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Rhetorical responses of mainstream parties towards a radical right party

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ESTHER MARY L. CALVO
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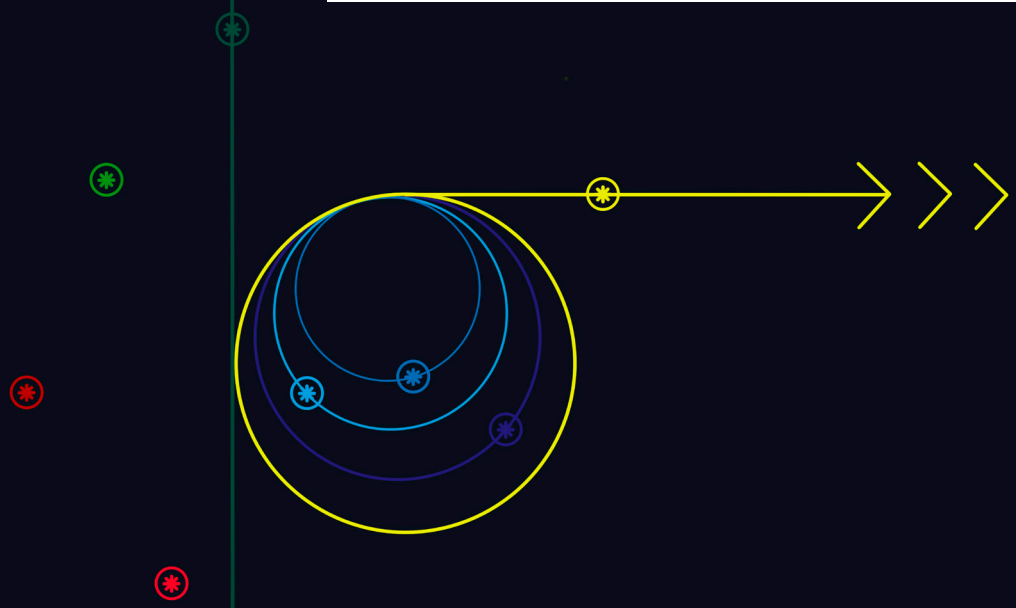

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Rhetorical responses of mainstream parties towards a radical right party

by Esther Mary L. Calvo

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Abstract
With their increasing electoral success, radical right (populist) parties (RRPs) are consolidating their presence in many western democracies. It is well-documented that mainstream parties alter policy positions and issue salience salience during elections to meet the RRP challenge, yet how these strategies unfold in parliament remains an area to be explored. In this dissertation, I focus on two attributes of legislative speeches, namely sentiment and issue attention, which I argue mainstream parties can leverage to compete against RRPs. These attributes, which I refer to as "rhetorical responses", vary and are shaped by the mainstream party's choice of strategy, the electoral threat from the RRP, as well as the extent to which the radical right and main rival bloc engage in the RRP's defining issue, that is immigration. **Paper 1** applies sentiment analysis to legislative speeches in the Swedish Riksdag. We find that MPs from Swedish mainstream parties use more negative language when addressing Sweden Democrats (SD) compared to when their speeches are directed at other mainstream parties. Furthermore, we demonstrate that negativity has declined over time, particularly among the center-right MPs. **Paper 2** reveals a differentiation in the levels of negativity between legislators from the center-left and center-right blocs. Specifically, I observe a less antagonistic tone in the speeches by center-right legislators who represent electoral districts where SD's vote share has increased relative to their own party. In **Paper 4** I find that immigration's salience in mainstream party speeches is positively associated with the RRP's attention to the issue and its electoral performance, as well as with a main rival bloc's emphasis on immigration. Moreover, in **Paper 3**, I explore the consequences of the negativity expressed in legislative speeches towards SD on partisans' affective polarization towards the RRP. By combining the National-SOM survey data with legislative speech data, I find that a partisan's affective polarization towards SD increases as their in-party's rhetoric towards the RRP becomes more negative, and that this relationship remains robust even when accounting for conventional predictors of affective polarization. Overall, the findings of this dissertation suggest that party responses towards the RRP go beyond merely altering policy positions during elections. More importantly, they identify the conditions under which politicians of mainstream parties are most likely to adjust their rhetorical responses towards the RRP.

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Para sa aking pamilya

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Malmö, March 2025

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Political Research Quarterly 77(3), pp. 950–961

II **Adapting to Radical Right Rival? Examining legislative speeches in response to SD's electoral success**
Esther Mary L. Calvo
Revise & Resubmit in an international peer-reviewed journal

III **(De)polarizing Words: How elite rhetoric shapes affective polarization towards the radical right**
Esther Mary L. Calvo
Unpublished manuscript

IV **Talking about the Challenger's Issue: Immigration's salience in Swedish parliamentary debates**
Esther Mary L. Calvo
Unpublished manuscript

Old Foe, New Friend?

The Sweden Democrats is a party not to be trusted. It is a populist party, always has been and always will be.

Stefan Löfven, 14-01-2015

1 Introduction

During a debate in 2019, the Christian Democrats' party leader, Ebba Busch, openly distanced herself and her party from the radical right party, Sweden Democrats (SD). As she has remarked, *"No, I still stick to the analysis that a lot of the Sweden Democrats' policies are difficult to implement in reality and I don't share the position in a lot of their policies"*.[1] This statement reflected the prevailing attitude at that time, which was vocal opposition and disdain towards SD. In a later debate in 2021, she made a noticeable reversal, stating, *"We are happy to reach agreements on migration with all parties in the Swedish parliament, but we share the ambition with SD to tighten it up considerably"*.[2] What initially started as a definitive dismissal of SD's policies has evolved into an open acknowledgment of issue agreements.

Statements made in legislative debates, such as the one presented above, tend

[1] The original statement in Swedish was *"Nej, jag håller fortfarande fast vid analysen att en hel del av sverigedemokraternas politik är svår att implementera i verkligheten och jag delar inte ståndpunkten i en hel del av deras politik."*

[2] The original statement in Swedish was *"Sedan träffar vi gärna uppgörelser bland annat om migration med alla partier i sveriges riksdag men vi delar ambitionen med SD att kraftigt strama åt den"*.

to go unnoticed by scholars who research how mainstream parties respond to radical right parties. This is unsurprising. Frequently cited works on the topic often focus on policy positions, meaning how policy stances of mainstream parties on immigration, law and order, and multiculturalism, begin to resemble that of the radical right (van Spanje, 2018). Grounded in Downsian spatial theory, the core insight from these studies is that mainstream parties–particularly those positioned on the right of the policy spectrum–are incentivized to realign themselves closer to the radical right in order to attract cross-pressured voters and gain a competitive edge. Consequently, these studies largely depend on party manifestos to determine whether mainstream parties pursue an accommodative, adversarial, or dismissive strategy. Some studies employ other types of data. By leveraging the ambiguity in the positions of mainstream parties towards the radical right (populist) party (RRP) and its issues in periods before elections, they conducted experimental studies to assess voter support for the radical right once mainstream parties adopt its core issue (Hjorth & Larsen, 2020; van Spanje, 2018).

While these studies offer important insights, focusing on the policy dimension presents a restricted view of competition between mainstream parties and the radical right. This perspective overlooks the reality that both types of parties compete at different dimensions and institutional contexts. Mainstream parties often compete not only by proposing alternative policies but also by emphasizing issues they are perceived to have expertise in and minimizing those on which they lack credibility (Abou-Chadi, 2014; Budge, 2015; Green-Pedersen, 2007; Meguid, 2008). Since the RRP's appeal is based on immigration and law and order issues, minimizing their importance by mainstream parties decreases its voter support. Moreover, mainstream parties can also compete with the radical right on a discursive level (Kollberg, 2023). They can adopt a rhetorical style similar to that of the radical right to attract voters or choose a demonizing discourse to portray the RRP unfavorably (Schwörer & Fernández-García, 2021). Alternatively, since the radical right is seen to have ownership of negative rhetoric, mainstream parties may opt to adopt a positive debating style to lessen the electoral gains of the radical right (Valentim & Widmann, 2021). RRPs also use anti-establishment rhetoric to undermine the comparative advantage of mainstream parties. As shown by Heinze (2022, p.345) from interviewing main-

stream MPs in German state parliaments, AfD MPs in state parliaments use provocations and insults to heighten tensions in parliamentary debates, disorient mainstream party MPs, and attract media coverage.

One arena where these types of competition occur is parliament, particularly during legislative debates. Although legislatures are usually defined by both formal and informal rules and structures, legislative debates create a unique environment for competition. Certain debates attract media attention, and both parties and MPs take advantage of this chance to present their positions to voters, allies, and opponents (Proksch & Slapin, 2015). More importantly, it is during these debates that parties can shape their constituents' perceptions of their own party as well as that of their rivals. To achieve this, parties and MPs strategically adjust two key attributes of their legislative speeches. The first attribute is sentiment, which refers to the emotional content of speeches, or put simply, how parties say things (Crabtree, Golder, Gschwend & Indriđason, 2020). As previous research has shown, parties modify the sentiment of their rhetoric depending on the nature of the debate, the status of the speaker's party, and the proximity of elections (Crabtree et al., 2020; Kosmidis, Hobolt, Molloy & Whitefield, 2019a; Osnabrügge, Hobolt & Rodon, 2021; Poljak & Walter, 2023; Schwalbach, 2022a; Silva, Schürmann & Proksch, 2023; Yildirim, 2024). The second attribute related to legislative speech is issue attention. As argued by Ivanusch (2024), despite constraints imposed by the legislative agenda, MPs can still go "off-topic" during their speeches and redirect the discussion to issues which they have "ownership" over. These adaptations in sentiment and issue attention in legislative speeches are what I refer to as rhetorical responses. To explore how these rhetorical responses are deployed against the radical right, this dissertation poses the following research questions:

- How do mainstream parties and MPs vary in their sentiment/negativity towards the radical right and the attention they place on immigration in their legislative speeches?
- What factors account for the differences in sentiment/negativity and focus on immigration of the radical right among mainstream parties and MPs?
- What consequences does in-party negativity have on affective polarization towards the radical right?

There are several reasons for my choice to focus on sentiment and issue at-

tention in legislative speeches. Firstly, similar to position adaptation, the tone chosen when addressing the RRP is shaped by goals related to vote-seeking and office-seeking, as such we can anticipate that the electoral performance of the radical right influences these strategic considerations (Strøm, 1990). Secondly, sentiment can be utilized by mainstream parties to reinforce their positioning goals against the radical right. In some instances, merely presenting an attractive or adversarial policy position is insufficient to regain voters from the RRP. Voters also evaluate parties based on character and valence-based dimensions (Bjarnøe, Adams & Boydstun, 2023). Following this, parties such as those on the left may strategically opt for valence-based attacks often through a negative tone in their speeches. Thirdly, regarding issue attention, deciding to address an issue often precedes taking a position on the policy dimension of the RRP. Earlier studies tend to assume this step when studying policy shifts. Finally, sentiment in legislative speeches can tell a different story of the mainstream party's relationship with the radical right. Even though an analysis of party manifestos may indicate issue alignment between the mainstream party and the radical right on immigration or multiculturalism, the statements directed at the latter may still exhibit a confrontational tone. As van Spanje (2018) suggests, it is entirely possible and even electorally beneficial for mainstream parties to imitate the pariah party's issue while simultaneously adopting an adversarial strategy.

By focusing on these aspects of legislative speeches, this dissertation makes the following contributions. First, it reveals how mainstream parties talk about the radical right. Only a few studies (e.g., Schwörer and Fernández-García, 2021, Bantel, 2023b) have directly examined how mainstream parties strategically use language that conveys specific emotions when addressing the RRP. While some studies have tackled how mainstream parties differentiate themselves or imitate the rhetorical style of the RRPs, they have not focused specifically on statements aimed at the radical right (Kollberg, 2023; Valentim & Widmann, 2021). In Paper 1, co-authored with Hanna Bäck and Royce Carroll, we argue that the sentiment reflected in speeches aimed at the SD can be used by mainstream parties to distance themselves from the radical right. However, we also observe this negativity reducing among center-right parties over time, suggesting that it can be adapted as prospects for cooperation grow.

The second contribution of this dissertation is highlighting how the electoral success of the RRP makes dismissive and adversarial strategies challenging to sustain. When faced with the choice between achieving electoral ambitions and meeting normative duties, the former often prevails (Bale, Green-Pedersen, Krouwel, Luther & Sitter, 2010; W. M. Downs, 2012). Paper 1 demonstrates that some center-right parties started adopting a more positive tone toward SD over time. Considering how the RRP is a more likely potential coalition partner for center-right parties than center-left ones, it is not unexpected that they have stronger motivations to soften their tone as the RRP attracts more voters (Abou-Chadi, Cohen & Wagner, 2022). Paper 2 shows that this difference in response to the RRP exists: speeches aimed at SD are more conciliatory in tone when the RRP's relative performance improves in the district of center-right MPs. Additionally, Paper 4 shows that when SD improves its poll performance, mainstream party MPs are more likely to engage with its defining issue.

The third contribution of this dissertation is theoretical, providing additional insights into the factors that determine affective polarization. I draw on the literature regarding party cues to argue that uncivil elite rhetoric is linked with partisans' affective evaluations of the radical right. So far, only a few studies have examined the role of elite communication on how partisans feel about the radical right, even though one might assume that the two are naturally correlated. Paper 3 examines this relationship and demonstrates an association between a partisan's affective polarization towards SD and the negativity of the individual's in-party.

This dissertation makes an empirical contribution by leveraging legislative speeches as data. To examine their emotional quality and focus on issues, I implemented various quantitative text methods and connected the results with meta-data about MPs, electoral results, and mass-survey data. Paper 1 used a dictionary-based approach to assess the sentiment of speeches aimed at SD. In Paper 2, I augmented an off-the-shelf sentiment lexicon using word embeddings techniques, making the dictionary more effective in capturing the negative language present in legislative speeches. Paper 3 connected the results from the sentiment analysis using the augmented dictionary with the National-SOM data. Paper 4 used a dictionary approach alongside structural topic models to analyze the extent mainstream parties address the issue of immigration in their

legislative speeches.

Together, the papers in this dissertation illustrate that competition between mainstream parties and RRPs extends beyond election campaigns and policy considerations. Rhetorical responses are dynamic and closely linked with party goals and the electoral performance of the RRP. Moreover, when the radical right becomes "too big and too entrenched", it becomes challenging for mainstream parties to remain committed to isolationist strategies and resist incorporating issues that originally motivated the radical right's party status. Additionally, the interaction between mainstream party elites and the radical right has downstream effects on how voters affectively perceive the RRP. As demonstrated in Paper 3, voters' affective polarization toward the radical right can shift, highlighting the crucial role of mainstream party elites, whose actions can either fuel affective polarization towards the RRP or contribute to its legitimization (Bantel, 2023b).

This kappa is structured as follows. In the following section, I define what I mean by mainstream parties and radical right parties. This is followed by a discussion on the responses available to mainstream parties identified in the literature to respond to the radical right challenge. After this, I discuss the two prevailing approaches to studying the competition between these two rivals. Afterwards, I justify why examining the parliament setting is important and how this institutional setting constrains the responses of mainstream parties but still provides opportunities to engage in rhetorical and issue competition using rhetorical responses. I then end section 2 with the downstream effects of this interaction on the affective evaluations of the radical right. The third section of this kappa is where I justify my case selection and describe briefly the structure of debates in the Swedish parliament, the Riksdag. This is also where I detail my data collection process for each paper, the quantitative methods I have used, and statistical analyses for each paper. These also include reflections during the process of my data collection. The third section provides an overview of the four papers which comprise this dissertation. Finally, in the last section, I discuss the insights from the findings of this dissertation as well as aspirations and suggestions for future research.

2 Concepts and Theories

During a debate regarding the Committee on Labor Market's report on equality and integration, the Left Party MP, Rossana Dinamarca, began her speech with "*Åhörare!*" (listeners), instead of the customary greeting "*Herr Talman!*" (Mr. Speaker). This refusal was unlikely to be coincidental, especially considering that, at that time, it was Björn Söder from SD, who was acting as deputy Speaker in the debate. When he pointed out to Dinamarca that one addresses the Speaker in legislative speeches, her response was "*You are not my Speaker*" (TV4 Nyheterna, 2014). This, of course, did not go unnoticed by the media.

Such clear displays of objection raises important questions. How is a mainstream party's choice of strategy adapted and manifested in the context of parliament, particularly in debates? What kind of tone is used by mainstream parties in their verbal exchanges with RRP politicians when they take on an accommodative or adversarial approach? And what are the consequences of such strategic use of emotive language on how partisans perceive the radical right? These are the questions I aim to answer in this section of the kappa. To do so, I draw from distinct bodies of literature. From studies on mainstream parties responses, we learn that parties are driven primarily by votes and office-seeking goals, and that they a have wide range of tactics at their disposal to confront the radical right challenge. Meanwhile, institutional approaches to legislative debates suggest that speeches can be electoral assets, that is either reflective of party positions, or sometimes individual stances on a particular issue. Moreover, recent studies on legislative speechmaking, suggest that emotive language and issue focus are strategically used by MPs and are impacted by external factors, such as the entry of new party challengers and crises. Finally, the insights from affective polarization and party cue literature demonstrate how interactions between mainstream party and RRP elites have a downstream effect on partisans' behavior. Together, these perspectives allow me to conceptualize what I call "rhetorical responses", and demonstrate how they are effectively used by mainstream parties to meet the challenge of the radical right in legislative debates.

2.1 Mainstream Parties and the RRP Challenger

Throughout this dissertation, I will refer to mainstream parties and RRPs. In this sub-section, I clarify what I mean by these two terms. Beginning with mainstream parties, W. M. Downs (2001, p.26) refers to them as "existing moderate parties" which, in contrast with pariah or extremist parties, are typically included in government coalitions. Akkerman and Rooduijn (2015), Meguid (2005), and De Vries and Hobolt (2020) define them as political parties that are electorally dominant in the center-left and center-right blocs, characterized by their governmental experience and centrist positions in the socio-economic dimension. Green-Pedersen (2019) differentiates mainstream parties from niche parties by describing the former as having a broader issue focus. In contrast, van Spanje (2010, p.582) prefers the term "established parties", referring to those which have "existed before the rise of anti-immigration parties in Western Europe in the end of the 1970s". In this dissertation, I adopt a broad definition and consider parties of center-left and center-right which are typically involved in coalition politics as mainstream (Calvo, Bäck & Carroll, 2024).

Though widely studied, we still see adjectives, such as "extreme" and "radical", used interchangeably to describe radical right parties. Other scholars have resorted to alternative labels, such as "far", "anti-immigration", "new right", "pariah", and "niche".[3] But as Norris (2005) points out, these labels are problematic because they imply certain preconceptions of the ideology and policy programs of these parties. Among the multitude of names, one thing is clear: a "terminology confusion" still exists, stressing the need to revisit its definition.

RRPs, together with extreme right parties, belong to the broader party family of the far right. Despite having many commonalities, these two groups differ in their relationship with Western democracy (Mudde, 2010). Extreme parties are opposed to pluralist democracy, and are likely to resort to violent and terrorist

[3]Niche party is a broader term that can be applied to communist, green, anti-immigration, and ethnoterritorial parties (Meguid, 2008). These parties emerged around a particular policy issue, such as the environment, immigration, and animal rights (Green-Pedersen, 2019). A pariah party is systematically excluded by established parties (van Spanje & de Graaf, 2018). For W. M. Downs (2012), the label "pariah" is used to describe extremist, radical and national-populist parties, regardless if they emerge from the left or right end of the political spectrum. They are characterized by their opposition to immigration, the establishment or the EU, as such they are regarded as "beyond the pale" by their mainstream rivals. For a more extensive discussion on pariah parties, see W. M. Downs (2012).

acts (Norris, 2005; Widfeldt, 2004). Examples of parties which belong to this group are the Fatherland Party in Norway, the National Democratic Party of Austria, the British National Front, and the German National Democratic Party.

RRPs differ in the sense that they support, or at least they claim to do so, procedural democracy, but reject its liberal elements, such as protection of minority rights and the rule of law (Mudde, 2010). These more successful parties have no desire to return to "pre-democratic, dictatorial political orders" (Minkenberg, 2013, p.10). Unlike extreme parties, RRPs are democratic, which, according to Widfeldt (2004), complicates justifying efforts of isolating them.

The electoral success of the RRP in post-War Europe occurred in phases (Mudde, 2019). The first group which emerged after the Second World War were groups that operated in the fringes and remained loyal to the old fascist cause (Norris, 2005). The second wave ushered in a new kind of radical right party, one that abandoned the disreputable neo-fascist ideology of their predecessors. The most important parties that emerged during this wave can be described as more neo-liberal populist, i.e., a mix of economic liberalism and opportunistic politics (Mudde, 2007). An example is the Danish Progress Party, which initially protested against high taxes and big government, and was later succeeded by the Danish People's Party (Christiansen, 2016). It was in the third wave where we witnessed the resurgence of the radical right. In this same period, RRPs like Vlaams Blok (currently known as Vlaams Belang) gained national representation, and support for the radical right revitalized, making them a familiar presence in most European countries (Norris, 2005). The fourth and current wave began in the 2000s. During this wave, the radical right has become more acceptable, managing to set foot into national parliaments of countries where they previously experienced resistance and turning into influential players in government formation. Some parties, such as the Freedom Party of Austria and the Swiss People's Party were included in coalition governments, while Fidesz in Hungary and the Law and Justice in Poland were able to secure majorities in their respective countries (Mudde, 2019).

There are three features which are shared by the RRPs of the present wave. The first and most defining feature is nativism, a belief that the nation-state should be exclusive for its native inhabitants. The ideal society for the RRP is a homogeneous state, one where the native's culture is to be the prevailing

way of life. For these parties, the ultimate threat to this vision is immigration. Moreover, RRPs insist on cultural assimilation, however they hold the belief that certain cultures and belief systems are fundamentally incompatible with Western values (Mudde, 2019).

Another feature of RRPs is authoritarianism. It is the desire for a strictly ordered society, where deviations from the law and social norms are to be met with harsher punitive measures (e.g., longer sentences, re-introduction of death penalty). RRPs are passionate supporters of tougher punishments on crime, increased policing, and the re-inclusion of traditional moral values in school instruction. The authoritarianism of RRPs has nativist elements in them, too. They attribute rising crime rates to mass immigration, and choose to selectively focus on crimes committed by non-natives (Mudde, 2019). The typical narrative employed by the radical right is that crime is widespread because of the lenient policies of the political establishment.

Lastly, some scholars describe the radical right as populist. Populism can be conceived as a political style or as an ideology. When considered as the latter, it divides society into two conflicting, homogeneous groups: the "pure" people versus the "corrupt" elite (Mudde, 2019). Typically, who is considered as part of the people is bounded by a certain criteria of culture and ethnicity. By asserting the "general will" of the people–which may conflict with minority rights–populist radical right parties undermine liberal democracy.

Table 1. The ideological features of the far right party family based on Golder (2016, p.482). While not all parties within this broad group are characterized by nationalism and populism, an increasing number display the combination of radicalism, populism, and nationalism.

	Ideological features			
Type	Radicalism	Populism	Nationalism	Anti-democratic
Radical right	✓	✓	✓	
Extreme right		✓	✓	✓

To summarize, the far right consists of parties which are either extremist or radical. These two broad groups have fundamentally opposing views of democracy. The former completely rejects the notion of democracy, while the latter claims to be in favor of procedural democracy but challenges its liberal elements. One important thing to note is that not all far right parties are populists or nativists (see Table 1). Far right parties, however, may incorporate one

or combinations of these traits across various stages in their development. For instance, the Norwegian Progress Party, founded in 1973, began as an anti-tax party but later on adopted populism in the 1990s (Mudde, 2019). But since the 1990s, nativism, populism, and radicalism have emerged as the primary features of RRPs (Golder, 2016).

2.2 Mainstream Party Strategies towards the RRP

Despite the shift to tougher immigration and integration policies, the Danish Social Democrats suffered an unexpected defeat in the 2015 general elections (Crouch & Eriksen, 2015). In contrast, the Danish People's Party (DPP) experienced an increase in electoral support, almost doubling its vote share from 12% to 21%. The tides turned for the Social Democrats in the following 2019 general elections, where they ended up as the largest political party, while the DPP lost almost half of its votes (The Economist, 2019). The reversal of electoral fortunes for these two parties raises the question whether the Danish Social Democrats' winning electoral strategy, that is the shift to restrictive immigration policies, contributed to the subsequent decline of the DPP. This sub-section seeks to answer the following questions. What are the variety of ways mainstream parties respond to the RRP challenge? What are the motivations that underlie mainstream parties' choice of strategy?

To address these questions, it is necessary to consider the nature of the competition between mainstream parties and RRPs. Meguid (2005; 2008) describes it as a competition of unequals, in which mainstream parties face a newcomer whose appeal to voters is primarily drawn on the novelty of its single issue. This newly introduced issue, according to De Vries and Hobolt (2020, p.55), does not neatly fit within the dominant left-right dimension, as such "it may have the potential to internally split dominant parties". Take, for instance, social democratic parties, which struggle when confronted with the immigration question, largely because "[they] are divided between working-class, anti-immigration supporters and middle-class, pro-immigration voters" (Johnston & Sprong, 2022, p.349).

In this scenario, mainstream parties have a repertoire of strategies to counter the RRP. W. M. Downs (2001, 2002, 2012) identifies two strategy choices for

mainstream parties: engage or disengage. These two have been referred to differently in other studies as ostracize and not ostracize (van Spanje & Van Der Brug, 2007), and marginalization and accommodation (Widfeldt, 2004). Bale et al. (2010) expands the choices into hold, defuse, and accommodate. Likewise, Meguid (2005, 2008) proposes three options, which are dismiss, adversarial, and accommodative, whereas Mudde (2019) identifies four strategies, which are demarcation, confrontation, co-optation, and incorporation. So far, W. M. Downs (2001, 2002, 2012) and Heinze (2018) have been the most extensive, identifying a wide variety of responses available to mainstream parties. To simplify these options, I draw on the typology developed by Meguid (2005, 2008) since they are broad enough to encompass more specific non-programmatic tactics.

One way of dealing with the radical right is to deliberately ignore, or dismiss the party and its core issue. The aim of this "do nothing" approach is to delegitimize the RRP and its agenda, in the hope that its allure will wane over time. Mainstream parties choosing not to have a position on the issue dimension of the RRP or diverting the attention of voters to the issues which they traditionally own is a clear example of this. A further instance of this strategy is when mainstream parties avoid engaging with the radical right in a debate over immigration.

How effective this strategy is remains disputed. For Meguid (2005, 2008), the choice to dismiss the RRP involves low risk and reduces the salience of the radical right's issue, leading to its vote loss. W. M. Downs (2001) thinks otherwise because ignoring the RRP disregards what voters are signaling by choosing the radical right. Failure to address the source of disaffection can only lead to further vote loss to the RRP.

Alternatively, mainstream parties can choose an adversarial approach, which means that they clearly express their objection to the radical right's policy stance by creating legal restrictions (e.g., bans, raising electoral thresholds), or by uniting as grand coalitions to deprive the RRP from any influence in government and policy-making. It entails systematically ostracizing the radical right, effectively turning it into a pariah party (W. M. Downs, 2002; van Spanje, 2018). One clear example of this is the collective agreement formed by Belgian mainstream parties that ruled out any form of cooperation with the former Vlaams Blok (van Haute & Pauwels, 2016).

The effectiveness of ostracizing the radical right in reducing its electoral appeal has also been questioned in the literature. Depriving the RRP a voice in politics undoubtedly fulfills some sense of moral duty to defend the institutions of liberal democracy from "intolerant parties", but it also makes the RRP even more attractive to their supporters, as it reinforces their image of being political underdogs. This is best articulated by Harris (1994, p.209), when he says that "you do not want to turn the RRP into professional martyrs, presenting the other mainstream parties as authoritarian and intolerant". Moreover, scholars like van Spanje and Van Der Brug (2007) observe that ostracized anti-immigration parties continue to hold extreme views as opposed to those that were not. Their belief is that coalition prospects incentivize anti-immigration parties to soften their view towards other parties and immigration. Meguid (2005, 2008) is also convinced that an adversarial treatment would only boost the issue ownership of the radical right, thus increasing public support for the RRP.

Other scholars consider it an unsustainable approach. The risk with forming alliances against the radical right is that there is very little that unites mainstream parties parties, except a common enemy (W. M. Downs, 2001). Furthermore, it artificially limits the choices of mainstream parties in forming a government, forcing themselves to construct broad, impractical coalitions, for the sake of maintaining the cordon sanitaire (Bale, 2003). Akkerman and Rooduijn (2015), however, think that the concern that ostracism leads to further radicalization of the RRP is unfounded. For instance, they did not find evidence for moderation in policy positions among non-ostracized parties that entered national office. They attribute this finding to the RRP's lack of incentives for de-radicalization, since maintaining their distinct position is electorally lucrative.

The opposite of the adversarial approach is the accommodative strategy. These can vary from adopting the issue of the RRP, temporary alliances in the form of voting with the radical right in certain pieces of legislation, agreeing to govern in a coalition, to agreeing to a minority government that is supported by the radical right. As Bichay (2024) argues, involving RRPs in coalition governments makes it difficult for them to continue with their strategy of anti-establishment rhetoric, as they cannot attack and criticize a government they are a part of. To give an example, the Freedom Party of Austria was never

formally ostracized by its largest competitor, the Austrian People's Party. The latter even formed a national coalition with FPÖ in 2000, until it split (van Spanje, 2018).

Accommodation also occurs beyond coalitions. It can also be visible in the direction of the policy positions of mainstream parties on immigration and multiculturalism. For instance, Han (2015), Abou-Chadi and Krause (2020), and van Spanje (2010) demonstrate that mainstream parties shift to stricter immigration and more culturally protectionist positions in response to RRP electoral success. The logic of co-opting the RRP's policy, according to Bale et al. (2010, p.413), is "if you cannot beat them, join them". For Meguid (2005, 2008), this strategy breaks the RRP's monopoly over the issue and provides voters with an anti-immigration stance a credible alternative. Because of their legislative experience and governmental effectiveness, voters tend to prefer mainstream parties over new parties in implementing an issue which they attach personal importance to.

However, the electoral benefits of the accommodative approach remains debated in the literature. Using the Danish case, Hjorth and Larsen (2020) demonstrate that an accommodative strategy by a social democratic party benefits the overall left due to progressive voters transferring to parties that are further left on immigration. Moreover, Hjorth, Nyrup and Larsen (2020) find that involvement of challenger parties in local governments increases the likelihood of these parties choosing moderate positions in issues. Additionally, Chou, Dancygier, Egami and Jamal (2021) observe that when mainstream parties move closer to the position of the radical right, the vote share for the RRP diminishes. In contrast, Krause, Cohen and Abou-Chadi (2023) are skeptical of any electoral rewards brought about by co-optation. They find that having such a strategy only leads to further defection to the radical right. Repositioning towards stricter immigration laws is also viewed to be counter-productive by Lewandowsky and Wagner (2023) since having populist attitudes makes Alternative for Germany voters inaccessible to mainstream parties.

Aside from its effectiveness not being guaranteed, accommodative responses put mainstream parties at risk of appearing as political sellouts to their core supporters (W. M. Downs, 2001). van Spanje and de Graaf (2018) and van Spanje (2018) also doubt that imitating the issue alone works, insisting that it

has to be coupled with ostracizing the RRP for mainstream parties to electorally gain from such a strategy. To elaborate, they argue that "parroting the pariah" by itself is not sufficient to diminish the RRP's electoral support, as they still retain the ability to implement their policies. Similarly, ostracism alone is also inadequate, as an isolated yet popular RRP could signal that there is an adequate level of public support for its issue, motivating voters to openly express their preference for the RRP (Valentim, 2021a).

Why do mainstream parties choose a certain response over another? To answer this question, it is important to understand what motivates political parties. Taking inspiration from Strøm (1990), I assume that the choices of political parties are driven by votes, office, and policy desires, which may sometimes come into conflict with each other. Parties prioritize winning votes in elections, because doing so increases their chances of being in government, which enables them to implement their policies. Certainly, the motivations of a political party are not limited to these three, nevertheless the findings from studies on party responses suggest that vote and office-seeking desires often outweigh other considerations. As Bale et al. (2010, p.68) observe in their study on social democratic parties' strategic options, "when faced with the trade off between democratic responsibility and electoral ambitions, the latter is proving to be more powerful than the former".

Electoral and office ambitions heavily weigh into the decision of political parties on which strategy to choose. These goals are put to risk when the RRP's size grows and when the mainstream party loses more votes to the radical right relative to its other rivals (Meguid, 2008). Bale et al. (2010), for instance, argue that a decisive factor for social democratic parties to adopt an accommodative strategy is vote loss to the RRP, whose electoral success enhances the chances of a center-right bloc gaining office. Likewise, Han (2015) finds evidence that mainstream parties align their policies on immigration with the RRP when the electoral success of the radical right is coupled with their underperformance relative to a primary main rival. Thus, what pushes mainstream parties to react to the RRP is electoral self-preservation. Meguid (2008) outlines scenarios that illustrate how electoral self-preservation guides the choice of response of mainstream parties, and their interactions with other parties, which, in turn, vary in their effect on the electoral outcome for the RRP. In a situation where the rad-

ical right does not pull many votes from mainstream parties, they will remain indifferent to the RRP's issue, and opt for dismissive tactics. However, in the case where one mainstream party suffers heavy losses to the RRP relative to another mainstream competitor, it will pursue an accommodative strategy as a way to recover lost voters. Meanwhile, the less affected mainstream competitor opts for an adversarial strategy. As predicted by Meguid (2008), this maneuver reinforces the issue ownership of the RRP, and as a result, it undermines the effectiveness of the disadvantaged mainstream rival's co-optation strategy. The final scenario has both mainstream parties threatened by the RRP. Under these circumstances, the mainstream parties are expected to pursue a joint accommodative strategy. By doing so, they acknowledge the demand for the RRP's issue and position themselves closer to the RRP, thus challenging its ownership over it.[4]

The following are other factors that influence the decision of mainstream parties on which response to choose. I address them briefly below.

- ***Electoral rules.*** The threat of the RRP is argued to be contingent on the electoral rules that exist in a country. Certain types of electoral systems make mainstream parties more sensitive to vote loss. W. M. Downs (2012, p.66), for instance, argues that plurality-based systems offer a "strategic buffer", and allows mainstream parties to ignore the the RRP and its issue. Similarly, PR systems with high thresholds and vote-seat proportionality make mainstream parties more resilient towards vote loss (Meguid, 2008). However, in systems where entry barriers and vote-seat proportionality are low, dismissive strategies will be uncommon.
- ***Democratic responsibility***. Mainstream parties may also be motivated by normative and political duties, such as defending democracy (Capoccia, 2001). Those particularly coming from countries with a previous experience of a challenger party using liberal institutions and processes against democratic order often employ tools within the boundaries of the law to combat the pariah party (W. M. Downs, 2012).
- ***Ideology and history of the RRP.*** Unlike RRPs with historical links to an old fascist party, those which originated as anti-tax parties and later

[4]See Meguid (2005; 2008) for further details on the predicted effects of mainstream party strategies on niche party electoral support.

on became anti-immigration parties are less likely to be ostracized (van Spanje, 2010). Mainstream parties may find it easier to justify working with a RRP as not violating social norms to their core supporters if the radical right possesses a reputational shield (Ivarsflaten, 2006).

- ***Previous commitments.*** These can hinder mainstream parties from dropping sub-optimal strategies towards the RRP. Once parties have committed to a dismissive strategy, it becomes complicated to shift to a more accommodative one without being seen as unprincipled or policy inconsistent. The scenario where mainstream parties become prisoners of their previous decisions is what Meguid (2008) calls reputational constraints. As an example, Backlund (2020) argues that the cordon sanitaire imposed by Swedish mainstream parties against SD became institutionalized in the sense that a rival party would invoke another party's previous decision as a means to portray it as inconsistent with its normative commitments.
- ***Organizational structure***. Organizational structure of mainstream parties may also contribute to the delay in choosing a more optimal course of action. Mainstream party leaders who need to secure the approval of their members, who may potentially possess diverging perspectives on the direction of the party's strategy, are much more limited in which responses they can employ. When this is the case, the party often resorts to low cost, uncontroversial strategies than accommodative ones (Meguid, 2008). Furthermore, a change in party leadership or dominant faction may also contribute to making a particular strategy towards the RRP more acceptable (Backlund, 2020).

2.3 Forms of Competition between Mainstream Parties and RRPs

Having identified the strategies that mainstream parties can employ to compete against the RRP threat, I now turn to the two approaches used to explain competition between these two parties: spatial theory and issue competition. The spatial approach to party competition is based on Anthony Downs' (1957) seminal work. It assumes that political parties are motivated by office-seeking desires and that voters are "policy-oriented", which means that they choose a political party that offers policies closest to what they prefer (Grofman, 2004).

Consequently, political parties will locate their positions on a single policy dimension where there is least distance between themselves and the voters.[5] To illustrate, assume a scenario that is similar to Figure 1, where $V1$ and $V2$ denote voters, and A and B represent parties. They are all located on the right area of the continuum, but party B and voter $V2$ exhibit more right-wing tendencies. According to the spatial model, party A will shift closer to party B, and by doing so, it attracts $V1$ and all those to its left.[6] Based on this logic, it is reasonable to assume that if the RRP performs well in a particular election, political parties located on the right of the continuum, such as conservative and moderate right-wing parties, should be incentivized to locate themselves closer to the RRP on immigration to prevent it from attracting more voters or gaining more advantage in subsequent elections (Abou-Chadi, 2014; van Spanje, 2010). By doing so, mainstream parties challenge the RRP's issue ownership over immigration, which loses its electoral appeal as voters are drawn to the extensive government experience of mainstream parties (Meguid, 2008).

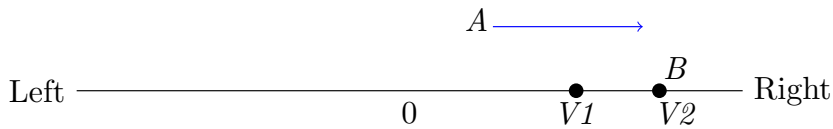

Figure 1: A scenario with two parties and two voters, where party A moves closer to party B on the policy dimension. Based on van Spanje (2018).

The spatial approach to party competition has been the primary method studying responses of mainstream parties to RRPs. As seen in Table 2, most of the research has focused on how the electoral success of the radical right affects the positions of mainstream parties on immigration and multiculturalism. Other studies have also explored how co-optation of restrictive immigration policies by mainstream parties are effective in winning back voters from the radical right. But as Lewandowsky and Wagner (2023) point out, strategic repositioning of established parties are ineffective in convincing radical right voters who exhibit strong populist attitudes to defect from the RRP.

[5] In this setting, a voter is equally likely to support either party when their policy offerings are not too different from each other.

[6] Assuming that voter preferences are normally distributed.

Table 2. Overview of studies. This is not exhaustive of all the studies on party responses towards the RRP and only includes those that I am aware of that specifically focused on policy positions. The Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) collects party manifestos from over 50 countries and classifies quasi-sentences from the manifestos into major issue categories. The Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) tracks the policy positions of political parties from EU member states, as well as from the Western Balkans, Norway, Switzerland, and Turkey on a range of policy issues (Jolly et al., 2022).

Study	**Data**	**Focus**
Meguid (2005, 2008)	CMP	Type of mainstream party response to niche parties and its effect on niche party electoral success
van Spanje (2010)	Expert survey	Shift in party position on immigration due to pariah party electoral pressure
Han (2015)	CMP & CHES	Shift in party position on multi-culturalism, intergation of immigrants and asylum-seekers due to RRP electoral threat
Abou-Chadi (2014)	CMP	Strictness in multi-culturalism stance due to electoral threat from RRP
Abou-Chadi and Krause (2020)	CMP	Shift in party position on multi-culturalism due to RRP electoral success
van Spanje (2018); van Spanje and de Graaf (2018)	CMP	Effect of co-opting a pariah party's key policy and ostracism on its electoral support
Chou et al. (2021)	Conjoint experiment	Effect of accommodation by mainstream parties on RRP voters' PTV for the RRP
Hjorth and Larsen (2020)	Survey experiment	Effect of accommodation by a social democratic party on PTV for the left bloc
Krause et al. (2023)	MARPOR project	Effect of accommodation by mainstream parties on RRP electoral support

Aside from altering policy positions, another way which parties compete for votes is by selectively emphasizing issues in which they are perceived by voters to be competent and avoiding issues which provide advantage to a rival during election campaigns (Green & Hobolt, 2008; Green-Pedersen, 2019).[7] Based on

[7]Competence refers to how much voters trust political parties to deliver policies (De Vries &

this logic, if inflation is identified as one of the most pressing social concerns, then there should be a general tendency to prefer conservative parties as they are commonly perceived as better at managing the economy. Conversely, if issues relating to the welfare state and redistribution are salient in a particular election period, then left-wing parties should expect an improvement in their performance.

One way for RRPs to challenge the comparative advantage of mainstream parties is to engage in a strategy such as issue entrepreneurship. This involves challenger parties raising previously ignored issues that cannot be neatly integrated within the traditional left-right dimension of conflict (Hobolt & De Vries, 2015). Consequently, mainstream parties steer clear of these issues because they risk causing internal division, alienating a segment of their voter base, or upsetting traditional coalition allies. One example of an issue which mainstream parties avoid is immigration. As mentioned in the previous section, immigration poses a difficulty to social democratic parties that often face the dilemma of trying to appease their traditional working-class voter base, who is more skeptical of immigration, while maintaining the support of their more cosmopolitan middle-class voters (Abou-Chadi & Wagner, 2020). Center-right parties also face this predicament: conservative parties historically have strong ties with business groups that tend to support globalization and economic migration, while Christian Democrats have links with religious groups that advocate for the protection of newcomers, however, these parties also emphasize nationalism and communalism which may be at odds with the ideals of their traditional support groups (Abou-Chadi et al., 2022; Akkerman, 2015; Hadj Abdou, Bale & Geddes, 2022).

RRPs actively mobilize immigration not only because it is an issue of ideological and political importance, but as importantly, it provides them with a distinct electoral advantage. Being the "first-mover", according to De Vries and Hobolt (2020), allows the RRP to have monopoly over the issue for some time. By being regarded as the original proponent of the issue, the RRP improves its electoral standing and coalition potential when its core issue, immigration, becomes prominent on the political agenda (Budge, 2015). For instance, Hutter

Hobolt, 2020).

and Kriesi (2022) observe that "new radical right upstarts" benefited from the heightened salience of immigration during the 2015 refugee crisis compared to more established RRPs.

Though issue entrepreneurship helps us understand the incentives of RRPs to promote their core issue, it does not explain why mainstream parties would choose to pay attention to it. As De Vries and Hobolt (2020) argue, keeping party competition within the left-right dimension is in the best interest of mainstream parties, given that it forms the basis of their dominance over challenger parties like the RRP. Some studies point to changes in socio-economic structures, external crisis events, and a growing public sentiment against immigration and asylum as the primary causes of politicization of immigration by mainstream parties (Gessler & Hunger, 2022; Grande, Schwarzbözl & Fatke, 2019; Green-Pedersen & Otjes, 2019). However, the findings on the effects of these objective factors are mixed. For instance, Hadj Abdou et al. (2022) argue that the influence of the 2015 refugee crisis on party politics was short-lived, and that it did not cause a shift to more negative attitudes to immigration. Moreover, Dancygier and Margalit (2020) observe that, despite the large influx of immigrants experienced by Western Europe in the 70s and 80s, immigration remained a minor issue in election programs of political parties.

Other studies suggest that it is the electoral pressure from the RRP that contributed to the renewed interest of mainstream parties in immigration, although the mechanisms behind the effect of RRP electoral success vary (Green-Pedersen & Otjes, 2019; Johnston & Sprong, 2022). First, mainstream parties may choose to engage in immigration to neutralize the threat from the RRP. By highlighting the same issue, mainstream parties signals to policy-oriented voters that they are responsive to their concerns. Given their extensive government and legislative experience, policy-oriented voters are more likely to prefer mainstream parties over RRPs (Meguid, 2008). Second, mainstream parties do it as a strategy to maximize vote- and office-seeking opportunities. As Green-Pedersen (2019) notes, if forming a coalition with socio-liberal parties proves not to be the winning strategy for certain mainstream right parties, they can turn to the electorally successful RRP, which enables them to focus on immigration that they previously avoided. Moreover, Abou-Chadi (2014) argues that center-right and conservative parties have more to gain from emphasizing immigration, as it

draws cross-pressured, left authoritarian voters who have traditionally supported left-wing parties. Third, the growing strength of RRPs drives mainstream left parties to emphasize immigration in their platforms and statements, but primarily to defend it. As observed by Johnston and Sprong (2022), MPs from the Dutch Green party were more inclined to address immigration in their speeches as a response to the improved performance of the RRPs.

Some scholars are wary of the impact of RRP electoral success on the decision of mainstream parties to focus on immigration (Hadj Abdou et al., 2022; Kortmann & Stecker, 2019; Meyer & Rosenberger, 2015). Despite their increasing popularity, the association of some RRPs with the historical extreme right deprives them of gravitas, as a result, their credibility and perspectives on issues are frequently dismissed or not given too much weight (Ivarsflaten, 2006). However, a mainstream rival is not burdened by such problematic origins, as such, addressing immigration as a response to a main rival's introduction of the issue, can easily be justified to the electorate and does not cause concern among mainstream politicians that they are breaking social norms.

2.4 Mainstream Party Strategies and Legislative Speeches

As shown in the previous section, most of the earlier research on party responses focuses on assessing policy proximity with the RRP on the issue of immigration and multiculturalism, and how radical right electoral success is related to increased emphasis on immigration by mainstream parties. What is common among these studies is that they concentrate on strategic options available to mainstream parties during electoral campaigns, and rely on party manifestos or expert surveys as data. However, as seen in Table 3, responding to the RRP challenge is not limited to just co-opting the radical right's policy preferences. Instead, mainstream parties can draw from a broad range of tactics, depending on the institutional setting of party competition.

One institutional setting which has remained largely overlooked in previous research is the legislative arena (Heinze, 2022). Yet, examining it is important for the following reasons. First, as Capoccia (2001, p.433) argues, "parliament is the main arena where political majorities are formed to support measures against extremists, whether this means passing special legislation or simply backing the

executive in its measures against extremists". Legislatures can grant powers to governments by passing legislation that permits the temporary ban or suspension of organizations considered threatening to the core institutions of democracy. Second, parliament is the same arena where the radical right can actively contest the dominance of mainstream parties. Unlike mainstream parties, it is not in the immediate interest of RRPs to be in government (De Vries & Hobolt, 2020). Because of this, they are not burdened by expectations from their party leaders to "defend compromises, speak about a specific bill, coordinate with coalition partners, or present credible policy alternatives" (Kollberg, 2023, p.46). This, in turn, allows legislators to deviate from the current issue being debated and emphasize another, and engage in anti-establishment rhetoric without suffering too much costs. Third, during election campaigns, contact between mainstream and radical right politicians is quite limited, often restricted to media appearances in election debates or indirect interactions through social media. Because of this, mainstream parties do not know what to expect from radical right representatives or how they will behave once they are elected into parliament. In the legislative setting, direct interaction with the radical right becomes unavoidable, thus necessitating mainstream politicians to become actually acquainted with RRP rivals and reconsider their initial strategies. Finally, legislatures, with their institutional rules and structures, limit the range of strategies that mainstream parties can implement to compete against the radical right (Schwalbach, 2022b). Once the radical right has successfully entered parliament, some tactics previously employed during election campaigns are inapplicable (Heinze, 2022). If the RRP could be completely ignored before, it can no longer be disregarded once it is represented in parliament, as each RRP legislator is now granted parliamentary privileges and rights (Heinze, 2022). For instance, an elected representative from the RRP has the right to ask interpellation questions to a government minister, file motions, become members or leaders of committees, and even be nominated as the speaker, which makes it challenging to avoid interacting with representatives from the radical right.

Parliamentary responses to the RRP can occur at the formal and policy levels (Heinze, 2022). Response options at the formal level involve the decision on whether, and to what extent to collaborate or not with the RRP in daily legislative functions. This includes exclusion, ad-hoc toleration, and legislative

Table 3. Examples of behavioral outcomes corresponding to mainstream party strategies in different arenas. Based on Meguid (2005), W. M. Downs (2012), Heinze (2018; 2022), and Blomgren (2018).

Strategy	**Elections**	**Legislative**	**Government**
Dismissive	No movement in issue position, no discussion of RRP issue in election manifesto	Disengagement in debates, no movement in issue position, social avoidance in committee hearings, abstaining from voting	
Accommodative	Convergence in issue position, discussion of RRP issue in election manifesto, electoral pacts	Positive sentiment in speeches directed at RRP, discussion of RRP issue in speeches, convergence in issue position, adopting populist rhetoric, voting with RRP in committees and plenary, joint motions and announcements	Coalition with RRP, minority government with RRP support, allocation of cabinet positions
Adversarial	Divergence in issue position, discussion of RRP issue in election manifesto, electoral pacts	Negative sentiment in speeches directed at RRP, discussion of RRP issue in speeches, divergence in issue positiion, demonization, cross-bloc agreements, changing parliamentary rules concerning the structure of committees, rejection of RRP initiatives, refusal to introduce joint motions	Cordon sanitaire, outright bans

and executive cooperation. For example, mainstream MPs can legally exclude or limit the influence of representatives from the radical right in committees by modifying formal rules or informal parliamentary practices, or collaborate by authoring motions and different parliamentary initiatives together. Another example is when mainstream politicians avoid interacting with RRP legislators in committees—as was the case in Sweden where certain MPs from the Social Democrats and the Left Party expressed their discomfort in socializing with members of SD in committee meetings (Blomgren, 2018). Strategies under the policy level focus on the actions that mainstream parties can take in response

to the issue of the radical right. This includes ignoring, defusing, debating, or adopting the core issue of the RRP. For instance, a mainstream party could assign one member to speak on the motion of the RRP on its behalf, but that speaker will only clarify or reinforce the position of the party. In this way, the mainstream party still adheres to the debate, without increasing the salience of the issue inititated by the radical right (Heinze, 2022).

Although legislatures are generally characterized by formal and informal rules, there are still some opportunities within this institutional setting where strategic maneuvering is possible. One such opportunity is participating in legislative debates.[8] Because some debates generate public and media attention, it provides an ideal platform for MPs to advertise their policy positions to their parties, party allies and rivals, and constituents (Osnabrügge et al., 2021; Proksch & Slapin, 2012, 2015).

However, legislative debates are, to some degree, also regulated environments. Unlike in manifestos and interactions on social media, legislative debates are normally on a particular government bill, or motion on the legislative agenda, which political parties must adhere to in their speeches (Proksch, Lowe, Wäckerle & Soroka, 2019). As such, the legislative agenda limits the range of topics MPs can choose to address in their speeches. Moreover, who gets to access the floor is determined by the incentives a country's electoral system generates, parliamentary rules, proximity to elections, and MP policy expertise (Bäck, Baumann, Debus & Müller, 2019; Bäck & Debus, 2016; Bäck, Debus & Müller, 2014; Giannetti & Pedrazzani, 2016; Poljak & Walter, 2023; Proksch & Slapin, 2012, 2015; van Kleef, Mickler & Otjes, 2024). For instance, in electoral systems where party unity matters, party leaders are expected to delegate speeches less. As a consequence, the statements tend to reflect the party line on the particular bill, motion, or amendment in question. In contrast, party leaders tend to distribute floor time to MPs with dissenting views where cultivating a personal reputation is rewarding, such as in parliamentary systems with majoritarian, mixed-member proportional, or preferential electoral systems where MPs are directly elected by their constituents.

[8] Following, Eggers and Spirling (2014), I refer to legislative debates as exchanges of statements on a particular subject and time, though it is important to note, that in the literature, they are sometimes not clearly and empirically differentiated from legislative speeches.

Despite the nature of legislative debates, speeches can be used as a tool by MPs to achieve vote, office, and policy-seeking goals (Ivanusch, 2024; Kollberg, 2023). In their analysis of austerity debates in Ireland, Herzog and Benoit (2015), find that, even in strong party systems, MPs use speeches as a form of verbal opposition and as a way to justify voting for unpopular austerity measures, thereby mitigating potential criticism from constituents. Similarly, Slapin, Kirkland, Lazzaro, Leslie and O'Grady (2018) observe that British MPs use speeches not only to justify rebellion, but also to signal ideological independence from their party on a particular issue to their constituency. Furthermore, Poyet and Raunio (2021) argue that, aside from investing in constituency service, speechmaking is also a strategy that MPs in preferential systems can engage in to improve the electoral performance of their parties.

Building on these insights, I identify facets of legislative speeches that are purposefully adapted by legislators in party competition, which I refer to as rhetorical responses. The first is sentiment, which is the underlying emotion or affectual attitude implied by a speech (Liu, 2012; Mohammad, 2016a).[9] Studies by Kosmidis, Hobolt, Molloy and Whitefield (2019b) and Crabtree et al. (2020) demonstrate that political parties adopt a positive tone in their manifestos to enhance the appeal of their policy offerings and to influence voters' perceptions of their current situation. Likewise, Schwalbach (2022a) finds that single-coalition governments become more positive in the way they express themselves in their speeches in parliament when elections draw closer. In contrast, Poljak and Walter (2023) observe that policy- and trait-based attacks towards political rivals increase in parliaments nearing the end of the election cycle. Other studies also find that MPs strategically use emotive language to attract media attention. For instance, Osnabrügge et al. (2021) find that British MPs resort to more emotive rhetoric in high-profile political debates, such as Prime Minister's Questions. Similarly, Yildirim (2024, p.4) suggested that "electorally vulnerable and junior MPs find more value in engaging in emotional displays during their speech

[9] I use sentiment and tone interchangeably. Other co-occurring concepts of sentiment are emotionality, polarity, negativity, and emotive content. It should be noted that it is the tone of the language used in the speeches that mentions the radical right that I focus on. Bestvater and Monroe (2023) and Burnham (2024) argue that sentiment and stance are orthogonal, but on some occasions, the underlying stance in a sentence and the emotive language used can be correlated.

time", which his analysis of speeches in the House of Commons supported.

Considering these instances of strategic use of emotive language, it becomes possible to form expectations on how mainstream MPs can also employ the same tactics when interacting with the RRP in parliamentary debates. If they view the RRP as a pariah, then in their verbal exchanges with the representatives of the radical right, they may deliberately opt for confrontational or negative language to emphasize to the voters the differences between the speaker's party and the RRP along character-based dimensions. For example, mainstream party MPs can use pejorative labels, such as "climate-deniers", "un-Swedish", "neo-Nazis", or "fascists", when describing the RRP and its members.[10] This type of rhetorical response may exemplify an adversarial approach. Indeed, Schwörer and Fernández-García (2021) find that some center-left parties demonize RRPs on social media platforms like Twitter. RRPs are also the subject of negative rhetoric in legislative debates, as Røed, Bäck and Carroll's (2023) findings show that the Progress Party is mainly criticized by the Labor Party, Socialist Left Party, and Center Party in the Norwegian Storting. Additionally, Hjorth's (2020) findings reveal that electorally secure and less issue constrained MPs are more likely to depict the Danish People's Party and its members as morally objectionable in their legislative speeches. Aside from attacking the RRP in their speeches, mainstream politicians can also use language associated with positive emotions to differentiate themselves from the RRP's anti-establishment rhetoric (Lewandowsky, Schwanholz, Leonhardt & Blätte, 2022; Valentim & Widmann, 2021). Table 4 summarizes how I expect a legislative speech's sentiment to be based on the mainstream party's choice of strategy. It should be noted that developing expectations for what a dismissive strategy will look like in sentiment is challenging if a mainstream party MP talks around the RRP during legislative debates. However, given the format of legislative debates, carrying out a dismissive strategy is difficult, as certain types of debates require a speaker to offer a reply.

Issue attention is another attribute of the legislative speech that can be strategically used in party competition. Ivanusch (2024, p.204) argues that, despite the topic constrain set by the legislative agenda, speeches can still be a tool for

[10] Meguid (2008) mentions organizational tactics, such as verbally denigrating the niche party, as analogous to a programmatic adversarial approach but does not elaborate on it.

Table 4. Rhetorical responses corresponding to mainstream party strategies

	Rhetorical responses	
	Issue attention	Sentiment
Dismissive	No discussion of RRP issue, divert attention to issue owned by party	-
Accommodative	Discussion of RRP issue	Positive/Reduced negativity
Adversarial	Discussion of RRP issue	Negative/Increased negativity

issue competition because MPs can focus on other aspects of the particular issue being debated, or connect it with another issue that the party owns by going "off-topic". Hager and Hilbig (2020), for instance, demonstrated how German cabinet members would align the topics in their speeches with those identified as important in the public opinion reports they received, and adjust their substantive positions towards the preferences of the public expressed in the same reports. Following this logic, it is reasonable to argue that by steering a discussion on immigration to familiar ground, that is, issues along the traditional socio-economic dimension, mainstream parties force the radical right into a policy terrain where they do not have a comparative advantage given that they mobilize support on a single issue. By doing so, mainstream parties also signal to the voters that the issue raised by the RRP is without merit. However, if a mainstream party chooses to address the RRP's defining issue in their speeches, they can either choose to defend it, as Johnston and Sprong (2022) observed among green party legislators, or strategically emphasize it as a means to draw cross-pressured left-authoritarian voters from center-left rivals or expand coalition prospects, as suggested by Abou-Chadi (2014).

2.5 Affective Polarization and Party Cues

So far, I have only covered the ways in which mainstream parties and the radical right compete with one another in their efforts to gain electoral advantage over the other. In this sub-section, I explore one potential consequence of this interaction among the electorate, that is affective polarization towards the radical

right.

While it has inspired significant research interest among political scientists due to its detrimental political consequences (Huddy & Yair, 2021), the term polarization has been understood in various ways in the literature (Skytte, 2021). Earlier studies of polarization have predominantly focused on extremity in issue positions (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2006), but as pointed out by Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes (2012), this is just one way to define partisan conflict. Indeed, scholars like Mason (2013) have questioned the extent of deepening divisions in policy positions among the electorate, arguing that voters possess moderate views on most issues. And even if the electorate has developed ideologically consistent attitudes towards policy area over time, it does not fully account for the alarming rise in partisan bias.

If the electorate largely agrees on most issues, where lies the polarization? According to Iyengar et al. (2012) and Reiljan (2016), the mass polarization we are witnessing today has more to do with the growing distance in affect between in-party and out-party members.[11] This type of polarization may not necessarily be based on substantive policy disagreements, but rather from deep-seated partisan and ideological identities. Formally known as affective polarization, it can manifest into heightened distrust in and refusal to interact with members of the out-party (Druckman & Levendusky, 2019), preferential treatment for co-partisans (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015), dehumanization of out-party members (Martherus, Martinez, Piff & Theodoridis, 2021), partisan stereotyping (Ahler & Sood, 2018), and arduous government formation (Barber, McCarty, Mansbridge & Martin, 2015). Studies on affective polarization have largely concentrated on the US experience and electorate, but notable efforts have been made to extend the concept to multi-party parliamentary democracies (Bantel, 2023a; Bassan-Nygate & Weiss, 2022; Bettarelli & Van Haute, 2022; Gidron, Adams & Horne, 2023; Reiljan & Ryan, 2021; Renström, Bäck & Carroll, 2021, 2022, 2023).

The identity-based approach to affective polarization builds on the results of Tajfel, Turner, Austin and Worchel's (1979) social identity theory, that posits

[11] While they might appear similar, it is important to distinguish affective polarization from negative partisanship. The latter refers to a strong dislike of the out-group rather than positive feelings towards the party one feels most attached to as a basis for partisanship (Abramowitz & Webster, 2018; Meléndez & Kaltwasser, 2021). Negative partisanship towards the radical right is also observed to be high.

that seeing one's self and others in a group creates strong psychological attachments, which in turn are expressed in an accentuated and distorted perception of differences between in- and out-group members.[12] Scholars like Iyengar et al. (2012), Iyengar and Westwood (2015), and Mason (2013, 2015, 2016) adhere to this identity-based conceptualization. This approach to affective polarization emphasizes strong partisan identities and their overlap with other salient, symbolic identities as the culprit behind animosity towards out-partisans (Bougher, 2017; Mason, 2013, 2015, 2016). Because there are fewer political and social identities that intersect across parties, it makes it easier for party supporters to see the opposite side as completely different from their own and as threats (Banda & Cluverius, 2018). Put differently, because parties in the US are increasingly becoming ideologically and demographically homogeneous in their composition, the out-party not only becomes a reference point but also an embodiment of the "other" (Lelkes, 2018).

While the identity-based model is the prevailing explanation for affective polarization, there are others who are not convinced that it is growing tribalism in politics that fuels out-party denigration. Advocates of this alternative "rational" perspective insist that negative partisan affect is driven by intense disagreement among party supporters on a wide range of issues, such as the size of welfare state, abortion, gay and transgender rights, gun control, and immigration (Abramowitz & Webster, 2018; Webster & Abramowitz, 2017). What facilitates this ideological disagreement, according to Druckman, Peterson and Slothuus (2013), is the polarization of elites over salient and non-salient issues. In a polarized environment, it becomes quite easy for voters to adopt their party's positions and hold attitudes that are consistent with one another. This entails fewer cross-cutting issues, thus fueling affective polarization. Among those who argue for an ideological basis to affective polarization are Rogowski and Sutherland (2016) and Lelkes (2021), who in their experimental studies, find that out-party candidates with relatively extreme policy preferences are consistently evaluated more negatively by voters. Because the policy consequences of the electoral victory of the other party becomes evident to the voters, it raises the stakes of electoral outcomes. However, a study by Lelkes (2018) found no evidence for

[12]See Huddy (2001) for a more thorough discussion of SIT.

the partisan sorting hypothesis, stating that affective polarization has increased among voters across levels of political knowledge and ideological consistency.

Similar trends of partisan dislike have also been observed among the electorate in multi-party systems across Europe (Bantel, 2023a; Gidron et al., 2023; Harteveld, 2021; Kekkonen & Ylä-Anttila, 2021; Knudsen, 2021). In a pioneering comparative study of the topic, Wagner (2021) finds that the level of affective polarization in the US is not exceptional when compared to less affluent and stable democracies. Similar findings of high partisan conflict are observed in Central and Eastern European countries, as well as Southern European countries (Reiljan, 2020).

Interestingly, affective polarization is on the rise, even in a consensus-oriented democracy such as Sweden. Consensus institutions are often characterized by having high satisfaction with democracy among its citizens, a more inclusive political decision-making, and a multi-party system that disincentivizes bloc formations and social sorting (Bernaerts, Blanckaert & Caluwaerts, 2023; Lijphart, 2012). Because of these qualities, they should exhibit lower levels of polarization compared to majoritarian institutions. And yet, in his study of trends in affective polarization for Nordic countries, Ryan (2023) noted an upward trend in Denmark and Sweden. Bettarelli, Reiljan and Van Haute (2023) confirms this finding, observing that affective polarization has increased over time, with the largest spike in countries like Italy and Sweden. Reiljan and Ryan (2021) suggest that the trend appears to be driven by the voters rating their own parties more favorably than others, but what is more interesting is the growing importance of the cultural values dimension that appears to be partly the basis of the affective divide (Oscarsson, Bergman, Bergström & Hellström, 2021). Indeed, as Renström et al. (2021, 2022, 2023) demonstrate in their study of Swedish voters, those who perceive immigration more as a threat to their in-party tend to exhibit stronger affective polarization towards members of the out-parties.

While overall out-group dislike is on the rise in multi-party systems, the RRP stands out in the intensity of loathing it receives and radiates (Gidron et al., 2023; Reiljan, 2020; Reiljan & Ryan, 2021). Radical right parties invoke the highest degree of negative emotions among the public in many contemporary European countries. This phenomenon is widely known as the radical right

exceptionalism. For instance, the negative affect between blocs in the Riksdag is moderate relative to the intense loathing for SD and its supporters (Reiljan & Ryan, 2021). Similarly, Renström et al. (2023) find that affective polarization is mostly directed at SD and the Left Party supporters. Bäck and Kokkonen (2022) also observe the same patterns in their study of affective polarization among Swedish MPs. Furthermore, Ryan (2023) finds that radical right parties in Denmark and Sweden are rated more negatively than their counterparts in Finland and Norway. In the Netherlands, the Party for Freedom (PVV) and the Forum for Democracy (FvD) are widely disliked by voters (Harteveld, 2021). This tells us that RRPs are recipients of unique levels of antipathy so much so it has produced a new cleavage: the radical right and its supporters versus mainstream parties (Bantel, 2023a).

There are several factors that explain the widespread dislike towards the RRP. First, mainstream party and RRP supporters fundamentally differ in their views on socio-cultural issues, such as immigration, national identity, gender, and environment (Bjånesøy, 2023; Harteveld, 2021). For instance, Reiljan and Ryan (2021) observe that attitudes towards refugee reception mainly explain affective evaluations of SD. Second, RRP politicians and members openly promote exclusionary forms of nationalism and use incendiary rhetoric, often depicting the mainstream or "cartel" parties in collusion against the people. The accusatory tone which they adopt in their speeches towards supporters and representatives of mainstream parties intensifies existing contempt for the radical right. Lastly, some RRPs are continuities of or have links with the historically extreme right, a connection which makes voters uneasy despite agreeing with the RRP on immigration (Harteveld & Ivarsflaten, 2018; Harteveld, Mendoza & Rooduijn, 2021; Ivarsflaten, 2006).

Recent studies indicate that elite communication also plays a role in driving affective polarization towards the radical right. Gervais (2017, 2019) argues that uncivil elite communication activates negative emotions like anger, which makes voters less likely to engage in bipartisanship and more likely to use the same hostile style of rhetoric. Such style of elite communication has also been noted to diminish political trust and widen the affective divide, especially among individuals who possess populist attitudes (Nai & Maier, 2024; Skytte, 2021).

One explanation for the connection between elite rhetoric and affective po-

larization towards SD comes from the party cues literature. Party cues are commonly defined as information shortcuts or labels that convey party affiliation of a candidate or where a party is located on a certain issue (Bullock, 2020). Voters turn to party cues for two reasons: to arrive at accurate political judgments without having to learn about the specific details of a policy or a candidate's background or to be consistent with their partisan identities and their parties' adopted positions (Slothuus & Bisgaard, 2021). Regardless of the underlying psychological motivation, the crucial insight from this literature is that voters integrate information into their affective evaluation of a group or party if it comes from their own political party (Levendusky, 2013). For instance, in their survey experiment in Sweden, Bäck, Carroll, Renström and Ryan (2023) demonstrate that exposure to a factual political message from an in-party source representative triggers affective polarization, especially among strong party identifiers. Similarly, Martin and Nai (2024) observe that partisan animus towards the out-party is correlated with the negative tone used by an individual's in-party. Bantel (2023b) also shows that dislike for the Alternative for Germany increases when mainstream elites create a common rhetorical front against the radical right party. Based on these insights, it can be expected that the sentiment of the legislative speeches directed at the RRP will influence partisans' affective evaluation of the radical right, as shown in Figure 2.

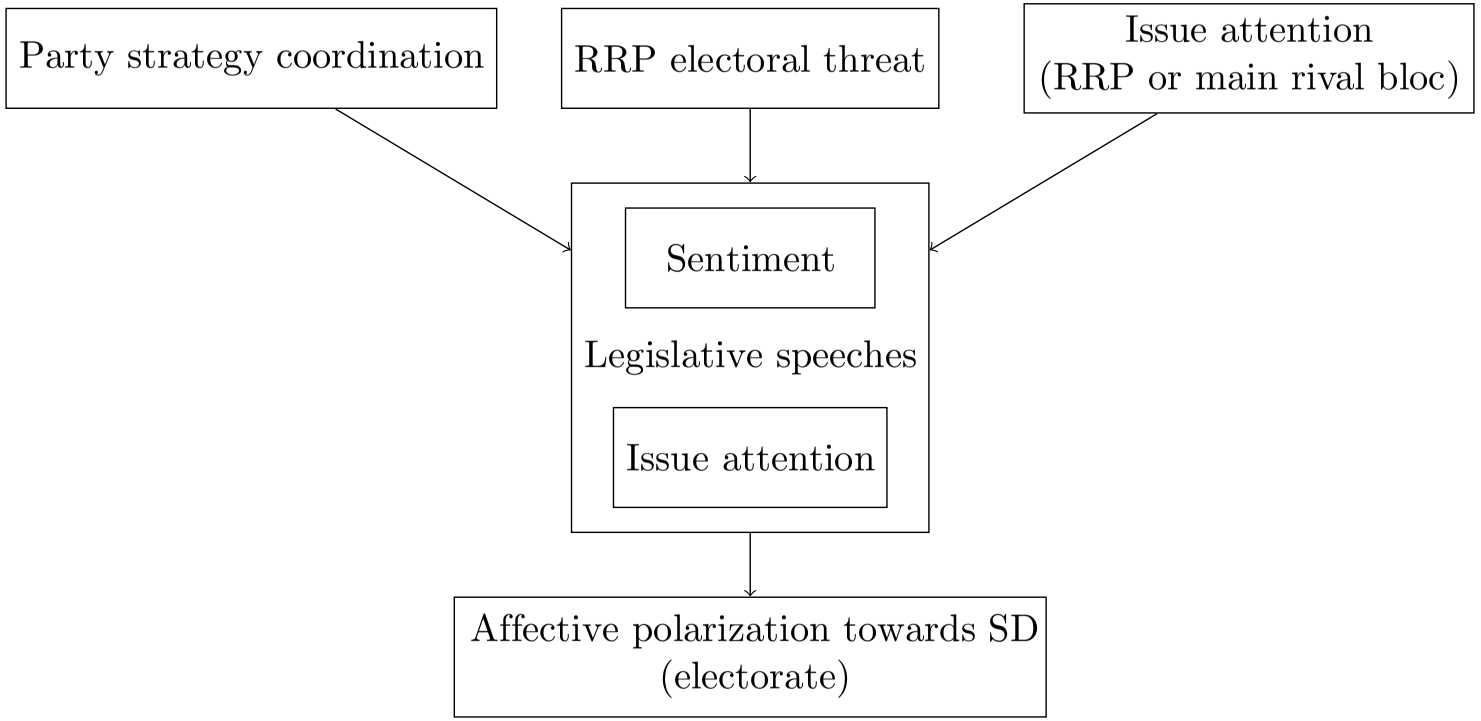

Figure 2: A summary of the relationships examined in this dissertation

3 Research Design

In this section, I explain my choice of Sweden as a case by revisiting the origins of what has been, by far, its most electorally successful radical right party, the Sweden Democrats. Furthermore, I provide a brief overview of the legislative debate structure in the Riksdag. However, a substantial portion of this section focuses on detailing the data collection process and statistical analyses in each paper, along with some of my reflections on how I balanced methodological requirements and practical limitations.

3.1 Examining the Swedish Case

Prior to 2010, Sweden was considered a country where the radical right could not thrive.[13] At that time, Rydgren (2002) thought of conditions in Sweden as hostile to RRPs: socio-economic issues dominated the GAL-TAN, immigration as an issue was of low importance, and mainstream parties were perceived to be distinct from each other by voters. But after struggling for two decades, the Sweden Democrats reached its longstanding goal of entering the Riksdag, earning 5.7% of the vote in the 2010 general elections. Since then, the party has only grown in size. Currently, it is supporting the center-right government, after earning 20.6% of the vote and becoming the second largest party in the last 2022 elections.

The Sweden Democrats was founded on 6 February 1988. Unlike the other successful radical right parties in Scandinavia, it did not originate as a protest against high taxes and big government (Oja & Mral, 2013). Instead, its predecessor, the Sweden Party (Sverigepartiet), was formed from the unification of the Progress Party (Framstegspartiet) and the far right group, Keep Sweden Swedish (Bevara Sverige Svenskt) (Rydgren, 2002). Thus, it can be said that SD has historical roots in extremism, and lacking in what Ivarsflaten (2006) calls a reputational shield.

The Sweden Democrats qualifies as a radical right party though it defines itself as socially conservative. The party views immigration as a threat, yet over time, it has noticeably mellowed its tone regarding the issue. In their most re-

[13]This was briefly interrupted by the entry of New Democracy into the Riksdag in 1994.

cent party manifesto, the party writes that "asylum immigration from countries outside our neighborhood must cease...and those who have no connection to Swedish society should leave than immigrate to Sweden"(Sverigedemokraterna, 2022).[14] SD has long demanded for the decrease in asylum seekers, as well as stricter language and civic knowledge requirements to obtain Swedish permanent residency and citizenship. It has also consistently advocated for repatriation and in 2018, proposed the institution of detention centers in cases where deportation cannot be implemented quickly. However, their perspective on assimilation has changed, and now views it as possible and even desirable. In their 2014 party manifesto, they called for a "return to the assimilation policy applied until the mid-1970s that immigrants must adapt to Sweden and not the other way around" (Sverigedemokraterna, 2014).[15]

Aside from immigration, law and order is also a priority for SD. It describes itself as the party striving for a safer Sweden. Traces of nativism are visible in the party's opinion on the source of criminality. To illustrate, they associate the rising gang criminality in the country with mass immigration. In their 2022 party manifesto, SD states that "second-generation immigrants are more likely to commit crimes than their parents" (Sverigedemokraterna, 2022).[16] To reduce criminality, the party proposes stopping the "flow of groups who have a hard time integrating into Swedish culture" (Sverigedemokraterna, 2022).[17]

The party also exhibits populism in their official statements. In their recent party manifesto, SD attributes the increasing crime rate to the ineffective integration policies implemented by the center-right and social democratic government parties (Sverigedemokraterna, 2022). Furthermore, in their analysis of keynote speeches delivered by party leaders in the 2019 Almedalen, Vahter

[14]The original sentence in Swedish was "*Asylinvandringen från länder utanför vårt närområde måste upphöra och fler som befinner sig i Sverige utan rätt eller som saknar anknytning till det svenska samhället bör framöver lämna, än som invandrar till Sverige.*"

[15]The original version of the sentence was "*En återgång till den assimileringspolitik som gällde fram till mitten av 1970-talet och som innebär att det är invandrarna som skall anpassa sig till Sverige och inte tvärtom.*"

[16]The original version of the sentence was ""Trots att kostnaden för integrationspolitiska åtgärder och för satsningar på skola, välfärd och bostäder i segregerade områden varit omfattande, har politiken misslyckats i sådan grad att andra generationens invandrare är mer benägna att begå brott än sina föräldrar och i stor grad utgör rekryteringsbasen för gängen.

[17]The original sentence in Swedish was "*En första och viktig åtgärd är att stoppa invandringen av grupper som har svårt att integreras i det svenska samhället och kulturen.*"

and Jakobson (2023) note that Jimmie Åkesson, SD's party leader, invokes a Manichean worldview in his rhetoric, i.e., discourse which conceives of politics as the conflict between the people and morally corrupt elites who are often center-right parties and the Social Democrats. In one part of his speech, he portrays the former Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven as being out of touch with the ordinary Swedish people. He draws on his personal activities, such as shopping at Ullared on a normal basis, to appear relatable to voters.

In contrast to other radical right parties in the Nordic region, SD was systematically ostracized when it first gained national representation in 2010. All parties from both blocs were clear and vocal in their unwillingness to collaborate with the Sweden Democrats, citing differences in their views on the worth of human beings and the neo-Nazi roots of SD as the primary reasons (Leander, 2022). The cordon sanitaire was enforced strictly even at the local levels (Axelsen, 2024; Backlund, 2020). This policy of non-cooperation became even more formalized upon the creation of the December Agreement in 2014, which prevented SD from having a hand in the passage of the minority government budget. However, it did not take long for some center-right parties to abandon the agreement. In 2015, the Christian Democrats (KD) voted to leave the December Agreement. Following the KD's decision, the leaders of the Conservative Party (M) and Liberals (L) announced that the agreement was effectively over. Nevertheless, they still chose to uphold their commitment to vote on their respective budgets and not support any vote of no confidence initiated by SD (Sveriges Radio, 2015).

Gradually, the resolve of some mainstream parties to uphold the cordon sanitaire began to weaken. By 2017, Anna Kinberg Batra, the former leader of the Conservatives, announced her party's willingness to talk with SD on individual issues at the committee level. In the following year, M and KD declared their openness to forming a government with the informal backing of SD, signalling the dissolution of the cordon sanitaire and creating a rift between the Conservatives and Christian Democrats on one side, and the Center (C) and Liberal Parties on another. At the same time, local politicians from M and KD in municipalities of Sölvesborg, Bjuv, Bromölla, Hörby, Staffanstorp and Svalöv formed right-wing coalitions with SD (Axelsen, 2024). Three years later, Ulf Kristersson, the successor of Kinberg Batra, expressed in a TV program on Swedish national television that his party could imagine working with SD. In the

interview, he described how the radical right party has changed and has become more serious in politics ("Kristersson: Därför kan vi tänka oss att samarbeta med SD", 2021). He, however, stressed that their openness only extended to collaborating on issues where the two parties shared views. In the same year, Nyamko Sabuni replaced Jan Björklund as the party leader of the Liberals. This change in L's party leadership brought about a shift in their strategy, one that was more conciliatory, as she announced her party's desire for a right-wing government with or without the support of SD. Thus, it came as no surprise that following the 2022 general elections, M, KD, and L would form a minority government, with SD acting as a supporting party, through the Tidö Agreement. In a recent statement by KD, the party announced that it is now open to sitting with SD in government in the upcoming general elections (SVT, 2024). These latest developments suggest the evolving nature of the Swedish party system, and its adaptation to an electoral landscape where the radical right has become an active actor (Aylott & Bolin, 2019).

3.2 Structure of Debates in the Riksdag

In this sub-section, I provide a brief overview of how debates are structured in the Riksdag. Understanding this is important because parliamentary rules, alongside informal practices and debating style, can influence the rhetorical responses discussed earlier. These parliamentary rules determine who can speak, their speech duration, and which topics can be addressed during plenary debates. Moreover, they are shaped by the incentives created by a country's electoral system. For example, Proksch and Slapin (2015) classified countries according to the degree of party leadership control over floor access, which varies depending on the incentives for personal votes created by their electoral systems. At one end, there are majoritarian systems that provide strong incentives for personal votes, requiring minimal control from party leaders over floor access. At the other end, there are party-centric systems with closed-list electoral rules that offer weak incentives for personal votes, as a result, individual access to the floor is generally lower (Proksch & Slapin, 2015). Sweden lies in the middle of this spectrum. Its open-list electoral system allows voters to cast personal votes for an individual candidate, providing moderate incentives for seeking personal

votes and allowing for some individual floor access. However, Bäck and Debus (2016) note that although the general guidelines for speechmaking in the Riksdag are fairly permissive, party lists remain prioritized.

Typically, legislative debates in the Riksdag focus on government proposals or private members' motions. Before these are debated, they are sent to the relevant parliamentary committees for review (*Så arbetar utskotten*, 2023). After deliberating the proposals, the committee formulates a position for each one. The proposal from the committee is based on the position held by the majority, although dissenting committee members can submit their reservations on the issue. Once a decision is reached, a report is published and prepared for debate in the Chamber. During these debates, the committee majority first speaks, followed by the largest party that filed a reservation. In the absence of any reservations, the speaking order is based on the size of the parties in the Riksdag (*Arbetsplenum*, 2024). Voting on the proposal takes place after the debate concludes.

MPs can also obtain floor time by inquiring about specific issues through written questions to a government minister, who is required to reply within two weeks. This process leads to interpellation debates, where the member and minister engage in a discussion. Speaking time is limited, and interested participants must pre-register to participate in interpellation debates (*Interpellationsvar*, 2018). Additionally, there are other opportunities for MPs to ask government members questions during question times, which are held weekly and every other month for the prime minister. A more high-profile debate is the party leader debate, which is held three times annually. Typically, the party group leaders and the Speaker of the Riksdag agree on the debate rules beforehand (*Debatter i kammaren*, 2023). Lastly, there are special debates addressing subjects unrelated to regular parliamentary business items. The Speaker consults with party group leaders regarding the timing of these debates, and the party that requests the debate initiates the discussion, followed by ministers and other parties (*Debatter i kammaren*, 2023).

Regarding rhetorical practices in the Riksdag, in her examination of unparliamentary behaviors in the House of Commons and the Riksdag, Ilie (2006) observes that Swedish MPs generally avoid confrontation and emotional displays. However, when they do engage in confrontational discourse, they tend to

focus more on ideological matters or on the shortcomings of a rival on a particular topic rather than resort to personal attacks. In addition to speaking styles, various factors have also been identified to impact speaking time in the Riksdag. For instance, Bäck et al. (2019) observe that the distribution of speaking time becomes more restrictive as elections draw closer. Furthermore, Bäck, Debus and Müller (2014) find that female MPs speak less during legislative debates, particularly on topics considered as "hard" such as those on macroeconomics, finance, and transportation. This disparity between male and female MPs is present across the different parties in the Riksdag but appears to narrow as female MPs gain more parliamentary experience (Baumann, Bäck & Carroll, 2021).

3.3 Measuring Sentiment in Legislative Speeches (Paper 1)

The primary dataset used for Paper 1 is from ParlSpeech v.2 by Rauh and Schwalbach (2020) which contains full-text vectors and meta-data of parliamentary speeches held in the legislative chambers of various countries, including Sweden. It provided information about each speech, including the date it was delivered, the speaker's name and party, the order in which it was delivered, the agenda in which it was held, its full content, and word count. A total of 365,560 speeches comprise the dataset for the Riksdag, which spans from the 2nd of October 1990 to the 21st of December 2018. However, as I am interested in the period when SD gained representation in the Riksdag, I narrowed the data from ParlSpeech to include only speeches after the 2010 general elections. This reduced data, however, still required further preprocessing to ensure its compatibility with other datasets. For instance, some observations in the data listed the speaker's ministerial position before their names, while others included (what I assumed) places of residence after their names. Both had to be removed during the data cleaning.

While the reduced ParlSpeech data was a starting point, it only provided speeches for two legislative terms. To expand the dataset, I obtained speeches from 2018 to 2022 from the Riksdag's Open Data website. Similar to the initial dataset, the additional speeches also needed cleaning. For instance, the parties the speakers belonged to were appended after their names, which had to be

removed to standardize the data. Moreover, upon examining the raw text of the speeches, I noticed that some of the statements were preceded by strings that appear to be agenda titles (e.g., "Applåder", "STYLEREF Kantrubrik MERGEFORMAT", "Val av andre vice talman", "Aktuell debatt om Försvarsberedningens förslag"). These also had to be removed; otherwise, they could have distorted the results of my analysis. After completing these cleaning steps and ensuring that the two datasets were compatible, they were merged into a unified speech data.[18] The speeches by the king, speakers, and deputy speakers, as well as political defectors and ministers, were also removed to refine the final data further.[19] This resulted in 131,536 speeches overall. Figure 3 illustrates the number of speeches delivered by each party for each year.

Once the speech data was assembled, the next step was to identify the target. This was crucial because, in Paper 1, the aim was to determine the sentiment of speeches directed at SD and compare it with that of other mainstream parties to argue that even in legislative debates, the party was perceived as a pariah. Inspired by Schwalbach (2022b), the target party of speeches was identified using a dictionary approach that featured the names of the parties and their MPs. I implemented a naive method of assigning party targets, which means that if the number of words associated with a party exceeds the combined number of words associated with other parties, I assign the dominant party. The reasoning behind this is to enhance the chances that the speech targets a specific party, even if it may reference other parties and their MPs.[20] After this step, I retained only speeches that were not self-referential.

[18] It is important to note that, while my description of the data cleaning process may sound straightforward, in reality, it was more iterative, which involved refining my preprocessing procedures as new issues or patterns were discovered along the way.

[19] The reason for this is that I am only interested in speeches when they are delivered by MPs who are affiliated with political parties.

[20] In this way, I can ensure that there is a primary target party. This approach is stricter than a simple frequency approach, which assigns the party target based on whether the number of keywords associated with one party exceeds the number of words associated with other parties. A more conservative approach would have been to retain those speeches containing keywords for SD only, however, this would decrease the dataset significantly.

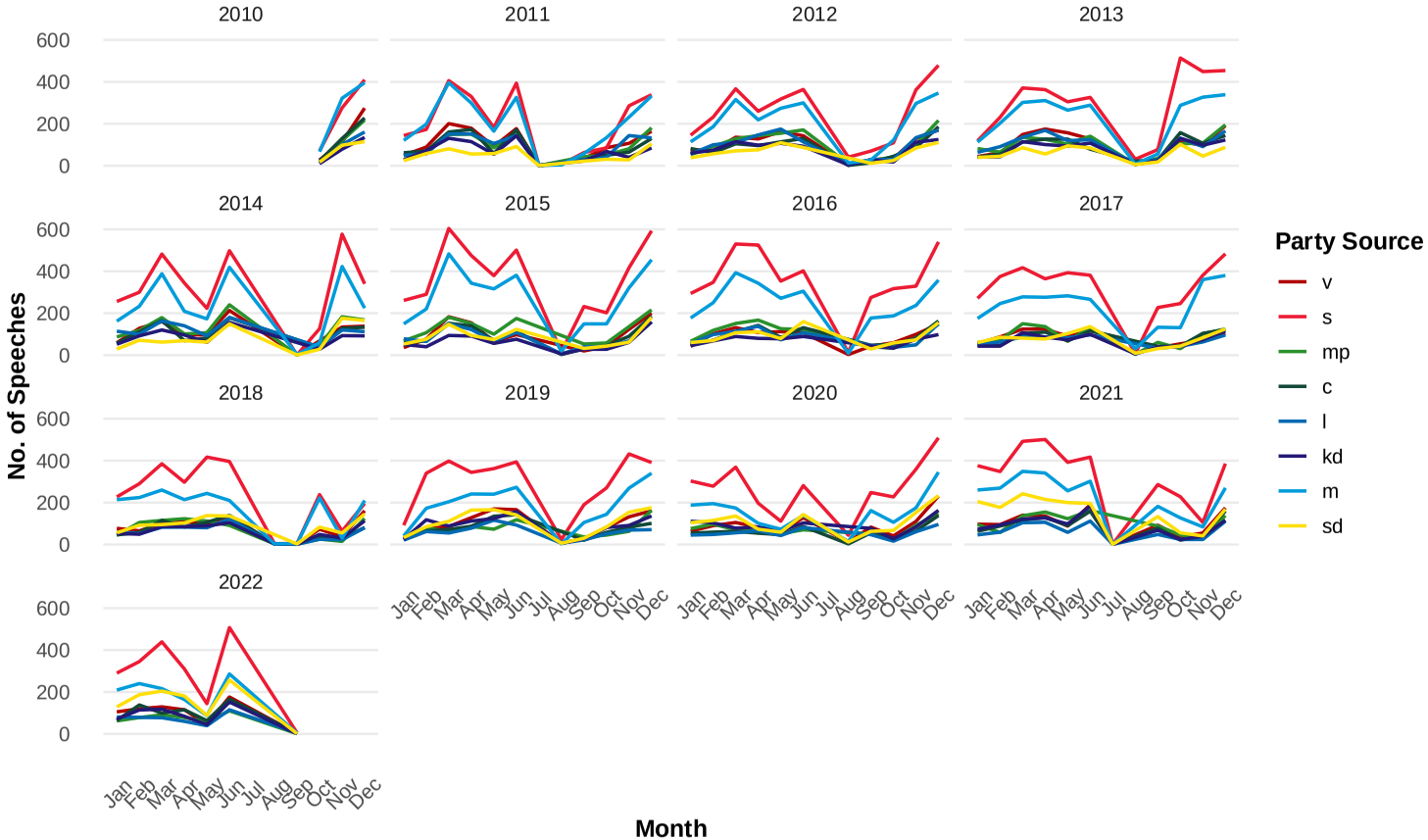

Figure 3: Number of speeches by party from 2010 to 2022

A key part of the analysis was to determine the sentiment of the speeches directed at the different parties. One common way of acquiring the emotional quality of texts is through sentiment analysis. Sentiment analysis generally refers to the process of determining the valence of a text, whether it is negative, positive, or neutral, as well as detecting the source's attitude towards the text's target or topic (Liu, 2012; Mohammad, 2016b). One approach to measuring sentiment in political texts is through a dictionary approach. Dictionary methods use the occurrence of keywords to determine if a category is present or not (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013). This approach is much easier to implement because it simply relies on the frequency of keywords precoded into discrete categories (Maerz & Puschmann, 2020). Despite their simplicity, dictionary methods produce meaningful and standardized measures that can be aggregated at different, meaningful units of analysis. As emphasized by Young and Soroka (2012, p.208), "with a well-defined comprehensive dictionary, a basic word count can provide a powerful and reliable analysis of [the] affective composition of a text".

One contributing factor to the popularity of this method is the access to reliable off-the-shelf sentiment lexicons, specifically designed for evaluating tone in political texts. Among these, the Lexicoder Sentiment Dictionary (LSD) by Young and Soroka (2012) is the most widely used in political science. The LSD is a comprehensive dictionary that has been demonstrated to outperform other generic lexicons such as LIWC and ANEW in matching with human coding standards (Proksch et al., 2019). Additionally, it has been machine translated into multiple languages, enabling Proksch et al. (2019) to assess sentiment in State of the European Union debates, and Schwalbach (2022a) and Silva et al. (2023) to examine the impact of the electoral cycle on the level of conflict in both speeches and Tweets across EU countries. For these reasons, I employed a dictionary approach using the translated LSD to assess the sentiment of legislative speeches focused on SD.

There are, of course, drawbacks to using dictionary-based techniques. Off-the-shelf dictionaries that are not developed for a specific task do not perform well when applied to texts featuring specialized languages (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013). Furthermore, they tend to rely on conventional uses of emotional words and phrases, making it challenging for purely dictionary-based sentiment

analysis to detect instances when a word is used in a specific way (Mohammad, 2016b). Rice and Zorn (2021) illustrates this with the word "love", which almost always carries positive valence in off-the-shelf sentiment lexicons, but has another meaning in tennis that is not emotional. Another downside to using sentiment analysis and an off-the-shelf dictionary like LSD is its difficulty in identifying sarcasm in speech. Approaches to dealing with sarcasm in natural language processing are still limited. As noted by Liu (2012, p.82), "sarcastic sentences pose significant challenges in sentiment analysis since they typically necessitate commonsense knowledge and discourse analysis for proper identification". Sarcasm is prevalent in political discussions such as legislative debates. For instance, after reviewing the speeches classified as "positive" by the LSD, I found examples that were arguably sarcastic in tone. To give an example, during a debate about police issues, a speaker from the Conservative Party used the words "*Congratulations on your proposals to solve today's social problems!*"[21] The sentence is sarcastic because, when reading the full speech, one sees that the speaker actually emphasizes how SD, at the beginning of its term in the Riksdag, lacked its own legal policies while nonetheless asserting it had created some. However, I want to emphasize that although I noticed these instances of miscoding sarcastic statements, it is crucial to highlight that the sentiment analysis using LSD effectively identifies speeches that are actually negative.

The statistical analysis conducted for this paper can be described as straightforward. I estimated several Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models with clustered standard errors at the speaker level and debate fixed effects. First, I regressed sentiment on the party target of the speech, as well as the legislative term during which it was delivered and the governmental status of the speaker's party using the full speech dataset, as shown in Equation 1.

$$Sentiment_i = \alpha_i + \beta_1 prtytrgt_i + \beta_2 legterm_i + \beta_3 gov_i + \gamma_2 debate_i + ... + \gamma_n debate_i + \epsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

Next, I estimated an interaction model to assess whether the sentiment of the speeches directed at SD became positive over time, as illustrated in Equation 2.

[21] The original statement in Swedish was "*Gratulerar till förslagen för att lösa dagens samhällsproblem!*"

$$Sentiment_i = \alpha_i + \beta_1 prtytrgt_i + \beta_2 legterm_i + \beta_3 gov_i + \beta_4 prtytrgt_i \cdot legterm_i + \gamma_2 debate_i + ... + \gamma_n debate_i + \epsilon_i \quad (2)$$

I then examined the differences in sentiment towards SD between center-left and center-right parties over time using an interaction model presented in Equation 3, using exclusively speeches directed at SD.

$$Sentiment_i = \alpha_i + \beta_1 bloc_i + \beta_2 legterm_i + \beta_3 gov_i + \beta_4 bloc_i \cdot legterm_i + \gamma_2 debate_i + ... + \gamma_n debate_i + \epsilon_{it} \quad (3)$$

3.4 Measuring Negativity in Legislative Speeches (Paper 2)

In Paper 2, I aimed to investigate the impact of the relative electoral success of SD on the negativity expressed in the speeches of mainstream parties. To achieve this, I needed to gather individual information about the MPs as well as demographic details about the electoral districts they represented. As a first step, I created a directory of MPs elected during the period I examined, using information from the EveryPolitician API. Some useful details included the MP's electoral district, start and end terms, wikiID, and gender.[22] However, from previous examinations of the legislative data, I observed that some MPs had changed their names during the period examined.[23] Additionally, through my initial attempts to merge the speech and directory datasets, I discovered that some substitute MPs were missing from the directory based on the information from the EveryPolitician API. To address this, I manually added the missing substitute MPs to the directory and included the former names of the MPs who changed their names during the study. This step was essential before assigning unique speaker IDs, as failing to do so would mean that MPs appearing under different names in the speech dataset would not have corresponding entries in

[22] It was later, while merging the speech data with the list position data, that I realized discrepancies between the electoral districts of the EveryPolitician API and electoral districts of the MP in the Elections Authorities data. In these situations, I verified the electoral district using the data from Welfare State Analytics and corrected the inaccurate information in the directory.

[23] For example, an MP from SD had changed her name three times during her brief stay in the Riksdag.

the directory. The final version of the directory includes a total of 810 MPs, but some are listed multiple times due to their representation of different electoral districts across various elections. After creating the directory and assigning distinct identifiers to each MP, I utilize the wikiIDs to scrape and integrate details about their educational background.

In the second step for Paper 2, I combined my MP directory with speeches aimed at SD.[24] Following this integration, additional data on the MPs—such as their list position in the previous general election, time served in parliament, party roles, and committee membership—obtained from Welfare State Analytics (accessed on May 2, 2023), Swedish Elections Authorities, and Riksdag Open Data were further added. The demographic details of the MP's district were acquired from Statistics Sweden. To determine the proportion of foreign-born residents in each electoral district, I gathered data on both the foreign-born population and the total population size of each municipality. Subsequently, I grouped all municipalities within an electoral district, totaled the number of foreign-born inhabitants, and divided that by the total population. Lastly, I incorporated the total vote counts and the share of votes for both the speaker's party and SD within their electoral district, which were sourced from the Swedish Elections Authorities. Table 5 summarizes the data collected for Paper 2.

In this paper, I chose to focus on the negativity present in speeches aimed at SD. This decision comes from insights drawn from the analysis conducted for Paper 1, where certain speeches classified as positive by LSD felt "quite negative". Additionally, operationalizing sentiment as a negative and positive scale presents challenges, particularly when speeches lack clear positive language. For example, a less hostile speech does not necessarily convey a positive tone rather, it may simply indicate a preference for avoiding more confrontational language. Because this is often the case when mainstream politicians address the radical right in their speeches, I decided to focus on detecting degrees of negativity instead.

Furthermore, as discussed in the previous section, relying solely on dictionary

[24] In this paper, I break down the speeches into sentences and attribute the party target using a frequency threshold. Frequent mentions of keywords associated with a party make it less likely due to random chance. Sentences that included an equal number of keywords associated with multiple parties were categorized accordingly NA.

Table 5. Overview of collected data for Paper 2. Variables were measured at the time the MP was speaking at the debate.

Variable	**Description**
Party leadership role	Dates when the MP was party leader, party secretary, party speaker, or group leader in the Riksdag
Gender	
Committee	Committee/s of which the MP was chair/vice-chair
University education	Name/s of the higher-education institution/s the MP attended
Seniority	Time served in the Riksdag
Service periods	Start and end dates of the MP in the Riksdag
List position	Rank of the MP on their party's ballot in the electoral district in the previous election
SD vote	Number and share of votes of SD in the district
MP's party vote	Number and share of votes for the MP's party in the district
Share of foreign-born	Proportion of foreign-born residents in the MP's electoral district

methods makes it difficult to consider the context in which words are used, as a result, one may miss negative words or underestimate negativity. A way to improve the performance of a dictionary-based sentiment analysis is to complement it with word embeddings. Word embeddings basically represent terms as vectors of numbers, wherein terms that are semantically similar in meaning are mapped closer into a multi-dimensional space (Rudkowsky et al., 2018). A classic example is the analogy task of $king - man + woman = queen$. This holds because if we represent the words as sets of numbers, with each number indicating a feature of a king, man, or woman, and perform some mathematical operation on these vectors, we will arrive at the resulting vector for queen (Grimmer, Roberts & Stewart, 2022). Thus, the distances between word vectors become informative. In contrast to the bag-of-words approach, word embeddings learn the meanings of a word by considering the company that it keeps (Widmann &

Wich, 2022).[25]

There are two models commonly used in the discipline to create word embeddings from a corpus: GloVe (Pennington, Socher & Manning, 2014) and Word2Vec (Mikolov, Sutskever, Chen, Corrado & Dean, 2013). According to Rodriguez and Spirling (2022), both are mathematically similar, however, in comparing the two, they conclude that Word2Vec is likely less robust than the former. Recently, scholars have taken advantage of the ease with which it can be implemented to enhance off-the-shelf dictionaries. For instance, Osnabrügge et al. (2021) use word embeddings to identify emotional words in speeches delivered in the House of Commons that have been overlooked by the generic sentiment lexicon, ANEW.[26] It has also been applied to tasks such as creating domain-specific dictionaries. These studies often begin with a small set of positive and negative seed words and, through word embeddings, identify terms in the corpus that are semantically similar to the seed words. To illustrate, Rice and Zorn (2021) created a corpus-based dictionary from a large dataset of movie reviews and demonstrated how the resulting dictionary outperforms AFINN and LIWC in matching the actual hand ratings of reviewers. Cochrane et al. (2022) largely follow the same approach and train a word embeddings model on speeches delivered in the Canadian House of Commons. They conclude that the dictionary induced by the Word2Vec embeddings outperforms other available dictionaries, including LSD, Vader, and Hu-Liu, in predicting sentiment scores from human coders. Another example of a study leveraging this method is Widmann and Wich (2022), where they train a word embeddings model on a large corpus of German political text to construct the ed8 dictionary. Finally, Røed et al. (2023) also utilizes word embeddings to create a lexicon for measuring negativity in speeches delivered in the Norwegian Stortinget.

[25]This is also known as the distributional hypothesis. Dictionary-based sentiment analysis, however, takes on the bag-of-words assumption, which "treats documents as a vector containing the count of each word present in the document, disregarding the order the words appear" (Lucas et al., 2015, p.257).

[26]Rudkowsky et al. (2018) refers to these as out-of-context words.

Table 6. Examples of medium and high negativity in speeches directed at SD. Words that are italicized are responsible for the target and level of negativity of the statement.

Original	**Translation**
Man kan säga, som vi har hört under dagen, att *sverigedemokraterna* har väldigt lite att tillföra av egna idéer eller tankar, utan det blir ett ständigt *angrepp* som egentligen inte innehåller så mycket annat.-*V, March 2010*	One can say, as we have heard during the day, that the Sweden Democrats have very little to add of their own ideas or thoughts, but it becomes a constant *attack* that really does not contain much else.
Sverigedemokraterna är ett *nationalistiskt* och *populistiskt* parti. En majoritet av riksdagens partier har därför tydligt deklarerat: vi samarbetar inte vi förhandlar inte och vi stöder inte en regering som gör sig beroende av *sverigedemokraterna*.-*S, December 2018*	The Sweden Democrats are a nationalist and populist party. A majority of the parliamentary parties have therefore clearly declared: we do not cooperate, we do not negotiate and we do not support a government that makes itself dependent on the Sweden Democrats.

Among the two discussed approaches, I opted for the one by Osnabrügge et al. (2021), which uses an off-the-shelf dictionary along with word embeddings to identify overlooked emotional words in a corpus for inclusion in the dictionary. The main motivation behind this choice is the selection of seed words for identifying these overlooked emotional words. With my selected approach, I could systematically choose both negative and positive seed words because they would be derived from the off-the-shelf dictionary. For instance, the AFINN dictionary I used assigns scores to words ranging from -5 (very negative) to +5 (very positive). This allowed me to easily set a threshold for these scores to identify the seed words. This approach appears more transparent than the one proposed by Rice and Zorn (2021), where specific steps for seed word selection were unclear. Overall, combining a dictionary approach with word embeddings seemed to improve the sentiment analysis accuracy in detecting negativity in speeches directed at SD, as elaborated in Paper 2. Table 6 shows two statements directed at SD that contain an equal amount of total words. The first statement is an example of moderate negativity, while the second one is classified as having higher negativity.

In the main analysis of this paper, I estimated negative binomial regression models to examine the relationship between changes in SD's relative vote share and negativity in speeches directed at it. First, I regressed negativity on SD' relative vote share, clustering standard errors at the speaker level and including

district fixed effects, as illustrated in in Equation 4.[27]

$$log(Negativity_i) = \alpha_i + \beta_1 \Delta relvoteshare_i + \gamma_2 district_i + ... + \gamma_n district_i + \epsilon_i \quad (4)$$

Next, I included my other variable of interest, the length of SD's time in parliament, along with a range of control variables. These include the overall engagement of the speaker, list position, a dummy variable indicating whether the speaker holds party leadership and committee chair positions at the time of speaking, and a dummy variable reflecting if the speaker's party is in government. Furthermore, I include the number of years the MP has served in the Riksdag at the time of speaking, their gender, if they have university education, and the change in the share of foreign-born residents in the districts they represent, as shown in Equation 5.

$$\begin{aligned} log(Negativity_i) = \alpha_{it} + \beta_1 \Delta relvoteshare_i + \\ \beta_2 SDyrsparl_i + ... + \beta_n X_{n,i} + \gamma_2 district_i + ... + \gamma_n district_i + \epsilon_i \end{aligned} \quad (5)$$

Finally, to determine whether the impact of SD's relative vote share on negativity towards it increases with its presence in parliament, I estimate an interaction model, as shown in Equation 6.

$$\begin{aligned} log(Negativity_i) = \alpha_i + \beta_1 \Delta relvoteshare_i + \beta_2 SDyrsparl_i + \beta_3 \Delta relvoteshare_i \cdot SDyrsparl_i \\ + ... + \beta_n X_{n,i} + \gamma_2 district_i + ... + \gamma_n district_i + \epsilon_i \end{aligned} \quad (6)$$

3.5 Affective Polarization towards SD (Paper 3)

Paper 3 examines how negativity from in-party elites toward SD influences a partisan's affective polarization aimed at the RRP. To do this, I combine the sentiment analysis results of speeches directed at SD from Paper 2 with the National-SOM survey (Society, Opinion, and Mass Media) data from 2010 to 2021. The National-SOM data is an annual representative survey that relies on questionnaires mailed out each September, achieving a response rate of $\approx 50\%$ (The SOM Institute, 2024). In the survey, respondents rate parties on

[27] It is the same as the equation for the Poisson model (Bruin, 2011).

a like-dislike scale from -5 to +5 and indicate their preferred party. I use these items to determine the party affiliation of the respondents as well as to measure their affective polarization towards SD. I took advantage of the variation in survey questionnaire dissemination dates to respondents and calculated the average negativity for each party based on the speech data from Paper 2 from three months before the questionnaire delivery date.[28] One advantage of taking speeches three months prior is that it increases the likelihood of in-parties delivering speeches aimed at SD. In total, more than 3,000 speeches focused on SD included negative language. To clarify, a Green Party partisan is assigned the average elite negativity derived from the speeches of the Green Party MPs directed at SD three months before the questionnaire was sent to the respondent. The same process is used for the cross-party measure of negativity, which is based on the speeches of all parties delivered three months before the questionnaire delivery date. Figure 4 shows this assignment process. By ensuring the assigned in-party elite negativity is before the actual survey responses to the survey, I try to address the endogeneity issue, which relates to whether affective polarization at the electorate level drives elite negativity towards SD.

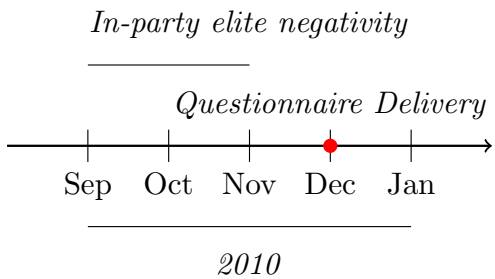

Figure 4: Assignment of in-party elite negativity to National-SOM respondents in Paper 3

There are different ways to measure affective polarization at the mass-level: individual-level surveys, implicit measures, and survey experiments (Iyengar, Lelkes, Levendusky, Malhotra & Westwood, 2019). Surveys, such as the American National Election Studies (ANES), and the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), are widely used sources for measuring affective polarization. In these surveys, respondents are typically asked, how cold or warm they feel

[28] Respondents who did not have values for the survey delivery dates were dropped from the dataset ($\approx 10,000$).

towards their own party and the out-party (Iyengar et al., 2019), how various traits describe in- and out-party members (Druckman & Levendusky, 2019), and how averse they are to having close interpersonal relations with those from the opposing party (Bäck & Kokkonen, 2022).

A common way of measuring affective polarization is through the net-difference approach, which is simply finding the difference in the evaluations of one's preferred party and the out-party. Other studies simply use raw out-party evaluation (Harteveld et al., 2021; Wagner, 2021). Measuring affective polarization this way is straightforward in a two-party system, such as the US, but becomes more challenging in a multi-party context. This is because voters can sympathize with more than just one party, which is the case in countries like Sweden and Finland, where parties are arranged into ideological blocs. To adapt the concept to a multi-party system, Wagner (2021) proposes the weighted spread-of-scores measure, where, if the value is small, we can say that the individual is not affectively polarized because they have the same opinion towards different parties and vice-versa. To gauge affective polarization between blocs in Sweden, Reiljan and Ryan (2021) modify the spread-of-scores measures by applying relative vote share as weights in the evaluations of the out-parties belonging to the out-bloc. Meanwhile, Reiljan (2020) introduces the affective polarization index (AIP), which considers like-dislike evaluations of parties and party size, to assess the phenomenon at the party and country level. In this paper, I utilize both the net-difference approach and the raw party sympathy scores, as the former may obscure whether in-party or out-party evaluations are influenced by in-party elite negativity.

In the main analysis of this paper, I estimate OLS models using robust standard errors, including party and year fixed effects to assess the impact of in-party elite negativity on partisan affective polarization towards SD. Additionally, I control for variables such as the respondent's party identification, position on socio-economic issues and cultural dimensions, trust in institutions, gender, age, and a weighted measure of cross-party negativity. The full model is shown in Equation 7.

$$AP_i = \alpha_i + \beta_1 inpartyneg_i + ... + \beta_n X_{n,i} + \gamma_2 party_i + ... + \gamma_n party_i + \lambda_2 year_i + ... + \lambda_n year_i + \epsilon_i \quad (7)$$

3.6 Immigration Salience in Legislative Speeches (Paper 4)

Paper 4 examines the emphasis that mainstream parties place on immigration in their legislative speeches. It looks at how this is influenced by the radical right's electoral performance and attention to immigration, along with the impact of a mainstream rival's focus on the issue too. To conduct this analysis, I employed both a dictionary method and structural topic modeling on the speech data from Paper 1.

For the dictionary method, I implemented the one created by Tzelgov and Olander (2018). A key reason for selecting this dictionary is that it was specifically designed to identify speeches within the Riksdag that discuss immigration. Additionally, the same authors have iteratively updated their list of words through their own manual validation process. However, since this dictionary was initially crafted for debate titles, I excluded terms that I believed would not be appropriate when applied to the actual content of speeches.

Unlike dictionary-based methods, topic modeling belongs to a class of unsupervised models that do not require prior annotations or labeling of documents or words (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013). These models use the co-occurrence of words across documents to reveal latent themes or topical categories (Blei, 2012).

Topic modeling algorithms are mixture models, meaning they estimate the probability of a document belonging to a certain topic (Bail, n.d.). One widely used technique is structural topic modeling (STM), which is quite similar to latent dirichlet allocation (LDA), but allows for covariates of interest to inform topic prevalence, or how much a speaker is expected to dedicate segments of their statements on a certain topic. To illustrate, a speaker's party affiliation may influence the extent to which they engage in a certain topic and the specific language they use to discuss it.

Topic models are commonly used to analyze political attention (Greene & Cross, 2017). An example of its application to legislative speeches is by Magnusson, Öhrvall, Barrling and Mimno (2018), where they use a modified LDA

Table 7. Pearson's correlation for GT search terms and importance of immigration based on National-SOM

Search term	**Correlation**
asyl+	0.76***
flyt+	0.72***
invandring+	0.48
Combined	0.69***

[a] $*p < 0.1$, $**p < 0.05$, $***p < 0.01$.

to examine how different mainstream parties frame the issue of immigration in various debates in the Riksdag. Another example is by Johnston and Sprong (2022), which utilizes STM to assess how Dutch Green Party MPs address immigration in their speeches as a result of RRP electoral success.

One of the challenging things with topic modeling is determining the number of topic clusters, k. There is no straightforward way of determining the k topics, as it depends on the nature of documents as well as one's goal in the analysis (Roberts et al., 2014). Furthermore, making sense of topic clusters and judging model quality requires a close examination of a substantive amount of texts that are supposed to exemplify the latent themes, necessitating validation procedures. To tackle the question regarding the number of topics, I adhere to Johnston and Sprong (2022), who argue that topic size must be sufficiently large to accommodate the diverse issues debated in parliament.

For Paper 4, I required more refined data on SD's electoral performance, unemployment rates, the number of asylum seekers, and public opinion on immigration. This is because the final data has a panel structure, where each observation indicates how much a speaker discusses immigration in their speech each month. To obtain as much variation as possible, I relied on SD's polling performance data. Additionally, I obtained the monthly number of asylum seekers from Statistics Sweden and the monthly unemployment rate from ILOSTAT database by the ILO. Regarding the perceived importance of immigration, I could have used the data from Svenska Trender, which is based on the National-SOM survey data, which provided yearly statistics on the percentage of respondents who indicated that immigration and integration were important social issues.

However, I chose to use Google Trends instead, as it has been previously used to understand public opinion on immigration (Lorenz, Beck, Horneber, Keusch & Antoun, 2022). To do this, I selected three immigration-related keywords as search terms: "asyl+", "invandring+", and "flytkt+". I obtained their monthly search volume index, which indicates the relative popularity of a search term entered in Google's search engine over a defined time period, ranging from 0 to 100. To evaluate the GT-based measures regarding the importance of immigration, I aggregate the SVI values by year and compare it with the National-SOM survey data on the significance of immigration (*Svenska Trender 1986-2022*, 2023). As shown in Table 7, the correlations between the Google search terms and the measures from the National-SOM survey data are significantly and positively correlated, with the exception of "invandring+". These findings suggest that GT data may capture trends similar to those observed in the survey data.

Given the nested structure of the data in this paper, where monthly observations are nested within speakers and years, I estimate a multi-level model with random intercepts at both the speaker and year levels and include cluster-robust standard errors. For the main analysis models, I include both the lagged and current values of SD's attention to immigration based on their speeches, alongside the current and lagged values of the speaker's main rival's focus on the same issue. Additionally, I include the lagged values for the number of asylum seekers, the unemployment rate, the government status of the speaker's party, their bloc membership, and a variable to account for potential linear time trends. Following Bickel (2007), I build the three-level random intercepts model as follows. For the level-1 model, Y_{ijk} in Equation 8 refers to the attention to immigration for a specific month (i) from speaker (j) in year (k). The term $\beta_{1jk}X_1$ represents a vector of explanatory variables which I keep constant. The random intercept, denoted by β_{0jk}, reflects the average attention to immigration for speaker j in year k.

$$Y_{ijk} = \beta_{0jk} + \beta_{1jk}X_1 + ... + \beta_{njk}X_n + e_{ijk} \tag{8}$$

For level-2, β_{00k} in Equation 9 refers to the speaker-level effect for the intercept, whereas u_{0jk} represents the speaker-specific variation around this value.

$$\beta_{0jk} = \beta_{00k} + u_{0jk} \tag{9}$$

$$\beta_{1jk} = \beta_{10k} + u_{1jk} \tag{10}$$

For level-3, γ_{000} in Equation 11 tells us the grand mean for issue attention, whereas u_{00k} denotes the year-specific deviation from this value.

$$\beta_{00k} = \gamma_{000} + u_{00k} \tag{11}$$

$$\beta_{10k} = \gamma_{100} + u_{10k} \tag{12}$$

This generates the mixed model shown in Equation 13.

$$Y_{ijk} = \gamma_{000} + u_{00k} + u_{0jk} + \beta_{1jk}X_1 + ... + \beta_{njk}X_n + e_{ijk} \tag{13}$$

4 Summary of the Papers

This section offers an overview of the four papers included in this dissertation. Table 8 summarizes the main independent and dependent variables, data sources, methods, and findings of each paper.

4.1 Paper 1: Debating the Populist Pariah: Changing Party Dynamics and Elite Rhetoric in the Swedish Riksdag

Research on mainstream party responses show considerable variation in the way RRPs are confronted. Initially, many mainstream parties have opted for systematic exclusion of these parties from governing coalitions, effectively making them pariahs in their countries. However, as RRPs grew larger in size, mainstream parties were prompted to reevaluate their treatment of these ostracized parties. While this transition from initial exclusion to potential inclusion or co-optation has been examined through the policy directions of mainstream parties on immigration, less is known about how they play out in the legislative arena.

We argue that legislative debates are valuable opportunities for re-election driven MPs and political parties to engage in strategic position-taking (Proksch & Slapin, 2012, 2015). They can be leveraged by mainstream party MPs to reflect and reinforce their positioning goals towards the radical right party. To illustrate, when mainstream parties face a RRP which they consider as a pariah, this treatment should be evident in the way they speak about the radical right in parliamentary debates. Thus, legislative speeches directed at the radical right should adopt a more negative tone than statements directed at other mainstream parties. But as the RRP becomes electorally successful and more influential in coalition politics, it may alter the strategic considerations of center-right parties, as they hold the most potential for cooperation.

To examine our hypothesis, we analyze legislative speeches delivered in the Swedish Riksdag from 2010 to 2022, which is the period that corresponds to the time the Sweden Democrats was represented in the national parliament. To capture the tone and emotive quality of the legislative speeches, we conduct a dictionary-based sentiment analysis using the translated Lexicoder Sentiment Dictionary (Proksch et al., 2019). Our results show that elites from mainstream parties employ more negative language when speaking about SD and its repres-

entatives compared to speeches directed at other mainstream parties. We also demonstrate that this negativity has diminished over time, particularly among the center-right parties. Paper 1 demonstrates that the tone which mainstream party MPs use in their legislative speeches exemplify strategies of isolation, as well as the beginnings of the RRP's pariah status gradually fading.

4.2 Paper 2: Aligning with the Radical Right? Examining legislative speeches in response to SD's electoral success

The second paper explores the findings from Paper 1 at greater depth by examining contextual and individual factors that motivate mainstream party MPs to adopt a more engaging approach towards the radical right. Earlier research shows that RRP electoral success has significant implications on the policy positions of mainstream parties (Abou-Chadi & Krause, 2020), perceptions of societal norms (Bischof & Wagner, 2019; Ekholm, Bäck & Renström, 2022; Harteveld & Ivarsflaten, 2018; Valentim, 2021b), and the way parliamentary discourse is conducted (Valentim & Widmann, 2021). Furthermore, it has been shown to affect mainstream parties differently, with center-right parties being more strongly impacted by voter defection towards the RRP (Abou-Chadi et al., 2022; Bale et al., 2010; Butler, Naurin & Öhberg, 2017; De Lange, 2012; Han, 2015). Building on these studies, I look into how improved relative performance of the radical right incentivizes certain mainstream party MPs to switch to a more conciliatory tone in their speeches.

To understand the impact of the RRP's improved relative electoral performance on statements aimed at it, I analyze legislative speeches delivered in the Swedish Riksdag from 2010 to 2022. By combining a dictionary approach with word embeddings technique, I develop an augmented dictionary that more effectively captures the negativity in the speeches directed at SD. My findings demonstrate a differentiation in rhetorical responses between legislators from the center-left and center-right. Specifically, I observe a less antagonistic tone in the speeches by center-right legislators who represent districts where SD's vote share has increased relative to their own party. However, center-left legislators show no reduction in negativity in their speeches, even with Sweden Democrats improving its vote share relative to their own party. Combined, Pa-

pers 1 and 2 illustrate the evolving perception of the radical right among certain Swedish mainstream parties and the key factors influencing this, particularly the RRP's electoral success, which indicates voter preferences and motivates parties to adjust their communication strategies accordingly.

4.3 Paper 3: (De)polarizing Words: How elite rhetoric shapes affective polarization towards the radical right

Paper 3 examines the downstream effects of the interplay between mainstream parties and RRPs in the legislative arena. In this paper, I specifically look into the influence of elite rhetoric on partisan animus towards the radical right among the electorate.

Insights from the affective polarization literature suggest that radical right parties are unique in the levels of partisan animus they receive and radiate. This exceptionalism of the radical right stems from their populist and nativist claims, linkages with the historically extreme movements, and radical positions in the socio-cultural dimension (Gidron et al., 2023; Harteveld et al., 2021; Reiljan, 2020). Previous research suggests that this affective polarization towards the radical right can also be influenced by elite communication (Bantel, 2023b). This is grounded on the findings from party cues studies, which in essence, observe that voters adjust their views to align with their preferred party. Following this logic, I argue that when a voter's in-party shows the RRP in a bad light, using overtly negative rhetoric, the voter will evaluate the radical right less favorably.

To test my argument, I analyze parliamentary speeches delivered in the Swedish Riksdag from 2010 to 2021, measuring negativity of elite rhetoric through sentiment analysis. I connect the results of the analysis with the National-SOM data to estimate partisan affective polarization towards the Swedish radical right party, Sweden Democrats. My findings indicate that there is an association between the respondent's affective polarization towards the radical right and the negativity of the voter's in-party. The effect of elite cues remain robust even among respondents who exhibit negative attitudes towards immigration. The findings in this paper stress the importance of elite rhetoric and how it can either contribute to the normalization or stigmatization of the radical right.

4.4 Paper 4: Talking about the Challenger's Issue: Immigration's Salience in Swedish parliamentary debates

Paper 4 explores the extent to which mainstream parties engage with the defining issue of the radical right, that is, immigration. Understanding this is important as mainstream parties must first choose to engage with the radical right's issue before they can alter their position. In this paper, I aimed to identify the factors that drive mainstream parties to focus on this issue.

One way to study this is by drawing on theories such as issue competition and issue entrepreneurship. In essence, issue competition suggests that political parties compete for voters by strategically highlighting issues where they are perceived as competent (Green-Pedersen, 2019). In this setting, one way for RRPs to undermine the comparative edge of mainstream parties is to raise issues that have been previously ignored and cannot be neatly subsumed within the traditional left-right dimension of conflict (De Vries & Hobolt, 2020; Hobolt & De Vries, 2015). As such, mainstream parties tend to avoid these issues because they risk causing internal divisions and alienating segments of their voter base. In contrast, RRPs benefit from actively promoting these issues. As immigration becomes more prominent on the political agenda, the radical right's electoral appeal and prospects for coalitions grow.

Why, then, do mainstream parties take up this issue? Studies suggest that electoral pressure from the RRP influences mainstream parties' interest in this topic (Spoon, Hobolt & De Vries, 2014). The reasons behind this vary. Mainstream parties may bring up such issues to challenge the RRP's ownership over it. Given their extensive government experience, "policy-oriented" voters are more likely to prefer mainstream parties over the inexperienced RRP (Meguid, 2008). Additionally, mainstream parties might aim to maximize office-seeking opportunities (Green-Pedersen, 2019). For instance, center-right parties have more to gain from highlighting these issues as they attract cross-pressured voters who traditionally vote for left parties (Abou-Chadi, 2014). In contrast, center-left parties might emphasize immigration but primarily to defend it against the RRP (Johnston & Sprong, 2022). Nevertheless, not all studies are convinced about the influence of RRPs on the politicization of immigration. However, when a mainstream rival with a history as a formateur and no ties to question-

able origins addresses immigration, mainstream parties respond accordingly.

To determine the effects of RRP electoral performance and attention to immigration, I use a dictionary approach and structural topic modeling on speeches delivered in the Riksdag from 2010 to 2022. I find that immigration's salience in mainstream party MPs' speeches is positively associated with the RRP's focus on immigration and electoral performance. Dancygier and Margalit (2020) observe that the effect of RRP electoral strength diminishes when the number of asylum-seekers and time trends are factored in. In my case, I find a similar decline in effect, to the point of disappearing when considering mainstream competitors' attention to immigration. Furthermore, it appears that the reaction to the mainstream rival's emphasis on immigration goes beyond simply participating in a debate on the topic or replying to a previous speaker who initiated the issue.

Table 8. Summary of Dissertation Papers

Paper	Variables	Data	Method	Findings
Debating the Populist Pariah: Changing Party Dynamics and Elite Rhetoric in the Swedish Riksdag	DV: Sentiment; IV: Party target and Bloc	ParlSpeech dataset and Swedish Riksdag Open Data (2010-2022)	Sentiment analysis and OLS regressions	Rhetoric directed at SD is negative relative to other Riksdag parties but this negativity has declined over time
Adapting to Radical Right Rival? Examining legislative speeches in response to SD's electoral success	DV: Negativity; IV: SD's relative electoral performance	ParlSpeech dataset, Swedish Riksdag Open Data (2010-2022), election and district data, meta-data on MP	Dictionary approach, word embeddings and NBM regressions	Speeches by center-right MPs becomes less antagonistic when SD relative electoral performance improves in their electoral district
(De)polarizing Words: How elite rhetoric shapes affective polarization towards the radical right	DV: Affective polarization towards SD (mass), IV: In-party negativity (elite)	ParlSpeech dataset, Swedish Riksdag Open Data (2010-2021), National-SOM data (2010-2021)	OLS regressions	Affective polarization towards SD increases with the negativity of the respondent's in-party despite negative attitudes towards immigration
Talking about the Challenger's Issue: Immigration's salience in Swedish parliamentary debates	DV: Share of Speeches on Immigration, Document-Topic Proportion; IV: SD's attention to immigration and electoral performance, Main rival bloc's attention to immigration	ParlSpeech dataset, Swedish Riksdag Open Data (2010-2022), polling and unemployment data, Google Trends data	Dictionary approach, Structural Topic Modeling, Multi-level models	Immigration salience in mainstream party speeches increases as SD and mainstream party MPs pay more attention to it, and when SD's poll performance improves

5 Conclusion

Previous studies have looked into how mainstream parties alter their immigration and multiculturalism policy positions in response to the radical right. In contrast, this dissertation focuses on the more overlooked legislative context. Unlike election campaigns, legislatures present a more constrained environment that may necessitate mainstream parties to reconsider their initial strategies (Heinze, 2022). Nevertheless, I argue that within this institutional framework, legislative debates enable mainstream parties to effectively challenge the radical right, particularly by adjusting the tone of their speeches regarding the RRP and choosing to emphasize or downplay its defining issue. I refer to these strategic actions as rhetorical responses by mainstream parties.

This dissertation addressed several research questions. First, how do mainstream parties and MPs vary in their sentiment toward the radical right and the attention they place on its defining issue in their legislative speeches? Second, what factors account for the variation in sentiment and focus on immigration among mainstream parties and MPs? Lastly, what consequences does in-party negativity have on affective polarization toward the radical right? To address these questions, I examined the case of Sweden, which was previously considered exceptional for not having an electorally successful radical right, a situation that changed with the Sweden Democrats entry into the Riksdag in 2010.

Regarding the first research question, Paper 1 reveals that speeches aimed at SD are generally more negative in sentiment than those addressed to other mainstream parties. Nevertheless, this negativity has decreased over time among center-right parties. By using a dictionary that better captures negativity in legislative speeches, Paper 3 reflects this trend, revealing a decline in negativity among center-right parties, except for the Center Party. Paper 4 shows that the focus on immigration among mainstream parties increased with the entry of the Sweden Democrats in parliament and during the 2015 refugee crisis. As for the second research question, the findings in the dissertation suggest that the changing sentiment towards SD and the focus on immigration can be attributed to the electoral threat posed by the radical right. In Paper 2, the results show that when the vote share gap widens in favor of SD in the district of the speaker's party, center-right MPs adjust their tone. Additionally, Paper 4 demonstrates

that when SD performs well in polls and highlights immigration, mainstream MPs are more inclined to address the issue in their speeches. However, this reaction also applies when a mainstream party rival brings up the issue. Lastly, regarding the consequences of in-party negativity, Paper 3 shows that partisans incorporate negativity directed at SD from their elites into their affective evaluations of SD, despite agreeing with the radical right on the issue of immigration. Overall, these findings deepen our understanding of how mainstream parties adapt their rhetoric when confronted by the radical right, as well as its implications for the electorate.

Despite these insights, there are several aspects of this dissertation that can be further expanded upon. For instance, in Paper 2, the differences in electoral incentives between MPs who re-ran and those who did not during my period of analysis can be examined. I expect that the latter group of MPs will experience greater electoral pressure, making them more sensitive to the threat posed by the relative performance of the radical right in their district. However, this information still needs to be incorporated into my current data. By including it, I anticipate that it will strengthen the observed effects of the improved relative performance of the radical right on the negativity adjustment of center-right MPs. Furthermore, in the papers, I focused solely on the strategic use of positivity and negativity in speeches. Future research could go beyond merely assessing positive and negative valence and explore whether mainstream parties strategically leverage more specific emotions, such as fear, anger, enthusiasm, disgust, or even joy, pride and hope, when addressing the radical right (Valentim & Widmann, 2021; Yildirim, 2024). However, as Haselmayer and Jenny (2017, p.2624) note, "automated methods tend to exhibit a strong bias, as they are predominantly developed and validated in the English language". This has, of course, impacted my dissertation while working with a language like Swedish. To my knowledge, I am only aware of the NRC Word-Emotion Association Lexicon (Mohammad, 2016b) and the Linguistic Inquiry Word Count (Pennebaker, 2001), which have been machine-translated into Swedish and can identify discrete emotions. But unlike LSD, they have not been specifically developed to detect valence in political texts. Nevertheless, I attempted to address the shortcomings of a dictionary approach by augmenting another off-the-shelf dictionary with word embeddings to identify context-specific words to add to it. Ideally,

I would have used crowd-sourcing to validate the performance of the sentiment analysis with the augmented dictionary. Additionally, I could have utilized large language models like BERT, which are currently state-of-the-art in language modeling, for generating contextual vectors, sentiment classification, and topic modeling. But, even to train some of these models, a considerable amount of hand-coded training data would be necessary. Furthermore, while they are slowly gaining popularity for research tasks in political science, understanding the necessary parameters to fine-tune these models and the evaluation metrics is crucial and must be clarified for applied researchers. Lastly, my findings are based on observational studies, which raise the issue of endogeneity—whether the independent variable or the dependent variable influences the other or vice versa. For example, in Paper 3, I attempted to tackle this issue by ensuring that in-party negativity occurred before the distribution of the survey questionnaire. In the absence of experimental design, I performed a form of placebo test to ensure that in-party elite negativity does not correlate with assessments of other out-parties. Nevertheless, an experimental design would, of course, be better at reducing endogeneity concerns.

Taken together, the findings of this dissertation provide important insights. As highlighted in the results from Paper 3, elite rhetoric has the potential to intensify partisan animosity, particularly towards the radical right. The decision to adopt a confrontational tone towards the RRP sets a precedent for how it is perceived by partisans. Whether the approach comes from strategy or some necessary defense of democracy, it risks deepening the emotional divide between the radical right supporters and those of mainstream parties, which could, in turn, legitimize uncivil behavior towards the opposing group. Additionally, such use of negative language could play into the radical right's narrative of victimhood, potentially benefiting them electorally. As illustrated by van Spanje and De Vreese (2015) with the case of Geert Wilders' incitement speech prosecution, targeting a political leader of an anti-immigration party can sometimes be counter-productive, indeed, his eventual acquittal only ended up increasing the probability of voting for the party. In contrast, mainstream parties opting to soften their rhetoric may contribute to the normalization of the radical right and its policies. Voters with latent sympathies for the radical right's policies may feel validated if their party leaders adopt a more accommodative tone to-

wards it. As shown by Ekholm et al. (2022), the tendency to sympathize with SD increases among voters when mainstream parties express their willingness to collaborate with the RRP in parliament.

Recent developments in Swedish party politics also indicate significant changes, with some center-right parties increasingly collaborating with the radical right on specific policy matters. One party has even expressed interest in including them in government. Meanwhile, other parties continue to uphold distinctively different views on the radical right and its issues. These changes in positions and alliances could lead to parliament, particularly legislative debates, becoming new sites of political division and polarization, influencing the overall tone of political discourse. Perhaps we may even observe a new rhetorical divide emerging in response to these realignments, particularly in debates concerning contentious issues such as immigration. Only time will reveal the outcomes.

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