Abstract

We study the politicians and voters of Sweden’s populist radical-right party. On the politician side, the Sweden Democrats overrepresent marginalized people who have weak labor-market attachment, poor socioeconomic background, and do not have a traditional nuclear family; the other parties underrepresent these groups. On the voter side, marginalized groups support the Sweden Democrats more strongly, especially labor-market outsiders. We interpret the outsider overrepresentation as a factor behind the party’s success. We also explore four follow-up questions. First, we show that outsider overrepresentation does not extend to other new parties in Sweden. Second, we find that the insider-outsider distinction offers insights into the particular temporal and spatial pattern of the party’s growth. Third, we demonstrate that Sweden-Democrat politicians and voters share political attitudes that are radically different from those held by politicians and voters of other parties. Finally, we uncover that Sweden-Democrat politicians score lower on a number of valence dimensions than other-party politicians.

Keywords: Political Selection, Radical Right, Populism.
1 Introduction

In the last two decades, many developed democracies have seen a strengthening of populist radical-right parties, a trend which manifests itself across continents and electoral systems. Such parties and politicians are visible throughout Europe. They are also resurging in Australia, Israel, Japan, as well as on other continents. Populist radical-right elements currently take part – or have recently taken part – in the governments of Austria, Brazil, Finland, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Philippines, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Turkey, and the United States (Rydgren, 2018). These parties share ideologies of ethno-nationalist xenophobia and anti-establishment populism (ibid), and many have political platforms that threaten core values of liberal democracy (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012).

Many scholars, across several academic fields, have explored the drivers of the populist radical-right movement. The bulk of this research studies voter support for those parties and politicians in particular countries, at particular times. Literally, hundreds of papers have put forward numerous socioeconomic and sociocultural explanations for voter support (see, among others, Knigge (1998), Lubbers et al. (2002), Ivarsflaten (2008), Dehdari (2019), Mutz (2018), Norris and Inglehart (2019), Guriev and Papaioannou (2020)).

But who steps forward to become a politician of the populist radical right and what this might imply for democratic representation remain basically uninvestigated. Despite the lack of academic attention, the profile of politicians appears prominently in the narrative of the populist radical-right. Their narrative emphasizes how traditional parties are made up by elites who are out of touch with reality and have little in common with a mass of outsiders without political representation (Mansbridge and Macedo, 2019; Norris and Inglehart, 2019): “the forgotten people” as prior US President Donald Trump liked to call them. By contrast, populist radical-right politicians portray themselves as the (true) representatives of those outsiders. These claims are often backed by appeals to shared personal or group characteristics, a practice sometimes labeled as “identity politics.”

The notion of a similarity between representatives and voters appears in several disciplines. In political philosophy, it is referred to as descriptive representation (Phillips Griffiths and Wollheim, 1960; Pitkin, 1967), which occurs when politicians share demographic, social, or economic traits with their political supporters. In political economics, the same idea appears in models of citizen candidates (Besley and Coate, 1997; Osborne and Slivinski, 1996) which assume that people from a certain social or economic group enter into politics to pursue policies that benefit this group. In political science, the notion provides the basis for (voluntary or mandatory) representation quotas for particular groups such as women or certain ethnicities (for surveys, see Dahlerup (2006) and Hughes et al. (2019)).

But does such correspondence between voters and representatives also describe who supports and becomes a politician of populist radical right parties? There are reasons to believe it should not. If politicians are positively selected, they will likely have better fortunes than the average voter, as shown to be the case for the broad political class in Sweden (Dal Bó et al., 2017). In fact, the few existing studies that address related questions point against the descriptive correspondence between radical-right voters and representatives. In his highly cited monograph, Art (2011) argues that radical-right parties succeed if they manage to attract highly educated and politically experienced activists, but fail when they attract low-status people with little experience. He supports this claim with data from interviews and information on the professions of party politicians from various European parties. In related research, Heinisch and Werner (2019) ask to what extent MPs from

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1 As of February 2020, Kai Arzheimer’s bibliography on the Radical Right in Western Europe alone stood at 907 articles (http://www.kai-arzheimer.com/extreme-right-western-europe-bibliography)
anti-immigration parties in Austria and Germany offer descriptive representation, while Tarditi and Vittori (2020) do so for Spanish anti-establishment parties (Podemos and Ciudadanos). Both papers find that politicians from these parties share social and economic traits with economic or educational elites rather than with the voters they claim to represent. Nevertheless, a more systematic analysis, and at more local level, may reveal a different picture.

Main analyses and findings: politicians The main novelty of this paper is to offer the first comprehensive account of political selection into a populist radical-right party. We study the Sweden Democrats, a party that went from a negligible political presence in 2002 to being Sweden’s third largest party in 2014. A yearly panel of administrative data (1979-2012) lets us describe the detailed economic and social traits of all (nominated and elected) politicians for the party.

In the first part of our analysis, we characterize politicians and their supporters in terms of being “insiders” or “outsiders.” In doing so, we borrow precise definitions of these (otherwise vague) terms from existing research in economics, sociology and social psychology. To study different dimensions, we explore three candidate insider-outsider distinctions. First, we classify individuals as economic outsiders if they have a weak labor-market attachment, by being either without stable employment or at a high(er) risk of losing their jobs. Second, we classify individuals as social outsiders if they do not belong to nuclear families, by being non-partnered (single or divorced) and/or do not having children. A third, auxiliary definition of social outsidership relies on coming from a low-income family background. Focusing on such outsider classifications can be rooted in theories of social identity (Tajfel, 1974). In our view, they are a natural way to describe a movement that often adopts a strong anti-establishment and anti-immigrant program and engages in identity politics. Looking at three alternative insider-outsider definitions allows the data to speak both to the same general idea and to the importance of outsider status in different dimensions that we find plausible a priori.

We compare people in three groups: (i) Sweden-Democrat politicians, (ii) other-party politicians, and (iii) the full population. Our main results pertain to the average patterns from 2002, the first election the Sweden Democrats are measurably represented, to 2014, the last election in our data. For labor-market attachments, we find that Sweden-Democrat politicians include more outsiders, as well as insiders with insecure jobs, than the population. Instead, the other political parties overrepresent insiders with secure jobs. For family types, results are analogous: the Sweden Democrats overrepresent the non-partnered relative to the partnered. Other parties greatly overrepresent the latter, especially traditional nuclear families with children. For family income backgrounds, patterns are weaker but qualitatively similar. Compared to the population, politicians from the Sweden Democrats more often have parents with historical incomes in the lowest quartile, and less often in the highest quartile. The opposite is true for politicians in other parties. While these results concern average national patterns, similar patterns prevail at the local level: wherever marginal groups of outsiders, vulnerable insiders, and singles are particularly large, the Sweden Democrats offer them more representation relative to other parties.

Main findings and analyses: voters In the second part of our main analysis, we study Sweden Democrats’ success among voters, using the same groups of economic and social outsiders and insiders. Specifically, our individual data allow us compute the shares of each group in Sweden’s 290 municipalities. Our data also let us analyze variation across about 6,000 electoral precincts. This allows for a uniquely detailed descriptive analysis of how Sweden Democrats’ local electoral success relates to the composition of the local electorate.

Across both municipalities and precincts, we find a strong positive correlation between Sweden-Democrat vote shares and the population shares of labor-market outsiders as well as vulnerable
insiders. A similar, but weaker, correlation exists for poor social backgrounds. For singles, the evidence is more mixed.

In sum, Sweden-Democrat politicians and voters share an outsider status along important dimensions. Thus, it is plausible to interpret the party’s success – at least to some degree – as reflecting an appeal to previously underrepresented outsiders. In the case of supporters this may not be surprising, but the finding that a disproportionate share of representatives come from marginalized groups challenges the idea that political success requires some elite advantages – e.g., in terms of human capital. In the remainder of the paper, we use the insider-outsider interpretation as a stepping stone to pose and empirically address four natural follow-up questions.

**Auxiliary analyses and findings** First, is an overrepresentation of outsiders among both politicians and voters a unique feature of successful populist radical-right parties like the Sweden Democrats, or is it a facet of all new parties (in Sweden)? We find that the Sweden Democrats are unique in this respect when compared to the politicians and voters of three new parties that entered national parliament in the late 1980s or early 1990s. The Green Party and the Christian Democrats show, if anything, an opposite pattern: that is, they draw politicians as well as electoral support from (different groups of) economic and social insiders, rather than outsiders. The politicians and local electorates of New Democracy, an unsuccessful populist party that held parliamentary seats for just one electoral period in the early 1990s, shows no stable pattern across economic and social groups.

The Sweden Democrats doubled their vote share in each of the two (four-year) electoral periods between 2006 and 2014, prompting a second question: does the insider-outsider distinction help us understand not just the Sweden Democrats’ general success but also its **timing**? We find that it does, by studying two dramatic economic events as prospective **triggers**. One event is the far-reaching reforms that substantially increased income inequality between labor-market insiders and outsiders in the years from 2006 to 2012. These reforms included a set of new earned-income tax credits financed by social-insurance austerity to “make work pay.” The other event is the recession after the 2008 financial crisis that drastically raised the risk of job loss for insiders with insecure jobs relative to those with safe jobs. Beyond the aggregate co-occurrence of these events and Sweden Democrat growth, the party’s local (within-municipality) vote-share gains in the elections from 2006 to 2014 are significantly related to the time paths of local economic losses of outsiders and vulnerable insiders. In our insider-outsider interpretation, these political gains can be understood as reflecting a sharper latent group conflict due to a falling relative status of the marginalized groups.

A third follow-up question is whether politicians and voters who share economic and social traits also share central **political attitudes**. The answer seems to be yes. We use new surveys designed to match responses by citizens and candidates, and show that along two crucial dimensions, the attitudes of the party’s voters and politicians match each other. At the same time, their attitudes depart dramatically from those of other-party voters and politicians. This finding indirectly strengthens our interpretation that the party’s electoral success, to some degree, reflects its representation of outsider groups.

Fourth, and finally, we ask: is the entry of Sweden Democrats, which promoted a more inclusive political class through better representation of economic and social outsiders, associated with some **costs**? Here too, we find that the answer is yes. Dal Bó et al. (2017) documented a clear positive selection into Swedish local politics. In this paper, we show that relative to other parties, the average Sweden-Democrat politician scores lower in a number of “valence” dimensions – such as ability, expertise, public-service motivation, and moral values. The data thus suggest that broader representation of outsider groups has gone together with a lower valence of these representatives. If effective representation requires adequate valence, descriptive representation may not yield substan-
tive representation even though politicians and voters hold similar views.

**Scope and organization of the paper** Our approach characterizes the universe of local politicians, who represent the populist radical right. This large-N approach explicitly abstracts from the traits and style of (national) party leaders, which is often delineated as a key object of study in the academic literature on populist parties (reviewed by Gidron and Bonikowski (2013)).

We present an inductive, rather than deductive, approach for understanding a populist radical-right movement. In that spirit, we use unique data to describe an example of the arguably most important political phenomenon in the last twenty years. This phenomenon certainly deserves sharp empirical tests of well-articulated theoretical hypotheses. If our description of basic – yet newly established – facts holds up for other parties elsewhere, it may serve as a stepping stone for modeling and testing. However, sharper theory and empirics, as well as checks for external validity, are beyond the scope of this paper.

The next section gives some background on Swedish elections, on the Sweden Democrats, and on earlier research about their electoral supporters. In Section 3 we describe our data – we also motivate and precisely define the key economic and social insider-outsider groups for our analysis. Based on these groupings, Section 4 examines who becomes a Sweden Democrat politician, whereas Section 5 investigates geographical voting patterns for the Sweden Democrats. In Section 6, we pursue the extensions tied to the four follow-up questions about new parties, timing and triggers, political attitudes, and valence consequences. Section 7 concludes. A Web Appendix collects some auxiliary material on data and empirical results.

## 2 Background

This section provides a brief background on Sweden’s electoral institutions and on the Sweden Democrats’ history, ideological stance, policy orientation, and voter support.

**Swedish elections** Every four years, Sweden runs elections at the level of 290 municipalities, 20 counties, and the nation. All these elections take place on the second Sunday in September with a turnout between 80 and 90 percent. In each election, citizens cast a separate party ballot, a ranked list with a large number of candidates. Based on the results, 13,000+ municipal-council members, 1,100 county councilors, and 349 members of parliament are appointed.

In Sweden’s proportional-representation (PR) system, seat shares in the municipal councils and the national parliament align closely with the vote shares of political parties. Since 1998, voters can also cast an optional preference vote for one candidate. But as only about a third of all voters exploit this option, the preference-vote reform only allows a handful of politicians from lower ranks to bypass the party’s list order and win a seat.²

**History of the Sweden Democrats** The Sweden Democrats were founded in 1988. In its early days, the party was a marginal force in national and local politics. It won political representation for the first time in 1991, with two municipal council seats. Although some regions exhibited stronger support than others, the party’s national vote share was only about 1 percentage point until 1998. Panel (a) of Figure 1 shows how the support for the party rose over time. In the national parliamentary elections of 2006, the Sweden Democrats only received 2.9 percent of votes, still below the

²This reflects voter “abstention” from the optional vote, a concentration of votes for candidates at the top of the ballot, and high thresholds. See Folke et al. (2016) for a thorough analysis of the preference-vote system and its consequences.
4-percent threshold to gain the first seat. The party broke this threshold in 2010, by earning 5.7 percent of the national vote. Another major breakthrough was the 2014 election, when the Sweden Democrats became the third largest party with a 12.9 percentage-point vote share and with considerably higher support in some municipalities.

Panel (b) of Figure 1 shows the number of seats won by the party over time at the three levels of Swedish politics. Despite its recent success – and differently from its sister parties in many other European countries – the Sweden Democrats have generally been denied essential political influence. However, this “cordon sanitaire” was broken in some municipalities after the 2014 election, when the party did play an essential role in putting a governing coalition in place (Aftonbladet, 2014).

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The Sweden Democrats have found it difficult to recruit candidates for their party lists, especially during the early era of the party’s success. Thus, the characteristics of the elected and non-elected candidates in our data mostly reflect self-selection into the new party, rather than screening by party leaders.

As described in Widfeldt (2008), the party initially grew out of an organization known as “Keep Sweden Swedish” (Bevara Sverige Svenskt, BSS). Over time, the Sweden Democrats moderated their political stance from biological racism towards cultural national chauvinism. They came to argue that social conflicts ensue when people from different cultures attempt to live together (Widfeldt, 2008). In the early 2010s, the party’s rhetoric replaced nationalism with social conservatism, and put more emphasis on family values and on law and order (Rydgren, 2018). Recent work on European-wide party ideologies has classified the Sweden Democrats as a typical radical-right party (e.g. Rydgren (2007), Rydgren (2008)) and as part of the populist right (e.g. Norris and Inglehart (2019); Van Kessel (2015)).

**Political stance**  As other populist parties, the Sweden Democrats adopt a clear anti-establishment stance. They also appeal to a nostalgic picture of Sweden’s past, drawing on the construct of the “people’s homestead”, a 1920s Social-Democratic vision that emphasizes working-class employment and a strong welfare state.

Using the Chapel Hill Expert Surveys, we can gauge Sweden-Democrat policy stances on general left-right policies and on immigration (Web Appendix Figure W1). As for other radical-right parties, anti-immigration policy is the party’s signature issue: the experts in the Survey rate the Sweden Democrats as very anti-immigrant, compared to the Social Democrats or Conservatives (see also Erlingsson et al. (2012)). The party has argued that (non-white) immigration takes a large toll on the public finances and threatens job prospects for natives. When it comes to the conventional left-right spectrum, the party ranks in between the Social Democrats and the Conservatives. In the national parliament, it has often voted with the center-right bloc. But its stance on taxes and labor-market issues is more ambiguous. A left-leaning think-tank concludes that for the 2010-2014 election period

“the Sweden Democrats are ambivalent [on tax issues]. The party wants to spend like a left-wing party, but tax like a right-wing party… the party thinks that it can solve this equation by lowering immigration and international aid.” (Tanksmedjan Tiden 2014).

In municipal politics, the Sweden Democrats have often supported center-right coalitions on tax cuts and privatization, warned of an Islamization of cities and neighborhoods, and demanded “multicultural accounting” that would describe the local budget by separately earmarked money spent
on natives and immigrants (Wingmar 2011). The party also emphasizes law and order, challenges multi-cultural education and feminist-inspired pedagogical frameworks, and often strives to redirect resources towards elderly care (Muliniari and Neergaard, 2017).

Who votes Sweden Democrat? Based on survey data, Sweden-Democrat voters are disproportionately male, working-class, and low-educated (Erlingsson et al., 2012; Jylhä and Strimling, 2018; Oskarson and Demker, 2015; Sannerstedt, 2014). The party’s voters are also less trusting of politicians, political institutions, the court system, and news media than voters of other parties (SCB 2011) (Jylhä and Strimling, 2018).

Earlier research disagrees somewhat on the role of economic vulnerability in driving support for the Sweden Democrats. Dehdari (2019) finds that layoff notifications among low-skilled native workers during the financial crisis raised the Sweden-Democrat vote share in precincts of notified workers. A weak labor-market attachment among the party’s voters also shows up in high self-reported support among the unemployed, people on disability insurance, and people on long-term sick leave (Erlingsson et al., 2012; Jylhä and Strimling, 2018; Sannerstedt, 2014). Some scholars argue that because these categories together do not make up a majority of the party’s voters, economic insecurity cannot be a major driver of the party’s rise (Erlingsson et al., 2012; Jylhä and Strimling, 2018; Sannerstedt, 2014, 2015). Section W1 in the Web Appendix discusses these results with regard to survey design and sample stratification.

Data from surveys and exit polls suggest that most of those who cast their ballots for the Sweden Democrats would otherwise vote for one of the two strongest parties, the Social Democrats and the Conservatives. Inflows were larger from the Social Democrats between 2006 and 2010 and from the Conservatives between 2010 and 2014 (SCB 2011, 2016).

On a left-to-right scale, Sweden-Democrat voters put themselves somewhere in the middle of the ideological spectrum (Sannerstedt, 2015).

3 Data

In this section, we discuss the data for our study. We also motivate and introduce the precise measures we use to classify the population into groups of insiders and outsiders in the economic and social domains.

Register data Our empirical analysis is entirely based on individual-level data (except for vote shares which come aggregated at the level of the electoral precinct or municipality). One important dataset encompasses all elected and non-elected individual candidates running for national or municipal political office between 1982 and 2014.4 Altogether, our data includes more than 200,000 unique politicians, more than 50,000 of which have been elected at least once. Electoral results containing vote shares for every party in every election are linked to our dataset from records kept by the Swedish Electoral Agency.

We link these politician data to several administrative registers from Statistics Sweden for the adult population (everybody aged 16 years or older). For most variables, our data holds annual

3Another possibility is mobilization via higher turnout (even though turnout in Swedish elections, around 85 percent, is internationally very high). A direct test in our data reveals that turnout did not go up significantly in municipalities where the Sweden Democrats made their largest gains. This evidence is not definitive, however, as turnout could have fallen absent the gains of the Sweden Democrats.

4Prior to every election, each political party must report its ordered list with a personal identification code for each politician. These lists are kept by Statistics Sweden or (in some cases) by regional electoral authorities. After the election, another record is created with a complete account of all elected politicians from each party.
records from 1979 to 2012 for everybody in the entire population, about 14 million unique men and women. These data contain precise information on demographic and socioeconomic variables (e.g., age, sex, education level, and occupation). Thus, we can precisely characterize how the personal traits of politicians compare to those in the entire population.

The Multigenerational Register identifies parent-child relations (we use only biological parents). As the income data begins in 1979, it is truncated. Nevertheless, we observe the income of fathers in 1979 for 78 percent of the politicians elected after 2002. To identify different family types, we also use personal and family ID-codes for linking to the Marriage Register and the Birth Register.

Various types of annual earnings for the entire population are available from the Swedish Tax Authority. We also have annual information about an individual’s sector of employment for the whole period. As occupations are only recorded on a yearly basis from 2003, we complement the occupation data with earlier information from censuses (conducted every fifth year).

**Survey data** We supplement these various register data with a variety of surveys. Of special note is the 2017 KOLFU survey directed to the universe of current local politicians. This survey was carried out in 2017 by a subset of the authors, in collaboration with political scientists from the University of Gothenburg (Karlsson and Gilljam, 2017). It had a response rate of close to 70 percent and asked the politicians numerous questions about their preferences, motivations, and personality traits (see Section 6 below). In the same year, the SOM survey conducted together with another set of Gothenburg political scientists posed a subset of the same questions (verbatim) to a random sample of Swedish voters together with questions about their party sympathies (Andersson et al., 2018).

**Why study marginalized groups?** The strong anti-establishment program, which the Sweden Democrats share with other populist radical-right parties, motivate us to focus on “outsiders” or “marginalized groups.” As highlighted in the theories of social identity (Tajfel, 1974) and social dominance (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999), group conflict along a key socioeconomic dimension can arise if a set of marginalized individuals in a certain dimension see themselves as members of an in-group and more established individuals as members of an out-group. Such group identification, and a sense of being at the bottom of a social hierarchy, can raise the appeal of an anti-establishment political program among members of the marginalized group. The marginalized may also be particularly susceptible to a nativist message that exploits economic and social grievances to paint a conflict between residents and (new) immigrants.

These ideas underpin our analysis of outsider groups in Sections 4 and 5. They also suggest that if members of such groups experience a relative decline in their relative economic or social status, this may deepen the latent group conflict, and prompt stronger mobilization in favor of the Sweden Democrat program. We return to this point in Section 6.

This simple idea of intergroup tensions is general enough to accommodate hypotheses based on economic insecurity as well as on cultural backlash, to use the labels in Norris and Inglehart (2019). Specific appeals to marginalized or outsider groups abound in the literature on radical-right politics, where leading scholars have argued that political preferences systematically relate to key economic and social circumstances, including labor-market socialization (Betz, 1994; Kriesi et al., 2006; ?), social background by parental economics status (Inglehart, 1981; Inglehart and Flanagan, 1987), and family structure combined with labor-market conditions (Kitschelt, 1994; Kitschelt and McGann, 1997).

We thus classify insider (core) and outsider (marginalized) groups along those three economic and social dimensions. Next, we make these classifications operational in relation to our data sources.
Insiders and outsiders in labor markets  Labor-market attachment is key for individual identity in a high-employment society like Sweden. Thus, we consider the possession of a steady job as well as the risk of losing that job. Borrowing from Lindbeck and Snower (1984), we label the tightly attached as labor-market insiders and the loosely attached as outsiders. Our operational definition relies on the Social Exclusion and Labor Market Attachment (SELMA) framework. This was developed by sociologists Kindlund and Biterman (2002) and Bäckman and Franzén (2007) to distinguish what they call core members of the labor force. Following their definitions, we classify individuals as insiders if their labor income exceeds 3.5 “basic amounts” (SEK 156,800 in today’s prices, about USD 18,700) in each one of the last three years.5

Other individuals are classified as outsiders. The whole outsider group makes up 35-40 percent of the adult, working-age population during our period of analysis. We only exploit the SELMA classification for the working-age population. Given our purposes, we exclude students from the outsiders as their labor-market attachment is difficult to classify. For similar reasons, we do not classify retirees by labor-market attachment. In the Web Appendix we extend parts of the analysis to different subgroups of outsiders.

Vulnerable and secure insiders. Not all insiders have the same labor market. Among those with relatively stable employment, different workers face differential risks of losing their job due to technological change, outsourcing, or general business downturns. To classify workers in this dimension, we again follow earlier research – this time by Autor (2013), Autor and Dorn (2013), and Goos et al. (2014). These scholars distinguish occupations with different Routine Task Intensity (RTI) defined by the typical tasks they entail. Specifically, occupations that require several (few) routine tasks, compared to manual or abstract tasks, have a high (low) RTI. We expect that individuals in such occupations are more exposed in times of high job loss.

How do we identify such individuals in our register data? These data include 2-digit occupation (ISCO) codes for each employed person. Using the RTI index from Goos et al. (2014), we divide all individuals with a 2002-2012 occupational code into two groups. We call those insiders (by the earlier definition) whose occupations have an RTI above the median vulnerable. By contrast, we refer to those insiders who work in occupations with a RTI index below the median as secure. We use this classification in the paper. In the Web Appendix we extend parts of the analysis to finer subgroups defined by the RTI-quartiles.

Privileged and non-privileged backgrounds  Economic privilege is another key dimension of being a more or less established member of society. We thus classify more or less marginalized individuals by their social background. Operationally, we follow our own recent work Dal Bó et al. (2017). Thus we measure the social background of a particular individual at a particular stage in her life cycle by the position of her parents in the national income distribution, within their sex and birth-year, at a similar stage of their life cycle.

Specifically, we exploit the 1979 income distribution to define quantiles of parental incomes. For the politicians elected between 2002 and 2014, our measure of social background is the income quartile of his or her (biological) father 23 to 35 years earlier, provided the father was an adult (at least 18 years old) in 1979.6 The 23-35 year time span approximates pretty well the (average) generational gap. To obtain this social background measure, we rely on a combination of the Income Register and

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5 The benchmark amount is updated each year for inflation and used in various Swedish social insurance programs. An income exceeding 3.5 benchmark amounts is expected to cover nearly all full-time jobs in minimum-wage sectors. Only a handful of occupations in the hotel and restaurant services would fall below the cutoff (Social Rapport 2010).

6 As discussed in Dal Bó et al. (2017), we can also use maternal income with similar results.
the Multigenerational Register.

## Nuclear and non-nuclear families

Another key divider is family type. In this social classification, we ask whether individuals are part of society’s most established family type. As sociologists have long emphasized (see, for instance, Parsons and Bales (2000), the traditional living arrangement in modern Western society is the nuclear family. This family type is usually defined as a married (or partnered) couple that currently stays together with their children, or had been staying with them in the past. By contrast, adults who live alone, or who have not had any children of their own, do not belong to the traditional family type.

To make this classification operational, we rely on data from the Marriage Register and the Birth Register. These sources plus (personal) ID codes allow us to directly define married couples and individuals with children. We approximate partnered (but unmarried) individuals as one of two similar-aged residents at the same address with the same (family) ID-code.

## Anti-establishment and anti-immigrant views by group

Our classification above rests on the simple idea that a populist anti-establishment and anti-immigration political program may more likely resonate with marginalized groups. While it is hard to directly validate this assumption, we can use survey data to shed some light on its plausibility. The politicians in the survey (KOLFU 2017) gave their informed consent to link responses (anonymously) with some (but not all) registers. These links allow us to classify the participants into different labor-market and family groups. We can also use the background information in the SOM-voter surveys to classify the respondents into labor-market groups.

Figure 2 shows the shares of these politician and voter groups who express high distrust in the national parliament (a proxy for anti-establishment attitudes), as well as strong support for reducing refugee immigration (a proxy for anti-immigration attitudes). For each dimension, the most marginalized group is marked to the left (black color), and the most established group(s) to the right (lighter, gray or white, color). Both the distrust in parliament and the support for reducing immigration is clearly higher for those who have weaker attachments to the labor market and for those who have not formed nuclear families.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

## 4 Politicians

This section focuses on the most novel part of our analysis. That is, we examine who becomes a Sweden Democrat politician. Specifically, we try to assess how the party’s elected representatives in municipal councils compare to those of the established parties in terms of our three alternative population groups.

### Labor-market attachment

The left panel of Figure 3 shows the composition of our labor-market categories for four sets of individuals. From left to right, these are the elected local politicians from the Sweden Democrats, the population, the elected local politicians from the Left Party, and the elected local politicians from all other parties except the Left.\footnote{We have also performed the analysis in this section on the full ballots of nominated candidates, rather than on the candidates elected from these ballots. The results can be seen in the Web Appendix (Figure W2) and are, if anything, stronger with this wider definition of representation. The same qualitative results hold if we look at a narrower group of politicians at the top of each local ballot.}
because one might think that marginalized groups in the labor-market naturally would turn to the left. The shares in this bar graph are computed as an average over the 2002-2014 electoral periods. As the black and gray segments of the middle bar show, 35 percent of the (non-student) population are outsiders and 29 percent are vulnerable insiders. Together these two groups of – more or less – marginalized labor-market participants represent 64 percent of the adult (non-student) population.

As the bottom (black and gray) segments of the leftmost bar show, the Sweden Democrats overrepresent each one of the marginal groups. Together, politicians who are outsiders or vulnerable insiders make up 74 percent of the party’s local councilors. Other parties instead underrepresent these marginal groups, which only make up about 41 percent of their representatives. The flip side is a massive overrepresentation of the secure-insider group (the white segment of the bar) by traditional parties: 59 percent of the representatives versus 36 percent of the electorate. We note that the Left party is similar to the other parties in this respect.

Social background The middle panel of Figure 3 shows the social background of politicians compared to the population, as measured by the quartile of their fathers’ incomes in the 1979 national income distribution among men born in the same years. The second bar from the left provides a benchmark, showing that fathers in the population (who were adult in 1979) have almost exactly 25 percent in each quartile. This is a result and not a definition: the birth-year-specific national income distributions for men in 1979 include non-fathers. Thus, sample selection on income does not seem to be a big problem when studying fathers.

As the leftmost bar shows, Sweden-Democrat politicians overrepresent poor social background with 32 percent of their fathers in the lowest 1979 income quartile, the black segment of the bar. This surplus comes at the expense of rich social backgrounds, as 20 percent of fathers are in the highest income quartile, the white segment of the bar. Quantitatively, this lopsidedness is small, with the overrepresentation (underrepresentation) of poor-family (rich-family) upbringing being only about 7 (5) percentage points.

Family type The right panel of Figure 3 plots the family situation for politicians and the general population. As explained in Section 3, we distinguish the married/partnered parents with children (the white segment), from those who are childless – single or cohabiting – or single parents (the shaded segments). The middle bar shows that 52 percent of the general population are partnered with children. Strikingly, 68 percent of politicians in other parties belong to a nuclear family, thus strongly overrepresenting the most established (insider) group. By contrast, Sweden-Democrat politicians underrepresent this group, with only 43 percent nuclear-family members.

This social dimension thus closely resembles the labor-market dimension. That is, Sweden-Democrat politicians clearly underrepresent the most established group in the population – nuclear families and secure insiders, respectively – while other parties clearly overrepresent them.

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8In the Web Appendix, we also reproduce Figure 3 for all parties separately (Figure W3). This figure reveals that the Sweden Democrats do not just distinguish themselves from the average of other parties. They stand in stark contrast against any other party individually.

9Since our individual data ends in 2012, we have to impute an individual’s 2014 group status from her 2012 data.

10The Dal Bó et al. (2017) results were expressed in terms of percentiles rather than in terms of quartiles. Also, that paper did not consider Sweden Democrat politicians as a separate category.
An overrepresentation index. We can refine the analysis in Figure 3 by estimating the following regression for the full population of politicians from each group $g$:

$$L_{i,t}^g = \beta^g SD_{i,t} + Z_{i,t} + \varepsilon_{i,t}^g.$$  

(1)

In this expression, $L_{i,t}^g$ denotes a binary indicator for councillor $i$ in group $g$ and election $t$, and $SD_{i,t}$ is a binary indicator for councillor $i$ being a Sweden-Democrat.

When studying political selection, unconditional patterns have descriptive value. But to the extent that some demographic characteristics are widely expected to correlate with radical-right support, it is also valuable to control for them. The stereotypical radical-right sympathizer is (white) middle-aged, low-educated, and male. To hold such traits constant, we add indicators, $Z_{i,t}$, for gender, age, and education. Indeed, compared to other parties, the Sweden Democrats candidates are less often female (26 vs. 44 percent), more often under-35 (23 vs. 13 percent), more often retired (23 vs. 16 percent), and less likely to have a tertiary education (25 vs. 48 percent).

We use the estimates to measure relative Sweden-Democrat supply. For each $g$, we compute,

$$\frac{\beta^g}{E(L_{i,t}^g \mid \text{other party})} - 1.$$  

(2)

This index is equal to 0 if the Sweden Democrats have the same share of elected councillors from subgroup $g$ as do other parties. It takes a positive (negative) value if the party overrepresents (underrepresents) the group. For instance, a 100-percent overrepresentation corresponds to an index value of 1.

Sweden Democrat overrepresentation across groups. Figure 4 plots this overrepresentation index along our three dimensions. The black dots in the figure show the average indexes (with 95-percent confidence intervals) estimated without controls. The dark-gray dots show the estimates with controls for sex, education, and age, while the light-gray dots show estimates when we also add municipal fixed effects.

The leftmost graph confirms that the Sweden Democrats overrepresent outsiders and vulnerable insiders, at the expense of secure insiders. This is true even as we add demographic and geographic controls, though the overrepresentation indexes fall from about 120 to 100 percent for outsiders and from about 95 to 55 percent for vulnerable insiders.

When we extend the analysis to students or the retired, we find that the Sweden Democrats do not overrepresent either of these two groups, particularly once we have added controls.

[FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

The middle graph in Figure 4 corroborates the finding depicted in Figure 3. Sweden-Democrat politicians are more often selected from a poor social background compared to other politicians and the population. While the difference is statistically significant, it is quantitatively small: about 10 percent, once we include demographic and geographic controls.

Finally, the rightmost graph shows that the Sweden-Democrat overrepresentation of singles remains a robust feature of the party’s elected politicians. It is on the order of 60 to 80 percent, conditional on demographies and geography. As in Figure 3, the party robustly underrepresents nuclear families relative to the other parties.

Similar patterns emerge when we focus on the nominated, rather than elected, candidates on the ballots (see Figure W4 in the Web Appendix).

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11 The reported results rest on a formulation where these four binary indicators enter additively. No result changes markedly in a saturated formulation with a full set of interactions among all indicators.

12 We have used social background in terms of income as one classifier. One may reasonably ask if the current family
Municipal selection of politicians So far, we have only presented analyses based on aggregated, nation-wide data. In Figure 5, we explore whether the Sweden Democrats continue to overrepresent the economically and socially marginalized when we disaggregate our representation measures to the municipality level. The figure again distinguishes Sweden Democrats from other parties, and includes a 45-degree (dotted) line to show where population and politician shares coincide.

As the two upper panels make clear, local parties do produce more elected politicians among labor-market outsiders and vulnerable insiders, respectively, when a larger share of the working-age population in their municipality hold that status. But as seen from the two regression lines, the Sweden Democrats do so at a higher rate compared to the other parties. In terms of levels, traditional parties have markers below the 45-degree line, meaning they underrepresent labor-market outsiders and vulnerable insiders almost everywhere (as we could guess from Figures 3 and 4). The Sweden Democrats instead have markers above, or close to, the 45-degree line and thus overrepresent these marginal groups in most municipalities.

The two lower panels of Figure 5 repeat the analysis for the two social-outsider categories. Based on the results in Figures 3 and 4, we use the shares of the municipal population and politicians with a father in the lowest 1979 income quartile. Here, the two regression lines have a slope close to unity. Even though on average the Sweden Democrats overrepresent those with a poor social background, these regression lines lie close to each other. Of course, this closeness corresponds to the small national-level overrepresentation documented in Figure 4.

Finally, the lower right panel displays the corresponding results for family structure. In line with the results presented in Figures 3 and 4, other parties systematically underrepresent the single and divorced almost everywhere, while the Sweden Democrats systematically overrepresent them, especially in municipalities where the non-partnered are a dominant share of the local population.

Summing up The Sweden Democrats offer considerably more local representation to the two marginalized labor-market groups than do the other parties in the Swedish political system. The party also overrepresents the non-partnered – including single parents and the divorced – while other parties overrepresent members of nuclear families. For social backgrounds (parental income), the differences are qualitatively similar but quantitatively small. Overall, Sweden Democrat politicians do indeed overrepresent groups of individuals with tenuous attachments to the most established groups in society, especially along labor-market and family dimensions.

5 Voters

In this section, we study how voting for the Sweden Democrats relates to our groups of economic and social outsiders. For this analysis, we aggregate our individual-level classifications to the level of a specific locality in a particular election period.
Methodology  We analyze voting both across Sweden’s 290 municipalities as well as across its 5,600 precincts. Precincts, the lowest level at which election results are recorded, form subsets of municipalities and have an average population of about 1,200 people.

For the municipality analysis we plot, in the top row of Figure 6, the relationship between the Sweden-Democrat vote share and the share of each marginalized group, one by one. To obtain the observations and the regression line, we use data from four election years, namely 2002, 2006, 2010 and 2014. For each of our measures, we hold constant election-year fixed effects, such that the y-axis shows vote-share deviations from the election-year mean. A dot in each scatterplot corresponds to an average over 50 observations. Note also that the vertical axes in each of the four plots have the same scale, so the slopes of the regression lines are easier to compare.

For the precinct analysis illustrated in the bottom row of Figure 6, we plot the same relationship for each marginalized group. Here, we only use data from 2002, 2006, and 2010, as the precinct delineations for 2014 are not available in our data. Our analysis now includes interacted municipality-election-year fixed effects, such that the horizontal axis shows deviations from the municipality mean. Once again, a dot represents 50 observations and the vertical axes are drawn at the same scale.

Labor-market attachment  In Section 4, we saw that elected Sweden Democrat councilors systematically overrepresent marginalized groups in the labor market. The first and second panels of the top row in Figure 6 show that an analogous relationship holds for the party’s electoral support. In other words, the Sweden Democrats saw larger vote shares in municipalities with larger shares of labor-market outsiders and vulnerable insiders (relative to the year-specific mean). The cross-municipality slope coefficient between the share of labor-market outsiders and Sweden-Democrat vote share is 0.074 (se = 0.027). The corresponding slope for the share of vulnerable insiders is 0.139 (se = 0.013). A 20 percentage point increase in the share of labor-market outsiders in the municipality is associated with a 1.5 percentage point higher vote share for the Sweden Democrats. Similarly, a 20 percentage points higher share of vulnerable insiders is associated with a 2.8 percentage points higher vote share.

The precinct-level graphs show that these positive associations hold (even more tightly) across precincts, within municipalities. The within-municipality slope coefficients between the Sweden-Democrat vote share and the precinct shares of outsiders and vulnerable insiders are 0.030 (se = 0.007) and 0.0865 (se = 0.005), respectively.

Social background  In Section 4, we looked for overrepresentation by Sweden-Democrat politicians of people with poor social backgrounds. While we uncovered such an overrepresentation, it was quantitatively small. The third top-row panel of Figure 6 shows that the Sweden-Democrat vote share is not as strongly correlated with the municipality’s share of fathers in the 1979 bottom national income quartile. The slope coefficient is 0.043 (se = 0.025) and only statistically significant at the 10 percent level. The relationship becomes considerably stronger at the precinct level, as seen from the corresponding plot in the bottom row. The slope is now 0.059 (se = 0.009), although some non-linearity is also apparent.

Family type  In Section 4, we documented that Sweden Democrat elected politicians systematically overrepresent those who do not belong to traditional nuclear families. However, in contrast to the other panels, especially the ones for marginalized labor-market groups, we do not find a strong and stable association between Sweden-Democrat vote shares and the share of singles or divorced in a
locality. With a slope coefficient of $-0.081$ (se = 0.028), the relationship at the municipal level is negative, as shown in the upper rightmost panel. At the precinct level, the relationship is instead weakly positive with a slope coefficient of 0.013 (se = 0.003), as shown in the lower rightmost panel.

6 Extensions

Our results in Sections 4 and 5 suggest a clear pattern. During 2002-2014, marginalized groups were overrepresented among Sweden-Democrat elected politicians and voters, especially relative to other parties but also relative to the population as a whole. The correspondence is the clearest for labor-market attachment, and to a lesser extent for social background and family type. Taken together, these findings suggest that the Sweden Democrats are providing descriptive representation to groups of economic and social outsiders. These outsiders, in turn, are supporting the party at the polls, particularly the labor-market outsiders. In this section, we rely on this interpretation to pose and empirically address four natural follow-up questions.

First, we ask (Subsection 6.1) whether an overrepresentation of outsiders is unique to this populist radical-right party or simply a facet of all new parties. Next, we investigate (Subsection 6.2) if the notion of outsider representation helps us understand not just the party’s general success but its particular timing, with a doubling in size over each of the two (four-year) electoral periods between 2006 and 2014. In addition, we explore (Subsection 6.3) whether the Sweden Democrat politicians and voters, who share economic and social traits, also share central political attitudes relative to the voters and politicians of other parties. Finally, we ask (Subsection 6.4) if the entry of Sweden Democrats, which promoted a more inclusive representation of outsiders, may have come with some costs in terms of political valence.

6.1 New Parties and Outsiders?

The Sweden Democrats descriptively represent economic and social outsiders and the party is more electorally successful where these groups make up larger fractions of the population. Are these patterns particular to the successful populist radical-right, or are they general to all new political parties? After all, new parties may implement entry strategies that rely on catering to previously underrepresented groups.

Apart from the Sweden Democrats, three new parties won seats in the Swedish parliament during the period covered by our data. The Green Party entered parliament in 1988, and the Christian Democrats and New Democracy in 1991. New Democracy was an anti-establishment populist party that formed only 6 months before the 1991 election, but disintegrated during the 1991-94 electoral period and failed to gain seats ever after. As such, it is an interesting point of comparison to the Sweden Democrats, but should not be seen as an example of another populist radical-right party that managed to solidly establish itself in national and local politics. In this subsection, we compare politicians and (cross-sectional) voting outcomes for the new parties in the election year that they entered parliament. For the Sweden Democrats, this is 2010. For the other three, we use 1991 (as 1988 has lower data quality).

Of course, this exercise may have its flaws. The twenty-year earlier entry of these three new parties took place under different economic, political, and social conditions. Despite these caveats, we deem the exploration useful. Our data should reveal if other cases of political entry were systematically related to catering to previously underrepresented voters.
Politicians  Figure 7 looks at the representation of economic and social outsiders by these four parties, for each of the four traits we considered in Section 4. We use an overrepresentation index akin to the one used in Section 4, except that the comparison group is now the working-age Swedish population (rather than politicians from other parties). We show this index on the vertical axes, where negative values stand for underrepresentation and positive values for overrepresentation, with a value of 1 corresponding to 100% overrepresentation.

Overrepresentation of economic and social outsiders is clearly not a general trait of new parties. The Green Party underrepresents outsiders for all four traits. The Christian Democrats marginally overrepresent people in the low social background group, but underrepresent the three other outsider groups. New Democracy marginally overrepresents labor-market outsiders, marginally underrepresents vulnerable insiders, and does not over or underrepresent the other two outsider groups.

Voters  On the voter side, Figure 8 shows correlations between new party electoral success and the shares of the four marginalized groups in municipal populations. The Sweden Democrats stand out from other new parties in terms of their vote success among the outsider groups. The Green Party’s electoral success happened primarily in places with more economic insiders, while the Christian Democrats were successful in places with many nuclear family structures rather than non-partnered people. For New Democracy, electoral success is not systematically correlated with the share of any outsider groups in the electorate.

Bottom line  To sum up, the Sweden Democrats stand out from the other new parties in terms of their descriptive overrepresentation of, and electoral support from, outsider groups. The Green Party overrepresents labor-market insiders and is electorally successful where this group is plentiful. The Christian Democrats overrepresented one type of social insiders (nuclear families) and are most successful in places where this insider group is plentiful. New Democracy marginally overrepresented labor-market outsiders but did not fare any better electorally where this group was numerous. New Democracy did not show any stable correlations in terms of overrepresentation or electoral support along the other three types of marginalized groups. In other words, overrepresentation of outsiders among politicians and voters does not seem to be a systematic feature of new parties.

6.2 Timing and Triggers?

We have seen that our insider-outsider approach helps us understand the general success of the Sweden Democrats. Does this approach also help explain the timing of the party’s electoral success, which consisted of a doubling in vote share both in the 2006-10 and 2010-14 electoral periods? Based on our discussion in Section 3, a natural trigger would be an event that widened the status gap between marginalized and core groups. A wider gap might deepen a latent tension between the groups and mobilize new politicians and voters for the party.

There are no obvious triggers that stand out along the two social dimensions during 2006-14. Movements of family status are bound to be slow and the social backgrounds of today’s politicians and voters are, by definition, predetermined. By contrast, two dramatic events widened the status gap between marginalized and core labor-market groups. In the remainder of this subsection, we describe these events and show that the local variation in the success of Sweden Democrats correlates strongly with the local size of these shocks.
The 2006-2011 make-work pay reforms  The left panel of Figure 9 shows how the disposable-income gap between labor-market insiders and outsiders widened drastically following the new Center-Right government takeover in 2006. Over two electoral periods (2006-14) the new government coalition enacted an ambitious reform agenda under the catch-phrase “to make work pay.” People with a stable job earned higher net incomes due to five annual installments (2007-11) of an Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). These are visible in the figure as rising average disposable incomes among labor market insiders (gray line in the figure). To finance this program the government rolled back various social programs and unemployment benefits. These cuts are visible as a falling average disposable income for labor-market outsiders (black line) after the change in government. By 2012, the last year of our income data, the insider-outsider gap had gone up by over 20 percentage points from 2006.

The 2008-2010 financial crisis  The second large economic shock is the recession following the 2008 financial crisis. The left panel of Figure 10 illustrates how this event drastically raised the relative unemployment risk of vulnerable insiders vs. secure insiders in the labor market. To draw the graph, we start from all working-age people who had a stable job 2006 and classify those into vulnerable and secure insiders, exactly as in the main analysis. We show the share in each group that received non-zero unemployment benefits in each year, both before and after 2006. Interpreting such unemployment benefits as a proxy for job-loss risk, the figure shows a rising risk gap after the crisis, which had far from closed when our data ends (in 2012).

Econometric specification  We now turn to a more formal analysis of how the within-municipality growth of the Sweden Democrats relates to the within-municipality changes in the inequalities of disposable incomes and unemployment risks. We define these two types of inequality as follows:

\[ I^Y_{m,t} = \frac{N^O_{m,t}}{N_{m,t}} \cdot G^Y_t \quad \text{and} \quad I^U_{m,t} = \frac{N^V_{m,t}}{N^I_{m,t}} \cdot G^U_t, \]
where \( N_{\text{O},m,t} \) and \( N_{\text{I},m,t} \) are the local shares of labor-market Outsiders and Vulnerable insiders, respectively, either in the current year or some initial year (see below). The variables \( G_Y^I \) and \( G_U^I \) are the national gaps in disposable incomes and unemployment risk, respectively, as plotted in Figures 9 and 10. Because these national gaps are more plausibly exogenous than the local gaps, our inequality measures, which capture expected inequality based on municipal population shares but national gaps in income or risk, are also more plausibly exogenous than inequality measures that use the actual municipal gaps. (The results hold up when using the municipal gaps – see Web Appendix Table W3.)

To estimate the relationship between the Sweden-Democrat vote share, \( v_{s_{m,t}} \) in municipality \( m \) and election \( t \), and the two inequality measures, we use the specification,

\[
v_{s_{m,t}} = \alpha + \beta_Y I_{Y,m,t}^I + \beta_U I_{U,m,t}^U + \eta_t + \delta_m + X_{m,t} \lambda + \varepsilon_{m,t}.
\]

To non-parametrically remove the average time trend in the Sweden-Democrat vote share, we always include election-period fixed effects, \( \eta_t \). To focus on variation within municipalities, we always include municipality fixed effects, \( \delta_m \). We sometimes include a vector with municipal controls, \( X_{m,t} \). We cluster the standard errors at the municipality level. Finally, to simplify the interpretation of our estimates we transform each inequality measure into a \( z \)-score.

**Estimation issues** We argue that the two economic events did not affect the support of the Sweden Democrats by changing the composition of the population, but rather by increasing their support in particular subsets of the population. To make this argument more credible, we re-run the analysis when the inequalities \( I_{Y,m,t}^I \) and \( I_{U,m,t}^U \) are based on the 2006 shares rather than the current shares.

Table 1 collects our estimates. In all three panels, columns (1) and (2) show the results when we include the two inequalities separately, while column (3) shows results when we include them jointly. The inequalities are based on current local population shares in columns (1)-(3), while they are based on the 2006 shares in columns (4)-(6).

Because the Sweden-Democrat program stresses anti-immigration positions, an important objection to our analysis is that the estimates of interest may be driven by local immigration. Most importantly, as immigrants make up a large proportion of labor-market outsiders, the local-outsider share will be positively correlated with the immigrant share in the population. To address this issue, the middle panel displays the same estimates as the upper panel while controlling for the local immigrant share.

In the bottom panel we add an additional set of controls for immigration, as well as a set of controls for crime (given that the party tries to make a strong link between immigration and crime). We provide further details about the controls below.

**Basic results** Column (1) in Table 1 reports the correlation of the Sweden-Democrat vote share with the income inequality between labor-market outsiders and insiders described in Figure 9. The effect is positive and precisely estimated. A one standard deviation increase in income inequality is associated with a 1.1 percentage point increase in vote share for the Sweden Democrats. Column (2) shows an even stronger relationship with the inequality in unemployment risk described in Figure 10. A one standard deviation increase in unemployment-risk inequality is associated with a 2.5 percentage point increase in vote share. When we include the two inequalities jointly in column (3), the estimates barely change. The correlations are not only precisely estimated, but also numerically large. As the population shares vary considerably across municipalities and the trigger events changed both national inequalities by one to two standard deviations, one can ascribe a substantial portion of the variation in Sweden-Democrat growth across municipalities to these events.
When we use the pre-event (rather than current) shares of labor-market outsiders and vulnerable insiders in columns (4)-(6), the coefficients of interest both double in size. This suggests that the changes in Sweden-Democrat support associated with the make-work-pay reforms and the financial-crisis recession indeed reflect higher support in particular population segments, and not changes in the population composition.

**Holding constant immigration and other covariates** As discussed in Section 2, the rhetoric of Sweden Democrats has been markedly anti-immigrant. Much existing research stresses how immigration shocks could boost radical-right support by promoting economic insecurity among natives who worry about scarce jobs (Billiet et al., 2014; Hangartner et al., 2019; Sekeris and Vasilakis, 2016), or scarce government welfare programs (Borjas, 1999). Sweden-Democrat proposals and campaigns indeed fuel such threats.

Figure W8 in the Web Appendix plots average Sweden-Democrat vote shares against the share of the population made up by immigrants in the municipality or the precinct. While the raw data show a positive correlation, this relationship disappears once we include the local population shares of labor-market outsiders and vulnerable insiders. Perhaps more importantly, the results in Table 1 become if anything stronger, not weaker, when we include a control for the share of foreign born in the municipality – see the middle panel of the table.

In the lower panel of Table 1, we add an additional set of controls that appear in earlier research on the radical-right. We describe these additional variables in more detail in the Web Appendix (Section W3). The additional controls do not change the estimates for income inequality when we use the current population shares, but do substantially reduce the point estimates when we use the pre-event population shares. The estimates for unemployment inequality are also reduced in size, but they do remain substantial and precisely estimated. Moreover, only two immigration variables (immigrant share including Nordic born and the change in the immigrant share) and one crime variable (rape and sex offenses) are positively and significantly related to the Sweden Democrat vote share, when added on their own. Most importantly, our main estimates are only marginally affected by the immigration and crime controls individually. Table W4 in the Web Appendix displays the full set of coefficient estimates from different specifications with immigration and crime controls.

**Bottom line** While we do not wish to make strong claims about causality, our approach, based on the insider-outsider distinction, does offer a helpful point of departure to analyze the timing of

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13 Billiet et al. (2014) and Guiso et al. (2017) show that economic insecurity is associated with anti-immigrant attitudes in the European Social Survey. Moreover, the most vulnerable economic groups exaggerate immigrant numbers, which triggers further anti-immigrant sentiments (Alesina et al., 2018).

14 Before the 2010 election, a party commercial featured burka-clad women with strollers winning a running race for the national budget against senior ladies with walkers. The message – a culturally distinct group crowds out support for vulnerable Swedes – could not be clearer. The video was censored by Swedish Public TV, which helped make it viral.

15 Specifically, we add controls for the share of foreign born outside the OECD, the share of foreign born outside the OECD plus people born in Sweden with at least one parent born outside the OECD, the change in the proportion of immigrants since the last election year, the share of immigrant outsiders in the municipal population, the weighted industry share of immigrants, the election year to election year change in that variable, and finally the weighted occupation share of immigrants. In addition we use statistics provided by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, to control for the total number of crimes per inhabitant, and the number of crimes per inhabitant in two sub-categories: larceny (most proximate to gang violence), rape and sex offences (massively politicized by the Sweden Democrats), and total crime. In these data, attempted offences are counted as crimes, and multiple offences against the same person are each counted as an individual crime.
Sweden-Democrat growth. It helps us lay bare two candidate triggers, namely the extensive 2006 fiscal reforms and the deep 2008 financial-crisis recession, which coincide with the party’s most rapid growth. These triggers account for a substantial portion of the within-municipality variation in the growth of Sweden-Democrat vote shares.16

The stable results for our labor-market measures and the fragile results for immigration variables may at first appear surprising. But it is worth bearing in mind (data and results available upon request) that: (i) Sweden did not see any dramatic immigration hike during 2006-2014, (ii) absent such hikes, the Swedish public did not become more anti-immigrant according to survey data, (iii) attitudes to immigration did not shift differentially across the labor-market groups we have emphasized. A better understanding of the electoral role of the radical right’s anti-immigrant rhetoric is an important task for future research.

6.3 Shared Political Attitudes?

Why would politicians who come from a certain outsider group receive higher electoral support from that group? A plausible mechanism is that a shared trait – like outsider labor-market status – credibly signals to voters that the candidate will represent them faithfully.17 A related mechanism is that voters find it is easier to trust candidates that look more like themselves.18

Survey data Do Sweden-Democrat politicians espouse the same political attitudes as their voters? As mentioned in Section 2, anti-establishment and anti-immigration views permeate the Sweden-Democrat program. To shed light on these views, we turn to survey data. Specifically, we compare distrust in the national parliament as a proxy for anti-establishment views (as in Figure 2). When it comes to anti-immigration views, we use a question about refugee immigration. We use the fact that politicians and voters were asked exactly the same questions in the 2017 KOLFU and SOM surveys. Because voters stated their party sympathies, we can check whether the attitudes of politicians and voters from a certain party are congruent. These unique features make it worthwhile to consider these surveys, even though they took place after our sample period.

Attitudes towards immigration The left graph in Figure 11 compares the views of voters and politicians on a proposal to reduce refugee immigration, with average politician views on the horizontal axis and average voter views on the vertical axis. Each party is marked by a circle (the diameter is proportional to the 2014 parliamentary-election vote share). Among voters for parties other than the Sweden Democrats (the unfilled circles), only 5-35 percent see reducing immigration as a very good proposal, as do 2-25 percent of the other-party politicians. These percentages contrast starkly with the views of Sweden-Democrat supporters and politicians (the filled circle). Among supporters, 80 percent think that restricting refugee immigration is a very good idea and about 90 of the party’s politicians agree.

[FIGURE 11 ABOUT HERE]

16 An extended analysis in the Web Appendix uses yet another sub-categorization of economic outsiders to support the analysis in this subsection. We show that the party’s electoral success is correlated with a larger presence of particularly hard-hit groups in local populations, and that these groups are particularly over-represented among Sweden Democrat politicians.
17 Such credibility, together with an inability to commit to electoral platforms, is the analytical basis for citizen-candidate models in political economics (Besley and Coate, 1997; Osborne and Slivinski, 1996).
18 This possibility is part of the argument in Guiso and Makarin (2020).
Attitudes towards the establishment  The right graph in Figure 11 compares levels of distrust in the political establishment. Among other parties, only 5-25 percent of voters and politicians say that their distrust in parliament is high or very high. Among the Sweden Democrats, the corresponding number is about 60 percent.

The unfilled and filled markers in both graphs lie close to the 45-degree line, showing congruence between the attitudes of voters and politicians in each party. Remarkably, the highly congruent views of Sweden-Democrat voters and politicians strongly diverge from the attitudes held by voters and politicians in all other parties. In other words, other parties cannot credibly represent voters of the Sweden Democrats in terms of their policy preferences. The filled and unfilled circles are on opposite sides of the 45-degree lines, with Sweden-Democrat (other-party) politicians expressing even stronger (weaker) antipathies than their voters do.

Bottom line  The shared political attitudes of Sweden Democrat politicians and voters and their stark differences from other-party politicians and voters strengthens our preliminary interpretation that the party’s electoral success, to some degree, reflects its representation of outsider groups. To say it in the language of Pitkin (1967), descriptive representation may have held out hope for substantive representation.

However, this interpretation would be implausible if the Sweden Democrats were made up of opportunistic politicians who have simply reshuffled themselves from another party. Voters would hardly swallow the implicit promise in descriptive representation – a stable tie from traits to attitudes – for politicians who abandon a mainstream party for a populist radical-right alternative.

We can look at this issue in our ballot data since the 1982 election (10 elections in total). As many as 90 percent of Sweden-Democrat local councilors have never appeared on a list for another party, and 98 percent have never been elected for another party. The corresponding numbers are much lower for the other parties (results available upon request). Thus, Sweden Democrat politicians do not look like opportunistic (office-motivated) candidates, who become Sweden Democrats because they judge their chances in other parties as poor.

6.4 Valence Costs?

The rise of the Sweden Democrats suggests a notable plasticity of Sweden’s democracy. As discussed in Sections 4 and 5, the new party gave voice to previously underrepresented outsider groups in Swedish society. But a frequent question mark around descriptive representatives (e.g., Phillips Griffiths and Wollheim (1960) and Pitkin (1967)) is that they may be less able to perform the tasks necessary to represent their voters – i.e., they may have lower valence than other politicians.

Does the rise of the Sweden Democrats entail a tradeoff of this kind? Specifically, do politicians in the Sweden Democrats differ from those of other political parties, when we move beyond economic and social groups to various valence traits?

Relative experience  Figure 12 compares politicians from different parties on a set of traits chosen to approximate an aptitude for local politics. The left graph shows the difference between the shares of Sweden-Democrat and other-party politicians who have experience holding a political councilorship, a public-sector job, and have a tertiary education. The difference in political experience is about −40 percentage points, a natural disadvantage for a newer party made of novices. The differences in other expertise variables are only somewhat smaller: compared to Sweden-Democrat politicians, other-party politicians are 35 percentage points more likely to have held a job in the public sector.
(the major concern in Swedish local politics), and above 25 percentage points more likely to have a tertiary education.

[FIGURE 12 ABOUT HERE]

Relative ability, motivation, and morality  The right graph in Figure 12 shows differences in a few other traits, all measured in terms of standard deviations (in the politician sample). The leftmost dot shows the difference in the earnings score, an ability measure developed by Besley et al. (2017) on the basis of residuals estimated from a rich Mincer equation for the whole population. Since we know that the Sweden Democrats are more often outsiders, we deliberately reduce their disadvantage by comparing the earnings score only for politicians who are labor-market insiders (hold a steady job). Among these insiders, Sweden-Democrat politicians still score 0.5 standard deviations below other-party politicians. In the Web Appendix (Table W5), we detail the levels of each valence variable for the Sweden-Democrat politicians and those of other parties.

While we compute the earnings score from register data, the remaining scores in the figure come from our own 2017 KOLFU survey among the universe of local politicians. With a smaller sample of about 9,000 politicians, the confidence intervals are a bit wider. In the middle, we consider public-service motivation in the form of a so-called Perry score. As suggested by administration scholars Kim et al. (2012), we compute this score from the answers to a battery of questions about private and altruistic motives. On average, Sweden-Democrat politicians score 0.6 standard deviations below politicians in other parties. Lastly, we use the HEXACO module of questions developed by social psychologists Lee and Ashton (2004) to construct an index for morality (honesty and humility). Sweden-Democrat politicians again score the lowest, now by about 0.25 standard deviations.

Bottom line  As these comparisons show, the Sweden Democrats do not just represent other groups in society compared to the established parties. Their representatives carry different qualifications, attitudes, and outlooks on life. Of course, the Sweden-Democrat politicians make up a particular selection of social and economic outsiders and some of their traits may not be representative for outsiders at large.

So, while the Sweden-Democrat politicians are likely to be descriptive representatives of their voters, and – as shown in Subsection 6.3 – share some of their voters’ attitudes, such descriptive representation and common views may not turn into substantive representation due to a representation-valence tradeoff.

7 Final Remarks

The global rise of the populist radical right as a political force is perhaps the most important political phenomenon in the last couple of decades. Our paper relies on unique individual data to describe the politicians and voters of the Sweden Democrats, a highly successful populist radical-right party. We draw upon insights from social psychology to delineate groups of economic and social outsiders that may be particularly receptive to the Sweden Democrats’ anti-establishment and anti-immigrant program.

Our findings, which are strictly descriptive, show the Sweden Democrats in a very specific light, reflecting both strengths and potential weaknesses of a democratic political system. On the one hand, the Sweden Democrat politicians overrepresent social and economic outsiders in the population, whereas other-party politicians underrepresent those groups. Thus the Sweden Democrats descriptively represent groups of voters – especially those marginalized in the labor market – whose
relative position has deteriorated, and who have lost faith in the political establishment. This reflects a democratic system that may get stronger by adjusting its representation patterns as social fortunes, and the conditions for credible representation, change. In the world of identity politics, policy stances may become credible when entering candidates share the socioeconomic traits of voters, and thus appear committed to representing them faithfully. Indeed, our survey data uncover how central political attitudes on immigration and the establishment coincide among Sweden-Democrat voters and politicians.

On the other hand, we show that the Sweden Democrats may weaken the political system in which they grew. Populist radical-right politicians score lower than other-party politicians on a broad set of skills. On “hard” skills like education or public-sector experience, this may be a natural consequence of outsider representation. But on “soft” skills like morality and public-service motivation, the lower scores of the Sweden Democrats – not common to all outsiders – do bear on the ongoing debate about populism and democracy. Populist radical-right parties may offer a voice for marginalized groups, but if they gain power their anti-government stance and lower soft skills may negatively affect government function.

We believe that our description of Sweden-Democrat politicians and voters might serve as a stepping stone for further research. To the extent one finds similar results for populist radical-right parties in other countries, future efforts should delve deeper into theoretical modeling and empirical identification of causal effects. These efforts might include examining how bonds of credibility are forged in political systems, and when exactly parties enter and exit the political scene.
References


Figure 1: Sweden-Democrat Votes and Seats over Time.

Notes: Vote share is defined as the share of votes in the national parliamentary elections. The number of seats is based on administrative data from the Swedish Electoral Agency.
Figure 2: Trust in Parliament in Different Labor-market and Family Categories

Notes: The graph shows the proportion of politicians or voters who respond that they have “low trust” or “very low trust” in the national parliament and the share stating that “Reducing refugee immigration” is a “Very good proposal.” The voter data is from the (annual) 2004 to 2015 SOM surveys, and the politician data from the 2017 KOLFU survey. As the KOLFU responses are linked to (some) registers, we can use the same definitions of groups as in the text. As the SOM survey response are not linked to any registers, we have to rely on an alternative definition of outsiders. Relying on the SOM background data, we define a voter as an outsider if she is employed in a government labor-market program, unemployed, on disability insurance, non-employed, or employed with a low household income. The SOM background data does include occupation, so we can use the same definitions of vulnerable and secure insiders as in the text.
Figure 3: Comparison of Labor-market, Social-background and Family Categories

Notes: The figure compares the composition of labor-market categories (left), social background categories (middle) and family categories (right) among Sweden Democrat politicians, the population, and politicians the left party and in all other parties. The politicians are all municipal councilors elected in 2002, 2006, 2010, or 2014, in pooled cross-sections. The population bars are average shares in pooled cross-sections of the full population of permanent residents in 2002, 2006, 2010, and 2012. The labor-market categories follow the SELMA model of labor market attachments, (detailed in Section 3 and Appendix Section W2). Data from 1979 were used to compute the quartiles of annual earnings for the fathers among all men with the same birth year. Fathers are only included if they are of adult age in 1979 (i.e., 18 or older). Family type is measured in administrative data, available for the full population and drawn from the Marriage and Birth Registers. These registers are based on mandatory personal ID codes, are available for all permanent residents in each year, and are linked to politicians via their personal ID codes. Partnership is approximated as two adults of similar age with the same family ID code and residing on the same address.
Figure 4: Labor-market, Social-background and Family Categories in Sweden Democrats Relative to Other Parties, Conditional on Demography and Geography.

Notes: The figure shows regression estimates for the relative size of labor-market (left), social-background (middle) and family categories (right) among Sweden-Democrat politicians compared to politicians from other parties. A y-axis value of 1 means that a certain category is twice as large (100 percent larger) in the Sweden Democrats than in other parties. Regressions are run without control variables (black dots) and with controls (gray dots, see legend for details). The data is pooled cross-sections for all municipal councilors in 2002, 2006, 2010, and 2014. The classification into categories is detailed in Figure 3.
Figure 5: Representation of Economic and Social Groups in Municipal Assemblies.

Notes: The figure plots binned averages of shares of social groups among elected municipal councilors (y-axis) against the share of the same social group in the municipal population (x-axis). The gray dots show the representation of each group among Sweden-Democrat politicians, and the black dots show the representation in all other parties. The dashed, 45-degree line shows where the share of a group among the elected politicians perfectly corresponds to the population share. The shares are calculated as an average across all elections between 2002 and 2014 and plotted for the pooled cross-sections. Municipalities are dropped if there are no elected Sweden Democrats. They are also dropped from the top-right graph if there are zero labor market insiders elected from the Sweden Democrats. The classification into categories is detailed in Figure 3.
Figure 6: Sweden Democrats Electoral Success across Municipalities and Precincts.

Notes: The figure shows correlations between the Sweden Democrats’ vote share and four socioeconomic characteristics of local populations: the share of labor-market outsiders (left), the share of vulnerable labor market insiders (center left), the share with fathers in the lowest income quartile (center right), the share of people whose father’s income belonged to the lowest quartile in 1979 (center right), and the share of singles or divorced (right). The classification of the categories are detailed in Figure 3. The top row of graphs is based on data from 290 municipalities and four election years (2002, 2006, 2010 and 2014). These plots include year fixed effects so that the y-axis shows deviation from the election year mean. Each point is the average of 5 observations. The bottom row of graphs compares 5,000 electoral precincts in three election years (2002, 2006 and 2010). These scatter plots include interacted fixed effects for municipality and election year so that the y-axis shows deviations between precincts and the municipality-mean within election years, and the x-axis shows deviations from the municipality mean. Each point is the average of 50 observations.
Figure 7: Descriptive representation of economic and social outsiders in new political parties

Notes: The figure compares the fraction of people in four marginalized groups among the municipal councilors for four new political parties to the fraction in the Swedish adult population. The observations correspond to the first year of entry to parliament of each party: 2010 for the Sweden Democrats and 1991 for the other three (the Green Party first entered in 1988 but due to data quality issues we also use 1991 observations for this party).

Figure 8: Vote shares of new political parties by the population shares of economic and social outsiders

Notes: The figure shows binned averages of vote shares of three new political parties in the 1991 election. The level of observation is a cross-section of Sweden’s 290 municipalities, and the X-axis shows the share of economic and social outsider categories in the municipal population.
Figure 9: Income Trends and SD Vote Support Trends based on labor market status

Notes: The left graph shows trends in real average disposable income for labor-market insiders and outsiders with year 2002 as a common baseline model. The right graph shows estimates from a bivariate regression correlating the municipal share of labor market outsiders and the vote share for the Sweden Democrats in each election.

Figure 10: Job-Insecurity Trends and Relative Political Representation of RTI Quartiles

Notes: The left graph shows trends in relative risk of receiving unemployment benefits for those that where secure vs. vulnerable labor-market insiders in 2006. The right graph shows estimates from a bivariate regression correlating the municipal share of vulnerable labor market insiders and the vote share for the Sweden Democrats in each election.
Figure 11: Anti-immigration and Anti-establishment Attitudes of Elected councilors and Self-identified Voters for Sweden Democrats and Other Parties

Notes: The figure shows averages of two attitudes in survey data among politicians (x-axis) and voters (y-axes). Filled circles are averages for Sweden Democrats and unfilled circles are averages for the other parties in the Swedish parliament. The left graph shows anti-immigrant preferences, measured as a dummy variable for the opinion that “Reducing refugee immigration” is a “Very good proposal.” The right graph shows the proportion with “high distrust” or “very high distrust” in the national parliament. Voter data is from the 2017 SOM survey and politician data from the 2017 KOLFU survey.

Figure 12: Traits of Elected Sweden-Democrat Councilors Compared to Other-party Councilors

Notes: Data on political experience, public sector experience, tertiary education and earnings score come from administrative registers for municipal councilors elected in 2002 to 2014. Data on public-service motivation, honesty-humility and generalized trust come from the 2017 KOLFU survey (sources for the different survey instruments are detailed in the text).
Table 1: Regression Results for Municipal Sweden Democrat Vote Share in Parliamentary Elections

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2006 Population Shares: ✓ ✓ ✓

Notes: Robust standard errors clustered at the municipality level are in parentheses. All regressions are estimated with OLS and include municipal and election period fixed effects. Additional immigration controls include the share of foreign born outside the OECD, the same share plus people born in Sweden with at least one parent born outside the OECD, the change in the proportion of immigrants since the last election year, the share of immigrant outsiders in the municipal population, the weighted industry share of immigrants, the election year to election year change in that variable, and finally the weighted occupation share of immigrants. The crime controls are total crime, total number of crimes per inhabitant, and the number of crimes per inhabitants in two sub-categories: larceny, and rape or sex offences.