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Far Right Electoral Success: A Comparative Case Study of the Sweden Democrats and Lega Nord

Bachelor's project in European Studies with Political Science
Supervisor: Wolfram Kaiser
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Norwegian University of
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Abstract

The far right is on the rise in Europe, and more and more far right populist parties makes it into parliament. This paper aims to find out how the far right parties Sweden Democrats in Sweden and Lega Nord in Italy reached electoral success in their latest election, where both parties grew substantially. By utilizing supply-side explanations, this paper argues that both parties use issue saliency and issue ownership, while Lega Nord additionally tries to create the "perfect ideology". The history of both parties are thoroughly explained, as this is crucial to understand since the party history explains to some degree the core differences between the Sweden Democrats and Lega Nord. Lega Nord's past of being a regional party for the people in the north might be a crucial reason as to why party leader Matteo Salvini is so active on social media, where he tries to convey Lega Nord's ideology to his 1,4 million Twitter followers. Swede Democrats' leader Jimmie Åkesson is probably most known through televised political debates where he during the election campaign for the 2018 election ended up in a heated argument over immigrants and their opportunity to get jobs in Sweden. This thesis utilizes voting statistics, news articles, journal articles and televised debates to create a qualitative comparative case study.

Sammendrag

Ytre høyre bølge skyller over Europa, og flere og flere populistiske ytre høyre partier vinner seter i nasjonale parlament. Denne oppgaven forsøker å finne ut hvordan de ytre høyrepartiene Sverigedemokratene i Sverige og Lega Nord i Italia oppnådde politisk suksess i deres siste valg. Ved å bruke supply-side forklaringer vil denne oppgaven argumentere for at begge partiene bruker issue saliency og issue ownership, mens Lega Nord i tillegg forsøker å skape den «perfekte ideologien. Historien til begge partiene blir nøye gjennomgått, siden dette er viktig å forstå siden partihistorien forklarer til en viss grad hovedforskjellene mellom Sverigedemokratene og Lega Nord. Lega Nords fortid som å være et regionalt parti for innbyggerne i nord kan være en viktig grunn til hvorfor partileder Matteo Salvini er så aktiv på sosiale medier, hvor han prøver å fremlegge Lega Nords ideologi til sine 1,4 millioner Twitter følgere. Sverigedemokratenes leder Jimmi Åkesson er sannsynligvis mest kjent gjennom kringkastede politiske debatter hvor han under valgkampanjen for valget i 2018 endte opp i en opphetet debatt over immigranter and deres mulighet til å skaffe seg en jobb i Sverige. Denne avhandlingen bruker stemmestatistikk, nyhetsartikler, artikler i tidsskrifter and kringkastede debatter for å generere en kvalitativ komparative casestudie.

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List of Abbreviations

BSS   Bevara Sverige Svenskt (Keep Sweden Swedish)

EU   European Union

FI   Forza Italia

LL   Lega Lombarda

LN   Lega Nord (Northern League)

ND   New Democracy

SD   Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats)

1 Introduction

20 years ago, the far right movement began to seep into the political mainstream in European politics. Three important historical events were utilized to direct the mainstream politics further to the right: the 9/11 attacks, the financial crisis of 2008, and the European immigration crisis of 2015. When 22 parliament seats in the Netherlands were won by far right politicians in 2017, few battered their eyes. But when only one far right politician made it into parliament in the early 1980's, a thousand protestors marched in the streets (Mudde, 2019, p.2). Similar examples can be found in many other European states, as a beacon of the far right's success to merge into the mainstream political climate in Europe since the turn of the new century.

It is therefore interesting to examine the electoral success that far right parties are experiencing in Europe today. By looking at Sweden and Italy this thesis is motivated by the following research questions: How did the far right parties Sweden Democrats and Lega Nord reach electoral success? And, what are the similarities and differences with their success and the parties themselves? It is particularly interesting to study these two cases because of their differences in history but likeness in electoral success in latter years and political standpoint. While they where both founded around the same time, the Sweden Democrats spent several elections trying to get their first seat in parliament, while Lega Nord secured 55 seats in their first election. Additionally, the political landscape in Sweden and Italy was quite dissimilar. While Sweden was social democratic for many decades after the Second World War, Italy struggled to reach political satisfaction after the fascist regime fell. It is also interesting to compare the far right in Northern Europe with the far right in South Europe to see how they differ from each other. Another crucial point as to why I chose the Sweden Democrats and Lega Nord, instead of e.g. Danish People's Party in Denmark and Vox in Spain, is due to the fact that the Sweden Democrats and Lega Nord has almost the exact same share of votes last election. This makes the parties equally electoral successful and creates a good baseline for discussion.

By conducting a qualitative comparative case study this thesis will seek to answer the research question. In order to do so, this thesis is structured as follows: First the term far right is defined, and the methodology is further explained. Then a literature review is presented before looking deeper into the context and history of the two cases. Furthermore, this thesis will look at the electoral success of these parties in the supply-side perspective by analyzing

their stance on immigration. Lastly, this thesis will discuss the similarities and differences between Sweden and Italy before presenting the conclusion.

1.1 Terminology

The term "far right" can be hard to describe. Scholars, parties, and the media also use additional words to describe the far right that increases the confusion. Is the radical right, the extreme right, populism, and the far right all the same? Cas Mudde argues that few scholars agree on the terminology of the far right movement and all the subgroups it contains (Mudde, 2019, p. 5). The terms used have changed over the years, where for instance "extreme right" was used in the 1980's, which changed into "radical right" in the 1990's. In recent years, though, the term "far right" is broadly used. This change in terminology comes both from scholars and from within the movement. Mudde defines the far right as parties and groups that are hostile to liberal democracy. The radical right and the extreme right are two sub-groups of the far right. Both Sverigedemokraterna (SD) and Lega Nord (LN) are regarded as radical right parties by Mudde.

1.2 Method

This paper is a qualitative comparative case study which relies on analysis of both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources used are SD's party program, principle program and other information published on their webpage, news articles and televised debates. This paper also uses secondary sources like academic papers and books.

1.3 Literature review

The fact that the far right is on the rise politically, especially in Europe, combined with the increased number of terrorist attacks on Western soil made by perpetrators influenced by extreme right-leaning ideas, had led to a surge in literature on this subject in the 21st century. Scholars are in intimate detail analyzing parties, voters, rhetoric, causes, effects, and outcomes of the far right movement. The scope of this paper combined with the huge number of academic papers on the far right had led me to rely on a particular set of sources to adequately answer the research question. Far right scholars use demand and supply perspectives to describe why the far right movement has grown to the size it is today. This paper will only look at the supply perspective, as it seeks to find out what the far right parties in Italy and Sweden do to gather votes, and not why Italians and Swedes vote for far right

parties. Matt Golder's paper *Far Right Parties in Europe* has been especially useful as a starting point to understand how far right parties become successful. His paper explains both the supply-side and demand-side explanations of far right electoral success.

A common issue I stumbled upon while researching this topic is that it seems that few scholars outside of Sweden and Italy are interested in the history of the parties, which results in few English articles and books. Luckily, I can read and understand Swedish so I was able to utilize Swedish texts for the context chapter. SD also has a very informative web site where they post their party program and additional in-depth reports to important policy issues. I had no problem finding SD's viewpoint on any policy issue, at least not om immigration, as that is probably SD's number one case. In the chapter about electoral success, I was able to find a transcript written by SVT, the Swedish state channel, of the most important statements in the last televised debate before the 2018 election in Sweden, which gave grate insight into how Jimmi Åkesson, leader of SD, tries to insert immigration in virtually all other policy areas. I find it a bit hard to understand Swedish when spoken, so the transcript was more reliable to use so I did not miss anything that had been said during the debate. Watching a televised debate can give a hint as to how the other parties' leaders feel about whatever is being said, especially during a heated debate. This gave me a better insight as in how SD is quite different in the immigration policy vs. the other Swedish mainstream parties' policy.

It has been especially demanding to find information about LN's party program. It is seemingly impossible to find it published anywhere in English, so I have been forced to rely on academic papers and statements in the media to understand LN's position on immigration and other policy areas. The most helpful piece has been Albertazzi et.al. that provides both an overview of LN's ideology under Salvini and how the party in part has reached the electoral success they hold today. In the history chapter for LN, I have used Bull & Gilbert's *The Lega Nord and the Northern Question in Italian Politics* combined with *The Crisis and Transformation of Italian Politics* by Edmondo Berselli to fill in the gaps. In both the case of LN and SD I have tried to use Parline when referring to the parties' number of votes. Parline is an organization that hosts data from all functioning parliaments in the world. I regard Parline as a highly reliable source, because their data is made in collaboration with the national parliaments, and because reputable organizations like the United Nations and The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) use data from Parline in their publications. Some of the links provided to Parline's data in the bibliography may seem very old and unreliable, but that is only because Parline archives it's data every so often,

making the archive pages static webpages. This is also the case of links to data from the Swedish Valmyndighet, the Election Authority. Sometimes, Parline does not include the number of seats or the percentage of votes a party received, but only what their coalition received in total. In those cases, I have used data from some of the articles stated above or from Politico, a nonpartisan politics news organization with a particular focus on European politics.

2 Contextualizing the cases

2.1 Sweden

Sweden is in many ways the epitome of the welfare state. The Social Services Act of 2001 dictates that all Swedes are entitled to support from the state if they cannot economically care for themselves (Socialtjänstlag, 2001). The elderly are guaranteed help either at home or in nursing homes, people with disabilities are given the opportunity to live like people without such disabilities, and people who are the victims of crimes are entitled to professional help from the state. However, Sweden has not always had such a high level of welfare. After the economic crisis following the stock market crash in 1929, the Swedish party Social Democrats started the first major reforms to social politics (Åmark & Lundberg, 2001, p. 160). They worked to get people back onto the labor market, strengthened peoples' pension plans, and implemented universal child allowances. These reforms where hugely popular with the Swedish voters, which in turn led the Social Democrats to hold the political power in Sweden for 44 years. Furthermore, social democratic parties dominated the Swedish parliament from the interwar years throughout the 20th century (1936-2006), except for 9 years where right-leaning parties held power (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2012, p. 69). Historically, Sweden has been quite open to immigrant, especially labor immigrants after World War II (Skodo, 2018). Additionally, during the 1970's and 1980's, Sweden received heaps of asylums seekers fleeing the horrors they endured during the Cold War. Currently, about 26 percent of Sweden's inhabitants has a foreign background, meaning that they are either born in another country or that both their parents were born in another country (SCB, 2021). Due to the fact that Sweden received a large number of immigrants during the immigration crisis of 2015, they enforced stricter immigration policies (Ministry of Justice, 2019). Their asylum rules are now the same as the minimum set by EU law. The Swedish

government also implemented stricter return policies to make unlawful immigrants return to their home country quicker than before.

Even though the Sweden Democrats is the first far right party to reach a significant share of votes, other far right parties have made a mark on Swedish politics. The populistic right-leaning party New Democracy (ND) was created in February 1991 by Ian Wachtmeister and Bert Karlsson after they published a debate article called "This is our party program" in the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* on the 25th of November 1990 (Ny Demokrati, n.d.). The article states that the party wishes to lower taxes, privatize the state by selling state property, and reform the refugee policy by making refuges work instead of sitting in refugee homes for long periods of time waiting to obtain citizenship (Wachtmeister & Karlsson, 1990). Regarding European cooperation, New Democracy wanted to join the European Community (EC), and notes in their party program that "Sweden's future is part of Europe's future". In the election in September 1991, only seven months after the party was created, ND managed to obtain 6,7 percent of the votes, which resulted in 25 seats in parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1991). ND was blocked from entering government, as some prominent leaders of the established parties on the right did not want to cooperate with ND because of their xenophobic views. In the end, the Moderate party, Liberals, Center Party and the Christian Democrats created a minority government with 170 out of 349 seats.

ND quickly went downhill after the 1991 election. Wachtmeister resigned from his possession as party leader in February 1994, and Vivianne Franzén was elected as new party leader in June 1994, but it was too late to revive the party (Wernersson, 2016). In the next election, held in 1994, ND only obtained 1,5 percent of the votes and lost all their seat in parliament. The party took a further hit in the 1998 election, where they only managed to obtain 0,16 percent of votes, totaling 8 293 votes (Valmyndigheten, 1998). ND declared themselves bankrupt in 2000 (Ny Demokrati, n.d.). A year later the party tried to start up again and wanted to participate in the 2002 election. They received a meager 106 votes in total (Valmyndigheten, 2002). 2002 is the last election where it is possible to find information on the number of votes for ND. Furthermore, it does not seem like the party was ever dissolved, but they have no presence either physically or online.

SD's history is a complicated one. The party has a dark past rooted in right wing extremism, xenophobia, and Nazism. The general consensus of Swedish researchers is that SD's history starts when the campaign group *Bevara Sverige Svenskt* (BSS)(which roughly translates to *Keep Sweden Swedish*) created an alliance with the party Sverigepartiet (Sweden Party) in

1985 (Lodenius, 2009). BSS was created in 1979 but was not involved in politics until the alliance with Sverigepartiet. Some years later, the party splits, but some of its former members meet up again in 1988 where they decide to change their group's name to the Sweden Democrats. BSS was once known to post flyers and place stickers with anti-immigration and xenophobic statements. One of BSS' most infamous stickers read: "Warning to Swedish girls! Avoid unprotected sex with negros who carry the deadly AIDS! Preferably: do not disgrace your race, your Sweden, your family and relatives. Have an abortion only in emergencies. Keep Sweden Swedish" (Expo, 2018). At SD's first party meeting in 1989, Anders Klarstöm is elected as spokesperson (Hellström, 2013, p. 76). He was a former member of the Nazi party The Nordic Realm Party. Other board members of the party had a similar background where some used to be a member of BSS or the neo-Nazi militant group White Aryan Resistance. In fact, around 60 percent of the board members had connection to Nazi organizations between 1989 and 1995. Furthermore, almost 40 percent of those listed on the ballot for the 1994 elections had or still had ties to Swedish Nazi groups (Hellström, 2013, p. 77).

Just as ND, SD entered their first election the same year the party was created. In this 1988 election, they received a measly 1 000 votes in total, but had some success in the municipality elections, where they for example were only 17 votes away from securing a seat in the municipality of Vårgårda (Lodenius, 2009). The party continues to increase their number of seats in regional parliaments through the next couple of elections, without much success in the national parliament elections. This is until the 2002 election, where they jump from about 20 000 votes in 1998 to 76 000 votes, equaling 1,44 percent of all votes. Some of this success might be due to economic help from Le Pen's populist French party Front National. This economic backing led SD to create and distribute thousands of brochures about the Swedish party across the country, which led more people to know about the party and its politics. In the 2006 election, SD doubles it votes to 160 000, 2,93 percent of all votes (Valmyndigheten, 2006). And then, in the 2010 election, SD finally reaches its goal: they secure 20 seats in national parliament by doubling their number of votes yet again, up to approximately 340 000 total votes, yielding 5,7 percent of all votes (Valmyndigheten, 2010). However, SD did not enter government, as the block known as the Alliance, consisting of four center-right parties formed a minority government (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2014). These parties, including the other leading parties in Sweden, had beforehand urged Swedes not to vote for SD and they were unwilling to form government with them, even if that meant that they would not have a

majority government. In the next election in 2014, SD continued to increase their votes, now totaling 12,86 of all votes and winning 49 seats (Valmyndigheten, 2014) (IPU Parline, 2021). Yet again they did not form government as the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party formed a minority government. SD again increased their votes in the last election in 2018, with a total of 17,53 percent of all votes (Valmyndigheten, 2018). They secured 62 seats, but neither this time were they able to form government, which after lengthy talks again resulted in a minority government led by the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party with the support of the Alliance group parties the Centre Party and the Liberal Party (IPU Parline, 2021b). In the last opinion polls, according to Politico, SD is Sweden's third biggest party with 19 percent of all votes, 3 percent behind the Moderate Party and 8 percent behind the Social Democratic Party (Politico, 2021).

2.2 Italy

Italy has a much richer history in terms of political extremism than Sweden. Italy's fascist past is important to keep in mind when discussing the far right's electoral success in Italy today. Fascist parties held political power in Italy from 1922 until the end of the Second World War in 1945. But what exactly is fascism? Stanley G. Payne writes that some scholars deny that there has ever existed a generic fascism, and that all fascist parties must be seen as singular ideologies (Payne, 1995, p. 4). However, Payne tries to define fascism by the common traits of fascist parties and not by the unique traits of each party. Some of the main point of fascist ideology, according to Payne, includes antiliberalism, anticommunism, nationalism, authoritarianism, and a tendency towards a charismatic leader (Payne, 1995, p. 7). After the fascist parties fell after the World War, Italians did not completely forget about fascism. Some core ideas still survived, such as a distrust of the liberal democracy. Campani argues that this might be the reason that the two biggest parties in the post-war era, the Christian Democrats and the Communists, also abstained from liberal democracy (Campani, 2016). A peculiar, short-lived populist movement dubbed The Ordinary man was founded in 1944 while Italy was under siege by Allied militaries. This movement was against the elite and taxes and believed that politicians were inherently negative. The movement died out in 1948, but the seeds of populism had already begun to sprout in Italy (Campani, 2016, p. 27). As the political landscape shifted, the old ways of the neo-fascist parties were beat by the more modern tactics and policies of the emerging far right parties.

LN also has a somewhat cloudy history with several branches going back for years, just like SD in Sweden. LN history starts in the 1980's, when the party Lega Lombarda (LL) was

created by Umberto Bossi (McDonnell & Vampa, 2016, p. 108). The party had some regional success in the first regional election in 1985, where they won 13 000 votes in total (Bull & Gilbert, 2001, p. 9). They won seats in city councils and regional assembly, but few people really knew what the party was all about. LL was one of several norther Italian parties that sought out regional political power. Bull & Gilbert characterize these northern parties as "cultural xenophobic" (Bull & Gilbert, 2001, p. 10). This can be observed in LL's manifesto and party program, where they among other points only want public housing to be given to Lombards, that the Lombardian flag should hang alongside the Italian flag in public settings, and that Lombardy should be a self-governing state that would heavily discriminate against people who are not "true" Lombardians. In late 1990, Bossi unleashes his plans of taking LL from regional to national politics (Bull & Gilbert, 2001, p. 22). In short, he wanted Italy to be broken into three: North, Centre and South, where the Italian state would only handle key policy areas such as defense strategy and foreign policy (Bull & Gilbert, 2001, p. 23). Bossi believed that this plan would never come to life if LL continued to be a regional party, which led to LL's creation in February 1991. LL would continue as a regional party, so an argument of who should lead which party was up to debate. Bossi argued that he should be leader of both parties because he felt that if he was only the leader of LN, other members in LL would undermine him since they, in his view, did not have the same extreme plans to divide Italy in three parts. The majority of LL agreed with Bossi, but the fact that he became leader of both LL and LN strained his relationship with major figures in the parties, including Franco Rocchetta and Franco Castellazzi, with the latter leaving the party all together a short time after the creation of LN.

Around the time LN is due to run for their first national election in 1992, a political crisis strikes in Italy at a scale Europe had not seen since the late 1950's. In short, 3 main events created the crisis; (1) the established parties struggled to reinvent themselves after the Soviet Union, and in part, European communism, collapsed, (2) a referendum set out to reform Italian politics passed with 95 percent majority, and (3) the newly established LN grew rapidly and capitalized on the established parties fall by bringing in a fresh outlook on Italian politics (Bull & Gilbert, 2001). LN managed to secure 8,7 percent of votes in the general election for the Chamber of Deputies of 1992, making it the fourth biggest party (Bull & Gilbert, 2001, pp. 28-29). LN won 8,2 percent of votes in the Senate. The party also won heaps of votes in the North region, coming in as the second biggest party with 17,3 percent of votes. Italian politics enters its second part of the crisis in 1993 when hundreds of Italian

politicians were charged with crimes ranging from corruption, extortion, and illegal financing of party events to links with the mafia and even murder charges. The Italian president at the time, Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, had to ask Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, head of the Bank of Italy, to become prime minister because, as Bull & Gilbert eloquently puts it, "there were, literally, no reputable party politicians left for Scalfaro to appoint" (Bull & Gilbert, 2001, p. 27).

After the messy start of the 1990's, LN continues to grow their electoral success to some extent. In the 1994 election, LN lost 0,3 percent of votes since the last election, in some part due to the creation of a new party, Forza Italia (FI), led by Silvio Berlusconi (Bull & Gilbert, 2001, pp. 33-34). Bossi knew that LN had no other choice than to create a coalition with FI if they wanted to keep their political power in Northern Italy. LN and FI came to an agreement: LN would keep the majority of candidates in the north and would in turn help FI in their political campaign by enlisting their large number of activists to fight for FI's politics and also let Berlusconi take the part of coalition leader. In the 1994 election, LN ended up with 8,4 percent of votes while FI took 21 percent of the vote (Bull & Gilbert, 2001, p. 34). Together with three other parties, LN and FI made up the political group Freedom Alliance which together gathered about 45 percent of all votes (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1994). The two other political groups, the Progressive Alliance and Pact for Italy, did not manage to beat the Freedom Alliance, and Berlusconi became the new Italian prime minister. However, the coalition between LN and FI was short lived. Already in December of 1994, mere eight months after Berlusconi became prime minister, LN withdrew its support and Berlusconi's government fell (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1996). Elections where then held in 1996 after a "technocratic" administration resigned less than two years after they became the governing body in Italy. This time LN did not take part in any coalition. They upped their percentage of votes to 9,9 and thereby saw themselves beat by what was now called the Olive Tree coalition comprising two center-left parties. Over the next 25 years, LN rose and fell on the voting polls. They reached their all time low in the 2001 election, gathering only 3,9 percent of all votes (Bull & Gilbert, 2001, p. 185). However, LN secured their record high election numbers in 2018 when they won 17,4 percent of all votes which made them the third biggest party in Italy and the largest party on the right (Politico, n.d.). LN's coalition did not reach majority, so they were forced to cooperate with the largest party, the Five Star Movement. Law professor Giuseppe Conte, who had previously never held a political position, became prime minister as the two parties failed to come to an agreement as of which party should take the spot of prime minister (IPU Parline , 2021).

3 Electoral success

As noted earlier in this paper, I will only focus on the supply-side explanations to SD and LN's electoral success. Supply-side explanations are all matters pertaining to the parties itself, while demand-side explanations focuses on the voters and the grievances they hold towards society and their day to day life, which can include but are not limited to economic grievances and cultural grievances (Golder, 2016). Supply-side explanations include e.g. a party's ideology and their opportunity to capitalize on the current political landscape. In this chapter, I will discuss the number one policy area for SD and LN: immigration. I will use the parties' party program and party members' statements in media and in televised debates. When discussing the supply-side explanations, it is fruitful to also discuss issue salience and issue ownership. Issue salience means that a particular policy issue is of importance, while issue ownership can be defined as a particular policy area voters associate with a party (Golder, 2016). I found that SD's electoral success can be attributed to the success of creating issue saliency and issue ownership, while LN's electoral success is more linked to a robust party organization with a charismatic leader than heavily relies on social media to create issue saliency. Matt Golder writes that "far right parties are expected to do well when they are seen to own the issues they promote and when these issues are salient", so it is to be expected that both SD and LN have a degree of issue salience and issue ownership in the policy areas of immigration.

3.1. Sweden

SD's migration policy is one of the top four policy areas they focus the most on (Sverigedemokraterna, n.d.). Both the asylum policy and immigration policy are areas SD want to rebuild from the ground up. In their migration focus program, SD want to only accept asylum seekers that resides in Sweden's neighboring countries (Sverigedemokraterna, n.d.b). They also want a stricter policy towards labor immigration so as only people with experience that the Swedish job market needs are able to come to Sweden on a worker's permit. These stricter laws will also make it harder for Swedish businesses that import foreign workers and do not follow Swedish law regarding the work environment to get away with exploiting immigrants. SD also wants to make it harder to go through family reunification by employing stricter rules on what constitutes as family members and stricter screening of these family members. Additionally, immigrants and asylum seekers that want to become Swedish citizens

need to go through harder citizen tests where they will be tested in both language and social skills, but also Swedish laws and history.

A deeper dive into SD's migration policy program and their principal program of 2019 gives a clearer picture of what SD actually wants to change regarding asylum seeker, immigration and refugee seekers. In their principal program, SD claims that Sweden has experienced several waves of immigration, mainly from countries near Sweden that has the same cultural background (Sverigedemokraterna, 2019, p. 14). These immigrants have successfully integrated themselves in the Swedish way of living. This is not the case for the immigrants Sweden has received in modern times, according to SD. They claim that immigrants that are coming to Sweden now comes from far away countries with a very different culture. SD believes that this type of immigration is negative for Sweden, both economically and socially. Further, they write that SD "does not oppose immigration, but believe that immigration has to be held at a level and be of such nature that it does not pose a threat to our national identity or against the welfare and security of our country". It seems quite clear that the problem for SD is not immigration in itself, but from *where* immigrants come from. SD also claims on their website that the fact that Sweden has received a large number of asylum seekers and people coming to Sweden for family reunions has led to a divide in society, fostered exclusion, and eroded the welfare system (Sverigedemokraterna, n.d.c).

SD tries to take issue ownership over immigration. As noted earlier in this paper, immigration is one of their four main political cases, and the other three are also to some degree linked to immigration. The other issues are welfare, security, and collectiveness. Regarding welfare, SD writes: "We believe that Swedish welfare should prioritize Swedish citizens". One the issue of security, SD writes that "foreign citizens who commits crimes in Sweden will be deported" (Sverigedemokraterna, n.d.). When SD tries to link immigration to all political debates in Sweden, they try to also invoke issue salience. SD wants to be the de-facto anti-immigration party, and wants voters to associate tough immigration laws to SD. Through their party program and principle program, but also statements in media and in televised debates, SD tries to create ownership and importance to the immigration question.

The last televised debate before the 2018 election in Sweden is an example of how SD party leader Jimmie Åkesson tries to link immigration to other policy areas, and also show how his party is the toughest when it comes to immigration. Five cases where up to debate: healthcare, climate, integration, economy, and government coalitions after the election (SVT, 2018). Maybe the most discussed case that came from this debate is one of Åkesson's statements

about immigrants and why it is hard for them to find jobs. Åkesson said that it is hard for immigrants to get a job because they are not Swedish, and that since they do not fit in in Sweden it makes it harder for them to get a job (Ertesvåg, Kolberg, & Oulie-Hauge, 2018). Leader of the Center party, Annie Lööf is clearly disgusted by this statement, and butts in angrily with the comment "How can you express yourself like this?" while banging the table with her fist. Åkesson answers backs to Lööf by saying "Your always so angry in every debate, Annie Lööf, stop screaming in every debate". On the topic of healthcare, Åkesson also tried to link this issue to immigration. He stated that new immigrants should not receive "full welfare benefits", and argued that the seven other parties present at the debate want to fill Sweden up with hundred thousands of people (SVT, 2018). Jonas Sjöstedt, leader of the Left party, seems to understand Åkesson's tactic, and says that it is typical of Åkesson to turn the topic of problems in the healthcare sector into problems with immigration. Åkesson tried to create both issue ownership and issue salience to the immigration policy area. He created ownership by making immigration the policy area he spoke the most about, and created salience by inserting immigration into other topics in the debate, like healthcare, to make it seem that Swedes will get a lower level of healthcare if immigrants keep coming into the country. He also tried to create a "us vs. them" discourse by claiming that immigrants only take from the welfare state without giving anything in return. SD marked themselves as the most immigrant hostile party in the debate and clearly showed their stance on the issue. This can be one of the reasons as to why the party reached their biggest electoral success to date in the 2018 election.

3.2 Italy

Immigration is a prominent party of LN's party ideology, especially after Salvini took over as party leader in 2013. Albertazzi, Giovannini & Seddone writes that 9/11 helped LN to justify their more radical view of immigrants by now being able to frame immigration "as an existential threat to the very survival of the identities and culture of the northern Italians" (Albertazzi et.al., 2018, p. 648). As it is seemingly impossible to find LN's party program anywhere online, this section relies on claims made by Salvini to explain LN's view on immigration. In 2018, when Salvini became the new interior minister in Italy, he made several claims against immigrants and refugees. When visiting Sicily in June 2018, Salvini stated: "Enough of Sicily being the refugee camp of Europe. I will not stand by and do nothing while there are landings after landings. We need deportation centers" (BBC, 2018). He also stated that "there is not enough housing and work for Italians, let alone half the continent of Africa",

and at a rally in northern Italy he said that the immigrants should "get ready to pack your bags". Salvini has also turned away boats coming into Italian ports with immigrants, where one of these boats had rescued 629 immigrants off of Libya's coast (BBC, 2018b). When entering government, LN and their coalition party the Five Star Movement said that one of their priorities was to deport approximately half a million undocumented migrants that reside in Italy.

LN's electoral success can be attributed to both creating issue saliency to the immigration issue and their successful party organization. Salvini heavily rely on social media to reach Italians, and with the help of exceedingly efficient social media experts, Salvini and LN is highly visible in social media which in turn makes voters more attentive to LN's politics (Albertazzi et.al., 2018). Additionally, Salvini has succeeded in making a new LN ideology that is attractive to the voters. This ideology includes immigration, identity issues and law and order, and these issues are also highly visible on Salvini's personal social media platform and LN's social media platforms (Albertazzi et. al., 2018, p, 649). Golder writes that "far right parties have the ability to influence their electoral fortunes through the ideology they espouse", and this is exactly what Salvini and his team has managed to do by relying on social media to convey their ideology and clear stances on the immigration issue in the mainstream media, as noted in the previous paragraph (Golder, 2016, p. 490). Salvini has especially prospered in taking LN from just being a regional party, to a national party by creating an ideology that is attractive to not only north Italians, but all Italians. The fact that Salvini has 1,4 million followers on Twitter, gives him free reign to create issue saliency by giving great attention to cases that LN has a clear policy on, like immigration and law and order. Salvini and his social media team can carefully create content to generate issue saliency in policy areas where LN also holds issue ownership, making it more likely that Italians will vote for LN. Voters can observe how Salvini and LN has a clear policy on immigration, and the fact that immigration is a problem in Italy, they will be more inclined to vote for LN because they have a clear idea of LN's immigration policy and know that they are tough on immigration. So, LN's electoral success in recent years can be attributed to Salvini's exceptional use of social media to create issue saliency and issue ownership, combined with the fact that he has successfully created an ideology that is attractive to voters in all of Italy, and not only in the north as was the case in the early days of the party.

4 Conclusion

To conclude, I would argue that SD and LN are two parties that have both dissimilarities and similarities. While SD finally find themselves situated in a relatively calm political environment where social democratic parties have dominate for seven decades, LN's electoral has been on and off since its beginning in the early 90's. There is evidence to support the statement that SD is to some extent built by extremist and neo-Nazis, while LN's history stems back to a "culturally xenophobic" party of the North, created to divide the Italian nation. In some ways, both parties have a difficult past thar they both try hard to rid themselves of. SD has made several remarks in media that they are under no circumstances a racist party, while Salvini and his LN are tackling the hard task as to make LN attractive to all Italians, not only those who live in the north. An almost perfect similarity between the two parties is their electoral success. Both parties collected approximately 17,5 percent of all votes. The parties are also similar in the way that their core case lies in immigration, and the fact that both are regarded as radical right populist parties.

When it comes to their electoral success, one can argue that the one thing SD and LN has in common is a leader with a clear political agenda. Åkesson has achieved electoral success for SD because he creates both issue saliency and issue ownership of the immigration issue both in the media and in the party program. While Åkesson seems more interested in creating issue saliency and issue ownership and not "the perfect ideology", Salvini is using a massive amount of time and resources to convey the new LN ideology, because of LN's regional past. Since the party want to make electoral success on the national level and not just on the regional level in the north, Salvini is forced to supply a new ideology that all Italians can see the benefit of. Åkesson is successful in using issue saliency when he inserts the topic of immigration into virtually all policy issue, and he stands out from the rest of the party leaders, particularly in televised debates. Both parties have also succeeded to some degree in crating issue ownership. SD and LN has immigration as their core cases, and by always fixating on immigration when giving an interview, posting a tweet or arguing in a debate, voters begin to associate immigration with SD and LN. When these voters then read news about large numbers of immigrants coming to they country, and they do not want that, they will think of SD and LN because they have successfully planted themselves in the brainstem of voters when they think about immigration.

Of course, issue saliency, issue ownership, and the creation of "the perfect ideology" are not enough to adequately explain how far right parties in Europe reach electoral success today. The voters must themselves also want to vote for these parties because they have a solution to the voters daily grievances. Because of the scope of this thesis it was hard to combine both supply-side and demand-side explanations to far right electoral success while still arguing both sides adequately. Due to the lack of available and comparative research, it is also much harder to rely on demand-side explanations when writing a comparative case analysis. On the other hand, few supply-side explanations are thoroughly research with the exceptions of issue ownership and issue salience. It was therefore logical that I relied on these two factors. In regards to further research, I agree with Golder that scholars should try to use both supply- and demand-side explanations to far right electoral success, as both is needed to create a successful party on the far right side of politics.

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