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# THE GROWTH OF THE RADICAL RIGHT IN NORDIC COUNTRIES: OBSERVATIONS FROM THE PAST 20 YEARS

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By Anders Widfeldt

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June 2018

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## Executive Summary

While recent high-profile elections in France, Austria, and Germany have attracted media attention to the rising power of radical-right parties in Europe, the phenomenon is hardly a new one in most Nordic countries. Of the four Nordic countries this report will examine (Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden), all but Sweden have had active radical-right parties since at least the 1970s. What has changed in the last two decades, however, is the level of support and political power these parties command. Three of these countries (Denmark, Finland, and Norway) have had radical-right parties serving in or supporting their governments, and in all four countries, these parties have the support of close to or more than 20 percent of voters.

The rise of radical-right parties—defined here as parties that call for radical changes to immigration and asylum policies and reject multiculturalism—has been accompanied by an observable shift in public attitudes toward and policies on migration. Over the last ten years, and especially since 2015, asylum and immigration policies in Nordic countries have been tightened. Governments across the region have introduced policies to reduce family reunification, restrict access to refugee and other protected statuses, and limit access to public assistance benefits for non-nationals. Moreover, the public discourse on immigration and asylum has become harsher. In Denmark, for example, a sitting immigration minister publicly celebrated passing new restrictive laws with a cake, an action that would have been unthinkable a few decades ago.

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However, it remains challenging to directly attribute these attitudinal and policy trends to the influence of specific political parties. In some cases, policy changes are likely to have arisen out of necessity and may have occurred regardless of the party in power. The decision by the Swedish government to close its border with Denmark in 2015 is one such example. Similarly, considering whether a negative shift in the public debate on immigration can be attributed to particular political parties is somewhat akin to the “chicken or the egg” question. Parties may reflect emerging anti-immigrant attitudes as much as they contribute to them.

Regardless, the rising political salience of radical-right parties—and the ideas they espouse—raises questions about why they have become so influential in Nordic countries. While it may be tempting to point to increased immigration as the root cause, an examination of asylum application numbers and the electoral fortunes of radical-right parties shows no systematic correlation between the two in Nordic countries. Data on public attitudes regarding immigration similarly show no clear connection with electoral support for the radical right. Rather than a single trend, it appears that a combination of factors specific to each national context is at work in determining the success or decline of radical-right parties.

While these specific external conditions are difficult to delineate, the makeup of the parties themselves—their internal organization, management, and leadership—also appear to play a role in deciding their success. Three factors in particular have been influential in Nordic countries:

- a party platform that addresses salient issues in a way that appeals to a broad audience and avoids overtly extreme or racist proposals;



- party discipline and an ability to avoid egregious public scandals; and
- party leadership that has good communication skills, is politically savvy (able to cooperate and win favor with other parties), and is pragmatic (able to compromise to achieve goals).

It is important to keep in mind, however, that though these factors have contributed to the success of parties in some countries, each context is different. It is difficult to apply the lessons of one country to the politics of another.

Drawing conclusions about the strategies mainstream parties have used to counter the rise of radical-right parties has proven similarly complex and context specific. Mainstream parties in Nordic countries have tried three general approaches: (1) co-opting radical-right policies and rhetoric to draw away radical-right voters; (2) accommodating radical-right parties in government or actively collaborating with them in opposition; and (3) attempting to keep them isolated from political influence. None of these approaches appears to have paid off yet. Co-opting the policy approaches of the radical right, as mainstream parties in Denmark have done, does not seem to have enticed radical-right voters to support more mainstream candidates. And in Finland and Norway, radical-right parties have shown themselves to be capable of governing effectively when allowed to enter government, with no detrimental effect to their public support. Rather, serving in government or having their proposals co-opted by mainstream public voices appears to have, to some extent, normalized these parties and their ideas.

Isolation would thus seem to be the only remaining response for parties that aim to counter an increasingly influential radical right. Yet isolating parties supported by nearly one-fifth of the electorate carries significant political risks that mainstream parties have not always been willing to stomach. Instead, faced with declining vote shares, mainstream parties have often chosen to allow radical-right parties into government. A willingness to stay the course, advancing policies that support tolerance and openness, will be needed if any effort to counter the influence of the radical right is to succeed in the long term.

## I. Introduction

Right-wing radicalism/populism in the Nordic countries is not a new phenomenon. The origins of the modern radical right in Finland can be traced back to the late 1950s, and such parties have been permanent fixtures in Denmark and Norway since the 1970s. While they remained outside the mainstream political system for years, these parties have become firmly established in all three of these countries. In Sweden, they emerged more recently, becoming permanently established at the national level in 2010. In the process, they have developed considerable support bases. Across all four countries, radical-right parties have in recent years held the support of close to or more than 20 percent of voters. Parties regarded as radical right, or populist right, have served in government in Finland and Norway, and in Denmark they have exerted considerable influence on the government as a support party, though not as formal coalition partners. While the radical right remains isolated in Sweden, this could change in the coming years.

This growth of radical-right parties has challenged Nordic political systems. While the Nordic countries have long held a reputation as tolerant, such parties generally seek to drastically change the public discourse and debate surrounding migration and related issues. The Danish People's Party has served as something of an example for the Nordic radical right. The party has been a driving force behind significant cuts in immigration to Denmark and has affected the political and cultural climate in the country by



promoting anti-Islam rhetoric and criticizing what the party has called pro-immigration “political correctness.”<sup>1</sup>

### **Box I. What is “the Radical Right”?**

There is extensive debate about how parties far to the right are labeled and defined. For simplicity, this report will use the label “radical right,” although several alternative designations exist, such as “far right,” “populist right,” and or “extreme right.” The report classifies parties as radical right if they combine a negative view on immigration with anti-establishment rhetoric and authoritarian views on law and order. These parties also tend to be conservative regarding gender and family relations, skeptical of measures to combat climate change, and opposed to European integration. They are radical in the sense that they argue for a profound change in migration policies and are often unwilling to compromise on this issue. They are considered “right” because of their ethnocentric positions and rejection of multiculturalism.

*Note:* For a discussion of the left-right divide, and why the parties discussed in this report can be classified as being on the right of the political spectrum, see the first chapter of Piero Ignazi, *Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

This report aims to provide an analysis of contemporary populist and radical-right parties in four Nordic countries—Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden.<sup>2</sup> It does not set out to recommend strategies that are effective in countering the rise of the radical right, but rather to facilitate a deeper understanding of a phenomenon that has become increasingly influential. It will argue that, although support for radical-right parties is to a significant extent driven by anti-immigration sentiment, there is no clear causal link between immigration policy or levels of immigration and support for the radical right. Rather, the successes and failures of radical-right parties are caused by a complex web of factors, including how these parties are managed and the personalities and capacities of the party leaders themselves.

## **II. Brief History and Electoral Performance of Nordic Radical-Right Parties**

In research on the subject, Nordic radical-right parties are widely regarded as members of a broader European radical-right “family” of political parties. It is difficult to assess their degree of radicalism through international comparison, but in general the Nordic parties are significantly less radical than some of the more extreme European parties, such as the Hungarian Jobbik or Greek Golden Dawn. Rather, they could be said to belong in a European radical-right mainstream, alongside parties such as Geert Wilders’ Freedom Party in the Netherlands and the Swiss People’s Party.<sup>3</sup>

Although the main radical-right parties in the Nordic countries have much in common, there are also important differences. The Danish People’s Party (DF) is arguably the most radical in the sense that it is the only one to frequently refer to ethnicity in its manifestos. The Sweden Democrats (SD) partially

1 See, for a recent example, the weekly online letter by Danish People’s Party (DF) leader Kristian Thulesen Dahl, “Valg i Sverige. Vågner de op?” *Kristians Ugebrev*, May 22, 2018, <https://danskfolkeparti.dk/valg-i-sverige-vaagner-de-op/>.

2 Iceland does not, at the time of writing, have any significant radical-right party and will therefore not be discussed in this report.

3 The French Front National (renamed Rassemblement National in 2018) under Marine Le Pen’s leadership could also be considered part of this group.



originated from a more extreme anti-immigration subculture, which the three other major parties discussed in this report did not. SD has, however, deradicalized since its founding. The Finns Party (PS) in Finland and the Progress Party (FrP) in Norway are arguably less radical. Such comparisons are inherently subjective, however, and party characteristics can change over time. The Finns Party, for example, may well radicalize under its new leader Jussi Halla-Aho, who was elected after the party split in 2017 (see Section III.C.). It is also worth noting that the position of the Norwegian FrP relative to other far-right parties is somewhat ambiguous; although the party is frequently included in comparative research on the radical right, some prominent scholars classify it differently.<sup>4</sup> FrP clearly takes an anti-immigration position, but it does not prioritize the issue to the degree that the SD and DF do. Instead, FrP places at least as much emphasis on economic issues, such as tax cuts and economic deregulation.<sup>5</sup>

This section traces the origins of the main radical-right parties in Nordic countries and examines the evolution of their views on immigration.

### A. *Origins of Nordic Radical-Right Parties*

With the exception of the Sweden Democrats, the origins of the major Nordic radical-right parties active today can be traced back to at least the 1970s (see Box 2). Ideologically, these parties have gone through a number of different phases. Most, however, did not begin as anti-immigration parties but had their roots in broader populist and anti-establishment movements.

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Economic concerns were central to the original platforms of radical-right parties in Finland, Denmark, and Norway. In Finland, the precursor to the Finns Party, the Rural Party (SMP), was created as an anti-establishment protest party, with initial emphasis on the plight of the impoverished rural population. SMP later broadened its scope to protest austerity more broadly, while also alleging corruption among the political elite. In Denmark, the Progress Party (FP), which was succeeded by the Danish People's Party (DF), and in Norway, Anders Lange's Party (ALP), which was renamed the Progress Party (FrP), began as protest movements against what their founders saw as heavy taxes and state bureaucracy. The short-lived New Democracy (NyD) party in Sweden also emphasized economics, with a pro-market stance, though immigration was also on the agenda throughout its existence.

While a combination of tax cuts and attacks on state bureaucracy—particularly the expansion of the welfare state—remained a central part of the FrP and FP party platforms through the mid-1980s, immigration began at that time to emerge as a key point of public interest, which compelled both parties to adjust their strategies. In an effort to broaden their appeal by tapping into growing discontent about immigration, the parties began to combine their anti-tax and anti-bureaucracy messages with anti-immigration and more authoritarian, law-and-order positions—a platform referred to by the scholar

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4 Cas Mudde, for example, does not refer to the Norwegian Progress Party (FrP) in his seminal volume on radical-right parties in Europe. See Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007). In an analysis of the Nordic radical right, the scholars Anders Ravik Jupskas and Ann-Cathrine Jungar classify the DF, the Finns Party (PS), and the Sweden Democrats (SD) as belonging to the radical-right party family, but regard FrP as an outlier due to its ideology, transnational contacts, and party name. See Ann-Cathrine Jungar and Anders Ravik Jupskås, "Populist Radical Right Parties in the Nordic Region: A New and Distinct Party Family?" *Scandinavian Political Studies* 37, no. 3 (2014): 232.

5 Anders Widfeldt, *Extreme Right Parties in Scandinavia* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2015), 93–102.



Herbert Kitschelt as the radical right's "winning formula."<sup>6</sup> The formula did indeed bring success, and both parties substantially increased their share of the vote in national elections through the late 1980s.<sup>7</sup>

## Box 2. Radical-Right Parties in the Nordic Region

**Finland.** The origins of the **Finns Party (PS)** can be traced back to the **Rural Party (SMP)**, which was founded in 1959. Created as a populist protest party, the SMP first focused on the situation of impoverished small-scale farmers, only later broadening its focus to a more general attack on the political establishment. The SMP had its electoral breakthrough in 1970 and participated in coalition governments in the period 1983–90. It disbanded in 1995 after declaring bankruptcy. The current PS was formed as a successor party to SMP. In 2017, PS split, with the more moderate wing forming a new party called **Blue Reform** (Sininen tulevaisuus, literally "Blue Future").

**Denmark.** The first contemporary radical right party to emerge in Denmark was the **Progress Party (FP)**, which made its electoral breakthrough in 1973. In 1995, FP split following a tumultuous party congress and a group of defectors formed the **Danish People's Party (DF)**. The DF soon overtook FP as the leading Danish radical-right party, a position it still holds. While the FP still exists, it has been of little significance since about 2000. In 2015, a new party emerged under the name **New Bourgeois (NB)**. The NB claims to combine "classic conservative value policies" with "bourgeois economic policies" and "unambiguous resistance to conventions and international treaties that restrict Danish self-governance." As the party has not yet participated in a parliamentary election, it will not be further discussed in this report.

**Norway.** Named after its founder, **Anders Lange's Party for a Drastic Reduction in Taxes, Fees, and Public Intervention (ALP)** entered parliament in 1973. As implied by its name, the party was founded as an anti-tax and pro-market protest party. Lange died in 1974, and in 1977 the party changed its name to the **Progress Party (FrP)**, the same as its Danish counterpart.

**Sweden.** In 1991, **New Democracy (NyD)** emerged with little warning, and entered parliament on its first attempt. The party was soon hit by internal divisions and was annihilated in the 1994 election after three years in parliament. It ceased to exist around 2000. The **Sweden Democrats (SD)**, formed in 1988, entered parliament after the 2010 elections. The SD has its origins in the small and short-lived **Sweden Party (SvP)** which, in turn, was an amalgamation of the small populist **Progress Party (FraP)** and **Keep Sweden Swedish (BSS)**, the latter of which was more of an anti-immigration campaign group than a formal party.

Source: NB statements drawn from NB, "Danmark har brug for Nye Borgerlige," accessed June 1, 2018, <https://nyeborgerlige.dk/>.

6 Herbert Kitschelt and Anthony J. McGann, *The Radical Right in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

7 Support for the Danish Progress Party (FP) rose from 4.8 percent in the 1987 election to 9 percent in 1988. See Table 1.



The parties' messages continued to evolve throughout the 1990s, in part in response to electoral setbacks early in the decade. By the mid- to late 1990s, FrP had accepted the need for a basic level of state welfare for the most vulnerable members of society. Similar views had also taken root in the Danish FP. The parties thus moved toward what has been termed "welfare chauvinism,"<sup>8</sup> or a belief that social assistance should be made available, but not to immigrants. In the FP, this shift caused a difficult internal debate between a faction with more pragmatic views on welfare and those that could be described as libertarian. The party split in 1995. The defectors, the present-day Danish People's Party (DF), adopted welfare chauvinism as their dominant view, and their current platform combines immigration skepticism with a welfare agenda that would not be out of place in some social democratic party platforms. In Finland, the Finns Party (PS), the successor to SMP, has maintained anti-austerity as a core part of its platform, along with negative views of immigration. The positions of PS on welfare and immigration are arguably close to the welfare chauvinism of DF.

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In Norway, FrP has similarly become more accepting of the welfare state but without abandoning an emphasis on tax cuts. This position, sometimes termed "petroleum populism," was made possible by Norway's extraordinarily strong economy, which is driven in large part by oil and gas revenue.<sup>9</sup> More recently, declining oil prices have made petroleum populism more difficult to maintain, though the FrP has not abandoned its demands for tax cuts.

The evolution of the Sweden Democrats differs quite a bit from that of the other parties discussed in this report. While it may be an exaggeration to call the SD a single-issue party, as its manifestoes cover a wide range of policy areas,<sup>10</sup> the party was founded almost exclusively on an anti-immigration platform. The party is pragmatic on welfare and economic issues. It has no history of radical tax cut demands and does not propose any radical changes to the role of the state in the economy or other matters. This pragmatic outlook on economics could prove advantageous for the party, as it gives the SD flexibility when attempting to strike deals with other parties.

All four parties are skeptical of European integration to varying degrees. The SD, DF, and PS are essentially anti-European Union and, albeit with varying degrees of intensity, welcomed the UK decision to withdraw from the bloc following a referendum in June 2016.<sup>11</sup> Norway, meanwhile, has never joined the European Union, and FrP was split on the issue of possible accession until 2017, when it decided to explicitly oppose Norwegian membership in the European Union.<sup>12</sup>

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8 See Jørgen Goul Andersen and Tor Bjørklund, "Structural Changes and New Cleavages: The Progress Parties in Denmark and Norway," *Acta Sociologica* 33, no. 3 (1990): 195–217.

9 Widfeldt, *Extreme Right Parties in Scandinavia*, 89.

10 This is evident in SD's 2011 party manifesto, a 48-page document that contains sections on policy areas such as the economy, labor market, criminal justice, defense, and energy. See SD, *Sverigedemokraternas Principprogram 2011* (Stockholm: SD, 2011), [https://sd.se/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/principprogrammet2014\\_webb.pdf](https://sd.se/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/principprogrammet2014_webb.pdf).

11 SD leader Jimmie Åkesson called the UK referendum result "very positive." See *Göteborgs-Posten*, "Politikerna oense om Brexit-segern," *Göteborgs-Posten*, June 24, 2016, [www.gp.se/nyheter/v%C3%A4rlden/politikerna-oense-om-brexits-segern-1.3254722](http://www.gp.se/nyheter/v%C3%A4rlden/politikerna-oense-om-brexits-segern-1.3254722). A PS member of parliament said the referendum date, June 23, should be a day of celebration. See *Åbo Underrättelser*, "Sannfinländarna öste hård kritik mot EU i Björneborg," *Åbo Underrättelser*, July 13, 2016, <http://gamla.abounderrattelser.fi/news/2016/07/sannfinlandarna-oste-hard-kritik-mot-eu-i-bjorneborg.html>. DF leader Kristian Thulesen Dahl called the referendum historic and advocated a Danish vote on EU membership. See Kristian Thulesen Dahl, "Kristians ABC," *Dansk Folkeblad* 3 (July 2016): 3, [https://danskfolkeparti.dk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/99992-DF-03-2016\\_web-1.pdf](https://danskfolkeparti.dk/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/99992-DF-03-2016_web-1.pdf).

12 FrP, *Prinsipp- og handlingsprogram 2017–2021* (Oslo: FrP, 2017), [www.frp.no/hva-vi-mener/prinsipp-og-handlingsprogram](http://www.frp.no/hva-vi-mener/prinsipp-og-handlingsprogram), 8.



## B. The Politicization of Immigration

While immigration was not initially on the agenda of all the Nordic radical-right parties analyzed here, it is now a core element of their platforms. Anti-immigration rhetoric can be traced back to individual ALP and FP representatives as early as the 1970s,<sup>13</sup> even though immigration was not a major part of their parties' agendas at that time. By contrast, the SD has been explicitly anti-immigration throughout its existence.

Immigration first became a priority for the radical right in Denmark and Norway in the mid-1980s, following an increase in asylum applications as a result of the Iran-Iraq War. Between 1983 and 1984, FP adopted an anti-immigration position, and FrP followed in 1986–87. Levels of non-European immigration to Finland were much lower, and the SMP took on immigration as a core issue somewhat later. The party eventually made opposition to immigration a part of its 1991 election campaign,<sup>14</sup> as a relatively limited number of refugees, mainly from Somalia and Vietnam, started to arrive in Finland. In Sweden, the New Democracy (NyD) party responded to the arrival of a large number of refugees from the Balkans by adopting drastic anti-immigration rhetoric after entering parliament in 1991.<sup>15</sup> However, the NyD soon imploded due to internal problems and was of no relevance after 1994. It should be noted that the demise of NyD was not a sign that immigration had ceased to be an issue of concern to the Swedish public. The intake of asylum seekers since the 1990s has fluctuated and attracted close scrutiny, and there has been much debate about the extent to which political leaders share and respond to public concerns about immigration.<sup>16</sup>

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Today, the Nordic radical-right parties are clearly opposed to immigration, although their exact positions and the relative priority they place on immigration issues vary. While their views are less extreme than other European radical-right parties, relative to mainstream parties in their own countries they are the most vociferous opponents of immigration. The Danish People's Party is arguably the most radical in its anti-immigration position, and its manifesto states that "Denmark is not a country of immigration and has never been. We will therefore not accept a multiethnic transformation of the country."<sup>17</sup> In Sweden, SD remains explicit in its opposition to multiculturalism, but has dropped its earlier more radical demands, such as the mandatory repatriation of all immigrants from "ethnically distant cultures" who arrived after 1970.<sup>18</sup> In Norway, the intensity of FrP's anti-immigration rhetoric has varied; in its 2017 manifesto, the party states that Norwegian immigration should be "strict and fair."<sup>19</sup> And while the party has stated that Norway should meet its international obligations to receive refugees allocated according to quotas, it

13 Widfeldt, *Extreme Right Parties in Scandinavia*, 96 (Norway) and 142 (Denmark).

14 David Arter, "Black Faces in the Blond Crowd: Populist Racialism in Scandinavia," *Parliamentary Affairs* 45, no. 3 (1992): 357–72.

15 Jens Rydgren, *From Tax Populism to Ethnic Nationalism: Radical Right-Wing Populism in Sweden* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 53–57.

16 For example, the political science professor Peter Esaiasson has argued that Swedish political elites have for many years neglected public concerns about immigration. See Peter Esaiasson, "DN Debatt. 'Eliten satte den demokratiska lyhördheten på undantag,'" *Dagens Nyheter*, February 14, 2016, [www.dn.se/debatt/eliten-satte-den-demokratiska-lyhordheten-pa-undantag/](http://www.dn.se/debatt/eliten-satte-den-demokratiska-lyhordheten-pa-undantag/).

17 DF, "The Party Program of the Danish People's Party," updated October 2002, <https://danskfolkeparti.dk/politik/in-another-languages-politics/1757-2/>.

18 This specification for arrivals after 1970 was made in the party's 1994–99 manifesto. See Widfeldt, *Extreme Right Parties in Scandinavia*, 196.

19 FrP, *Prinsipp- og handlingsprogram 2017–2021*, 13.



believes priority should be given to helping refugees in places nearer their origin<sup>20</sup>—an approach also espoused by SD.<sup>21</sup>

In Finland, the issue of immigration contributed to a split within PS in 2017. Former party leader Timo Soini adopted a comparatively moderate position, and the rhetoric in party manifestos under his leadership was also restrained.<sup>22</sup> But a faction within the party, led by Jussi Halla-Aho, had come to attract attention for its more drastic anti-immigration rhetoric.<sup>23</sup> After Soini announced his resignation as leader in March 2017,<sup>24</sup> Halla-Aho was appointed as his successor, causing a split in the party. A more moderate faction, including the sitting ministers and several members of parliament, formed a new party called Blue Reform (ST).

### III. Explaining the Electoral Success of the Radical Right

While radical-right parties are not a new force in Nordic politics, they have recently experienced a growth in electoral support. This section charts the recent fortunes of the far right and examines several factors that have contributed to their current strength. The reasons for the growth in support of radical-right parties are complex. Although concerns about immigration are a key reason why individuals vote for the radical right, system-level shifts in immigration and public opinion about immigration do not provide a straightforward explanation. This is not to say that immigration is irrelevant, but that the process by which immigration concerns translate into radical-right votes is indirect and complicated. It is also complemented by factors such as voter disillusionment with established parties and politicians, concerns about crime and the sustainability of welfare systems. While factors such as these are important in a broader sense, they cannot directly explain short- to medium-term shifts and variations in radical-right support. Instead, the success of radical-right parties is often best explained by factors within these parties themselves.

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#### A. Growing Electoral Support for Radical-Right Parties

While electoral support for Nordic radical-right parties has fluctuated over time (see Table 1), they have been represented in the parliaments of Denmark, Finland, and Norway since the 1980s,<sup>25</sup> and entered the

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20 Ibid., 62.

21 SD, *Sverigedemokraternas Principprogram 2011*, 23.

22 PS, “The Finns Party’s Immigration Policy,” updated 2015, [www.perussuomalaiset.fi/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/ps\\_immigration\\_final.pdf](http://www.perussuomalaiset.fi/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/ps_immigration_final.pdf).

23 Tapio Raunio, “The Finns: Filling a Gap in the Party System,” in *Exposing the Demagogues: Right-Wing and National Populist Parties in Europe*, eds. Karsten Grabow and Florian Hartleb (Cambridge, MA: Center for European Studies, 2014), 133–60; Niklas Evers, “Flera Sannfinländare Fällda För Hets Mot Folkgrupp—6 Domar På 6 År,” *Yleisradio*, January 7, 2017, <https://svenska.yle.fi/artikel/2017/01/05/flera-sannfinlandare-fallda-hets-mot-folkgrupp-6-domar-pa-6-ar>.

24 Eva-Maria Koskinen and Maria von Kraemer, “Timo Soini avgår som ordförande i juni men vill fortsätta som utrikesminister,” *Yleisradio*, March 14, 2017, <https://svenska.yle.fi/artikel/2017/03/05/timo-soini-avgar-som-ordforande-i-juni-men-vill-fortsatta-som-utrikesminister>.

25 Radical-right parties have been in parliament without interruption in Finland since 1970, in Denmark since 1973, and in Norway since 1981.



Swedish Parliament in 2010.<sup>26</sup> They have proven themselves resilient to setbacks,<sup>27</sup> demonstrating clearly that the radical-right presence cannot be considered a passing phase.

While in Denmark, Finland, and Norway, the electoral fortunes of radical-right parties have fluctuated, there is a long-term trend of increasing or at least consolidating their levels of voter support. Three of the four parties are currently among the top two or three largest parties in their national parliaments (the exception is Finland, where PS was the second-largest party in the 2015 election before its size was reduced by the 2017 split), though there have also been setbacks.

In Denmark, FP had wildly fluctuating highs and lows, but DF displays an almost continuously positive trajectory. The party suffered a marginal loss of 1.6 percentage points in 2011 after serving as a support party for a center-right minority government for ten years (see Table 1). The loss was likely linked to an agreement between DF and the government to phase out a partial retirement scheme that was popular with voters but considered financially unsustainable by the government. The loss proved to be only a temporary setback, however, and after four years in opposition, DF received an all-time high of 21.1 percent of the vote in 2015, making it the second largest party in parliament. In Norway, FrP is currently the third-largest party in parliament (receiving 15.2 percent of the vote in the 2017 election) and has continued as a member of the governing coalition. The party's 2013 and 2017 electoral results represent a decline from their peak success in the 2009 elections, when it received 22.9 percent of the vote. DF and FrP have been among the most successful of the West European radical-right parties, surpassed only by the Swiss People's Party and the Austrian Freedom Party.

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*DF and FrP have been among the most successful of the West European radical-right parties.*

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In Sweden, SD received 12.9 percent of the vote in the parliamentary election of 2014, the third-highest vote share in that election. The party is likely to build on its success in the September 2018 elections. Some pollsters estimate that SD is supported by less than 20 percent of voters (but more than their 2014 share), while others put the party at around or more than 25 percent.<sup>28</sup>

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26 New Democracy (NyD) held seats from 1991 to 1994, but support for the party soon collapsed.

27 The only radical-right party to disappear without immediately being succeeded by a replacement party was NyD in Sweden.

28 This estimate is based on opinion poll data collected by the author. Some internet-based polls involve self-selected samples and are thus statistically questionable, but thus far, such polls have better estimated SD support levels than other types of polls. The pollsters that tend to attribute the largest numbers to the SD are YouGov and Sentio. See Lars Gylling, "Stödet för S Växer," YouGov, September 25, 2017, <https://yougov.se/news/2017/09/25/stodet-s-vaxer/>; Chang Frick, "Nytt SD-Rekord i Sentio-Samtidigt Vänder det Uppåt för Moderaterna," *Nyheter Idag*, August 17, 2017, <https://nyheteridag.se/nytt-sd-rekord-i-sentio-samtidigt-vander-det-uppat-for-moderaterna/>.

**Table 1. Electoral Performance of Nordic Radical-Right Parties as a Share of Valid Votes Cast and Seats Gained in Parliament, 1970–2017**

Year	Denmark		Finland		Norway		Sweden	
	Vote Share (%)	Seats Gained	Vote Share (%)	Seats Gained	Vote Share (%)	Seats Gained	Vote Share (%)	Seats Gained
1970			SMP 10.5	SMP 18/200				
1972			SMP 9.2	SMP 18/200				
1973	FP 15.9	FP 28/175			ALP 5.0	ALP 4/155		
1975	FP 13.6	FP 24/175	SMP 3.6	SMP 2/200				
1977	FP 14.6	FP 26/175			ALP 1.9	ALP 0/155		
1979	FP 11.0	FP 20/175	SMP 4.6	SMP 7/200				
1981	FP 8.9	FP 16/175			FrP 4.5	FrP 4/155		
1983			SMP 9.7	SMP 17/200				
1984	FP 3.6	FP 6/175						
1985					FrP 3.7	FrP 2/157		
1987	FP 4.8	FP 9/175	SMP 6.3	SMP 9/200				
1988	FP 9.0	FP 16/175					SD 0.001	SD 0/349
1989					FrP 13.0	FrP 22/165		
1990	FP 6.4	FP 12/175						
1991			SMP 4.8	SMP 7/200			NyD 6.8 SD 0.1	NyD 25/349 SD 0/349
1993					FrP 6.3	FrP 10/165		
1994	FP 6.4	FP 11/175					NyD 1.2 SD 0.2	NyD 0/349 SD 0/349
1995			SMP 1.3	SMP 1/200				
1997					FrP 15.3	FrP 25/165		
1998	FP 2.4 DF 7.4	FP 4/175 DF 13/175					NyD 0.2 SD 0.4	NyD 0/349 SD 0/349
1999			PS 1.0	PS 1/200				
2001	FP 0.5 DF 12.0	FP 0/175 DF 22/175			FrP 14.6	FrP 26/165		
2002							SD 1.4	SD 0/349
2003			PS 1.6	PS 3/200				
2005	DF 13.3	DF 24/175			FrP 22.1	FrP 38/169		
2006							SD 2.9	SD 0/349
2007	DF 13.9	DF 25/175	PS 4.1	PS 5/200				
2009					FrP 22.9	FrP 41/169		
2010							SD 5.7	SD 20/349
2011	DF 12.3	DF 22/175	PS 19.1	PS 39/200				
2013					FrP 16.3	FrP 29/169		
2014							SD 12.9	SD 49/349
2015	DF 21.1	DF 37/175	PS 17.4	PS 38/200				
2017					FrP 15.2	FrP 27/169		

ALP = Anders Lange's Party; DF = Danish People's Party; FP = Progress Party (Denmark); FrP = Progress Party (Norway); NyD = New Democracy; PS = Finns Party; SD = Sweden Democrats; SMP = Rural Party.

Note: Years when none of the four countries had an election or no radical-right parties participated are excluded from the table.

Sources: Folketinget, "Tal og Fakta om Valg og Afstemninger," accessed October 18, 2017, [www.ft.dk/da/folkestyret/valg-og-afstemninger/tal-og-fakta-om-valg-og-afstemninger](http://www.ft.dk/da/folkestyret/valg-og-afstemninger/tal-og-fakta-om-valg-og-afstemninger); Dag Anckar and Carsten Anckar, "Finland," in *Elections in Europe: A Data Handbook*, eds. Dieter Nohlen and Philip Stöver (Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos, 2010), 593–638; Statistics Finland, "Parliamentary Elections," accessed October 18, 2017, [www.stat.fi/til/evaa/tau\\_en.html](http://www.stat.fi/til/evaa/tau_en.html); Charlotte Larsen Cadoret, "Norway," in *Elections in Europe: A Data Handbook*, eds. Dieter Nohlen and Philip Stöver (Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos, 2010), 1421–70; Stortinget, "Valgstatistikk," accessed October 18, 2017, [www.stortinget.no/no/Stortinget-og-demokratiet/Valg-og-konstituering/Valgstatistikk/](http://www.stortinget.no/no/Stortinget-og-demokratiet/Valg-og-konstituering/Valgstatistikk/); Anders Widfeldt, "Sweden," in *Elections in Europe: A Data Handbook*, eds. Dieter Nohlen and Philip Stöver (Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos, 2010), 1841–78; Statistiska Centralbyrån, "Från Fem Till Åtta Partier i Riksdagen," accessed October 18, 2017, [www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/sverige-i-siffror/val-och-partier/valresultat-over-tid/](http://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/sverige-i-siffror/val-och-partier/valresultat-over-tid/).



## B. *The Influence of Immigration and Asylum Flows on Support for Radical-Right Parties*

Opposition to immigration is the single most important, and universal, factor behind radical-right voting at the individual level.<sup>29</sup> Yet the macrolevel relationship between levels of immigration, public opinion of immigration, and changes in immigration policy on the one hand and levels of support for radical-right parties on the other is complex. Thus, while individual anti-immigration attitudes are a core underlying factor behind the ability of radical-right parties to establish themselves, fluctuations in their electoral support do not always follow broader societal or political changes, such as shifts in immigration levels or whether the general public, on average, has grown more or less positively inclined toward immigration. This section will explore this relationship in greater detail.

Asylum has been one of the most significant channels of entry for non-EU migrants into Nordic countries in recent years. The levels of asylum applications each country received between 2000 and 2016 are shown in Figures 1 and 2, in absolute numbers and relative to the domestic population. Sweden has had particularly high numbers of asylum applications since 2000, both in terms of raw numbers and relative to its population. Yet as noted in Table 1, SD has not, so far, reached the same level of support as corresponding parties in Denmark, Finland, and Norway. By contrast, DF in Denmark has remained a strong and durable political force even though asylum application numbers in that country have been comparatively moderate since the early 2000s, when DF began to influence the migration policy agenda. As shown in Table 1, both DF and the Norwegian FrP made electoral gains in 2005, when the numbers of asylum seekers declined in both countries.

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*Fluctuations in their electoral support do not always follow broader societal or political changes, such as shifts in immigration levels.*

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There are also no systematic patterns across countries. A comparison of Table 1 and Figure 2 shows that Sweden has for long periods received the highest proportions of asylum applications relative to its population. Yet substantial support for SD began to grow only in 2010 and has still not reached levels of support akin to those of FrP, DF, and PS in nationwide elections (although, as noted above, it may do so in the election scheduled for September 2018).

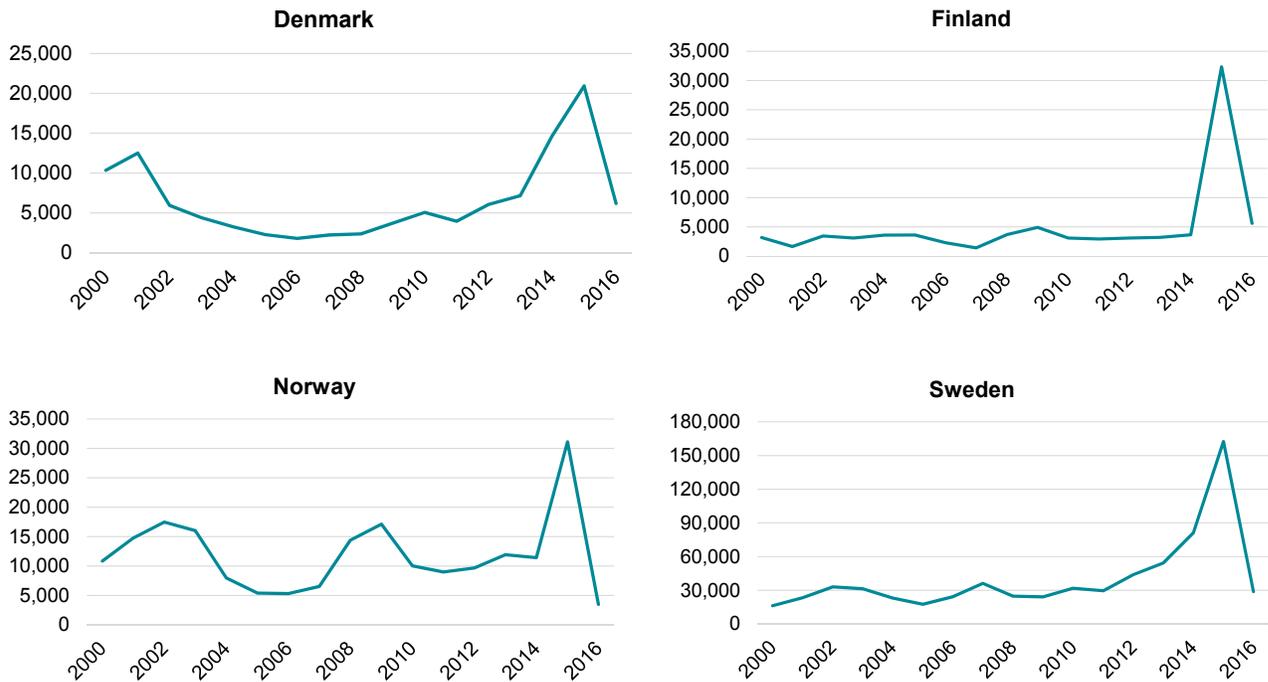
Thus, it can be concluded that the volume of asylum applications is not necessarily a strong predictor of radical-right party success in Nordic countries. Variations over time in number of asylum applications an individual country receives are not always reflected in corresponding shifts in support for the radical right in that country. Moreover, if a country receives more asylum applications than others, it does not necessarily predict that the country will have a correspondingly strong radical-right party.

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<sup>29</sup> Anders Widfeldt, "The Radical Right in the Nordic Countries," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, ed. Jens Rydgren (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

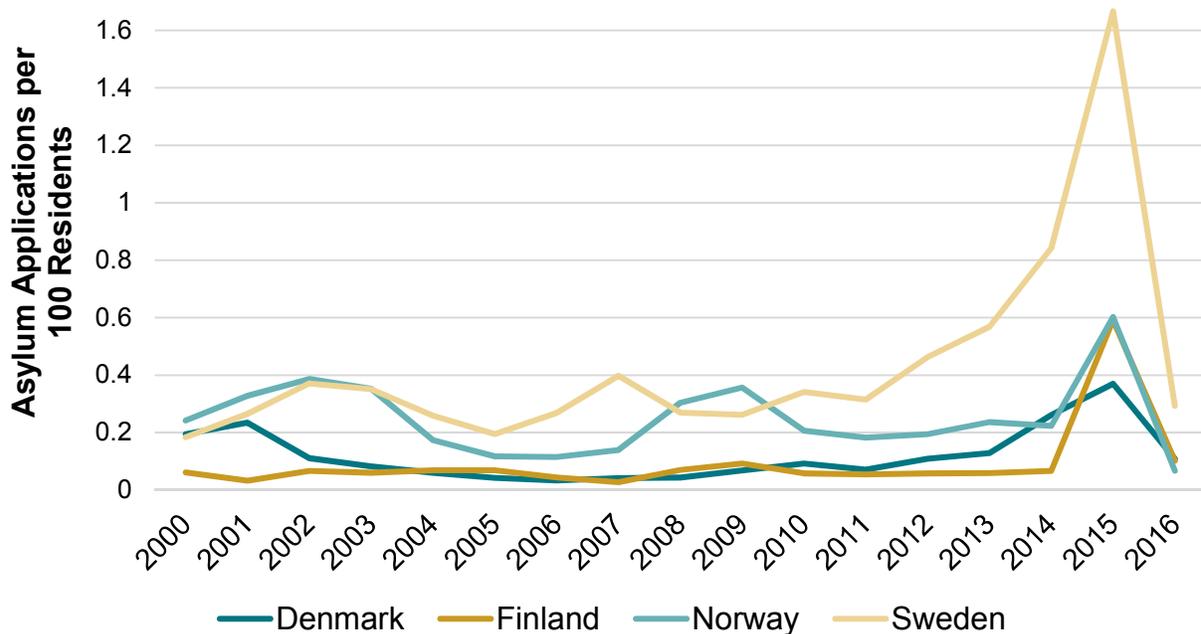


**Figure 1. Annual Asylum Applications in Nordic Countries, 2000–16**



Sources: Eurostat, “Asylum and First Time Asylum Applicants—Annual Aggregated Data (Rounded) [tps00191],” updated June 8, 2018, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/tps00191>; Eurostat, “Population on 1 January [tps00001],” updated May 18, 2018, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/tps00001>; Piotr Juchno, *Asylum Applications in the European Union*, Report 110/2007, Statistics in Focus: Population and Social Conditions (Brussels: Eurostat, 2007), <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3433488/5285137/KS-SF-07-110-EN.PDF/c95cc2ce-b50c-498e-95fb-cd507ef29e27>.

**Figure 2. Per Capita Asylum Applications in Nordic Countries, 2000–16**



Sources: Eurostat, “Asylum and First Time Asylum Applicants”; Eurostat, “Population on 1 January”; Juchno, *Asylum Applications in the European Union*.



A look at broader immigration flows and public views on immigration shows a similar mismatch. Table 2 presents one measure of how positive or negative public opinion is on immigration-related matters in 15 European countries, based on European Social Survey data from 2016.

**Table 2. Average Responses to European Social Survey Questions Related to Immigration, 2016**

Country	Immigration Bad (0) or Good (10) for Economy	Country's Cultural Life Undermined (0) or Enriched (10) by Immigrants	Immigrants Make Country Worse (0) or Better (10) Place to Live	Average Score
Iceland	6.67	7.16	7.07	6.97
<b>Sweden</b>	<b>5.74</b>	<b>6.87</b>	<b>6.21</b>	<b>6.27</b>
Ireland	5.82	6.04	6.07	5.98
<b>Finland</b>	<b>5.37</b>	<b>6.91</b>	<b>5.54</b>	<b>5.94</b>
Switzerland	6.03	6.10	5.50	5.88
United Kingdom	5.87	5.90	5.65	5.81
Spain	5.42	6.40	5.49	5.77
Germany	5.83	5.96	5.21	5.67
<b>Norway</b>	<b>5.53</b>	<b>5.80</b>	<b>5.62</b>	<b>5.65</b>
Portugal	5.63	6.07	5.19	5.63
Netherlands	5.29	6.08	5.44	5.60
France	4.86	5.37	4.95	5.06
Austria	4.74	4.69	4.27	4.57
Italy	4.15	4.39	3.54	4.03
Hungary	3.03	3.61	3.48	3.37

*Notes:* Data for Denmark have not been released for the 2016 round of the European Social Survey, though the country has been included in past rounds (see text). Respondents answered questions according to a 0–10 scale, where low numbers indicate negative views and high numbers positive views on immigration. Averages (in the right-most column) are based on responses to the three questions shown to the left. The number of responses varied between 867 (Iceland, 1st question) and 2,809 (Germany, 1st question). Standard deviations varied between 1.83 (Netherlands, 3rd question) and 2.75 (Italy, 1st question). Post-stratification weight has been used.

*Source:* Author's analysis of data from the European Social Survey, "Round 8: European Social Survey—Data file edition 2.0," Norwegian Centre for Research Data, May 30, 2018, [www.europeansocialsurvey.org/data/download.html?r=8](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/data/download.html?r=8).

Based on the results of the European Social Survey, the Nordic countries appear to have relatively positive views on immigration compared to other European countries. Indeed, Sweden and Finland have among the most positive views of immigration of the countries covered in Table 2. Yet as seen in Table 1, SD in Sweden more than doubled its share of the vote in the 2014 election, and PS in Finland performed strongly in the 2011 and 2015 elections. Denmark, where DF has performed strongly for a number of years, was not included in the round of the European Social Survey on which Table 2 is based. Earlier data, however, indicate that public opinion about immigration in Denmark is largely on par with that of Norway, somewhat less positive than Sweden and Finland but more positive than in many other European countries.<sup>30</sup> The success of the radical right, then, in these four Nordic countries does not seem to be the result of an electorate that is particularly hostile to immigration. The same can be said of other countries that have recently experienced successful radical-right parties. While Swiss respondents, for example, had the fifth-most positive view of immigration, Switzerland has also seen the rise of the most successful radical-right party in the whole of Western Europe, the Swiss People's Party.<sup>31</sup> Conversely, Spain and

30 In the previous round of the European Social Survey, conducted in 2014, responses from Denmark had an average score of 5.48. By comparison, Norway had an average score of 5.67, Finland 5.89, and Sweden 6.58. Author's analysis of data from the European Social Survey, "Round 7: European Social Survey—Data file edition 2.1," Norwegian Centre for Research Data, updated December 1, 2016, [www.europeansocialsurvey.org/data/download.html?r=7](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/data/download.html?r=7). See also Widfeldt, *Extreme Right Parties in Scandinavia*, 41–2.

31 The Swiss People's Party has for some time been the biggest party in Switzerland, reaching 29.4 percent in the 2015 federal election.



Portugal, where respondents reported somewhat more negative views on immigration, have no significant radical-right parties.

There are, however, some caveats to this assessment. Austria and France reported more negative views on immigration and also have important radical-right parties. Meanwhile Iceland and Ireland, without important such parties, report comparatively positive opinions. The fact that these opinions and political forces sometimes correspond—but not consistently so—is evidence that the relationship between immigration and radical-right success is not straightforward.

The main observation thus remains that there is a lack of systematic variation between public opinion about immigration and the performance of radical-right parties. This assertion is also supported by country-specific data on public opinion about immigration. In Sweden, for example, there is much evidence to suggest that the highest levels of public resistance to receiving refugees occurred in the early 1990s (the time during which NyD had their electoral breakthrough). Yet NyD never had as much support as SD has had in the 2010s, when public opinion about asylum admissions has been less negative, according to a comparable indicator.<sup>32</sup>

### C. Other Factors in the Success of the Radical Right

Not only is it impossible not to attribute the success of the radical right solely to changes in immigration flows and public opinion, there are also no easily identifiable factors that explain fluctuations in radical-right support universally across countries. In a broader sense, factors such as concerns about crime and the impact of immigration on the welfare system are part of why support for radical-right parties has grown. But it is difficult to find evidence that suggests such demand-side factors account for country-by-country variations, or even fluctuations in radical right support within the same country.<sup>33</sup> It is, however, possible to identify a few specific factors—many of them internal party dynamics—that have contributed to the success of radical-right parties in particular cases.

Apt leadership and media communication skills have benefited the radical right in all four countries. Internal party organization is also important as radical-right parties are sometimes hurt by the presence of extremists or “oddballs” in their organizations. There is much to suggest that DF and FrP both owe much of their success to strict internal discipline. DF, for example, strictly vets membership applications, and members are often expelled.<sup>34</sup> FrP has also exercised measures to control dissenters and eccentric personalities.<sup>35</sup> The party was, however, powerless when former member Anders Behring Breivik committed terrorist attacks in July 2011; although Breivik no longer had any connections with the FrP, his earlier association with the party was damaging to its public support. It should be noted that partly as a response to the Breivik attacks, FrP toned down its anti-immigration rhetoric after 2011.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the party suffered losses in the 2011 subnational election and the 2013 parliamentary election.<sup>37</sup> As the case of FrP suggests, developing a sufficiently moderate ideology that will appeal to a wide audience has

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32 Marie Demker, “Mobilisering Kring Migration Förändrar det Svenska Partisystemet,” in *Fragment*, eds. Annika Bergström, Bengt Johansson, Henrik Oscarsson, and Maria Oskarson (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, SOM Institute, 2015).

33 See, for example, Jens Rydgren, “Immigration Sceptics, Xenophobes or Racists? Radical Right-Wing Voting in Six West European Countries,” *European Journal of Political Research* 47, no. 6 (2008): 737–65. Rydgren argues that “in most countries we did not find significant associations, or only weak significant associations, for frames that link immigration to job losses and the welfare chauvinist frame that immigrants drain the welfare system of resources.” (761)

34 Widfeldt, *Extreme Right Parties in Scandinavia*, 152–3.

35 *Ibid.*, 104–5.

36 *Ibid.*, 82–3, 101.

37 The 2013 election result (16.3 percent) represented a partial recovery from earlier opinion polls.



boosted radical-right party outcomes. The breakthrough of SD also owes much to the weeding out of extreme proposals from party manifestos.<sup>38</sup>

Radical-right parties have also proven adept at tapping in to other areas of anxiety among their respective electorates. In Norway, a key factor in the all-time high vote shares FrP received in 2005 and 2009 was the party's embrace of the welfare chauvinism and petroleum populism described in Section II. These FrP positions resonated with a substantial proportion of the electorate at a time when other political parties declined to support such policies out of concern that they could increase the risk of inflation and that cautious expenditure policies might be needed to offset a future drop in oil and gas revenue.<sup>39</sup> In Finland, the sudden surge in support for PS in 2011 can be partially explained by the party's opposition to the eurozone bailouts.<sup>40</sup>

Personality also plays a role in determining party success. The leader of PS at the time of the 2011 elections was Timo Soini, whose jovial personality worked well on television. Soini's witty but hard-hitting criticism of the European Union resonated well with the electorate, which was growing weary of Union. Immigration was only part of the PS message that year, not the dominant issue. Pragmatic and smart party leadership has proven to be just as important as charisma. FrP, for example, changed leaders in 2006, from the archpopulist Carl I. Hagen to Siv Jensen, whose political style is more pragmatic. Jensen has been better able to form a working relationship with other party leaders than Hagen, whose divisive style and vain personality made cooperation difficult. Similarly, SD leader Jimmie Åkesson is revered among SD supporters, and his low-key communication style is one of several factors behind the party's success.

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*In Finland, the sudden surge in support for PS in 2011 can be partially explained by the party's opposition to the eurozone bailouts.*

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The problem, however, is that even though these factors are important for understanding how and why radical-right parties have broken through and been able to establish themselves in the Nordic countries, it is much more difficult to identify factors that explain shifts and variations in support for them over time. The success of PS in the 2011 Finnish election, for example, was followed by marginal losses in the 2015 elections, despite Soini's continued leadership. Conversely, SD did not suffer in the polls when its popular leader Jimmie Åkesson was away on sick leave, with his return uncertain, between October 2014 and March 2015.

Time spent in government or collaboration with other parties can also have an effect. Although DF, for example, has maintained much of its populist rhetoric, its initial status as an anti-establishment party has shifted somewhat due to its position for long periods as an influential government support party. The party's platform has not changed significantly, but it has an open-minded approach to cooperation with other parties on the center left as well as the center right. In another example of DF's respect for political institutions and parliamentary procedures, its former leader Pia Kjærsgaard was appointed speaker of the

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38 This draws on Widfeldt, *Extreme Right Parties in Scandinavia*.

39 In the fall of 2000, when FrP was the biggest party in several opinion polls, the most frequently cited reason for supporting it was its policies on health and elder care. See Thor Gjermund Eriksen and Ole Nygaard "Fremskrittspartiet Knuser Ap," *Aftenposten*, September 15, 2000. See also Henry Valen and Hanne Martha Narud, "The Storting Election in Norway, September 2005," *Electoral Studies* 26, no. 1 (2007): 219–23.

40 The 2011 election took place against the backdrop of the eurozone crisis, and the bailouts of struggling eurozone economies were a major theme in the election. Finland, the only Nordic country to have introduced the euro as currency, would be asked to contribute to such bailouts, which PS opposed. Opposition to the bailouts was also the main reason why PS did not enter government after the election.



Danish parliament after the 2015 election. If anything, close relations with government have benefited the party. The DF was able to achieve its goal of reducing asylum application numbers as part of the party's cooperation pact with the 2001–11 center-right government. With support from DF, the government introduced a series of measures to reduce asylum inflows, including a stricter definition of refugees and tighter criteria for family reunification.<sup>41</sup> As shown in Figure 1, asylum applications in Denmark did decline after 2001. Indeed, there is much to suggest that the stricter immigration policies of the 2001–11 government, with active assistance from DF, were well received by the public. The near-continuous electoral success of DF since 2001 may thus be understood more as a reflection of voter gratitude for DF's active contributions to restrictive immigration policies than as a continued protest against immigration and the established parties.<sup>42</sup>

DF has, however, not yet been part of a government. Formal inclusion in government can sometimes be more problematical for radical-right parties, as suggested by the Finnish example. PS entered government after the 2015 election as part of a coalition with the center and conservative parties. The PS leader at the time, Timo Soini, became minister for foreign affairs, and the party was given three additional cabinet posts.<sup>43</sup> Being in government proved to be a difficult experience for the party; it was pushed into concessions on asylum policy as well as welfare cuts, the latter in response to a declining economy. The party split in 2017. This split was partly due to earlier compromises made while in government, though the main issue was that party defectors viewed the new leader, Jussi Halla-Aho, as too extreme in his anti-immigration rhetoric. The remaining members of PS, with the controversial Halla-Aho as leader, are back in opposition, which could pave the way for a return to vote-getting, anti-establishment strategies in elections to come. But Halla-Aho may be too radical for parts of the electorate that were attracted by the more moderate Soini, who commanded grudging respect in almost all political circles. The future of the party is far from clear. Recent indications suggest that both PS and the splinter Blue Reform are suffering. An opinion poll in April 2018 showed PS with 8.5 percent of the vote and the more moderate Blue Reform with less than 2 percent.<sup>44</sup>

The FrP also found itself under strain when it entered government for the first time in 2013. The party was forced into a number of initial concessions. In June 2015, for example, the party was forced to accept the resettlement of an additional 8,000 Syrian refugees over a two-year period.<sup>45</sup> Later in the year, however, Norwegian asylum policy was significantly tightened, and FrP claimed credit for having made it the most restrictive in Europe. But while the party found its performance in the 2015 subnational elections highly disappointing (it received 9.5 percent of the vote), it had recovered by the time of the 2017 election (in which it received 15.2 percent of the vote). This success was due in part to a successful division of labor within the party. While party leader and Minister of Finance Siv Jensen essentially adopted a mainstream and nonpopulist profile, the Migration Minister Sylvi Listhaug adopted a more vocal and skeptical message on immigration. In a particularly successful public gesture, Listhaug visited Stockholm during the campaign for the stated purpose of learning from the Swedish experience with

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41 Widfeldt, *Extreme Right Parties in Scandinavia*, 136–7, 101.

42 According to research conducted by the Harvard scholar Pippa Norris, public approval of politicians and parliament in Denmark at this time was at the highest level in the democratic world, which would suggest the public was supportive of the policy changes. See Pippa Norris, *Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

43 Jan Sundberg, "Political Data Yearbook: Finland," *European Journal of Political Research* 55, no. 1 (2016): 91–98.

44 Simon Karlsson, "Yles Partimatning: Samlingspartiet Backar Men Förblir Ändå Landets Största Parti," Svenska Yle, May 3, 2018, <https://svenska.yle.fi/artikel/2018/05/03/yles-partimatning-samlingspartiet-backar-men-forblir-anda-landets-storsta-parti>.

45 Johannes Bergh and Rune Karlsen, "Political Data Yearbook: Norway," *European Journal of Political Research* 55, no. 1 (2016): 199–203.



asylum and reception. Opponents, however, suggested that the real aim of the visit was to use it for anti-immigration scare-mongering.<sup>46</sup>

The steep and steady trajectory of SD's growth in Sweden is particularly difficult to explain. It is hard to pinpoint any specific external events that prompted its rise. In the two decades before SD's electoral breakthrough in 2010, Sweden had experienced high but fluctuating levels of asylum admissions, but SD continued to gain support irrespective of these variations. Sweden has not experienced many terrorist attacks committed by militant Islamists or other groups with links to immigration. The first serious incident occurred in April 2017 when a truck struck pedestrians in Stockholm, killing several people.<sup>47</sup> SD was, however, already established as a substantial electoral force by that time. The popularity of the SD has also not been negatively affected by problems with internal discipline highlighted in the press. In the most serious incident, several high-ranking SD members—two of whom went on to become members of parliament—were filmed in a heated, early morning argument with a Swedish comedian with Kurdish roots and some bystanders on a Stockholm street. The incident did not, however, negatively affect SD's poll ratings.<sup>48</sup> More recent events, including allegations of economic misconduct and fights outside nightclubs, have similarly proven to have little effect.<sup>49</sup>

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*Sweden had experienced high but fluctuating levels of asylum admissions, but SD continued to gain support irrespective of these variations.*

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This close examination of the successes of these radical-right parties suggests that there are no easily identifiable or generalizable factors that explain fluctuations in radical-right support in the Nordic countries. There is little evidence that levels of immigration or changes in immigration policy explain variations in support. DF in Denmark has continued to grow, despite restrictive asylum policies that resulted in fewer asylum applications. Sweden, on the other hand, had high levels of asylum admissions for more than two decades before SD broke through in 2010. And in Finland, the PS breakthrough in 2011 was not primarily caused by immigration. In some cases, it is possible to identify other factors that contribute to radical-right parties' success, from internal party discipline and timely positioning on particular issues to talented party leaders. A critical position on eurozone bailouts benefited PS in 2011, while the Breivik terrorist attacks hurt FrP in the same year. These and other idiosyncratic factors may explain specific events, but it is impossible to extract from them more general rules regarding the success of radical-right parties.

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46 Cato Husabø Fossen and Marit Kolberg, "Støre mener Solberg er passiv overfor Frp," NRK, August 29, 2017, [www.nrk.no/norge/store-mener-solberg-er-passiv-overfor-frp-1.13663481](http://www.nrk.no/norge/store-mener-solberg-er-passiv-overfor-frp-1.13663481). Listhaug resigned from the government in March 2018, following controversial postings on her Facebook account. See Vilde Heljessen, "Erna Solberg: – Sylvi Listhaug kan komme tilbake som statsråd senere," NRK, March 20, 2018, [www.nrk.no/norge/erna-solberg--sylvi-listhaug-kan-komme-tilbake-som-statsrad-senere-1.13970728](http://www.nrk.no/norge/erna-solberg--sylvi-listhaug-kan-komme-tilbake-som-statsrad-senere-1.13970728).

47 Christina Anderson, "Sweden Mourns Stockholm Attack Victims; Suspect Is Formally Identified," *New York Times*, April 10, 2017, [www.nytimes.com/2017/04/10/world/europe/sweden-terror-attack.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/10/world/europe/sweden-terror-attack.html).

48 Widfeldt, *Extreme Right Parties in Scandinavia*, 207–8.

49 The Local, "Sweden Democrat MP Kent Ekeroth Fined over Stockholm Brawl," The Local, June 28, 2017, [www.thelocal.se/20170628/sweden-democrat-mp-kent-ekeroth-fined-over-stockholm-brawl](http://www.thelocal.se/20170628/sweden-democrat-mp-kent-ekeroth-fined-over-stockholm-brawl); Radio Sweden, "Sweden Democrat MP Resigns Ahead of Embezzlement Trial," Radio Sweden, May 31, 2017, <http://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=2054&artikel=6707813>. Kent Ekeroth, the politician involved, was later acquitted on appeal. See Associated Press, "Swedish Lawmaker Acquitted of Assault after Night Out," *U.S. News & World Report*, December 1, 2017, [www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2017-12-01/swedish-lawmaker-acquitted-of-assault-after-night-out](http://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2017-12-01/swedish-lawmaker-acquitted-of-assault-after-night-out).



## IV. The Influence of Radical-Right Parties on Policy and the Political Debate

The influence of a party, or groups of parties, on policymaking can be direct or indirect. This section examines each type of influence in turn, considering how and to what extent radical-right parties have shaped immigration policymaking in Nordic countries.

### A. Direct Influence on Policy

Direct influence is comparatively straightforward to identify—this is when a party participates in government, either by being formally included in government or as a government support party. It is also possible, but in practice much less common, for a party in opposition to put forward proposals that are accepted by a government or a majority of parties. Direct influence by radical-right parties—both inside and outside government—has become relatively common in the Nordic countries.

Radical-right parties have played a role in governing coalitions, whether as formal partners or as allies, in all of the countries studied here except Sweden (see Table 3). FrP in Norway entered a two-party minority coalition with the Conservative Party in 2013, a coalition that remained in office after the 2017 election.<sup>50</sup> The PS in Finland entered a three-party majority coalition with the Center and Conservative parties in 2015 (PS's predecessor, SMP, participated in coalition governments in the period 1983–90). When PS split in 2017, the defecting Blue Reform took its place in government, which remains a majority coalition. DF in Denmark has so far never been in government but exerted considerable policy influence as a government support party during 2001–11. And as the second-biggest party in parliament, the DF has held considerable bargaining power more recently as well. Indeed, after the 2015 elections, DF leader Kristian Thulesen Dahl decided not to enter government, stating that his party could exert more influence from outside than inside government, where it would be bound by a joint government program.<sup>51</sup>

**Table 3. Radical-Right Parties in Government or Serving as Government Allies in Nordic Countries, 1983–Present**

Party	Country	Years in Government	Coalition Partners
Rural Party (SMP)	Finland	1983–90	Social Democratic Party; Center Party; Conservative Party; Swedish People's Party
Danish People's Party (DF)*	Denmark	2001–11	Liberal Party; Conservative People's Party
Progress Party (FrP)	Norway	2013–Present	Conservative Party; beginning in 2018, also the Liberal Party
Finns Party (PS)/ Blue Reform**	Finland	2015–Present	Center Party; Conservative Party

\* DF was not a formal member of the governing coalition but collaborated with the governing parties to give support to specific policy initiatives.

\*\* A faction of PS split off to form the Blue Reform party in 2017. Blue Reform has continued as part of the governing coalition, while PS went into opposition.

<sup>50</sup> The government was expanded from two to three parties in January 2018, with the inclusion of the center-right Liberal Party (Venstre). It remained a minority government, however. See The Local, "Here is Norway's New Coalition Government," The Local, January 18, 2018, [www.thelocal.no/20180118/here-is-norways-new-coalition-government](http://www.thelocal.no/20180118/here-is-norways-new-coalition-government).

<sup>51</sup> Kristian Thulesen Dahl, "Arbejdet er Først Lige Begyndt," DF, June 29, 2015, <https://danskfolkeparti.dk/arbejdet-er-foerst-lige-begyndt/>.



Radical-right parties have not been shy about claiming influence over policy when they have held power. In Norway, FrP has claimed credit for policy changes that tightened asylum rules.<sup>52</sup> And in Denmark, DF lists on its website a total of 80 DF proposals for more restrictive immigration policies that have been enacted. These include border checks and an “emergency brake” that increases the possibility of asylum seekers being refused entry directly at the border, as well as various disincentives for asylum seekers to come to Denmark, such as restricted access to welfare, increased monitoring of Muslim schools, and the requirement that asylum seekers make their own contributions toward the cost of their residency in Denmark.<sup>53</sup>

Whatever the cause, immigration policies in the Nordic countries have, in fact, become more restrictive in recent years. From 2001 onward, Denmark has drastically changed its policies to become more restrictive. While DF did have significant influence on these changes as the government support party, most of the major Danish parties also argued for stricter policies in the 2001 election campaign.<sup>54</sup> The proposed policy changes were much debated at the time and included a stricter definition of refugee status—to be achieved by abolishing de facto refugee status—and an increase in the amount of time in the country required to qualify for a residence permit, from three to seven years. Family reunification was made more difficult, and the rules governing which nonresident spouses can join their partners in Denmark were tightened to require that both spouses be 24, rather than 18, years of age. The first such policy package was initially tabled by the government in early 2002, without direct influence from DF, but DF participated in the final drafting of the package, which was adopted by parliament some months later.<sup>55</sup> A long series of other restrictions followed that were directly influenced by the DF. When it became difficult to further restrict the criteria for the admission of refugees, Denmark took various steps amounting to indirect deterrence by making Denmark a less attractive option for potential asylum seekers. This included restricting access to welfare, more efficient expulsion of failed asylum applicants, and steps to prevent asylum seekers from entering the informal labor market.

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*Whatever the cause, immigration policies in the Nordic countries have, in fact, become more restrictive in recent years.*

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All four Nordic countries have continued to introduce more restrictive policies since the dramatic rise in asylum applications in 2015. The policy shift was arguably most abrupt in Sweden, which in late 2015 announced it would no longer issue permanent residence permits to successful asylum applicants in exceptional cases, stricter conditions for family reunification, and, perhaps most important, the introduction of border checks in southern Sweden.<sup>56</sup> Also in 2015, Denmark introduced border checks on incoming traffic from Germany. Norway introduced similar changes, and also implemented measures to stop potential asylum seekers at the borders of other Nordic countries and declared Russia a safe third country to which asylum seekers crossing the Norwegian-Russian border can be returned.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, FrP claimed that the new policies were the strictest in Europe.<sup>58</sup> Finland also

52 FrP, “Europas Strengeste Asylpolitikk,” updated November 19, 2015, [www.frp.no/aktuelt/2015/11/europas-strengeste-asylpolitikk](http://www.frp.no/aktuelt/2015/11/europas-strengeste-asylpolitikk).

53 DF, “Stramninger på udlændingepolitikken,” accessed October 2, 2017, <https://danskfolkeparti.dk/politik/stramninger-paa-udlaendingepolitikken/>.

54 Lars Bille, “Political Data Yearbook: Denmark,” *European Journal of Political Research* 41, no. 7–8 (2002): 941–46.

55 Widfeldt, *Extreme Right Parties in Scandinavia*, 136.

56 Kerstin Holm and Anna H. Svensson, “Regeringen: Ny Lagstiftning för Färre Asylsökande,” Sveriges Television, November 24, 2015, [www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/regeringen-utokade-id-kontroller-vid-gransen](http://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/regeringen-utokade-id-kontroller-vid-gransen).

57 Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen, “Refugee Policy as ‘Negative Nation Branding’: The Case of Denmark and the Nordics,” in *The Danish Foreign Policy Yearbook: Copenhagen*, eds. Kristian Fischer and Hans Mouritzen (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2017), 106.

58 FrP, “Europas Strengeste Asylpolitikk.”



introduced stricter rules on family reunification and access to welfare, while tightening the criteria for asylum for applicants from the key source countries: Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan.<sup>59</sup>

While it is easy for radical-right parties to claim they have had influence over policy decisions such as these, in practice it is possible that many of these changes may have happened anyway, as the result of the broader political climate or practical necessity. In Sweden, for example, the arrival of large numbers of asylum seekers caused considerable practical and logistical problems. These problems were highlighted by SD and other immigration opponents, but by no means only by them. Trains were overflowing, and it was not always possible to control where the many migrants went—there were fears that some would be snapped up by criminal gangs or other groups with exploitative aims. For the local councils of small towns asked to accommodate asylum seekers, the burden was extremely heavy. The government at the time, a minority coalition of the Social Democrats and the Green Party, was comprised of historically pro-immigration and anti-racist parties, and the policy changes were particularly hard to accept, especially for the Greens. Yet the government decided to follow through with the more restrictive measures out of necessity, and the Green Party complied in order to keep the coalition intact. In Denmark, while DF had for some time demanded border controls, the checks introduced in early 2016 by the newly returned center-right government were a response to the high number of incoming migrants and similar restrictions introduced elsewhere in the Schengen Zone, rather than direct demands from DF.

Moreover, it is not possible to determine any pattern between the presence of radical-right parties in Nordic governments and the more restrictive asylum policies introduced after the 2015–16 spike in applications. Norway and Finland had radical-right parties in government at this time. Denmark did not, but DF was in a potentially influential position. In Sweden, SD was not in government and no other party was willing to cooperate with it. Still, all four countries tightened their asylum policies. Denmark has continued this process with a series of decisions in 2016 and 2017.<sup>60</sup>

## **B. Indirect Influence on the Political Climate and Public Debate**

Radical-right parties can have influence in other ways than on concrete policymaking. It is not unreasonable to assume that the growth, or the prospect of potential growth, of radical-right parties may lead other, more mainstream parties to modify their positions, for instance, toward more restrictive asylum and migration policies.

In addition, radical-right parties actively seek to influence public discourse on immigration-related topics. Radical-right parties, and the radical right in general, often complain about the media, which they argue provides a biased perspective on migration and multiculturalism. They seek to change this media climate and, more broadly, public debate. The radical right also frequently criticizes “political correctness,” which they argue prevents an open and honest debate about immigration. This attempt to change the political and societal climate is sometimes referred to as “metapolitics,” the politics of political discourse. The ways in which the radical right pursues this battle vary but can involve regular political and parliamentary debates as well as the use of social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.<sup>61</sup>

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59 Matti Sarvimäki, “Labor Market Integration of Refugees in Finland” (VATT Research Report 185, VATT Institute for Economic Research, Helsinki, February 2017), 6.

60 The Danish government has published on its website a list of immigration restrictions introduced. They include, among other things, stricter criteria for acquiring Danish citizenship, the right to take asylum seekers into custody for identification purposes, tighter criteria accessing social benefits, faster and more efficient expulsion of rejected asylum applicants, and stricter criteria for permanent residence permits. See Government of Denmark, Ministry of Immigration and Integration, “Gennemførte Stramninger på udlændingsområdet,” updated June 6, 2018, <http://uim.dk/gennemførte-stramninger-pa-udlaendingeomradet>.

61 Tamir Bar-On, “Transnationalism and the French Nouvelle Droite,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 45, no. 3 (2011): 199–223.



The SD leader Jimmie Åkesson, for example, has said that he does not trust any media, which he sees as part of an “agenda-driven establishment.”<sup>62</sup> SD representatives in parliament have also proposed changes to what they see as bias in public-service media channels.<sup>63</sup> A growing number of websites and social media platforms—some without party affiliation, some with more or less open links to SD, and some with more extremist connections—are doing their utmost to challenge the dominance of the mainstream media and affect the debate about migration and national identity.<sup>64</sup>

Parties, policy developments, and events can also have influence outside their national borders, and radical-right parties in Nordic countries have pointed to their neighbors as positive or negative examples of particular policy approaches. Radical-right social media outlets in Sweden, for example, often highlight Denmark and at times Norway as positive examples of a more “open” migration debate. The impact of these platforms is difficult to assess, but there is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that they are widely read and used by many citizens to complement mainstream media reports about crime, for example.<sup>65</sup> More traditional media voices have also weighed in to draw comparisons between the Nordic countries. The Danish writer Mikael Jalving published a book in 2011 entitled *Absolut Sweden: A Journey through the Realm of Silence*, where he argued that an open and honest debate in Sweden about immigration and the dangers of Islam has been stifled by political, cultural, and media elites.<sup>66</sup>

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*Radical-right social media outlets in Sweden ... often highlight Denmark and at times Norway as positive examples of a more “open” migration debate.*

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There are observable differences in the climate of debates about immigration and minorities in different Nordic countries, and an argument could be made that this is due to the relative influence of the radical right. Public debate on immigration is quite different in, for example, Denmark than Sweden, and some have argued that DF is one reason behind this difference.<sup>67</sup>

A recent example illustrates this difference. In March 2017, Denmark implemented its 50th measure restricting migration and asylum. This was celebrated by the Minister for Migration Inger Støjberg with a cake decorated with a Danish flag and the number 50, and a picture of a smiling Støjberg behind the cake was widely circulated on Facebook.<sup>68</sup> Støjberg, however, is not from DF but represents the Liberal Party (Venstre), which has led the various governments that have cooperated with DF since 2001. Støjberg was criticized for the cake picture, including by colleagues from her own party,<sup>69</sup> but has kept her job in government. This case exemplifies the complexity of discerning the radical right’s

62 Marcus Morey-Halldin, “Jimmie Åkessons Uttalande om Medier Får Kritik,” Sveriges Radio, December 5, 2016, <http://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=478&artikel=6580341>.

63 See, for example, Aron Emilsson, Angelika Bengtsson, Sara-Lena Bjälkö, and Cassandra Sundin, “Mediefrågor Motion 2016/17:2210,” Sveriges Riksdag, October 5, 2016, [www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/motion/mediefragor\\_H4022210](http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/motion/mediefragor_H4022210).

64 These platforms, Swedish equivalents to U.S. and international sites such as Breitbart, include Samhällsnytt (Society News), which up until September 2017 was called Avpixlat, meaning “Unpixelated” (<https://samnytt.se/>); Nyheter Idag, meaning “News Today” (<https://nyheteridag.se/>); and Fria Tider, meaning “Free Times” ([www.friatider.se/](http://www.friatider.se/)).

65 One example is former Conservative Minister for Culture Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth (2006–14), who in a newspaper interview stated that she occasionally reads Avpixlat, because it is interesting to see how it reports on violent crime. See Dagens Nyheter, “Östermalm Skiftar Färg,” Dagens Nyheter, March 20, 2016, [www.dn.se/arkiv/nyheter/ostermalm-skiftar-farg/](http://www.dn.se/arkiv/nyheter/ostermalm-skiftar-farg/).

66 Mikael Jalving, *Absolut Sverige: En Rejse i Tavshedens Rige* (Copenhagen: Jyllandsposten Forlag, 2011).

67 Lena Sundström, *Världens Lyckligaste Folk* (Stockholm: Leopard Förlag, 2009).

68 David Attardo, “Raser Over Støjbergs Kage-billede: Nu Svarer Hun Igen,” *Ekstra Bladet*, March 14, 2017, <http://ekstrabladet.dk/nyheder/politik/dansktopolitik/raser-over-stoejbergs-kage-billede-nu-svarer-hun-igen/6573769>.

69 Amalie Lyhne, “Facebook-Forargelsen har Skadet Støjberg,” *Berlingske*, March 21, 2017, <http://lyhne.blogs.berlingske.dk/2017/03/21/facebook-forargelsen-har-skadet-stoejberg/>.



influence on the overall political climate. As previously noted, Denmark has a different debate climate than Sweden. It is unthinkable that a Swedish minister from a mainstream party would appear with a celebratory cake after making decisions to tighten asylum policy—even if such decisions may sometimes be deemed necessary, as was the case in late 2015. For example, as the former Green Party Deputy Prime Minister, Åsa Romson, announced the Swedish policy changes at a press conference in November 2015, her voice broke with emotion.<sup>70</sup>

The problem is that while it is possible to make broad observations regarding differences and changes in public debates between countries, it is almost impossible to isolate the effect of the radical right from other factors. For analysts, it is thus difficult to know whether the difference in the behavior of Støjberg and Romson is due to the effect of DF or other party, political, or personal dynamics. Mainstream parties may well argue that they are capable of making their own decisions without glancing at the radical right. The former may explain changes that tighten immigration policies as driven by “reality,” for example, pressures on the welfare system and limitations in the capacity of authorities to accommodate and process large numbers of asylum applicants. This is not to say that radical-right parties have no influence—just that it is difficult to isolate and measure this influence separately from other factors.

### C. Mainstream Party Strategies for Responding to the Radical Right

Among party leaders and political analysts, mainstream parties’ options for responding to the challenges posed by radical-right parties have been the subject of much discussion. Yet there is little agreement about which strategies are most efficient. Briefly, mainstream parties have three main options:

- **Co-optation.** Mainstream parties may try to (re)capture potential radical-right voters by co-opting policies put forward by their radical-right opponents. In Denmark, for example, it has been the parties of the governing coalition, not the radical right, that have adopted and put forward many of the core policies that have formed Denmark’s increasingly restrictive approach to immigration.<sup>71</sup>
- **Accommodation.** Mainstream parties can choose to accommodate radical-right parties in government, directly or via some kind of cooperation agreement. To the extent that such decisions are driven by an effort to reduce radical-right support, mainstream parties may believe that the radical right, with its populism and lack of political experience, is likely to fail to govern effectively, which would in turn undermine its support. An alternative justification for including the radical right in government is that it may “tame” it into more moderate policy positions. Accommodation could, of course, also be an indication that the political distance has narrowed between the mainstream parties and the radical right. For example, mainstream parties in Norway, Denmark, and Finland have recently shifted their approach to collaborate with radical-right parties either within government or through support agreements, and these parties have so far proven themselves capable government partners.
- **Isolation.** A third possible strategy is for mainstream parties to isolate a radical-right party, along the lines of the Belgian cordon sanitaire that saw a range of other parties agree to exclude Vlaams Belang from any governing coalition.<sup>72</sup> This is the approach that has been adopted so far in Sweden, where neither of the two main party blocs has been willing to

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70 Evelina Malteson, “Romson Hade Nära Till Tårar Under Pressträff,” *Expressen*, November 24, 2015, [www.expressen.se/nyheter/romson-hade-nara-till-tarar-under-presstraff/](http://www.expressen.se/nyheter/romson-hade-nara-till-tarar-under-presstraff/).

71 See Section III.C.

72 Jan Erk, “From Vlaams Blok to Vlaams Belang: The Belgian Far-Right Renames Itself,” *West European Politics* 38, no. 3 (2005): 493–502.



work with SD. In January 2017, the Conservative Party's leader announced that her party would be open for policy discussions with SD; government participation was still ruled out, but even so this was an unprecedented step for a mainstream party. This seemed to hurt the Conservatives in the polls and led to a leadership change.<sup>73</sup>

None of these approaches appear to have significantly affected levels of support for radical-right parties. When other parties co-opt parts of the radical-right agenda (or, as on occasion in Denmark, even embrace it), this does not stop radical-right parties from growing. A strategy of accommodation into government may have worked to some extent in Finland, where PS found it difficult to explain the welfare cuts necessitated by the ailing Finnish economy. In Norway, however, FrP emerged almost unharmed in the 2017 election, despite four difficult years in a minority government. In Denmark, DF grew for much of the 2001–11 period as a government support party.

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*There is little to suggest that the isolation, or the negative news stories about SD representatives, have limited SD's levels of support.*

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Rather, gaining government experience seems to normalize these parties within the political sphere and to provide them with opportunities to professionalize their platforms and operations, without forcing them to abandon their more radical positions and rhetoric on immigration. It should also be noted that international examples do not suggest that radical-right and anti-establishment parties cannot handle government responsibility. The scholars Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell show, based on a study of Italy and Switzerland, that radical-right, populist parties in these two countries have fared well in government.<sup>74</sup> The fact that the party still seems to harbor so many unruly individuals is one reason why it remains politically isolated, despite its high levels of popular support. There is little to suggest that the isolation, or the negative news stories about SD representatives, have limited SD's levels of support. Indeed, it has given the party the opportunity to portray itself as persecuted by the establishment, and as the only true opposition party.<sup>75</sup> And in the Nordic case, there are several good examples of this. In Norway, FrP leader Siv Jensen is widely regarded as a highly competent Minister of Finance, and there has been no suggestion that FrP has lacked the competence to serve in government. In Denmark, current DF leader Kristian Thulesen Dahl has earned widespread respect outside his party for his command of policy detail. And in Finland, the problems PS faced were not related to a lack of competence among its ministers—Timo Soini has handled the job as Foreign Minister with considerable integrity.

Isolation also does not appear to be effective. The SD, for example, has not been negatively affected by efforts to isolate the party. In fact, very little seems to have affected SD negatively since it started to grow, circa 2006–07. There have been several scandals in which SD representatives were exposed as

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73 Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, *Populists in Power* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

74 For example, a delegate at the SD national conference in 2017 said that Muslims are not fully human. See Mimmi Nilsson and David Baas, "Kan Vara Det Värsta Vi Hört," *Expressen*, November 26, 2017, [www.expressen.se/nyheter/sd-ledamot-muslimar-ar-inte-manniskor-fullt-ut/](http://www.expressen.se/nyheter/sd-ledamot-muslimar-ar-inte-manniskor-fullt-ut/). Other examples are noted in Widfeldt, *Extreme Right Parties in Scandinavia*, 207–10.

75 Johanna Eklundh and Mathias Gerdfeldter, "Anna Kinberg Batra Avgår Som Partiledare För Moderaterna," *SVT Nyheter*, August 25, 2017, [www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/anna-kinberg-batra-haller-presskonferens-efter-avgangskraven](http://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/anna-kinberg-batra-haller-presskonferens-efter-avgangskraven).



extremist or lacking in political judgement, for example, by their ill-judged comments on social media or at political meetings.<sup>76</sup>

Moreover, mainstream parties that were previously skeptical, even hostile, to the thought of a radical-right party in government have sometimes softened or even reversed their position. This may to some extent be driven by strategic considerations. When support for radical-right parties growing these parties have a stronger claim to inclusion in government. If they, when given the chance, prove themselves competent policymakers, the strategic incentives may grow stronger. For the Danish Liberals and Conservatives, a 2001–11 cooperation pact with DF provided a stable right-of-center majority, prompting them to overcome their earlier qualms about working with the radical-right party. Any attempts to keep the DF isolated would have come at a cost neither party was prepared to pay. The situation is similar in Norway, where the centrist parties that persisted in their opposition to FrP were punished by the voters, particularly in the 2009 elections.

Thus, although it is possible to identify mainstream party approaches that have negatively affected Nordic radical-right parties in individual cases, contrary examples are at least as frequent and it is difficult to draw general conclusions from them. Co-opting radical-right policies does not seem to have affected support for DF in Denmark, or SD in Sweden. Government participation can be said to have hurt PS, but has not harmed FrP to the same extent, although it is too early to make a final assessment of FrP's first period in government. DF was not harmed by its period of isolation in the 1990s and early 2000s, and support for SD has grown to levels on par with that of DF, despite still being isolated. PS, however, has suffered in the polls after becoming isolated by other parties after its 2017 split. Of course, exact causal links are difficult to establish, but much suggests that the behavior of other parties does not seem to have a consistent effect on the radical right across political systems.

## V. Conclusions

On the whole, radical-right parties have established themselves as significant political forces in the four Nordic countries discussed in this report. Their electoral fortunes have fluctuated, but where parties have disappeared, new and more durable ones have emerged to take their place. There is thus nothing to suggest that the radical right is a transient political phenomenon. If anything, the evidence suggests that radical-right parties are becoming more legitimate and influential. Today, these parties serve in coalition governments in Finland and Norway, while in Denmark and Sweden they are the second- and third-largest parties in parliament, respectively.

Radical-right parties have proven themselves to be adept political actors in many ways, allowing them to build substantial levels of support in all four countries. While the origins of most of these parties, with the exception of the Sweden Democrats, do not lie in anti-immigration movements, they have demonstrated flexibility in adjusting their platforms to effectively capitalize on salient public anxieties—including those about immigration. The marriage of a populist economic agenda that prioritizes welfare support for nationals in need with deep skepticism of immigration has proven to be a potent recipe for success, though the exact formula that parties adopt varies. This political competence, together with effective party discipline and pragmatic leadership, accounts for some of the success these parties have experienced in recent years.

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<sup>76</sup> At the same time, the SD leadership is keen to clean up the party image in order to break the isolation and increase its future chances of direct policy influence. Some of the more radical elements have been expelled. Others have been deselected as election candidates, in some cases responding by leaving the party on their own initiative. Some of the defectors have moved to a newly formed party, Alternative for Sweden. See Niklas Svensson, "SD Förbjuder Ledamöter Att Gå På Pressträffen," *Expressen*, March 15, 2018, [www.expressen.se/nyheter/sd-riksdagsledamot-lamnar-for-nya-partiet/](http://www.expressen.se/nyheter/sd-riksdagsledamot-lamnar-for-nya-partiet/).



The ascendancy of the radical right has influenced the Nordic countries in a number of ways. Radical-right parties have been driving forces behind shifts to more restrictive immigration policies in Denmark especially, though recently effects can also be seen in Norway. Radical-right parties have also had an apparent influence over the political and social climate, though measuring the extent of this influence is extremely difficult. The comparison between Denmark and Sweden is illustrative in this respect—the political climate is more open to immigration in Sweden than in Denmark, where DF has exercised extensive political power since 2001. On the other hand, the shift toward more restrictive immigration policies in Sweden could mean that the differences between it and Denmark may be less pronounced in the future.

The Nordic case does not, however, show which strategies by mainstream parties have affected the growth and influence of radical-right parties, and in what direction any such effect has taken place. Efforts to isolate parties have not been sustainable or effective over the long term. Other strategies such as accommodating parties in government or co-opting some of their proposals also have not led to a decline in support for the radical right. In Denmark and Norway there is even evidence that radical-right parties have become normalized within the political sphere. This seemed to be the case in Finland as well, though future developments are uncertain since the 2017 split of PS. In Denmark, DF has been treated, more or less, as a mainstream party since the 2001 election. Similarly in Norway, the centrist parties eventually accepted the inclusion of FrP in government after their attempts at isolation backfired with voters. In Sweden, SD remains isolated, with the exception of a partial opening to dialog from the Conservative Party in early 2017. In the longer term, however, gradual acceptance of SD by at least some other Swedish parties is possible—even probable.

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*Strategies such as accommodating parties in government or co-opting some of their proposals also have not led to a decline in support for the radical right.*

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While it is difficult to identify specific and concrete takeaways for mainstream parties, the following three observations are worth noting:

- 1. Co-opting radical-right policies will not necessarily draw voters away from radical-right parties.** The experiences of Denmark and Sweden suggest that mainstream parties cannot reclaim support from the radical right simply by adopting their policy proposals. In Denmark, almost every mainstream party has moved nearer the DF position on immigration and asylum. Yet support for DF continues to grow, reaching an all-time high in the most recent parliamentary election. Similarly, support for SD showed no signs of diminishing after the tightening of Swedish migration policy in 2015–16. This suggests that adopting more restrictive asylum and migration policies may not alone be enough to draw supporters from the radical right to more mainstream parties.
- 2. Radical-right parties have proven themselves capable of governing.** The experiences of PS in Finland, DF in Denmark, and FrP in Norway have demonstrated that radical-right parties are able to take political responsibility. It cannot be assumed, then, that once these parties are tested in government, support for them will drop. Rather, serving in or cooperating with government appears to normalize, and in some cases somewhat deradicalize, radical-right parties, while allowing them to have an observable effect on policies and the general climate surrounding immigration debates. While such effects are difficult to identify with any exactness, a comparison between Denmark and Sweden suggests that a persistently pursued radical-right agenda can affect the general political climate. Keeping radical-right parties out of government would thus seem to be a necessary,



though perhaps not a sufficient, condition for parties that aim to limit their influence on immigration policies and debates.

- 3. *Attempts to limit the influence of the radical right will carry political risks.*** Voters may not, at least in the short term, reward parties that stand against the radical right. Parties attempting to limit the radical right should recognize that electoral setbacks are a very real possibility, and that persistence will be needed if they are to affect long-term change. This will of course be difficult to accomplish in practice—the Norwegian centrist parties that gave up their opposition to FrP did so because they faced serious electoral consequences from their resistance.

Societies and political systems in the Nordic countries are undergoing a process of rapid transition. Radical-right parties are now firmly established in all four countries discussed in this report, and will almost certainly remain so in the foreseeable future. In some cases, notably Denmark, they have come to be viewed as a “normal” party—one with which other parties compete, but largely on the same terms as they compete with each other. The main point of contrast is Sweden, where SD remains isolated, though this could well change in the next few years as support for SD continues to grow. In the longer term, then, the distinction between “mainstream” and “radical right” may disappear. At the same time, immigration flows are unlikely to cease, and the development of the Nordic countries into increasingly multicultural societies is more or less irreversible. Thus, issues related to migration, asylum, and integration will remain on the political agenda. The parties referred to as “radical right” will continue to play a significant part in shaping that agenda.

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*Radical-right parties are now firmly established in all four countries ... and will almost certainly remain so in the foreseeable future.*

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## About the Author



**Anders Widfeldt** is a lecturer in politics at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. His main research interests are political parties, populism, and right-wing extremism/radicalism.

Among his recent publications on these topics are *Extreme Right Parties in Scandinavia* (Routledge, 2015); “What Kind of Party is UKIP? The Future of the Extreme Right in Britain or Just Another Tory Party?” (co-authored with Heinz Brandenburg, *Political Studies*, 2017); “Tensions Beneath the Surface: the Swedish Mainstream Parties and the Immigration Issue” (*Acta Politica*, 2015); and “The Radical Right in the Nordic Countries”, in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, ed. Jens Rydgen (Oxford University Press, 2018).

Dr. Widfeldt obtained his doctoral degree from the University of Gothenburg in Sweden.



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1400 16<sup>th</sup> Street NW  
Suite 300  
Washington, DC 20036

Tel: 001 202-266-1940  
Fax: 001 202-266-1900

