How Party Organization Matters: Understanding The Ups and Downs of Radical Right-wing Populism in Sweden

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Abstract

In analyzing the Swedish case, this paper aims at filling a void in earlier theorizing about the emergence of radical right-wing populist (RRP) parties by showing the impact of organizational factors. First, organizational factors may contribute to our understanding of how favorable opportunity structures arise, in particular how niches emerge in the electoral arena. Secondly, a focus on organizational factors directs our attention to why some newly founded RRP parties may have short-term advantages in maximizing voter support. This is particularly true of parties with a hierarchical or even authoritarian structure and access to external resources, which lessens the dependency on party members—while making them especially vulnerable in the longer run. Thirdly, this paper strongly indicates that the relative failure of Swedish RRP parties may depend as much on organizational factors as on the demand side and supply side factors that have been the main focus of earlier research.

Key words: party organization—populism— radical right—Sweden

Introduction

During the last two decades, we have witnessed a resurgence of the radical right in Western Europe, where parties such as the Danish People's Party, the French Front National, the Italian Lega Nord, and the Austrian Freedom Party, among several others, have attracted large voter support, and in some cases, have been included in ruling governmental coalitions. These parties, which hereafter will be called radical right-wing populist (RRP) parties, share a core of ethno-nationalist xenophobia and anti-establishment populism. In their political platforms, this ideological core is embedded in a general socio-cultural authoritarianism that stresses themes like law and order and family values (Rydgren 2005b; see also Mudde 2000).

Although the research on RRP parties has become more sophisticated and comparative in scope during the last ten years (e.g., Betz 1994; Ignazi 2003; Kitschelt 1996; Norris 2005; Mudde 2007), there are still important lacunas to fill. Earlier research on radical right-wing populism has focused mainly on so-called demand-side factors. In particular, such explanations have been associated with macro-structural transformation processes (i.e., post-industrialism), economic crises and unemployment, and/or increased immigration to West European countries, which are believed to influence the voters' preferences and voting patterns in ways beneficial to the emergence of successful RRP parties. An alternative approach has gained ground lately, focusing on so-called supply-factors, in particular, political opportunity structures such as electoral laws and convergence tendencies (see Eatwell 2003; Rydgren 2007). Notwithstanding the many merits of such explanations, they have not taken organizational factors sufficiently into account. Consequently, they are too deterministic: the presence of favorable structures

influencing the demand side and/or the supply side of politics does not automatically result in the emergence of successful RRP parties. For one thing, there has to be an existing RRP party with sufficient organizational sophistication to take advantage of the favorable situation. Earlier research largely lacks an explicit and integrated theory of the role of organizational factors in explaining the electoral successes or failures of RRP parties. Moreover, the few exceptions (e.g., Carter 2005; Norris 2005; Taggart 1996) are contradictory: some argue that a minimal organization is a prerequisite for success (e.g., Taggart 1996), whereas others argue for the need of a well-developed party organization (e.g., Carter 2005; Norris 2005). In this paper I will resolve this paradox, at least in the Swedish case, by showing that a minimal party organization may increase RRP parties' chances for an electoral breakthrough, while a well-developed organization may be a necessity for party survival after such a breakthrough (cf. Mudde 2007).

In the first half of this paper, I outline a theory of the importance of organizational factors in explaining the electoral successes and failures of RRP parties. In the second half, I use this theory to discuss the situation in Sweden. Sweden is a particularly interesting case, since the two leading RRP parties there during the last two decades have used very different organizational strategies. New Democracy was a purely national party with a minimal organization and it was very weakly rooted on the local level. Moreover, it was a newly-founded party and it did not build on the heresy of older radical right-wing organizations. These facts, I would argue, were important reasons for its electoral breakthrough (New Democracy garnered 6.7 percent of the vote in the 1991 parliamentary election) but also for the party's failure to survive more than a few years. (New Democracy gradually disintegrated and lost all its parliamentary mandates with

only 1.2 percent of the votes in the 1994 election.) On the other hand, the Sweden Democrats, formed in 1988, was a direct continuation of earlier extreme right-wing organizations. The party remained electorally marginalized for more than a decade after its foundation. Unlike New Democracy, the Sweden Democrats was—and is—no pure national party, and when its voter shares started to increase (to 1.4 percent in the 2002 parliamentary election and 2.9 percent in the 2006 election), it was largely the result of growing organizational strength in a number of local strongholds (in particular in the south of Sweden). Taken together, this discussion will show that organizational factors provide very important reasons for the ups and downs of RRP parties in Swedish national politics.

Party organization and internal resources

One guiding hypothesis of this paper is that too strong a dependency on party activists may obstruct RRP parties' chances of an electoral breakthrough, or at least prolong the period before it reaches an electoral breakthrough, while a too weakly- developed party organization may make it very difficult to survive in the long run. However, before substantiating these claims it is necessary to provide a brief outline of a general theory to explain the success or failure of RRP parties. Because of lack of space, this outline does not aspire to present an exhaustive model, but rather focuses on one particular aspect, which has the strength of combining demand side and supply side factors, as well as paving the way for an integral theory of the importance of organizational factors.

Specifically, we need to look at the emergence of niches in the electoral arena. We may assume that no new parties—RRP parties or otherwise—can emerge if there are no

sufficiently large niches, which can be defined as the gap between the position of the voters and the perceived position of the parties in the same political space (i.e. as a given demand not being satisfied by a corresponding supply). Niches sometimes appear as a result of the time lag between the movements of the voters and the parties in political space. When public opinion changes course, the political parties have to adapt their profiles accordingly, lest they lose voters (Downs 1957); political parties, however, are not as flexible and quick to change as voter opinion, and so these time lags develop. Despite this, niches of any significant size rarely appear under normal, relatively stable circumstances, as the parties have a fair amount of time to locate their optimal positions. Instead, they normally open up only in the event of rapid and dramatic shifts in public opinion or when one or more of the larger mainstream parties makes radical changes to their political profile. If a new party is able to maintain a political profile that matches the vacant niche, it has a good chance of attracting voter support (see e.g., Kitschelt 1996; Rydgren 2003b).

However, whether or not new parties emerge does not simply depend on how favorable such political opportunity structures are; it is also a matter of how well the parties themselves manage to exploit these opportunities:

(1) Here, the parties' ideological/rhetorical profiles are crucial. Earlier research indicates that anti-establishment populism and anti-immigration/immigrant messages have been most effective in taking advantage of available niches (see e.g. Betz 1994; Kitschelt 1996; Rydgren 2005). RRP parties use the anti-establishment strategy when they present themselves as opposing the entire political class (and thus disregard the differences among the governing party/parties and the opposition party/parties) while at

the same time trying hard not to appear anti-democratic and too politically extreme. Since an overwhelming majority of the electorate in all Western European countries supports democracy and see anti-democratic organizations as highly illegitimate, being branded an anti-democratic extremist party would be a stigma that would severely hinder their vote-winning potential (Schedler 1996). Moreover, four main anti-immigration/immigrant frames have been used by the RRP parties: (A) the ethno-pluralist idea that mixing different ethnicities leads to cultural extinction, that is, that the unique national culture will disappear as a result of immigration; (B) the related idea that peaceful development is possible only if the nation is ethnically homogeneous, that is, that immigration leads to conflict and increased criminality; (C) the welfare-chauvinistic notion that immigrants drain the country of resources that could have been used to improve the welfare of the native-born; (D) the related idea that immigrants are illegitimate competitors for other scarce resources, such as jobs (see e.g., Rydgren 2003a).

(2) However, it is not only the RRP parties' ideological/rhetorical profiles that are critical, but also the structure of their internal organizations and the available internal resources. The ability of a political party—and this applies to all political parties—to follow changing public opinion and adopt new ideological/rhetorical profiles, is generally more or less restricted by its own historical background and the preferences of its members.

In that political parties have two principal goals—to survive as organizations and maximize their influence over the politics pursued in the given political system—they are obliged to deal with factors that occasionally curb their powers of voter maximization.

Firstly, they have to act in a way that does not undermine the cohesion of the party organization and its members' willingness to do vital, yet unpaid, party work. A political party with weak internal solidity is unable to maintain full control over the image given to the party by the pronouncements of individual party representatives. Secondly, such a party can also find it hard to compel its parliamentary group to vote in accordance with the party line on key issues. These effects can be seriously detrimental to a party's survival. Finally, a party needs a certain number of active members, partly to be able to fill any empty seats in the parliament and local government offices with able and reliable party representatives (Strøm 1990: 575), and partly to do the voluntary campaigning—which is particularly important before a party has become established (and won seats in the parliament). Without this critical mass of loyal volunteers on hand to distribute leaflets, put up posters, or give out voting slips during elections, most political parties would find themselves in difficulties (cf. Gamson 1975: 60).[1] The political parties thus still require a member organization. The problem, however, is that the factors and strategies that foster a strong, united party organization have the potential to restrict their capacity to maximize voter support (see Sjöblom 1968) for reasons we discuss below.

Party members are not politically neutral; they identify with the party ideology, with different policies, or with particular party leaders (Sjöblom 1968: 187). This means that any attempt by the party leadership to modify certain aspects of the political program can meet with resistance from the party organization. Proposed changes may generally not depart too radically from the party line already embarked upon, without a great deal of hard, time-consuming work to win acceptance and approval within the organization; otherwise party unity is jeopardized or, at worst, disintegrates into opposing factions.[2]

However, this builds considerable party inertia, which can give rise to niches in the political arena. In some situations, it is almost impossible to anchor proposals on political change, and because of this, permanent niches can be formed.

As we can see, political parties can easily find themselves in situations in which the advantages of maintaining strong party unity must be weighed against the advantages of following changing public opinion or of otherwise exploiting the potential to maximize voter support (Rose & Mackie 1988: 540; see also Lawson 1994). This mechanism does not only explain the materialization of niches in the voter arena but also helps us understand why emerging RRP parties sometimes fail to exploit what would otherwise seem a favorable political opportunity structure for voter mobilization. Apart from this, there is above all a general problem for social movements[3] that have been transformed into political parties: while committed activists are the foremost resource for social movements, too many and too committed party members can actually pose a problem for political parties (Ahrne & Papakosta 2003), for whom the voter is the first resource of mobilization (see Rucht 1996: 187). As we have seen, the populist antiestablishment strategy is one of the most important tools for emerging RRP parties. In using this strategy, the party must be able to neutralize, in a credible way, radical members of the organization who push for an uncompromising, radical party line (which in the eyes of the voters might seem overly extreme and/or antidemocratic). Not all these parties succeed in doing this, particularly those that have their roots in extra-parliamentary right-wing extremism—such as the Sweden Democrats—and those that have scant access to alternative resources (such as governmental party support, external sponsors and the media), and are therefore more dependent on volunteers among the party activists. One

possible way of dealing with such crisis points, and this applies to mainstream and emerging RRP parties alike, is to apply one rhetoric to the "front stage" (i.e. the voters), and another to the "back stage" (i.e. the party members) (cf. Goffman 1959). However, such evasive action does not always prove effective.

Another obstacle to the ability of the mainstream parties, and to a lesser extent the RRP parties, to maximize voter support is the expectations of internal party democracy. This is generally supported by the party members and is powerfully legitimizing (within most democracies). Political parties that forego at least a rudimentary internal democracy are considered illegitimate, both by the voters and by their own members (cf. Meyer & Rowan 1981). At the same time, a rigidly hierarchical organization makes it easier for the party leaders to follow changing popular opinion than does a flat organization with a well-developed internal democracy. A centralized power structure can also help to solve the problem of how to deal with the real or potential internal conflicts that are a natural part of a party organization (Gamson 1975: 93, 99). This too often forces mainstream parties to choose between legitimacy and party unity on the one hand and effectiveness and voter maximization on the other. By the inertia this trade-off situation creates, it contributes to the emergence of niches on the political arena.

The goal of maximizing influence over political decisions taken by parliament can, paradoxically enough, also limit a party's powers of voter maximization (see Sjöblom 1968: 254). When the political party in question cannot expect to secure a parliamentary majority, which is normally the case in proportionally representative democracies, it has little choice but to join forces (formally or informally) with other parties in order to realize as many of its political proposals as possible. However, this

means that a certain degree of consideration must be paid to current or likely political partners when such a party is broadcasting its political message, and this can limit its ability to establish a political profile or to make abrupt changes in political direction. As Zald and Ash (1966: 335) have shown, for instance, political coalitions and collaborations require a certain measure of ideological compatibility. This poses little problem for *newly formed* RRP parties without parliamentary representation, and for parties that have been excluded from political partnerships with established parties (either through dissociation from the other parties, or through a deliberate choice to hold the balance of power). RRP parties that have won national parliamentary representation can, however, find themselves hampered by the same strategic dilemma, which can affect them dramatically owing to the difficulties they thus face in continuing to use the populist antiestablishment strategy with any credibility.

In closing this section, we can conclude then that (1) political parties are encumbered by an inherent inertia, which can help to open up niches in the political arena; (2) newly formed parties, without a party history, can be at an advantage in this arena as the potential conflict between the internal arena and that of the electorate is less obvious—particularly if they have (3) a hierarchical or even authoritarian party structure, and (4) access to external resources (i.e. money and/or the media), which lessens the dependency on party members. Hence, we may reasonably assume that RRP parties that tend toward extreme dependency on the party leader, hierarchical or even authoritarian party structures, absence of internal party democracy, and an extremely weak position of the party members have initial, short-term advantages, which make it relatively easy for them to mine niches in the electoral arena and other favorable opportunity structures.

Panebianco (1988) has termed such party organizations "charismatic party organizations." More specifically, Panebianco (1988: 145) defined a *charismatic party* in the following way: the party must have been formed by its leader to realize his or her personal goals; the party leader must be alone in choosing those with whom he or she is to work; the party leader must be the sole (or at least the main) interpreter of the party's political doctrine, which creates an organization comprising a dominant group united by a strength of loyalty to the leader (which counters factionalism as long as the leader is seen as authoritative); internal career paths must be closed to those not favored by the party leader, partly as a result of elite recruitment and partly through the imposition of a high degree of centralization; and the party must usually be an anti-party party that presents itself as an alternative to all others. Many, but far from all, RRP parties have such party organizations.

Nonetheless, these advantages can eventually become disadvantages, for example, when the new party's membership suddenly increases dramatically as a result of an electoral breakthrough; when access to external resources declines; and/or when there are no internal democratic tools to handle splits and conflicts within the party organization. Moreover, if a new party succeeds in winning representation in the legislature, it usually must undergo a transformation process, during which it develops a broad and relatively coherent political platform and a more extensive party organization. Not all new parties manage to undergo such a transformation successfully. The risk that a party will disband is greatest during the years immediately after its electoral breakthrough, and in particular, after it has won representation in legislative bodies (cf. Stinchcombe 1965).[4] In fact, a relatively weak party organization might be advantageous for the emergence and

electoral breakthrough of a party, but in the long run, it may be disadvantageous for the party's survival. An internally democratic party organization—with party-identified members and activists—and a deep party history and tradition give some stability to a political party. Precisely because of the fact that traditional parties' room to maneuver is constrained when compared to authoritarian and hierarchical RRP parties, they are less dependent upon specific single individuals.

The emergence and electoral break-through of New Democracy

The party New Democracy was founded by Ian Wachtmeister and Bert Karlsson, two relatively well-known public figures: Karlsson was the director of a record label and the owner of an amusement park; Wachtmeister was a businessman (and had previously been the president of large listed companies) and was associated with the SAF (Swedish Employers' Confederation)-supported *New Welfare* think-tank. The discussion about founding the party became public in November 1990, and the party was formally founded 4 February 1991. Less than a year later, in September 1991, the party won representation to the Swedish parliament with 6.7 percent of the votes (Widfeldt 2000).

Because of lack of space, we cannot provide a full explanation of New Democracy's electoral breakthrough here. However, earlier research clearly shows that the rise of New Democracy coincided with opportunity structures (i.e., niches in the electoral arena) that favored a political message that combined neoliberalism, (xenophobic) anti-immigrant sentiments, and a populist critique of the political establishment (Gilliam & Holmberg 1993; Rydgren 2006; Taggart 1996). New Democracy clearly presented such an explicit message (Gardberg 1993; Rydgren 2006;

Westlind 1996). Our main task here is to discuss New Democracy's organizational structure and its ability to mobilize resources. We may assume from the above discussion that (1) newly formed parties lacking a party history are at an advantage in the voter arena, as the potential conflict between the internal arena and the voter arena is less salient, particularly if they have (2) a hierarchical or even authoritarian party structure and (3) access to external resources (i.e. money and/or media), which reduces the reliance on party members. New Democracy fitted this description perfectly. It was not only newly-formed and therefore without a party history, but also extremely hierarchical in its power structure. Even though the party's own statistics gave it a membership of 5,000 in 1991, roughly the same as the Swedish Green Party at the time (Widfeldt 1997: 266), none but a select elite had any real opportunity to influence decisions.

Unlike the other Swedish parties, New Democracy had no regional organization. Although the party professed to have a flat organizational structure (see Taggart 1996: 122) by pointing to the opportunities that existed for direct contact between the local councils and the national party leadership, it was in fact very much controlled from the top down, even from its very inception. Looking at it another way, we can interpret the lack of regional associations as simply a way of saving money and of giving the leadership more room to maneuver. In fact, there were never any real attempts by the party leadership to build a nationwide network of local organizations. Such bodies did spring up spontaneously in 1991 as the party started to draw more and more attention, but they operated without any financial support from the party leadership (to cover the costs of printing ballot papers etc.), in spite of their resolve to stand in the local council elections under the party's banner. The party leadership also opposed the initiatives taken

by the local associations to establish a coherent, nationwide party organization (Westlind 1996: 158-9). In fact, instead of having any kind of local organizational level after 1993, New Democracy adopted a system of contracts which it required independent local parties to sign before they could use the name New Democracy (Widfeldt 1997: 38). And unlike all other parties represented in the Swedish parliament, New Democracy had neither a women's organization nor a youth league (Widfeldt 1997: 83). In other words, it is clear that New Democracy had no interest at all in establishing a "social movement-like organization." Although this no doubt benefited the party in the short term, it also served to hasten its rapid dissipation only a few years later, as we will see below.

A further illustration of the party's authoritarian control was the way its election candidates were not nominated by members around the country (as is normally the case for other Swedish parties), but handpicked by its two party leaders. The likely goals of New Democracy's organizational form were not only to maximize its effectiveness but also to disassociate it from other parties (in line with the populist antiestablishment strategy). By tradition, Swedish politics is intentionally deliberative and "participant intensive," and pressure groups have always been given ample room in practical political space (Widfeldt 2004). However, this involved a degree of inertia, and perhaps created the impression that the inertia was greater than it actually was. Such inaction was anathema to New Democracy, which pledged to bring efficiency to the political process—to make it, as the party said, more "businesslike" (Widfeldt 2004). There was thus a conscious decision to organize the party along the lines of a listed company, a structural form which is almost by definition non-democratic in nature (see e.g. Schattschneider 1975).

New Democracy also managed to acquire considerable space to maneuver in the voter arena because of its ability to find alternative resources for electoral mobilization. As a newlyformed party, New Democracy was excluded from the Government party subsidy program, the principal source of income for all mainstream parties (Pierre & Widfeldt 1994: 348). Such disentitlement makes it extremely difficult for many unestablished parties to finance the printing of ballot papers and the general campaign material necessary to broadcast their message, etc. Despite this, New Democracy was able to acquire much of the resources it needed through its contacts with the corporate world and the generous free publicity offered by the media (see Gardberg 1993: 51). New Democracy was a typical media party. It exploited the media's craving for the unexpected and the spectacular, and in so doing, rendered it less reliant on labor-intensive resources; but, in the longer run, this also left it more vulnerable to media exclusion and neglect.

We can safely maintain that New Democracy fulfilled several of the criteria identified by Panebianco (1988: 145) as characteristic of a *charismatic party* (see above). However, New Democracy's problem ultimately lay in there being *two* party leaders (even though Wachtmeister was the real leader, Karlsson was considered a leader by some of the party activists). This triggered early discord, although splits did not appear until after the 1991 general election. So as much as this organizational form helped the rise of New Democracy in the short term, it also eventually proved a severe obstacle to its survival.

In conclusion, we can say that New Democracy's organization was well adapted to exploiting the niches that had opened up in the voter arena. Because the party was newly formed and without any party history, and because of the party executive's iron

hold on the members, it managed to avoid many of the limitations that traditional parties face. New Democracy emerged largely unscathed from the conflict between the voter and the party arenas in the run-up to the 1991 election, and found itself with the balance of power in its hands—a strategy decision that is not so easy for other parties to make by virtue of their traditional and/or emotional allegiance to either one of the political groupings or blocs. I would therefore contend that New Democracy's poorly developed organization was an advantage to the party for the election of 1991. However, as we will see below, it eventually proved the main instrument of the party's disintegration.

The collapse of New Democracy

New Democracy's success was only a short-lived one; the party gradually fell apart during its parliamentary term, and eventually lost its parliamentary mandates with only 1.2 percent of the vote in the 1994 general election. The first cracks started to appear shortly after the 1991 election, and when Ian Wachtmeister resigned as party leader in February 1994, its disintegration was inevitable. More specifically, New Democracy's problem in the internal arena was the materialization of two different disintegration tendencies, one involving a conflict between the party leadership and the members, and one *within* the leadership itself. New Democracy had problems with its parliamentary group of MPs, and the party saw four defectors among its MPs during the mandate period. Also, relations within the inner executive, that is to say between Wachtmeister and Karlsson, early showed signs of disintegration. Most important, Bert Karlsson disapproved of Ian Wachtmeister's strategy to maximize the party's implementation potential through compromise. One of the central themes of the populist

antiestablishment strategy is the need for a new political force beyond the established party conflicts; hence Karlsson's reaction to the realization that Wachtmeister had opted to favor the non-socialist (i.e., bourgeois) camp in Swedish politics. Karlsson would have liked to overthrow the Government to accentuate the inherent weakness of the political mainstream (Karlsson 1994).

Although the main reason for the party's demise was its lack of organizational backbone, the deep recession into which the country had been plunged had also turned public opinion away from New Democracy's political profile. More specifically, one of the niches behind the growth of the party was a powerful shift to the right in the socioeconomic dimension before the 1991 general election. Gradually, however, this shift slowed and changed direction to a shift to the left as the economic crisis began to take hold. Moreover, the economic crisis re-politicized the socioeconomic cleavage dimension and, thus, de-politicized the sociocultural cleavage dimension in general and the immigration issue in particular (Gilliam & Holmberg 1993; Rydgren 2006). These political developments made it more difficult for New Democracy to win over voters on the ideological/rhetorical profile it pursued before the 1991 election. In consequence, elements within the party, even within the executive, appealed for urgent changes of direction, and in so doing highlighted the lack of party strategies for dealing with internal conflict. As we will discuss below, in the final analysis, these organizational factors brought about the party's collapse and electoral failure in 1994.

As we have seen, New Democracy was formed in a matter of months before the election, leaving it no time to establish an efficient organization. Nor was there any interest to do so amongst the leadership: the party was to be run like a company, with the

managing director making the decisions to be implemented by others under his command. This proved a recipe for only ephemeral success. In fact, if the rise of New Democracy can be understood as the outcome of (1) its leaders' extremely authoritarian rule over the rest of the party organization (i.e. the lack of internal democracy), (2) the presence of external resources (especially the media), which made it less reliant on party members, and (3) the credible use of the populist antiestablishment strategy, its "fall" can in many respects be attributed to the same factors.

Let us begin with the third point. The populist antiestablishment strategy was one of the main causes of New Democracy's emergence and success in the 1991 general election, mainly because it allowed the party to mobilize voters who had little faith in politicians and because it guaranteed that the party could follow public opinion on individual issues. Being able to adapt to what the voters think is naturally important to all parties in Sweden, but it was especially so to New Democracy. From the beginning, the party portrayed itself as a voters' party, and unlike the mainstream parties, it had no core voter group, leaving it reliant on floating voters. During their parliamentary term, however, a conflict arose between the voter arena and New Democracy's internal arena.

The party was no longer a novelty and it had developed a tradition of a political platform. In combination with the party manifesto, this tradition helped to create a "path dependency" for the party, from which it could not simply deviate without inciting protest from members who identified strongly with the original manifesto clauses. The types of conflict inherent to all parties thus appeared within New Democracy, which lacked the organizational tools to deal with them effectively. The fact that the party had two leaders (and founders), who identified with different manifesto items and disagreed

about strategies, simply exacerbated matters. It proved even harder for the party to keep itself outside Swedish bloc politics (which the populist strategy demanded) as there were clearly considerable costs associated with bringing down a non-socialist government: the resentment of party members and voters who valued the party's neoliberal economic-political program, and the adverse response of the market, which hit many voters personally (Rydgren 2006). All this made it hard for New Democracy to use the populist antiestablishment strategy in the same way as prior to the 1991 election. New Democracy thus found itself with less freedom of movement—and less popular appeal.

The New Democracy party leadership tried to get round this goal conflict by turning the party into a purely national party. By shrinking the internal arena so that it encompassed the national organization only, they tried to mitigate the conflict between the voter arena and the internal arena. The new order gave the party leadership, especially the two party leaders, greater space to maneuver to pursue the party's policies with impunity. It also let them avoid taking responsibility for the dubious remarks of local politicians who had ended up on the ballot papers without any check of their conduct and moral credentials. The problems with this kind of voter party, which prioritizes the voters at the expense of the members, are that it is heavily dependent on strong leadership and that, due to the lack of a membership base, it inevitably stakes its existence on the support of the voters and on the attention of the media. It is unlikely that such an organization can survive a governmental term outside the parliament, as for instance the Swedish Green Party did between 1991 and 1994. There was, for instance, no established network of local organizations that could mobilize activists to continue working for the party until the leadership crisis was resolved (see Svåsand & Wølund 2001: 14). Bert Karlsson

admitted later that the decision to divorce the local branches from the party was a failure: "This is when the real disintegration starts. Ian [Wachtmeister] made ambitious party colleagues feel that they had been divided up into an A and a B team" (Karlsson 1994). As Zald and Ash (1966: 333) have pointed out, it is also hard to keep the party members motivated if they feel they have no chances of rising within the organization. And as is the case for all "charismatic" parties, there are dangers associated with excessive personal importance, and organizations in which certain members are considered indispensable find it hard to survive for any length of time (Ahrne 1994). Karlsson and (in particular) Wachtmeister were virtually irreplaceable and the party's reorganization simply served to accentuate this. Not only were there far too few differences between person and position, the party also happened to have (unlike other typical "charismatic" parties) *two* leaders. Such an organization necessitates a strong leadership all working for the same ends, which was not the case with Karlsson and Wachtmeister after the 1991 election. New Democracy's organizational form therefore probably benefited the party while it possessed a strong leadership, but left it especially vulnerable when rifts appeared between its two leaders and, in particular, when one of them (Wachtmeister) resigned.

New Democracy's problems within its own parliamentary group can also be largely reduced to its peculiar organizational structure. The many defections can be attributed to the lack of a coherent ideological glue, the result of the manner in which its MPs were appointed autocratically by the executive rather than democratically by the members. Since the party was newly-formed at the time of the general election, the opportunities for internal recruitment were small, and there was neither the time nor the will to instruct New Democracy's candidates in the field of politics through internal party

work, which usually serves to sift out less suitable candidates before they reach the nomination stage. The upshot of all this was that the party group acted with little discipline, and without a fairly unified party group, parliamentary parties function poorly. (New Democracy, for instance, failed on several occasions to keep its members in line at the parliamentary ballot box.) This sudden goal conflict was costly for New Democracy, and one which it was organizationally ill-equipped to remove painlessly.

After Wachtmeister's resignation, New Democracy lost cohesion. General party conferences were plagued by in-fighting and its parliamentary group failed to maintain a unified party line at voting times. The most likely reasons for this disarray were its organizational structure, which was unable to accommodate Wachtmeister's departure, and the lack of a binding ideology and common history. What had been a precondition for its rapid growth and success in the 1991 election proved ultimately to be its undoing.

Finally, New Democracy's strategy of relying on the media as an external resource for disseminating its political message also proved vulnerable during the party's term in the parliament, and the party disappeared into the media shadow for two lengthy periods of time. The first instance occurred in connection with the crisis settlement between the Government and the Social Democrats in 1992,[5] which deprived New Democracy of the balance of power. The second occurred when the party voluntarily relinquished this power position in 1993 after Prime Minister Carl Bildt's threat to resign and call a new election. This reduced New Democracy to a relatively obedient support party for Government (thus rendering it of little interest to the media).[6] Once in the media shadow, it was obvious that the party had few alternative resources for political

mobilization. This also heralded the first real signs of what proved to be an irreversible decline in the opinion polls for New Democracy.

The relative failure of the Sweden Democrats

During the 12 years after the collapse of New Democracy in 1994, no Swedish RRP party came close to winning parliamentary seats. Not until 2002 did the Sweden Democrats exceed one percent of the votes, when it received 1.4 percent, and in the 2006 election, the party increased its share to 2.9 percent of the votes. Yet, since 1994, Sweden's RRP parties have been largely marginalized in a Western European perspective. Although the relative failure of radical right-wing populism in Sweden could not be explained by organizational factors alone (see Rydgren 2002 for a number of other factors that have worked against the emergence of electorally successful RRP parties in Sweden), the fact remains that at least partially favorable political opportunities did present themselves (most notably an anti-immigration niche and political discontent; see Rydgren 2002) but the Sweden Democrats were unable to take full advantage of them.

The Sweden Democrats, which was formed in 1988, has its roots in Swedish fascism, and there were, particularly at the end of the 1980s and for the first half of the 1990s, distinct overlaps between them and openly anti-democratic, Nazi and fascist groupings (Larsson & Ekman 2001). During the latter half of the 1990s, however, the party worked hard to present a more respectable façade. In 1996, new leader Mikael Jansson banned uniforms, and in 1999, the Sweden Democrats openly renounced Nazism. Furthermore, some of the more provocative paragraphs in the party manifesto were also toned down or eventually deleted (in particular, those dealing with capital punishment, the banning of abortion and non-European adoption, to which the party was strongly

opposed). Hence, since the late 1990s, the Sweden Democrats fulfilled all characteristics of a full-fledged RRP party, with its reliance on ethno-nationalism, xenophobia, and anti-political establishment populism (see Rydgren 2002).

Until 2002, the Sweden Democrats, unlike New Democracy, had little access to alternative resources, whether party subsidy or major private donations, and/or to the media. Consequently, the party was heavily dependent on its members and party activists and the voluntary work they did.[7] Moreover, as we have seen, the Sweden Democrats party was not newly-formed, and it was built on the heresy of older extreme right-wing organizations; the party was therefore encumbered by the chains of a far from flattering history. This not only frustrated the credible use of the second component of the populist antiestablishment strategy, it also aggravated the goal conflict between the voter and internal arenas. There were party members who identified strongly with ideological principles and old manifesto tenets and objectives that were not optimal for attracting electoral support (and were likely to frighten off potential voters). This goal conflict was also exacerbated by the way in which the Sweden Democrats were so desperately dependent on party members for the peddling of their message—and for enabling the party to function in the first place. As Larsson and Ekman (2001: 212) have insightfully noted, the Sweden Democrats were during this time facing a difficult and awkward dilemma:

> If the Sweden Democrats, on the one hand, openly appear as a "national"
> [i.e. proto-fascist] party in the way that it did in the first half of the 1990s, it
> will probably scare off its potential voters. If, on the other hand, the party

continues to "liberalize" its rhetoric and tone down the opinions that make

up its ideological core, it risks becoming so mediocre that key members of

the activist cadre will abandon it. It is these passionate devotees to the cause

and their tireless voluntary work, leafletting and public rallying that have

kept the party running.

There were no clear answers to how the party would deal with this dilemma and the party

leadership occasionally tried to resolve the conflict by adopting one rhetorical line

externally (towards the voters) and another internally (towards the members). However,

at critical junctures, such as when it was time to revise the party manifesto and principle

program or to specify the contents of the election campaign, the conflict flared up and

triggered a wave of defections and party splits.

As Gamson (1975: 101) has written, "Factional splits … are the primary

manifestation of the failure of the group to resolve the problem of internal conflicts."

There will always be internal conflicts, to a greater or lesser extent, but they are likely to

be greater and more common in parties which, like the Sweden Democrats, (1) were

marginalized (which increased the pressure on internal cohesion); (2) had a strong

ideological conviction of an almost messianic nature (of having "seen the light" and of

needing to "rescue society from annihilation"); and (3) originated as "front

organizations" to unite disparate groups (which means that the party was ideologically

divided from the beginning). As a result, the party suffered various defections, exclusions

and splits. It is significant that two of the party's most recent organizers left the party

under traumatic circumstances. In the first instance, Tor Paulsson left the Sweden

Democrats with several others to form the National Democrats, a far more radical right-wing authoritarian and explicitly xenophobic party, in protest of what they viewed as an over-liberalization of policy. Paradoxically, the Sweden Democrats may have benefited from this move, despite losing a substantial segment of its activists, not least at a local level. Political actors can sometimes gain from what are known as "radical flank" effects (e.g. Tarrow 1998). After the appearance of the National Democrats in the voter arena, the Sweden Democrats were no longer the most extreme of extremist parties and might even appear, in comparison with their new rival, rather restrained and level-headed. This possibly helped to reduce the party's stigma and enabled it to make more credible use of the populist antiestablishment strategy.

Moreover, even if the latest loss, that of Tommy Funebo and a number of leading local party politicians, all of whom joined the SPI (a pensioners' party), did damage to the party in the short run, it might have benefited the party in the longer run. This is because it undermined the legitimacy of the old leadership and made it easier for the new, relatively more liberal wing to take power in the party.

This time it was the defectors who (with a certain measure of authority) accused the party of using far-right and undemocratic methods rather than vice versa. The party leadership moved to dispel the rumors of a split. According to an article by party member Mattias Karlsson in the party newsletter, the conflicts were caused by the party's deliberate drive to recruit new activists to be able to participate in local elections in as many municipalities as possible:

The obvious advantages of this strategy were that it gave us more seats, more electoral support, more money and more publicity, which all in all also greatly improved our chances of getting into parliament after the 2006 election. At the same time, a number of skilled activists and competent politicians have been recruited into the party, some of whom might have been disheartened if they had not been allowed to stand in their home constituencies. The only possible downside of this way of doing things is that the party found itself no longer able to keep as close tabs on each candidate as it has done on previous elections, when we just had candidates in a handful of places. … It does not matter how fine the net, there are always a few rotten fish that slip through, and that's been the case here too (SD Newsletter, 13 January 2004).

This is a perfect illustration of the Sweden Democrats' problems at the time: to create a working national party organization, to resolve the goal conflict between the voter and internal arenas, and, most importantly, to apply the populist antiestablishment strategy credibly. The fact that the party was still perceived as far too extremist repelled voters and was one of the most important reasons why the party did not manage to exploit potential niches and other political opportunity structures for voter mobilization.

These problems still exist. However, a number of critical events during the past few years have made this dilemma less acute. First, the party has gradually gained access to alternative resources, which has lessened its dependency on party members. Because of its relative local success in the 2002 election, the Sweden Democrats received eight

million SEK in municipal party subsidies. These could be pooled with other resources (e.g., the Sweden Democrats also issued a "party bond," in which ordinary people could invest money) to finance the distribution of folders that were sent out directly to the voters. Moreover, because of the election results in 2002, the Sweden Democrats were entitled to free distribution of election ballots for the 2006 election (Ekström von Essen 2006: 26). After the 2006 election, in which the Sweden Democrats not only doubled its voter share nationally from 1.4 percent to 2.9 percent but also increased its local representation from 49 seats in 29 local councils to 282 seats in 145 local councils, the state subsidy to which the party was entitled was multiplied.

Secondly, and partly as a result of this, the Sweden Democrats have been increasingly successful in creating a more respectable façade, which enhanced its chances both to use the antiestablishment strategy and to attract issue voters without repelling potential voters because of appearing too extremist. The keys to this process have been change of leadership within the party leadership and successful local mobilizations in a handful of regional strongholds. Since the 1990s, the party leadership had been based in the Stockholm area. However, after the 2002 election and the strong increase of votes in the south of Sweden, the party leadership—which was more and more seen as "traditionalist"—was increasingly challenged by a group of activists based in Skåne. This wing of the party was generally younger, and pushed for changes in the party's profile. Whereas the old leadership was inspired by the French Front National and the Belgian Vlaams Blok, the Skåne-based wing rather looked at the Danish People's Party for inspiration. They believed that the relatively leaner image of Pia Kjærsgaard and the Danish People's Party would be a better strategy to escape marginalization. At the party

congress in 2005 the Skåne-wing took control of the party, with Jimmy Åkesson as the new party leader (see Ekström von Essen 2006: 26). Although the central tenets of the party's ideological program are still unchanged—it is still based on ethnonationalism and opposition against the multicultural society—the new party leadership has removed some of the more blatant expressions of xenophobia. One important example is the change of party symbol in 2006, from the flaming torch with a Swedish flag (very similar to the symbols used by the Italian neo-Fascist party MSI and the French Front National) to the much more neutral blue anemone.

Unlike New Democracy, the Sweden Democrats aspire to build a popular base, a "movement," made up of well-developed local associations.[8] This is still largely an unfinished project; in fact, in most Swedish municipalities the Sweden Democrats completely lack organizational presence, or are represented by only one or two persons (without much organizational activity). Yet, in the south of Sweden, the party has succeeded in establishing itself in a number of local strongholds. These strongholds provided a power base from which the new party leadership could build, and it was because of electoral successes in these local settings that the party was able to gain access to alternative resources. Part of the reason why the Sweden Democrats could manage to build a strong organizational—and electoral—presence in the south of Sweden, was that it had the opportunity to cooperate with, and in some instances co-opt, other local populist parties (*Skånes Väl*) deeply entrenched in the region; this meant that it could draw upon established local organizations and distribution channels, and attract voters who were already used to voting for a populist anti-immigration party in local elections.

If realized, the Sweden Democrats' ambitions to build strong local and regional organizations might—after a possible electoral breakthrough—rescue them from the same fate that awaited New Democracy when the party lost its electoral representation, at which time it possessed no organizational infrastructure to keep itself alive. However, this goal is still an unfinished project. Although the level of organizational sophistication has increased during the past years, the Sweden Democrats' internal democracy is still highly limited. There is no education of party activists, and the party has yet to establish clear standardized procedures for internal party work, etc. (see Ekström von Essen 2006: 175). One reason for this is lack of recourses. The available recourses are used to reach out to the voters, and there is very little left for educating party activists. As a result, the Sweden Democrats have difficulties to keep a consistent party line in local councils, its local party activists are often absent from meetings, and defections are common (cf. Ekströn von Essen 2006). This weakness in the internal organizational infrastructure combined with the one-issue character of the Sweden Democrats might create severe problems after an electoral breakthrough. The only issues that are really discussed among the party members are the immigration issue, as well as—to a lesser extent—issues related to law-and-order, such as the death penalty. However, there are no discussions about economic policy, for instance. One reason for this is probably that such issues are potentially dissipating (see Ekström von Essen 2006: 39): activists join the party because of the immigration issue, and represent a wide spectrum of attitudes toward other issues. If the Sweden Democrats should become represented in the parliament, the party would have to take clear positions on many issues that are now shoved aside, and this might create severe factionalism within the party.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to fill a lacuna in earlier theorizing about the emergence of radical right-wing populist parties by showing the effect of organizational factors. First, organizational factors may contribute to our understanding of how favorable opportunity structures arise, in particular of how niches emerge in the electoral arena. It is not sufficient to focus on demand side factors alone to explain why niches form; it is a theoretical concept that by definition refers to both demand side and supply side factors. Secondly, a focus on organizational factors directs our attention to why some newly-founded RRP parties may have short-term advantages to voter maximization—particularly if they have a hierarchical or even authoritarian party structure and access to external resources, which lessens the dependency on party members. This same aspect, however, makes them especially vulnerable in the longer run. Thirdly, in discussing the Swedish case, this paper strongly indicates that the relative failure of Swedish RRP parties may depend more on organizational factors—in particular, the Sweden Democrats' difficulties to distance itself from its 'too extremist' past—than on the demand side and supply side factors (such as unemployment rates, number of immigrants, political discontent, electoral laws, and convergence processes) that have been the main focus of earlier research (Rydgren 2002). Hence, this paper has shown that party organizations must be taken seriously when studying the electoral successes and failures of RRP parties and that such a focus should be made an integrated part of future comparative studies as well as efforts to build theories on the subject.

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[1] This applies though the need for such internal (labour intensive) resources has declined somewhat since the advent of television and the media society (cf. Epstein 1967; McCarthy & Zald 1977). Much of the process of electoral mobilisation takes place today through public channels, while labour-intensive campaign work such as knocking on doors has become relatively rare (see Snow et al. 1980: 7900), even though members can still be used to man the faxes, computers, etc. (Scarrow 1996). The need for labour-intensive resources has, however, declined—at least for the mainstream parties—as governmental party support has increased (Strøm 1990: 575).

[2] Hence, a party's own history and traditions constrain its strategic room to maneuver by creating a *path dependency*, where choices of action at t_1 constrain the ability to deviate from the path at t_2 (cf. Powell 1991: 194; Thelen & Steinmo 1992).

[3] RRP parties that have not yet had their electoral breakthrough (e.g. the Sweden Democrats in the 1990s, Front National in the 1970s and Lega Nord in the 1980s) function more as social movements than political parties (see Ruzza 2004). The Sweden Democrats and the Front National are also examples of parties that emerged out of social movements.

[4] Furthermore, as was the case for New Democracy, when a party was founded and led by a charismatic leader, the resignation of that leader may increase the risk of dissolution or break up. The routinization of charisma is a crucial process that is likely to lead to tension between those who want to 'normalize' (i.e., develop a bureaucratic organization) and those who want to be faithful to the original charismatic character of the movement (see Weber 1978).

[5] In August 1992 New Democracy announced its intentions to veto three key Government proposals. The strategy failed, and instead of appealing to New Democracy, the Government, faced with a deteriorating currency crisis, cut a broad settlement with the Social Democrats.

[6] In March 1993, New Democracy defeated the Government on partial pensions by voting against its own proposal at the eleventh hour in favor of the Social Democrats. As a result, Prime Minister Bildt threatened to resign, which prompted Wachtmeister to pledge the party's support.

[7] The party organization of the Sweden Democrats is, at least formally, more akin to the organizations of the traditional parties: with regional organizations and local organizations. The party also has a youth organizations, a religious organization (*Fädernas kyrka*), a women's organization, and a student

organization—although it is unclear if the latter two actually entail much activity (Ekström von Essen 2006).

[8] According to the party leadership itself, the 2001 Church election was a turning point for the party's organization, and many local organizations sprung up as a result of the public interests aroused by the election campaign.