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Crisis at home and abroad

How the Migration Crisis increased far right support in Sweden

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the Migration Crisis of 2015 furthered the Sweden Democrats' (SD) electoral success and why the strategies of the mainstream parties failed. This is done through a demand-side and supply-side approach, using statistical analysis to explain the growing demand for a party opposing immigration and document analysis to examine how the supply of the Social Democrats and the Moderates failed. The thesis finds that opposition to immigration and nativist attitudes increased among Swedish constituents following the Crisis, increasing the demand for restricting immigration for which SD was the established proponent. The changes in attitudes were reflected in statistical evidence, a discourse analysis and in the changing attitudes of the Moderates. Additionally, I found the approach of the mainstream to benefit SD through increasing issue saliency and boosting the credibility of their critical views on immigration. I conclude that the Migration Crisis is a great example of how events may alter the political status quo in liberal democracies through altering demand and supply, and that political actors play a crucial role in this process.

Sammendrag

I denne oppgaven undersøker jeg hvordan flyktningkrisa fra 2015 økte oppslutningen til Sverigedemokratene (SD) og hvorfor responsen til de etablerte partiene slo feil. Dette er gjort gjennom å fokusere på konseptene tilbud og etterspørsel. Jeg anvender dokumentanalyse for å undersøke og avdekke hvorfor strategiene, dvs. Tilbudet, til Sosialdemokratene og Moderatene slo feil. For å vise en økende etterspørsel for en restriktiv innvandringspolitikk anvender jeg statistisk analyse. Den økte etterspørselen gjenspeiles i økt skepsis til innvanding og økende fremmedfientlige holdinger. Holdningsendringene er reflektert i statistikk, en diskursanalyse utført av Yantseva, samt de skiftende holdningene til partiet Moderatene. I den politiske kampen om velgere endret Moderatene holding fra en liberal innvandringspolitikk til å ta til orde for å begrense innvandring kraftig. Sosialdemokratene beskyttet prinsippene bak en liberal innvandringspolitikk mens de implementete lovendringer som begrenset innvandring. Strategiene falt derimot i SD sitt favør gjennom å øke prevalansen av innvandringsdebatten og styrke troverdigheten til SD sitt innvandringskritiske sysnpunkt. Jeg konkluderer med at flyktningkrisa fra 2015 er et godt eksempel på hvordan en hendelse kan påvirke den politiske status quo, og at politiske aktører spiller an avgjørende rolle i denne prosessen.

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List of Abbreviation

BSS	Bevara Sverige svensk (Keep Sweden Swedish)
ER	Extreme right
PRR	Populist radical right
PRRP	Populist radical right party
SD	Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden democrats)
SvP	Sverigepartiet (Sweden Party)
UN	United Nations

1 Introduction

In the last decades, many states throughout Europe have seen a rise in far-right sentiments and ideologies (BBC, 2019). National elections and attitudes reflected in poll results show that the populist radical right (PRR) is growing increasingly relevant in the current political discourse in states throughout Europe. (BBC, 2019). This has also been the case for our neighbouring country Sweden, where the populist radical right party (PRRP) the Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna, SD) has been the third or second largest national party since 2015. SD has its origins under a different name; Sverigepartiet (SvP, Sweden Party) which again was the result of a merger of two existing parties, Fremstegspartiet (Progress Party), a small populist party, and the anti-immigration campaign group Bevara Sverige Svenskt (BSS, Keep Sweden Swedish) (Widfeldt, 2017). SvP quickly vanished due to internal conflicts, but SD arose from its ashes. Its connections to BSS have been the subject to many debates on wheter the party as wholly racist (Widfeldt, 2017). Due to stigma, the party did not reach notable electoral success until 2010, where they gained 5.7% of the vote (Elengenius, G. & Rydgren, J. 2019). From 2011 till 2015, they gained an average around 10 percent in the general elections (Politico, 2021). The party surged up in 2015, however, and has remained interchangeably the third or second largest political party in Sweden since (Politico, 2021).

The year of 2015 was characterized by the Migration Crisis, in which hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing their home countries. The sudden increase of refugees was due to the war in Syria intensifying and conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan worsening, according to The United Nations (UN) Refugee Agency (UNCHR, 2020). Refugees mainly came from Syria, where, according to the UN, over 12 million people needed humanitarian aid inside of Syria and over four million people had fled the country in 2015 (Metcalfe-Hough, V. 2015). The migration surge has been described as the largest and most challenging issue facing Europe since the second world war (Metcalfe-Hough, V. 2015). The surge resulted in many European states increasing their admittance of refugees and with it, migration was moved to the forefront of political debates throughout Europe. Sweden received 163,000 refugees during 2015, more per capita than any other European country apart from Germany (Bengtsson, J. 2020).

The crisis had an immense impact on the political discourse in Sweden, and the subsequent acknowledgement of immigration problematic and integration as a failure by mainstream parties only served to legitimize the harsh rhetoric of SD (Strømbäck, 2018). Seen in conjunction, this leads to an assumption that the migration crisis of 2015 led to an unprecedented electoral success for the SD. While most academic research on the far right focus on demand-side explanations of their prevalence, I will in this dissertation focus on the supply-side, i.e. how SD seized the opportunity the crisis presented when putting the spotlight on an issue they held issue ownership. Additionally, I will include statistical evidence to highlight the increasing demand for a party focused on restricting immigration. My approach is thus a combination of demand-side and supply-side explanations surrounding the electoral success of SD following the Migration Crisis of

2015 and the subsequent failure of mainstream parties to respond. Consequently, my research question reads as follows:

How did the migration crisis help SD further their electoral success and why did the strategies of the mainstream parties fail?

2 Methodology

This dissertation is a qualitative analysis of how existing literature and studies of the far right may explain the development of SD in Sweden. It is a case study applying document analysis and minor statistical analysis to strengthen the hypothesis that the Migration Crisis of 2015 enabled SD to reach new electoral heights. Document analysis is a way to produce qualitative data through analysing non-scientific material (Tjora, A. 2017). My method is descriptive in that I have sought to study how the Migration Crisis of 2015 effected the political situation in Sweden. Being an ingrained part of SDs success, I have chosen to examine the response of the mainstream and why it ostensibly failed. My approach includes both supply-side and demand-side explanations, as both a high demand and an open supply is needed to gain electoral success (Golder, M. 2016). My method for data collection has been two-folded. To suggest a change in attitudes and thus demand for stricter policies I have used relevant statistical data gathered by credible actors. To highlight the political competition following the crisis I chose to analyse the actions of the two largest mainstream parties (the Moderates and the Social Democrats) reported in by the Swedish newspaper "Aftonbladet". A crucial part of document analysis is the collecting of primary source material (Burnham, P. et al, 2008). There is a myriad of primary sources I could have included in this dissertation, ranging from interviews and memoirs to speeches and government publications. I have chosen to focus on newspaper articles as they play a crucial role in how political actors engage with voters and present themselves.

There are both strengths and weaknesses to my approach. With existing studies forming the bedrock of my analysis, it is reliant on existing explanations and understandings of the far right and supply-side theory. This weakens the dissertations explorative elements. It does, on the other hand, strengthen the validity of the elements I do find as they are deeply embedded in existing scientific literature. Additionally, my approach is two-folded in that I provide both a demand-side and a supply-side explanation. This is, however, done to underscore the broad effect the Migration Crisis of 2015 had on the Swedish political composition. One could argue that such an approach may be too ambitions for a dissertation because there is less room to thoroughly analyse from the two approaches. In using both, however, I am able to show the interaction between demand and supply, thus giving a clearer picture of how an event may affect the political status quo.

3 Literature review

There already exists extensive research of the far right, both in general and exclusive to the case of Sweden. In the following section, I will present books and articles on the topic related to my research question. Existing literature has a clear conclusion of SD as a populist radical right party (PRRP).

3.1 The far right defined

First, it is important to gain an understanding of what the populist radical right (PRR) is. To answer this question Mudde's book "The far right today", the culmination of years of research into the far right, give an apt description of the far right. The book reaffirms some general assumptions about the far right, while dismantling others. Mudde finds, for example, that the far right is far more diverse than it is believed to be (Mudde, c. 2019). Referring to his older work he argues that while the extreme right (ER) rejects procedural democracy, meaning a democratic system where popular sovereignty dictates who rules, the PPR does not reject democracy as a whole (Mudde, C. 2010). Instead, they challenge the liberal values of liberal democracy, arguing that the wishes of the majority should not be blocked by the protection of the minority (Mudde, C. 2010). Their ideal of the majority is influenced by their nativist ideology, which according to Cas Mudde holds that "states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ('the nation') and that non-native elements (person and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation state" (Mudde, C. 2007, p. 19).

With the far right being an umbrella term under which both ER and PRR is located, theories on the far right also applies to PRR. Jens Rydgren interprets the far right as emphasising "ethnonationalism rooted in myths about the past" and that their cause is "strengthening the nation by making it more ethnically homogeneous and … by returning to traditional values" (Rydgren, J. 2017, p. 1). Sabrina P. Ramet argues that the far right is characterized by an "ideological and programmatic emphasis on "restoring" supposedly traditional values of the nation or community and imposing them on the entire Nation or community" (Ramet, 1999, p. 4). The common denominator in these descriptions of the far right is a nativist ideology in which 'others' are to be excluded.

Though not exclusive to the far right, another key feature is authoritarianism; a belief that society should be governed through strict order and infringements of authority are to be punished severely (Mudde, 2019). Here, almost all issues, including drug addiction, illegal immigration and is some cases sexual deviancy, are seen as cases requiring law-and-order to curb, believing punishment is the best preventative strategy (Mudde, c. 2019).

Finally, the final key feature of the far right is populism. Populism is characterized by a separation of the people into two groups: the pure and oppressed, and the corrupt elite. Subscribers of the ideology argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people (Mudde, C. 2019). Under this perception the effort of the far right is not only justified but seen as heroic actions to free the people from a corrupt system of oppression. By PRRPs this is often expressed through a confrontative rhetoric attacking the mainstream parties for not doing more for 'the common man'.

Cas Mudde explains the rise and fall of far right movements in the form of waves. We are currently experiencing the fourth wave, which began with the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in 2001 (Mudde, C. 2019). Two other crises have also painted this wave: The Great Recession in 2008 and the refugee crisis of 2015 (Mudde, 2019). These events shook the national and international political status quo of the western world and gave rise to unseen levels of islamophobic and populist attitudes and was in some form or another capitalized on and furthered by the PRR, according to Mudde (2019). Here, SD is no exception (Elgenius, G. & Rydgren, J. 2018). For most of the 21st century, the party was on the political fringes, but since its electoral success of 2010 it has grown steadily.

3.2   The issue of immigration

Scholars Gabriella Elgenius and Jens Rydgren use the theory of framing when explaining how the SD are talking about immigration. Frames are related to psychological principles governing perception i.e., how we interpret messages (Tversky, A. & Kahneman, D. 1981). In their analysis of SD's nativist rhetoric, they found historical continuity of it for the past two and a half decades, but that their message had changed from using openly nativist and xenophobic rhetoric and reduced their usage of motivational and prognostic frames to more a subtle ethno-nationalistic rhetoric and increased their usage of the diagnostic frame (2019). This has ostensibly helped SD reach parliamentary success by altering their façade to a more acceptable alternative to the mainstream parties. Though their rhetoric changed, their stance on immigration did not.

In 2015, scholar Anders Widfeldt found through a binominal regression analysis that the electoral appeal of SD relied heavily on immigration (Widfeldt, 2015). Other researchers also suggest that immigration has a large impact on voting behaviour. Arzheimer finds anti-immigration sentiments to be the single most important reason as to why voters support the far right (Arzheimer, K. 2018). In fact, given the fact that immigration, ethnic tensions, and PRR actors permeate Western societies, Arzheimer finds focusing on why they fail to be more fruitful than why they succeed, both politically and intellectually. Mudde argues the media's high focus on immigration is one explanation as to why the far right is so prevalent in Europe, using the Migration Crisis as an example as far right parties throughout most of Europe grew following the event (Mudde, C. 2019). Kirsti M. Jylhä et al. concluded that support for SD was above all explained by a negative stance on immigration and found SD voters to hold significantly more xenophobic attitudes than voters of mainstream parties (Jylhä, K.M., Rydgren, J. and Strimling, P. 2019).

3.3   Demand-side explanations

Much of the existing literature on the far right is concentrated around demand-side explanations. These are texts that emphasize the (perceived) deprivations and grievances of constituents, prompting them to put faith into far right parties (Golder, M. 2016), (Rydgren, J. & Tyrberg, M. 2020). These grievances have been given many names depending on the field of research and variables weighed, but are generally split into three groups: cultural, social, and economic. Examples include the cultural backlash theory, economic anxiety theory and social marginalization theory.

Mudde groups these theories as the Normal Pathology Thesis. It explains subscription to far right ideology as irrational, often caused by fear and anxiety. This idea is captured in Seymour Martin Lipset's quote from his book *Political Man* in which he argued:

> *"To sum up, the lower-class individual is likely to have been exposed to punishment, lack of love, and a general atmosphere of tension and aggression since early childhood – all experiences which tend to produce deep-rooted hostilities expressed by ethnic prejudice, political authoritarianism, and chiliastic transvaluational religion . . .. In 'normal' periods, apathy is most frequent among such individuals, but they can be activated by crisis, especially if it is accompanied by strong millennial appeals"* (Lipset, S. 1960, p 120, 122).

The thesis is still prevalent, being the basis of Sabrina Ramet's description of the radical right as cultural irrationalism inspired by intolerance and fuelled by an image of 'us' versus 'them' where the other is translated to 'the enemy' in 1999 (Ramet, S. 1999). Similarly, Helmut Graus argued that the success of the far right was due to 'underlying insecurities and fears' that were activated under periods of crisis (Graus, H. 2004). The thesis' emphasis on crises is crucial, as the fear they impose supposedly make subjects act irrational by triggering a survivalist instinct.

Demand-side explanations can yield results. In a multi-level analysis of radical right-wing party support in Sweden, scholars Jens Rydgren and Maria Tyrberg found support for the ethnic competition hypothesis, which argues "voters turn to PRRPs in order to reduce competition in housing, social welfare, and to promote cultural hegemony if there is a high proportion of immigrants" (2020, p. 559). They found consistent evidence of a positive correlation between an increase in foreign-born residents and the share of votes for the SD (2020). This may explain why the SD saw an increase during and following the Migration Crisis of 2015.

Other articles, however, point in the opposite direction. Widfeldt (2015) found no general support for the 'losers of modernization' thesis in his binominal logistic regression analysis.

3.4   Supply-side explanations

Supply-side explanations, on the other hand, focus on the conditions for political actors to capitalize on a demand. Factors here include political opportunity structure, a strong party organization, and a winning ideology (Golder, M. 2016).

Through his Pathological Normalcy Thesis, Cas Mudde argues that:

> *"Populist radical right ideas are not alien to the mainstream ideologies of western democracy and populist radical right attitudes are not just shared by a tiny minority of the European population"* (Mudde, C. 2010, p. 1178).

Instead, the PRR further the same issues as the mainstream view. The difference is that they are radicalized (Mudde, C. 2010). He backs up his thesis by referring to ESS results, which shows strong attitudes regarding immigrants, illegal immigration, and law-and-order throughout Europe (Mudde, C. 2010). In his book from 2019 he argues that most countries, if not all, "have a fertile breeding for populist radical right ideas and organizations" and that nativist, authoritarian and populist attitudes are widespread and sometimes even in majority, something support for PRR policies such as less immigration and stricter sentences suggest (Mudde, C. 2019). In a nutshell, the thesis holds that the PRR do not differ in opinion from the mainstream but in its degree. Subsequently, PRRP should be analysed in the same manner as mainstream parties.

As for the causes of PRR movements, Mudde argues that there is no universal explanation to why some movements succeed. Rather, their success is related to issue saliency and issue ownership, that is; how prevalent is an issue in the current political

discussion and which parties have adopted a stance regarding it (Mudde, C. 2019). Related to this is the role of agenda-setting, a process in which the media plays an important role based on who they give space among the headlines (Mudde, C. 2019). As the media's business model is based on engagement with the article more radical stances are often given an unproportionally large amount of space in the media, inflating their prevalence in society (Mudde, C. 2019).

Like Mudde, Elgenius and Rydgren also claim that issue saliency has a big influence on the success of the Far Right, arguing:

> *"in a situation of decreased issue salience of the economic cleavage dimension, fewer people will make use of class frames in understanding the world and their being in the world. For example, for individuals experiencing a threat against their statis position, a frame stressing clashes of economic interests between 'immigrants' and 'natives' may be adopted as an alternative interpretation"* (2019. p. 588).

Another important factor for PRR success is credibility, which Hellström defines as "explicitly concern[ing] political language and how we interpret the claims being addressed in the public debate" (Hellström, A. 2016, p. 5). In other words, a party needs credibility to be considered a legitimate alternative to the political mainstream. Credibility is also gained by conforming to the zone of acquiescence, that is, the social codes governing what is perceived as acceptable to say (Hellstöm, 2016). In doing so, voters will consider what you have to say even if they do not agree with you. The zone is never static, however, and Hellström argues failures of mainstream parties to notice a shift may lead to the electoral success of PRRPs if they supply an alternative to the currently disconnected mainstream. Hellström (2016) argues SD succeeded by constructing a narrative in which immigration posed a threat to the nation's identity and culture through invoking memories of Sweden's great harmonious past.

These are all supply-side explanations. Based on these assumptions, we should expect to find an increase in SD poll results following the refugee crisis of 2015.

Currently, few academic studies emphasize supply-side explanations when assessing the electoral success of SD. Rydgren and Van der Meiden (2018), however, used supply-side explanations when examining the success of the SD. They argued that the growth of the SD was linked to a decline in class politics, the growing salience of sociocultural politics (particularly immigration), mainstream convergence over socioeconomic issues and immigration, and SD efforts to improve their façade.

3.5   Existing literature on SD and the Migration Crisis

There exist several scientific studies of SD, some which I have already presented. The most prominent researcher of SD is Swedish scholar Jens Rydgren, who has written several books and articles explaining the prevalence of the far right in Sweden. Scholars Hellström and Strømbäck link the migration crisis to the electoral success of SD. The former focuses on how the crisis stretched the capacity of municipalities. This led to more confrontations between locals and refugees in Swedish society, increasing demands for political action (Hellström, 2018). Strømbäck links the efforts of the mainstream party in contesting the issue of immigration following the Migration Crisis and argues this benefited SD more than the mainstream parties, as it increased issue saliency and legitimized SDs critical view on immigration (Strømbäck, 2018). However, the format in which they present their arguments are not scientific. Hellström presented his views in a blogpost. Strømbäck shared his thoughts in a report, but the report is not scientific vis-à-vis as it does not reference sources to back up the claims being made. Consequently, a

scientific study of how the Migration Crisis benefited SD is non-existent. I aim to answer this question using demand-side and supply-side explanations, thus filling a gap in the literature currently written on SD.

4 Theoretical framework

For any discussion in social science, theory forms the bedrock from which constructive arguments can be made, the far right being no exception. As I have chosen an approach in which I study the interaction between supply and demand I will base my discussion on two theories, one for each. My interpretations of these concepts are heavily influenced by scholar Matt Golder, who examines the rise of the far right in Europe through demand-side and supply-side explanations (2016). The concept of supply and demand is borrowed from economic theory, but it works well as a concept in explaining the relation between the demands and attitudes of voters and the supplies of competing political parties.

4.1 Demand-side theory

Several theories have been suggested as demand-side explanations for the rise of the far right. Most often, they revolve around feelings of economic deprivation, caused by modernization and globalization, creating 'losers of globalization'. Others suggest that modernization and increased immigration has created a perceived identity crisis in which national culture and values are corroding ((Hellström, A. 2018), (Jylhä, K.M. et al. 2019). The situation in Sweden, however, is best explained through the theory of ethnic competition. The theory suggests that ethnicities compete for societal resources: jobs, public spending, housing etc. (Rydgren, J. & Tyrberg, M. 2020). The theory is similar to welfare chauvinism, which holds that public spending should first and foremost serve the native population (Jylhä, K.M., Rydgren, J., & Strimling, P. 2019). Since the resistance is also based on sociocultural differences, reflected in the rhetoric of SD and to an increasing degree the public, ethnicity is also a central part of the demand. This makes ethnic competition the most suitable theory to explain demand.

4.2 Supply-side theory

Golder suggests three main supply-side explanations for political success: a favourable political opportunity structure, a strong party organization, and a winning ideology (2016). Several concepts are located within these, but I will only focus on the ones most relevant for the success of the SD. My chosen approach focuses on party competition, as it explains how the interactions between parties in the struggle over convincing voters ended up in favour of SD. Traditionally, these relationships are defined by political cleavages or degree e.g., if the rich should be taxed or how much. When mainstream parties converge in the political space, however, it leaves room for far right parties to seize issue ownership (Golder, M. 2016). Party competition includes several concepts previously presented: issue saliency, issue ownership and credibility. Multiple scholars have emphasised one or more of these as a factor for electoral success, including Strømbäck (2018), Anders Hellström (2016) and Cas Mudde (2019). According to Jesper Strømbäck, a professor in journalism and political communication, it is an established truth in political communication theory that election efforts are largely battles for opinion,

and within it, the battle over the political agenda as it is in the party's interest to keep the issues on which they hold a key position in centre focus (Strømbäck, J. 2018). Moreover, it is a battle over issue presentation i.e., the general perception of the issue. Although using a different theory, Strømbäck is essentially saying the same thing as Golder: parties compete over voters through issues.

I argue that all the aspects of party competition are to some degree needed for a party to compete for voters. For voters to care, issue saliency is needed. Issue ownership is important as voters evaluate which party to vote for based who is the most credible proponent for their issue perception (Golder, M. 2016). Lastly, credibility is essential to be considered a legitimate option, and is affected by political competition, party organization, and ideology. In a nutshell, party competition deals with how parties fight over these concepts on various issues.

5. Statistical evidence: Sweden and immigration

For the last decades prior to 2014, except in 1993, 2002 and 2010, the issue of immigration has had a low degree of saliency in Swedish politics (Widfeldt, 2015, p. 404). Additionally, statistics prior to the migration crisis show very positive attitudes towards migration in Sweden. An ESS from 2014/15 found that on a scale from zero to ten, where zero indicated the country became a worse place to live due to immigration and 10 indicated it became better due to immigration, Sweden scored the highest score out of the surveyed countries with a score of 6.7 (ESS, 2016, p. 4).

A survey by Demoskop examined attitudes surrounding immigration from January 2008 till April 2016. The survey concludes that the large majority finds immigration to be too high, with 70% answering that immigration is far or somewhat too high (Demoskop, 2016). Furthermore, they find that the issue of immigration has become more polarized, alluding to the sharp increase in respondents believing immigration to be far too high and the decrease in neutral respondents (Demoskop, 2016). Negative attitudes increased steadily from 2012 to 2015, and sharply between 2015 and 2016, where the number of respondents believing immigration to Sweden as far too high went up from 30 percent to 43 percent (Demoskop, 2016). Overall, 58 percent found immigration to be too high in 2015, and 70 percent believed so in 2016. Lastly, the survey finds that while there are different levels of immigration criticism in different social groups, e.g., older being more sceptical than younger respondents and higher educated being more tolerant than less educated respondents, all of them have become increasingly sceptic of immigration (Demoskop, 2016). The same trend was found among most party groups.

The survey also asked if respondents believed immigration enriched Sweden. Attitudes were measured on a scale from 1 to 7, where one meant a complete disagreement with the statement "immigration enriches Sweden" and 7 meant complete agreement. The survey finds attitudes to be very consistent across the eight years of the survey, scoring highest in 2018 with 4,82 and lowest in 2016 with 4,4, though there has been a slight downward trend. The survey concludes that the majority sees immigration as enriching Sweden and suggest that Swedes are not generally opposed to immigration but are

concerned about the level of immigration (Demoskop, 2016). There were clear ideological differences on this question, however. When subtracting the portion of respondents believing immigration enriched Sweden by the number who responded it did not, it showed that most mainstream parties to a varying degree saw immigration as enriching Sweden (Demoskop, 2016). The graph set 100 percent as the value for completely agreeing that immigration enriched Sweden, 0 percent as neither nor and minus 100 percent as completely disagreeing immigration enriched Sweden. Sweden's then largest party, the Social Democrats (socialdemokraterna) scored an average of 55 percent in 2016. Their support had risen gradually every year from a score of around 40 percent in 2012. The second largest party, the moderates (Moderaterna) scored an average of 48 percent in 2015, but this had fallen to 26 percent in 2016. SD, on the other hand, held a relatively stable values, scoring minus 69 percent in 2011, minus 60 percent in 2012, increasing to minus 71 percent in 2014, falling to around minus 60 percent in 2015, before rising again to minus 70 percent in 2016 (Demoskop, 2016). Other surveys have suggested the same polarization between parties on the perception of immigrants between the parties (Jylhä, K.M. et al. 2019).

6. Analysis and discussion

Following the introduction of several concepts relating to how a party may achieve electoral success, I will in the following analysis apply them to the case of the SD in the wake of the Migration Crisis of 2015.

It is perhaps inaccurate to argue that it was the Migration Crisis of 2015 that led to the electoral success of the SD as the issue of immigration was highly salient in the general election of 2014, in which SD gained doubled their vote share from 2010. Rydgren and Van der Meien argues that the party already held issue ownership of immigration from 2011. Additionally, the results of the 2014 indicate that several voters saw the party as a credible option in 2014. I argue, however, that the Migration Crisis of 2015 still had a profound impact on SD. Firstly, the issue saliency of immigration increased drastically. A systematic analysis of media discourse on migration in Sweden from 2012 to 2019 finds that the number of tweets, posts and articles on the issue tripled at the height of the Migration Crisis of 2015, solidifying the issue is Swedish society (Yantseva, V. 2020). Secondly, statistical evidence shows a negative trend and increased polarization on the question of whether immigration enriched Sweden or not. This may suggest an increased demand for restrictive immigration policies. Lastly, as issue saliency over immigration increased following the crisis prompted a response from the mainstream parties, who chose to adopt an accommodative approach to the issue, acknowledging that immigration had become problematic and that integration had failed (Strømbäck, 2018).

6.1. Attitudes and opinions on immigration

Demand is best explained through examining the attitudes and opinions of Swedish constituents. As presented earlier, Demoskop's survey found changes in opinions towards immigrants. It shows that the issue has become increasingly important to voters, as more respondents believed immigration to be too high following the Migration Crisis, suggesting a higher demand for a political response. Additionally, the survey found that as the number of respondents believing immigration to be too high, the number of

respondents believing immigration enriched Sweden decreased, i.e., a negative correlation.

Another indicator of how the Migration Crisis altered opinions can be found by analysing the discourse on immigration in the news, social media, and forums. Here, Victoria Yantseva found that news outlets generally focused on how the Migration Crisis affected Sweden, rather than how it directly affected the subjects fleeing the conflicts (Yantseva, V. 2020). Furthermore, the media's covering of migration was found to be historically positive and the immigration was framed as a low salience issue in the official discourse (Yantseva, V. 2020). This happened despite Demoskop's survey showing that constituents to an increasing degree saw immigration as a problem, which may have had the effect of making voters frustrated with the current establishment. Additionally, Yantseva found that social media posts were increasingly permeated with racist undertones and negative emotions, suggesting an increase in hostile attitudes and prejudice towards immigration following the Migration Crisis (Yantseva, V. 2020). Overall, this suggests that the demand for restricting immigration increased in part due to the Migration Crisis of 2015. Furthermore, it was increasingly based on nativist attitudes.

The theory of ethnic competition may provide an explanation as to why voters have come to prefer SD over other political parties. Though other parties came to be increasingly sceptic of immigration following the crisis, they did not base their opposition on sociocultural arguments. SD, on the other hand, did so. Their party newsletter SD Kuriren made explicit links between refugees, unemployment and welfare dependency (Elgenius, G. & Rydgren, J. 2018). Additionally, they argued that the current level of immigration would mean the end of the Swedish welfare state. This is a powerful rhetorical message, as the welfare state is an integrated part of Swedish national identity (Elgenius, G. & Rydgen, J. 2018). In 2016, SD argued to decrease immigration due to it threatening national identity, welfare, and security (Sverigedemokraterna, 2016). With regards to the Migration Crisis, the party held that refugees should be helped in their own country rather than to be granted asylum in Sweden, sending a clear message that domestic needs should be put before the needs of foreign refugees (Sverigedemokraterna, 2016). Additionally, the rhetoric of SD lied more in tune with the changes in attitudes suggested by Yantseva and the Demoskop survey. With reference to party competition, SD was likely seen as the most credible alternative to the increasing number of voters holding these nativist attitudes.

6.2. The Moderates' and the Social Democrats' response to the Migration Crisis

As the two largest parties in Sweden, the Moderates and the Social Democrats played a key role in the response of the mainstream to the Migration Crisis. The shifting tone of the mainstream happened before the Migration Crisis of 2015, when the Moderates in August of 2015 criticized the leading party, the Social Democrats for its silence on integration and refugee issues, arguing in a letter to the party that Sweden was facing many societal challenges and in need of political leadership (Holmqvist, A. 2015). The Moderates invited the Social Democrats to debate on jobs and integration, highlighting the need for easier ways for immigrants to enter the job market (Holmqvist, A. 2015).

The shift is crucial for a number for reasons: firstly, the Moderates acknowledge that Sweden's current integration programme is faulty. Secondly, it increased the issue

saliency. The party did not suggest reducing immigration, meaning they still subscribed to the current liberal immigration policy. This may have been due to their alliance with the Green Party from 2011, which Rydgren and Van der Meiden found to cause the Moderates to adopt a liberal stance on immigration (2018). The debate suggests that the mainstream initially did not see immigration as problematic, but that it was integration that was the actual issue. Nevertheless, it put the issue of immigration in the spotlight of the public debate, increasing issue saliency.

In September of 2015, when the Migration Crisis unfolded, the party leaders of all parliamentary parties, except SD who were excluded, met to discuss the 'acute' refugee crisis (Forsberg, O. & Karlsson, P. 2015). The parties agreed that 'other European countries should take their responsibility too' in housing refugees (Forsberg, O. & Karlsson, P. 2015). This may have sent a signal that Sweden was receiving more refugees than it could bear, increasing issue saliency and demand for political action. The parties also agreed to continue to have a generous refugee policy, which continued the trend of SD holding issue ownership as the sole critic of the current immigration system. Additionally, this may have led increasingly worried voters to turn to SD.

In October of 2015, however, the Moderates adopted a tougher migration policy, arguing municipalities were approaching a breaking point (Aftonbladet, 2015a). Party leader Anna Kinberg Batra described the situation as unsustainable and criticized the government for not having control of the 'emergency'. She also criticized the SD as being 'populists pointing fingers', suggesting that though the SD criticized the other parties for not restricting immigration, they put little efforts in themselves to do so. Relating to the concepts of party competition, the Moderates are here seen as changing its approach to the immigration issue from an adversarial approach, where the party distanced itself from the views of SD, to an accommodative approach, where they are attempting to contest the issue ownership of SD as the sole critic of the current immigration system. They are also scrutinizing the credibility of SD. Additionally, the sudden change of heart by the Moderates pushed the discussion of immigration policy to the forefront of Swedish media, increasing issue saliency. In November of 2015, the Moderates demanded a refugee stop at the border, which intensified the message they had sent the previous month (Aftonbladet, 2015b). The Social Democrats responded by arguing that such a policy would break with the rights of asylum (Aftonbladet, 2015b). Following the harsh criticism of their handling of the Migration Crisis, a survey from 2016 showed the Social Democrats losing three percent, mainly to the Moderates (Aftonbladet, 2016). While this may have indicated that the Moderates' strategy was working, I argue it was mainly the result of immigration becoming politicized and increasingly important to voters.

Though the shift from the Moderates may have been for strategic purposes preparing for the approaching 2018 election, it may have had the effect of portraying the SD as a legitimate political option as the latter had been critical of immigration for years. Additionally, the strategy likely failed due to SD holding issue ownership. In a scenario where a party has issue ownership, increased salience will likely benefit them (Mudde, 2019), (Strømbäck, 2018). Though implementing stricter policies, the Social Democrats' uneasiness in addressing the issue may have resulted in a loss of legitimacy as voters increasingly saw immigration as a key issue, reflected in their declining voter support.

6.3. The effect of the crisis on Swedish politics

As demand and supply for a harsher stance on immigration increased following the Migration Crisis, the rhetoric of SD gained a solid footing in Swedish politics. It has

proven to be very hard to disentangle it. In the subsequent debates, the SD paint migration as the main cause of Sweden's domestic issues. Constituents concerned with the current level of immigration may adopt these views. Subsequently, every debate about domestic issues, be it about welfare or healthcare, can be channelled into an issue of migration. One may also interpret the Moderates' response as arguing the same, as they warned of a system collapse if immigration had not been significantly reduced. This suggests that an effect of the Migration Crisis was that the issue of immigration was extended beyond its original frames, making it part of multiple issues in Swedish politics.

SD has benefitted greatly from this. The party has on several occasions in the years following the Migration Crisis explained domestic issues as caused by immigration. A great example is during the party leader election debate of 2018. In the debate Christian Democrats leader Ebba Buch Thor raised the issue of unjust healthcare in Sweden, which SD leader Jimmie Åkesson challenged by stating that due to increased spending on immigration Sweden was unable to deliver equal benefits for all and ended his argument saying, "the Christian democrats want to increase immigration, which is the reason why welfare is so shallow today" (Aftonbladet, 2018, my translation). The strategy can also be seen as a way of agenda-setting through redirecting other debates to the issue of immigration i.e., maintaining issue saliency. This can also be seen to prolong the nativist perceptions (i.e., demand) that increased following the crisis, despite that fact that the restrictive policies implemented by the Swedish ruling parties has lowered immigration significantly each year (Statista, 2021). In fact, a survey by Eurobarometer from 2018 found that 73 percent of Swedes believe integration to be unsuccessful, 61 percent believed immigrants worsened crime problems, and 58 percent believed immigrants to be a burden to the Swedish welfare system, suggesting that negative attitudes towards immigrants still permeate Swedish society (Robinson, L. & Käppeli, A. 2018). In the general election of 2018, SD received 18 percent of the votes (Politico, 2021). In February 2020 the party was marked as the largest party in Sweden in an opinion poll, where 23,4 percent of respondents said they would vote for SD (SR, 2020). Overall, the results in the years following 2015 show that SD is being regarded as a legitimate political alternative by an increasing number of constituents.

SD's strength is thus their issue ownership over immigration. It is, however, also their weakness. One way of reducing the presence of the far right is to shift the political debate away from the issues in which they hold a key position i.e., issue ownership (Mudde, 2019). If the issue of immigration were to lose saliency, SD is likely to lose relevance as well. During and following an event such as the Migration Crisis, however, this may prove difficult as such events permeate news outlets and social media. In a poll from May 2020, however, the Social Democrats had overtaken the lead, polling 30.1 percent while SD had fallen to 18.8 percent (Holmqvist, A. 2020). The shift may suggest that the Corona pandemic i.e., a new crisis, decreased the issue saliency of immigration.

7. Conclusion

This dissertation has sought to answer the questions of how the Migration Crisis benefitted SD and why the efforts of the mainstream parties to curb SD's issue ownership failed. To answer the former question first, the crisis increased the saliency of the immigration issue. Secondly, it increased hostility towards immigration. This created both an increase in demand and supply for restrictive immigration policies, and legitimized the narrative advocated by SD. Secondly, the strategies of the two largest parties failed. The orally pacifistic attitude of the Social Democrats made voters lose faith in the political establishment. The Moderates' attempt to contest the issue ownership of SD may have benefited the party in the short term, but it benefited the SD more as the acknowledgement that the current immigration system was a disaster put the mainstream under even more scrutiny. Additionally, it increased the demand for restricting immigration which the SD had advocated for years. Put bluntly, as the Migration Crisis was increasingly painted as a domestic crisis by both the Moderates' and the SD and constituents grew increasingly negative towards both immigration and integration, the zone of acquiescence moved towards a more nativist approach putting the domestic situation in front of granting refugees asylum. In sum, the effects of the Migration Crisis led SD to be increasingly perceived as a legitimate political actor, who had warned of the dangers of a liberal immigration system for years.

My dissertation thus contributes an understanding of how SD benefitted from the Migration Crisis of 2015. Moreover, it describes how a crisis or event may alter the demand and supply in domestic politics and that the response of the mainstream parties can have an immense impact on how voters perceive issues and political actors. Although the case of Sweden is unique, multiple European countries experienced a rise in far right sentiment following the Migration Crisis. Further research should thus investigate if the same effects are found elsewhere. Similar findings could provide an interesting perspective of how crises may affect the political status quo in liberal democracies.

I do, however, find several limitations in my own research. Firstly, my empirical evidence to describe the response of the mainstream may be scrutinized as I've only included empirical evidence on the two largest mainstream parties. One could thus argue it is inaccurate to characterize their response as the response of the mainstream. Secondly, my analysis of SD portrayed the Migration Crisis was very brief despite it being a central element in their success. There was, however, no room for inclusion of this interesting perspective in my dissertation. Further research can improve my thesis by focusing on the role of SD in the debates following the Migration Crisis as this may provide an additional perspective into how the party benefited from it.

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