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An Explorative Study of the Impact of Local Political Opportunity

Structures on the Electoral Mobilisation of the Far-Right Movement in Sweden

Abstract

Since the early European labour movements, one preferred action and organisational strategy of social movements has been to mobilise their followers in political parties. As an outgrowth of the environmental movement the Swedish Environmental Party was formed in 1980 and first entered the parliament in 1988, the same year that the Sweden Democrats, at that time a rather obscure sect within the Swedish neo-Nazi movement, was formed. In 2010 the party successfully mobilised voters and entered the Swedish parliament with 5.7 per cent of the vote. However, voters were mobilised unevenly across the spread of Sweden's 290 municipalities – more successful in some and less in others. In this paper we utilise the notion of local political opportunity structure (POS) to interrogate these geographical differences in mobilisation outcomes. While the original concept of POS formulated by Eisinger in the early 1970s focused on local government structures, the notion has been more commonly employed in Europe in cross-national research. By re-focusing on local political opportunity structures the aim of the paper is to contribute new insights into the favourable circumstances for voter mobilisation of a movement-party.

Since the early European labour movements, *one* preferred action and organisational strategy of social movements has been to mobilise their followers in political parties. As an outgrowth of the environmental movement the Swedish Environmental Party was formed in 1980 and first entered parliament in 1988, the same year that the Sweden Democrats, at that time a rather obscure sect within the Swedish neo-Nazi movement, was formed. In the 2006 elections the Sweden Democrats received 2.9 per cent of the votes in the national election and 280 seats in municipal councils. In 2010 the party successfully mobilised voters and entered the Swedish parliament with 5.7 per cent of the vote in the national election, also receiving 612 seats in the municipal councils. However, voters were mobilised unevenly across the spread of Sweden's 290 local governing municipalities –

more successful in some and less in others. In this paper we utilise the notion of local political opportunity structure (LPOS) to interrogate these geographical differences in mobilisation outcomes. In this paper our aim is to contribute to an understanding of the conditions under which extreme-right movements can find favourable circumstances to mobilise voters in support of a movement-party.

While we find successful and more established far-right political parties across Scandinavia, the Sweden Democrats is a unique political phenomenon. The Progress Party in Norway, founded in 1973, became the second largest parliamentary party in 1997 and 2005. The Danish People's Party, founded in 1996 as a split-off from the (Danish) Progress Party, has since 2001 consistently attracted between 12 and 15 per cent of the vote in the national elections. The Finns Party in Finland, founded in 1996, dramatically increased its parliamentary electoral support from four per cent in 2007 to 19 per cent in 2011. Scandinavia's far-right political parties have traditionally evolved from populist anti-tax stands and demands for the downsizing of bureaucracy to more direct engagements with nationalist ideologies and anti-immigrant politics. In Denmark, Norway and Finland, with a common historical legacy of German occupation during the Second World War, parties with National Socialist roots have not found fertile ground. The Sweden Democrats, with its roots in the neo-Nazi Movement, is the only movement-party in the far-right Scandinavian context. Rather the party parallels the British National Party and the National Democratic Party of Germany – movement-parties solidly entrenched within neo-Nazi movements.

Research on Far-Right Political Parties

"Tasteful" movements, like the environmental, women's, human rights and peace movements, have attracted the most attention in the literature on social movements. More neglected in the body of social movement research has been the study of "distasteful" movements, such as the neo-Nazi and other extreme-right movements. However, West European right-wing extremist parties have received a great deal of attention in the academic literature due to their electoral success, though the variation of their success across political contexts has been less studied and the few comparative studies that do exist have only analysed their variations of success cross-nationally, and have offered only partial explanations for this phenomenon.[1] These studies have in turn tended to focus only on

1 Robert W. Jackman/Karen Volpert: Conditions favouring parties of the extreme right in Western Europe, in: British Journal of Political Science 26:4 (1996), pp. 501–521. Robert W. Jackman/Karen Volpert: Conditions favouring parties of the extreme right in Western Europe, in: British Journal of Political Science 26:4 (1996), pp. 501–521. Amir Abedi: Challenges to established parties: The effects of party system features on the electoral fortunes of anti-political-establishment parties, in: European Journal of Political Research 41:4 (2002), pp. 551–583.

why right-wing parties have been successful, rather than on why they have not (an exception is the discussion in Rydgren).[2]

Important for this study is Rydgren and Ruth's analysis of the socio-economic and demographical impacts on voting for the Sweden Democrats in Swedish municipalities.[3] They found support for the social marginality hypothesis in that the Sweden Democrats gained more votes in both the 2006 elections and 2010 elections in socio-economically marginalised municipalities, i. e. those with lower Gross Regional Products (gross domestic product for municipalities); higher aggregated unemployment rates; and a lower average level of education. Further, they found rather ambiguous support for the ethnic competition hypothesis since for the 2006 elections there were negative correlations for the proportion of immigrants from non-European countries (and a positive correlation for the proportion of immigrants from countries of the European Union and European Free Trade Association) with support for the Sweden Democrats. This changed in the 2010 elections when the correlation was positive. This means, according to Rydgren and Ruth, "that the party has been able to advance their electoral support more in municipalities with a relatively higher proportion of non-European immigrants."[4] Lastly, they found robust positive correlations between the rate of reported criminal offences and electoral support for the Sweden Democrats. Rydgren and Ruth's analysis makes a strong case for the socioeconomic and demographical characteristics of geographical electoral entities and support for the radical right: place matters! The socioeconomic and demographic context is a vital intervening factor in explaining the impact of movement mobilisations.[5] Nonetheless, we argue that the socioeconomic and demographic context does not explain all of the variation. Social marginality, ethnic competition, and in Rydgren and

Pia Knigge: The ecological correlates of right-wing extremism in Western Europe, in: European Journal of Political Research 34:2 (1998), pp. 249–279. Herbert P. Kitschelt: The Radical Right in Western Europe, Ann Arbour 1995.Marcel Lubbers/Mérove Gijsberts/Peer Scheepers: Extreme right-wing voting in Western Europe, in: European Journal of Political Research 41:3 (2002), pp. 345–378. Kai Arzheimer/Elisabeth Carter: Political opportunity structures and right-wing extremist party success, in: European Journal of Political Research 45:3 (2006), pp. 419–443. Jens Rydgren: Mesolevel reasons for racism and xenophobia: Some converging and diverging effects of radical right populism in France and Sweden, in: European Journal of Social Theory 6:1 (2003), pp. 45–68.

2 Rydgren Jens: Radical right populism in Sweden. Still a failure, but for how long?, in: Scandinavian Political Studies 26:1 (2002), pp. 26–57.

3 Jens Rydgren/Patrick Ruth: Voting for the Radical Right in Swedish Municipalities: Social Marginality and Ethnic Competition?, in: Scandinavian Political Studies 34:3 (2011), pp. 1–24.

4 Ibid. p. 22.

5 cf. Dieter Rucht: The impact of environmental movements in Western societies, in: Marco Giugni et al. (eds.): How Movements Matter: Theoretical and Comparative Studies on the Consequences of Social Movements, Minneapolis 1999, pp. 185–204; cf. Atle Midttun/Dieter Rucht:

Ruth's analysis even an insecurity hypothesis measured by the rate of reported criminal offences, does not explain all of the variations in radical-right voter mobilisation. In this paper we will complement this research by interrogating the impact of the local political contexts on the voter mobilisation success (or relative failure) of the Sweden Democrats.

The Impact of Political Opportunity Structures on Social Movement Organisational and Action Strategies

We will take as our theoretical point of departure the notion of political opportunity structure (POS), a concept which highlights the importance of the political context for the mobilisation of social movements and the chances for their "success". In short, the POS is the impact of the state and the political representation system on social movements, it traces the regulatory contours of the political environment within which social movements operate. In Eisinger's classical study the POS refers to the "openings, weak spots, barriers and resources of the political system itself".[6] Kriesi et al. conceptualise the POS as including three broad sets of properties of a political system:

> […] its formal institutional structure, its informal procedures and prevailing strategies with regard to challengers, and the configuration of power relevant for the confrontation with the challengers. The first two sets of properties provide the general setting for the mobilisation of collective action; they also constrain the relevant configurations of power.[7]

These authors argue that the POS "determines the set of strategic options available for the mobilisation of 'challengers'."[8] On the national level the neo-Nazi movement in Sweden and their xenophobic claims have been met with "full exclusion" by the Swedish state with neither formal nor informal access to the political system, thereby restricting their strategic options *vis-à-vis* the state. Fridolfsson and Gidlund maintain that the parliamentary parties in Sweden forged more or less a cartel against extreme-right parties.[9] While the

Comparing Policy Outcomes of Conflicts Over Nuclear Power: Descriptions and Explanations, in: Helena Flam (ed.): States and Anti-Nuclear Movements, Edinburgh 1994, pp. 371–403.

6 Peter K. Eisinger: The Conditions of Protest Behavior in American Cities, in: American Political Science Review 67:1 (1973), pp. 11–28, quotation on pp. 11–12.

7 Hanspeter Kriesi/Ruud Koopmans/Jan Willem Duyvendak/Marco Giugni: New Social Movements and Political Opportunities in Western Europe, in: European Journal of Political Research 22:2 (1992), pp. 219–244, p. 220.

8 Ibid.

9 Charlotte Fridolfsson/Gullan Gidlund: De lokala partierna och den nya politiska kartan, Örebro 2002.

movement enjoyed partial success with some concessions in some municipalities in the region of Skåne in southern Sweden during the latter 1980s and 1990s, the Swedish neo-Nazi movement was confronted by a situation in which they could choose continued marginalisation *or* make a bid to enter the political system as the most direct way of achieving their goals. Political entrepreneurs within the movement formed the party in 1988 as a successor to the Sweden Party. Until the mid-1990s the party was entrenched within the openly anti-democratic Nazi and racist networks within the broader movement, however in their work to erect a more respectable *façade* the party banned uniforms in 1996 and in 1999 the Sweden Democrats openly renounced Nazism. In 2005 the new party leader Jimmy Åkesson continued efforts to reform the party along the lines of the more successful far-right parties in Western Europe.[10] The early successful radical-right parties across Europe have impacted the developmental dynamics of latecomers such as the Sweden Democrats. In a sense we can regard the Sweden Democrats as a spin-off electoral mobilisation whereby through diffusion processes "the ideational, tactical, and organisational lessons of the early risers are made available to subsequent challengers."[11]

This social movement strategy – forming a "movement party" as the partisan arm of the movement[12] – brings with it inherent dilemmas.[13] In order to enhance the appeal of the party among the electorate the party must rid itself of its most radical elements. The Sweden Democrats have undergone many of the internal organisational strategies, which are characteristic of movement parties during a process of reform or "make-over".[14] Factionalism, as a result of the power struggles within the party, led to a split in the party in 2001 when hardliners founded the National Democrats. There have been ongoing purges when party officials have been expelled for public statements that have put in question the sincerity of the party's make-over process, e. g. overt and offensive racist claims or support for Nazism. While not without a great deal of friction, the Sweden Democrats have been able to transform their movement-party into a more appealing form, which has made possible their relative success among the electorate.

10 Jens Rydgren/Patrick Ruth, p. 4.

11 Doug McAdam: Conceptual origins, current problems, future directions, in: Doug McAdam/John D. McCarthy/Mayer N. Zald (eds.): Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements, Cambridge 1996, pp. 23–40, p. 33.

12 Manfred Keuchler/Russell J. Dalton: New Social Movements and the Political Order: Inducing Change for Long-term Stability?, in: Russell J. Dalton/Manfred Keuchler (eds.): Challenging the Political Order, New York 1990, pp. 277–300.

13 Elizabeth Bomberg: The German greens and the European community: Dilemmas of a movement-party, in: Environmental Politics 1:4 (1992), pp. 160–185.

14 cf. Mildred A. Schwartz: Continuity Strategies among Political Challengers: The Case of Social Credit, in: American Review of Canadian Studies 30:4 (2009), pp. 455–477.

The Impact of Political Opportunity Structures on Voter Mobilisation

Amenta et al. argue that the political context, here conceptualised as the political opportunity structure (POS), mediates the impact of a movement's range of possible outcomes.[15] The POS mediates the political conditions under which movements win recognition and achieve their goals. Giugni et al. point out that in the social movement literature we can distinguish between two competing sets of explanations for far-right support.[16] Firstly, the dominant approach has been to focus on "demand-side factors", which refer to "conditions that have led to the creation of a social and cultural "reservoir" to be exploited by far-right organisations". Within this set of explanations we find the social marginality hypothesis and the ethnic competition hypothesis, which Rydgren and Ruth tested through statistical methods and found support for in explaining variations in far-right voting patterns in Swedish municipalities (see above).[17] Secondly, social movement researchers have also focused on "supply-side factors" that point "to political and institutional aspects such as the structure of the electoral system, the responses of established actors, and the dynamics of party alignment, demarcation and competition, which may provide the extreme right with a political niche to be exploited".[18] These authors modify the political opportunity approach by combining political-institutional factors, based on the political opportunity model, and cultural-discursive factors, based on a framing perspective in their cross-national analysis of extreme-right mobilisation.

Local Political Opportunity Structures

By international standards, Sweden can be regarded as a relatively open political system, one in which it is generally easy for its citizens to gain access to political institutions.[19] Its highly developed corporate structure makes access particularly easy for (some) movement organisations and associations, particularly and traditionally, labour market actors,

15 Edwin Amenta/Bruce G. Carruthers/Yvonne Zylan: A hero for the aged? The Townsend movement, the political mediation model, and U. S. old-age policy, 1934–1950, in: American Journal of Sociology 98:2 (1992), pp. 308–339, pp. 309 ff.

16 Marco Giugni/Ruud Koopmans/Florence Passy/Paul, Statham: Institutional and Discursive Opportunities for Extreme-Right Mobilization in Five Countries, in: Mobilization 10:1 (2005), pp. 145–162, p. 146.

17 Jens Rydgren/Patrick Ruth, pp. 206–211.

18 Marco Giugni et al.: Institutional and Discursive, p 146.

19 Herbert P. Kitschelt: Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-Nuclear Movements in Four Democracies, in: British Journal of Political Science 16:1 (1986), pp. 57–85. Bo Rothstein (ed.): Demokrati som dialog. SNS-demokratiråds 1995 års rapport, Stockholm 1995.

i. e. unions and employer associations. Karl-Werner Brand[20] summarised the comparative findings of a study of social movement marginalisation and incorporation by institutional politics in Western Europe and the United States as primarily determined by the existence of corporate political structures.[21] Sweden distinguished itself in this comparative study as a nation-state with a highly developed corporate structure, which readily incorporates movement organisations (not only labour movement organisations), as well as their demands (or rather some of these [more moderate] demands) within traditional political channels and institutions.[22] While the institutional corporate structure has crackled since the early 1990s, the informal practices of corporatism have nevertheless lingered on in a somewhat diluted form. Sweden can still be regarded as a comparatively open political system that has been, to varying degrees, facilitative to the demands of the labour movement and the so-called new social movements (e. g. women's, environmental, human rights, and antiracist movements).

The points in the discussion above have been related to comparative studies of, for social movement researchers in general, more "tasteful" movements such as, for example, the environmental movement and the women's movement. We argue that the Swedish corporate system's relative openness has far less relevancy for what has been regarded in the research as "distasteful" movements, such as xenophobic and nationalist movements. In Sweden the corporate political structures have been closed for these types of movements,[23] and the established political parties, particularly on the national level, had been opposed to any sort of engagement or debate with the Sweden Democrats prior to the 2010 elections. The seven established political parties represented in the Swedish parliament actively attempted to close political space to the challenges posed by the Sweden Democrats.

The strategy of the established political parties has been discursive repression towards the challenges of the Sweden Democrats. However, these attempts of closure or discursive repression might have in fact opened the electoral space available to the Swe-

20 Karl-Werner Brand: Vergleichendes Resümee, in: Karl-Werner Brand (ed.): Neue soziale Bewegungen in Westeuropa und den USA: Ein internationaler Vergleich, Frankfurt a. M. 1985, pp. 306–334.

21 See also Michael Nollert: Neocorporatism and Political Protest in Western Democracies: A Cross-National Analysis, in: J. Craig Jenkins/Bert Klandermans (eds.): The Politics of Social Protest. Comparative Perspectives on States and Social Movements, Minneapolis 1995, pp. 138–166.

22 See also Michele Micheletti: Political Virtue and Shopping: Individuals, Consumerism and Collective Action, New York 2003. Bo Rothstein: Den korporativa staten: Intresseorganisationer och statsförvaltning i svensk politik, Stockholm 1992. Mattias Wahlström/Abby Peterson: Between the State and the Market: Expanding the Concept of „Political Opportunity Structure", in: Acta Sociologica 49:4 (2006), pp. 363–377.

23 Charlotte Fridolfsson/Gullan Gidlund: De lokala partierna.

den Democrats in that a significant proportion of the voters felt that their views were excluded. As the established political parties, even the moderate-right parties have not occupied anti-immigrant positions within the public discourse. This left a large political space open for the Sweden Democrats thereby enhancing their chances for electoral success.[24] Subsequently, voting for the Sweden Democrats can be regarded as an indication of discontent with the prevailing parties.[25] Schedler has argued that new extremist parties across Europe have accused established parties of forming an exclusionary cartel, unresponsive and unaccountable to "ordinary citizens".[26] In this political framing the extremist parties contrapose the political elite against citizens, on the one hand, and against themselves, on the other hand.

> Happy to affirm their own identity in opposition to anti-political establishment challengers, political elites often respond to anti-political establishment attacks with symmetrical hostility. Quite often, therefore, anti-political-establishment parties indeed end up as party-systemic outcasts, punch bags and untouchables.[27]

Schedler argues that most anti-political-establishment parties, which have succeeded in presenting candidates in more than three consecutive national elections, can be found in parliamentary systems with proportional representation.[28] Arzheimer and Carter have found that the empirical evidence for this hypothesis is not without exceptions.[29] They have found that even in disproportional electoral systems the extreme right has found some electoral success. They field a further possible conflicting hypothesis that second-order elections in disproportional electoral systems may serve as a kind of safety valve for the political system by providing citizens with an opportunity to express their political frustration with the mainstream parties without overly disturbing the political process on the national level. While the Swedish electoral system is not disproportional, local elections might offer this type of safety valve for voters reluctant to cast a vote for a party which they regard as having little chance of entering the parliament.

24 cf. Marco Giugni et al.: Institutional and Discursive, p 150.

25 cf. Piero Ignazi: The Crisis of Parties and the Rise of New Political Parties, in: Party Politics 2:4 (1996), pp. 549–566.

26 Andreas Schedler: Anti-Political-Establishment Parties, in: Party Politics 2:3 (1996), pp. 291–312.

27 Ibid. p. 300. And see Mario Diani: Linking Mobilization Frames and Political Opportunities: Insights from Regional Populism in Italy, in: American Sociological Review 61:4 (1996), pp. 1053–1069.

28 cf. André Blais/R. Kenneth Carty: The psychological impact of electoral laws: Measuring Duverger's elusive factor, in: British Journal of Political Science 21:1 (1991), pp. 79–93.

29 Kai Arzheimer/Elisabeth Carter: Political opportunity structures and right-wing extremist party success, in: European Journal of Political Research 45:3 (2006), pp. 419–443, p. 423.

The stability of elite alignments is the key to understanding the prevailing political culture in a country. During most of the 20th century Sweden's national five-party system was regarded as one of the most stable in the world,[30] solidly entrenched within a left-right cleavage of block politics. New political dimensions, however, began to challenge the hegemony of the left-right cleavage. The Christian Democratic Party was the first to gain entry, followed by the Green Party towards the end of the 1980s and New Democracy, a short-lived xenophobic populist party in the early 1990s. At the national level the four per cent threshold for entrance to the parliament has made it difficult for new parties to gain entry. In the cases of the Christian Democrats, the Green Party and now the Sweden Democrats they have first entered municipal politics as a springboard to their later parliamentary successes. There is no threshold in the municipal parliamentary system for representation, which has encouraged the formation of small parties. Entry into local party-political systems augments the legitimacy of a party and increases a party's chances for national representation later. *Our hypothesis is that in municipalities where the Sweden Democrats had gained seats in the local governing body in the 2006 elections, the vote for the Sweden Democrats in that municipality in the 2010 national elections had risen.*

The Sweden Democrat's 2006 electoral success when they gained 280 municipal council seats resulted in a political breakthrough. We argue that the outcome of the 2010 election is related to the 2006 municipal election results (while the elections are situated on different political levels, they are comparable since municipalities (with a very little variation) have relatively similar percentage of votes on these two levels). We assume that the municipal success in 2006 amplified the success of the Sweden Democrats on the national level in the subsequent election – a "springboard effect". Nonetheless, it needs to be kept in mind that in more than half of the 144 municipalities where the Sweden Democrats received at least one seat in the local council in the 2006 local election, the party received less than three per cent of the total votes in the respective municipality.[31] They were thus only represented because there was no four per cent threshold to clear. The question remains as to whether the Sweden Democrats' success is due to the electoral success on the local level, i. e. that the party received more than three per cent, or due to the fact that the party was represented in the local municipal council. One argument that would support the latter explanation is that figures clearly show that in all of the municipalities where the Sweden Democrats had acquired seats in municipal councils in 2006, even though they had received less than three per cent of the total vote, they received more than four per cent of the total vote in the 2010 national election. In 53 per

30 Stefano Bartolino/Peter Mair: Identity, Competition and Electoral Availability. The Stabilization of European Electorates 1885–1985, Cambridge 1990.

31 Expo.se: Sverigedemokraternas valresultat 1988–2010. Published on webpage 20/07/2010 at: http://expo.se/2010/sverigedemokraternas-valresultat-1988–2010_3174.html. (accessed on 23 July 2010).

cent of the municipalities where the party had received less than three per cent in the 2006 local election but still managed to take seats in the municipal council, it received more than six per cent of the total vote in the 2010 national election.[32] Subsequently, in municipalities, where the Sweden Democrats were represented in the local council, they received more than double the number of votes in the 2010 national elections than in the 2006 elections.

In the 147 municipalities where the Sweden Democrats did not take seats in the 2006 municipal councils the party had more difficulty in mobilizing voters in the 2010 national elections. The party received more than six per cent of the total vote in the 2010 national election in less than a third of these municipalities.[33] The Sweden Democrats garnered a significantly greater success in municipalities where they were already represented in the local council prior to the 2010 national election compared to those where they were not. This result is further reinforced when comparing the results of the 2010 national election in those municipalities were the party received seats in the municipal councils in 2006 with those municipalities were it did not.[34] In the municipalities where Sweden Democrats had been represented in the municipal councils prior to the 2010 national election, they received two percentage points more of the vote compared to those where the party were not represented in the same period (6.8 per cent in the first category compared with the latter 4.8 per cent of the total vote in the 2010 national election).

In all municipal councils where Sweden Democrats were represented, they managed to increase their support in the 2010 national election. In contrast, the party significantly increased the number of votes in the 2010 national election in only a couple of the municipalities where the party had not taken any seats in the 2006 election. We argue that the Sweden Democrat's representation in municipal councils in 2006 had a positive influence on the electoral support for the Sweden Democrats in the 2010 national election. An intermediary factor that resulted from success in the 2006 municipal election, which enhanced the party's political opportunities in the following national election, was that an increasing number of party members succeeded in entering the local media sphere in that they were represented in the local party-political system of government. Local representation provided the party with a channel into the local media domain and

32 The Swedish Electoral Authorities, at: http://www.val.se/val/val2010/slutresultat/K/rike/index.html (accessed on 13 August 2013)

33 Ibid.

34 In order to carry out the comparison all the municipalities were split up into two separate categories, each of which contains a population of its own; one group in which all municipalities showed at least one mandate for Sweden Democrats and one group where none of the municipalities showed a mandate for Sweden Democrats. In every group the total number of votes for Sweden Democrats in each municipality was summed up separately and divided by the total population of the specific group.

an increased legitimacy in the local party-political system. We found substantial support for our hypothesis that the political opportunities for a far-right vote on the national level increase through political representation on a lower level, e. g. by entering the municipal council – a factor we designate as the "springboard effect". This would appear to be a pre-condition for a successful movement-party's grass-roots electoral mobilisation.

In regard to the Swedish electoral system with its relatively high threshold for parliamentary representation, Miller and Listhaug characterised the Swedish national party system as comparatively rigid, where accumulating dissatisfaction among voters tended to be directed at the regime more generally because people failed to see any of the parties as a viable alternative.[35] In Sweden, the Social Democratic Party elites have more or less governed the country since the 1930s; less since 2006 when a moderate/right coalition entered government. The election in 2010 was a struggle between a newly-formed left alliance including the Social Democrats as the major party, together with the Green Party and the Left Party and a moderate/right alliance including the Conservative Party as the major party, together with the Liberal Party, the Centre Farmers' Party and the Christian Democratic Party. In the 2010 national election the latter alliance won over the left alliance, however, they did not achieve a clear majority of the votes. The moderate/right coalition formed a minority government and the Sweden Democrats found themselves in the attractive position of holding the balance of power in the parliament between these two block alliances.

Whereas national politics can be characterised as remaining relatively stable with alternating left-right block alliances governing the country, this is less the case on the level of municipalities. In addition to the established national parliamentary parties, on the local level a wide variety of local political parties have emerged since the 1960s, which has successively weakened the hegemony of the left-right blocks alternating in local governments. At the local level block alliances have had to increasingly seek new allies within less stable and more tentative coalitions in order to form majority governments.[36] This has brought a new instability into local political landscapes. Small local parties (or small national parties as in the case of the Green Party and now the Sweden Democrats) increasingly find themselves in a position of power far beyond their electoral support in that they often hold the balance of power between the two traditional left-right blocks. In that position they are either invited to join in the governing coalition, which is often the case for the Green Party at the local level, and which is increasingly the case for small locally based parties, or they may influence the policies of the governing coalition indirectly.

35 Arthur H. Miller/Ola Listhaug: Political Parties and Confidence in Government: A Comparison of Norway, Sweden and the United States, in: British Journal of Political Science 20:3 (1990), pp. 357–386.

36 Charlotte Fridolfsson/Gullan Gidlund: De lokala partierna.

However, in none of the local municipalities where the Sweden Democrats have gained mandates, have they been invited to join the governing coalition. According to Sartori,[37] for a party to be politically relevant in a specific party-system, it must have a "coalition-potential", i. e. the party must be interesting for other parties to collaborate with in creating alliances, *or* the party must have the capacity for political extortion, "blackmail-potential". The former capacity is an option for small parties in the middle of the political spectrum, for example the Green Party, while the latter option is that available for small extremist parties. The Sweden Democrats have assumed the role of "horse-traders", what Satori calls "blackmail-potential", in the national parliamentary political market, hoping to gain some concessions for their political goals and have the same role in many municipal governing bodies. What we should keep in mind, however, is that even in municipalities such as Bjuv with a 19.25 per cent SD vote, Burlöv with a 17.32 per cent SD vote and Svedala with a 16.19 per cent SD vote (all municipalities in the southern region of Skåne), the Sweden Democrats were not invited by the established left-right parties to join in a governing coalition. The established parties have not only taken a strategy of discursive repression, they have also assumed a strategy of exclusion in governing bodies. These strategies employed by the established parties to exclude the Sweden Democrats from the party-political space leaves the party with the alternative of "political blackmail". In municipalities with what we define as "weak" governments and/or minority governments this potential is nevertheless a significant avenue for political influence.

Our hypothesis is that in municipalities with unstable left-right block alliances strong support for the Sweden Democrats is more likely to emerge. We contend that there are two arguments which support this hypothesis. Firstly, weak governments "open" for challengers since voters perceive that chances will be available for concessions in goals that are not expressed by the established parties. Voters "calculate" that the Sweden Democrats can find the leeway to negotiate regarding immigration and integration issues that would not otherwise be on the local agenda. Secondly, coalitional electoral alliances between the major parties, we argue, tends to result in a convergence between the mainstream parties in their joint struggle to attract voters in the middle of the political spectrum and their efforts to convince voters that their alliance is strong enough to form an effective government. Another possible explanation is that the Sweden Democrats benefited from the convergence of the mainstream parties in that the party could credibly argue that if voters wish to see a real alternative to both the government and the mainstream opposition, then they should support the Sweden Democrats, what Diani would define as an

37 Giovanni Sartori: Party and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis. Vol. 1. Cambridge 1976.

"anti-system frame".[38] This mobilising frame directly challenges the political system and encourages voters to support their entrance into the political system itself.

We have defined unstable left-right block alliances as those municipalities with minority governments, and/or coalitions with small local parties, alternative right/moderate governments including the Green Party, or cross-block governing coalitions, or municipalities that had not yet two months after the 2010 elections succeeded in building governing coalitions. This included 132 municipalities out of a total of 290 Swedish municipalities. 45.5 per cent of the municipalities in Sweden had governments with unstable left-right block alliances.[39] Among the 91 municipalities with less than three per cent voter support for the Sweden Democrats only 27.4 per cent had unstable block alliances, significantly less than the national average. Among the 46 municipalities with more than eight per cent electoral support for the Sweden Democrats 45.6 per cent were governed by unstable block alliances. We conclude that the successive weakening of the hegemony of Swedish left-right block politics has improved the political opportunities for Sweden Democrat electoral support, just as it has improved the political opportunities for small local parties more generally (alternative, the Green Party as a local ally of a conservative/moderate liberal government in contrast with their national alliance with the Social Democrats and Left Party in the 2010 national elections). The political opportunities for a far-right vote are considerably undermined in local political contexts, which remain dominated by left-right block politics. We found robust support for the hypothesis that "weak" governments opened a political space for a successful mobilisation of voters for an extreme right-wing party.

Local Cultural Opportunity Structures

Recognising the importance of culture, Tarrow, among other researchers, has struggled to incorporate the role of symbolic production into his theory of the political opportunity structure, a vague notion of political culture, which became the key explanatory variable in his model.[40] Gamson and Meyer have also argued for the inclusion of cultural aspects of the POS with factors such as values, myths and worldviews (more stable), as well as *zeitgeist*, class-consciousness and media representation (more contingent

38 Mario Diani, p. 1057.

39 The Swedish Electoral Authorities, at: http://www.val.se/val/val2010/slutresultat/K/rike/index.html (accessed on 13 August 2013).

40 Sidney Tarrow: Power in Movement, Cambridge 1994.

factors).[41] Koopmans and Statham[42] elaborated on these attempts to incorporate the ways in which social movements mobilise symbolic resources in their claim making, arguing that not only political institutional factors constrain and facilitate mobilisation, but also political-cultural factors constrain and facilitate social movement mobilisation. They introduced the notion of "discursive opportunity structure", which: "may be seen as determining which ideas are considered 'sensible', which constructions of reality are seen as 'realistic', and which claims are held as 'legitimate' within a certain polity at a specific time."[43]

In a later work analysing the institutional and discursive opportunities for radical-right mobilisations Giugni, Koopmans, Passy and Statham operationalised the cultural-discursive factors in their modified POS model with the notion of national configurations of citizenship, which either constrain or facilitate the extent and forms of claim making by the radical-right. In order to define the concept they combined two dimensions: (1) the *individual equality dimension*, or the national community's formal criteria of inclusion or exclusion; and (2) the *cultural difference dimension,* namely, the cultural obligations imposed on outsiders to become members of the community."[44] By combining these dimensions they obtained four ideal-typical models of citizenship: the assimilationist model; the universalist model; the multicultural model; and the segregationist model. The Swedish model of immigrant policy, which has never been subject to partisan competition in Sweden,[45] has been traditionally characterised as multicultural. Until the 1990s this model of immigrant policy enjoyed a political consensus among the political parties, however, since then the model has been tentatively questioned with voices being raised as to the necessity of immigrants' integration in Swedish society and their acceptance of at least certain Swedish norms and values. Nevertheless, on the national level among the established political parties, we find a basic consensus behind the multicultural model of immigrant policy.[46] According to Giugni et al., xenopho-

41 William Gamson/David S. Meyer: Framing Political Opportunity, in: Doug McAdam/John D. McCarthy/Mayer Zald (eds.): Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements, Cambridge 1996, pp. 275–290.

42 Ruud Koopmans/Paul Statham: Ethnic and Civic Conceptions of Nationhood and the Differential Success of the Extreme Right in Germany and Italy, in: Marco Giugni et al. (eds.): How Movements Matter: Theoretical and Comparative Studies on the Consequences of Social Movements, Minneapolis 1999, pp. 225–252.

43 Ruud Koopmans/Paul Statham, p. 228; cf. Mario Diani.

44 Giugni/Ruud Koopmans/Florence Passy/Paul Statham, p. 147.

45 Johannes Lindvall/Joakim Sebring: Policy Reform and the Decline of Corporatism in Sweden, in: West European Politics 28:5 (2005), pp. 1057–1074, p. 1067. Carl Dahlström: Nästan välkomna (Almost welcome), Göteborg 2004.

46 Johannes Lindvall/Joakim Sebring. Karin Borevi: Välfärdstaten i det mångkulturella samhället (The Welfare State in the Multicultural Society), Uppsala 2002.

bic and extreme-right claims, for example restricting or halting immigration, "should be facilitated where they "resonate" better with the prevailing configuration of citizenship and where they are more legitimate, in the sense that they have a greater degree of acceptability in the public domain".[47] We do not find support for this hypothesis in our study. Despite a dominant political elite consensus behind the multicultural model of immigration, the Sweden Democrats xenophobic messages resonated among a significant number of voters in some municipalities and less in others. In order to understand these variations in support for the Sweden Democrats we will have to bring further nuances to the notion of cultural-discursive factors for far-right mobilisations. We argue that local public opinion is a factor, which underlines the saliency of political culture for the success of the far-right movement's capacity to mobilise voters in specific municipalities. This factor attempts to capture local public opinion on issues related to immigration and immigrant integration policies. The factor allows for xenophobic claims to resonate in local political cultures that are more or less at odds with the cultural discourse in the national political opportunity structure. This leads us to formulate a tentative hypothesis regarding the local political culture's impact on the far-right vote. *In municipalities where the local media spaces are open to the messages of the Sweden Democrats and where the dominant ideology of multiculturalism is challenged we will find greater support for the Sweden Democrats than in municipalities where this space is more restricted to these messages or where the ideology of multiculturalism is supported.*

Table 1: Electoral Support in our Sample Population for the Sweden Democrats in the last two National and Local Elections (per cent)

	2006		2010		
Municipality	**Vote SD local**	**Vote SD national**	**Vote SD local**	**Vote SD national**	**Local government after 2010 election**
Kristianstad	4.4	4.4	12.3	11.8	Moderate-right alliance; minority
Trelleborg	12.6	9.0	15.1	13.8	Moderate-right alliance; minority
Borlänge	4.0	3.6	10.9	9.2	Left alliance; minority
Östersund	0.0	1.3	2.3	3.1	Left alliance; Social Democrats and the Greens
Luleå	0.0	1.3	2.0	3.5	Left alliance
Gotland	1.3	1.6	2.4	3.2	Left alliance; power shift

47 Marco Giugni/Ruud Koopmans/Florence Passy/Paul Statham, p. 148.

In order to capture how local political opportunity structures shape voting behaviour for the far-right in regards to cultural-discursive factors we have concentrated upon a small sample of municipalities (*kommuner*) (see Table 1). Three of the municipalities are significantly above the average voter support for the Sweden Democrats (Kristianstad, Trelleborg and Borlänge) and three are significantly under the national level of voter support (Östersund, Luleå and Gotland).[48]

The municipalities in our sample population correspond to the general findings in Rydgren and Ruth's study of "demand-side factors", which explain variations in far-right voting patterns in Swedish municipalities according to the social marginality hypothesis and the ethnic competition hypothesis. While we recognise the importance of demand-side socioeconomic and demographic factors for support for the Sweden Democrats, we argue that this is only one side of the explanation. Even "supply-side factors", local political opportunity structures, impact the electoral support for the extreme right, in our case, support for the Sweden Democrats.

To operationalise the cultural-discursive factor in our analysis and capture local public opinion which resonates with the claims of the Sweden Democrats, we analysed the local newspapers in each of the six municipalities for a period of two months prior to the 2010 elections and one month after.[49]

Local Media Spaces

The data for the media analysis is based on information retrieved from the local newspapers with the highest sales figures in each of the six municipalities: *Kristianstadsbladet* for Kristianstad, *Trelleborgs Allehanda* for Trelleborg, *Borlänge tidning* for Borlänge, *Östersundsposten* for Östersund, *Norrbottenskuriren* for Luleå and *Gotlands Allehanda* for Gotland. As there is more than one dominant newspaper with approximately the same sales figures in Luleå (*Norrbottenskuriren* and *Norrländska Socialdemokraten*) and Gotland (*Gotlands Allehanda* and *Gotlands Tidningar*), the newspapers with the more

48 In order to roughly control for the socioeconomic and demographic variables employed by Rydgren and Ruth (2011), which they found interacted with the level of electoral support for the Sweden Democrats, we chose municipalities with roughly similar population sizes, median incomes and levels of education. Rydgren and Ruth (2011) found that the electoral support for the Sweden Democrats increased between the 2006 elections and the 2010 elections in municipalities with a higher proportion of non-European immigrants relative to other municipalities. Our research sample matches their findings. Our data for our comparisons was collected from Statistics Sweden (SCB).

49 According to Hadenius and Weibull (2005: 401), more than 90 per cent of the Swedish population reads a daily newspaper. Furthermore, the part, which is most frequently read in the daily newspaper, is the local news and the local paper is a highly influential actor in shaping local political opinion.

conservative profile were selected (*Norrbottenskurriren* and *Gotlands Allehanda*). Social Democratic newspapers (with approximately the same sales figures) were excluded. As we were measuring the political-discursive space open for the Sweden Democrats and their political challenges we excluded the left-wing Social Democratic newspapers. The newspapers in our research sample were either independent liberal or conservative, and thereby at least potentially more open to the far-right's political messages.

For the analysis of newspaper articles we examined all of the relevant articles that were published in the period extending from two months before the national and local elections on the 19 September 2010 until one month after the election. Of all the newspaper articles published in this period only those were chosen for further analysis that matched the specific criteria defined by the authors. The articles needed to show at least one of three relevant keywords associated with the far-right movement and the Sweden Democrats. The chosen keywords were: "immigration", "refugee" and "integration". In addition, we examined how these keywords correlated with the actual party, the "Sweden Democrats".

To gain an overview of the 1,317 articles matching the criteria laid out above, they were coded into different groups as shown in Table 2. This table provides a quantitative synopsis containing all the articles published during the actual period and matching the keywords. The local newspaper in Kristianstad published almost double the number of articles containing the keyword "Sweden Democrats". Furthermore, the same pattern appears with regard to articles where the party name correlated with both the keywords "immigrant" and "refugee" (Table 2). We found the local media space in this municipal-

Table 2: Total Number of Articles for each Concept/Phrase in Local Newspapers during the Period between 19 July 2010 and 19 October 2010 (number)

Local newspaper **(L=Liberal; Cp=The Centre Party; C=Conservative)**	**Immigrant (immigrant + Sweden Democrats)**	**Refugee (refugee + Sweden Democrats)**	**Integration (integration + Sweden Democrats)**	**Sweden Democrats**	***Total (any of the four phrases included in article)***
Kristianstadsbladet (L)	102 (42)	24 (10)	38 (12)	232	*345*
Trelleborgs Allehanda (L)	71 (17)	12 (3)	31 (8)	143	*228*
Borlänge tidning (L)	50 (14)	7 (2)	32 (6)	136	*195*
Östersunds-posten (Cp)	49 (19)	5 (2)	9 (5)	123	*169*
Norrbottens-Kuriren (C)	39 (13)	2 (0)	18 (5)	139	*188*
Gotlands Allehanda (C)	31 (13)	6 (0)	15 (4)	155	*192*

ity was particularly open for the political messages of the Sweden Democrats. A factor, we argue, that boosted their successful voter mobilisation. In Kristianstad the local electoral support for SD increased with almost eight per cent between the 2006 election and the 2010 election (see Table 1).

The quantitative overview indicates that there was a vast variation in the articles dealing with the Sweden Democrats in the local media over the chosen period. The articles were further coded into different subcategories. Those were, among others, letters to the editor, editorials and regular news coverage. A significant number of the articles examined were letters to the editor and editorials expressing respectively the personal opinions of the readers and the editors. While only 28 per cent of all the articles examined were reader's letters or editorials we found significant differences among the newspapers in our sample. Whereas 52 per cent of the articles in *Gotlands Allehanda* reflected personal opinions, only 18 per cent of the articles in *Trelleborgs Allehanda* do so. Articles reflecting personal opinion were more frequent in the municipalities with a lower electoral support for the Sweden Democrats (Östersund, Luleå and Gotland) than in the other three municipalities (Kristianstad, Trelleborg and Borlänge) where the proportions of opinion-reflecting articles were lower. There are two interrelated explanations for this pattern. Firstly, the number of regular news articles covering the Sweden Democrats was higher in these latter three municipalities. We assumed that the Sweden Democrats were more active in the latter three municipalities, as there were more news articles that related to local events or current campaigns. Therefore, a possible outcome is that readers in the municipalities with a higher local electoral support acquire a more active view of the local branch of the party in the local media. Secondly, we argue that the media spaces in the three municipalities were more closed for coverage of the Sweden Democrats electoral mobilisation. In this situation opinion-reflecting articles, letters to the editor and editorials, remained as an avenue for entering the media space – for *both* Sweden Democrat supporters (letters to the editor) and critics (letters to the editor and editorials). While Sweden Democrat supporters used letters to the editor to bring their political messages forward, it was above all the critics in municipalities with weak support for the Sweden Democrats who used this channel to make their warnings heard.

The local elections on the 19 September 2010 can be regarded as a clear turning point for what has been written in the six newspapers. Compared to the situation prior to the election, the editorials in *Kristianstadsbladet* (four times) and *Trelleborgs Allehanda* (five times) more often used the word Islam in connection with the Sweden Democrats, e. g. when the party was described as an "Islam-critical party". Prior to the election, both *Kristianstadsbladet* and *Trelleborgs Allehanda* did not show this combination. In the other four local newspapers, this keyword was only mentioned once or twice after the election. Further, the keyword "refugee" appeared more frequently after the election, while "immigrant" and "integration" were mentioned more often before the election. In *Borlänge tidning, Kristianstads-bladet* and *Trelleborgs Allehanda*, the government's immigration and integration politics were repeatedly criticised. This was an ongoing issue primarily before

the election where the percentage was more frequent in these three municipalities with a significantly higher proportion of Sweden Democrat voters. In the local public domains of the three municipalities with strong support of the Sweden Democrats the anti-immigration and integration-critical messages of the party resonated with the local media and the party was thereby awarded a legitimacy that they did not enjoy in the local media in the three municipalities with weak electoral support. To borrow the terms of Koopmans and Statham, their political messages appeared "sensible" and "realistic" to voters.[50]

Election results show that the Sweden Democrats attracted more voters in the southern part of Sweden than in the north. Fridolfsson and Gidlund found in their factor analysis of 92 local parties in 1998 significant regional differences.[51] The local parties in the north had a decidedly left-wing orientation, while the local parties in the south had a distinctly right-wing orientation. Furthermore, the local parties in the most southern region of Sweden were the most xenophobic, while the local parties in the north were the most positive to immigration.[52] Their findings dovetail with the geographical variations in the electoral support for the Sweden Democrats. The party had its strongest support in the most southern Swedish municipalities and the weakest in the north, with mid-region municipalities occupying a more varied position. While the results of our empirical media analysis show that the variations are complex, we could observe a different political climate in the northern part of the country compared to the south. In our media analysis the Sweden Democrats' political agenda shows clear regional differences. Some of the articles written in the north (in *Norrlands-Kuriren* and *Östersundsposten*) deal with the relationship between the Swedish majority population and the indigenous population, the Sami. The articles written in the south, in *Kristianstadsbladet* and *Trelleborgs Allehanda*, instead focus on immigrants and segregation. In these southern newspapers these issues were represented as threats to Swedish ethnic culture and the national identity. Immigration and integration issues were more often discussed in the south compared to the north (see Table 2). This might explain why the two local newspapers in the northern municipalities (Luleå and Östersund) have a lower correlation with Sweden Democrats and the three selected keywords (immigrant, refugee and integration). A significant number of the articles deal with the party's will to preserve a strong Swedish ethnic identity and Swedish traditions. This is clearly visible in all six newspapers, which represent the Sweden Democrat party as an organisation that feels threatened by local ethnic minorities, even though the origin of the "threat" towards the Swedish national identity varies across the regions. Furthermore, resonance as to the viability of the "threat" varies between the local media contexts.

50 Ruud Koopmans/Paul Statham.

51 Charlotte Fridolfsson/Gullan Gidlund: De lokala partierna.

52 Ibid. pp. 64–65.

Conclusions

Preliminary analyses from the 2010 elections in Sweden provide us with a rough "socio-economic picture" of the "average" Sweden Democratic voter: an unemployed male member of the blue-collar union confederation LO between the age of 18 of 29. However, we also know that there were significant variations in the percentage of the vote that the Sweden Democrats achieved across the 290 governing municipalities (*kommuner*) in the country. In other words, the "average" Sweden Democrat did not vote for the Sweden Democrats to the same degree in all of the municipalities: significant differences, for example, could be found between "northern" and "southern" municipalities, between major cities and middle-sized cities, and between urban and rural municipalities/counties. Furthermore, and most importantly, the party was more successful in some municipalities than in others in mobilising the vote among broader sections of the local population in addition to the "average" Sweden Democrat voter. While we recognise the influence of socioeconomic and demographic factors in support for the Sweden Democrats, we argue that even the local political context influences the relative success or failure of the party's voter mobilisation in the municipalities. Local political and cultural opportunity structures – political context – influence the success of the extreme-right's potential to mobilise support in the form of voter preferences.

We found that success on the national level was not won overnight. Voter mobilisation is a process, which was enhanced by the Sweden Democrats' relative success in the 2006 municipal elections. Their success in 2006 paved the way for their later success in the 2010 national election. Local municipal election success and subsequent representation in local municipal councils acted as a "springboard" for their mobilisation efforts in the following national election. An intermediary factor that resulted from success in the 2006 municipal election, which enhanced the party's political opportunities in the following national election, was that an increasing number of party members succeeded in entering the local media sphere as they were represented in the local party-political system of government. The springboard effect acted as a link between the local political opportunity structures and the local cultural opportunity structures. In regard to the local cultural opportunity structures we found that in the local public domains of the municipalities in our study which had significantly higher proportions of Sweden Democrat votes, the local media was open to the political messages of the party. The party's anti-immigration and integration-critical arguments resonated with those in the local media providing the party with legitimacy and their messages with a degree of sensibleness. Furthermore, we found that what we defined as "weak" local governments acted as windows of opportunity for the extreme-right Sweden Democrat party's voter mobilisation. In contrast, "strong" local governments where traditional left-right block politics dominated undermined the political opportunities for the party's voter mobilisation. In conclusion, it is obvious that place matters! On the local level, demand-side factors are joined by the supply-side factors studied in this paper

in together explaining the emergence of far-right political parties and their relative success at the polls.

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