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Producers and Takers:

The Socioeconomic Narrative of Sweden Democrat Voters

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Abstract

Recently, several academic studies have proposed a theoretical ‘producerist framework’ to address the lack of research and conceptual clarity on the economic dimension of national populism. Essentially, this framework refers to a narrative that pits *the producers*, understood as citizens that contribute to the nation’s economic wealth, against parasitic *takers*, who threaten the producers’ well-being by exploiting the welfare system. This thesis contributes to this growing scholarly interest in the economic dimension of national populism by qualitatively interviewing Sweden Democrat voters and analysing their articulation of the producerist narrative. The approach is innovative in two ways: by being the first empirical study of Swedish producerism and by focusing on the previously understudied voters’ narrative. Having analysed the meanings and ideas articulated in the interviews, the thesis indicates the existence of a Swedish producerist narrative that shares many features with other European narratives, while at the same time having several key particularities related to the social democratic Swedish welfare system. Moreover, it is acknowledged that the meanings of the Swedish producerist narrative differ from the American, while still fitting within the overarching theoretical framework.

Keywords: Producerism, Sweden Democrats, Welfare State, National Populism

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1 Introduction

Swedes are not self-righteous *sostrar* [social democrats, derogatory] or spineless *borgare* [bourgeois, center-right politicians], we are honest, diligent and hardworking. And we, we deserve to feel safe and at home in our own country. We deserve a Sweden that is good – again.

Sweden will be good again – the Sweden Democrat’s election video 2022

As the evening of the 2022 Swedish general election day progressed, it became increasingly evident that the Sweden Democrats would narrowly defeat the Moderate Party. With all votes counted, the Sweden Democrats (SD) secured over 20 per cent of the votes, which meant that the Moderate Party for the first time since the 1970s did not find itself as the second-largest political party. Nevertheless, the Moderates formed a minority cabinet in coalition with the Christian Democrats and the Liberal Party. The coalition agreement, *Tidöavtalet*, specified the terms of the cooperation between the government parties and the SD, which, short of becoming part of the government coalition, was granted “equal influence over issues concerning the collaboration projects.”¹ In stark contrast to their neo-fascist roots in the 1980s² and pariah status after entering the national parliament in 2010,³ the Sweden Democrats had become a major party with significant influence on government policies. Despite SDs significant role in Swedish politics, there is a remarkable lack of consensus on one key issue: how to label the party. Is the SD a right-wing, or even right-extreme, political party as it is often depicted by political opponents⁴ and in the

¹ *Tidöavtalet* grants the SD a central role in decision making. It states that “[a] cooperating party that is not part of the government has full and equal influence over issues concerning the collaboration projects in the same way as the government parties.” *Tidöavtalet: Överenskommelse för Sverige*, 2 (2022).

² Whether the early SD should be labeled as neo-fascist (or in related terms) remains debated. However, scholars on populism generally agree that the SD has neo-fascist roots. On the SDs relation to neo-fascism, see Anders Hellström, *Trust us: reproducing the nation and the Scandinavian nationalist populist parties* (Berghahn Books, 2016), 39.; on the SDs “ambivalent relationship,” see Jens Rydgren and Sara van der Meiden, “The radical right and the end of Swedish exceptionalism,” *European Political Science* 18, no. 3 (01/01/ 2019). Furthermore, the first interim report of the “white paper,” written on behalf of the SD by an author chosen by the party, concludes that “a significant part of the founding generation had a background in Nazi, racist or undemocratic contexts.” Tony Gustafsson, “Sverigedemokraternas Vitbok, Delredovisning,” (2022).

³ Cornelia Leander, “Assessing pariah party status: Concept operationalization and the case of the Sweden Democrats,” *Scandinavian Political Studies* (04/04/ 2022).; Anders Backlund, “Isolating the Radical Right: Coalition Formation and Policy Adaptation in Sweden,” (Huddinge: Södertörns högskola, 2020).

⁴ See, for example, Leader of the Social Democratic Party and former prime minister Magdalena Andersson, “SD:s högerregim hotar grunderna i vår demokrati,” debate article, *Dagens Nyheter*, 06/05/2023.; Leader

media?⁵ Is the SD a true worker's party with its rhetoric of honesty, diligence, and hard work, as the opening quote suggests? The election campaign film further praises honest and hard-working people and goes on to declare that "no matter what, the Swede has worked diligently and munched. Sweden is built on hard work. Gunpowder and soot, of steel, sweat and broken backs."⁶ Moreover, the SD emphasises "the maintenance of a solidary-based welfare model" as one of the "most important tools in building a good society"⁷ and the 2022 election manifesto mentions welfare 42 times, comparable only to the Social Democratic and Left parties.⁸ Or, alternatively, has research on European populism correctly assessed that socioeconomics are virtually unimportant for the party compared to issues such as nationalism or authoritarianism?⁹

To examine the economic dimension of Swedish national populism more accurately, the present thesis argues for the need of an analytical framework that transcends the left-right political spectrum. To that end, it proposes a framework of *producerism*, which has been implemented by several scholarly authors in the United States as well as in a small but increasing number of research studies in Western Europe. In essence, the conceptual framework holistically addresses the national populist economic narrative of an antagonistic dichotomy of *producers*, understood as citizens that contribute to the nation's economic wealth, and the parasitic outgroup of *takers*, who threaten the producers' well-

of the Centre Party (C) Muharrem Demirok, C member of the European parliament Abir Al-Sahlani and C member of the Riksdag Jonny Cato, "Tydligt att samarbete med SD inte fungerar," debate article, *Svenska Dagbladet*, 21/04/2023.; Green Party member of the European parliament Alice Bah Kuhnke, "Regeringen viker ner sig för SD:s alla extrema krav," debate article, *Dagens ETC*, 03/05/2023.

⁵ See, for example, Sonya Angelica Diehn, "The astonishing rise of the right-wing Sweden Democrats," *Deutsche Welle*, 09/15/2022.; Charles Szumski, "Sweden's influential right-wing populists to review EU membership," *Euractiv*, 03/05/2023.; David Crouch, "Swedish election: far right makes gains but overall result on knife-edge," *The Guardian*, 12/09/2022.

⁶ Sverigedemokraterna, "Sverige ska bli bra igen – Sverigedemokraternas valfilm 2022," (2022). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yseFnoQb4c>.

⁷ *Sverigedemokraternas principprogram*, (Sverigedemokraterna, 2019).

⁸ Occurrences of *välfärd* [welfare] and related terms in the respective parties' 2022 election manifestos: The Left Party: 44 times *Vänsterpartiets valplattform 2022*, (Vänsterpartiet, 2022).; SD: 42 times *Sverigedemokraternas Valplattform 2022*, (Sverigedemokraterna, 2022).; the Social Democratic Party: 29 times (however in a considerably shorter manifesto than the SD), *Socialdemokraternas Valmanifest 2022 - Vårt Sverige kan bli bättre* (Socialdemokraterna, 2022).; the Moderate Party: 8 times, *Så får vi ordning på Sverige - Moderaternas valmanifest 2022*, (Moderaterna, 2022).; the Green Party: 4 times, *Valmanifest 2022 - Alla ska med när Sverige ställer om*, (Miljöpartiet de gröna, 2022).; the Christian Democrats: 4 times, *Redo för en ny regering - Valmanifest 2022*, (Kristdemokraterna, 2022).; the Liberal Party: 3 times, *Maktskifte för ett nytt Sverige. Liberalernas valmanifest 2022*, (Liberalerna, 2022).; the Centre Party: no mention, *För Sveriges bästa - Valmanifest 2022*, (Centerpartiet, 2022).

⁹ This position has been common in research on national populism since the early 2000s. In the 1990s, national populism was instead often associated with a neo-liberal stance on socioeconomic issues. This is further discussed in chapter 3.3.

being by exploiting the welfare system. The *takers* constitute both horizontal outgroups, such as immigrants or ‘the lazy poor,’ and vertical outgroups, such as ‘the political establishment’ or ‘the economic elite.’ These groups are narratively defined based on cultural values, such as work ethics and a sense of national belonging.

Methodologically, this thesis takes a narrative approach to qualitative interviews with Sweden Democrat voters. This approach provides an innovative perspective for multiple reasons. No previous study has empirically examined Swedish articulation of the narrative, the Nordic social democratic welfare system has not been a focal point in previous scholarly research on producerism, and the voters’ articulation of producerism remains understudied.¹⁰ Thus, by examining this national expression of the conceptual narrative as part of a wider Western European, as well as the North American context, this thesis contributes with empirical findings from a previously understudied context to the broader, internationally comparable analytical framework of producerism as proposed in previous research studies. To this end, the thesis answers the following research questions:

- To what extent does the theoretical concept of producerism provide an analytical framework for addressing the economic dimension of national populism in Sweden?
- What particular characteristics of producerism are articulated in the narratives of Sweden Democrat voters?

The thesis is organised as follows: Chapter 2 provides a review of available scholarly literature on producerism and related topics. Chapter 3 focuses on the theoretical framework of producerism. To provide a holistic understanding of the concept, the third chapter first provides an overview of the Swedish welfare system, followed by a brief historic background of research on national populism, a discussion about the current scholarly conceptual confusion about the economic aspect of national populism and lastly the presentation of a producerist framework. Chapter 4 outlines the method of narrative analysis and the qualitative interview study of SD voters. In chapter 5, the findings from the interviews are presented. Its subchapters are structured based on the four main features of producerism, as described in chapter 3.4. Chapter 6 provides a discussion of the findings

¹⁰ For references, see chapter 2.

in relation to previous research on producerism and other materials. Chapter 7 briefly presents the conclusions, summarising the discussion and concretely answering the research questions.

2 Previous research

This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the present body of research on producerism in Western Europe, based on a throughout examination of Lund University's digital and physical databases and resources, digital sources indexed by 'Google Scholar,' and the sources mentioned in academic publications on producerism. It includes a concise overview of research on the economic dimension of national populism (NP) in Sweden with a focus on the SD. Additionally, it presents a selection of academic studies on producerism in contemporary North America, as well as examples of its usage as a historical term for social movements in the 1800s and 1900s United States. Other applications of the term than those related to national populism are not accounted for, such as producerism within studies in law as a label for a legal arrangement that contrasts with consumerism.¹¹

In studies on Western European national populism, the concept of producerism has only recently been introduced, and only to a limited extent. Much of the academic work on the subject refers to three empirical studies. The earliest is the paper "Economic Populism and Producerism: European Right-Wing Populist Parties in a Transatlantic Perspective" (2019) by researchers on populism Gilles Ivaldi and Oscar Mazzoleni. The authors aim, with a transatlantic approach, to "develop a conceptual framework to address the economic dimension of right-wing populism," for which they propose producerism, primarily inspired by research on populism in the United States. The framework is demonstrated by an empirical analysis of differences and commonalities in the economic policies and discourses of several European and American right-wing populist actors. Ivaldi and Mazzoleni conclude that "economic populist frames are common to all of the parties under scrutiny, albeit subject, however, to different interpretations of the producerist antagonism and groups."¹² The second article, written by political scientist Philip Rathgeb in 2020, is titled "Makers against takers: the socioeconomic ideology and policy of the Austrian Freedom Party" and focuses mainly on the Austrian context. While Rathgeb only briefly mentions the term producerism, the case study resolves around the same themes, leading to the conclusion that "a conceptual approach based on producerist makers–takers distinctions

¹¹ See, for example, James Q. Whitman, "Consumerism versus Producerism: A Study in Comparative Law," *Yale Law Journal* 117, no. 3 (12/01/ 2007).

¹² "Economic Populism and Producerism: European Right-Wing Populist Parties in a Transatlantic Perspective," *Populism* 2, no. 1 (2019): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1163/25888072-02011022>.

may instead be a fruitful avenue to capture the policy positions and choices of PRRPs [populist radical right parties] in future research.”¹³ The third study refers to both of the above, but also criticises them: published in 2022, the article “The Welfare Agenda of the Populist Radical Right in Western Europe: Combining Welfare Chauvinism, Producerism and Populism” is written by sociologists and political scientists who specialise in nationalism and European politics Koen Abts, Emmanuel Dalle Mulle, Stijn van Kessel and Elie Michel. Although the theoretical frameworks of producerism in the three studies share many features, Abts et al. distinguish more clearly between producerism and welfare chauvinism and stress the multidimensionality of the welfare state. The authors qualitatively analyse party documents of national populist parties from four Western European countries – Belgium, France, Italy and the Netherlands – and conclude that “through the combination of chauvinism, producerism and populism, PRRPs formulate an apparently ‘egalitarian’, but in fact selective critique of the welfare state.”¹⁴ It should be noted that these authors have previously advanced the concept of producerism in earlier articles. For instance, the described article is based on a Dutch-language article from 2013 in which Abts and sociologist Thierry Kochuyt propose producerism as a label for the New Flemish Alliance.¹⁵ The latter article is also referred to by Mulle in the publication *The Nationalism of the Rich. Discourses and Strategies of Separatist Parties in Catalonia, Flanders, Northern Italy and Scotland* published in 2017, in which Mulle introduces the term ‘welfare producerism’ to conceptualise a phenomenon similar to what is analysed in the present thesis, however without clearly associating it with populism.¹⁶

In addition to the above, a limited amount of research has been published on producerism in (mainly Western) Europe, most of it in the last few years. In a 2022 article, Matthew E. Bergman analyses European Social Survey data of 14 Western European countries to demonstrate how government welfare spending might catalyse support for national

¹³ "Makers against takers: the socio-economic ideology and policy of the Austrian Freedom Party," *West European Politics* 44, no. 3 (2020): 654, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2020.1720400>.

¹⁴ "The Welfare Agenda of the Populist Radical Right in Western Europe: Combining Welfare Chauvinism, Producerism and Populism," *Swiss Political Science Review* 27, no. 1 (03/01/ 2021): 36, <https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12428>.

¹⁵ No further details can be provided as the full article was not available to me. However, it is referred to by multiple of the works presented below, wherefore I deemed it worthy to mention; Koenraad Abts and Thierry Kochuyt, "De vreemde bedreiging van de verzorgingsstaat," *Tijdschrift voor Sociologie* 34, no. 3 (2013).

¹⁶ *The nationalism of the rich: discourses and strategies of separatist parties in Catalonia, Flanders, Northern Italy and Scotland* (Routledge, 2017), 158.

populist political parties, arguing that producerism is part of the explanation.¹⁷ Regarding the French context, political scientists Tristian Guerra, Chloé Alexandre and Frédéric Gonthier analyse populist attitudes among Yellow Vest protesters, concluding that “producerism is key to make sense of the protesters’ populist attitudes and relationship to politics.”¹⁸ In another study on French politics, Maura Benegiamo and William Loveluck identify the discourse of two agricultural trade unions as an expression of producerist populism.¹⁹ In an article on the Portuguese national populist party Chega, which primarily focuses on other aspects of populism, political scientist Mariana S. Mendes determines that producerist views are articulated in the party’s political documents.²⁰ An article based on qualitative interviews with Austrian and Eastern German blue-collar workers by PhD candidate Paulus Wagner presents evidence that producerist values are widespread in this voter group.²¹ A somewhat different perspective is provided by social scientist Marko Grdešić in his article from 2017 on anti-bureaucratic populism in late 1980s Serbia. By analysing political cartoons, Grdešić demonstrates that populist tendencies can get strengthened if coupled with a producerist discourse.²² Furthermore, some studies apply the concept of producerism to contemporary politics without clearly connecting it to populism. An example of this is the article “The Producerist Narrative in Right-Wing Flandres” by Jérôme Jamin.²³ However, these are relatively few and take a different approach to the concept than the present thesis.

At the time of writing, no study has to my knowledge empirically examined producerism in a Swedish context. However, two articles explore related concepts and come to similar conclusions. The first, “Welfare Chauvinism in Populist Radical Right Platforms: The Role of Redistributive Justice Principles” is written by political scientist Laurenz Enns-

¹⁷ "Labour market policies and support for populist radical right parties: the role of nostalgic producerism, occupational risk, and feedback effects," *European Political Science Review* 14, no. 4 (11/26/ 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S175577392200025X>.

¹⁸ "Populist Attitudes among the French Yellow Vests," *Populism* 3, no. 1 (2020).

¹⁹ "Agrarian crises and producerist populism in French rural unions: limits and potential for an emancipatory rural politics," Article, *Sociologia del Lavoro*, no. 162 (01/01/ 2022), <https://doi.org/10.3280/SL2022-162008>.

²⁰ "Enough' of What? An Analysis of Chega's Populist Radical Right Agenda," Article, *South European Society & Politics* 26, no. 3 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13608746.2022.2043073>.

²¹ "Varieties of Laborism Social Inclusion and Exclusion in Working-Class Visions of the Political Economy," *Totalitarismus und Demokratie* 19, no. 1 (12/01/ 2022), <https://doi.org/10.13109/tode.2022.19.1.127>.

²² "Images of Populism and Producerism: Political Cartoons from Serbia's 'Anti-Bureaucratic Revolution'," *Europe-Asia Studies* 69, no. 3 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2017.1323325>.

²³ "The Producerist Narrative in Right-Wing Flanders," (2011).

Jedenastik, who conducts a qualitative analysis of election manifestos of the Sweden Democrats along with national populist parties in several other countries. Ennser-Jedenastik concludes that the SD advocate for non-natives to be excluded from some welfare benefits but are open to including them in others. The article thereby covers several aspects of producerism and will be further discussed in chapter 3. However, welfare chauvinism is not directly comparable to producerist narratives as it only refers to certain aspects of it, while overlooking for example resentment towards native ‘takers.’²⁴ The latter element is, however, accounted for in the second article: “Discursive constructions of otherness in populist radical right political blogs” by social scientists Inari Sakki and Katarina Pettersson. By adopting a discourse psychological approach, the authors suggest that the Swedish and Finnish national populist discourses contain both internal and external threats to the welfare system. However, the analysis is only partially comparative to the framework of producerism as other concepts are in focus, and it primarily focuses on discursive strategies in using political blogs to express national populist views.²⁵

As is the case for producerism, the economic dimension of national populism generally remains understudied in the Swedish context, with a number of exceptions. Sweden was perceived as an anomaly in Western Europe for a long time because of the absence of a successful NP party. In a 2008 article, political sociologist Jens Rydgren concludes that “Sweden’s RRP parties appear marginalised in a comparative Western European perspective,” noting the short-lived *Ny Demokrati* as the only political party to briefly defy marginalization. He points out that *Ny Demokrati* grew due to a shift to the right on socioeconomic issues among voters but suffered during the subsequent reverse trend. Rydgren concludes that “a combination of populism, xenophobia and ‘left-wing economics’ [...] would have been much better suited to mobilise voters.”²⁶ In 2015, five years after the SD passed the parliamentary threshold following the 2010 national election, political scientists Maria Oskarson and Marie Demker attribute the strong support from the

²⁴ Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik, "Welfare Chauvinism in Populist Radical Right Platforms: The Role of Redistributive Justice Principles," *Social Policy & Administration* 52, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12325>.

²⁵ Inari Sakki and Katarina Pettersson, "Discursive constructions of otherness in populist radical right political blogs," *European journal of social psychology* 46, no. 2 (2016).

²⁶ Jens Rydgren, "Sweden: The Scandinavian Exception," in *Twenty-first century populism : the spectre of Western European democracy*, ed. Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell (Basingstoke England ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 135, 39.

working class for the SD to their decreasing alignment with the Social Democratic Party and the weakening left-right polarization among the major political parties, which allowed for the increasing SD mobilisation of working-class voters with nationalist and authoritarian views.²⁷ Anders Hellström, Tom Nilsson, and Pauline Stoltz instead attribute the party's success to a narrative that blames immigrants for the failures of the welfare system and portrays the SD as its defender.²⁸ In 2020, political scientist Sven Schreurs demonstrates that the SD articulate a 'welfare nostalgic' and 'welfare chauvinistic' narrative, advocating for "generous welfare provision for select citizens and restrictive immigration policy." These citizens perceive themselves as hard-working, in opposition to non-natives and "undeserving natives' such as the 'work-shy' and welfare 'cheaters.'"²⁹ Thus, many of the ideas presented in the present thesis have been put forward in previous research on NP in Sweden, although without a coherent and internationally comparable analytical framework.

In research on populism in North America, particularly the United States, producerism constitutes a core concept and has been covered far more extensively than in research on populism in Europe. In the present paragraph, I present a selection of this research, attempting to provide a brief but holistic overview of various scholarly approaches to producerism in the region. A recent example is the book *Producers, parasites, patriots: race and the new right-wing politics of precarity* by political scientists Daniel Martinez HoSang and Joseph Lowndes (2019). The book emphasizes producerist resentment towards public employees and unions, which tends to be more pronounced in the United States than most Western European countries, but also towards 'poor people' due to their perceived lack of work ethic. It traces these sentiments to historical and contemporary economic and cultural conditions in the United States, particularly focusing on the central role of race issues. The authors conclude that, although producerist resentment against public sector unions had declined since a high mark during the Great Recession in 2007-2009, they remained a focal point in the conservative political discourse. Moreover, they note that the rise and election of Donald Trump reflects producerist sentiments, particularly

²⁷ Maria Oskarson and Marie Demker, "Room for Realignment: The Working-Class Sympathy for Sweden Democrats," research-article, *Government and Opposition* 50, no. 4 (10/01/ 2015).

²⁸ Anders Hellström, Tom Nilsson, and Pauline Stoltz, "Nationalism vs. Nationalism: The Challenge of the Sweden Democrats in the Swedish Public Debate," *Government and Opposition* 47, no. 2 (01/01/ 2012).

²⁹ Sven Schreurs, "Those were the days: welfare nostalgia and the populist radical right in the Netherlands, Austria and Sweden," *Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy* 37, no. 2 (2021).

the conservative narrative of a threat to the formerly politically dominant white ‘Silent Majority’ and Trump’s promise to the restoration of the previous order.³⁰ An older example is the book *Right-wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort* (2000) by Chip Berlet and Matthew N. Lyons. The book presents the producerist sense of a dual squeeze between “Elite Parasites,” partially imagined in conspiratorial terms such as “secret elites,” but also for example “government bureaucrats,” and “Lazy and Sinful Parasites,” including “blacks,” immigrants and feminists. The authors argue that this narrative is, furthermore, present in American politics and society beyond national populist politics and has historical roots as far back as colonial America and the Jacksonian democracy in the 19th century.³¹ The book concludes that producerism “remains today the most common populist narrative on the right, and it facilitates the use of demonization and scapegoating as political tools.”³² Researcher on political communication Reece Peck notes the longevity and significance of moral narratives of producerism in the United States, referring to it as “a political discourse that has been recycled in American political culture ever since the Jeffersonian era” in his book *Fox Populism: Branding Conservatism as Working Class*. Peck describes how *class*, perhaps seemingly contradictory, became central in the agenda of the conservative TV network Fox News during the Great Recession; although struggling with evident contradictions, Fox successfully deployed a discourse that framed the business elite as a *producing class*, being morally superior by contributing through a heavy tax burden and possessing a work ethic.³³ Moreover, writing on the Canadian context, researchers on labour geography Steven Tufts and Mark P. Thomas define producerism as “the economic emphasis on rewarding those who produce ‘useful’ things” and describe the presence of the concept within both left- and right populism. Regarding right populist producerism, the authors emphasize resentment against

³⁰ Daniel Martinez HoSang and Joseph Lowndes, *Producers, parasites, patriots: race and the new right-wing politics of precarity* (Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2019).

³¹ In the United States, the concept producerism has also frequently been applied in research on historic populism, in particular in connection to labour groups such as the Knights of Labor, the Greenback movement, and the Farmer’s Alliance, of the late 1800s. See, for example, Robert C. McMath, Jr. and Eric Foner, *American populism: a social history, 1877-1898*, 1st ed., American century series, (Hill and Wang, 1993), 65.; William L. Niemi and David J. Plante, "Antecedents of Resistance: Populism and the Possibilities for Democratic Globalizations," *New Political Science* 30, no. 4 (2008): 439-41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393140802486187>.; christine mchugh, "midwestern populist leadership and edward bellamy: "looking backward" into the future," research-article, *American Studies* 19, no. 2 (10/01/1978).; Michael Kazin, *The populist persuasion: An American history* (Cornell University Press, 1998).

³² Chip Berlet and M. Nemiroff Lyons, *Right-wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort* (Guilford Publications, 2000).

³³ Reece Peck, *Fox Populism: Branding Conservatism as Working Class* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

“lazy public sector workers,” similar to much of the literature on the United States.³⁴ However, in the context of the present thesis, I am cautious to the notion of a “left populist” equivalent, which the authors characterize as anti-elitist, mainly because the producerist narrative as conceptualized in chapter 3 is closely related to nationalist and chauvinist sentiments. Generally, the concept of producerism appears to be less prevalent in research on Canadian politics, and is primarily applied to historical populist movements of the 19th and early 20th century.³⁵ Finally, as an insight from another region, Benjamin Moffitt relates to the North American context in his chapter “Populism in Australia and New Zealand” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. Moffitt concludes that “Like North American populists, antipodean³⁶ populists also share a producerist notion of ‘the people.’” This notion is closely tied to an idealized rural identity of hard work, which is opposed to the multicultural and parasitic urban *takers*.³⁷

In conclusion, the theoretical framework of the present article is primarily based on the articles by Abts et. al., Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, and, to a lesser extent, Rathgeb. To capture the multidimensionality of the welfare state, the framework also incorporates five ‘criteria of deservingness’ articulated by sociologist Wim van Oorschot in his article “Who should get what, and why? On deservingness criteria and the conditionality of solidarity among the public.”³⁸

³⁴ Steven Tufts and Mark P. Thomas, “Populist Unionism Confronts Austerity in Canada,” *Labor Studies Journal* 39, no. 1 (03/01/ 2014).

³⁵ See, for example, William Ramp and Trevor W Harrison, “Libertarian populism, neoliberal rationality, and the mandatory Long-form Census: Implications for sociology,” (2012).; William L Niemi and David J Plante, “Democratic Movements, Self-Education, and Economic Democracy: Chartists, Populists, and Wobblies,” *Radical History Review* 2008, no. 102 (2008).; Jeffery M Taylor, “The Language of Agrarianism in Manitoba, 1890-1925,” *Labour/Le Travailleur* 23 (1989).

³⁶ The term relates to Australia and New Zealand

³⁷ Benjamin Moffitt, “Populism in Australia and New Zealand,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, ed. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (Oxford University Press, 2017).

³⁸ Wim van Oorschot, “Who should get what, and why? On deservingness criteria and the conditionality of solidarity among the public,” *Policy & Politics* 28, no. 1 (2000).

3 National populist producerism

In essence, producerism refers to a narrative about the well-being of the *producers* – those who contribute to the nation’s wealth and therefore deserve the benefits of it – being threatened by *takers* who exploit the benefits of the welfare state without contributing to it. The makers are portrayed not only in economic terms but also as culturally and morally superior to the takers. This definition is elaborated in chapter 3.4. However, a holistic understanding of the concept requires contextualisation within the broader context of national populism. Therefore, the elaboration of producerism is preceded by contextualisation within the broader context of Swedish national populism. Hence, this chapter is structured as follows: subchapter 3.1 provides an overview of the Swedish welfare state. Thereafter, in subchapter 3.2, a brief history of research on national populism is presented, which leads to a discussion about the current lack of research on, as well as conceptual confusion regarding the national populist stance on economic issues in subchapter 3.3. Taking this background into account, chapter 3.4 formulates a framework of ‘producerism’ based on previous research on the topic and sociological literature on the concept of ‘deservingness.’

3.1 The Swedish welfare state

The producerist narrative is largely a narrative about access to welfare benefits – as described in the basic definition of producerism, it divides society into one group that is seen as the producers of wealth and therefore deserving of welfare benefits, and one or multiple groups that are not. Therefore, by addressing welfare states in general and the Swedish one in particular, this section provides the background for the discussion of the producerist framework.

A minimal definition of the welfare state is provided by legal historian James Q. Whitman: “The welfare state can be regarded as the major institutional arrangement of western societies that contributes to a socially accepted allocation of resources among the members of a given society.”³⁹ Whitman captures the essence of the concept, but welfare states operate in radically different ways in different countries. An often-cited typology of

³⁹ Steffen Mau, *The moral economy of welfare states: Britain and Germany compared*, vol. 5 (Routledge, 2004), 1.

welfare states is that of the Danish sociologist Esping-Andersen.⁴⁰ He categorises welfare regimes into three clusters based on ideal types: *the liberal welfare state*, *the conservative, 'corporatist' welfare state*, and *the social democratic welfare state*. *The liberal model*, exemplified by the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia, is relatively limited and strict to encourage the market and work rather than relying on welfare subsidies. Compared to the other models, welfare is means-tested, basic and restricted to the poorest citizens, providing only a minimal safety net. There is generally a social stigma attached to receiving welfare. *The conservative model* is typical of central European states such as Germany, Austria and France. It is generally influenced by the social teachings of the Catholic Church and encourages traditional family patterns within the sphere of social support. This model includes traditional gender roles, such as families with a working husband and a housewife. The ideal type of the conservative welfare system interferes with family matters only when necessary. It largely supersedes private welfare providers, and benefits are linked to social status in the labour market, thereby preserving status differences and having only a weak redistributive effect. Sweden, on the other hand, is an example of a *social democratic welfare state*. In this model, welfare programmes are largely universal, meaning that the entire population is covered and provided by the state. In addition, the welfare system is far more comprehensive, integrated into society and ambitious than a mere safety net. These regimes are characterised by high levels of government intervention, taxation, and social equality.⁴¹

As the most distinct example of a social democratic welfare state following Esping-Andersen's ideal types, possibly besides Denmark, Sweden constitutes a particularly interesting subject of research on producerism. Conversely, as stated by much-cited Scandinavian historian Mary Hilson, "the welfare state is central to any discussion of the Nordic countries after 1945," which makes the lack of clarity on the economic stance of the SD striking. Still today, despite trends towards neo-liberalism, political support for a

⁴⁰ Esping-Andersen's typology of welfare is referred to by much of the literature which was consulted for the present thesis, such as Wim van Oorschot, "Making the difference in social Europe: deservingness perceptions among citizens of European welfare states," *Journal of European Social Policy* 16, no. 1 (2006): 30, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0958928706059829>; Abts et al., "Welfare Agenda," 25.; Ennsner-Jedenastik, "Welfare Chauvinism," 295-97.; Marius R. Busemeyer, Philip Rathgeb, and Alexander H. J. Sahm, "Authoritarian values and the welfare state: the social policy preferences of radical right voters," *WEST EUROPEAN POLITICS* (02/06/ 2021): 80-81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2021.1886497>; Mary Hilson, *The Nordic model: Scandinavia since 1945*, Contemporary worlds, (Reaktion, 2008).

⁴¹ Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The three worlds of welfare capitalism* (Princeton University Press, 1990).; Hilson, *The Nordic model*.

strong and far-reaching welfare state remains strong.⁴² Like in the other Scandinavian countries, the development of the Swedish welfare model is traditionally strongly associated with the Social Democratic Party. This narrative is, however, increasingly challenged by the Sweden Democrats (SD), who, in the words of political scientist Anders Hellström conceive that “the Social Democratic governments of later decades have deserted the idea of the People’s Home.” In the SD narrative, the party is the true heir to the “old” Social Democratic welfare project, embodied by the metaphor *folkhemmet*, or *the People’s Home*, which refers to an idealised past that the SD strives to restore.⁴³ Thus, the welfare state cannot be disregarded when addressing national populism and producerism in Sweden.

3.2 National populism

Populism is a highly contested concept. This statement has become something of a cliché in research on populism,⁴⁴ but the issue remains valid and needs to be addressed in any study of the subject, particularly in the present thesis, as it aims to explore a recent and debated contribution to the multitude of concepts and meanings used in scholarly discourses to make sense of populism. As early as 1971, when *populism* had only recently begun to be used beyond historical research on specific movements in the late 1800s,⁴⁵ political sociologist John Allcock noted that “In its short lifetime the concept of populism has travelled a long way [...] but we are no nearer to developing an acceptable use of the term.”⁴⁶ Half a decade and almost countless proposed definitions later, Cas Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser noted that “populism is one of the most contested concepts in the social sciences. [...] the discussion about populism concerns not just exactly what it is, but even whether it exists at all.”⁴⁷ Not only is there a lack of a common terminology: scholars disagree on the basic premise of whether populism can be considered an ideology at all, or

⁴² Hilson, *The Nordic model*, 87-88.

⁴³ Hellström, *Trust us*.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism, a very short introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 2.; Hellström, *Trust us*, 22.; *Right-wing populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse*, ed. Ruth Wodak, Majid Khosravi-Nik, and Brigitte Mral (Bloomsbury, 2013), 192.; Stijn Van Kessel, *Populist parties in Europe : agents of discontent?* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1.; Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, *Twenty-first century populism: The spectre of Western European democracy* (Springer, 2007), 2-3.

⁴⁵ John B Allcock, "Populism: A brief biography," *Sociology* 5, no. 3 (1971): 372.

⁴⁶ Allcock, "Populism," 379.

⁴⁷ Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism, a very short introduction*, 2.

rather a political strategy or a discourse.⁴⁸ Furthermore, much of the empirical work on populism focuses on specific regions and countries – this fragmentation renders cross-country generalisations difficult.⁴⁹

Although scholars disagree on what form or forms populism takes, there is a degree of consensus on some basic concepts. For example, most researchers agree that the populist conceptualization of society is based on an antagonistic divide between two discursively homogenised groups: *the people* and *the elite*.⁵⁰ Furthermore, many definitions include the notion of a *general will* that populist actors claim to understand and represent.⁵¹ Beyond these basic concepts, populism more or less needs to be coupled with other ideological perspectives to transcend an almost meaningless shell:⁵² this is often referred to as the ‘thin-centred nature of populism.’⁵³ In his much-cited 2004 article, Cas Mudde describes that “populism is only a ‘thin-centred ideology’, exhibiting ‘a restricted core attached to a narrower range of political concepts.’ [...] As a thin-centred ideology, populism can be easily combined with very different (thin and full) other ideologies, including communism, ecologism, nationalism or socialism.”⁵⁴ Thus, to approach a more useful conceptualisation, the following subchapter narrows the focus to *national populism* in Western Europe, referring to a type of populism that is discursively constructed in combination with ideological features such as nationalism, nativism, and anti-immigration.⁵⁵ This type of populism is often conceptualised as *right-wing populism* or *populist radical right*.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ See, for example, Michael Freeden, "After the Brexit referendum: revisiting populism as an ideology," (Taylor & Francis, 2017).

⁴⁹ Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al., *Populism: An Overview of the Concept and the State of the Art*, Oxford Handbooks, (Oxford University Press, 2017), 1.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism*, Oxford Handbooks in Politics & International Relations, (Oxford University Press, 2013).; Van Kessel, *Populist parties in Europe : agents of discontent?*; for an earlier example, see: Allcock, "Populism."

⁵¹ See, for example, Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism*.; Ruth Wodak, *The politics of fear : what right-wing populist discourses mean* (Sage, 2015).; on the African context: Danielle Resnick, *Populism in Africa*, Oxford Handbooks, (Oxford University Press, 2017).; on the East Asian context: Olli Hellmann, *Populism in East Asia*, Oxford Handbooks, (Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁵² Benjamin Moffitt, *Populism*, Key concepts in political theory, (Polity Press, 2020), 14-15.

⁵³ See, for example, Ben Stanley, "The thin ideology of populism," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13, no. 1 (2008), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310701822289>.; Teun Pauwels, *Populism in Western Europe: Comparing Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands* (Routledge, 2014).; Paul Taggart, *Populism in Western Europe*, Oxford Handbooks, (Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁵⁴ Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," research-article, *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (10/01/ 2004): 544.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Taggart, *Populism in Western Europe*.; Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism*.

⁵⁶ Although many other labels are used. For several example, see Bobrowicz Ryszard and Nowak Mattias, "Divided by the Rainbow: Culture War and Diffusion of Paleoconservative Values in Contemporary Poland," *Religions* 12, no. 170 (03/01/ 2021), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12030170>.; Hellström, *Trust us*,

However, this thesis problematises the notion that political parties that are included in this conceptualisation would be economically right-wing, which is why I consider the term *national populism (NP)* to be more appropriate. Although not the most common in research on the subject, it has been used in the Nordic context by the Swedish political scientist Anders Hellström.⁵⁷

3.3 The national populist stance on economic issues

Research on national populism has thus far suffered from a lack of scholarly conceptual clarity on economic issues. Insofar as scholars have written on the topic, national populist political parties (NPPs) have until recently mainly been described as holding vague or ambiguous positions. However, an increasing number of scholars argue that socioeconomic issues are in fact central to NPPs, and not necessarily neoliberal.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, despite the growing scholarly interest, this remains an understudied topic – there is for example little research on how NPPs that hold political office have acted with regard to socioeconomic policies.⁵⁹ This problem area that is deeply covered in this thesis' analysis.

During the 1990s, European national populist political parties were commonly associated with neoliberal economics. Several scholars attributed the electoral successes of several NPPs to what was referred to as the 'winning formula', a blend of authoritarianism, nationalism, and neoliberalism.⁶⁰ The winning formula was, however, soon disputed by a growing number of researchers. Instead, from around the early 2000s, the dominant view became that socioeconomic issues were either of secondary importance to NPPs, deliberately blurred, or that these parties took a centrist, if not left-leaning stance. For example, in a much-cited study from 2007, researcher on political extremism Cas Mudde asserts that “the economic program is a secondary feature in the ideologies of populist radical right parties. In fact, it is also secondary to their electorates.” Moreover, he rejects the winning formula, arguing that when they do take a socioeconomic stance, they usually

14.; Cas Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 11-12.

⁵⁷ Hellström, *Trust us*.

⁵⁸ Abts et al., "Welfare Agenda," 22.

⁵⁹ Rathgeb, "Makers against takers," 639.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Herbert Kitschelt and Anthony J. McGann, *The radical right in Western Europe : a comparative analysis* (University of Michigan Press, 1995).; Hans-Georg Betz, *Radical right-wing populism in Western Europe* (Macmillan, 1994).; Piero Ignazi, "The silent counter-revolution: Hypotheses on the emergence of extreme right-wing parties in Europe," *European Journal of Political Research* 22, no. 1 (01/01/ 1992), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.1992.tb00303.x>.

adopt fairly centrist positions.⁶¹ Some scholars, like sociologists Eger and Valdez, even go so far as to assert that NPPs may take leftist positions.⁶² Other studies suggest that RPPs intentionally refrain from taking a clear economic stance. Jan Rovny, for example, argues that these parties blur their positions on economic issues to instead compete with more established political parties in domains such as immigration or nationalism, which they are seen to have neglected. This strategy thus enables national populist parties to appeal to voters on both sides of the left-right political spectrum.⁶³ A similar position has been claimed by the leader of the Sweden Democrats Jimmie Åkesson, who argues that the party is neither right nor left, and that “for the voters, the left-right dimension is not anymore the most relevant. In a country where most of the population can be considered middle class, there is no appetite for class struggle. The old parties in power have a hard time accepting this fact.”⁶⁴

In the last couple of years, some scholars have begun to challenge the idea that economic issues are secondary to RPPs, particularly concerning economic redistribution and welfare. They argue that there has been confusion over the issue because researchers have not sufficiently taken into account that NPPs and voters hold various views depending on which aspect of the welfare state is under consideration and who it might benefit. Thus, while national populist actors indeed may articulate ambivalent or vague positions on the general level of welfare spending, they often seem to take a clear stance on specific aspects of it. More precisely, on some welfare issues, they appear to support the inclusion of certain groups, while excluding others. On other issues, however, they seem to favour a more universal system.⁶⁵ Various models have been proposed by scholars to conceptualise this theory. One notable example is *welfare chauvinism*, which can be summarised as supporting welfare benefits for natives while excluding non-natives. To put it simply, welfare chauvinism implies what could be simplified as a rightist stance on welfare for

⁶¹ Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 119-20, 36-37.

⁶² Maureen A. Eger and Sarah Valdez, "From radical right to neo-nationalist," *European Political Science* 18, no. 3 (2019/09/01 2019).

⁶³ Jan Rovny, "Where do radical right parties stand? Position blurring in multidimensional competition," *European Political Science Review* 5, no. 1 (2013).

⁶⁴ Translation by the author from Swedish: “För väljarna är det inte längre vänster-högerdimensionen som är mest relevant. I ett land där större delen av befolkningen kan räknas som medelklass finns inget sug efter klasskamp. De gamla maktpartierna har svårt att ta detta faktum till sig.” Jimmie Åkesson, *Det moderna folkhemmet: en Sverigevänlig vision* (Asp & Lycke, 2018), 18.

⁶⁵ See, for example, Abts et al., "Welfare Agenda.," Philip Rathgeb and Marius R. Busemeyer, "How to study the populist radical right and the welfare state?," *West European Politics* 45, no. 1 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2021.1925421>.

non-natives, but leftist concerning natives.⁶⁶ It is not a new concept within research on populism, originally coined in 1990 by political scientists Andersen and Bjørklund. The authors used the label *welfare state chauvinism* to address the increasing support for the populist Progress parties in Denmark and Norway, referring to the notion that “the welfare services should be restricted to ‘our own.’”⁶⁷ More recent research further substantiates the concept. For instance, Ennsner-Jedenastik analyses election manifestos of anti-immigrant parties in Sweden, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the UK, and shows that welfare chauvinism is a central element, although its intensity varies across policy areas.⁶⁸ While providing some insights into the economic stance of NPPs, welfare chauvinism only concerns ethnically motivated redistribution of welfare. Hence, the concept does not encompass the wide array of groups that national populist parties label as non-deserving of welfare benefits or posing a threat to the well-being of ‘the people.’ For example, a deeply rooted element of populist discourse in the United States is the characterisation of union members and public employees as ‘parasitic elements’ – they demand more, although already enjoying generous welfare benefits without sufficiently contributing to society.⁶⁹ Similarly, the French National Rally (Rassemblement National) sees not only immigrants as a threat to the well-being of the people, but also cosmopolitan elites, journalists, and ‘lazy poor’ people.⁷⁰

Therefore, the following subchapter introduces the concept of *producerism*. I argue that the concept provides a highly relevant framework that can encompass the multidimensionality of welfare states and include more elements than only the ethnically motivated exclusion of certain groups from welfare benefits. Furthermore, ‘producerism’ can provide an analytical frame for socioeconomic aspects of NP in different welfare systems, in Western Europe as well as in North America – this has recently been empirically tested by a small number of studies⁷¹ – thereby attempting to address the problem of research on national populism being too fragmented and focused on specific countries or smaller regions.

⁶⁶ Ennsner-Jedenastik, "Welfare Chauvinism."

⁶⁷ Jørgen Goul Andersen and Tor Bjørklund, "Structural changes and new cleavages: The progress parties in Denmark and Norway," *Acta Sociologica* 33, no. 3 (1990): 212-14.

⁶⁸ Ennsner-Jedenastik, "Welfare Chauvinism."

⁶⁹ Martinez HoSang and Lowndes, *Producers, parasites, patriots*.

⁷⁰ Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, "Economic Populism," 18-19.

⁷¹ A transatlantic perspective is provided by Ivaldi and Mazzoleni in "Economic Populism."; multiple Western European countries in Abts et al., "Welfare Agenda."; and Bergman, "Labour market".

3.4 A conceptual framework of ‘producerism’

The framework of producerism presented in this thesis is primarily based on a 2018 paper by political scientists Gilles Ivaldi and Oscar Mazzoleni, who suggest that the concept can provide a useful analytical framework for the economic aspect of Western European populism. In short, producerism conceptually links the economic dimension with cultural issues, addressing the academic debate about whether the growing support for NPPs is chiefly due to cultural backlashes or economic anxieties.⁷² Accordingly, as political scientists Rathgeb and Busemeyer note in a 2022 article, “‘cultural’ and ‘economic’ explanations are much more complementary than usually portrayed in academic debates,” because “economic and cultural developments interact in shaping a ‘status anxiety’ that increases the likelihood of voting for the radical right.”⁷³ Based on Ivaldi and Mazzoleni’s framework, this status anxiety is based on the idea that ‘the producers’ – a group of people perceived to be the true contributors to society, who are driven by work and honest and therefore superior both economically and culturally – are threatened by ‘parasitical takers’ at the top and bottom of society. Thus, the authors define producerism as “essentially [...] the idea that ‘the ‘producers’ of the nation’s wealth should enjoy the economic fruits of their own labors.”⁷⁴ Moreover, it addresses the academic debate about classifying NPPs as politically left or right: “populist producerism clearly operates beyond the traditional boundaries of the economic left and right, providing an alternative model of particularistic redistribution of wealth and resources restricted to the community of producers.”⁷⁵ Producerism has, however, until recently primarily been applied in research on populism in the United States. Ivaldi and Mazzoleni instead suggest that the concept fills the gap in internationally applicable and comparable frameworks: “producerism may be seen as a common ideological bond between right-wing populist movements and actors across both sides of the Atlantic,” it can provide “a new – and fruitful – perspective from which to study right-wing populism across different contexts and deepen our general understanding of the populist phenomenon as a whole.”⁷⁶ With this in mind, the framework is further elaborated based on the four core features of producerism as formulated by Ivaldi and Mazzoleni:

⁷² Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, "Economic Populism."

⁷³ Rathgeb and Busemeyer, "How to study," 7.

⁷⁴ Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, "Economic Populism," 6.

⁷⁵ Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, "Economic Populism," 27.

⁷⁶ Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, "Economic Populism," 27, 8.

- *the producers,*
- *the uncertainty of the people's economic well-being,*
- *a dual threat to the people's well-being, and*
- *the necessity for change and the promise to restore the producers' well-being.*

The first and third features, *the producers* and *a dual threat to the people's well-being*, can be likened to the populist conceptualization of society as a dichotomy between two antagonistic groups: an ingroup and one or multiple outgroups. The producers make up the ingroup that produces a nation's wealth and therefore deserves the fruits of the community's economic wealth, including welfare benefits. Moreover, the group is perceived as morally and culturally superior, united by common values such as honesty, work ethics and morality. The producers are opposed by the outgroup, the *takers*, who do not contribute to the welfare of the people and, as a result, do not deserve welfare benefits.⁷⁷ The takers constitute a *dual threat to the people's well-being*: similar to the national populist dual antagonistic opposition between 'the people' and 'the elite' on the one hand, and 'the people' and an, often non-native, outgroup on the other,⁷⁸ the producers are pitted against horizontal and vertical outgroups. Because the narrative construction of horizontal takers typically includes non-natives, it commonly involves an element of welfare chauvinism. However, the group often encompasses native groups as well, portrayed as unproductive welfare abusers. These are largely characterised as 'parasitic elements' that exploit the economic wealth of the community without contributing to it. Moreover, these groups are considered morally and culturally inferior to the makers due to their perceived lack of work ethic and moral values. The non-native takers are additionally, according to Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, "undeserving by default of their ethnic background or immigrant status, and therefore cannot redeem themselves by becoming producers." On the other hand, vertical takers are mostly categorised as a corrupt elite and typically include politicians, cosmopolitan elites, government bureaucrats and global elites.⁷⁹ While Ivaldi and Mazzoleni do not elaborate further on the vertical takers, other scholars suggest that the elites are held responsible for mismanaging the allocation of welfare benefits, enabling the horizontal takers to abuse the system, and for being corrupt and self-serving.⁸⁰ The

⁷⁷ Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, "Economic Populism."

⁷⁸ Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe*, 22-23.

⁷⁹ Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, "Economic Populism," 8.

⁸⁰ Abts et al., "Welfare Agenda," 35.; Rathgeb, "Makers against takers," 642.

second feature, the *uncertainty of the people's economic well-being*, is part of a broader populist rhetoric of, in the words of Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, “fragility, stagnation or decline in the economic well-being of the community.”⁸¹ Researcher in European politics Stijn van Kessel provides a concrete example of how this feature has been successfully deployed by describing how European national populist parties deployed welfare chauvinistic narratives during the 2008 financial crisis and gained support among voters who experienced economic insecurity.⁸² Moreover, the sense of uncertainty includes cultural concerns – the perceived threat to the producers' economic well-being leads to a fear of cultural marginalisation relative to the outgroups, such as immigrants or liberal elites, who represent inferior cultural values. The final feature, the *necessity for change and the promise to restore the producers' well-being*, is essentially a response to the last two points, the sense of a threat to, and the uncertainty of the people's economic well-being. Donald Trump's slogan “Make America Great Again” is perhaps the most well-known example of this feature and how it alludes to the a nostalgic narrative of an idealised past that needs to be restored. Therefore, as Ivaldi and Mazzoleni note, the national populist producerist narrative includes an “economic-populist recreation of an ‘idealised’ past and a lost era of ‘real’ community values” and, as a response to the perceived threats against this, promise to restore the community's economic well-being, including its traditional values and social hierarchy.⁸³

The four features of producerism presented above provide the foundation for a conceptual framework for this study, but possess certain limitations. To begin with, Ivaldi and Mazzoleni do not provide a systematic conceptualization of the underlying criteria for deserving welfare benefits. Although they do mention some examples of makers and takers, such as ‘the native middle-class’ and immigrants respectively, I argue that a more systematic framework would provide a more precise basis for the present study, not the least for formulating the interview questions. To develop a more systematic conceptualization of this issue, some authors suggest the sociological concept of (*welfare*) *deservingness*.⁸⁴ Accordingly, I will build my framework on two such studies by Wim van Oorschot, professor of Social Policy. In the first study from 2000, he suggests five criteria

⁸¹ Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, "Economic Populism," 7.

⁸² Van Kessel, *Populist parties in Europe : agents of discontent?*, 26.

⁸³ Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, "Economic Populism," 8-9.

⁸⁴ See, for example Abts et al., "Welfare Agenda."; Dalle Mulle, *The nationalism of the rich.*; Paulus, "Varieties of Laborism."

of deservingness based on findings from earlier studies and tests them against a public opinion survey conducted in the Netherlands:

1. *control*: poor people's control over their neediness, or their responsibility for it: the less control, the more deserving;
2. *need*: the greater the level of need, the more deserving;
3. *identity*: the identity of the poor, ie their proximity to the rich or their 'pleasantness'; the closer to 'us', the more deserving;
4. *attitude*: poor people's attitude towards support, or their docility or gratefulness: the more compliant, the more deserving;
5. *reciprocity*: the degree of reciprocation by the poor, or having earned support: the more reciprocation, the more deserving⁸⁵

In the second study, published in 2006, van Oorschot expands the material to include 23 European countries. The results suggest that there is a common deservingness culture across Europe – the results repeat the pattern from earlier empirical studies in which elderly, sick, and disabled people are considered most deserving, while unemployed are seen as less deserving and immigrants the least. Furthermore, individuals with low trust in welfare state institutions and democracy show higher levels of conditionality, especially towards immigrants.⁸⁶ Generally, the criteria of deservingness add to the framework a more precise understanding of both economic and identity considerations in the makers-takers dichotomy. Based on these criteria, a more differentiated analysis of for example the producerist narrative on poverty can be made – depending on the moral condition of a perceived level of *control*, the interviewees proved to not view all poor as takers, but instead discriminate between the “deserving poor,” that is victims of circumstances that are not within their control, and “undeserving poor,” perceived as, for example, lazy or irresponsible. As another example, the elements of *identity*, *need* and *reciprocity* provide a more precise analytical framework for the differentiation that several interviewees made between different groups of immigrants, as shown in the analysis.

Furthermore, Ivaldi and Mazzoleni do not systematically distinguish between different aspects of the welfare state, such as pensions and unemployment benefits. Failing to

⁸⁵ van Oorschot, "Who should get what."

⁸⁶ van Oorschot, "Making the difference."

account for the multidimensionality of the welfare state generally remains a deficiency in research on national populism and has contributed to the conceptual confusion about national populist parties' positions on economic issues and placement on the left-right spectrum. According to Rathgeb and Busmeyer, this lack of differentiation has resulted in analyses that are "too crude to capture how different dimensions of the welfare state affect voting behaviour at the micro level as well as the dynamics of party competition and policy making at the macro level"⁸⁷. Ennsner-Jedenastik provides a specific example that highlights this point: inquiring the Sweden Democrats' manifestos, he does not find any opposition against family allowances and notes that the party might "find it more difficult to take an anti-family position, even regarding non-natives" compared to some other welfare programs.⁸⁸ Thus, to provide a more nuanced discussion of the Swedish producerist narrative, this thesis strives to distinguish between different aspects of the welfare states.

To summarize, the present thesis aims to address the economic dimension of national populism as articulated by voters for the Sweden Democrats through an analytical framework of producerism. The framework is based on four aspects of producerism – *the producers*, *the uncertainty of the people's economic well-being*, *a dual threat to the people's well-being*, and *the necessity for change and the promise to restore the producers' well-being*. Moreover, it adds five criteria of deservingness to systematically address the producerist distributive agenda: *control*, *need*, *identity*, *attitude* and *reciprocity*. Lastly, it accounts for the multidimensionality of the welfare state.

⁸⁷ Rathgeb and Busmeyer, "How to study," 9.

⁸⁸ Ennsner-Jedenastik, "Welfare Chauvinism," 307.

4 Narrative method and interviewing Sweden Democrat voters

The first subchapter outlines the narrative approach taken to address the economic aspect of Swedish national populism. Therein, I assume that various producerist narratives across different national contexts can be considered part of a broader producerist narrative and thus can be analysed using the common framework introduced in the previous chapter. Thereafter, in subchapter 4.2, I clarify how the primary data for the narrative analysis was collected by conducting qualitative interviews with Sweden Democrat voters. This method aims to address the lack of attention given to voters generally, and Swedish voters specifically, in research on producerism. Lastly, chapter 4.3 addresses the main methodological limitations of the thesis.

4.1 The narrative approach

The present thesis employs a narrative approach to examine Sweden Democrat voters' articulations of producerism, an approach which is in line with that of a substantial part of existing literature on producerism and populism.⁸⁹ Populism is, however, generally not considered one coherent narrative. Instead, populist sentiments can be viewed as being articulated through different and sometimes contradictory narratives about for example history, morals or class.⁹⁰ The same can to a degree be said about producerism. For example, Ivaldi and Mazzoleni note that "one might also expect diversity regarding how producerist narratives are deployed according to different ideological traditions, as well as contextual opportunities for populist mobilization."⁹¹ Accordingly, because the features of producerism largely can be equated with the concept "empty signifiers"⁹² – meaning terms that can be attributed different meanings or be interpreted differently, rather than carrying specific meanings themselves – they account for different articulations of producerism in different contexts.⁹³ Thus, the four features presented in chapter 3.4 constitute a coherent definition which allows for the operationalization of producerism as a comparative analytical framework for national populism in different contexts: the different meanings

⁸⁹ See, for example, Guerra, Alexandre, and Gonthier, "Populist Attitudes " 8.; Reece Peck, "'You say rich, I say job creator': how Fox News framed the Great Recession through the moral discourse of producerism," *MEDIA CULTURE & SOCIETY* 36, no. 4 (05/01/ 2014): 528, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443714527565>.; Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, "Economic Populism."

⁹⁰ See, for example, Ben Stanley, *Populism in Central and Eastern Europe*, Oxford Handbooks, (Oxford University Press, 2017).; Wodak, *The politics of fear*.

⁹¹ "Economic Populism," 9.

⁹² The concept of 'empty signifiers' is usually associated with discourse analytical methodologies, notably in the works of the influential political scientists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.

⁹³ Ernesto Laclau, *On populist reason* (Verso, 2005).

attributed to the categories, rather than the categories themselves, constitute the variables. For example, the ‘takers’ that constitute a threat to the producers’ well-being could in one national narrative primarily be articulated as ‘non-natives,’ but in another rather as ‘the lazy poor.’ Accordingly, the present thesis assumes that articulations of producerism in different national contexts can be generalised as national narratives which are articulated by different interrelated actors, such as supporters of national populist political parties. Furthermore, it assumes that the national producerist narratives are part of a broader, international⁹⁴ producerist narrative, which is in line with the aim to formulate an “internationally applicable and comparable” framework, as stated in chapter 3.4. Thus, the thesis focuses on interviews of Sweden Democrat voters, aiming to approach the Swedish producerist narrative in a national context and internationally comparative way.

As the interviews were prepared, conducted, and analysed based on the theoretical framework of producerism, the approach was primarily deductive, but it included inductive elements. Scholars rather tend to approach narratives inductively, with as few presumptions as possible instead of a set theoretical framework.⁹⁵ Thus, the reasons for opting for a deductive narrative method should be briefly addressed before specifying the operationalization of the narrative method. The aim is, namely, *not* to conduct an elaborated inductive narrative study of the economic and cultural sentiments of Swedish national populist voters, which could *potentially* lead to findings that can be conceptualised as producerism. It is, moreover, beyond the scope of the present thesis to conduct the number of qualitative interviews required for such a method. Instead, the aim is to apply the theory of producerism in a Swedish national populist context, thus examining the feasibility of producerism as a framework for addressing the economic dimension of Swedish NP. Thus, rather than conducting a comprehensive inductive study, the thesis relies deductively on prior research on national populism that is based on analyses of primary source material such as manifestos, statements, speeches, and policy choices of national populist political parties, as well as quantitative surveys of voters.⁹⁶ Nevertheless,

⁹⁴ At least concerning Western Europe and Northern America, which is the focus of the present thesis and most previous research on producerism, as described in chapter 2.

⁹⁵ Although it is often difficult to clearly differentiate between deductive and inductive approaches as they often overlap, and although it differs depending on research field, narrative methods tend to be operationalised primarily inductively. See, for example, Corinne Squire et al., *What is Narrative Research?* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 91.

⁹⁶ For example: Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, "Economic Populism."; Rathgeb, "Makers against takers."; Bergman, "Labour market "; Abts et al., "Welfare Agenda."

to address specific characteristics of producerism as articulated by Swedish NP voters, the approach includes an inductive element of, as described in the following subchapter, among other things keeping the interview questions open-ended for unexpected insights and themes from the interviewees.

Thus, I will clarify the narrative approach of the present thesis. A broad definition of the term is provided by Corinne Squire et al. in their handbook for narrative research: “A narrative is first of all a set of signs, which may involve writing, verbal or other sounds, or visual, acted, built or made elements that similarly convey meaning.”⁹⁷ In conducting interviews, my aim was to identify elements that may relate to or contradict the producerist narrative. The elements are, however, not mere descriptions from a narrative standpoint: rather, they convey meanings, providing insights into how people make sense of the told. Devoid of meaning, a narrative would be reduced to a simple set of signs, without conveying the narrator’s opinions and explanations. However, narratives and meanings do not exist in a vacuum. Squire et.al. add to the definition that a “narrative must also carry some particular, rather than only general, meanings,” that is, meanings are “specific to a certain historical and social context.”⁹⁸ For the present study, it is not crucial whether producerism as articulated by the individual interviewees include all the components of a narrative in a strict sense (which is, however, highly dependent on which definition of narrative is considered). What matters is rather how the narrative can be related to, and give further insights into, broader Swedish, Western European, and transatlantic narrative frameworks. The interviews are therefore approached with an open definition of a narrative. However, because the interviews are presented as transcribed quotes, the analysis focuses on verbally communicated signs rather than for example paralinguistic signs.⁹⁹

Importantly, the producerist narrative cannot be examined as an isolated phenomenon. It is closely connected to the national context, including narratives of the Swedish welfare state,

⁹⁷ Squire et al., *What is Narrative Research?*, 5.

⁹⁸ Squire et al., *What is Narrative Research?*, 5-6.

⁹⁹ Paralinguistic signs, such as laughter, breaks, sighs, and facial expression, are not presented in the present chapter. They were, however, to an extent valuable for my interpretation of the narratives. However, this leads to a common limitation of narrative analyses – the narrative is reconstructed and interpreted, and thereby influenced by, a researcher and their subjective biases. The solution, to present the transcribed quotes, is only partial, as only I, the interviewer, have access to interpreting the paralinguistic signs. This limitation was, however, not deemed significant enough to motivate the additional presentation and analysis of paralinguistic signs, which is beyond the limited scope of the present masters’ thesis.

notably including the metaphor of the *folkhem*, and the historical close relationship between trade unions and the Social Democratic Party. Moreover, producerism can hardly be analysed without addressing concepts such as populism, welfare chauvinism and nationalism. These points are key to addressing the research question of which particular characteristics of producerism are articulated in the narrative of voters of the SD. Therefore, as highlighted in the framework, different aspects of the welfare state and ‘deservingness criteria’ should be accounted for. To this end, a narrative method provides an analytical frame to capture the complexity and multidimensionality of producerism, as articulated by SD voters in a Swedish context, and in relation to other narrative producers, such as SD leader Åkesson or official party documents.

4.2 Qualitatively interviewing Sweden Democrat voters

The primary data for the analysis was gathered by conducting semi-structured interviews with four Sweden Democrat voters. The interviews lasted between 40 and 70 minutes and were conducted as online video calls. Below, I address the main methodological considerations for the interview study, loosely based on the phenomenological approach to semi-structured qualitative interviews, as described by professors of psychology Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale. They formulate a number of aspects of the method, out of which the most relevant are presented here. The first key aspect is *life world*, which recommends that the interview topics should be relatable to the experiences and lives of the interviewed. The framework of producerism is abstract and theoretical, but the interview questions based on it are related to local and national issues, focus on personal opinions and can be associated with individual stories. The second aspect, *meaning*, can be expressed both implicitly and explicitly and relates to how the interviewees make sense of the life world. This is a core concept in narrative analysis methods and is addressed in the previous subchapter. Additionally, the *qualitative* aspect is central to the analysis method, as the aim is to capture a nuanced narrative based on a complex theoretical framework. Moreover, the interview method *deliberate naiveté* refers to having an open interview approach instead of being overly tied to preformulated questions based on a framework. This was applied in line with the semi-structured approach. In other words, although the questions were formulated based on the framework of producerism, they were largely openly formulated to accommodate for unexpected themes to be brought up. Finally, two interconnected aspects, *interpersonal situation* and *positive experience*, were crucial for

building trust between the interviewer and the interviewees, as well as for limiting the sense of power asymmetry which typically derives from the researcher having control over the questions and a monopoly on interpreting the results. To establish a positive interpersonal dynamic, rooted in mutual trust, I aimed, amongst other things, to demonstrate knowledgeability, curiosity and interest in personal experiences, as well as openness about the goals and methodology of the study.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, following the semi-structured method, feedback from the interviewees was continuously taken into account: interview questions were discussed to improve subsequent interviews and unexpected themes were discussed further with other interviewees.

The interview study was limited to Sweden Democrat voters. As argued in chapter 3, producerism is closely related to national populism. Among the major political parties in Sweden, only the SD are generally considered to represent this ideology.¹⁰¹ Although other national populist political parties and movements do exist, they are marginalised and not represented in the national parliament.¹⁰² Furthermore, identifying individuals with national populist attitudes that do not support national populist parties was not practically feasible for the present thesis. The interviewees were identified using a combined criterion and snowball sampling method. The primary criterion was, naturally, supporting the SD, either by voting for the party in the last election or regarding it as the preferred party at the time of the interviews. The secondary criterion was that the interviewees should be “normal voters,” rather than representants of the party. This was in line with the aim to

¹⁰⁰ Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale, *InterViews: learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*, 3., [updated] ed. (Sage Publications, 2015), 33-35.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, Ann-Cathrine Jungar, "The Sweden Democrats," in *Understanding populist party organisation : the radical right in Western Europe*, ed. Reinhard Heinisch and Oscar Mazzoleni, Palgrave Studies in European Political Sociology (2016), 190.; Rydgren, "Sweden: The Scandinavian Exception," 146-49.; Kai Arzheimer, "Electoral sociology - who votes for the Extreme Right and why - and when?," in *The populist radical right : a reader*, ed. Cas Mudde (Routledge, 2017).; Hellström, *Trust us.*; Ralph Schroeder, "The Dangerous Myth of Populism as a Thin Ideology," *Populism* 3, no. 1 (01/01/ 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1163/25888072-02021042>.; Taggart, *Populism in Western Europe*, 252.; Simon Oja and Brigitte Mral, "The Sweden Democrats Came In from the Cold: How the Debate about Allowing the SD into Media Arenas Shifted between 2002 and 2010," in *Right-wing populism in Europe : Politics and Discourse* (Bloomsbury, 2013).; Van Kessel, *Populist parties in Europe : agents of discontent?*, 67.

¹⁰² For example, then newly formed national populist Ny Demokrati (New Democracy) entered the national parliament with 6.7 % of votes in the 1991 general election. In the following election of 1994, the party got 1.4 % of votes and thereafter neglectable results: Oja and Mral, "The Sweden Democrats " 19.; "Valresultat i Sverige 1921–2018," *Valforskningsprogrammets faktablad* 2018:29. https://www.gu.se/sites/default/files/2020-03/1711742_2018-29-valresultat-1921-2018.pdf.; another example of a national populist party is Alternativ för Sverige (Alternative for Sweden), which was formed by expelled members of the SD. The party's best result was just over 20 000 votes in the national election of 2018: Maik Fielitz et al., "Från Nordiska motståndsrörelsen till alternativhögern: En studie om den svenska radikalnationalistiska miljön," (Försvårshögskolan, 2020), 125.

address the understudied demand-side of producerism, rather than for example policy choices, communications from party representants or party manifestos. It is, however, difficult to draw a clear distinction between voters and decision-makers in a political party. Furthermore, politically active individuals proved to be easier to identify and recruit, as they tend to be more active on social media connected to the SD, more open with their support of the party and more willing to participate in the study. Active supporters and party members also tended to have more connections to other voters, who thereby could be accessed through snowball sampling, a method of recruiting further interviewees among contacts of the already contacted or interviewed. Therefore, the sample included voters active in local politics. Beyond these two criteria, the sample was primarily based on access and largely random.

Before further specifying how the interviewees were sampled, the size and representativeness of the sample should be addressed. Admittedly, there are differences between the sample and average SD voters. The interviewees were, for example, significantly more politically active than the average voter and all identified as men. At the same time, the sample varied in other aspects, such as age, place of residence and place of origin. Moreover, as the interviewees are largely politically active, they can be considered information rich. Because the aim of this thesis is not to reach statistically generalizable conclusions, these limitations to the sample are deemed acceptable. As for determining whether the sample is sufficient for addressing the research questions, different strategies can be employed. Jill Francis et. al. for example suggest that even on a relatively homogenous sample, at least ten interviews should initially be conducted, whereafter the interviews are continued until at least three consecutive interviews without new key data indicate saturation.¹⁰³ Similarly, Greg Guest, Arwen Bunce and Laura Johnson conclude that homogenous samples tend to be largely saturated after around twelve interviews.¹⁰⁴ However, because the present thesis is based on a theoretical framework and assumptions of the producerist narratives as formulated in previous research, it suffices that the key aspects of Swedish producerism emerge from the interviews. With this in mind, significantly fewer interviews can in some circumstances be sufficient to provide accurate

¹⁰³ J. J. Francis et al., "What is an adequate sample size? Operationalising data saturation for theory-based interview studies," *Psychology & Health* 25, no. 10 (2010): 1234, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08870440903194015>.

¹⁰⁴ "How Many Interviews Are Enough?: An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability," Article, *Field Methods* 18, no. 1 (01/01/ 2006): 74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903>.

data for most of the basic elements. For example, anthropologists Romney, Batchelder, and Weller suggest that as few as four informants can provide highly accurate information, provided that they have a high level of competence within the surveyed cultural context, which in this study can be compared to knowledge about SD voters and the topics covered.¹⁰⁵ Guest, Bunce and Johnson demonstrate that most data in a saturated study is present after the first six interviews.¹⁰⁶ Thus, although it is difficult to draw general conclusions about sufficient sample sizes,¹⁰⁷ I argue that at least four to six qualitative interviews with SD voters that are knowledgeable about the topics covered and represent different voting groups as defined by factors such as age, place of origin and occupation can be expected to provide sufficient data for addressing the research questions. This is especially the case as the results are compared with and complemented by among other things previous research on the SD and producerism, statistics and party documents.

Sweden Democrat voters were approached in three ways based on the criteria and the sampling methods described previously. First, by reaching out to commentators on open Facebook groups with connections to the SD. The second approach used the snowball method by contacting regional spokespeople of *Ungsvenskarna SDU*, the youth wing of the party, to request contact details of members. The third approach was once again based on the snowball method, asking the interviewees to provide further contacts. All four interviewees were anonymised, and pseudonyms were used. The interviews took place in the following order:

- Viktor: Man, 20s, janitor from Southern Scania. Has voted for the SD in all elections, apart from the regional election of 2018 when he voted for the Moderate Party.

¹⁰⁵ A Kimball Romney, Susan C Weller, and William H Batchelder, "Culture as consensus: A theory of culture and informant accuracy," *American anthropologist* 88, no. 2 (1986): 326.

¹⁰⁶ Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, "How Many Interviews Are Enough?: An Experiment with Data Saturation and Variability," 59.

¹⁰⁷ Many scholars hesitate to recommend a specific initial sample size altogether, see, for example: Mark Mason, "Sample Size and Saturation in PhD Studies Using Qualitative Interviews," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 11, no. 3 (2010): 3.; Oliver C. Robinson, "Sampling in Interview-Based Qualitative Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 11, no. 1 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2013.801543>.

- Mikael: Man, 60s, retired from Northwestern Scania. Has mainly run his own business. Worked within the mechanical engineering sector and for the last couple of years with property management.
- Filip: Man, 20s, service engineer from Southern Scania. Voted for the Moderate Party in 2018, the first in which he was eligible to vote, and for the SD in 2022.
- Lukas: Man, 20s, student in political sciences from Östergötland. Voted for the SD in 2022, the first in which he was eligible to vote.

4.3 Methodological limitations

The following chapter briefly addresses the main methodological limitations of the present thesis: the representativeness of the interview material, the possibility that the interviewees adapt their responses to the context and the relatively small sample size.

Two central limitations are the representativeness of the interview subjects as “normal voters” and the possibility of the interviewees adapting their responses to the context. These limitations are interrelated and should be addressed holistically. To specify the first issue, it proved difficult to recruit interview participants from the group that in the previous chapter is crudely summarised as “normal voters.” Because of that, the interviews were conducted with SD voters that were politically involved on a local level, either as elected members of municipality councils or by being engaged in the party’s youth section. This was not my initial intention; I attempted several recruiting methods that proved relatively ineffective. Most requests were ignored, and a majority of the responders were sceptical, negative or in some cases hostile towards the prospect of participating in an interview. Although other recruiting methods, such as attending physical SD events, could possibly have yielded a larger and more representative material, time and budget constraints rendered such methods unfeasible. Thus, the primary material does not constitute a “normal voter” perspective to the extent that was intended. The second limitation, the risk that the interviewees adapted their responses to the context, was likely increased by their political engagement. The interviewees likely viewed themselves as party representatives with at least some responsibility for its public image. In this, political and social contexts probably played a crucial role. For example, the social stigma associated with supporting

the SD¹⁰⁸ and the image of academics and students (and thereby me as a researcher) as politically opposed to the party¹⁰⁹ likely influenced the way that the participants responded to the questions. This potential issue, as well as the limitation of representativeness, was, however, mitigated by several factors. Firstly, the interviewees were made aware of the anonymization, which limited the risk of them being personally held responsible for their responses. Secondly, the respondents were not likely to be media-trained, which increased the likeliness of direct and honest answers. Thirdly, none of the participants had been members of the SD, nor held political roles, for more than up to a few years, and solely on a voluntary basis. Lastly, the scope of the interviews enabled the establishment of a trustworthy environment and a limited relationship between me and the interviewees through social interaction. This seemingly led to increasingly sincere and comprehensive responses over the course of each interview. Moreover, both latter factors partially reinforce the argument that the interviewees do not represent a principally top-down, or elite, party perspective, despite them admittedly not entirely representing “normal voters” either. With the aim of the present thesis to provide a new perspective in mind, this can be compared to analyses of political elite narratives in most comparable scholarly research on producerism, for example with members of the party programme drafting committee of the Austrian FPÖ¹¹⁰ or speeches by and interviews with the leader of the Italian Lega, Matteo Salvini.¹¹¹

Another factor that limits the conclusiveness of the study is the relatively small number of interviews. As argued in the previous subchapter, at least four to six qualitative interviews could be expected to provide accurate data for basic elements of the research topic, provided that the participants are information-rich and representative of the population which is the subject of the study. Despite this, and although other primary and secondary sources were included to verify the results, more interviews would have benefited the conclusiveness of the study.

¹⁰⁸ Hellström, *Trust us*, 153.

¹⁰⁹ This was brought up by most interviewees. Mikael stated that social pressure, political correctness and a lack of knowledge hampered support for the SD in the university context of Lund. Lukas and Viktor attributed this tendency to students, and young people generally, being liberal or socialistic.

¹¹⁰ Rathgeb, "Makers against takers."

¹¹¹ Irene Landini, "Beyond welfare chauvinism? Populist radical right parties' social policies and the exclusion of migrants from national welfare in Italy," *Italian Political Science* 16, no. 2 (03/01/ 2022).

In conclusion, these factors limit the conclusiveness of the study, but the results can be considered indicative, providing a foundation for further research, and indicating that producerism can indeed be considered an analytical framework for the economic dimension of national populism in Sweden. Furthermore, the particular characteristics of this narrative are indicative of the characteristics of the Swedish producerist narrative. Although these results are further reinforced by previous research on producerism and other primary sources, for example party documents, further investigations must be conducted to provide more generalisable results.

5 Findings

In this chapter, the findings from the interviews are presented and briefly commented. The structure follows the four aspects producerism as introduced in chapter 3.4: *the producers*, *the uncertainty of the people's economic well-being*, *a dual threat to the people's well-being*, and *the necessity for change and the promise to restore the producers' well-being*. These results provide the primary material for the discussion in chapter 6.

5.1 The producers

A narrative of *producers* as a culturally superior ingroup, united by common values of honesty, work ethics and morality, who constitute the worthy recipients of the nation's economic wealth, was articulated by the interviewees. However, as anticipated in the theoretical framework, the producers were primarily defined in opposition to the outgroup, the *takers*, which is further discussed in chapter 5.3. Moreover, the interviewees framed the Sweden Democrats as the political party that best represents and understands *the people*, a concept and discursive label that frequently occurred in the interviews in a way comparable with *the producers*.

The interviewees associated the producers with values such as work ethics, personal responsibility for their own well-being and the willingness to contribute to the national economic prosperity. For example, Mikael, an interviewee in his 60s living in Northwestern Scania, stated that "it is not the state's job to make people rich"¹¹² and further elaborated:

Mikael: But, I guess I have to see myself as some kind of mediocrity. I am a poor pensioner.

If you want to put a name to something.

David, *the interviewer, and author of the present thesis*: Okay, yes.

Mikael: But that's only because I've run a company all my life and taken a very low salary, but always to leave as much money as possible in the company. And then you have to organise your pension in some other way.

David: Would you say that you have undeservedly little money – would you say that you, given what you have achieved and accomplished, should have more money?

¹¹² This citation, as well as all forthcoming citations that are not specified as originating from other sources than the conducted interviews, are translated by the author from transcripts of the four interviews with SD voters. For the original transcripts, see appendix: Translations of the cited interview transcripts.

Mikael: Absolutely not. The thing with poor pensioner, that's the pension that the state pays out. That's the name for it, and as I said, it's not much to count on, but at working age you have to take care of your own pension that will come later. And I have done that. So I, I'm not poor in that way.

David: Right, individual responsibility is important?

Mikael: Yes, exactly.

Mikael did not oppose welfare benefits; he supported it as a backup in case of sickness or injury. However, he viewed the mentioned values as conditions for deserving welfare benefits, contrary to people unwilling to contribute to the economic prosperity or immigrating to Sweden to take advantage of the system. The other interviewees articulated a similar narrative of the producers, but less directly, rather referring to the undeserving takers' lack of these values.

Moreover, the interviewees frequently framed the *producers* in terms of nationality and citizenship. These characteristics were largely defined in opposition to non-nationals and non-citizens, which are further discussed in chapter 5.3. However, I will briefly address the concept of *folkhem*¹¹³ already because it was central to the articulated narrative. Essentially, the interviewees agreed with the Sweden Democrats' articulation of the concept as formulated in the 2019 party manifesto: "The vision of a restored folkhem, where belonging is not based on class, but on nationality, and where all citizens are guaranteed a high level of physical, economic and social security, also guides the Sweden Democrats' welfare policy."¹¹⁴ Belonging to the folkhem, and thereby being entitled to the benefits of the welfare system, was thus linked to being a Swedish citizen and part of the Swedish nation. This belonging, in turn, was narratively associated with the attributes of producers: hard work, honesty, and national identity. For example, Filip, a service engineer from Southern Scania, commented on the formulation of the manifesto with the following remark:

¹¹³ *People's home*. The term is a Swedish political concept of welfare state that was adopted by social democratic prime minister Per Albin Hansson in the 1920's, although it was originally used in a conservative anti-labor movement discourse.

¹¹⁴ Author's translation, from Swedish: "Visionen om ett återupprättat folkhem, där samhörigheten inte är baserad på klass, utan nationstillhörighet, och där alla medborgare är garanterade en hög nivå av fysisk, ekonomisk och social trygghet, är också vägledande för Sverigedemokraternas politik på välfärdsområdet." *Sverigedemokraternas principprogram*, 21.

Isn't that the dream scenario? When it is then that we are Swedes, all of us. Like, and we have a connection to each other, we have a connection to our country. It would be wonderful if that were the case. [...] My idea of being part of the nation, it's that you are a Swedish citizen. You love your country. You contribute, above all, that's probably the most important. In other words you play your part. So it becomes a society that helps each other. It becomes a big "we" instead.

Thereby, in line with the assumptions of the theoretical framework, the interviewees defined producers based on a combination of economic and cultural values of, as summarised by Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, "the 'true' people as an economic community of hardworking people who share a common destiny."¹¹⁵

Moreover, the issue of class should be briefly addressed. *The people* was partially defined as a working-class phenomenon. For example, Filip pointed out the following:

SD have become the party for the working class. First of all. And it is there that they have taken over completely. Then they've also taken over everything concerning rural issues, which are the ones I find interesting, because I have a long way to drive, that is, for example, I have a long way to drive to work. They want to reduce fuel prices.

However, social and economic class did not appear to be a strong determinant for defining the in-group in the narrative. Mikael opposed using the label in a Swedish context, while the others vaguely identified themselves as working and middle class respectively.

5.2 The uncertainty of the people's economic well-being

The sense of uncertainty of the people's well-being is summarised by Ivaldi and Mazzoleni as "the anxieties and fears of economic decline, pessimism, and a sense of loss of status, dignity and values among voters who feel socially and culturally marginalised by the dominant liberal culture."¹¹⁶ The interviewees did not articulate any significant sense of threat to the participants' personal economic well-being. Instead, there was a more general sense of societal decline with certain negative economic implications, which is further detailed below.

¹¹⁵ Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, "Economic Populism," 3.

¹¹⁶ "Economic Populism," 7.

The respondents generally expressed satisfaction with the general level of state welfare spending. Filip and Lukas advocated even for a higher level. For instance, Lukas, a student in his 20s, expressed that he “would like to see more money spent on welfare. We have a welfare system today that is undersized.” Although the respondents were divided on what welfare policy area should be prioritised, education, old-age pensions, healthcare, and child benefits were generally viewed favourably, while ‘unnecessary’ university educations such as gender studies, mother tongue education, and foreign aid were seen as a waste of tax money. However, rather than the distribution between welfare areas, the impression that welfare benefits went to the wrong people was depicted as a major problem. For example, Viktor, a janitor in his 20s, expressed that “It's too open, that's a burden on welfare, which causes it to work poorly in general. But if you had just reduced how open it was, it would have worked very well.” Filip provided a similar argument: “But there are so many people taking part in the welfare system who don't actually contribute to it. And in many cases this is what causes it to fail.” The distribution issue is closely connected to the dual threat to the people's well-being and will be further discussed in the next subchapter.

Furthermore, all interviewees except Mikael expressed a sense of societal decline. Both Filip and Viktor identified the start of the decline during the cabinets of social democratic prime minister Olof Palme, 1969-1976 and 1982-1986. Although initially slow, the decline accelerated over time. Not only the Social Democratic Party was blamed, however, as both interviewees accused the cabinet of the Moderate Party prime minister Fredrik Reinfeldt (2006-2014) for causing further decline, primarily by allowing high levels of immigration that led to problems such as criminality. Other than that, Filip and Viktor did not identify the precise causes and consequences of the decline. Lukas similarly addressed the problem, but pointed to a later starting date for the period of decline and more clearly addressed the issue of insecurity:

I can only go back to my parents, who are around 50 years old: when they were young - around the age of 10-20 - it was still quite calm. You could move freely in the streets and squares without having any problems with running into serious criminals. And yes, let's say that in the 80s and 90s this was the case. And they felt safe then. I think it was a safe society back then. That's my point of reference.

Although these narratives do not directly allude to a particular economic decline, they reflect a general sense of a lost, idealised past and an increasing, future oriented economic insecurity. This narrative was, for instance, articulated by Viktor as follows:

David: Which groups in society would you say are mainly negatively affected by what is not working well [with the welfare system]?

Viktor: Well, it is mainly those who are long-term sick and perhaps need, for example, I'm thinking of my aunt. She got cancer in her ear, I think it was, and she had surgery after about half a year. Now, the cancer didn't spread, so that was good, but you shouldn't wait that long in general. [...] So it's mainly those who are supposed to use it [the welfare system], in other words pensioners and so on. And the sick. They're the ones who are burdened, or the ones who take the hit, when it is burdened by people who don't contribute.

As exemplified, the narrative of uncertainty primarily concerned threats to native disadvantaged people, such as the long-term sick, the retired, and the poor.

5.3 A dual threat to the people's well-being

Following the framework of producerism, the dual threat to the people's well-being is constituted by the *outgroup* in the narrative of a makers-takers dichotomy: the producers are pitted against *non-native horizontal*, *native horizontal*, and *vertical takers*. The horizontal takers are generally characterised as a 'parasitic element,' taking advantage of the system without contributing to it. Generally, the interviewees emphasised non-native takers, while native takers, especially vertical, or elite, were less frequently mentioned.

Non-native horizontal takers

Immigration, integration, and criminality (implicitly and explicitly associated with immigration) were central issues to the interviewees and was framed as the most central threats to the people's well-being. The narrative of immigrants, primarily from outside of Europe, as non-deserving takers that constitute a threat to the welfare system was most directly articulated by Mikael:

Mikael: Well, now these famous Moderates [the Moderate Party] made sure that large groups from the Middle East and some from Africa come in, who do not contribute to any great extent. They just came to Sweden to be supported.

[...]

David: Would you say that they are entitled to the benefits of the welfare [system]?

Mikael: Not at all.

David: None of them or some of them?

Mikael: Some of them are of course individuals who are enterprising and do something, some of them have very quickly started a company and run it in Sweden. But most of them do not.

While largely agreeing with this narrative, the other interviewees framed it in less exclusionary terms. Filip, for example, stated that:

It serves no purpose to bring here, as we have now, if it was 700,000, who do not work. So it serves no purpose to bring them here then. Sure, they are fleeing from war. Absolutely. But it's better to bring half of them here and be able to get them into the labour market, for example.

As in these quotes, the respondents frequently highlighted the importance of reciprocity – earning welfare benefits by contributing to society – in relation to immigrants, arguing that they otherwise burden the system and thereby pose a threat to the deserving makers. This narrative was particularly strong in relation to healthcare, as for example expressed by Lukas:

So, yes, I take offence when a person who is perhaps from Sweden and has lived here all his life and worked for 40 years, and that person ends up in the healthcare queue and has to compete with people who have just arrived in Sweden and who have no connection to Sweden at all and have not worked in Sweden. That they have to compete for a hospital bed as well. I take offence. I think it's wrong. If you have worked in Sweden and paid into the system in Sweden, you should somehow be prioritised. Now, I would also find it difficult to say to this other person that 'just because you haven't worked in Sweden, we say stop and then you can lie down and die in your own misery.'

Although considering the situation problematic, Lukas admitted that it would be difficult in practice to completely excluding the non-deserving from the healthcare system, indicating that need plays a determining role for deserving welfare benefits.

Furthermore, the interviewees emphasized the criterion of belonging to the Swedish nation. All participants favoured largely limiting welfare benefits to include only members of the

Swedish nation, although they held different views of what the requirements for becoming 'Swedish' should be. Generally, it was not regarded as impossible for immigrants to become members of the nation. Several respondents associated nationality with citizenship, although they advocated for stricter requirements. Deserving citizenship was generally associated with multiple criteria, primarily *reciprocity*, *attitude*, and *identity*. For example, Filip referred to attitude as 'love for the country' and 'feeling as part of the society', and reciprocity as 'contributing to it'.

Filip: Well, my idea of being part of the nation is that you are, you are a Swedish citizen. You love your country. You do what's right for you, above all, that's almost the most important thing. You pull your weight. So it becomes like that, it becomes a society that helps each other. So it becomes a big 'we' instead.

David: Is it possible to become part of the Swedish nation if you come here from other countries?

Filip: Yes. If you contribute to Swedish society and feel like a part of Swedish society, then you are included. But if you don't contribute and don't feel part of Swedish society and you, you don't really know anything about Swedish society, no, then you will probably never become part of Swedish society either.

Lukas similarly articulated a narrative of attitude and reciprocity, but added identity as 'acting Swedish,' learning the language and 'actually becoming Swedish' as crucial for deserving citizenship. At the same time, he expressed openness towards deviant religions:

Sweden basically has fundamental values, and the way we live in Sweden. If you are newly born in Sweden, for example, you learn how things work and how they have worked for a long time. It is the same if you come from another country. If you're from Syria, for example, and you come to Sweden, you should know that this is how we live and act in Sweden. We behave well, we work, we learn the language, we really try to make everything work. Yes, and in Sweden we have a different religion than in your own home country, but that's not a big problem. You can go home from work on a Friday night and sit and pray to whatever god you want, it doesn't matter, but you have to enter society and behave like everyone else. [...] but if Sweden says that 'this is what is fundamental and then everyone is welcome to this', it is very easy to actually become Swedish as a person and enter this. Then, of course, you can make the choice not to, and not become Swedish, and in that case, if you misbehave and don't follow Swedish laws and regulations, then maybe you should be

locked up or not be in Sweden. But if you follow Swedish laws and rules and behave yourself, you are super welcome, whether you were born in Baghdad or in Stockholm.

On the other hand, Mikael, himself an immigrant from another Nordic country, considered it impossible to entirely become part of the Swedish nation without being born into it. At the same time, he did not view nationality as crucial for deserving welfare benefits.

Mikael: Yes, I am an immigrant myself and I have been one for so long, in Sweden, that I have become part of the Swedish community. And that's pretty close to belonging to the nation. Not 100 per cent, but pretty close, about as close as you can get. And over the years I have also tried to do the right thing, so to speak, I think I have paid a lot more in taxes than the average Joe has done. So I still want to agree with that formulation¹¹⁷.

[...]

David: But where would you say the line is drawn on who should be included in the welfare society?

Mikael: Those who deserve it. Beyond that it doesn't matter what they look like or where they come from, but in my opinion you should qualify.

Although Mikael and Lukas stated that people from all national backgrounds could qualify as legitimate recipients of welfare benefits, as long as they meet certain deservingness criteria, all interviewees expressed that country or region of origin does make a difference. Mikael, for example, implied a link between identity and reciprocity as he described “large groups from the Middle East and some from Africa” who “do not contribute to any great extent” and “just came to Sweden to be supported.” The predominant reasoning among the participants was that people from culturally distant countries, primarily in the Middle East and Africa, had more difficulties adapting to society than those from culturally closer regions. Lukas, for example, commented the following:

Then I think it's easier for a person moving from Helsinki to Stockholm to enter society than for a person moving from Baghdad to Stockholm. But I think that both have the opportunity

¹¹⁷ “That formulation” refers to a quote from the SD party manifest from 2019 that was discussed in the interview, translated from Swedish by the author: “The vision of a restored folkhem, where belonging is not based on class, but on nationality, and where all citizens are guaranteed a high level of physical, economic and social security, also guides the Sweden Democrats’ welfare policy.”: *Sverigedemokraternas principprogram*, 21.

to do so. Both have the opportunity to enter society, and both should be given the opportunity to enter.

Ukraine was specifically mentioned in contrast to immigrants from the Middle East:

Filip: We now see from Ukraine, for example, that many of the people who have come here are studying – great. There are a lot of people who have started working almost immediately. And the idea is that they will return later.

David: Do you think Ukrainians find it easier to do that than people from other countries further away?

Filip: Yes, well, much easier. And there is, it is very logical why as well. Because Ukrainians are, firstly, a very, they have good universities from the beginning. So many are very well educated. Then, if you look at countries in Europe, it's easier to adapt. It's like that. It's much easier to adapt, versus if you're going to, like, it's a completely different society, everything is different if you come from the Middle East, for example. There is nothing you can see as a similarity. The only similarity is the vulnerable areas we have in Sweden, where only other people from the Middle East live. That's the only thing they know, that's where they might feel a sense of belonging. Whereas Ukrainians from a well-educated country might still recognise themselves in some way in society. That is, in the democracy that we have.

Following the criterion of identity, Ukrainians were thus viewed as culturally closer and therefore more easily could become legitimate members of the Swedish society. Furthermore, regarding reciprocity, Filip assessed that they were better educated and thus more likely to quickly start working or studying.

Another perceived threat to people's well-being was crime, particularly violent crime. These issues could play a part in both the narrative about non-native, as well as native threats. However, the interviewees primarily associated crime with non-natives – implicitly and explicitly. Furthermore, though being described as one of the most acute threats to Swedish society generally, criminality was not always articulated as part of the producerist narrative. Still, there were connections to producerism. For example, Filip described criminals as a burden for the welfare system:

So we have everything from all the criminals in Sweden who don't work, who make a living from crime. They don't contribute with anything. They don't contribute in any way to Sweden other than negatively, that's one way to put it, because that's very nice in the first place. But, or it's just my opinion, but they don't contribute, they haven't got a job. But when they get injured, they gratefully accept medical care. And it gets weird. In the same way, those who have not become part of Swedish society, who live in marginalised areas. They are not part of Swedish society. It becomes a huge problem - it weighs down many areas that they should also take part in the welfare system. Then it's completely inhumane to say 'no, you don't get any healthcare because you don't work,' you can't do that and you shouldn't do that. And it's like, somewhere we're getting into human rights, you know. You have the right to healthcare. So you can't do that to them, but they still don't contribute.

Thus, because criminals were not considered contributors to the economic wealth of the nation and an economic burden to society, they did not deserve welfare state benefits. At the same time, healthcare was viewed as a human right that even non-deserving people cannot be excluded from. This exemplifies that the interviewees did differentiate between different aspects of the welfare state.

Native horizontal takers

The issue of native horizontal takers was considerably less salient in the producerist narrative articulated by the interviewees than that of non-native horizontal takers. Beyond criminals, which are discussed above, the participants only addressed a broad group of 'native, undeserving poor.' Poverty was understood as largely caused by individual choices while the welfare system provided enough preventive measures, although there were individual exceptions. For example, Viktor said that:

I don't remember who said it, but it was something like 'poverty is a choice you make.' It's not like that for everyone, of course, but – I can't remember who said it – but it's that you consume in a way, beyond of your financial limit. And then you can complain that 'yes, okay I'm poor.' Yes, you are poor, but you eat out four days a week, for example. [...] Although you don't overspend, it might be that you for example have children. My aunt is an example. She has, well, two children, single mother. And even though she doesn't spend much, the money still is spent. And [the situation of having] children is a bit more difficult to change, you can't just, well, that's why the children's allowance is important and so on, I believe.

Later in the interview, Viktor further explains:

Viktor: I'm thinking about all of people who live in 'the hood', so to speak, where the culture is more like, okay, the school is rubbish, you have to be a gangster instead of being cool, and so on. But we have financial support and education and, yes, the welfare society that helps you. So being poor in Sweden and not having chosen it, it's a bit of, okay, it's very unusual. But it can happen, like my aunt for example. But I think the majority are definitely, could have, if you had looked at the economy.

David: So, would you say that the state or the individual is most responsible for individual poverty?

Viktor: It is the individual, yes.

David: Do you think the government is doing enough to combat poverty in Sweden?

Viktor: Yes, 100 per cent. I went over it before: free schools, free health care, what else can the state do? It has already maxed out, so to speak.

In this narrative, the criterion of control plays a key role: people responsible for their own poverty are framed as parasitic elements because they take advantage of welfare benefits without contributing to the system. They are not unable to work, but rather unwilling. Attitude plays in as well, as the unworthy poor are viewed as lazy, lacking of a work ethic, immoral, cheating the system, and wasteful, overspending to live a lifestyle that they cannot afford.

Native and non-native vertical takers

Moreover, the interviews conveyed a narrative in which 'elites' are seen as a threat to 'the people'. The elites were not, however, viewed primarily as 'takers' in the sense of a non-productive, parasitic element exploiting the system without contributing to it. Rather, they were held responsible for the political decisions that led to the perceived ongoing societal decline. The native elite was exclusively referred to as a perceived political establishment, mainly politicians belonging to the Social Democratic Party and the Moderate Party. These parties have, it should be noted, led the governments during most of the 20th and 21st centuries, which could be a reason for this claim.¹¹⁸ The political elite was mainly blamed

¹¹⁸ Lennart Lundquist, "regeringen," in *Nationalencyklopedin*.
<https://www.ne.se/uppslagsverk/encyklopedi/l%C3%A5ng/regeringen>.

for failing to take responsibility by allowing too much immigration and neglecting integration.

While the respondents mainly mentioned native elites, they also regarded the EU as an external threat. The Union was mainly referred to as an economic burden, while other member states were held accountable for Sweden's high rates of immigrants as pointed out by Mikael:

The EU has a big role, the EU has become a giant colossus that costs a lot of money and doesn't work very well. If the EU member states had stuck to the EU's own rules, Sweden would not have had almost any immigrants from the MENA countries now. This is just one example. So the EU is not as good as it could have been.

Furthermore, the political elites were considered culturally inferior to SD politicians. The interviewees accused them of a lacking understanding of the will of the people, being disconnected from 'the real world' and acting out of self-interest. This is further discussed in the following subchapter.

5.4 The necessity for change and the promise to restore the producers' well-being

The necessity for change due to the failures of the other political parties was described as an important reason for the interviewees' support for the Sweden Democrats. They viewed the SD as the party capable of undoing the errors and reinstating the well-being of the producers. A central aspect of this narrative was the belief that the Sweden Democrats understand and care for 'the people' more than other political parties. Moreover, it was believed that SD politicians see logical solutions that other politicians have ignored or overlooked.

The narrative of restoring the producers' well-being mostly revolved around a sense of general dissatisfaction with the present societal situation, as well as the specific issues of immigration, healthcare, elderly care, and waste of tax money. Filip summarised these issues as reasons for support for the SD:

Well, a fundamental thing to understand SD voters, that is to understand why so many are dissatisfied. I've probably touched on this in every other question. It's not much more difficult than that things don't work. We keep saying that we have good healthcare and Sweden. Yes but not everyone has access to it. It doesn't matter how good care you have if not everyone has access to good care. Yes, we have pretty good elderly care as it is, but it can be much better. Yes, why settle for, like, average, when it can be super good? And then, this huge waste of money, that's where many people are dissatisfied. So it's really, from the start there is probably a lot of dissatisfaction, and it becomes that all parties, many people say that the Sweden Democrats are a party of dissatisfaction, and from the beginning that's how it is. But that's the case with all parties. There is no party like 'we just want to praise the rest of you because you have done so damn well.' That has never happened. Instead, parties emerge because people are dissatisfied.

The Sweden Democrats' ability to solve these issues was explained with reference to several fundamental differences from other political parties: the ability to understand 'the people' generally and the party's voters specifically; the honesty of SD politicians; SD politicians' closeness to the people and 'real-world experience;' a genuine will to improve society and help people; as well as the novelty of the party. On the first point, Viktor concluded that "I think that many politicians don't understand their voters. To a large extent. And I think SD really are the best at understanding its own voters." A similar explanation was provided by Mikael:

Well, we can say this, in our municipality in [Northwestern Scania], the Social Democrats ruled for many years, as in many other municipalities. Then the Moderates came in strong and have ruled in modern times. And these two parties are not particularly good at understanding the people. They have shown this in practice here in our municipality. So, in that respect, the SD are much better in any case.

Filip further addressed the issue and added the importance of, among other things, 'real' work experience:

I think, if you have any kind of connection to the people, that you have some kind of... I think that, like *sossarna* [*social democrats*, derogatory] are the worst at it, definitely the worst at it. Because there are a lot of people who join the SSU [the Swedish Social Democratic Youth League], and then they are trained all the way up to become like potential politicians. They don't work for real even for one day. Some of them. Then it has to do with

like, if you've belonged to those who work and struggle, who get to work your way up in your career and so on, and then maybe get involved politically - well, then you might feel some kind of connection to the people.

Then, Filip went on to describe that SD politicians generally cared more about those in need than many other politicians, because for them, “to talk about those who are not so well, that is pretty boring. Like, they want to talk about other things, [...] they want to attract attention. So, I think that they are probably silent about those who are not so well off.” Moreover, he blamed politicians for wasting tax money: “some municipalities carry out completely pointless projects worth millions of euros. And so on. Skip it! Help those who are suffering.” On my question on who is to blame for the negative trends, Lukas responded similarly, adding the advantage of the SD being a non-establishment party:

You could say the overall politics, because there has been some kind of big consensus on the major issues that have affected, for example, insecurity, the large-scale immigration that we have had. [...] And that's why I think it's good that SD comes in, a bit from the side, they haven't been involved in making these decisions, but they come in and are a bit more fresh.

Thus, the interviewees articulated a narrative about the Sweden Democrats as the party that genuinely strives to and promotes political policies that will restore the producers' well-being, both economically and culturally.

6 Discussion

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the interviews disclosed the existence of a Swedish producerist narrative of ‘the people,’ understood as a group of *producers* contributing to the economic wealth of the nation and seen as entitled to welfare benefits. The narrative of producers is, however, conceptually vague. Regarding a conceptual definition, the producers are primarily defined in opposition to the so-called *takers*. This may, in part, provide an alternative explanation to how the SD has attracted support from both sides of the ideological left-right spectrum, compared to the theoretical argument of several previous studies that national populist parties are vague or avoidant on economic issues. The analysed narrative of producerism can as well be viewed in the context of the broader populist narrative, which similarly builds on a dichotomy between an ingroup, ‘the people,’ and different outgroups. In the producerist articulation of the interviewees, ‘the people’ is generally conceptually vague and almost entirely constructed in opposition to the outgroups, which has led some researchers to consider it a useless concept in analyses of populism.¹¹⁹ Other researchers, however, argue that the vagueness in fact is the crucial factor behind the strength of the populist phenomenon. Among the latter is the influential political scientist Ernesto Laclau, who stated the following concept of ‘the people’: “I see this moment of vagueness and imprecision [...] as an essential component of any populist operation.”¹²⁰ Laclau further explains that the vagueness of ‘the people’ allows populist political actors to attract support across heterogeneous social groups.¹²¹ Similarly, the researchers on populism Mudde and Kaltwasser argue that “given that populism has the capacity to frame ‘the people’ in a way that appeals to different constituencies and articulate their demands, it can generate a shared identity between different groups and facilitate their support for a common cause.”¹²² Likewise, the interviews conducted for the present thesis illustrate that the concept of ‘producers’ does not come with very much substance on its own, other than vague values such as ‘moral’, ‘work ethic’ and ‘honesty.’ Instead, it is primarily constructed in opposition to antagonistic groups of ‘takers.’ Hence, following the reasoning on populism provided above, the interviewees’ vague definition of the producers could provide a partial explanation for how the Sweden Democrats have

¹¹⁹ Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism, a very short introduction*, 9.

¹²⁰ Laclau, *On populist reason*, 118.

¹²¹ Laclau, *On populist reason*, 98-99.

¹²² Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism, a very short introduction*, 9.

attracted voters from political parties on both sides of the economic left-right spectrum, which is demonstrated in figures 1 and 2.



Figure 1. Vote in the previous election among SD voters 2018. The graph shows how SD voters in the Swedish 2018 national parliament election voted in the 2014 election. Those who voted for the SD in 2014 (54%) are excluded. The numbers are based on exit poll survey data. The poll did not count those who did not vote in the last election or voted for parties not represented.

Source: "SVT Valu, Väljarströmmar," 2018.

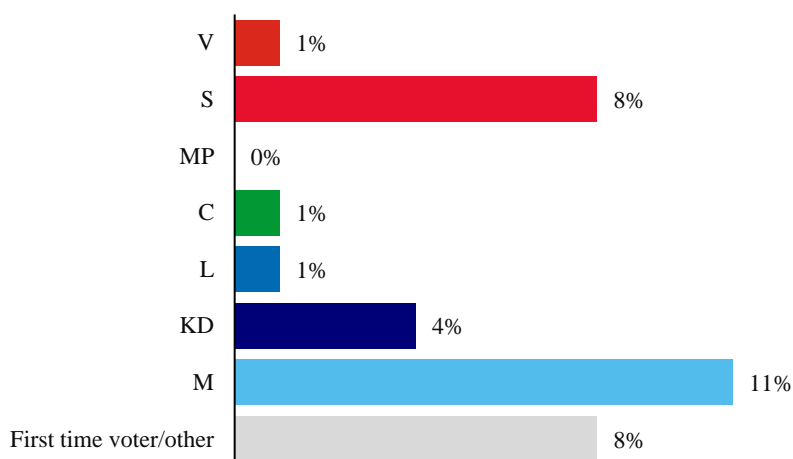


Figure 2. Vote in the previous election among SD voters 2022. The graph shows how SD voters in the Swedish 2022 national parliament election voted in the 2018 election. Those who voted for the SD in 2018 (66 %) are excluded. "First time voter/other" includes respondents who did not vote in the last election or voted for parties not represented. The numbers are based on exit poll survey data.

Source: Sören Holmberg et al., "Väljarna avgör," Sveriges Televisions Vallokalsundersökningar 1991-2022 (2023): 54

Moreover, as described in chapter 3.3, scholars increasingly argue that populist political parties are not as vague or avoidant concerning socioeconomic issues as has sometimes been assumed in previous research. Accordingly, the present thesis argues that the Sweden Democrats' gaining support from both sides of the political left-right spectrum cannot be attributed to an ambiguous stance on economic issues. Instead, the ingroup, or *the producers*, are vaguely defined based on a common opposition to various outgroups, *the takers*. As a result, it encompasses voters from various economic camps, but with a shared

self-identification as *producers* who contribute to the welfare of the nation and therefore deserve the benefits of it more than the *takers*.

Furthermore, the framework attributes the producers with a shared sense of uncertainty of ‘the peoples’ economic well-being. This perceived uncertainty should not be mixed up with real economic decline or poverty – although they might correlate, the sense of uncertainty is not necessarily caused by real economic decline. For example, although one interviewee identified the SD as “the party for the working class,” the other interviewees either articulated only a vague sense of working- or middle-class belonging or rejected the label altogether. Furthermore, although it is true that the SD has attracted many working-class voters who would traditionally vote for the Social Democratic Party, the overrepresentation is only marginal. Compared to winning 21 per cent of the popular vote, 29 per cent of those perceiving themselves as labourers voted for the SD. The equivalent share among business owners was 24 per cent, and among highly educated voters 13 per cent. In contrast, over 50 per cent of labourers voted for the Social Democratic Party in the elections between 1991 and 2006, and 32 % in 2022. Furthermore, 30 % of the unemployed voted for the SD – on par with the Social Democratic Party.¹²³ In fact, support for the SD has in the past five years been considerably weaker among voters in the lowest income group than in the others, comparable only to the voters with the highest incomes, as shown in figure 3.

¹²³ Sören Holmberg et al., "Väljarna avgör," *Sveriges Televisions Vallokalsundersökningar 1991-2022* (2023): 75, 165-67.

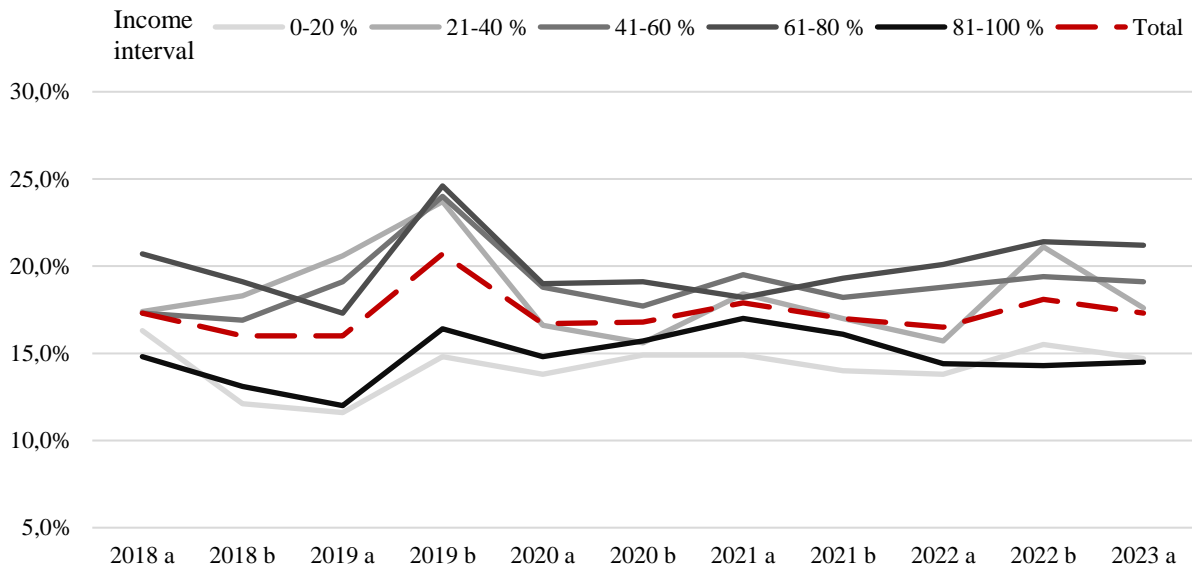


Figure 3. Voting preference for the Sweden Democrats per income interval, 2018-2023. Voting preference is based on what party the respondent considers “the best political party.” Each year, the survey was conducted in May (a) and November (b). The income interval is based on the Central Bureau of Statistics’ register for income and tax assessment and includes the entire Swedish population over 18 years. The intervals are based on percentiles, where, for example, 0-20 % covers the 20 % of the population with the lowest incomes during the last two years. **Source:** SCB, “Partisymptati efter kön och inkomstintervall efter percentiler (urvalsundersökning). Mätmånad 2007M11 - 2023M05.”

In contrast, SD voters stand out as considerably more pessimistic about the future than other voters – 89 % believe that the general development of Sweden is going in the wrong direction, while 3 % believe that it is going in the right direction, as shown in figure 4.

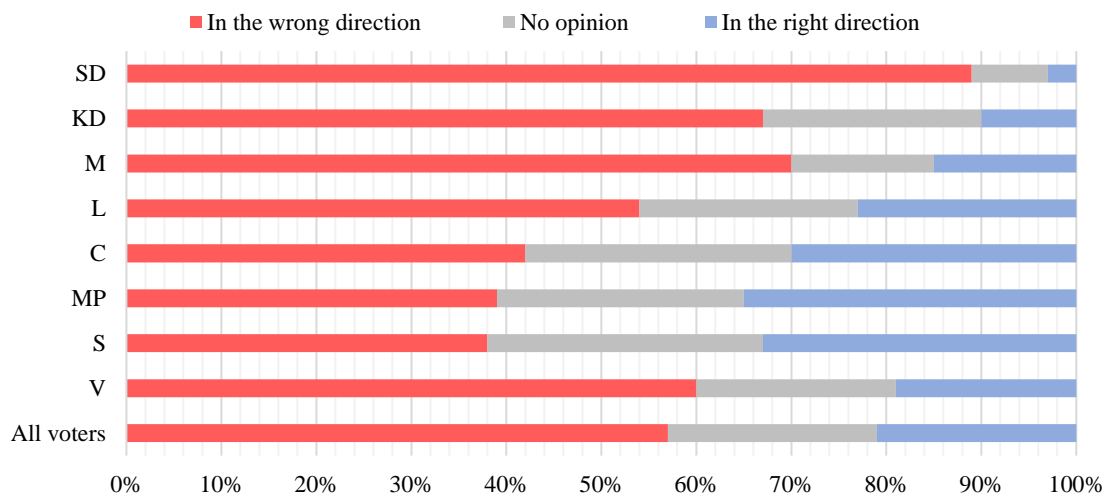


Figure 4. Assessment of the general development in Sweden by party preference, 2021. The question asked was “Allmänt sett, tycker du att utvecklingen i Sverige går åt rätt håll eller fel håll?” (Generally seen, do you think that the development in Sweden is going in the right or wrong direction?) and the response options: “Åt rätt håll” (in the right direction), “Åt fel håll” (in the wrong direction) and “Ingen uppfattning” (no opinion). **Source:** Johan Martinsson, “Varför ett så missnöjt folk?” in *Du sköra nya värld*, ed. Ulrika Andersson et al. (SOM-institutet, Göteborgs universitet, 2022).

Thus, voting for the SD correlates less with economic uncertainty than with a negative outlook on the future and, as is the argument of this thesis, fear of economic and social decline relative to the takers. The latter point is exemplified by the researcher on political economy Mathew E Bergman: writing on labour market policy effects on national populist support, he concludes that policies that favour groups not regarded as deserving in the producerist view – for example, immigrants and undeserving unemployed – tend to catalyse support for NP parties and policies that favour the already employed. In other words, support for the economically disadvantaged can lead to more voter support for NP parties, that themselves advocate for increased welfare support, at least for certain societal groups.¹²⁴ SD leader Åkesson touches on this in his book *Det moderna folkhemmet*: “We see how fundamental principles of the rule of law and equal treatment are being eroded by special rights and special treatment. The government’s entry-level jobs¹²⁵ constitute direct discrimination against Swedish employees. New start zones¹²⁶, diversity plans.”¹²⁷ In other words, Åkesson opposes policies that mainly favour non-natives or residents in economically marginalised urban areas, arguing that they discriminate against natives. Furthermore, the interviewees agreed with SDs vision of a restored *folkhem*, where “belonging is not based on class, but on nationality.” They associated this belonging with several deservingness criteria, including *identity*, as in national belonging, integration, and love for Sweden; *reciprocity*, or contributing to the wealth of the nation; and *attitude*, or having good morals and work ethics. Thus, the present thesis argues that *the producers* in the Swedish narrative as articulated by the interviewees are not primarily defined as a socioeconomically threatened or disadvantaged group, for example as ‘the working class,’ but rather based on a perceived threat of economic and social decline relative to *the takers*. Thus, in conclusion, producerism appears to relate less to *actual economic and social decline* than to *the perceived threat of relative economic and social decline*. This conclusion is in line with Ivaldi and Mazzoleni’s previously cited definition of the

¹²⁴ Bergman, "Labour market " 521, 30.

¹²⁵ *Instegsjobb*, a system that subsidizes employment of newly arrived immigrants in Sweden with the condition that the employer participates in a national language course. Since 2018 replaced by the similar *introduktionsjobb* (introductory jobs).

¹²⁶ *Nystartszoner*, a proposed system that would have allowed companies in areas with the lowest employment rates and highest rates of inhabitants without secondary education to make deductions of social security contributions.

¹²⁷ Åkesson, *Det moderna folkhemmet*.

producerist sense of ‘uncertainty of the people’s economic well-being’ as “anxieties and fears of economic decline, pessimism, and a sense of loss of status, dignity and values.”¹²⁸

In the interviewees’ articulation of the producerist narrative, *the takers*, who are considered to pose ‘a dual threat to the people’s well-being’, were primarily referred to as non-native. This emphasis is common to the producerist narratives in most European national contexts, particularly regarding non-natives from countries that are predominantly Muslim or considered culturally distant.¹²⁹ This tendency is empirically demonstrated by researcher on Social Policy van Oorschot in a study based on the, although over 20 years old, comprehensive 1999/2000 European Values Study survey: “It is found that Europeans share a common and fundamental deservingness culture: across countries and social categories there is a consistent pattern that elderly people are seen as most deserving, closely followed by sick and disabled people; unemployed people are seen as less deserving still, and immigrants as least deserving of all.”¹³⁰ Accordingly, as demonstrated in chapter 5.3, the interviewees referred to the elderly and the sick as the most threatened groups. Unemployed people were not frequently addressed, but not working or contributing was generally regarded as negative in the narrative. Likewise, poverty was attributed to poor individual choices rather than a lack of state intervention, except for rare exceptions – as cited by Viktor, one of the interviewees in this thesis, “poverty is a choice you make.” The narrative thus included both native and non-native unemployed and poor, but the two groups were talked about differently. Although the interviewees acknowledged exceptions in both groups, the native poor were implicitly described as more deserving, while the non-native poor were seen as more unwilling to work, lazy, lacking in work ethic and prone to crime. In other words, there was a perceived difference in attitude and control, or willingness to work, which correlated with identity. Although generally consistent with the framework, the interviews revealed a difference in this respect. As noted in chapter 3.4, Ivaldi and Mazzoleni state that non-natives are automatically undeserving and therefore cannot become producers. However, the interviews indicated that although non-natives are viewed as non-deserving by default, they can redeem themselves by working, contributing and integrating into society. Furthermore, non-natives from origins perceived as more familiar, such as immigrants from Finland or Ukraine, were seen as more likely to be or

¹²⁸ "Economic Populism," 7.

¹²⁹ Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, "Economic Populism," 8.; Abts et al., "Welfare Agenda."

¹³⁰ van Oorschot, "Making the difference," 23.

become deserving than more culturally distant immigrants. This narrative of non-natives as the primary threat to the producers' wellbeing differs from the producerist narrative in the United States. Although non-natives are present in the American narrative, notably in Donald Trump's rhetoric about 'illegal immigrants,' it includes a stronger element of race, focusing on stereotypes such as 'poor African Americans.'¹³¹ Moreover, and in starker contrast to European producerism, public sector workers and unions are frequently targeted in American producerism. As summarised by Daniel Martinez HoSang and Joseph Lowndes, researchers on ethnicity and right-wing politics, "these workers are depicted as unproductive, wasteful, excessive, and indolent; they indulge in the envied pleasures of shorter working hours, long vacations, and early retirement." These groups, add the authors, constitute a threat to "the producer – in this case the taxpayer and private-sector workers."¹³²

The interviewees articulated considerably less resentment towards vertical than horizontal takers. In the interviews, native 'elites' were not viewed as parasitic takers. Instead, political elites were blamed for creating and maintaining a system that enabled the horizontal takers, mainly 'non-native,' to take advantage of the welfare system. Consequently, the interviewees pointed out the failures of the political establishment, that is previous Social Democratic and Moderate governments, as a major catalyst for SD support. The way in which they articulated the differences between 'establishment' and SD politicians in terms of values and characteristics in some ways resembled the makers-takers dichotomy. More precisely, SD politicians were described as more honest, having a better understanding of 'the people' and being more ready to act for the greater good. In short, they were viewed as morally superior. This articulation of native elites resembles some other European producerist narratives but differs from others. To name a few, the Dutch Party for Freedom has, like the SD, accused past and present governments of favouring immigrants rather than natives; the French National Rally goes further and constructs a narrative of greedy political and economic elites that exploit the wealth of the nation at the expense of the people; the UK Independence Party similarly blames political elites – 'Westminster' – and large corporations for the similar actions; and the Belgian Vlaams Belang specifically criticises Walloon political elites for exploiting the Flemish.¹³³

¹³¹ Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, "Economic Populism," 13-18.; van Oorschot, "Making the difference," 25-26.

¹³² Martinez HoSang and Lowndes, *Producers, parasites, patriots*, 27.

¹³³ Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, "Economic Populism."; Abts et al., "Welfare Agenda."

The EU was, in contrast to national elites, narratively described as a vertical non-native parasitic element and blamed for negative developments, such as high levels of immigration, by the interviewees. Although less frequently referred to, the EU was thereby the only vertical outgroup that the interviewees referred to as a ‘taker’ in the parasitic sense – an economic burden, costing money without sufficiently contributing to, or benefiting, society. A similar Eurosceptic rhetoric is articulated in several other Western European national contexts.¹³⁴ In the United States, the producerist narrative often includes elements of protectionism and anti-globalization,¹³⁵ which could be at least partially compared to the European producerist Euroscepticism.

Interestingly, three of the interviewees portrayed Left Party politicians as being similarly honest and sympathetic to ‘the people’ compared to SD politicians, which contrasts with their description of ‘the political establishment.’ For example, the Lukas expressed that as a municipality politician, he has “more in common with the Left Party than with the ruling Moderate Party when it comes to the welfare issues.” At the same time, there was some ambivalence among the interviewees about Left Party politicians, who despite their partially good intentions failed to fully understand the will and needs of the people, thereby losing working-class votes. Still, this sympathy for the Left Party can be put in the context of the strong Swedish welfare state traditions. As described by Mary Hilson, “the welfare state is central to any discussion of the Nordic countries after 1945,”¹³⁶ a quote that could as well, argues the present thesis, be applied to the Sweden Democrat populist narrative. Regarding this aspect, a central difference between the Swedish and American producerist narratives becomes apparent. Looking back on a joint conference with the SD and the United States Republican Party, Lukas noted that “they think that we are almost like Bernie Sanders,¹³⁷ we are communists, and we want a *folkhem* and high taxes and so on.” Indeed, high welfare spending is generally not advocated for in the producerist narrative in

¹³⁴ Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, "Economic Populism."; Abts et al., "Welfare Agenda."

¹³⁵ Joseph Lowndes, *Populism in the United States*, Oxford Handbooks, (Oxford University Press, 2017).; Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, "Economic Populism."

¹³⁶ Hilson, *The Nordic model*, 87-88.

¹³⁷ United States Senator, formally unaffiliated with political parties but ran for the Democratic presidential nomination in the 2016 and 2020 elections. Self-described as a democratic socialist and generally considered politically left of much of the Democratic Party, Gregory Lewis McNamee, "Bernie Sanders," in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2023). <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bernie-Sanders>.

the United States.¹³⁸ Compare these differences with the contrast between the Swedish social democratic welfare model and the liberal model of the United States as described by Esping-Andersen, the Swedish arrangement being considerably more extensive and integral to many aspects of the society.¹³⁹ The processes behind the different producerist views of the welfare system are too complex to explain in the present thesis, but the comparison leads to a key observation: despite the differences between the national contexts and the constructed meanings of producerism, the processes are in many respects comparable and can be addressed within the producerist framework. For instance, while the interviewees considered the Swedish welfare system well-functioning in principle but blamed political elites for allowing non-deserving parasitical takers to take advantage of it, the American producerist narrative centres around a perceived bloated and resource-sucking system that favours the underserving, such as non-white ethnical groups and the state employed. The American narrative thereby accuses political elites of directly wasting tax money at the expense of the well-being of ‘the hard-working people.’¹⁴⁰ Both narratives share the vision of restoring an idealised past, but in Sweden, it implicates the functioning welfare state of the 50s and 60s, the *folkhem*. and in the United States a welfare system that is limited to being a mere safety net limited to the most deserving. Furthermore, the narratives share resentment against different out-groups that threaten the takers’ well-being, but the primary suggested solution in Swedish producerism is limiting immigration and ceasing the perceived special treatment of non-natives, whereas generally limiting welfare benefits to encourage ‘hard work’ is more often suggested in the United States.

To further address the vision of restoring an idealised past, the producerist narrative of a ‘promise to restore the producers’ well-being,’ discussed in chapter 5.4, implies a notion of a previously existing ‘well-being’ that has now been diminished or lost. Similarly, Ivaldi and Mazzoleni suggest that “producerism embraces the nostalgic, economic-populist recreation of an ‘idealized’ past and a lost era of ‘real’ community values as a response to current uncertainty.” Although the interviews revealed a narrative of socioeconomic

¹³⁸ See, for example, Peck, "You say rich."; Katherine J. Cramer, *The politics of resentment : rural consciousness in Wisconsin and the rise of Scott Walker*, Chicago studies in American politics, (University of Chicago Press, 2016).

¹³⁹ See chapter 3.1.

¹⁴⁰ Cramer, *The politics of resentment : rural consciousness in Wisconsin and the rise of Scott Walker*, 6, 210.; see also Peck, "You say rich."

decline, the participants did not directly describe any significant threats to themselves personally. Instead, they articulated a narrative of an ongoing general decline that began in the 1970s or 80s and accelerated in the 2000s. An elaborate analysis of the reasons for this is beyond the scope of the present thesis, but it fits into the nostalgic Sweden Democrat narrative of a society characterised by the metaphor of *folkhem* in the 1950s and 60s, which has since been lost. It is central to the SD narrative that the Social Democratic Party has abandoned the project of creating and maintaining this idealised society, and that it is the SD that continue the effort to restore it. Thus, similar to the previously referred to arguments that national populist parties are economically left or represent ‘the new workers’ parties,’ the SD claim to be the new ‘folkhem party.’ However, unlike the Social Democratic interpretation, the SD associate the metaphor with national populist aspirations for national cohesion.¹⁴¹ As this thesis has previously concluded, the Swedish producerist narrative describes the non-native takers as the biggest threat to the well-being of the people. Thus, as summarized by Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, such narratives are “based on the idea of returning to pre-established social hierarchies that ensure dominance of the ethnically and economically defined community of the ‘true’ people, which is in danger of losing its power status.” This idea, moreover, alludes to the previous conclusion of this thesis – that the Swedish producerist narrative does not necessarily refer to a perceived economic and social threat in the absolute sense, but rather a perceived threat of economic and social decline *relative to the takers*.

¹⁴¹ Hellström, *Trust us*, 90-91.

7 Conclusions

Until recently, the study of national populism has suffered from a lack of scholarly interest in the socioeconomic dimension. More precisely, researchers have predominantly focused on the cultural dimension and general othering-mechanisms of national populism, while regarding economic issues as secondary to national populist political parties. This approach has caused conceptual confusion regarding the role and importance of the economic dimension. It was largely prompted by the lack of a coherent analytical framework that adequately captures the complex relation between economic issues and cultural grievances. To address this problem, the present thesis concurs with a small, yet expanding, body of research in suggesting that the socioeconomic dimension is central to the academic understanding of national populism and its increasing appeal among a socioeconomically broad electorate, from both sides of the economic left-right political spectrum. Thus, this study contributes to the research on European producerism by empirically examining the narrative of national populist voters in Sweden. This focus provides an innovative perspective in three ways. Firstly, no previous research on producerism has empirically investigated the Swedish national context. Secondly, Sweden is a distinct instance of a social democratic welfare system, as described in Esping-Andersen's typology presented in chapter 3.1, which similarly remains understudied regarding producerism. Thirdly, the articulation of the producerist narrative by voters of national populist political parties has not been a focal point of prior European research on the issue, which has instead mainly analysed the top-down narrative articulations of political parties. Thus, this thesis addresses the economic dimension of national populism in Sweden with a producerist analytical framework by answering two research questions:

Firstly, to what extent does the theoretical concept of producerism provide an analytical framework for addressing the economic dimension of national populism in Sweden?

Having empirically examined the theoretical concept of producerism through a narrative analysis of in-depth interviews with four active supporters of the Sweden Democrats and considering perspectives from previous research, statistical data and other primary SD sources, the present thesis suggests that it does provide such an analytical framework. It allows the economic dimension within Swedish national populism, with a particular focus on voters, to be successfully scrutinised. The results of the conducted analysis largely correspond to the assumptions of previous studies on producerism in Europe. Accordingly,

the interviews indicated that socioeconomic problems are indeed a core issue in Swedish national populism. The interviewees articulated a narrative with the four core features described by Ivaldi and Mazzoleni in their paper on producerism in Europe: *the producers*, *the uncertainty of the people's economic well-being*, *a dual threat to the people's well-being*, and *the necessity for change and the promise to restore the producers' well-being*. Furthermore, the analysis shows that the five criteria of deservingness *control*, *need*, *identity*, *attitude* and *reciprocity* can be successfully applied to the narrative, allowing a systematic examination of the producerist distributive agenda.

Secondly, *what particular characteristics of producerism are articulated in the narratives of Sweden Democrat voters?* By conducting interviews, the study reveals that the Swedish narrative is largely comparable to other Western European producerist narratives. For instance, the definition of *the producers* is conceptually vague and mainly defined in contrast to *the takers*. The producers are, furthermore, not primarily connected to economic decline. Instead, the producerist narrative revolves around a perceived threat of economic and social decline relative to the takers. The primary threat is posed by non-natives, mainly immigrants from culturally distant countries. To a lesser degree, native takers, such as 'the lazy unemployed' and criminals, and the non-native elite 'the EU' were perceived as threats. Native elites, such as 'the political establishment,' were solely held responsible for enabling the societal decline. These findings are mostly in line with previous research on European producerism, with the main difference being that the native elites in some other national narratives were accused of more directly exploiting the system for personal economic gains. Conversely, the American producerist narrative varies from the Swedish one, mainly due to a more negative view of welfare generally, and by portraying state employees as native parasitic takers. Still, it fits within the same overarching theoretical framework of producerism.

While this study shows the existence of a Swedish producerist narrative and points to its key features, the limited material renders more specific and generalisable conclusions imprecise. Therefore, future studies should include a larger and more varied sample of Sweden Democrat voters. Moreover, although the interview results were compared to other articulations of the national populist narrative, such as the Sweden Democrats' election manifestos, political speeches and previous research on the party, future research should examine the party's articulation of the producerist narrative by including more SD sources.

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Appendix: Translations of the cited interview transcripts

Page	English translation	Swedish original
Interviewee		
p. 29 Mikael	No, it is not the state's job to make people rich.	Nej men, det är ju inte staten som ska göra människor rika.
p. 29 Mikael	Mikael: But, I guess I have to see myself as some kind of mediocrity. I am a poor pensioner. If you want to put a name to something. David: Okay, yes.	Mikael: Men, jag får väl se mig som någon sorts medelmåta. Jag är fattigpensionär. Om man nu ska sätta namn på någonting. David: Okej, ja.
	Mikael: But that's only because I've run a company all my life and taken a very low salary, but always to leave as much money as possible in the company. And then you have to organize your pension in some other way.	Mikael: Men det beror ju enbart på att jag har drivit företag i hela mitt liv och tagit ut väldigt låg lön, men alltid för att låta så mycket pengar som möjligt vara kvar i företaget. Och sen så får man ordna sin pension på annat sätt.
	David: Would you say that you have undeservedly little money – would you say that you, given what you have achieved and accomplished, should have more money?	David: Skulle du säga att du har oförtjänt lite pengar – skulle du säga att, med tanke på vad du har presterat och utfört, att du borde ha mer pengar?
	Mikael: Absolutely not. The thing with poor pensioner, that's the pension that the state pays out. That's the name for it, and as I said, it's not much to count on, but at working age you have to take care of your own pension that will come later. And I have done that. So I, I'm not poor in that way.	Mikael: Absolut inte. Det med fattigpensionär, det är ju den pensionen då som staten betalar ut. Det är ju det man benämner som med det, och som jag sa, det är ju inte mycket att räkna med, utan man måste ju i arbetsför ålder sörja för sin egen pension som ska komma sen. Och det har jag gjort. Så att jag, jag är inte fattig på så sätt.
	David: Right, individual responsibility is important?	David: Just det, individens ansvar är viktigt?
	Mikael: Yes, exactly	Mikael: Ja precis.
p. 30 Filip	Isn't that the dream scenario? When it is then that we are Swedes, all of us. Like, and we have a connection to each other, we have a connection to our country. It	Det är väl drömscenariot? När det är sen det blir som så att vi är svenskar, allihop. Liksom, och vi har en samhörighet till varandra, vi har en samhörighet till vårt

would be wonderful if that were the case. /.../ My idea of being part of the nation, it's that you are a Swedish citizen. You love your country. You contribute, above all, that's probably the most important. In other words you play your part. So it becomes a society that helps each other. It becomes a big "we" instead.

land. Det hade väl varit underbart om det var så. /.../ Min uppfattning att vara en del av nationen, det är att du är svensk medborgare. Du älskar ditt land. Du gör rätt för dig, framför allt, det är väl det viktigaste nästan. Alltså man drar sitt strå till stacken. Så det blir så, det blir ett samhälle som hjälps åt. Så det blir ett stort vi i stället.

p. 31
Filip

SD have become the party for the working class. First of all. And it is there that they have taken over completely. Then they've also taken over everything concerning rural issues, which are the ones I find interesting, because I have a long way to drive, that is, for example, I have a long way to drive to work. They want to reduce fuel prices.

SD har ju blivit partiet för arbetarklassen. För det första. Och det där de där de tagit över fullständigt. Sen har de även tagit över allt gällande landsbygdsfrågorna som är de jag tycker är intressanta, för jag har långt och köra, alltså exempel så har jag har långt att köra till jobb. De vill sänka drivmedelspriserna.

p. 31
Lukas

I would like to see more money spent on welfare. We have a welfare system today that is undersised

Jag skulle gärna se att man lägger mer pengar på välfärden. Vi har ju en välfärd idag som är underdimensionerat

p. 31
Viktor

It's too open, that's a burden on welfare, which causes it to work poorly in general. But if you had just reduced how open it was, it would have worked very well.

Den är ju för öppen, det belastar ju välfärden, vilket gör att den fungerar dåligt generellt. Men hade man bara minskat hur öppen den var så hade den fungerat jättebra.

p. 31
Filip

But there are so many people taking part in the welfare system who don't actually contribute to it. And in many cases this is what causes it to fail.

Men där är ju jätte-jättemånga som tar del av välfärden som faktiskt inte bidrar till den. Och det är i många fall det som gör att den fallerar.

p. 32
Lukas

I can only go back to my parents, who are around 50 years old: when they were young - around the age of 10-20 - it was still quite calm. You could move freely in the streets and squares without having any problems with running into serious criminals. And yes, let's say that in the 80s and 90s this was the case. And they felt safe then. I think it was a safe society back then. That's my point of reference.

Jag kan ju bara gå tillbaka till mina föräldrar, som är runt 50 år liksom: när de var unga - runt 10-20-årsåldern - så var det ju ändå rätt så lugnt liksom. Man kunde röra sig fritt på gator och torg utan att ha några som helst problem med att man sprang på grovt kriminella. Och ja, låt oss säga att på 80-, 90-talet var ju det här liksom. Och de kände sig trygga då. Jag tror ju att det var ett tryggt samhälle då liksom. Det är det jag har att utgå ifrån.

p. 32

David: Which groups in society would

David: "Vilka grupper i samhället skulle

Viktor	you say are mainly negatively affected by what is not working well?	du säga huvudsakligen drabbas negativt av det som inte fungerar bra?"
	Viktor: Well, it is mainly those who are long-term sick and perhaps need, for example, I'm thinking of my aunt. She got cancer in her ear, I think it was, and she had surgery after about half a year. Now, the cancer didn't spread, so that was good, but you shouldn't wait that long in general. [...] So it's mainly those who are supposed to use it [the welfare system], in other words pensioners and so on. And the sick. They're the ones who are burdened, or the ones who take the hit, when it is burdened by people who don't contribute.	Viktor: "Ja, det blir ju framför allt de som är långtidssjuka och behöver kanske, till exempel, jag vet ju min moster. Hon fick cancer i örat tror jag det var, och hon fick väl operation efter ett halvår ungefär. Nu hann ju inte cancer sprida sig, så det var ju bra ju, men så länge ska man ju inte vänta generellt. Jag tror det var sex månader, jag kommer inte ihåg. [...] Så det är ju framför allt de som ska använda det [välfärdssystemet], alltså pensionärer och så vidare. Och sjuka. Det är ju de som belastas, eller de som får smällen liksom, när det belastas av folk som inte tillför liksom.
p. 33 Mikael	Mikael: Well, now these famous Moderates [the Moderate party] made sure that large groups from the Middle East and some from Africa come in, who do not contribute to any great extent. They just came to Sweden to be supported.	Mikael: Nja alltså, nu såg ju de här omtalade Moderaterna till att det kommer in stora grupper från Mellanöstern och lite från Afrika, som inte bidrar i någon större grad. Utan bara, de kom till Sverige för att bli försörjda.
	[...]	[...]
	David: Would you say that they are entitled to the benefits of the welfare [system]?	David: Skulle du säga att de har rätt till välfärdens fördelar?
	Mikael: Not at all.	Mikael: Inte alls.
	David: None of them or some of them?	David: Inga av dem eller några av dem?"
	Mikael: Some of them are of course individuals who are enterprising and do something, some of them have very quickly started a company and run it in Sweden. But most of them do not.	Mikael: Några utav dem är naturligtvis individer som är företagsamma och gör någonting, en del har väldigt fort startat företag och driver det i Sverige. Men de flesta gör ju det inte.
p. 33 Filip	It serves no purpose to bring here, as we have now, if it was 700,000, who do not work. So it serves no purpose to bring them here then. Sure, they are fleeing from war. Absolutely. But it's better to bring half of them here and be able to get	Det fyller ingen funktion att ta hit, som vi har nu, 700 000 om det var det, som inte arbetar. Alltså det fyller ingen funktion att ta hit dem då. Visst, de flyr från krig. Absolut. Men det är väl bättre att ta hit hälften och kunna få ut dem exempelvis

them into the labour market, for example. på arbetsmarknaden.

p. 34
Lukas

So, yes, I take offence when a person who is perhaps from Sweden and has lived here all his life and worked for 40 years, and that person ends up in the healthcare queue and has to compete with people who have just arrived in Sweden and who have no connection to Sweden at all and have not worked in Sweden. That they have to compete for a hospital bed as well. I take offence. I think it's wrong. If you have worked in Sweden and paid into the system in Sweden, you should somehow be prioritized. Now, I would also find it difficult to say to this other person that 'just because you haven't worked in Sweden, we say stop and then you can lie down and die in your own misery.'

Alltså, ja, det sticker ju lite i ögonen att en person som kanske är från Sverige och bott här i hela sitt liv, och jobbat i 40 år och den personen i vårdkö och ska då konkurrera med personer som nyss har kommit till Sverige och som inte har någon anknytning till Sverige över huvud taget och inte har arbetat i Sverige. Att de får konkurrera om en sjukhussäng liksom. Det sticker i ögonen. Jag tycker att det är fel. Om du har jobbat i Sverige och betalat in till systemet i Sverige så ska du på något sätt prioriteras. Jag skulle också ha svårt och säga till den här andra personen att, 'men bara för att du inte har arbetat i Sverige så säger vi stopp och då får du ligga och dö i din egen sörja liksom'.

p. 34
Filip

Filip: Well, my idea of being part of the nation is that you are, you are a Swedish citizen. You love your country. You do what's right for you, above all, that's almost the most important thing. You pull your weight. So it becomes like that, it becomes a society that helps each other. So it becomes a big 'we' instead.

Filip: Jo men, min uppfattning att, så här, vara en del av nationen, det är att du är, du är svensk medborgare. Du älskar ditt land. Du gör rätt för dig, framförallt, det är väl det viktigaste nästan. Alltså man drar sitt strå till stacken. Så det blir så, det blir ett samhälle som hjälps åt. Så det blir ett stort vi i stället.

David: Is it possible to become part of the Swedish nation if you come here from other countries?

David: Går att bli del av svenska nationen om man kommer hit från andra länder?

Filip: Yes. If you contribute to Swedish society and feel like a part of Swedish society, then you are included. But if you don't contribute and don't feel part of Swedish society and you, you don't really know anything about Swedish society, no, then you will probably never become part of Swedish society either

Filip: Ja. Men alltså bidrar du till det svenska samhället och känner dig som en del av det svenska samhället så är du ju inräknad där. Men bidrar du inte och inte känner dig som en del av det svenska samhället och du, du kan egentligen ingenting om det svenska samhället, nej, då kommer du troligtvis aldrig någonsin bli en del av det svenska samhället heller.

p. 35
Lukas

Sweden basically has fundamental values, and the way we live in Sweden. If you are newly born in Sweden, for example, you learn how things work and how they have worked for a long time. It is the same if

Sverige har ju i grund och botten någonstans grundläggande värderingar och så som vi lever i Sverige. Om man exempelvis är nyfödd i Sverige så får du ju lära dig hur det funkar och hur det har

you come from another country. If you're from Syria, for example, and you come to Sweden, you should know that this is how we live and act in Sweden. We behave well, we work, we learn the language, we really try to make everything work. Yes, and in Sweden we have a different religion than in your own home country, but that's not a big problem. You can go home from work on a Friday night and sit and pray to whatever god you want, it doesn't matter, but you have to enter society and behave like everyone else. [...] but if Sweden says that 'this is what is fundamental and then everyone is welcome to this', it is very easy to actually become Swedish as a person and enter this. Then, of course, you can make the choice not to, and not become Swedish, and in that case, if you misbehave and don't follow Swedish laws and regulations, then maybe you should be locked up or not be in Sweden. But if you follow Swedish laws and rules and behave yourself, you are super welcome, whether you were born in Baghdad or in Stockholm

funkat länge liksom. Det är samma sak om du kommer från ett annat land. Om du kommer från Syrien exempelvis och kommer till Sverige, då ska ju du få veta att såhär lever och verkar vi i Sverige. Vi betar oss bra, vi jobbar, vi lär oss språket, vi försöker verkligen göra så allt ska funka liksom. Ja, och i Sverige har vi en annan religion än vad ni har i erat eget hemland men det är inget större problem. Du kan gå hem från jobbet en fredagskväll och sitta och be till vilken gud du vill, det spelar ingen roll liksom, men du ska komma in i samhället och sköta dig som alla andra. [...] men om Sverige säger att 'det här är vad som är grundläggande och sen är alla välkommen in på det här' så är det väldigt lätt att som egen person faktiskt bli svensk, och komma in i det här. Sen kan man självklart göra valet att inte bli det, och inte bli svensk, och i sådana fall, om du missköter dig och inte följer svenska lagar och regler då kanske du ska sitta bakom lås och bom eller inte vara i Sverige. Men om du följer svenska lagar och regler och sköter dig så är du supervälkommen, oavsett om du är född i Bagdad eller i Stockholm.

p. 35
Mikael

Mikael: Yes, I am an immigrant myself and I have been one for so long, in Sweden, that I have become part of the Swedish community. And that's pretty close to belonging to the nation. Not 100 per cent, but pretty close, about as close as you can get. And over the years I have also tried to do the right thing, so to speak, I think I have paid a lot more in taxes than the average Joe has done. So I still want to agree with that formulation.

[...]

David: But where would you say the line is drawn on who should be included in the welfare society?

Mikael: Ja, jag är själv invandrare och jag har ju varit det så länge, i Sverige, så att jag har kommit till att bli en del av den svenska gemenskapen. Och det är ganska nära nationstillhörighet. Inte 100 procent, men rätt nära, ungefär så nära som man kan komma. Och jag har genom åren också försökt att göra rätt för mig så att säga, jag har betalat väldigt mycket mera i skatt än vad genomsnitts-Kalle har gjort. Så att jag vill ändå hålla med om den formuleringen.

[...]

David: Men var skulle du säga att gränsen går i vilka som ska ingå i välfärdssamhället?

Mikael: Those who deserve it. Beyond that it doesn't matter what they look like or where they come from, but in my opinion you should qualify.

Mikael: De som gör sig förtjänta av det. Sen spelar det ingen roll hur de ser ut eller vad de kommer ifrån, utan enligt mig så ska man kvala in.

p. 36
Lukas

Then I think it's easier for a person moving from Helsinki to Stockholm to enter society than for a person moving from Baghdad to Stockholm. But I think that both have the opportunity to do so. Both have the opportunity to enter society, and both should be given the opportunity to enter.

Sen tror jag att det är lättare om en person flyttar från Helsingfors till Stockholm att komma in i samhället än om en person flyttar från Bagdad till Stockholm. Men jag tror att, båda har verkligen möjlighet att göra det. Båda har möjlighet att komma in i samhället, och båda ska få möjligheten att komma in.

p. 36
Filip

Filip: We now see from Ukraine, for example, that many of the people who have come here are studying – great. There are a lot of people who have started working almost immediately. And the idea is that they will return later. [...]

Filip: Vi ser nu från Ukraina, exempelvis, att jättemånga av dem som har kommit hit, det är jättemånga som pluggar – jättebra. Det är jättemånga som kommit ut i arbete nästan direkt. Och tanken är att de ska återvända sen. [...]

David: Do you think Ukrainians find it easier to do that than people from other countries further away?

David: Tror du att ukrainarna har lättare att göra det än människor från andra länder längre bort?

Filip: Yes, well, much easier. And there is, it is very logical why as well. Because Ukrainians are, firstly, a very, they have good universities from the beginning. So many are very well educated. Then, if you look at countries in Europe, it's easier to adapt. It's like that. It's much easier to adapt, versus if you're going to, like, it's a completely different society, everything is different if you come from the Middle East, for example. There is nothing you can see as a similarity. The only similarity is the vulnerable areas we have in Sweden, where only other people from the Middle East live. That's the only thing they know, that's where they might feel a sense of belonging. Whereas Ukrainians from a well-educated country might still recognize themselves in some way in society. That is, in the democracy that we have.

Filip: Ja, men alltså mycket lättare. Och där finns alltså, det är väldigt logiskt varför också. För att ukrainare är för det första ett väldigt, de har bra universitet från början. Så många är väldigt välutbildade. Sen är det så att om du tar då länder i Europa så är det ju lättare att liksom anpassa sig. Blir det ju. Det är ju mycket lättare att anpassa sig, kontra om du ska liksom, det är liksom ett helt annat samhälle, allting är annorlunda om du kommer från Mellanöstern till exempel. Där är ju ingenting du kan se som en likhet. Enda likheten är väl de utsatta områdena vi har i Sverige, där det bara bor andra människor från exempel då Mellanöstern. Det är väl det enda de kan då, det är väl där de kanske kan känna tillhörighet. Medans då ukrainare från ett välutbildat land kanske ändå känner igen sig på något sätt i samhället. Alltså i demokratin vi har.

p. 37
Filip

So we have everything from all the criminals in Sweden who don't work, who make a living from crime. They don't contribute with anything. They don't contribute in any way to Sweden other than negatively, that's one way to put it, because that's very nice in the first place. But, or it's just my opinion, but they don't contribute, they haven't got a job. But when they get injured, they gratefully accept medical care. And it gets weird. In the same way, those who have not become part of Swedish society, who live in marginalised areas. They are not part of Swedish society. It becomes a huge problem - it weighs down many areas that they should also take part in the welfare system. Then it's completely inhumane to say 'no, you don't get any healthcare because you don't work,' you can't do that and you shouldn't do that. And it's like, somewhere we're getting into human rights, you know. You have the right to healthcare. So you can't do that to them, but they still don't contribute.

Så vi har ju allt ifrån alla kriminella i Sverige som inte jobbar, som livnär sig på kriminaliteten. De bidrar inte med någonting. De bidrar inte på något sätt till Sverige mer än negativt, så kan man ju uttrycka det, för det är ju jättesant för det första. Men, eller så är det bara min uppfattning, men de bidrar inte, de har inte skaffat sig ett jobb. Menar de blir skadade, då tar de tacksamt emot med mot sjukvård. Och det blir märkligt. Samma sätt, de som inte blivit en del av det svenska samhället, som lever i utanförskapsområdena. De är inte en del av det svenska samhället. Det blir jättestor problem-, alltså, det tynger ner många områden att de också ska ta del av välfärden. Sen är det helt ohumant att säga 'nej, du får ingen vård för du jobbar inte', så kan man inte göra och det tycker inte man ska göra. Och det är liksom, någonstans går vi in på mänskliga rättigheter, liksom. Du har ju rätt till vård. Så så kan man inte göra mot dem, men ändå så att de bidrar inte.

p. 38
Viktor

I don't remember who said it, but it was something like 'poverty is a choice you make.' It's not like that for everyone, of course, but – I can't remember who said it – but it's that you consume in a way, beyond of your financial limit. And then you can complain that 'yes, okay I'm poor.' Yes, you are poor, but you eat out four days a week, for example. [...] Although you don't overspend, it might be that you for example have children. My aunt is an example. She has, well, two children, single mother. And even though she doesn't spend much, the money still is spent. And [the situation of having] children is a bit more difficult to change, you can't just, well, that's why the children's allowance is important and so on, I believe.

Jag kommer inte ihåg vem det var som sade det, men det var typ att 'fattigdom är ju ett val man gör' typ. Det är ju inte det för alla såklart ju, men – jag kommer inte ihåg vem det var som sade det – men, det är ju att du konsumerar på ett sätt, alltså utanför din ekonomiska gräns. Och sen så kan man ju klaga på att 'ja okej, jag är fattig' liksom. Ja okej, du är fattig, men du äter ute typ fyra dagar i veckan, till exempel. [...] Även om man inte överspenderar kan det ju vara att man har barn till exempel. Jag vet min moster är ett exempel. Hon har väl två barn, ensam mamma då ju. Och även om hon inte spenderar mycket så går ju pengarna ändå bort. Och [situationen att ha] barn är lite svårare att ändra på, du kan ju inte bara liksom jaja, så det är därför som barnbidraget är viktigt och så vidare, tycker jag.

p. 38
Viktor

Viktor: I'm thinking above all of people who live in 'the hood', so to speak, where the culture is more like, okay, the school is rubbish, you have to be a gangster instead of being cool, and so on. But we have financial support and education and, yes, the welfare society that helps you. So being poor in Sweden and not having chosen it, it's a bit of, okay, it's very unusual. But it can happen, like my aunt for example. But I think the majority are definitely, could have, if you had looked at the economy.

Viktor: Jag tänker framför allt på typ alltså, folk som bor i så att säga 'orten' där kulturen är mer att ja okej, skolan är piss, man ska vara gangster i stället för att det är coolt och så vidare. Men vi har ju ekonomiskt stöd och utbildning och ja, välfärdssamhället som hjälper en. Så det blir det att vara fattig i Sverige och inte ha valt det, blir ju lite av, okej, det är ju väldigt ovanligt. Men det kan ju hända, som min moster tex. Men jag tror att majoriteten är ju definitivt, hade kunnat, om man hade sett över ekonomin.

David: So, would you say that the state or the individual is most responsible for individual poverty?

David: Skulle du säga att staten eller individen då har mest ansvar för individens fattigdom?

Viktor: It is the individual, yes.

Viktor: Det är individen ja.

David: Do you think the government is doing enough to combat poverty in Sweden?

David: Tycker du att staten gör tillräckligt för att bekämpa fattigdom i Sverige?

Viktor: Yes, 100 per cent. I went over it before: free schools, free health care, what else can the state do? It has already maxed out, so to speak.

Viktor: Ja, 100 procent. Jag gick ju över det innan: fri skola, fri sjukvård, vad mer kan staten göra? Det har ju maxat redan liksom.

p. 39
Mikael

The EU has a big role, the EU has become a giant colossus that costs a lot of money and doesn't work very well. If the EU member states had stuck to the EU's own rules, Sweden would not have had almost any immigrants from the MENA countries now. This is just one example. So the EU is not as good as it could have been.

EU har en stor roll, EU har blivit en jättekoloss som kostar mycket pengar och fungerar inte så bra. Hade EUs medlemsländer hållit sig till EUs egna regler, så hade inte Sverige haft nästan någon invandrare ifrån MENA-länderna nu. Det är bara ett exempel. Så att EU är inte så bra som det kunde ha varit.

p. 40
Filip

Well, a fundamental thing to understand SD voters, that is to understand why so many are dissatisfied. I've probably touched on this in every other question. It's not much more difficult than that things don't work. We keep saying that we have good healthcare and Sweden. Yes but not everyone has access to it. It doesn't matter how good care you have if not everyone has access to good care.

Nej men alltså, en grundläggande grej för att förstå SD-väljare, det är att förstå varför så många är missnöjda. Jag har väl halvt varit inne på det i var och varannan fråga. Det är ju inte mycket svårare än att saker och ting fungerar inte. Vi säger hela tiden att vi har en bra vård och Sverige. Ja men alla har inte tillgång till den. Det spelar ingen roll, hur bra vård du har, om inte alla har tillgång till bra vård. Ja, vi

Yes, we have pretty good elderly care as it is, but it can be much better. Yes, why settle for, like, average, when it can be super good? And then, this huge waste of money, that's where many people are dissatisfied. So it's really, from the start there is probably a lot of dissatisfaction, and it becomes that all parties, many people say that the Sweden Democrats are a party of dissatisfaction, and from the beginning that's how it is. But that's the case with all parties. There is no party like 'we just want to praise the rest of you because you have done so damn well.' That has never happened. Instead, parties emerge because people are dissatisfied.

har ganska bra äldrevård som så, men den kan ju bli mycket bättre. Ja, varför nöja sig med liksom, medel, när det kan vara superbra? Och sen, det här enorma slöseriet med pengar, det är väl där många är missnöjda. Så är väl egentligen, från början är det väl väldigt mycket missnöje, och det blir att alla partier, många säger alltså att Sverigedemokraterna är ett missnöjesparti, och från början så är det så är det ju så. Men så är det med alla partier. Det tillkommer inte ett parti liksom som "vi vill ju bara berömma er andra för ni gjort det så jäkla bra." Det har aldrig hänt. Utan partier tillkommer ju för att man är missnöjd.

p. 41
Viktor

I think that many politicians don't understand their voters. To a large extent. And I think SD really are the best at understanding its own voters.

Jag tror att många andra politiker förstår inte sina egna väljare. Till stor del. Och jag tror SD är verkligen bäst på att förstå sina egna väljare.

p. 41
Mikael

Well, we can say this, in our municipality in [Northwestern Scania], the Social Democrats ruled for many years, as in many other municipalities. Then the Moderates came in strong and have ruled in modern times. And these two parties are not particularly good at understanding the people. They have shown this in practice here in our municipality. So, in that respect, the SD are much better in any case.

Ja, vi kan säga så här, att i vår kommun i [nordvästra Skåne] så styrde ju Socialdemokraterna i många år, som i många andra kommuner. Sen kom Moderaterna starkt och har styrt i modern tid. Och de två partierna är inte så bra på att förstå folket. Det har de visat praktiska prov på här i vår kommun. Så att där är ju SD i alla fall mycket bättre.

p. 41
Filip

I think, if you have any kind of connection to the people, that you have some kind of... I think that, like *sossarna* [*the social democrats*, derogatory] are the worst at it, definitely the worst at it. Because there are a lot of people who join the SSU [the Swedish Social Democratic Youth League], and then they are trained all the way up to become like potential politicians. They don't work for real even for one day. Some of them. Then it has to do with like, if you've belonged to those who work and struggle, who get to work your way up in your career and so on, and

Jag tror, har du någon form av anknytning till, alltså folket, att du har liksom... Jag tror typ som *sossarna*, tror jag är sämst på det, helt klart sämst på det. För där är jättemånga som går in typ i SSU, och så skolas de hela vägen upp till liksom politikermaterial. De jobbar inte på riktigt en dag. Vissa av dem. Sen har det att göra med liksom, har du tillhört dem som arbetar och sliter, som får jobba dig uppåt i karriären och så där, och sen kanske engagerar dig politiskt – ja, men då kan du väl känna någon form av anknytning till folket.

then maybe get involved politically - well, then you might feel some kind of connection to the people.

- p. 41
Filip
- to talk about those who are not so well, that is pretty boring. Like, they want to talk about other things, [...] they want to attract attention. So, I think that they are probably silent about those who are not so well off.
- att prata om de som inte har det så bra, det är ganska tråkigt. Man vill liksom prata om andra grejer, [...] man vill locka till sig uppmärksamheten lite mer. Så jag tror att är nog tysta om dem som far illa.
- p. 41
Filip
- some municipalities carry out completely pointless projects worth millions of euros. And so on. Skip it! Help those who are suffering.
- vissa kommuner genomför helt meningslösa projekt för miljontals kronor. Och så. Skippa det! Hjälp dem som far illa.
- p. 41
Lukas
- You could say the overall politics, because there has been some kind of big consensus on the major issues that have affected, for example, insecurity, the large-scale immigration that we have had. [...] And that's why I think it's good that SD comes in, a bit from the side, they haven't been involved in making these decisions, but they come in and are a bit more fresh.
- Man kan väl säga den samlade politiken, för det har ju rätt någon sorts storkonsensus kring de stora frågorna som har påverkat exempelvis otryggheten, den stora invandringen som vi har haft. [...] Och det är därför jag tror att det är bra att SD kommer in, lite från sidan, de har inte varit med och tagit de här besluten, utan de kommer in och är lite mer fräscha.
- p. 50
Lukas
- I have more in common with the Left Party than with the ruling Moderate Party when it comes to the welfare issues.
- Jag har ju mer gemensamt med vänsterpartisterna när det kommer till välfärdsfrågorna än vad jag har med det moderata styret egentligen.
- p. 50
Lukas
- they think that we are almost like Bernie Sanders, we are communists, and we want a *folkhem* and high taxes and so on.
- de tycker ju att vi är nästan som Bernie Sanders, vi är ju kommunisterna och vi vill ha ett folkhem och hög skatt och så.