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NUMBER 11

NEW QUESTIONS AND NEW ANSWERS
Strategies towards parties with radical right-wing populist profile

Sigrid Saveljeff
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PREFACE

This paper is as an overview of newly conducted research within the research field of populist parties at MIM (Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare), Malmö University. The paper is based on research conducted by the author together with Dr. Jenny Kiiskinen, also active at MIM at Malmö University.

The author wishes to thank Professor Björn Fryklund, the Director of MIM, for the generous funding that facilitated the completion of this paper.

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MIM, Malmö University
Malmö, January 2011
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ABSTRACT

The presence of radical right-wing populist parties (RRP-parties) and their emerging support have created a discussion concerning the responses of the political establishment towards these parties. The paper focuses on the Swedish context and the strategic approaches taken by the Social Democratic party and the Moderate party towards the Swedish RRP-party the Sweden Democrats. The paper discusses why the content of the strategic approaches towards the Sweden Democrats have changed and why the specific issue politicized by the Sweden Democrats, i.e. the immigration- and refugee issue, have become central in the formation of the strategic approaches used by the two established parties.

Keywords: radical right-wing populism, democracy, political strategies, immigration, political establishment
INTRODUCTION

In recent decades political parties with a clear populist profile have become more successful. The specific party family that in this paper is categorised as radical right-wing populist (RRP-parties) is an interesting object of study, in that although it is positive to democracy as a fundamental idea of governance, in contrast to the extra parliamentary right, it challenges certain aspects of today’s liberal democracy. In countries all over Europe, parties that can be categorised as RRP-parties have gained electoral support through a political agenda that questions and criticises the development of multicultural societies, prioritises conservative issues and claims to speak on behalf of the “ordinary people” rather than the political establishment. The success of RRP-parties in Europe can be seen as a sign of voters criticising a development of society in which growing tendencies towards globalisation, and more specifically international migration, change the way that societies have been formed. Some voters in Sweden, as well as in other countries in Europe, feel that the established parties have neither wanted to nor been able to deal with the critique that has followed such changes in society and that the political establishment is instead “dancing out of step with the voters” on such issues. Indeed, people’s discontent with the political agenda that has been promoted by the established parties is reflected in the amount of electoral support that RRP-parties receive in national elections (Demker 2007; Mudde 2007a). But when this discontent is politicised by RRP-parties, a discussion about how to strategically deal with the presence of parties that attract voters but at the same time challenge certain aspects of liberal democracy becomes central.

The question of how RRP-parties should be approached from a strategic point of view is twofold. It involves how a new political competitor for voters’ support is approached and dealt with by the other established parties and what kind of strategic approach should be adopted towards a competitor that is elevated to hegemonic status by a public opinion that describes it as the ugly ducklings of politics or as a pariah party (Downs 2001; Bale 2003; de Lange 2008) and whose presence is seen as challenging central aspects of liberal democracy.
The presence of RRP-parties in Europe therefore gives rise to what could analytically be called a *democratic dilemma* (Schain *et al* 2002; Eatwell 2004; Mouffe 2005; Fryklund *et al* 2007; Mudde 2007b). The presence of this dilemma and the positions that the established parties need to take in relation to it could be regarded as factors that complicate the strategic approach to parties seen as *the ugly ducklings of politics*.

**The study of political populism: new questions to be answered**

As already stated, RRP-parties are active within the political context all over Europe and are therefore not only an empirical reality but are also becoming (once again) a research question of importance. This paper discusses the kind of populist parties that are active in Europe and Sweden today and shows the importance of continuous research related to these parties. More specifically, the paper tries to answer the important and difficult question of how parties that are seen as challenging specific aspects of liberal democracy are dealt with in the political arena. Research that has previously been presented by the author in conjunction with Dr. Jenny Kiiskinen contributes interesting answers to this question. This research also provides an important base for the outline of this paper.1 The research presented in our PhD thesis and the discussions outlined in this present paper are also important, not only because they provide answers to a highly debated question in Sweden (and Europe) today but also because it constitute an important and interesting contribution to future studies of political populism.

In this paper the following questions are of special importance:

- What do we know about the RRP-parties that are active in Europe and Sweden today?
- Which strategies do the established parties use in order to deal with the presence of this new competitor?
- How can the established parties’ strategic choices be theoretically explained?

**What do we know so far?**

We can safely state that parties with a populist profile have been present on the European political scene for the last four decades. It

also means that, even though radical right-wing populism evolved
during the 1980s, this political movement has not passed unnoticed
among researchers. Since the 1960s, different researchers have paid
attention to populism as a political phenomenon (Ionescu & Gellner
and Tomas Peterson (1981) adopted a Nordic comparative perspective
on populist parties through the doctoral thesis Populism and Parties
of Discontent in the Nordic Countries: Studies of Petty Bourgeois
Class Activity. They also tested a number of hypotheses related to
the concepts of populism and parties of discontent. Their empirical
material consisted of a study of four different populist parties in the
Nordic countries. In the dissertation the hypothesis was put forward
that populism can be perceived as an ideological current as well as a
political movement. What combines the two is that populism generates
from the petty bourgeois class and the specific interests related to
it. In the dissertation Fryklund and Peterson also argued that the
Swedish Centre Party (the former Swedish Agrarian Party) posed as
a populist party in Sweden during the 1970s, which meant that no
“real” populist party was able to develop in Sweden during this period
as they did in the other Nordic countries. The Centre Party managed
to make a twofold appeal to people in general and was therefore able
to attract the kind of voter who had favoured populist parties in the
other Nordic countries.

In the last twenty years research on populism has focused on the
establishment and growth of RRP-parties in Europe. This research has
mostly focused on two main areas. Firstly, researchers have tried to
explain how general socio-structural changes paved the way for the
development and success of RRP-parties (Betz 1994; Taggart 1996;
Kitschelt 1997; Betz & Immerfall 1998; Hainsworth 2000; Rydgren
2002a; 2002b). Secondly, researchers have been interested in mapping
the ideological and organisational characteristics of RRP-parties
(Mudde 2000; Taggart 2000; Mény & Surel 2002; Ignazi 2003;
Rydgren & Widfeldt 2004; Fryklund et al 2007; Mudde 2007a; 2007b;
Davies & Jackson 2008). But as parties of this kind have established
themselves as consistent (and rather successful) political elements all
over Europe, it has also become important for researchers within the
field to ask new questions and try to bridge the knowledge gap that
is now apparent. The political landscape has changed in a number of
European countries and the presence of radical right-wing populism is
both an empirical reality and a research question of importance. This
also occasions a discussion about what happens when RRP-parties
take part in decision-making assemblies and are given the possibility
to influence the way that politics and policies are shaped. In the last couple of years some of the researchers within the field have started to intensify their discussions about the relationship between RRP-parties and aspects of liberal democracy, and especially the tension between the two (Betz & Johnson 2004; Panizza 2005; Mouffe 2005; Mudde 2007). Another important extension of the research into RRP-parties is the production of new knowledge concerning reactions from the established parties and how the established parties strategically position themselves in relation to RRP-parties (Capoccia 2001; Downs 2001, 2002; Bale 2003; Meguid 2005, 2008; Art 2007; van Spanje & van der Brug 2007; de Lange 2008; Kiiskinen & Saveljefi 2010).

Previous studies have mainly focused on countries within Europe, with the exception of Sweden. The presence of radical right-wing populism has not been as apparent in Sweden as in the rest of Europe - apart from the brief appearance of the New Democracy party on the Swedish political scene during the beginning of the 1990s. Indeed, the absence of successful radical right-wing populism in Sweden has also characterised research in Sweden. In this context, Björn Fryklund has made important research contributions with regard to understanding the development of (and absence of) populist parties in Sweden. During the 1990s, Fryklund (and his co-writers) studied New Democracy from both an ideological and organisational perspective and provided a number of explanations for the rise and fall of New Democracy (Bjurulf & Fryklund 1994). The studies of local parties with a populist profile undertaken by Fryklund and his fellow researchers are also important contributions to the development of populism research in Sweden (Peterson et al 1988).

Since the fall of New Democracy in the election of 1994, research on populism in Sweden has tried to explain why Sweden has seemingly been an exception in terms of successful radical right-wing populism. The development that has taken place in the rest of Europe, in which a number of radical right-wing populist parties have demonstrated their success for at least a couple of decades, has not quite reached Sweden (Rydgren 2002b; 2005; Widfeldt 2004; Bennich-Björkman & Blomqvist 2008). In fact it was only at the beginning of the 21st century that the established parties in Sweden once again started to experience competition from a radical right-wing populist party, the Sweden Democrats. It also implies that the research has an opportunity to tread new ground. So far, research on the Sweden Democrats has mainly focused on explaining the factors that contributed to the development of the party, its ideological features and its electoral grounds (Rydgren 2002b; Lipponen 2004; Rydgren & Widfeldt 2004;
Rydgren 2005; Sannerstedt 2008; Erlingsson et al 2009). During the last couple of years, research has also begun to focus on studying the reactions to the presence of the Sweden Democrats from the established parties (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010; see also Fryklund et al 2007).

**From France to Denmark and Norway: the development of populist parties**

In order to fully comprehend the discourse that exists in relation to the RRP-parties of today, it is important to show how these parties have developed from a historical perspective. For example, in the 1970s such parties were characterised by economic neo-liberalism, whereas today’s RRP-parties are characterised by anti-pluralism and a strong criticism of the multicultural society.

Shortly after the end of the Second World War populist parties started to grow and expand their hunting-grounds. The parties that appeared during this phase based their political message on appeals concerning criticism against the political establishment and its perceived difficulties in handling the problems that followed in the wake of Western Europe’s economic development. The Poujadist movement in France during the 1950s is one of the first examples of this kind of populist party, although it was mainly during the 1970s that parties like this became most prominent. This development was mostly concentrated in the Nordic countries and, during this second phase of populism, the tax-issue was the principle on which populist appeals where organised (Fryklund & Peterson 1981; von Beyme 1988; Björklund & Goul Andersen 1999; Goul Andersen 2004; Widfeldt 2004). In Norway, Anders Lange’s party – later renamed as the Progress Party (Fremskrittspartiet) – managed to get into the Norwegian Parliament (Stortinget) in 1973. Carl I. Hagen was the leader of the party for a number of years, until Siv Jensen took over the role as leader in 2005.

The development in Denmark was very similar to that in Norway. In 1971 a new party was formed in Denmark and was also called the Progress Party (Fremskridtspartiet). At the beginning the party was led by Mogens Glistrup, a lawyer who specialised in taxation-issues. During the time that Glistrup was serving a prison sentence Pia Kjærgaard emerged as the new leader of the party. Glistrup became more and more marginalised and the final break between Kjærsgaard and Glistrup came at the end of 1995. Kjærsgaard then created a new party called the Danish People’s Party (Dansk Folkeparti); a party with a strong radical right-wing populist profile that has become very popular in Denmark in recent years (Fryklund & Peterson 1981; Bjørklund & Goul Andersen 1999; Goul Andersen 2004; Widfeldt 2004).
In the last two decades Europe has witnessed another phase of populist party emergence that includes the combination of populist appeals with anti-pluralism and value-conservatism in an attempt to attract votes. Moreover, these parties use a political rhetoric that is coloured by a mistrust and intolerance of foreigners, which in some instances can become xenophobic. This combination has been very successful and has helped RRP-parties in Europe to attract voters who have abandoned the traditional parties and their policies. Through their establishment in countries throughout Europe, these parties have also managed to put new issues on the political agenda, including resistance to immigration and the creation of a multicultural society. This resistance is based on the exclusion of certain individuals who are perceived as not belonging to society; a mechanism of exclusion based on the perceived ethnic- cultural- and religious belonging of the individual (Kitschelt 1997; Hainsworth 2000; Taggart 2000; Mény & Surel 2002).

**Populist parties of the 21st century: radical right-wing populism**

The definition of the party family that is in focus in this paper and that is active in 21st century Europe has been heavily debated by many researchers within the field. The populist parties that are active in Europe today are given different epithets by different researchers. In some contexts the parties are described as ethno-nationalistic parties and in others as xenophobic and right-wing extremists. In this paper such parties are described as radical right-wing populist parties; a definition that is based on research undertaken by Professor Jens Rydgren. Rydgren (2005) defines these parties as radical right-wing populist parties (RHP-parties) and emphasises the three separate components of the definition, namely radical, right and populism. In relation to this it is important to state that the concept of populism is the fabric into which the other two components are woven. Although populism is the common denominator of these parties today, a number of the populist parties that are currently active have combined populist appeals with a political agenda that includes radical aspects and a right-wing oriented political perspective.

The term radical can occasion a number of contradictory associations. In many respects the term has a positive meaning, is positively charged and related to aspects like improvement and development. In a political context, however, the term often has rather negative connotations and is mostly associated with left-wing radicalism and extremism. In the literature that focuses on the presence of RRP-parties, the term radical is sometimes used synonymously with the term extreme
(Rydgren 2002a) and sometimes a distinction between the terms is made (Ignazi 2003; Mudde 2007). In this paper, as well as in the PhD thesis written by myself and Jenny Kiiskinen, the term radical is used to describe this particular party family (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010). Researchers like Betz & Johnson (2004) suggest two aspects that portray the different kinds of radical elements within RRP-parties. Betz & Johnson maintain that in this respect the term radical is appropriate in that RRP-parties use a political rhetoric that, in relation to the rhetoric of the established parties, can be described as radical. The other reason for labelling these parties as radical is based on the parties’ political projects. The RRP-parties of today have managed to mobilise voters through a combination of anti-pluralism, value-conservatism and populism and at the same time support democracy as the governmental model. However, as Betz and Johnson indicate, the politics that these parties promote will lead to fundamental changes in the political system on which the contemporary society is based (Betz & Johnson 2004).

Defining the radical elements of RRP-parties on these criteria can lead to another difficulty, namely that the term becomes too relative and restricted to a specific context. What can be perceived as radical in one political context can be perceived as mainstream in another. The degree of relativity is therefore dependent on the political context. In order to create a non-contextual and more general definition of the term radical, the political scientist Cas Mudde (2007) bases his definition of the radical elements within the RRP-parties on the critique that these parties convey liberal democracy. Mudde maintains that the radical elements of these parties can mainly be linked to their criticism of how liberal democracy defends aspects of pluralism; principles that are in sharp contrast to the monistic base of these parties (Mudde 2007; see also Rydgren 2004).

The radical elements of this party family are also evident in the way that these parties critically address universal and egalitarian values such as human rights – in other words democratic values that are fundamental to how liberal democracy was established (Rydgren 2002a; Rydgren 2004). In the research conducted by the author of this paper and Jenny Kiiskinen it is stated that the degree of radicalism that is demonstrated by RRP-parties can also be seen in relation to another important principle of liberal democracy, namely the degree of tolerance shown. The degree of tolerance for dissidents is supposed to be high in liberal democracies, which is illustrated in the degree of tolerance for the religious and cultural beliefs of an individual. The political message that is put forward by RRP-parties could undermine
the present level of tolerance shown to other religions and cultures (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010).

One of the most debated issues related to the definition of this specific party family is the position of the parties as right-wing (see also Ignazi 2003). The position of political parties on the right-left political scale is often based on the way the party positions itself with regard to political issues of a socio-economic nature. But given that parties within the RRP party family rarely position themselves on socio-economic issues it is difficult to place them on the usual measuring scale. This is due to the fact that these parties perceive such issues as being subordinate to other issues (Mudde 2007; see also Meguid 2008). Cas Mudde (2007) has an elegant way of circumventing these difficulties. Mudde bases his classification of these parties on the way the RRP-parties position themselves on issues related to inequality. Mudde uses Bobbio’s analysis (1994) to argue that parallels can be discerned between the ways in which the RRP-parties and the traditional Right relate to issues of inequality. Mudde claims that parties to the left of the political scale see inequality as an unnatural condition that needs to be adjusted by interventions from the state. This is contrary to the approach of the traditional Right, which views aspects of difference as something natural and therefore something that the state does not have the resources or incentives to change (Mudde 2007; see also Bobbio 1994; Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010).

In the research conducted by myself and Jenny Kiiskinen the argument regarding the position of RRP-parties on the right of the political scale is based on how these parties position themselves on socio-cultural issues (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010). When it comes to questions of law and order, family values and policies of migration, parties placed to the right have an authoritarian attitude, while parties that are positioned to the left adopt a more liberal approach (Rydgren 2002a). When it comes to the kind of populist parties present in Europe today I find it easy to agree with Rydgren’s pragmatic argumentation for a position to the right. This argumentation is also supported empirically, in that today a number of RRP-parties exclusively focus on issues with a socio-cultural dimension and position themselves clearly to the right. For example, the RRP-parties of today pay much more attention to the refugee and immigration question than to other issues and propagate more rigorous rules and stricter regulations for migration issues at a national and European level. These parties also take a fairly conservative stance when it comes to family matters, where marriage between a man and a woman is seen as the “natural state”. When it comes to the question of abortion these parties also
take a clear conservative position and often suggest that laws relating to the right to abortion should be more restrictive (Rydgren 2004; Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010).

In the definition of this party family the third element - which is perhaps also the most important - is the populist nature of these parties’ rhetoric. It has to be stated that populism can be identified within a number of political parties and is therefore not unique to the types of parties discussed in this paper. But it is at the same time important to clarify that what distinguishes these parties from other parties using a populist rhetoric is the way in which the populist appeals are combined with other core components, namely the radical and right-wing aspects. The populist appeals in the politics of the RRP-parties are most evident in the way the RRP-parties build their politics around the tension between what is perceived as ordinary, hardworking People and the power-mad and unrealistic Elite. The way that these parties often advocate simplified solutions to very complex problems and their way of highlighting questionable causes and effects, such as that reduced immigration to a country leads to reduced levels of criminality, often reflects the populist rhetoric used by these parties (Rydgren 2004; Widfeldt 2004; Rydgren 2005; Mudde 2007; Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010).

Furthermore, the RRP-parties that are active in Europe today differ from their predecessors in a number of ways. The first difference is that in most western European democracies the establishment of RRP-parties has been almost synchronic. Secondly, the RRP-parties of today have managed to influence the political agenda to a much higher degree than their predecessors, especially with regard to refugee- and immigration issues. Thirdly, in that they have been more successful than their predecessors when it comes to gaining access to influential political positions they have also been able to improve their possibilities to become politically influential (Betz 1998). In short, the time seems to be ripe for this kind of political parties. Even though some of these parties are still perceived as far too radical in their attempts to become equal partners in coalitions with the established parties, it is clear that these parties are attracting more electoral support and thereby seriously challenging the political establishment in the competition for votes.

The early years of the 21st century can be regarded as a turning point when it comes to the RRP-parties’ ability to promote themselves as attractive political alternatives. In 2000 the RRP-party FPÖ (Freiheitliehe Partei Österreichs) became part of the government in
Austria. During its time in government, parts of the FPÖ’s highly xenophobic politics became a reality.\(^2\) In France, Jean-Marie Le Pen, the leader of the RHP-party Front National, won more votes than the Socialists’ presidential candidate, Lionel Jospin, in the first round of the presidential elections of 2002. The presidency of France then became a battle between Le Pen and Jacques Chirac. In Denmark, the non-socialist coalition government managed to maintain its position of power due to its collaboration with the Danish People’s Party. This RRP-party has maintained its position since the beginning of 2000 and has had a great deal of influence on policies related to immigration in Denmark (Ringmose & Pedersen 2004; Goul Andersen 2005). Similar patterns can be identified in Norway. During the election in 2005, the Progress Party (Fremskrittspartiet) gained an important key position in the Norwegian Parliament (Stortinget). The party received about 22 percent of the national votes and electoral support for the party has remained strong over the years. In relation to the election in September 2009, the party achieved its highest scores ever and gained almost 23 percent of the national votes, which gave the party 41 seats in the national Parliament (www.stortinget.no). In 1999 a number of RRP-parties achieved representation in the European Parliament, and if the results of the last European parliamentary elections are anything to go by this trend is likely to continue.

Sweden has long been something of an exception or anomaly with regard to successful radical right-wing populism. The populist party known as New Democracy made its entrance into national politics in 1991, although after only a short period in the spotlight the party disappeared from the Swedish political scene in the national elections of 1994.\(^3\) Since then the RRP-party known as the Sweden Democrats

\(^2\) The leader of FPÖ, Jörg Haider, left the party at the beginning of 21st century and started a new party, BZÖ, with a strong radical right-wing populist position. In the election of 2006, the party received about 4 percent of the votes and in the election to the parliament in the autumn of 2008 the party received, together with FPÖ, almost 30 percent of the votes. Jörg Haider was killed in a car accident in October 2008 and was replaced by Josef Buchner, who formally took over the role as leader of BZÖ in April 2009 (www.bzoe.at; www.sydsvenskan.se 2006-10-06; www.sydsvenskan.se 2008-10-12).

\(^3\) Although in some respects New Democracy can be defined as a radical right-wing populist party, it should not be regarded as an ideal RRP-party type, due to the fact that the party was mostly dominated by a clear neo-liberal approach.
(Sverigedemokraterna) has been the only active RRP-party in Sweden. The Sweden Democrats was created in 1988 and the party has adopted an obvious strategy of working its way through the political system, starting at the local level. In the national election of 2006 the party received about 3 percent of the national votes, which wasn’t quite enough for the party to be represented in the Swedish Parliament (Riksdagen). But the results of the election generated 281 local mandates in municipalities in different parts of Sweden, which gave the party the local break-through it had been striving for. Opinion polls conducted during 2009 clearly showed that the party had a fairly stable electoral support, with figures of over 4 percent in almost every poll. In the national election of September 2010, the Sweden Democrats received 5.7 percent of the national vote and won 20 seats in the Swedish Parliament – the first time since the early 1990s that a radical right-wing populist party has been represented in the Swedish Parliament.
THE IDEOLOGY OF RRP-PARTIES:  
A COMBINATION OF ANTI-PLURALISM, 
VALUE CONSERVATISM AND POPULISM

The critique of the development of the multicultural society:  
anti-pluralist segments

Anti-pluralism is a prominent feature of today’s RRP-parties’ ideology,  
of which the Sweden Democrats is no exception. The anti-pluralist  
features are most evident in the party’s resistance to the development  
of a Swedish society based on multiculturalism. According to the  
Sweden Democrats, a society characterised by multiculturalism is one  
that is marked by instability and poses a threat to the kind of society  
the party is striving for, i.e. a society based on cultural and ethnic  
homogeneity.

According to the Sweden Democrats, the main problem with the  
development of a multicultural society is that the established parties  
have not been able to deal with exclusion, antagonism between  
different groups in society, criminality and the draining of the welfare  
system. From the Sweden Democrats’ point of view, these problems  
threaten to destroy the very foundations on which Swedish society  
is built. In order to minimise the risk of depletion in the current  
development the Sweden Democrats maintain that immigration to the  
country must be reduced and that the current policy of integration in  
relation to immigration should be abandoned in favour of one that  
is marked by assimilation (Küskinen & Saveljef 2010:54ff; see also  
Lipponen 2004:70; Rydgren 2004:216; 2005:120f; The political  
programme of the Sweden Democrats).

A frequently asked question in the official discussion concerning the  
Sweden Democrats is whether the party’s anti-pluralistic view on  
immigration should be categorised as xenophobic or racist. As a body  
the Sweden Democrats describes itself as a nationalistic party that  
dissociates itself from any form of racism and xenophobia (www.  
sverigdemokraterna.se 16/10/2009). But according to the analysis  
of the nationalism that characterises the party’s politics, a so-called  
ethno-pluralistic doctrine appears to be central (Ekström von Essen &  
Fleischer 2006:39). This ethno-pluralistic doctrine is most evident in
the racist tendencies after 1945, when the concept of race was replaced by the concept of culture as a dividing marker. According to this view, the world is divided into nationally based territories with their own specific cultures. As long as the natural order is maintained, no problems will arise. But according to the RRP-parties, problems arise when individuals migrate and leave their cultural places of residence for another (Hervik 2004a:247f, 253; 2004b:151; Rydgren 2004:24f).

[The doctrine is based on the idea that] different people or ethnicities must be kept apart. If this does not happen, their unique cultural characteristics will disappear: they stop being distinct groups of people or ethnic groups (Rydgren 2004:25, the author’s own translation from Swedish to English).

Analyses of how the Sweden Democrats describe the dangers related to the multicultural society show that a certain language can be related to the ethno-pluralistic doctrine. Both the Sweden Democrats and other RRP-parties are highly sceptical of the multicultural society; a scepticism that is based on the idea that insurmountable cultural differences exist between different groups of people and that a society that works in the way it was intended cannot be based on principles of cultural pluralism (Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010:55ff; see also Rydgren 2002a:205f; Hervik 2004a:235f; Ekström von Essen & Fleischer 2006:33f).

**The view of the nation: anti-pluralist segments**

To the Sweden Democrats and other RRP-parties the nation constitutes a central concept around which large parts of their ideology and politics is woven. These parties talk about the nation in terms of a highly idealised heartland (Taggart 2000). In this heartland, values and morals are imagined as being based on ordinary people’s common sense and where the extreme and/or marginalised are excluded. The notion of the creation of a heartland based on a population that is ethnically and culturally homogenous is also closely linked to this nostalgic and ideal perception of how society and the nation should be formed. According to the Sweden Democrats, the nation and the heartland are the equivalent of a common cultural heritage and a population that is ethnically demarcated (Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010:59ff).

The RRP-parties that are active today all indicate that the heartland must consist of a unity of individuals – a homogenous unity. The concept of the people is thus used in order to define this homogenous group of individuals who own the right to the heartland (Taggart 2000:16f; see also Berlin et al 1968:173). The image of the
people occupying the heartland is also highly idealised and represents the RRP-parties’ norms and values (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010:59ff; see also Taggart 2000:91f; Betz 2002:198f; Mény & Surel 2002:11f).

The elite, immigrants and the anti-establishment strategy

‘The people’ is an important concept to the Sweden Democrats and other RRP-parties for several reasons. The way in which these parties define the concept of the people also allows them to draw a sharp line between those who are perceived as belonging to the community and those who are excluded from it. RRP-parties are often the product of a reaction to an ongoing development in society. Most of the RRP-parties of today oppose the development of the multicultural society and promote the exclusion of the so-called elite of society and immigrants.

The elite consists of individuals that the RRP-parties perceive to be responsible for what is regarded as the destructive development of society, such as politicians, researchers and other opinion-makers. People like this are regarded as being part of the ruling elite and are therefore criticised by RRP-parties for not looking after the interests of the ordinary people and for creating an elitist structure that is characterised by a bureaucracy and autocracy that is supposed to have led the country onto the dangerous path of development (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010: 59ff; see also Fryklund & Peterson 1981; Betz 1994; 1998: 2002; Canovan 1999; Taggart 2000; Rydgren 2002a).

The tension between the people and the elite, as it is portrayed in the dissatisfaction of the development in society, is also evident in these parties’ relationship with the rest of the political establishment. This discontent is often aimed towards the political establishment and its way of (not) debating problems in society. It is also often based on a feeling that there are no realistic solutions to the problems that every society needs to deal with as a consequence of globalisation and immigration (Betz 1998:4; Mény & Surel 2002:13f). RRP-parties often use a so-called anti-establishment strategy to channel this discontent (Schedler 1996). The strategy is used in order to create an image of the RRP-party as being able to combine important principles, namely that the party is on the one hand able to distance itself from the political elite and on the other hand recognise democracy as a model for governance. In order to create distance to the political establishment, it is therefore important for the RRP-parties to reinterpret the parliamentary arena (see also Sjöblom 1968) and the usual bipolar separation between parties in governance and parties in opposition. This reinterpretation leads to the erasure of the differences between the parties in gover-
nance and the parties in opposition and instead clusters them together in one single category, i.e. the political elite. This is further motivated by the RRP-parties that any visible differences between these parties represent a superficial manoeuvre to manipulate the ordinary people. RRP-parties often develop a political rhetoric against their opponents that often is seen as quite aggressive and uncompromising (Schedler 1996:295; Rydgren 2002a:281). In the following model, the strategy and the specific rhetoric that accompanies are portrayed in a symbolic triangle which shows the supposedly “true” relationship between the ordinary people, the elite and the challenger, i.e. the RRP-party.

**Model 1. The anti-political triangle**

![Model 1. The anti-political triangle](image)

The image that an RRP-party wants to produce and mediate to the ordinary people is that the political elite is the enemy and that the ordinary people are the innocent victims who need saving by the hero, i.e. the RRP-party. By using the anti-establishment strategy, the RRP-party is able to portray itself as the true (and only) opposition to the political elite (Schedler 1996:302f; see also Eatwell 2004). The usage of the strategy also enables the RRP-party to lump the opposition parties together with the parties in governance by painting a picture of these parties as belonging to the political establishment, irrespective of whether they are in governance or not (Schedler 1996:303).

The second group of people to be excluded from the ordinary people (according to RRP-parties, such as the Sweden Democrats) are individuals who are members of a society as a result of developments about which the RRP-parties are unhappy. This group mostly consists
of refugees and immigrants. The excluding features are evident if we study how the Sweden Democrats view citizenship. The party regards the concept of citizenship as an exclusive right that was originally created for a culturally homogenous people and is therefore a right that refugees and immigrants are only entitled to if they fulfil a number of requirements (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010; see also Kitschelt 1997:19f).

The excluding features that are evident among RRP-parties like the Sweden Democrats become even more apparent when studying these parties’ views about who should be allowed access to the welfare system. These parties maintain that society consists of sustaining and consuming groups, which means that they see certain groups in society as constantly contributing to the common welfare (sustaining groups) and others as not contributing but rather exploiting these structures for their own good (consuming groups) (Mény & Surel 2002:12f). The latter groups (tearing groups) often consist of the unemployed, bureaucrats, intellectuals and immigrants (Taggart 2000:94). Welfare is the social safety net that is used in order to protect and take care of a country’s citizens in case of need. The Sweden Democrats claim that this safety net should only be accessible to individuals who are regarded as belonging to the people; a people based on cultural, national and ethnic preferences and who have taken part of the creation of this welfare apparatus, i.e. the sustaining groups. The groups that are categorised by these parties as consuming groups are not seen as contributing to the construction of the welfare system and in view of this should not be entitled to any benefits it (Kitschelt 1997:5). Some researchers define this way of viewing the welfare system as ethno-national welfare chauvinism (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010; see also Rydgren 2004:25; Fryklund et al 2007:42).
THE ESTABLISHMENT VS. RRP-PARTIES: THE STRATEGIC APPROACH

So far the discussion has concentrated specifically on the RRP-parties. But what about the rest of the political establishment? How do the other political parties that are active on the political scene deal with the presence of this new competitor? Do they regard it as a competitor that is also perceived as challenging certain aspects of liberal democracy? And how can we, from a theoretical point of view, explain the strategic choices that the established parties make? These are research questions of importance and complexity, but in order to fully comprehend their importance we need to return to the discussion indicated at the beginning of this paper, namely that concerning the democratic dilemma to which RRP-parties are said to give rise to.

Pluralism and tolerance are two essential principles in the liberal democracies of today. As stated before, RRP-parties are not only new competitors on the political scene but are also perceived, due to their attitude towards the development of the multicultural society, as challenging certain aspects of the fundamental values of liberal democracy, such as the degree of tolerance and the equal rights of every individual (Schain et al 2002; Eatwell 2004; Mouffe 2005; Mudde 2007). In general, new parties almost always pose a challenge to the established parties. Although that is not a controversial statement in itself (Hug 2001; Erlingsson 2005), it is not possible to at the same time state that all new parties automatically challenge aspects of liberal democracy. That these parties do not question democracy as form of government is not hard to understand. Any party that questions the principle of democracy is doomed to a languishing and marginalised political life in most countries today. Supporting the principle of democracy and at the same time questioning aspects of liberal democracy, and making a political statement about that, is a more accessible and less provocative political approach (Schain et al 2002; Eatwell 2004; Mouffe 2005; Mudde 2007). RRP-parties try to work towards a society that is based on homogeneity (in relation to ethnic and cultural preferences), which in the long run can lead to a society based on exclusion rather than inclusion. Fundamental aspects of liberal democracy include the equal rights and possibilities of the
individual and a high degree of tolerance for dissidents (Carter & Stokes 2002; see also Holden 1993; Gutmann 1994). What happens when RRP-parties enter the scene and start to influence either the public debate or the actual formulation of different policies is that liberal perspectives are indirectly questioned; something that can also lead to reduced tolerance. In the long run it can also lead to the creation of a society that only includes individuals who “truly belong” and excludes everyone who is not perceived as belonging to the national, ethnic or cultural community (Mudde 2007; see also Capoccia 2004).

It is at this intersection that liberal democracy is challenged, since being based on fundamental principles it promotes a heterogeneous and pluralistic society (Mudde 2007). It is also at this intersection that the previously mentioned democratic dilemma appears (Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010; see also Schain et al 2002; Eatwell & Mudde 2004; Fryklund et al 2007; Mudde 2007). The democratic dilemma occurs in the intersection between the mechanisms that on the one hand control the supply and demand of democracy – as long as voters demand this kind of political party. It will thus be followed by a supply that meets this demand. On the other hand, the fundamental rights of the individual that are intimately related to liberal democracy are perceived as inviolable and securely anchored in international legislation. While RRP-parties act within the frames of democracy, they promote a political agenda that could lead to human rights restrictions for individuals with other ethnic backgrounds than the majority of the population. In the long run it can create an atmosphere in which the politically sanctioned exclusion of individuals with an immigrant background is a given fact (Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010; see also Schain et al 2002; Eatwell & Mudde 2004; Fryklund et al 2007; Mudde 2007).

Although the extreme right may not threaten democracy tout court, the failure of more-established parties to respond adequately to this challenge may function to undermine the quality of liberal democracy (Hossay & Zolberg 2002:3).

In that a number of RRP-parties are active on the European political scene of today their existence can no longer be perceived as a temporary phenomenon, but rather as something that will continue to challenge the established parties in the competition for voter support. The biggest challenge for the political establishment and for society today is therefore how to deal with the presence of these parties.
[Radical-right wing populist parties] have already existed for some time, but they were considered marginal and their strong presence in countries like Austria was explained by specific national idiosyncrasies, so it was possible to dismiss them as a ghost from the past, soon to be brushed away by the advances of the process of ‘modernisation’. [...] Instead of being seen as an exception, those parties are now presented as the main threat to our democratic institutions (Mouffe 2005:50).

New theories, new results, new knowledge
The research conducted by myself and Jenny Kiiskinen over the last couple of years has focused on the presence of RRP-parties within liberal democracy and, more specifically, on answering the question of how the rest of the political establishment deals with the presence of this new political competitor. As discussed in the previous sections of this paper, one can easily state that the presence of RRP-parties creates discussions related to the democratic dilemma that becomes particularly evident when deciding how these parties should be strategically dealt with. The research we conducted have focused on the strategies that the established parties used in order to deal with the presence of an RRP-party, and also which factors were central for the established parties when deciding which strategy to use against their new opponent. The research question was operationalised within a Swedish context, with a special focus on the strategic approaches of two of the largest established parties, which were also the parties most challenged by the Sweden Democrats in relation to the competition for votes. The two established parties in focus were the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the Moderate Party. But even though the study focused specifically on the Swedish context, the results of the research can also be used in a more general context of RRP-party success.

The established parties’ strategic approaches to the Sweden Democrats have been an issue of importance ever since the Swedish national election of 2006. As a result of the increased electoral support for the party, the Sweden Democrats is no longer a marginal party with minimal electoral support, but a political opponent that the established parties have to deal with and take seriously. Regarding the Sweden Democrats as a temporary political phenomenon is no longer an option. In 2006 this resulted in an intensified debate concerning how the presence of this new opponent should be strategically dealt with (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010).

Strategies of how to cope with other political parties are not an unusual feature; in multiparty systems it is a natural consequence of the way in which the political system is structured. But when it comes
to RRP-parties, the content of the strategic approach is not obvious. Research conducted in parts of Europe shows that the most common strategy used by the established parties has been to isolate and exclude the RRP-party (Downs 2001; 2002). This kind of strategy can be seen as a rational solution in order to control and reduce the level of competition from opponents, although it also has a tendency to be perceived as undemocratic by the electorate, since it is used in order to prevent a democratically elected party from gaining access to the political arena. Therefore, the presence of the democratic dilemma contributes to the fact that the strategic process (related to the new opponent in the shape of the RRP-party) becomes more complicated. A reconstruction of the content of the strategic approaches used by the established parties and the explanation of which factors influence this content is therefore an essential contribution to the question of how established parties strategically handle the ugly ducklings of politics.

Understanding political strategies from a theoretical perspective
As already stated, it is only in recent years that researchers specialising in the field of populist parties have started to look more specifically at the strategic responses from the political establishment towards RRP-parties. In 2005, an American scholar named Bonnie Meguid published an interesting article on the strategies used by the political establishment to deal with so-called niche parties (Meguid 2005). Meguid’s definition of niche parties is embodied parties that focus their politics and rhetoric on one single issue, such as environmental issues or issues connected with immigration. Meguid’s study focused on three different types of parties, namely environmental parties, territorial parties and RRP-parties, and more specifically on which strategies the established parties used in order to deal with the presence of these parties (Meguid 2005:347; 2008:3ff). Meguid later published her results in a book entitled Party Competition between Unequals: Strategies and Electoral Fortunes in Western Europe (Meguid 2008). The major contribution of Meguid’s research is her focus on a new theoretical perspective of how the strategic responses of the political establishment can be understood. By using the so-called PSO-theory (Position, Salience and Ownership theory), Meguid was able to reveal the actual strategies used, the effects they had on the electoral support of the niche party and, more importantly, the factors that were central to decisions concerning the established parties’ choices of strategies for dealing with RRP-parties (Meguid 2005; 2008). The PSO-theory uses rational choice as its point of departure; an assumption that can be extracted from rational party theory that predicts that a party will
choose a strategic approach based on a content that creates the best possible odds in order to achieve and fulfil the goals of the party, such as the maximisation of electoral support (Downs 1957:137; Strom 1990:566f; Håkansson 2005:81f). The PSO-theory goes a bit further in relation to these basic assumptions, however. When it comes to the relationship between parties competing for the same group of voters, the goals are also focused on maximising one’s own party’s relative strengths towards its main opponent (Meguid 2005:350ff; 2008:94). The content of the strategic approaches used by the established parties in order to deal with the presence of a challenging RRP-party is, in relation to the PSO-theory, dependent on whether the RRP-party poses a threat to the established parties or not. This threat is considered in relation to the specific political issue raised by the RRP-party and the extent to which the established parties are electorally threatened by the RRP-party due to its politicisation of this specific political issue (Meguid 2005; 2008). In the case of the RRP-parties, it is the immigration and refugee issues that are central.

The magic box of strategies: from a dismissive strategy to a strategy of convergence

The PSO-theory shows that the established parties can choose from three specific strategies: a dismissive strategy, a convergence strategy and a divergence strategy. The unifying element of all these three strategies is the specific issue put forward by the niche party. In the case of RRP-parties the strategies are built around the immigration and refugee issue. The PSO-theory clearly states that the strategic response to the challenging RRP-party begins when a decision is made about whether or not the established party should take a stand on the specific issue put forward by the RRP-party.

The dismissive strategy is used in cases where the specific issue is either not regarded as important (from a political point of view) or is difficult to address. In cases like this, the established parties can use a more passive strategic response, such as ignoring the specific issue. By doing this, the established parties attempt to communicate to the voters that the specific issue is not of importance. This also means that the established parties communicate that a vote for the challenging RRP-party is a lost vote. If the dismissive strategy is successful it will lead to the RRP-party losing votes as a direct consequence of voters being influenced by the established party and not viewing the specific issue as important, and will thus eliminate the threat posed by the RRP-party (Meguid 2005:349; 2008:28; Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010:99; see also Downs 2001:26; van Spanje & van der Brug 2007:1022).
In contrast to the dismissive strategy, some strategies focus on a more active stand taken by the established parties on the specific issue. As a result of the usage of these strategies, the specific issue raised by the RRP-party attracts a lot more attention, becomes more legitimised and can therefore also become more important to the voters. If the established party chooses to take an active position on the specific issue it has two strategies to choose from, the first of which is the strategy of convergence. By choosing this strategy the established party meets the challenge posed by the RRP-party by moving its position on the specific issue closer to the position of the challenging RRP-party (Meguid 2005:349; 2008:28f; Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010:100; see also Downs 1957:117ff; Sjöblom 1968.180f; Downs 2001:127; Widfeldt 2004b:153). The aim of the strategy is to neutralise the success of the RRP-party by undermining the uniqueness of the party’s position on the specific issue. When an established party uses a strategy of convergence in order to meet the challenge of an RRP-party it provides the voters with a choice of two parties holding similar positions on the issue. According to the PSO-theory, voters who are ideologically closer to the established party will abandon the challenging RRP-party in favour of the established party (Meguid 2005:349; 2008:29; Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010:100; see also Downs 2001:127). By choosing this specific strategy the established party also tries to challenge the RRP-party for the “right” to ownership of the specific issue. According to Meguid, it will also appear as more attractive for the electorate to cast their vote for the “copy” (the established party) rather than the “original” (the RRP-party) (Meguid 2005:349; 2008:29; Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010:100; see also van Donselaar 2003:290).

But there are also risks attached to the usage of the strategy of convergence. If the strategy is not successful, there is a high risk that electoral support for the RRP-party will increase and that the attention paid by the established party to the specific issue may result in the issue becoming more important to the voters. Moving its position on the specific issue towards the RRP-party position can also signal that the RRP-party is regarded as a political ally that in the future could be seen as a potential coalition partner (Art 2007:332ff).

There is also a third strategy, which is the strategy of divergence. This specific strategy could be useful in situations in which an established party wants to create an image (directed to the voters) that the party wishes to distance itself from the position taken on the specific issue by the RRP-party. This is done by the established party adopting an opposing position on the specific issue to that taken by the RRP-party (Meguid 2005:350; 2008:29; Kiiskinen & Saveljef
2010:101; see also Downs 1957:117ff; Sjöblom 1968:180f; Capoccia 2001:451). One difficult aspect of the divergence strategy is that it can have a contra-productive effect, since it actually reinforces the position of the RRP-party as the legitimate owner of the specific issue. This can also provide the RRP-party with more voters sharing the same views about the issue (Meguid 2005:350; 2008:29; Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010:101).

It may seem rather strange for an established party that bases its decisions on rationality to choose the divergence strategy in order to meet the challenge of a new political opponent. But in multiparty systems (like the Swedish political system) where a number of different parties compete for the same voters, a strategy that reinforces the electoral support of the RRP-party could be used in order to limit electoral support for the main opponent of the established party positioned on the other side of the political scale. At the same time as the divergence strategy reinforces support for the RRP-party it also weakens the main opponent, in that voters shift their allegiance to the RRP-party. The expression “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” clearly applies to this situation (Meguid 2005:350; 2008:32f; Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010:101).

The salience- and ownership-altering aspects of adversarial tactics allow the mainstream parties who are not directly threatened by the niche party to use it as a weapon against their mainstream party opponents. This is the political embodiment of the adage “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” (Meguid 2005:350).

**Important factors in relation to the strategic choice**

Why does a party choose one strategy over another? Which factors have such an important impact on the strategic decision-making of the established parties when faced with a new political opponent, such as the RRP-parties? In the struggle for votes between the established parties and RRP-parties we can identify a number of factors that are significant for the strategic choice. These factors influence, and sometimes also limit, the strategic choices available to the established parties. The PSO-theory is very useful in this respect, since this theoretical perspective gives us a chance to identify these factors and understand how they influence the strategic choices made.

In some cases the established parties’ strategic choices are affected by factors that “force” the parties to make choices that can be perceived as irrational. The empirical results emanating from Meguid’s study show that it is not uncommon for the established parties to choose a strategy that is far from optimal from a vote-maximisation point
of view (Meguid 2008). I will discuss these factors in the following section of the paper and show how they impact the strategic choices made by the established parties.

**Relative maximisation of power**

In their role as rational actors political parties will presumably choose a strategy that will maximise profits and minimise costs. But how do political parties define profit? Models for strategic choices presuppose that parties strive for a maximisation of power and influence. A party is therefore supposed to choose a strategy that will enhance its possibilities to realise its goals in the parliamentary, electoral and internal arena (Sjöblom 1968). A party that is challenged by a new opponent is supposed to act in such a way that its present position of power is upheld or that at least minimises any potential losses, which also becomes the main goal for the strategy of choice. The particular goal explains the cases in which an established party chooses to respond to the challenge put forward by a new political competitor, such as an RRP-party, with a dismissive strategy or a strategy marked by convergence, since both strategies are assumed to limit electoral support for the opposing RRP-party (Meguid 2008:28ff). But the assumption put forward by Anthony Downs in his classic book on strategic behaviour from 1957, and which focuses on the fact that parties only act rationally in order to maintain their positions of power or in order to minimise their losses, cannot explain situations in which parties choose a strategy that does not generate more votes for one’s own party. However, by looking more closely at the PSO-theory provided by Bonnie Meguid, we can find an answer to this question. According to Meguid, political parties also strive towards another goal, namely that of the relative maximisation of power. With this goal in sight, the established parties try to maximise the distance between them and their main opponent when it comes to electoral support. The goal can be thus realised by maximising the power of one’s own party; an action that can be applied to the assumptions made by Anthony Downs. But in situations in which a party may find it difficult to increase its electoral support, it can instead choose a strategy that will enhance its relative power by minimising the power of its main opponent (Meguid 2008:94ff; Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010:105ff).

**Threat or challenge?**

When an RRP-party and an established party compete for voters, the PSO-theory predicts that the strategic choice made by the established party is dependent on the strength of the provocation from the
RRP-party. The strength of the provocation or the intensity of the threat posed by the RRP-party is based on how many voters the established parties lose to the RRP-party (Meguid 2008:92; see also Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010:106). An RRP-party is seen as a potential threat if it manages to attract a substantial number of voters of the established party. On the contrary, the RRP-party is seen as a lesser threat if it does not manage to attract a large number of the established party’s voters. The strategic model put forward by the PSO-theory is therefore based on how many voters the RRP-party manages to attract and, more importantly, which of the established parties loses most voters to the RRP-party.

The decision about which strategy to use in order to meet the challenge posed by the RRP-party is also influenced by the strategic choices made by the rest of the political establishment. The PSO-theory states that in multiparty systems, such as the Swedish party system, it is possible to identify three ideal cases that describe the strategic interplay between two established parties (party A and B) and a RRP-party.

**Absent threat from the RRP-party**
The most common scenario when it comes to competition between RRP-parties and established parties is that the new opponent does not attract any of the established parties’ voters and is therefore not seen as a potential threat. Given that the RRP-party competes with the established party with one single political issue as point of departure, this scenario means that the voters do not have any preferences on this issue and that the issue is therefore not seen as important enough to influence the choice of party to vote for. If the voters do not position themselves on the issue put forward by the RRP-party, there is no incentive for the established parties to position themselves on it. In such cases, the PSO-theory states that established parties will make the same strategic decision and choose the dismissive strategy. By doing this, the established parties enhance the voters’ opinions, i.e. that the issue driven by the RRP-party is not important and that in the long run the RRP-party will lose electoral support (Meguid 2008:100f; see also Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010:107).

**Asymmetrical threat from the RRP-party**
The second case describes a situation in which an RRP-party politicises a certain issue and adopts a position that the voters regard as attractive – which in turn leads to one of the established parties losing more votes to the new opponent. In a case like this the PSO-theory
stipulates that the established parties will act in different ways. Party A, the party that is threatened most by the RRP-party, is stipulated to respond to this threat by choosing a strategy that will enhance its possibilities to win back the voters who have abandoned the party in favour of the RRP-party. The only way for party A to manage this is to position itself on the specific issue raised by the RRP-party. Aided by a convergence strategy, party A will move closer to the position held by the RRP-party on the issue. If the tactics are successful, party A will increase its electoral support at the same time as the electoral support for the RRP-party will be reduced (Meguid 2008:101; see also Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010:107ff).

Party B will also be threatened by the RRP-party, but to a much lesser extent than party A. But since party B is also threatened, it cannot remain passive and is forced to make certain strategic decisions. Party B is likely to experience difficulties in winning back the (relatively few) voters who have abandoned the party in favour of the RRP-party, in that it would probably have chosen a convergence strategy that is unattractive to many of the party’s supporters. Instead, the best option would be for party B is to enhance its own strength towards its main opponent, i.e. party A. Given that party A has chosen a strategy marked by convergence, party B will instead choose a strategy marked by divergence. By doing this, party B will legitimise the specific issue raised by the RRP-party at the same time as it adopts an opposite position on the certain issue in relation to the positions of party A and the RRP-party. This specific strategy will enhance the status of the RRP-party as the owner of the specific issue; a move that party B hopes will lead to efforts on the part of party A to regain votes and the right to ownership of the specific issue. By using a divergence strategy the goal for party B becomes the reinforcement of its position of power towards its main opponent, i.e. party A, by enhancing the electoral support for the RRP-party and reducing the status of party A (Meguid 2008:101f; Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010:107ff).

Deciding which one of the chosen strategies will dominate and influence the electoral support for the RRP-party is crucial. If the convergence strategy is stronger than the strategy of divergence, the result will be that the electoral support for party A will increase, even in relation to party B. If the opposite situation occurs, i.e. the strategy of divergence is stronger than that of convergence, it will lead to party B increasing its relative electoral support in relation to party A (Meguid 2008:101f; see also Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010:107ff).
Symmetrical threat from the RRP-party

The third and last ideal typical case demonstrates how a symmetrical threat from the RRP-party influences the strategic choices of the established parties. A symmetrical threat exists when equal numbers of voters of both established parties show preferences in the certain issue that are closely related to the preferences of the RRP-party. The PSO-theory states that the most rational thing to do in such a situation is for both the established parties to adopt a strategy marked by convergence. By doing so, both parties will recognise the importance of the new issue and move towards the position taken by the RRP-party. From a rational point of view this is the most strategic thing to do, since voters are obviously attracted by the position taken by the RRP-party on the certain issue. If the strategy of convergence is successful, the electoral support of the RRP-party will be reduced, since voters will return to the established parties (Meguid 2008:102f; see also Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010:109).

How much are you willing to pay? Profit vs. costs

The three above mentioned strategies form the basis of the strategic “toolbox” available to the established parties. Related to these strategies are also potential profits and potential costs, which the established parties need to consider when choosing a certain strategy in order to meet the challenge posed by the RRP-party (Meguid 2008:92f).

*Profits* that come with both the dismissive strategy and the strategy of convergence are that both these strategies lead to electoral support for the RRP-party being reduced. But the dismissive strategy only influences a voter’s preferences concerning the importance of the issue, whereas the strategy of convergence can be much more powerful. The strategy of convergence can enhance the importance of the specific issue at the same time as it challenges the RRP-party as the rightful owner of the specific issue. The strategy of divergence also enhances the importance of the specific issue, but at the same time strengthens the status of the RRP-party as the rightful owner of the issue, which can lead to increased electoral support for the RRP-party (Meguid 2008:93; see also Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010:109).

The dismissive strategy is related to lower *costs*. This is true at least for a short period of time, since the strategy does not put strains on the established party to actively position itself on a new political issue. The dismissive strategy is most frequently used at the very beginning of the response to a new RRP-party, since it usually takes a couple of years for the new opponent to acquire electoral support of importance.
As long as the RRP-party does not pose a potential threat to the established parties, there is no incitement for these parties to engage in high-cost strategic measures and therefore the most rational thing to do is to engage in a dismissive strategy.

But if the threat posed by the RRP-party becomes more intense, it can force the established parties to redefine the strategy of choice and instead engage in a more active strategy, such as one of convergence or divergence. If the established parties change their response from a dismissive strategy to a strategy marked by convergence or divergence, they can also avoid some of the costs involved with taking opposite positions on an issue at different periods of time. But it also needs to be said that the dismissive strategy is related to certain costs being incurred. The PSO-theory states that if a strategy of convergence replaces the dismissive strategy, the strategy of convergence becomes less effective, which is a cost that the established parties need to consider when choosing one strategy over another (Meguid 2008:93f; see also Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010:109ff).

The use of more active measures, such as a strategy marked by convergence or a strategy marked by divergence, is also related to a number of costs. The party will not only need to pay the costs normally related to engagement in a new political issue, but also those related to the party being forced to compete with other parties on this new political issue (Meguid 2008:94; see also Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010:109ff).

The essence of timing...
Regardless of which strategy the established parties choose in order to respond to the presence of a RRP-party, the importance of when the certain strategy is chosen cannot be foreseen. If the RRP-party has been given the chance to establish a stable organisation and a stable electorate, it will be harder to gain success by using the different strategies. In fact, the strategies can even become contra-productive. The established parties need to operate a certain strategy relatively soon after the RRP-party has established itself on the political scene. Once the voters start to connect the RRP-party with a certain issue, changing the image can be both difficult and costly (Meguid 2005:351; 2008:37f; see also Art 2007:332; Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010:111).

... and credibility
Another important factor that affects the strategic possibilities of the established party is the strategic choices made by the party in the past. It can be rather difficult to maintain credibility when a
strategy of convergence or divergence is chosen if the new strategic position contradicts the position taken by the party in the past. The established parties will, most likely, direct their strategic response to the RRP-party as a consequence of its development. Indeed, it is common for the established parties to engage in a dismissive strategy at the very beginning and then replace this strategy with a more active strategic response as the electoral support of the RRP-party develops. A party can therefore change from a dismissive strategy to a more active position on the certain issue by the use of a strategy marked by convergence or divergence. However, switching between the strategies of convergence and divergence can have a negative impact on the credibility of the party and lead to a growing mistrust among the voters and a potential loss of votes. It is therefore crucial for the established party to be consistent in its position on a certain issue, since a party that frequently changes its position is seen as less credible (Meguid 2008:35f; 2008:93f; see also Downs 1957:105ff; Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010:111f). As a consequence, a party can be “forced” to engage in a strategy that is not optimal at the time (from a vote maximisation point of view) but which ensures the credibility of the party over time.

Another limitation related to the strategic choice available to the established party, and which is also closely linked to the party’s credibility, is that the established party cannot engage in a strategy of convergence in all given situations. The RRP-parties’ usage of the so-called anti-establishment strategy is the factor that creates this limitation. The anti-establishment strategy is not a certain political issue, but is an important part of how the RRP-parties position themselves towards the established parties on the refugee- and immigration issue. They do this by categorising all the established parties as part of the political elite that holds contrasting positions on the issue to those of ordinary people. By using the anti-establishment strategy, the RRP-party can attract voters by portraying itself as a party that speaks for the people against a political system that is dominated by a corrupt political elite that does not listen to the voice of the people. If the RRP-party wins the sympathy of the voters by using this strategy, and the established party engages in a strategy marked by convergence, there is a risk that voters will not see the established party as credible and rather see it as trying to copy the populist attack on the political system and the political elite. In other words, in the way the RRP-parties organise the refugee- and immigration issue some elements are very difficult for the established party to take over. These elements therefore limit the strategic choices that are available to the established parties, which can also explain why in some instances less rational strategic choices
have been made by the established parties (Meguid 2008:35f; see also Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010:111ff).

**Internal factions**

Another factor that can help to explain why parties do not always act in optimal and rational ways is related to the organisational structure of the party. *Factions* in a party (especially among the party elite) can make it more difficult to reach a strategic decision. According to Meguid, a lack of internal cohesion (related to ideological positioning on certain issues) can prevent the creation of effective, internal consensus concerning the strategy chosen to respond to a new political opponent (Meguid 2008:104f; see also Sjöblom 1968:68ff; Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010:113).

**Additional strategies**

The established parties also have access to strategies that are not related to the specific issue politicised by the RRP-party. One of these strategies focuses on demonising the RRP-party publicly and prohibiting any collaboration with it. The main aim of this strategy is to *demonise the RRP-party and its position on the specific issue*. But according to Meguid, this strategy can also make the electoral support for RRP-party stronger, in that its position as owner of the specific issue is enhanced (Meguid 2008:31; see also Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010:114).

By focusing negative attention on the new party and its issue position, this form of organizational strategy – like that of the issue-based adversarial tactic – publicizes the niche party and strengthens its claim to issue ownership and its attractiveness to like-minded voters (Meguid 2008:31).
THE CASE OF SWEDEN: STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH THE SWEDEN DEMOCRATS

From extreme to mainstream?
The development of the Sweden Democrats

The presence of the Sweden Democrats in the Swedish political context is strongly debated. It is no exaggeration to say that different views exist among Swedish researchers as to how the party should be classified. Sometimes the party is defined as a “racist national party” (Ekman & Larsson 2001:8), while at other times it is portrayed as a nationalistic party (Hellström & Nilsson 2010:1) or as a party with a political agenda based on the criticism of immigration (Erlingsson et al 2009:3). Together with my colleague Jenny Kiiskinen, I have joined the group of researchers that defines the Sweden Democrats as an RRP-party. In this sense the Sweden Democrats can be categorised as an RRP-party due to the fact that the party bases its political agenda on a combination of anti-pluralism, value-conservatism and populism (Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010; see also Rydgren & Widfeldt 2004; Rydgren 2005; Mudde 2007a; 2007b).

The Sweden Democrats belongs to the RRP-party family; a family with members all over Europe. It is also clear that the Sweden Democrats has, to a certain extent, been inspired by its European colleagues. During the initial phase of the party (1988-2000), the French RRP-party Front National was an important source of inspiration and contact. During the election campaign in 1988, the party actually received financial support from the Front National so that the it could print a number of leaflets and distribute them (Wigerfelt & Wigerfelt 2001:94; Rydgren 2004:215; Slätt 2004:72; Mattson 2009:20). In the first decade of the 21st century the relationship with the Front National has become more sporadic and the Sweden Democrats have instead sought inspiration and support closer to home. Inspired by the Danish People’s Party, the party tried to turn itself into a more attractive alternative for Swedish voters in the parliamentary elections of September 2010 (Mattson 2009:94).
Although the party has participated in all national elections since 1988, it only really came into focus during the election of 2006. In the years prior to 2006 the party had struggled to attract electoral support and had to contend with internal fights and negative attention on the party’s xenophobic politics. In 2005 the Sweden Democrats acquired a new and younger leader, Jimmie Åkesson. Something changed in relation to the election of 2006 in that the party acquired almost 3 percent of the national votes. More importantly, the party won almost 300 seats in local municipalities throughout Sweden and suddenly became a more prominent political force to be reckoned with, at least at the local level (Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010). The results of the national election in September 2010 clearly stated that the Sweden Democrats was a party to be taken seriously and that the party’s politics had to be dealt with at national level. Furthermore, the success of the Sweden Democrats in the 2006 and 2010 elections underlined the discussion concerning how the party should be strategically dealt with by the rest of the political establishment and highlighted the need to apply a theoretical understanding to the strategic debate in Sweden.

**Tendencies towards divergence and convergence: the case of Sweden**

One of the most important results generated by the research conducted by myself and Jenny Kiiskinen was that:

the strategic approaches used by the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the Moderate Party towards the Sweden Democrats are woven around the specific issues that have been politicised by the Sweden Democrats and combined with an additional strategy in the shape of the demonisation of the Sweden Democrats.

The results clearly showed that both the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the Moderate Party viewed the Sweden Democrats as a potential competitor for which a strategic approach was needed. Before the election of 2006, the Sweden Democrats did not constitute a potential threat towards either of the two established parties. The Sweden Democrats did not win more than 1.44 percent of the national votes and was viewed by the two established parties as a marginal party that positioned itself on one single issue, namely the refugee- and immigration issue; a political issue that had largely been ignored by the established political parties and the electorate. As a result, the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the Moderate Party chose to adopt a dismissive strategic approach towards the Sweden Democrats. Due to the status of the Sweden Democrats as a marginal party, the content of the strategic approach was also rationally based. The
situation changed in the middle of 2006, however, in that the Sweden Democrats won 2.93 percent of the votes in the national election of 2006. Although this did not provide the party with seats in the national Parliament, it nonetheless provided the party with more than 280 seats in local municipalities in Sweden. The party also acquired mandates in different regional parliaments, and thereby became a more significant threat to the established parties. In the aftermath of the 2006 election it also became clear that even though the Sweden Democrats attracted voters from the established parties, a significant number came from former Social Democratic voters. Even though the party still retains a loyal electorate, it was the Swedish Social Democratic Party that lost most votes to the Sweden Democrats in comparison to the Moderate Party. A reconstruction of the content of the strategic approaches by the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the Moderate Party towards the Sweden Democrats shows that the refugee- and immigration issue (the specific issue that has been politicised by the Sweden Democrats) has become increasingly important for the formation of these strategic approaches. This change follows the paths stipulated by the PSO-theory, which claims that the issue put forward by the RRP-party will become the focus of the content of the strategic approaches used by the established parties once the RRP-party becomes a more prominent threat towards the political establishment (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010:199ff).

The reconstruction also show that both parties have left the previous dismissive strategy behind and are instead moving towards strategies that imply a stronger position on the issue put forward by the Sweden Democrats, i.e. the refugee- and immigration issue. Moreover, the results of the research conducted by myself and Jenny Kiiskinen indicate that the Swedish Social Democratic Party is adopting a strategic approach towards the Sweden Democrats based on divergence, whereas in the case of the Moderate Party we can see tendencies of the party adopting a rather hesitant strategic approach based on vague tendencies of convergence. Both parties also combine the issue-based strategy with a one that demonises the Sweden Democrats and its members and portrays it as extreme, odd and adopting a position on the specific issue that is unacceptable (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010:199ff).

Interestingly enough, the results of our research showed that the content of the strategic approaches used by the Swedish Social Democratic Party and Moderate Party towards the Sweden Democrats did not follow the ideal model of strategic approaches stipulated by
the PSO-theory. As noted earlier, the theory stipulates that in order to win back the voters the party that is most threatened by the challenging RRP-party should move towards a strategic approach based on convergence. The established party that is not threatened to the same extent as its counterpart should instead strengthen its power towards its real opponent (the other established party) by adopting a strategic approach marked by divergence. However, the results of our research showed the opposite tendencies with regard to the Swedish context. Despite being the party that out of the two established parties is seen as being most threatened by the presence of the Sweden Democrats, the Swedish Social Democratic Party has not engaged in a strategic approach marked by convergence but has instead engaged in one showing tendencies of divergence. The Moderate Party has, on the other hand, adopted a strategic approach that is rather reserved in combination with vague tendencies of convergence (in relation to the specific political issue politicised by the Sweden Democrats (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010:217ff).

**The importance of credibility...**

How can the results generated from the Swedish context be explained? The results of our research show that **credibility** is an important factor in the strategic choices made by the established parties. Maintaining a high level of credibility is also taken into account by the PSO-theory when understanding why some parties chose a strategy towards an opposing RRP-party that at first sight does not seem to offer voter and power maximisation (Meguid 2008).

**...within the party**

The credibility factor is important in the Swedish case for a number of reasons, such as maintaining internal cohesion within the party. This factor is especially relevant in the case of the Swedish Social Democratic Party which, in order to maintain internal cohesion in relation to the position held in the immigration and refugee issue, needs to engage in a strategic approach towards the Sweden Democrats that is focused on divergence rather than convergence (which would be the most rational strategic approach in order to weaken electoral support for the Sweden Democrats). A strategic approach that is marked by convergence would simply be too costly in terms of maintaining credibility in the eyes of party members. Over the years the Swedish Social Democratic Party has adopted an ideological position on the immigration and refugee issue, which can be described as the opposite position taken by the Sweden Democrats in this particular issue. Therefore, if the
Swedish Social Democratic Party changed its position on the issue and moved closer to that taken by the Sweden Democrats (which a strategy marked by convergence implies) it would probably cause problems with regard to the maintenance of credibility amongst party members. A similar discussion can be applied to the positioning of the Moderate Party, in that among the established parties it is the most critical of Swedish immigration- and refugee policies. The vague tendencies of convergence shown in the strategic approach of the party towards the Sweden Democrats can therefore neither be seen as contradictory to the views of party members nor challenging its credibility in relation to its own party members (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010.217ff).

... towards the voters
Another factor that has had implications for the two established parties’ choice of strategic approach towards the Sweden Democrats is the position of the voters in relation to the immigration- and refugee issue. Here the two parties have to listen to their own electorate and decide their own position on the issue. In the case of the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the point in time in which our research was conducted, a strategic approach based on convergence was more likely to interest voters who left the party in favour of the Sweden Democrats in the election of 2006. But at the same time, this kind of strategic approach (even though according to the PSO-theory it is the most effective in limiting electoral support for the Sweden Democrats) might also be associated with an altogether too high cost in relation to the goal of keeping a stable electorate (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010:220ff). It is also important to state that the party does not have to adopt a static position. The strategic choices and the potential costs and benefits are all related to the specific state of the voters and may have to be revised if the attitudes among one’s own electorate change.

... in the approach towards an anti-establishment party
The same discussion can be applied to the strategic approach of the Moderate Party towards the Sweden Democrats and the maintenance of credibility with voters. Moderate Party supporters have, over time, proved to be most critical when it comes to how the question of immigration to Sweden should be dealt with. Therefore, the vague tendencies of convergence in relation to the strategic approach towards the Sweden Democrats cannot be seen as challenging the credibility of the party among the electorate. Even though we see vague tendencies of convergence in the content of the strategic approach of the Moderate Party towards the Sweden Democrats, neither of the two established
parties are willing to engage in a strategic approach that is strongly marked by convergence. Another factor that is important when understanding the results from the Swedish context is the Sweden Democrats’ use of the anti-establishment strategy. In this context the party portrays itself as a party that is “outside” the political establishment and one that holds a position on the immigration- and refugee issue that is strongly influenced by the views “of the people”. Neither the Swedish Social Democratic Party nor the Moderate party can engage in an outspoken strategic approach that is marked by convergence (i.e. close to the position taken by the Sweden Democrats on the specific issue) since they are part of the establishment. Being part of the political establishment makes it hard for the two parties to adopt a position on the specific issue that is similar to that taken by the RRP-party, i.e. posing as a party that is outside the political establishment. A clearly outspoken move towards a strategic approach of convergence would probably challenge the credibility of the two established parties (Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010:222ff).
AN EXTENDED UNDERSTANDING OF THE STRATEGIC APPROACHES TOWARDS RRP-PARTIES: CONCLUDING REMARKS

The PSO-theory has served as a point of departure for the analysis of the empirical results discussed in this paper. The theory has provided a substantial understanding of which factors affect the content of the strategic approaches used by the established parties in relation to an opposing RRP-party. The importance of and focus on the specific issue that is politicised by the RRP-party in relation to the content of the strategies has provided the knowledge needed in order to analyse and understand the empirical results of the Swedish case. But the results generated from the Swedish study need to be developed and analysed even further. First of all, the results from the Swedish study clearly show that there are some limitations when it comes to the capacity of the PSO-theory to fully explain the results generated in the Swedish context.

First of all, even though the PSO-theory focuses on the specific issue that has been politicised by the niche-party, it does not take into account what kind of political issue is in focus. The PSO-theory was used in a study that focused on three different types of niche-parties, such as environmental parties, RRP-parties and ethno-territorial parties, and does not differentiate between the different issues raised by the different parties but rather focuses on the fact that these parties base their rhetoric on one single issue. But when it comes to understanding the strategic choices made by the established parties in order to meet the challenge of the RRP-party, it is clear that the specific issue that has been politicised by the RRP-party needs to be analysed further. In the case of the Sweden Democrats, it has become apparent that a strongly value-charged issue like that of immigration and refugees can be portrayed as having had a significant impact on the strategic choices made by the established parties. This issue is marked by a discourse within which dichotomies like “right-wrong” and “tolerance-intolerance” are strong and where of moral and ethics issues are debated. In this context the political establishment has
stated that it stands for a morally right political position (see also Mouffe 2005; Hellström 2010) that is far removed from the (immoral) position held by the Sweden Democrats. This discourse therefore also limits the strategic choices that are available to the established parties and explains why neither of the established parties in Sweden have chosen a strategy marked by strong convergence and that could be interpreted as a sign of moving closer to the “immoral” position held by the Sweden Democrats. The need to maintain a distance from the Sweden Democrats in this highly value-charged issue is therefore of importance for the Swedish political establishment and can also be useful in a further analysis of the strategic possibilities available to the established parties when challenged by an RRP-party that politicises the immigration- and refugee issue.

Furthermore, in the case of Sweden another important factor has proved vital when analysing and understanding the strategic choices made by the established parties. In the empirical material on which the Swedish study is based, the perception of the Sweden Democrats proved to be an important factor with the potential to influence the content of the strategic approaches used by the established parties. This negative perception is not unique to the Sweden Democrats, however, but also applies to most of the RRP-parties in Europe – although it is not taken into account by the PSO-theory. In the case of the Sweden Democrats, the negative perception of the party is given an almost hegemonic status and is often related to discussions concerning principles of liberal democracy such as pluralism and tolerance (i.e. the democratic dilemma). This negative perception has also clearly reduced the strategic choices available to the established parties. In addition, it has consequences for the content of the strategic approaches used by the established parties towards the Sweden Democrats and can also be used to explain why neither of the established parties adopts a strategic approach that is strongly marked by convergence. Since the position of the Sweden Democrats on the immigration- and refugee issue is portrayed as too extreme, xenophobic and undemocratic, none of the established parties are willing to fill their strategic approach with a content that can be seen as taking a parallel position to that of the Sweden Democrats. The negatively charged perception of the Sweden Democrats (and the party’s views on the immigration- and refugee issue) therefore limits the strategic choices that are available to the established parties. A strategic approach that strongly opposes this general perception of the Sweden Democrats is therefore (at this moment in time) regarded as being too costly for the established
parties (Kiiskinen & Saveljef 2010:224ff). By way of conclusion, it can be said that an extended understanding of the strategic approaches used by established parties to meet the challenge of an opposing RRP-party could clearly benefit from taking the negative perception of these specific types of parties into account.

Another possible explanation for the strategic choices made by the two established Swedish parties in the case of the Sweden Democrats could be the fact that both the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the Moderate Party have engaged in coalitions with other political establishment parties. The presence of coalition-partners is not addressed by the PSO-theory when explaining why parties choose one strategy over another, although in relation to the Swedish case it could have influenced the strategic choices available to the two parties when dealing with the Sweden Democrats. Both the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the Moderate Party have and are engaged in coalitions with other established parties. However, it has to be stated that this is a rather new experience for both these parties. In December 2008, the Swedish Social Democratic Party created a coalition together with the Green Party and the Left Party with the aim of winning the election held in September 2010 and gaining power. In the light of the positions held by the Green Party and the Left Party on the immigration- and refugee issue, the strategy of divergence applied by the Swedish Social Democratic Party is both understandable and rational. If the Swedish Social Democratic Party was to engage in a strategy of convergence, which according to the PSO-theory would be the most rational choice in order to limit the electoral support of the Sweden Democrats, the cost would probably very high, since the party would risk losing its coalition partners and would thereby limit its possibilities of gaining power. With the threat from the Sweden Democrats as a point of departure, a strategy of convergence is the most rational choice. However, when choosing a strategy that meets the challenge of this new competitor, the Swedish Social Democratic Party also needs to relate to what such a position might mean in terms of a continuous collaboration with its coalition partners. From this perspective, a strategy of convergence would be too risky and too costly. These arguments could therefore be used to explain the Social Democrats’ choice of strategy, since the strategy of divergence does not challenge the ideological position held by its coalition partners on the immigration- and refugee issue.

The same arguments can also be applied to the Moderate Party, given that the party is currently involved in a coalition with the Liberal
Party, the Centre Party and the Christian Democrats. As the coalition won a majority in both the national elections of 2006 and 2010 it is still in government, despite losing its majority position in 2010. When it comes to the Moderates’ strategic choice of approach towards the Sweden Democrats the rather precarious position of the party cannot be regarded as being associated with very high costs in relation to the positions held by its coalition partners on the immigration- and refugee issue. On the other hand, if the Moderate Party were to take a stronger position on the specific issue, it could limit the strategic choices that are available to it.

One important question still remains to be answered. Can the content of the strategic choices made by the Swedish Social Democratic Party and the Moderate Party still be seen as rational? The answer to this question is yes. Even though the content of the strategic approaches made by the established parties does not coincide with the ideal typical approach stipulated by the PSO-theory, we can still view the choices made by the Swedish Social Democratic Party and Moderate Party as rational choices. The answer can also be found in the analysis of the key factors relating to the content of the strategic approaches used by the two established parties. It was evident that both parties chose a strategic approach that provided them with favourable positions in the election of September 2010. In the analysis of the above-mentioned factors it can be concluded that reducing the electoral support of the Sweden Democrats was not the primary goal of the two parties. Rather, maintaining the parties’ credibility in relation to their party members and the electorate (in relation to the strategic approach towards the Sweden Democrats) was given a much higher priority. At the same time, the strategic choices have neither challenged the negative perception of the Sweden Democrats nor the different coalitions in which the two established parties are or were engaged. The strategic approach and its content has instead provided the two established parties with a tool that can be used to relate to the arguments of the electorate concerning more political debate about the specific issue. By adopting this position the parties can indirectly challenge the Sweden Democrats when it comes to electoral support (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010:224ff).

The presence of radical right-wing populism: a democratic or strategic dilemma?
How can the presence of RRP-parties on the political scene be analysed? Can we still conclude that their presence constitutes a
democratic dilemma for the established parties? Based on the results of the research conducted by myself and Jenny Kiiskinen, the answer to this question can be both yes and no. Although the democratic dilemma is present in the discussions of the two established parties (to varying degrees) it is accentuated by the fact that the content of the strategic approach towards the Sweden Democrats needs to be focused on a specific issue that is strongly related to human values and principles, such as pluralism and tolerance (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010: 229ff).

Neither the Swedish Social Democratic Party nor the Moderate Party can provide answers as to how to solve the democratic dilemma, although they do signal that the strategic approach towards the Sweden Democrats needs to be formed in a way that gives the established parties an opportunity to handle this democratic dilemma. In this sense, the presence of the democratic dilemma causes a strategic dilemma, in relation to which the established parties need to weigh the goals they are striving towards with the strategic approach of the RRP-party, at the same time as they relate to the strongly value-charged issue that has been politicised by the RRP-party and the democratic dilemma that the presence of the RRP-party gives rise to. As a result of this the character of the democratic dilemma is somewhat changed, and the goal of not losing votes becomes paramount. This also leads to the democratic dilemma becoming subordinated to the strategic dilemma that the presence of the RRP-parties also gives rise to (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010:229ff).

Taking the results of the Swedish national election on 19th of September 2010 as a point of departure – when the Swedish radical right-wing populist party known as the Sweden Democrats won parliamentary representation for the first time – it becomes clear that the presence of RRP-parties represented at a national level is now also a tangible part of the Swedish political context. In the aftermath of the election results, much of the debate focused on how the presence of the Sweden Democrats in parliament should be dealt with and what kind of influence the party can expect in Swedish politics in relation to its electoral support. It is therefore possible to conclude that in the current Swedish political climate the topicality of research related to the presence of RRP-parties in the democratic institutions is high. It also reveals the need for future research into what affects the contents of the strategic approaches that are used by established parties to deal with parties perceived as the ugly ducklings of politics.
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SUMMARY

In recent decades political parties with a clear populist profile have become more successful. The specific party family that in this paper is categorised as radical right-wing populist (RRP-parties) is an interesting object of study, in that although it is positive to democracy as a fundamental idea of governance, in contrast to the extra parliamentary right, it challenges certain aspects of today’s liberal democracy. In countries all over Europe, parties that can be categorised as RRP-parties have gained electoral support through a political agenda that questions and criticises the development of multicultural societies, prioritises conservative issues and claims to speak on behalf of the “ordinary people” rather than the political establishment. The success of RRP-parties in Europe can be seen as a sign of voters criticising a development of society in which growing tendencies towards globalisation, and more specifically international migration, change the way that societies have been formed. Some voters in Sweden, as well as in other countries in Europe, feel that the established parties have neither wanted to nor been able to deal with the critique that has followed such changes in society and that the political establishment is instead “dancing out of step with the voters” on such issues. Indeed, people’s discontent with the political agenda that has been promoted by the established parties is reflected in the amount of electoral support that RRP-parties receive in national elections. But when this discontent is politicised by RRP-parties, a discussion about how to strategically deal with the presence of parties that attract voters but at the same time challenge certain aspects of liberal democracy becomes central.

The question of how RRP-parties are being approached from a strategic point of view by the political establishment is in focus for this paper. The discussion concerns aspects of how a new political competitor for voters’ support is approached and dealt with by the other established parties and what kind of strategic approach being adopted towards a competitor that is elevated to hegemonic status by a public opinion that describes it as the ugly ducklings of politics or as a pariah party and whose presence is seen as challenging central aspects of liberal democracy. This paper discusses the kind of populist parties that are active in Europe and Sweden today and shows the importance of continuous research related to these parties. More specifically, the paper tries to answer the important and difficult question of how parties that are seen as challenging specific aspects of liberal democracy are dealt with in the political arena. Point of departure is the Swedish context, where a Swedish radical right-wing populist party...
named the Sweden Democrats, have gained more and more electoral support over the years and managed to get representation in the national Parliament in Sweden as a result of the election in September 2010.

The results from the study clearly shows that the swedish political establishment, with the Social Democratic and the Moderate party in the frontline, view the Sweden Democrats as a potential competitor towards which a strategic approach is needed. In the national election of 2006 the Sweden Democrats got 2,93 % of the votes which did not provide the party with seats in the national Parliament but, nonetheless, provided the party with more than 280 seats in local municipalities in Sweden. The party also got mandates in different regional parliaments. Suddenly, the party became a more potential threat towards the established parties. In the aftermath of the election of 2006 it also became clear that, even though the Sweden Democrats attracted voters from both established parties, a significant number came from former Social Democratic voters. Even though the party still retains a loyal electorate, it was the Social Democratic party which, in comparison to the Moderate party, lost most votes to the Sweden Democrats.

A reconstruction of the content of the strategic approaches by the Social Democratic party and the Moderate party towards the Sweden Democrats, shows that the refugee- and immigration issue (the specific issue that the Sweden Democrats have politicized) has become increasingly important for the formation of these strategic approaches. This change follows the paths stipulated by the so called PSO-theory (Position, Salience and Owner-ship theory) promoted by the american scholar Bonnie Meguid, and which claims that the issue put forward by the RRP-party will become more in focus of the content of the strategic approaches used by the established parties once the RRP-party becomes a more prominent threat towards the political establishment. The reconstruction also show that both parties have left the previous dismissive strategy behind and are instead moving towards strategies which imply a stronger position in the issue put forward by the Sweden Democrats, i.e. the refugee- and immigration issue. Moreover, the results indicate that the Social Democratic party is adapting a strategic approach towards the Sweden Democrats based upon divergence whereas, in the case of the Moderate party, tendencies of the party taking a rather hesitant strategic position but slowly adapting a strategic approach based upon vague tendencies of convergence can be seen. Both parties also combine the issue-based strategy with a strategy of demonization of the Sweden Democrats which focuses on, in relation to the voters, demonization of the party and its members
and portraying it as extreme, odd and with a position in the specific issue which is not acceptable.

The results show that credibility, in order to explain the strategic choices made by the established parties, is an important factor. The factor of credibility is important for a number of reasons, such as keeping internal cohesion within the party. This factor is especially relevant for the Social Democratic party which, in order to keep internal cohesion in relation to the immigration- and refugee issue, needs to engage in a strategic approach towards the Sweden Democrats focused on divergence instead of convergence (as would be the most rational strategic approach in order to diminish the electoral support of the Sweden Democrats), since a strategic approach marked by convergence is associated with high costs to pay when keeping its credibility in relation to the party members. Over the years, the Social Democratic party has taken an ideological position in the immigration- and refugee issue rather distant from the position taken by the Sweden Democrats. Therefore, if the Social Democratic party changed its position in the issue and moved it closer to the position taken by the Sweden Democrats (which a strategy marked by convergence implies), it would probably cause problems for the Social Democratic party when it comes to keeping the credibility of the party in relation to the party members. The strategic approach chosen by the Social Democratic party showing tendencies of divergence can therefore be explained.

In the case of the Moderate party, a similar discussion is applicable. The Moderate party is the party among the established parties holding the most critical views in relation to the Swedish immigration- and refugee policies. The vague tendencies of convergence showing in the strategic approach of the party towards the Sweden Democrats can therefore neither be seen as contradictory to the views among the party members and does not challenge the credibility of the party in relation to its own party members. Furthermore, the perception of the Sweden Democrats has, in relation to the empirical results, proven to be an important factor with potential to influence the content of the strategic approaches used by the established parties. The Sweden Democrats is surrounded by a negatively perception given an almost hegemonic status. The perception of the Sweden Democrats is often related to discussions concerning principles of liberal democracy such as pluralism and tolerance (i.e. the democratic dilemma). This negative perception surrounding the Sweden Democrats reduces the strategic choices available to the two established parties. This have consequences for the content of the strategic approaches used by the established parties towards the Sweden Democrats and can also be
used in order to explain why neither of the two established parties convey a strategic approach strongly marked by convergence. Since the position of the Sweden Democrats in relation to the immigration- and refugee issue is portrayed as too extreme, xenophobic and undemocratic, neither of the two established parties is willing to fill their strategic approach with a content that can be seen as a position in the issue close to the position of the Sweden Democrats. The negatively charged perception of the Sweden Democrats (and their view on the immigration- and refugee issue), is therefore putting restraints on the strategic choices accessible to the established parties. A strategic approach marked by a content that strongly opposes this general perception of the Sweden Democrats, is therefore associated with too high a cost for the established parties to pay.

The discussions and results outlined in this present paper are important, not only because they provide answers to a highly debated question in Sweden (and Europe) today but also because it constitute an important and interesting contribution to future studies of political populism.
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Sigrid Saveljeff holds a Ph.d in Ethnicity and works as a researcher and evaluator at Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare (MIM) and Centre for Work Life Studies (CTA), Malmö University. Her research is focused on the impact radical right-wing populist parties have on the political establishment and the strategies used by the other parties in order to handle the presence of this new competitor. The subject was also in focus for the Ph.d dissertation Sigrid Saveljeff wrote together with Jenny Kiiskinen Att dansa i otakt med väljarna. Socialdemokraternas och Moderaternas strategiska bemötande av Sverigedemokraterna (Dancing out of step with the voters – the strategic approaches of the Social Democratic Party and the Conservative Party towards the Sweden Democrats) (Kiiskinen & Saveljeff 2010)
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CURRENT THEMES IN IMER RESEARCH

NUMBER 11

NEW QUESTIONS AND NEW ANSWERS

Strategies towards parties with radical right-wing populist profile

Sigrid Saveljeff