit. While the NRM typically recruits adults with a vocational background, GI typically recruits young university students. One reason may be that the style of each group is quite different. The NRM displays a grounded, rural, family-oriented, caring, and authoritarian style. In contrast, GI's style is rebellious, urban, youth-oriented, carefree, and anti-authoritarian.

Finally, the number of dedicated activists involved is considerably smaller for the NRM than for GI. While the Swedish NRM branch currently claims a few hundred members, there were fewer than a hundred in Finland, and fewer than 50 in Norway. That said, the NRM's website appears to have a considerable readership – between 300,000 and 400,000 unique visitors per month, according to their own estimates (The Nordic Resistance Movement, 2018, p. 133).

GI operates with a rough estimate of more than two thousand members in France alone (Les Identitaires, 2016), and all together the entire transnational network probably amounts to a few thousand dedicated activists. These numbers notwithstanding, compared to most other political movements, the NRM and GI remain marginal. To compensate for their lack of numbers, one important tactic is therefore to carry out spectacular stunts to draw the public eye, as the next section shows.

Action repertoires

In line with National Socialist thinking that humans are a small part of a larger organic whole – a divine nature – many of NRM's internal activities consist of outdoors activities such as forest and mountain trips. Besides these trips, the NRM also organize annual summer camps and competitions (*Nordendagarna*), internal seminars, radio broadcasts, and ceremonial

events related to festivities, weddings, and births. Such events give activists a feeling of being part of a community. For some activists, this community might even function as an extended or alternative family, considering that several had to break ties with their original families because of their political activism.

The NRM's most regular external activity is sticker and flyer raids, which often occur at night. In addition, NRM activists carry out flyer distributions in public squares during the daytime. From time to time, the NRM also carries out protest events addressing specific topics. Previously, NRM activists would regularly sell their magazines to the public (today's media production is mainly online). Another regular activity consists of hanging up large NRM banners at various public locations, typically road bridges, and sometimes at spectacular heights. Within the organization, these types of stunt are called "Skorzeny operations", referring to the German Nazi hero Otto Skorzeny, who famously liberated Mussolini from a mountain prison during a spectacular special operations rescue.

More irregular types of activity include "sealing off" enemy buildings, using specially produced NRM-cordons, vigilante street patrols, and broadcasting confrontational phone pranks against people considered as political enemies, including the police and the security service. In its early days, NRM youth activists also carried out a handful of sabotage operations against art exhibitions because they thought these exhibitions were promoting pedophilia.

The NRM sometimes combines legal action with threatening behavior. For example, after its controversial participation at the 2017 annual political gathering in Almedalen in Sweden, several Swedish officials wanted to ban the group from participating at next year's convention. As a result, the NRM threatened to systematically harass the festival, should they not be allowed to participate (The Nordic Resistance Movement, 2018, pp. 257–258).

More recently, the NRM has carried out a number of larger demonstrations, which to date have been organized legally in cooperation with the police. However, during several of these demonstrations, there have been violent clashes between NRM-activists and the police. The Swedish NRM branch has therefore threatened no longer to seek legal approval for its

demonstrations, because it is not satisfied with the way the police have handled them (The Nordic Resistance Movement, 2018, pp. 258–264).

From time to time, NRM members have also been involved in illegal activities, including violent attacks using weapons such as knives and explosives (some with deadly outcomes). Such activities are, of course, dismissed by the NRM leadership as something these activists have carried out on their own initiative. Interestingly, after some of these illegal actions, the NRM receives "exclusive" interviews from members of the self-titled "action groups" that claim to be behind them (see e.g. The Nordic Resistance Movement, 2018, p. 120). One could speculate that the existence of such clandestine "action groups" may serve as a tool for the NRM to carry out illegal activities without compromising the organization.

Compared to the NRM, GI's action repertoire is more irregular and multifaceted. This stems partly from GI's network-centric organizational structure, and partly from GI's emphasis on creative countercultural (metapolitical) activism, leaving much of the initiative to each local group. Among the best-known internal activities are the annual Summer University training camp arranged by the French GI division, and activities organized at the various "Identity houses" that appear to be most common in France.

Although GI's external activities vary a lot, they are usually premised on the same basic idea: to carry out creative, spectacular, or provocative publicity stunts to generate media attention – a form of action referred to as *guerrilla media tactics* (Zúquete, 2018, p. 48). These stunts can range from small-scale street-based artistic displays or performances, via regular street patrols meant to protect the native population from violent foreigners, to symbolic "occupations" of buildings associated with political enemies or even large-scale operations such as the Defend Europa campaign in 2017. For this campaign, GI joined forces with other like-minded groups and used crowdfunding to charter a ship, which was subsequently used to intervene against rescue operations sent out to help refugees lost in the Mediterranean Sea. On a more regular basis, GI activists also organize flyer distributions, protest events, and larger street demonstrations.

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Publicly, GI presents itself as a non-violent group, and violent confrontation with political enemies is not part of its daily action repertoire. At the same time, GI adheres to a war-like rhetoric alluding to violent images. Several publicity stunts orchestrated by the French GI contain elements of symbolic violence, for instance when they "occupy" mosques, carry out vigilante "patrols" to protect natives from immigrant "rabble" (*racaille*), seek to interfere with search-and-rescue vessels to "defend" Europe from migrants lost at sea, or "block" popular migrant routes through the Alps.

However, GI activists are not restricted to imagined violence. For example, at their annual summer camps, newcomers are expected to participate in an initiation rite inspired by the movie Fight Club, in which they have to fight one of their own for one minute, while the crowd stands around cheering (Bouron, 2015, pp. 15–16). GI also organizes martial arts training for their members (Zúquete, 2018, pp. 59, 62), and from time to time, they experience violent confrontations with opposing anti-fascist groups – fights that are hailed and commemorated among GI members (Zúquete, 2018, pp. 336–337). Furthermore, French GI activists have proven to be quite violent when acting on their own, and even bragging about it to fellow GI activists (Al Jazeera, 2018). In the end, physical violence is not rejected altogether. As the GI-leader Delrieux stated in an interview with a Greek magazine: "We reject violence, but we will use force if necessary" (Generation Identity, 2013, p. 39).

In sum, most of the activities carried out by the NRM and GI are legal, but for many members of the public deeply provocative. Considering that these are militant protest groups promoting the interests of certain races (the NRM), or ethnic groups (GI), that is to be expected. However, in the case of the NRM, legal activities such as protests and demonstrations often lead to violent confrontations with counter-protestors or the police. Although GI refrains from such violent confrontation, they do carry out various forms of civil disobedience, such as road blockages, compelling the police to deal with them forcefully. As such, both groups represent particular challenges to contemporary Western governments and those tasked to prevent political violence and extremism.

Concluding discussion: Six advice for preventing violence and extremism

Using the above findings as a point of departure, this section offers advice on how policy-makers and practitioners tasked to prevent violence and extremism might go about dealing with militant protest groups such as the NRM and GI without compromising liberal democratic principles.

It should be noted that having extremist (or anti-democratic) ideas is not illegal *per se* in most liberal democracies, as long as the views are not translated into extremist behavior. This does not mean that extremist ideas are to be welcomed in a liberal democracy, or that governments cannot work systematically to prevent or minimize the prevalence of such ideas. However, trying to prevent or minimize extremism (ideas and behavior) is a delicate task that can easily backfire and lead to unintended consequences. One should therefore be careful about giving too specific advice about how certain measures might reduce extremist views or behavior, in particular because measures that have proven effective in one case do not necessarily apply to other cases, or to similar cases in different contexts.

Although there is a vast academic literature on preventing violent extremism (see Stephens et al., 2019 for a review), this field of research suffers from an inherent challenge of isolating and documenting the effects of measures intended to reduce extremism, because meaningful control groups are hard to establish. Thus, considering the delicate and volatile effects from counterextremism measures, the following advice is kept at a general level, and tailored to groups such as the NRM and GI, i.e., militant protest groups mainly operating in the extra-parliamentary space and seeking to influence people through mostly legal yet sometimes disturbing and confrontational actions.

1. Deny the role of heroic victim

An essential element of the NRM's and GI's militant identities is that they – as true representatives of their peoples – have become victims of a malicious system trying to crush them. As such, they have chosen to sacrifice a comfortable "normie" life to become part of a

heroic battle against "the system". This romantic self-perception appears to be a strong motivator for many militant activists. Denying this role of heroic victim might therefore reduce some of the appeal these groups are benefiting from. Any initiative or reaction from the "the system" – i.e. the government – that might solidify the perception of being heroic victims, such as derogatory public labeling, unwarranted public arrests, or unannounced house searches at night, should therefore be considered against alternative measures that might be perceived as less intrusive or repressive.

This does not mean that governments should not initiate measures against militant protest groups, or react promptly when their behavior crosses certain boundaries. Trying to deny their role as heroic victim should, for example, never be used as an excuse for not responding to illegal extremist behavior. However, there is likely to be benefit in always thinking hard about how certain initiatives or responses might affect these groups' self-perception, and whether alternative measures could do the same job but with less of a victimizing effect.

2. Encourage responsible media coverage

As militant protest groups trying to convey messages to larger audiences, both the NRM and GI thrive on media attention, including the negative kind. Both groups have become experts in making the most of any form of media attention, often with follow-up initiatives such as video-filmed personal confrontations or public responses. At the same time, the media's interest in these groups is undeservedly high due to their controversial political messages. Minimizing media attention towards these groups would likely impact negatively on their recruitment and mobilization.

However, in a liberal democracy, it is of course not acceptable to dictate what the media should or should not do. Therefore, perhaps the most viable option from a governmental perspective is to establish a dialogue with the media about the potential negative effects of disproportionate coverage of militant protest groups. All things considered, these groups have limited impact, unless it is granted to them by the media.

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3. Build knowledge about militant protest groups

Valid, in-depth, and updated knowledge is needed to carry out informed assessments of how certain measures might impact on the self-perception and behavior of militant protest groups. Building, sustaining, and disseminating such knowledge may therefore contribute to more effective responses and initiatives, both outside and within governments. Poor understanding will lead to misinformed responses and initiatives that can easily backfire and lead to unintended consequences. For example, considering the fanaticism, experience, and position of well-established NRM leaders, home visits by the security police intended to warn them about their activism are not likely to have the desired effect.

This type of knowledge has limited shelf-life and therefore requires some form of permanent structure designed to produce, update, and disseminate it. Furthermore, considering the radical nature of militant protest groups, those responsible for producing it should not represent interest groups with political agendas, but rather more "neutral" civil or government agencies. At the same time, because we are dealing mostly with legal actors here, these agencies should not operate clandestinely like intelligence agencies, but openly and in line with international privacy laws and regulations.

4. Build knowledge about liberal democracy

A shared denominator for the NRM and GI is their fierce opposition to liberal democracy. By implication, building knowledge about liberal democratic ideas and values could serve as a firewall against their anti-liberal propaganda. Many Western countries are currently experiencing an erosion of support for democratic systems, including among young people (Foa & Mounk, 2017). Some of this erosion may result from the fact that today's young people have been born into fairly well-functioning democratic societies and have no experience of illiberal or authoritarian regimes. Liberal democracy can easily be taken for granted and even blamed for broader societal trends related to modernization and globalization. Some might also regard liberal democracy as a rather neutral and boring political construct, unaware of the historical significance of its core values such as civil and

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human rights, freedom of speech, freedom of organization, freedom of religion, and the rule of law.

For these reasons, contemporary liberal democratic governments have a responsibility to build knowledge about what liberal democracy essentially is, how and why it came about, and what its alternatives might entail. Ideally, liberal democracy should not be perceived as neutral and boring, but as an ideology worth defending. Making liberal democracy fashionable among young people may sound like a difficult task, but is one that should be striven towards.

5. Recognize genuine concerns while dismissing extreme solutions

Some concerns voiced by groups such as the NRM and GI are genuine in the sense that they are heartfelt by the activists and may also relate to actual societal challenges. For example, assuming that current patterns of demographic change continue, people of white ethnic decent will most likely be outnumbered by people of mixed ethnic background by the end of the century in several European countries (Kaufmann, 2018). Increasing ethnic/cultural heterogeneity may also impact negatively on social cohesion and social trust (Collier, 2013). These developments cause concern among considerable parts of the population in European countries (Goodwin, 2017). Such concerns must be recognized and discussed openly, without prejudice and moralization. At the same time, the extreme solutions proposed by groups such as NRM and GI, such as remigration, must also be brought into the light and criticized, not only as entirely unrealistic, but also as deeply problematic from a democratic point of view.

6. React decisively to extremist and violent behavior

Finally, although liberal democracies may have to tolerate illiberal or anti-democratic opinions, they must never extend this liberal attitude to tolerating extremist or violent behavior, especially when specific communities, groups, or citizens are being targeted systematically. In such instances, decisive reactions with real consequences are needed to clearly signal the types of extremist (or anti-democratic) behavior that is intolerable.

However, knowing precisely where to draw the line between tolerable extremist opinions and intolerable extremist behavior is not a straightforward exercise.

To some extent, the law dictates the types of statements and behaviors that are intolerable such as direct threats, violent attacks, or causing public disorder. However, all laws are subject to interpretation, and some laws are vaguer and harder to enforce effectively than others. This is especially the case with hate crime laws. One reason is that the police will only be able to respond to a small proportion of hate crimes, either because they are not reported, or because they are difficult to prosecute. As a result, those few who get convicted may perceive their punishment as unfair and arbitrary. In addition, enforcing hate crime laws may produce unintended consequences, such as stronger internal group cohesion, further radicalization, and a sense of victimization. For example, NRM activists are regularly sentenced to prison using hate crime laws. However, the justifications for imprisonment are often vague and the sentences short. Serving short prison sentences appears to give *status* to activists within these groups, in particular if they perceive the conviction as unfair. Activists have (according to their own accounts) been imprisoned for a few months for posting a picture of the Star of David being thrown into a garbage can, and publishing statements such as "long live National Socialism!" Although explicit promotion of such views may be interpreted as illegal according to hate crime laws, one can easily bypass such laws by making the statement more implicit. The result is a cat-and-mouse interpretation game, which does not seem to have the intended preventive or protective effect, rather the contrary.

Similar laws have been used in attempts to punish GI activists for expressing incitement to hatred. However, most of these accusations have been dismissed in court because a racist intent could not be proven, thereby boosting the confidence of the accused GI activists (Die Tagesstimme, 2018). Similarly, GI activists in Germany and Austria have been subjected to quite repressive measures by the state, including being put on surveillance, being prosecuted as a criminal organization, and having their homes raided and their funds confiscated, without such harsh measures leading to legal convictions (Zúquete, 2018, pp. 85–

86). These types of measures might then only strengthen the notion of being heroic victims, unfairly targeted by a malicious system.

Rather than policing political views, one should perhaps be more concerned with policing extremist and threatening behavior targeting specific individuals, groups, or communities. A recent documentary showed how French GI activists in their spare time seek out violent confrontations with random Muslims, including young girls, in the streets at night (Al Jazeera, 2018). This type of behavior should be reacted to decisively. On a similar note, the NRM has been harassing and threatening political opponents into silence at different locations in Sweden, apparently without any firm reactions from the police (Bjørgo & Ravndal, 2018).

Precisely where the boundary for legal reactions should be situated remains an open question in need of further scrutiny. At the moment, we see legal reactions to controversial political views, which may lead to unintended consequences, and we see a lack of legal responses to extremist actions that are clearly overstepping the boundary of what our societies should tolerate. Well-informed analyses of where this boundary should be drawn remains an important task for future research.

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