

Voting for the Radical Right in Swedish Municipalities: Social Marginality and Ethnic Competition?

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Sweden is no longer a negative, exceptional case regarding the presence of radical right-wing populist parties. The Sweden Democrats has continually grown stronger, and in 2010 they won seats in the Swedish parliament. However, their electoral support varies considerably across Sweden. This study analyses their electoral support in 290 Swedish municipalities in order to explain this variance. Support is found for the social marginality hypothesis: electoral support for the Sweden Democrats tends to be negatively correlated with the average level of education and with the Gross Regional Product per capita, and positively correlated with the unemployment rate. The ethnic competition hypothesis, that there is a positive correlation between the proportion of immigrants and electoral support of the Sweden Democrats, is also supported.

Introduction

Radical right-wing populist parties have established themselves in several Western European countries, including Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Norway, Switzerland and the Netherlands. Until recently, Sweden was an exception: aside from the short-lived right-wing populist party New Democracy, which was represented in the Swedish parliament between 1991 and 1994 with 6.7 percent of votes, radical right-wing parties were electorally rather marginalised in Sweden. This started to change in 2006, when the Sweden Democrats received 2.9 percent of the votes in the national election and 280 seats in municipal councils. In 2010, Sweden Democrats almost doubled its votes, with 5.7 percent in the national election – giving them 20 seats in the Swedish parliament and 612 seats in municipal councils.

The question of how electoral support for radical right-wing parties can be explained has generated a large number of studies. This literature has become increasingly sophisticated and can roughly be divided into four

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ideal types, which can be – and, increasingly often are – combined in empirical analyses. First, in terms of explanations, they focus on demand-side factors or supply-side factors (see, e.g., Mudde 2007; Rydgren 2007). Here, a combination of the two factors has become increasingly common. Second, in terms of research design, countries or national elections are used as observations, or individual-level data on voting. The advantages of cross-national data are, of course, that it allows for international comparisons and that it takes contextual factors into account. The disadvantage is the small number of cases, which is also true for the few studies that have used multilevel models (Arzheimer & Carter 2006). The disadvantage of individual-level data is the lack of reliable data on contextual factors. In this study we will examine support for the Sweden Democrats in the 2006 and 2010 local elections, and we will analyse differences between 290 Swedish municipalities. This makes it possible to increase the number of observations, to avoid ideological and programmatic idiosyncrasies between radical right-wing parties in different countries (which is a problem with cross-national analyses), and to keep institutional factors constant (cf. Kestilä & Söderlund 2007).

The aim of this study is twofold: to increase our knowledge about important ongoing processes in Swedish politics and, in particular, to put to rigorous empirical tests two hypotheses that have been presented in previous research as key explanations to the emergence of radical right-wing populist parties. First, social marginality has been suggested by previous research to be a potentially important explanation – that is, that support for radical right-wing parties is stronger in socioeconomically more marginalised municipalities. Second, following the so-called ‘ethnic competition’ hypothesis, it has been argued that support for radical right-wing parties is stronger in municipalities with a high proportion of immigrants. Contrary to earlier studies, we will be able to distinguish between immigrants from the Nordic countries, those from the European countries, and a third group from non-European countries. Since immigrants of non-European origin are the main target of radical right-wing propaganda, there are good reasons to expect support for such parties to be particularly strong in municipalities with a high proportion of immigrants from non-European countries. We also add a factor that has largely been overlooked in earlier research: the prevalence of crime in the municipality. For reasons accounted for below, we expect that support for radical right-wing parties will be higher in municipalities in which crime is more prevalent.

The remaining parts of this article will be structured in the following way. First, we will provide a brief background of the Swedish case. Second, we will discuss earlier research and the theoretical rationales for assuming that social marginality and ethnic competition are important for understanding variance in support for radical right-wing parties. Third, we will

discuss data and methods. The fourth section will analyse the results of our ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions, and the fifth section will provide a conclusion.

The Swedish Case

Radical Right-wing Populism in Sweden

While populist parties emerged in Denmark and Norway in the early 1970s, no Swedish populist party succeeded in escaping electoral marginalisation (e.g., Andersen & Bjørklund 1990, 2000; Fryklund & Peterson 1981; Widfeldt 2000). Although a Swedish Progress Party was founded as early as 1968, its successes were limited to some occasional deputies being elected to local councils (Lodenius & Larsson 1994, 57–76). In addition, *Skånepartiet* [Skåne is a region in the south of Sweden], a populist separatist party, had some local successes in the 1980s but did not have any impact at the national level (Peterson et al. 1988). Xenophobic, anti-immigration sentiments were manifested in the small town of Sjöbo, in Skåne county, in 1987–88, when local Centre Party leader Sven-Olle Olsson initiated a local referendum on the issue of hosting political refugees. The referendum resulted in a clear majority against accepting refugees in Sjöbo, and the outcome of the election, as well as the election campaign, drew the attention of the national media. After being excluded from the Centre Party, Olsson founded the Sjöbo Party, which was relatively successful in his home region and received 0.5 percent in the 1991 national election (Fryklund & Peterson 1989; Widfeldt 2000).

However, a Swedish right-wing populist party of national significance did emerge in the early 1990s, when New Democracy obtained 6.7 percent of the votes in the 1991 parliamentary election. The party was officially founded on 4 February 1991, but its prehistory began on 25 November 1990, when Bert Karlsson and Ian Wachtmeister published a debate article in one of the leading Swedish newspapers, *Dagens Nyheter*. Both Karlsson and Wachtmeister were already well-known to the Swedish public: the former was a fun-fair and record company owner, who made a political reputation by criticising food prices; the latter was a businessman, who was associated with the right-wing think tank ‘The New Welfare’, and had written popular books in which he ridiculed Swedish politicians and the bureaucracy (Rydgren 2002, 2006; Taggart 1996; Westlind 1996). New Democracy turned out to be short-lived. After Wachtmeister had resigned from his position as a party leader, the party’s fall in the opinion polls (which had started as early as 1992) became drastic. In the 1994 election, New Democracy received only 1.2 percent of the votes, and it disappeared shortly thereafter.

The Sweden Democrats party was formed in 1988 as a direct successor to the Sweden Party, which in turn was the outcome of a merger in 1986 of the Swedish Progress Party and the BBS (Keep Sweden Swedish) (Rydgren 2006). The Sweden Democrats have their 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, the party worked hard to erect a more respectable façade. A ban on uniforms was introduced in 1996 by new leader Mikael Jansson, and in 1999 the Sweden Democrats openly renounced Nazism. In 2005, Jimmy Åkesson replaced Jansson as party leader and continued to reform the party to make it more like successful Western European parties, in particular the Danish People's Party. This process has not been without friction. In 2001, the party split and some hardliners founded the National Democrats. Whereas the National Democrats have stayed highly marginalised, the Sweden Democrats have continually increased their voter share and received 2.9 percent of the votes in the national election and 280 mandates in municipal councils. In 2010, the Sweden Democrats almost doubled their votes, with 5.7 percent in the national election – giving them 20 seats in the Swedish parliament and 612 mandates in municipal councils.

The Municipal Level

Political decision making in Sweden takes place at three levels: national, regional and local. The supreme political decision-making body is the national parliament, while the regional level consists of twenty county councils. Local political power lies with 290 municipal assemblies. The main task of the county councils is to provide health care, while municipal authorities are basically responsible for all other matters that relate to their inhabitants and their immediate environment. This means, for instance, that Swedish municipalities are legally or contractually responsible for the provision of all social services, child and elder care, and primary and secondary education. On a more or less voluntary basis, they are furthermore responsible for providing housing, industrial and commercial services, and leisure activities for their populations. The municipality's most important political privilege is the ability to levy taxes.

Since each level of political decision making has distinct areas of responsibilities and very far reaching self-governing rights, no obvious hierarchical relationship exists between them. The local level of political decision making is thus vitally important, even though issues of national importance are obviously handled by the central government and despite the fact that central government's decisions may impinge on a municipality's self-governance. That means that election to the municipal council is of great

importance in Sweden, which at least partly explains the high voter turnout in local elections (79.4 percent in 2006, and 81.6 percent in 2010). Elections are held every four years on the third Sunday in September, which is the same day as for the national and regional elections. Sweden's 290 municipalities vary in size from small, rural units with fewer than 3,000 inhabitants to metropolitan areas like the city of Stockholm with 800,000 inhabitants.

Most voters vote for the same party in national elections as in municipal elections (Oscarsson & Holmberg 2008). However, it has become increasingly common to split votes between the national and the municipal election, and it is more common in local elections to vote for contenders outside of the group of mainstream parties. This means that nonestablished parties – including radical right-wing populist parties – often find it easier to make inroads at the municipal level, and that local elections may function as a springboard for further mobilisation at the national level.

How to Explain Electoral Support for Radical Right-wing Populism

Social Marginality

Social marginalisation has been one of the most common explanations for the emergence of radical right-wing populist parties and, indeed, older forms of right-wing radicalism and extremism. The relative deprivation theory and the modernisation losers theory are the most influential theories of the role of social marginalisation for the emergence and establishment of radical right-wing populist parties.

Relative deprivation theory focuses on the frustration arising from feelings of relative deprivation. Such feelings, in turn, are caused by disappointing comparisons with one's own past (i.e., when one's life trajectory suddenly deviates from the expected) or with social reference groups (i.e., when one's ingroup is negatively evaluated in comparison with significant outgroups) (see, e.g., Gurr 1970; Runciman 1966). Most research that builds on the relative deprivation thesis has been operationalised in economic terms as declining market situations for individuals or groups, or fear of economic decline in the near future (but see, Bell 2002; Lipset 1959).

The modernisation losers theory is one of the central tenets in the literature on radical right-wing populist parties. Minkenberg (2003, 151), for instance, has argued that the rise of radical right-wing populist parties can be understood as 'the radical effort to undo' social change associated with modernization – that is, 'a growing autonomy of the individual (status mobility and role flexibility) and ongoing functional differentiation of the society (segmentation and growing autonomy of societal subsystems)'. The ethnonationalistically defined, homogeneous community and the virtue of

traditional roles stressed by radical right-wing populist parties constitute appealing counterweights for people who do not feel at home in a modernising society.

Betz (1994, 26–7) proposed a similar explanation in arguing that the emergence of the radical right-wing populist parties is largely ‘a consequence of a profound transformation of the socioeconomic and sociocultural structure of advanced Western European democracies’, and more specifically from an industrial to a postindustrial economy. According to Betz, this transition is largely characterised by dissolution, fragmentation and differentiation, which are the result of increased individualisation. These processes also have implications for the cultures of contemporary Western societies, in which, according to Betz (1994, 29), ‘established sub-cultures, milieus, and institutions, which traditionally provided and sustained collective identities, are getting eroded and/or are being destroyed . . . , and are giving way to a “flux of contextualized identities”’. Taken together, these developments increase the importance of cultural capital, flexibility and individual entrepreneurship for people’s efforts to adapt to the rapidly changing circumstances of contemporary Western societies. Hence, those who possess these characteristics can be expected to be among the winners in the postindustrial societies (Betz 1994, 29–30). However, the losers, those who are unable to cope with the ‘acceleration of economic, social, and cultural modernization’ and or are stuck in full or partial unemployment, run the risk of falling into the new underclass and of becoming ‘superfluous and useless for society’ (Betz 1994, 32).

This situation may favour the emergence of radical right-wing populist parties in three ways, according to Betz. First, the losers in the postindustrialisation processes may be supposed to become anxious, bewildered, insecure and resentful – sentiments that may be channeled into support for policy proposals that stress the need to return to the traditional values of the *status quo ante*. Second, as a response to the inability of established political parties to cope with the (at least perceived) perverted effects of rampant economic and cultural transformation processes, many have become increasingly discontented and disenchanted, which has opened up a niche for parties ready to exploit popular political discontent to win protest votes. Third, the fragmentation and individualisation of postindustrial societies has led to a decline in cleavage politics – that is, to a decreased salience of the economic cleavage dimension, which may open up a space for parties that address new issues, such as the immigration question (Betz 1994, 34–5).

In practical terms, ‘modernisation losers’ has usually come to refer to unemployed people and unskilled workers threatened by unemployment in the near future (see, e.g., Betz 1994). However, others, such as Minkenberg (2000), have argued that modernisation losers should be defined more

broadly to include 'the second-to-last fifth' stratum of society – a stratum that is 'rather secure but objectively can still lose something' (Minkenberg 2000, 187). One may complain that this definition makes for poor predictions of which voter groups will turn to the radical right-wing populist parties, but it largely agrees with Lipset's (1981, 489) well-known argument that the inter-war fascist parties were disproportionately supported by sections of the old middle class (such as self-employed craftsmen and small shop owners) who were 'displaced or threatened by the emergence of centralized, large-scale industry and the growing power and status of organized labor'. Empirical research clearly shows that workers and the old middle classes are indeed over-represented among new radical right voters (Ivarsflaten 2005, 465; Lubbers et al. 2002, 364; Norris 2005, 139). When considering voters' education, however, empirical findings seem to support the relative deprivation theory better than the modernisation losers thesis (or at least Betz's version of it). Although support for the new radical right-wing parties varies inversely with the level of education (Lubbers et al. 2002), radical right-wing parties receive their strongest support from the mid-school stratum (Arzheimer & Carter 2006; Evans 2005).

In terms of unemployment, we find some individual-level support for the hypothesis that the unemployed are over-represented among new radical right voters (see, e.g., Lubbers et al. 2002, 134), although unemployment rates have been shown to be a bad predictor of cross-national variation in the electoral fortunes of the new radical right-wing parties. Several macro-level studies have shown that there is either no significant relationship (Lubbers et al. 2002) or a negative relationship (Arzheimer & Carter 2006, Knigge 1998) between unemployment rates and differences in the electoral fortunes of radical right-wing populist parties. Swank and Betz (2003) found no significant association between either the unemployment rate, slower economic growth or inflation rates and the success of radical right-wing parties, although they did find a significant negative association between having a universal welfare state system (including an active labour market programme) and the electoral success of radical right-wing populist parties. Only Jackman and Volpert (1996) have reported a positive relationship for unemployment, whereas Golder (2003) found a positive interaction effect: high unemployment rates are favourable to radical right-wing populist parties only in countries with a large (i.e., 6.3 percent or more) presence of foreign resident populations.

Hence, we would expect voter support for the Sweden Democrats to be higher in municipalities that are in a more vulnerable economic situation. We will measure this by using Gross Regional Product (GDP for municipalities) per capita, as well as aggregated unemployment rates and the average level of education. Whereas the two former are direct indicators of the economic situation in the municipality, the latter is an indicator of

how well prepared the municipality is for ongoing postindustrialisation processes.

Ethnic Competition

The ideology and discourse of the radical right-wing populist parties are based on ethnonationalism and opposition to immigration and the multicultural/multiethnic society. These parties have framed immigrants as problems in four different ways: first, as already mentioned above, as a threat to ethnonational identity; second, as a major cause of criminality and other kinds of social insecurity; third, as a cause of unemployment; and fourth, as abusers of the generosity of the welfare states of Western democracies, which results in fewer state subsidies and the like for 'natives'. The first two of these frames can be treated as a manifestation of the ethnopluralist doctrine – that is, that different ethnicities should not 'mix' lest cultural specificities disappear and insecurity and crime increase – whereas the last two can be treated as part of a welfare chauvinist doctrine in which immigrants and 'natives' are depicted as competing for limited economic resources. In such a conflict situation, immigrants are portrayed as illegitimate competitors, pitted against 'natives' who are *entitled* to keep the entire cake for themselves.

The strong prevalence of ethnic nationalism and anti-immigration politics in the programmes of radical right-wing populist parties has led some scholars to view immigration scepticism, xenophobia and/or racism as the main reasons – and sometimes the sole reasons (e.g., Mitra 1988) – why these parties have emerged and established themselves in a number of Western European countries. To believe that anti-immigration attitudes are a very important factor for explaining the electoral mobilisation of radical right-wing parties makes some intuitive sense. Although the anti-immigration nexus is only a part of a wider web of issues (Mudde 1999), it is at the core of the radical right-wing parties' political programmes and dominates the images voters have of these parties. Earlier research results were consistent with the hypothesis that anti-immigration attitudes are an important factor in predicting who will vote for radical right-wing populist parties (e.g., Lubbers & Scheepers 2000; Lubbers et al. 2002; Norris 2005; Rydgren 2008). Even if not all voters who are sceptical of immigration vote for radical right-wing parties, most voters who do vote for those parties have such attitudes.

According to the ethnic competition thesis, voters turn to the radical right-wing populist parties because they want to reduce competition from immigrants over scarce resources such as in the labour market, housing, welfare benefits and even the marriage market (Fennema 2005; Koopmans et al. 2005; Kriesi 1999; see also Blalock 1957, 1967; Olzak 1992; Pettigrew

1957). Hence, ethnic competition makes voters sceptical of immigration. Two hypotheses follow from ethnic competition theory: that radical right-wing parties will be more successful in areas with many immigrants, where this kind of competition is more manifest; and that the radical right-wing parties will be supported primarily by voters who are more likely to be confronted by competition from immigrants – that is by lower educated, unskilled, male voters who aspire to the same jobs and consumer goods as many immigrant groups in Western Europe (Fennema 2005; Koopmans et al. 2005; Kriesi 1999; see also Olzak 1992).

Knigge (1998) and Lubbers et al. (2002) showed that the electoral results of radical right-wing populist parties correlate positively with the number of immigrants in a country, and Swank and Betz (2003) and Van der Brug et al. (2005) have shown that the same holds true for the number of asylum seekers. However, Golder (2003) showed a positive relationship between the proportion of immigrants in a country and electoral turnout for radical right-wing populist parties only in situations in which the unemployment rates exceeded 1.3 percent, while the analyses of Norris (2005) failed to show a significant relationship between ethnic heterogeneity and the electoral popularity of radical right-wing parties. Nor did possible interaction effects between such indicators of ethnic heterogeneity and unemployment prove significant. Rydgren (2008) showed that voters living in areas with many immigrants were significantly more likely to vote for the radical right in Denmark and the Netherlands, but not in Austria, Belgium, France or Norway.

From ethnic competition theory we would expect a positive correlation between the proportion of immigrants and the electoral support of the Sweden Democrats. We would argue that our level of analyses of the local and municipal levels is better suited to test this theory than are cross-national studies. Most competition over scarce resources, we may assume, is local in character. Moreover, contrary to other studies, we will be able to separate between immigrants born in the Nordic countries, immigrants born in the European Union (EU) and European Free Trade Area (EFTA) countries, and immigrants from the rest of the world. There are good reasons to assume that the proportion of non-European immigrants, in particular, will matter for the electoral support for radical right-wing populist parties. Like other radical right-wing parties, the Sweden Democrats have emphasised that immigration from 'culturally distant' countries is more problematic than immigration from culturally more similar countries since the cultural threat is seen as greater from such immigration. Immigration from Muslim countries is singled out as especially problematic (Betz & Johnson 2004; Rydgren 2008; Zaslove 2004).

As indicated above, we will also add one dimension that is typically left out from earlier studies – namely crime. A high level of crime within the

municipality, we would argue, not only generates feelings of insecurity, but also aggravates the feelings of being left behind – that is, of being socially marginalised. In addition, a high level of crime within a municipality is likely to increase the salience of law and order, which is one of the Sweden Democrats' profile areas. In addition, it is potentially highly important to look at possible interaction effects between the proportion of immigrants and criminality. As demonstrated by Rydgren (2008), the frame linking immigration to increased criminality was particularly effective for radical right-wing populist parties in mobilising electoral support. We may assume that this frame is particularly resonant in municipalities that combine a high proportion of immigrants and a high level of criminality.

Finally, as demonstrated by research by Golder (2003) and Arzheimer (2009), it is potentially important to look at interaction effects of the proportion of immigrants and the level of unemployment. There are reasons to suspect that support for radical right-wing populist parties is stronger in municipalities that combine a high level of unemployment and a high proportion of immigration since the resonance of welfare chauvinist frames is more effective in such settings.

Data and Methods

We have estimated eight ordinary least squares (OLS) multiple regression models, which were tested against the electoral support for the Sweden Democrats in the local elections of 2006 and 2010 (proportion of votes) as well as against the change in voter support for the Sweden Democrats between 2006 and 2010. Sweden's 290 municipalities constituted the units of observation. There are two main reasons for running the same models for two separate elections: first, it constitutes a reliability check; and second, and more importantly, it introduces some dynamic factors into the analyses. We would expect to find more systematic differences between the municipalities in support for the Sweden Democrats in the 2006 election than in the 2010 election simply because the party was smaller in 2006. It is not far-fetched to assume that municipalities characterised by social marginalisation and ethnic competition over scarce resources would be among the 'early adopters' – that is, be the first municipalities in which Sweden Democrats received substantial electoral support – and that more average municipalities would be among the 'late adopters'. If that is true, we would expect the effects of the key variables in the models to be generally smaller when looking specifically at the change in voter support for the Sweden Democrats between 2006 and 2010.

We have combined data from three national registers. Data on election results, the aggregated level of education, the gross regional product per capita (GRP/capita) and the proportion of immigrants, were obtained from

Statistics Sweden. Data on unemployment were obtained from the Swedish Public Employment Service. Data on crime were obtained from the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention. In Table 1, below, we list the dependent and independent variables, briefly explain how they were coded (when applicable) and provide some descriptive statistics.

Model 1 will test the three indicators of socioeconomic marginality; Models 2 and 3 the effects of the proportion of immigrants (the total proportion of immigrants in Model 2, and in Model 3 we break down the categories to immigrants from the Nordic countries, immigrants from the EU/EFTA countries, and non-European immigrants); and Model 4 the effect of crime rates on the electoral support of the Sweden Democrats. Model 5 will combine variables included in Models 1–4, with the purpose of checking the robustness of the findings. For the same reason, we will introduce two control variables in Model 6: population size and a lagged measure of the combined proportion of the vote for the Social Democrats and the Left Party in the prior local election. The main reasons for this are that ethnic competition can be assumed, *ceteris paribus*, to be more salient in smaller towns, and that the strength of the left may work as a shield against radical right-wing parties' attempts to mobilise working-class support (Coffe 2009; Kriesi et al. 1995; Rydgren 2002). To further test the robustness of the findings, we introduce interaction variables in Models 7 and 8.

Results

Let us start with the 2006 election (Table 2). We receive support for the social marginality hypothesis. As expected, voter support for the Sweden Democrats varies negatively with the GRP/capita. This finding is robust and the negative correlation is reinforced by introducing additional variables in Models 5–8. Also as expected, we found a robust positive correlation between unemployment rates and voter support for the Sweden Democrats. For the average level of education, however, the results are slightly more complex. We found the expected negative effect, but only when controlling for the proportion of immigrants and the crime rate in Model 4 (and for additional variables in Models 5–7). However, it should be noted that the Adjusted R² reveals that socioeconomic factors explain little of the variance between the municipalities, and considerably less than the proportion of immigrants and crime rates (which will be discussed below).

Regarding the proportion of immigrants, however, the results are unexpected and ambiguous. In Model 2 we found the expected positive correlation between the total proportion of immigrants and the electoral support for the Sweden Democrats. When we disentangled this effect in Model 3, however, we found a rather strong positive correlation for the proportion of immigrants from the EU/EFTA countries, whereas the proportion of

Table 1. List of Variables and Descriptive Statistics (Mean and Standard Deviation)

Variables	Description	Mean (standard deviation) 2006	Mean (standard deviation) 2010
Dependent variable	Proportion of vote for the Sweden Democrats in the 2006 and 2010 local elections.	2.11 (2.96)	4.75 (3.31)
GRP	Gross Regional Product (for municipalities) per capita (2006 and 2008 data).	256.68 (108.98)	278.48 (123.44)
Unemployment	Percentage of the population openly unemployed according to labour market statistics from the Swedish Public Employment Service (2006 and 2010 data).	3.39 (0.96)	3.84 (0.98)
Education	Percentage of the population with a higher education degree, specified as postsecondary education of at least three years duration (2008 data).	11.84 (5.46)	11.84 (5.46)
Immigrants (total)	Percentage of the population born in foreign countries.	9.45 (5.12)	10.59 (5.39)
Nordic immigrants	Percentage of the population born in the Nordic countries (2006 and 2009 data).	3.28 (3.12)	3.18 (3.06)
EU/EFTA immigrants	Percentage of the population born in the EU and EFTA countries, excluding the Nordic countries (2006 and 2009 data).	1.77 (0.97)	2.21 (1.78)
Non-European immigrants	Percentage of the population born in the rest of the world (2006 and 2009 data).	4.40 (3.21)	5.19 (3.56)
Crime	Number of reported offences per 1,000 of average population (2006 and 2009 data).	96.22 (30.75)	104.21 (32.17)
S+V	Proportion of vote for the Social Democrats and the Left Party in the local elections of 2002, resp. 2006.	46.16 (10.82)	46.52 (11.47)
Population	Population size specified as number of thousands (2009 data).	31.42 (60.60)	31.42 (60.60)
Unemployment × Nordic immigrants	Interaction between Unemployment and immigration 1.	11.42 (15.34)	12.64 (15.37)
Unemployment × EU/EFTA immigrants	Interaction between Unemployment and immigration 2.	5.77 (3.52)	8.42 (5.33)
Unemployment × Non-European immigrants	Interaction between Unemployment and immigration 3.	15.00 (13.37)	20.82 (18.13)
Crime × Nordic immigrants	Interaction between Crime and immigration 1.	326.21 (336.53)	345.30 (355.45)
Crime × EU/EFTA immigrants	Interaction between Crime and immigration 2.	184.83 (155.18)	246.69 (196.90)
Crime × Non-European immigrants	Interaction between Crime and immigration 3.	484.94 (529.12)	614.72 (641.42)

Table 2. Differences in Voting for the Sweden Democrats in Local Elections across Municipalities in the 2006 Election (OLS Regression Analyses)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Local elections, 2006								
GRP	-0.002 (0.002)				-0.004 (0.002)	-0.004 (0.002)	-0.004 (0.002)	-0.004 (0.002)
Unemployment	0.194 (0.187)				0.185 (0.184)	0.205 (0.195)	-0.408 (0.385)	0.208 (0.202)
Education	0.014 (0.034)				-0.111 (0.033)	-0.089 (0.037)	-0.068 (0.041)	-0.087 (0.038)
Immigrants (total)		0.98 (0.034)						
Nordic immigrants			-0.063 (0.053)		-0.128 (0.050)	-0.133 (0.050)	-0.290 (0.173)	0.024 (0.211)
EU/EFTA immigrants			1.052 (0.232)		1.218 (0.244)	1.192 (0.245)	0.046 (0.872)	0.481 (0.783)
Non-European immigrants			-0.006 (0.070)		-0.107 (0.077)	-0.085 (0.078)	-0.049 (0.265)	0.152 (0.254)
Crime				0.034 (0.005)	0.032 (0.007)	0.035 (0.007)	0.035 (0.007)	0.037 (0.012)
S+V						0.004 (0.017)	0.005 (0.017)	0.003 (0.017)
Population size						-0.005 (0.003)	-0.007 (0.003)	-0.005 (0.004)
Unemployment × Nordic immigrants							0.038 (0.037)	
Unemployment × EU/EFTA immigrants							0.349 (0.251)	
Unemployment × Non-European immigrants							-0.021 (0.071)	
Crime × Nordic immigrants								-0.002 (0.002)
Crime × EU/EFTA immigrants								0.007 (0.007)
Crime × Non-European immigrants								-0.002 (0.002)
Constant	1.808 (0.848)	1.189 (0.361)	0.486 (0.381)	-1.123 (0.537)	-0.461 (0.851)	-1.136 (1.115)	0.733 (1.526)	-1.370 (1.511)
N	290	290	290	290	290	290	290	290
Adjusted R ²	-0.003	0.025	0.109	0.119	0.228	0.229	0.231	0.226

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

immigrants from non-European countries were shown to correlate negatively to the electoral support for the Sweden Democrats, which is contrary to expectations. Both results are robust. For crime, we found the expected positive relation between the rate of reported criminal offenses and electoral support for the Sweden Democrats. Also this result is robust, and standard errors are small.

Hence, we do find some support for the hypothesis that social marginality is an important factor in explaining differences in voter support for the Sweden Democrats, even at an aggregated level. Also the ethnic competition hypothesis gains some support, although the results are less straightforward to interpret. We would have believed that the effects on the electoral support would have been strongest for the proportion of immigrants from non-European countries, which are those most explicitly targeted by the radical right's propaganda. However, this was not the case; rather on the contrary, the Sweden Democrats tends to do worse in municipalities with a high proportion of immigrants originating in non-European countries. Yet, we found a relatively strong positive correlation between the proportion of immigrants from the EU/EFTA countries and the electoral support of the Sweden Democrats. This may indicate that voters were motivated by economic rationality rather than xenophobia *per se* – that is, what mattered most was the total proportion of immigrants, and in particular the proportion of immigrants that are competitive on the labour market, rather than how culturally distant immigrants are perceived to be. Seen from this perspective we may assume that immigrants from the EU/EFTA countries are seen as a greater threat than non-European immigrants (which tend to have a weaker position on the local labour market). Interpreted in this way, the results do not run counter to the ethnic competition hypothesis. Finally, and not least important, the results demonstrates the potential importance of including the factor of criminality – in this case, the proportion of reported criminal offenses – in explanations of radical right-wing mobilisation. In the 2006 election, the Sweden Democrats tended to do better in municipalities with higher crime rates.

When looking at the 2010 election (Table 3), we received even stronger support for the social marginality hypothesis than in the 2006 election. Although the effect of GDP/capita is approximately the same, the effect of unemployment rates on the electoral support of the Sweden Democrats is considerably stronger in 2010. Moreover, we found consistent negative correlations for the average level of education within the municipalities, and these correlations are slightly stronger than in 2006. Although still low, the Adjusted R² shows that socioeconomic factors explain more of the variance in 2010 than in 2006. Also, the ethnic competition hypotheses received stronger support in 2010 than in the 2006 election: as in the previous election, the total proportion of immigrants are positively correlated to the

Table 3. Differences in Voting for the Sweden Democrats in Local Elections across Municipalities in the 2010 Election (OLS Regression Analyses)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Local elections, 2010								
GRP	-0.003 (0.002)				-0.005 (0.001)	-0.004 (0.001)	-0.003 (0.001)	-0.004 (0.001)
Unemployment	0.756 (0.204)				0.329 (0.202)	0.523 (0.212)	-0.411 (0.397)	0.494 (0.214)
Education	-0.007 (0.037)				-0.153 (0.036)	-0.164 (0.040)	-0.122 (0.045)	-0.169 (0.040)
Immigrants (total)		0.152 (0.035)						
Nordic immigrants			-0.065 (0.058)		-0.167 (0.054)	-0.159 (0.054)	-0.404 (0.268)	0.088 (0.265)
EU/EFTA immigrants			1.011 (0.189)		1.097 (0.178)	0.953 (0.183)	-0.315 (0.751)	0.023 (0.627)
Non-European immigrants			0.070 (0.063)		-0.004 (0.072)	0.007 (0.072)	-0.133 (0.233)	0.373 (0.234)
Crime				0.038 (0.006)	0.031 (0.007)	0.035 (0.007)	0.035 (0.007)	0.038 (0.013)
S+V						-0.046 (0.018)	-0.044 (0.018)	-0.046 (0.018)
Population size						-0.005 (0.003)	-0.006 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.004)
Unemployment × Nordic immigrants							0.056 (0.056)	
Unemployment × EU/EFTA immigrants							0.328 (0.185)	
Unemployment × Non-European immigrants							0.016 (0.052)	
Crime × Nordic immigrants								-0.002 (0.002)
Crime × EU/EFTA immigrants								0.008 (0.005)
Crime × Non-European immigrants								-0.003 (0.002)
Constant	2.753 (1.044)	3.136 (0.417)	2.353 (0.427)	0.743 (0.614)	1.599 (1.031)	2.569 (1.221)	5.887 (1.720)	2.271 (1.633)
N	290	290	290	290	290	290	290	290
Adjusted R ²	0.053	0.058	0.162	0.136	0.326	0.341	0.353	0.345

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

electoral support for the Sweden Democrats, and this effect is stronger than in 2006.

When we break down the categories in Model 3, we see that the proportion of immigrants from the EU/EFTA countries is strongly positively correlated with the electoral support of the Sweden Democrats – just as it was in 2006. Unlike in 2006, however, we also found positive correlations for the proportion of non-European immigrants (although this correlation is not robust, and disappears when controlling for socioeconomic factors in Model 4). As in 2006, we found robust positive correlations between crime rates and the electoral support of the Sweden Democrats. Finally, contrary to in 2006, the lagged variable measuring the electoral support of the left-wing parties (the Left Party and the Social Democrats) in the previous election played a role. Everything else being the same, the Sweden Democrats tended to do worse in municipalities in which the left parties had been relatively strong four years earlier.

Hence, we received no support for the assumption that municipalities characterised by social marginalisation and ethnic competition over scarce resources would be among the ‘early adopters’ – that is, be the first municipalities in which Sweden Democrats received substantial electoral support – and that more average municipalities would be among the ‘late adopters’. If anything, the results above indicate the opposite: social marginality (unemployment rates in particular) and ethnic competition explained the electoral support of the Sweden Democrats more effectively in 2010 than in 2006. To look further into this, it might be useful to look specifically on the *change* in electoral support for the Sweden Democrats between the 2006 and 2010 elections.

As Table 4, below, indicates, the Sweden Democrats has been able to advance their electoral support foremost in municipalities in which the average level of education is low, with high unemployment rates (but this negative correlation only appear while controlling for proportion of immigrants and the rate of reported criminal offenses), and with higher proportions of immigrants from the EU/EFTA countries *and* from non-European countries. This time we found a robust positive correlation between the proportion of non-European immigrants and electoral support of the Sweden Democrats, indicating that this factor is becoming more important over time.

One important question that should be addressed is to what extent these results can be generalised. Are local elections too particular to allow for generalisations to national elections? When comparing the results above to analyses of the electoral support of the Sweden Democrats in the national elections of 2006 and 2010, across municipalities, we find similarities as well as differences (Tables 5, 6 and 7). In both 2006 and 2010 the results for GRP/capita is approximately the same as they were in the analyses of local

Table 4. The Change in Electoral Support for the Sweden Democrats in Local Elections between 2006 and 2010 (OLS Regression Analyses)

Local elections (lagged)	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
GRP	0.000 (0.001)				-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)
Unemployment	-0.002 (0.127)				-0.225 (0.144)	-0.123 (0.152)	0.116 (0.288)	-0.130 (0.155)
Education	-0.058 (0.023)				-0.119 (0.025)	-0.135 (0.029)	-0.146 (0.033)	-0.140 (0.029)
Immigrants (total)		0.049 (0.022)						
Nordic immigrants			-0.015 (0.039)		-0.045 (0.038)	-0.038 (0.038)	-0.043 (0.194)	0.050 (0.191)
EU/EFTA immigrants			0.183 (0.125)		0.189 (0.127)	0.120 (0.131)	0.221 (0.545)	0.397 (0.452)
Non-European immigrants			0.056 (0.041)		0.134 (0.051)	0.132 (0.052)	0.296 (0.169)	0.157 (0.169)
Crime				0.007 (0.004)	0.003 (0.005)	0.004 (0.005)	0.005 (0.005)	0.013 (0.009)
S+V						-0.026 (0.013)	-0.028 (0.013)	-0.026 (0.013)
Population size						0.000 (0.002)	0.000 (0.040)	0.000 (0.003)
Unemployment × Nordic immigrants							0.000 (0.040)	
Unemployment × EU/EFTA immigrants							-0.029 (0.134)	
Unemployment × Non-European immigrants							-0.035 (0.038)	
Crime × Nordic immigrants								-0.001 (0.002)
Crime × EU/EFTA immigrants								-0.002 (0.004)
Crime × Non-European immigrants								0.000 (0.001)
Constant	3.361 (0.652)	2.112 (0.216)	1.987 (0.282)	1.921 (0.403)	3.942 (0.734)	4.730 (0.876)	3.953 (1.247)	3.833 (1.179)
N	290	290	290	290	290	290	290	290
Adjusted R ²	0.015	0.014	0.023	0.008	0.089	0.096	0.095	0.090

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 5. Differences in Voting for the Sweden Democrats in the 2006 National Election across Municipalities (OLS Regression Analyses)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
General election, 2006								
GRP	-0.002 (0.001)				-0.003 (0.001)	-0.002 (0.001)	-0.002 (0.001)	-0.002 (0.001)
Unemployment	-0.158 (0.108)				-0.056 (0.099)	0.055 (0.115)	-0.338 (0.213)	0.111 (0.117)
Education	-0.058 (0.020)				-0.145 (0.018)	-0.152 (0.022)	-0.133 (0.024)	-0.157 (0.022)
Immigrants (total)		0.044 (0.020)						
Nordic immigrants			-0.029 (0.031)		-0.081 (0.027)	-0.079 (0.027)	-0.163 (0.092)	0.017 (0.112)
EU/EFTA immigrants			0.930 (0.135)		1.111 (0.131)	1.069 (0.132)	0.132 (0.466)	0.546 (0.416)
Non-European immigrants			-0.115 (0.041)		-0.119 (0.041)	-0.108 (0.042)	-0.014 (0.142)	0.244 (0.135)
Crime				0.014 (0.003)	0.017 (0.004)	0.017 (0.004)	0.018 (0.004)	0.023 (0.006)
S+V						-0.019 (0.012)	-0.018 (0.012)	-0.023 (0.012)
Population size						-0.003 (0.002)	-0.004 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.001)
Unemployment × Nordic immigrants							0.021 (0.020)	
Unemployment × EU/EFTA immigrants							0.284 (0.134)	
Unemployment × Non-European immigrants							-0.034 (0.038)	
Crime × Nordic immigrants								-0.001 (0.001)
Crime × EU/EFTA immigrants								0.005 (0.004)
Crime × Non-European immigrants								-0.003 (0.001)
Constant	4.826 (0.493)	2.782 (0.216)	2.148 (0.221)	1.832 (0.014)	3.041 (0.459)	3.480 (0.677)	4.611 (0.866)	2.743 (0.856)
N	290	290	290	290	290	290	290	290
Adjusted R ²	0.043	0.013	0.152	0.058	0.367	0.374	0.381	0.388

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 6. Differences in Voting for the Sweden Democrats in the 2010 National Election across Municipalities (OLS Regression Analyses)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
General election, 2010								
GRP	-0.003 (0.001)				-0.004 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)
Unemployment	0.201 (0.152)				-0.003 (0.153)	0.467 (0.162)	-0.027 (0.292)	0.441 (0.161)
Education	-0.112 (0.028)				-0.196 (0.027)	-0.260 (0.030)	-0.229 (0.034)	-0.268 (0.030)
Immigrants (total)		0.056 (0.027)						
Nordic immigrants			0.006 (0.046)		-0.085 (0.041)	-0.053 (0.039)	-0.171 (0.193)	0.237 (0.189)
EU/EFTA immigrants			0.879 (0.149)		0.930 (0.135)	0.662 (0.134)	-0.612 (0.541)	-0.145 (0.450)
Non-European immigrants			-0.120 (0.049)		-0.121 (0.055)	-0.142 (0.052)	0.028 (0.168)	0.198 (0.167)
Crime				0.019 (0.004)	0.025 (0.005)	0.025 (0.005)	0.025 (0.005)	0.031 (0.009)
S+V						-0.094 (0.015)	-0.096 (0.015)	-0.096 (0.015)
Population size						-0.003 (0.002)	-0.004 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.003)
Unemployment × Nordic immigrants							0.028 (0.040)	
Unemployment × EU/EFTA immigrants							0.325 (0.133)	
Unemployment × Non-European immigrants							-0.048 (0.038)	
Crime × Nordic immigrants								-0.003 (0.002)
Crime × EU/EFTA immigrants								0.007 (0.004)
Crime × Non-European immigrants								-0.003 (0.001)
Constant	7.597 (0.778)	5.703 (0.326)	4.958 (0.337)	4.340 (0.490)	5.870 (0.781)	8.641 (0.922)	10.468 (1.267)	8.138 (1.212)
N	290	290	290	290	290	290	290	290
Adjusted R ²	0.095	0.011	0.105	0.054	0.335	0.414	0.422	0.425

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 7. The Change in Electoral Support for the Sweden Democrats in the National Elections between 2006 and 2010 (OLS Regression Analyses)

General elections (lagged)	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
GRP	-0.001 (0.001)				-0.001 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)
Unemployment	0.020 (0.069)				-0.103 (0.078)	0.078 (0.085)	0.054 (0.155)	0.064 (0.086)
Education	-0.070 (0.013)				-0.096 (0.014)	-0.123 (0.016)	-0.116 (0.018)	-0.128 (0.016)
Immigrants (total)		0.007 (0.013)						
Nordic immigrants			0.020 (0.022)		-0.015 (0.021)	-0.002 (0.020)	0.041 (0.103)	0.127 (0.101)
EU/EFTA immigrants			0.100 (0.072)		0.110 (0.069)	0.009 (0.070)	-0.298 (0.287)	0.083 (0.239)
Non-European immigrants			-0.024 (0.024)		-0.003 (0.028)	-0.013 (0.028)	0.061 (0.089)	0.022 (0.089)
Crime				0.004 (0.002)	0.009 (0.003)	0.009 (0.003)	0.008 (0.003)	0.015 (0.005)
S+V						-0.037 (0.008)	-0.037 (0.008)	-0.037 (0.008)
Population size						-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)
Unemployment × Nordic immigrants							-0.008 (0.021)	
Unemployment × EU/EFTA immigrants							0.078 (0.071)	
Unemployment × Non-European immigrants							-0.019 (0.020)	
Crime × Nordic immigrants								-0.001 (0.001)
Crime × EU/EFTA immigrants								-0.001 (0.002)
Crime × Non-European immigrants								0.000 (0.001)
Constant	4.039 (0.353)	3.022 (0.151)	2.938 (0.163)	2.651 (0.230)	3.818 (0.398)	4.947 (0.485)	5.045 (0.672)	4.322 (0.644)
N	290	290	290	290	290	290	290	290
Adjusted R ²	0.118	-0.002	-0.001	0.011	0.178	0.231	0.227	0.231

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

elections. However, we fail to find robust positive correlations for unemployment rates (which in 2006 are negative in Models 1 and 5 and slightly positive in Model 6, and in 2010 positive in Models 1 and 6 but negative in Model 5). Moreover, in both 2006 and 2010 we found positive correlations for the total proportion of immigrants. Also the proportion of immigrants from the EU/EFTA countries was positively correlated with the electoral support for the Sweden Democrats. However, we found rather strong and robust negative correlations for the proportion of non-European immigrants. As for the local elections, the proportion of reported criminal offences was consistently positively correlated with the electoral support of the Sweden Democrats in the national elections of 2006 and 2010, when analysed across municipalities.

These comparisons show somewhat less support for the social marginality hypothesis and less support for the ethnic competition hypothesis in the national elections compared to local elections. To us, this indicates that these hypotheses are more important when explaining the electoral support for radical right-wing populist parties in secondary elections, at least when these parties are still seen as marginalised political alternatives. Voters seem to be more willing to translate sentiments and preferences linked to the immigration issue – and maybe also frustration with established parties – into support for a hitherto marginalised radical right-wing populist party in local elections (which although important still are second-order elections) than in national elections. However, it remains an open question whether these differences between local and national elections will remain in coming elections if the Sweden Democrats become more established.

Conclusion

Sweden is no longer a negative, exceptional case regarding the presence of radical right-wing populist parties. The Sweden Democratic Party has continually grown stronger and in 2010 won seats in the Swedish parliament. However, its electoral support varies widely across Sweden. In this article, we analysed 290 Swedish municipalities in the elections of 2006 and 2010 to explain this variation. Aside from increasing knowledge about the specific empirical case of Sweden, this study is an important contribution to the literature on radical right-wing voting generally. It draws upon a considerably higher number of observations than what is used in cross-national studies (which is dominating the research field), which means that we can put key hypothesis to more reliable tests. Comparing local elections within one country also means that ideological and programmatic idiosyncrasies between radical right-wing parties in different countries are avoided, and that institutional factors are kept constant, which means that we can avoid

important confounders and mis-specifications that potentially harm the validity of cross-national analyses.

The main conclusions are that we found support for the social marginality hypothesis in both elections. Moreover, social marginality is becoming more important over time for explaining the electoral support for the Sweden Democrats in local elections. We also found support for the ethnic competition hypothesis, although this support varies across the two elections. The total proportion of immigrants is consistently positively correlated with the electoral support of the Sweden Democrats, and so is the proportion of immigrants from the EU/EFTA countries. For the proportion of non-European immigrants, however, we found negative correlations in the 2006 election and positive ones for the 2010 election. We found the strongest positive correlation for the proportion of non-European countries when looking specifically at the changes in electoral support for the Sweden Democrats between the 2006 and 2010 elections, which means that the party has been able to advance their electoral support more in municipalities with a relatively higher proportion of non-European immigrants. Both the social marginality hypothesis and the ethnic competition hypothesis received stronger support in our analyses of local elections than in analysing voter support for the Sweden Democrats in national elections, across municipalities. Finally, our results demonstrated the potential importance of including criminality as a factor explaining differences in support for radical right-wing populist parties (a factor that so far has not received much attention): we found robust positive correlations between the rate of reported criminal offenses and electoral support for the Sweden Democrats.

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