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From Governmental Success to Governmental Breakdown: How a New Dimension of Conflict tore apart the Politics of Migration of the Swedish Centre-Right

ABSTRACT

The 2018 election made it clear the Swedish politics of migration no longer was an outlier in comparative European perspective. In this contribution, we analyse some of the reasons behind this development, which trace back a decade earlier We focus on the troubled relationship the centre-right has had with the issue of immigration and draw attention to two critical junctures in order to explain it. First, the entry of a populist radical party to the national legislature in 2010 meant immigration and integration were reframed as multi-dimensional issues, and, second, the collapse of the centre-right Alliance for Sweden in 2014 led parties with different ideologies to scramble for common ground to be able to co-operate. The move from uni- to multi-dimensional competition, along with the absence of a formal coalition, allowed dormant ideological tensions to emerge and enabled parts of the centre-right to discuss immigration and integration in distinctly socio-cultural terms. The signature solutions of the populist radical right were thereby fast-tracked into the mainstream, and the Swedish party system is likely to experience increased (ideological) turmoil in the future.
Introduction

The Swedish politics of migration was typically characterised as a deviant case in Western Europe (see e.g. Dahlström and Esaiasson, 2011). While most states pursued a restrictive line on immigration and asylum, and adopted assimilationist positions on integration, the Swedish approach was remarkably different for a long period of time. It went for a generous interpretation of the 1951 Geneva Convention and continuously emphasised the importance of family reunification and diversity in the public sphere (Krzyzanowski, 2018; Borevi, 2017). At the same time, public opinion was less hostile compared to many other European countries (Andersson et al, 2018). And any significant support for the populist radical right (PRR) was contained at the local and regional levels (Loxbo and Bolin, 2016). Sweden was thus classified as a vanguard nation with its liberal entry regime and multicultural understanding of inclusion, and where any significant opposition to immigration was low (Vogt Isaksen, 2020; Westin and Dingu-Kyrklund, 2003). However, between 2010 and 2019 the Swedish ‘exception’ turned into a typical European case (see further Abbas, 2021).

In this contribution, we explore some of the reasons for the Swedish party politics of migration eventually falling in line with developments found elsewhere in Europe. We focus in particular on the centre-right and its relationship with the issue of immigration as it developed into an ‘issue’ during the above time-period. A couple of critical junctures are important to understand this trajectory. On the one hand, a PRR party - Sverigedemokraterna (SD) – entered the national legislature in 2010. And, on the other, the centre-right coalition Alliance for Sweden collapsed after the 2014 election, which eventually led to the so-called January Agreement in early 2019 (an ‘ unholy’ compromise between the centre-left, social-democrats (Socialdemokraterna, S), the social-liberal Liberalerna (L), the reformed-agrarian
party, Centerpartiet (C), and the Green party, Miljöpartiet de gröna (Mp)). The former juncture caused a departure from the cross-party consensus, which characterised previous parliamentary discussions and policy formulation on immigration and integration. The result was a more confrontational style of engaging with questions of immigration and integration. The latter, conversely, meant dormant ideological tensions, within as well as between parties, were played out in the open, (Odmalm, 2014).

To shed light on our research question - why has the Swedish politics of migration become a typical case in Western Europe - we draw attention to two institutional factors, which, as Hadji-Abdou, Bale and Geddes (YEAR) point out in the introduction to this special issue, high-light “the pivotal role played by party politics and wider systemic factors in giving political meaning to immigration”. First, with SD in parliament, immigration and integration were (re)framed according to a new dimension of conflict, namely, the GAL/TAN one (Green/Alternative/Libertarian – Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist). This meant the centre-right had to address them in relation to a (new) cleavage, which lay outside its usual comfort zone. This shift also crystallised a set of ideological strains between different factions within the respective parties. Second, competition in multi-party and proportional electoral systems is associated with a greater number of challenges than two-party majoritarian ones (Adams and Merrill, 1999; de Sio et al, 2018). To gather enough support, parties must balance several potentially conflicting aims. They need to be internally cohesive and maximise their share of the vote, but also engage and co-operate with other parties. As long as the Alliance for Sweden was kept together, the centre-right shared the same objective and could therefore circumvent these tensions. Once the coalition broke down, however, parties became increasingly mercenary and opportunistic. In the short term, these developments led to SD and its signature policies getting fast-tracked into the mainstream (see Widfeldt 2017; Rydgren and van der Meiden, 2019). But in the long-term, they are likely to generate increased amounts of
ideological and political uncertainties. The centre-right (as well as the centre-left) will consequently have to adjust to an uncharacteristically volatile and multi-dimensional party system in the future.

The emergence of SD, was, and remains, a critical change of the Swedish party system (Oskarson and Demker 2015, Hooghe and Marks 2018). In the past, new parties aligned with the material left-right orientation which had been the basis of Swedish politics since at least the Second World War. In the late 1980s, Mp aspired to change the party system and introduce post-material values. However, only a few years later, the party settled on a (slightly) left-of-centre position on economic issues but had to abandon its hopes for a different kind of political debate. The party organisation of Mp still differs from that of the others, for example, members have an unusually strong voice and the aspiration to try new ways of communicating with citizens lingers. Today, however, Mp is a junior coalition partner in the centre-left government which is led and controlled by S (see further Bennulf 1995, Bolin 2012).

From previous research, we know that one of the most important tasks for a political party is to realise its policies through gaining power and influence (Schattschneider 1942, Harmel and Janda 1994, Hacker and Pierson 2014). In a multi-party system with proportional representation, this task is more demanding compared to a two-party and majoritarian one. To meet its objectives, a party must prioritise internal party cohesion, optimise voter support and the ability to act strategically in relation to other parties. In his seminal work *Party Strategies in a Multiparty System*, Sjöblom (1968) thus identified three arenas which were important to parties - the electoral, the internal, and the parliamentary. In these various arenas, a party must act strategically to achieve its overall objective, namely, the implementation of its policies. The electoral arena requires capacity to gain support for the party’s ideological preferences, whereas the internal arena demands both discipline and internal democracy. And, finally, the
parliamentary arena requires the ability to form alliances and to strike compromises with other parties (Lewin 1985, Maor 1998, Bergman and Ström 2011).

But parties also have to find a middle way between its ideological philosophy, upon which proposals are typically based, and the strategic actions required to be a credible coalition partner and gain support for its proposals. It is not unusual therefore that parties change their political positions, but is less common for them to fundamentally change their ideological principles. Changes to ideology require repeated voter losses and, normally, a change of party leader as well. (Demker 1997, Adams et al 2004). To understand why the Swedish politics of migration went from a deviant to a typical case we need to study which motives and incentives parties had to act strategically in these three arenas in relation to their ideological baggage (Hadenius 1983). In so doing, we are also able to discuss the profound effect the dimension conflict has had on the Swedish party system. The article is structured as follows. We first discuss the impact of SD on the Swedish party system following its breakthrough election in 2010. The party managed to mobilise popular support around the anti-immigration stance, which up until then had been a non-position in Swedish party politics. We then connect these changes to the 2015 ‘migration crisis’ and how the latter served as a catalyst for the subsequent process of mainstreaming that SD and its policies went through.

The final analytical section explores the implosion of the (previously successful) Alliance for Sweden in 2014, the new coalition that emerged after the 2018 election, and the novel types of challenges these developments will pose for the centre-right politics of migration. In the conclusion, we address the balancing act the liberal-conservative (Moderaterna, M) and Christian democratic parties (Kristdemokraterna, KD), in particular, have to perform as they navigate a new political environment characterised by diminishing support for mainstream parties and an increased level of ideological tension between the former centre-right partners.
Immigration as a Divisive Issue in the Electoral Arena: Increased Polarization of Public Attitudes

After the 2010 election, the centre-right coalition lost its parliamentary majority but managed to form a minority government with the assistance of so-called ‘jumping majorities’, meaning the government was supported by different parties on different issues. In 2011, therefore, the centre-right coalition brokered an agreement with the Green Party for a revised immigration policy. The outcome resulted in increased opportunities for family reunion and better conditions for the sans-papiers. And it was an agreement and a policy on which all four parties in government agreed. However, after SD gained enough seats at the national level, the cross-party consensus on immigration and integration was challenged (Oskarson and Demker, 2015; Hooghe and Marks, 2018; Bolin, 2016). While the party is a centrist one regarding levels of state involvement in the economy, it stands out with its restrictive and assimilationist agenda on immigration control and ethnic relations (Elgenius and Rydgren, 2019). Considering that the Alliance for Sweden managed to govern for four years and not fall out over the immigration issue (despite confirmed differences in their respective party profiles), the presence of SD was a particular threat to the coalition dynamics (Aylott and Bolin, 2019). At the same time, however, there was a disconnect between an anti-immigration party represented in parliament and the level of public opposition to asylum-seekers and refugees.

For one thing, public opinion had not been strongly partisan since the Swedish stance was defined through agreements between the two largest parties, namely, M and S (Hinnfors et al, 2012). In the 2000s, however, asylum and immigration became issues which increasingly differentiated parties from one another (Odmalm, 2011). As early as 2002 refugee reception, in particular, developed into a controversial issue. L, for example, called for language tests as
part of the naturalisation process, while M wanted to restrict the scope for asylum (Dahlström and Esiasson, 2013). Any earlier opposition had primarily meant a stream of defections from M to SD but coalesced in the latter party around the election of 2006. And after SD entered parliament in 2010, immigration and integration became much more uncertain policy areas than most of the mainstream parties realised (Widfeldt, 2017). Although the electorate is, and was, comparatively less negative towards immigration and refugees the issue has nevertheless become more and more partisan over the last ten years.

The debut of SD also meant the (re)introduction of the GAL/TAN-divide (Hooghe et al, 2002). Earlier attempts to politicise this cleavage (by KD and Mp) were largely unsuccessful due to prevailing coalition dynamics and the low salience level of post-material issues. The parties eventually settled on a right- and left-of-centre position respectively on economic issues, albeit with an underpinning of Christian and green ideological values. SD was not subject to the same type of institutional pressures and showed little interest therefore in the ‘old’ left-right structure. By 2010, its voters typically were on the TAN-side of spectrum but held a variety of views on issues of redistribution and managing the economy (Oscarsson and Holmberg, 2016). However, a unifying factor was the scepticism-to-outright-hostility towards the status quo of immigration and integration. The presence of SD thus meant the political conversation was beginning to change. The party continuously emphasised the negative impact of non-Western migration – especially of the Muslim variety – on core “Swedish” values such as gender equality, emancipation and solidarity. This changing frame meant immigration and integration were problematized along two fronts. On the one hand, according to labour market and welfare state chauvinism, and on the other, its impact on national identity and ways of life. As such it was a clear break from the dominant frame which had been in place since the early 1970s, that is, a regulated form of labour migration coupled with liberal approaches to asylum and family unification migration. This change in frame and level of politicization was further
reflected in the public opinion data. More specifically, they came to exacerbate the degree of polarisation on immigration and integration. Figure 1 illustrates these developments from 2006 when the centre-right government took office.

Figure 1. Polarisation on Migration and Integration, 1990–2019 (eta)$^\dagger$

Remarks: The possible answers were that the proposal was ‘very good’, ‘fairly good’, ‘neither good nor bad’, ‘fairly bad’, or ‘very bad.’ The reported percentage is the respondents who said the proposal was very good or fairly good. The question ‘Which party do you like best at the present time?’ was asked to measure party sympathy. Only respondents who answered the entire question are included in the percentage base. The eta-value varies between 0 and 1. The higher the value the more party polarised the voters are. The total number of respondents varied between approximately 1 500 and 6 000.

Following the 2014 election, there was a change in government and S and Mp took office under the leadership of Stefan Löfven. S was only able to form a minority government and therefore initiated cross-party budget talks with the reformed left party (Vänsterpartiet – V). Due to the credible threat that SD presented after almost doubling in size between 2010 and 2014, the new government could not be certain its policies would get approved by parliament. Especially challenging were the proposed immigration and asylum policies since SD had made it clear these were the only questions that mattered to the party (Green-Pedersen and Otjes, 2019). And this sentiment was also echoed by its supporters. Figure 2 shows that SD sympathisers have not modified their views on asylum and refugee reception in the ten years the party has been a key player in the Swedish party system. To contrast, voters for the mainstream parties were remarkably mobile (see further Vrânceanu and Lachat, 2018; Sanhueza Petrarca and Demker, 2019). In 2008, KD, V and Mp had the least restrictive sympathisers, but by 2019, KD sympathisers, together with M sympathizers, were the second-most restrictive. Only SD had more supporters who considered it a good idea to accept fewer refugees. An attitudinal change also took place among C sympathizers. In 1998, they were the second-most restrictive group with 50 percent wanting fewer refugees, but by 2019 their profile was remarkably different. Together with V and Mp, C sympathisers were now the least restrictive group. Figure 2 further shows how supporters of KD, M and, to some extent, S have moved in the restrictive direction once SD became a relevant party. Conversely, supporters of V, Mp, and C shifted in the opposite direction.
Figure 2. Attitudes on Refugee Reception by Party Sympathy. Percentage who said Accepting Fewer Refugees was a Good Proposal (1998–2019).

Source: Remarks: The proposal that the respondents were asked to take a stance on read, ‘Accept fewer refugees in Sweden’. The alternatives were that the proposal was ‘very good’, ‘fairly good’, ‘neither good nor bad’, ‘fairly bad’, or ‘very bad’. The question ‘Which party do you like best at the present time?’ was asked to measure party sympathy. The reported figure is the percentage who answered very or fairly good. Only respondents who answered both entire questions are included in the percentage basis.


The ‘migration crisis’ in 2015 put significant pressures on European borders and on the Swedish Left-Green government. Sweden initially opted for a generous approach, but given the (un)expected levels of asylum-seekers, a decision was taken in late 2015 to restrict entry, a move which included the reintroduction of border controls and a stop to issuing permanent residence permits. The aim of these restrictions was to align national policy with that of the EU and to establish that only applicants who met the minimum requirements established by
international conventions would be admitted. Although the Swedish government was not the only one to modify its refugee and immigration stance in 2015, its Nordic neighbours already had implemented a restrictive set of regulations. The long-term attitudes of the Swedish population had begun to change but did not turn restrictive until after the 2015 spike and following decisions by the left-green coalition to close the Swedish borders. Thereafter, public opinion became considerably more averse to accepting refugees, with opposition rising from the lowest ever 40 percent (2015) to 52 percent (2016). The shift in public opinion thus corresponded with those elite cues coming from the political mainstream (Demker, 2019).
Figure 3. Public Perception of the Magnitude of Swedish Refugee Reception.

Percentage who believe accepting fewer refugees is a good or bad proposal (1990–2019)

Remarks: The proposal that the respondents were asked to take a stance on read, ‘Accept fewer refugees in Sweden’. The alternatives were that the proposal was ‘very good’, ‘fairly good’, ‘neither good nor bad’, ‘fairly bad’, or ‘very bad’. The reported figure is the percentage who answered very or fairly good. Only respondents who answered the entire question are included in the percentage basis. The total number of respondents has fluctuated between 1,512 and 6,410.


However, public attitudes on immigration and asylum were until overall less negative compared to other European countries. For example, the Eurobarometer 469 (April 2018) showed that Sweden had the largest percentage of the population who felt comfortable having
various types of social relationships with immigrants and considered immigration as an opportunity. That said, by party supported, the differences were greater. M sympathisers were most restrictive already in the 1990s, and the party mirrored this in its’ approach to refugee reception in particular (see further Strömbäck and Theorin, 2018). Over the past ten years, then, the question of whether to accept refugees has become politicised and increasingly partisan in ways previously only seen elsewhere in Europe. The entry of SD created a new field of gravity, which drew supporters from KD and M, but also from S, towards the restrictive pole. Yet at the same time, C, V and Mp supporters had moved further away from the restrictive position. From 2010, these shifts have meant that four levels of restrictiveness emerged amongst party supporters - 1) the monolithically restrictive SD; 2) the majority restrictive KD and M; 3) the majority liberal Left and Mp, and 4) the somewhere in the middle S, L and C supporters. And this was the context in which Swedish parties had to contest the issue of immigration during the 2018 election campaign.

**Immigration as a Divisive Issue in the Internal Party Arena: the Implosion of the Alliance for Sweden**

The *Alliance for Sweden* held office from 2006 to 2014, and the four centre-right party leaders had launched a joint declaration prior to the 2006 election. This was the first time the centre-right parties, ahead of an election, had designed a detailed joint programme for the reforms they were aiming to implement (Aylott and Bolin, 2007). The situation was thus unique in Swedish party politics, but also a manifestation of the left-right bloc competition that had been established for several years. After the 2014 defeat, Anna Kinberg Batra replaced Reinfeldt as party leader of M. Not long afterwards, criticisms of Reinfeldt’s shift to the centre ground in
order to create the *Alliance for Sweden* began to be heard. In order to bring about a united force, Reinfeldt had opted to tone down M’s right-wing image, especially on many traditional left-right issues. In areas such as employment protection, taxes, and redistribution policy, M went for a more centrist approach than before, which made Reinfeldt’s leadership of a centre-right coalition acceptable to liberal forces as well (Ekengren and Oscarsson, 2015). Moreover, Reinfeldt chose to launch an asylum and immigration policy that was less restrictive than that of his predecessors. However, Kinberg Batra decided to break with this ‘new’ approach in January 2017 and also opened up for cooperating with SD on bespoke issues both parties agreed on. This was the first time any of the mainstream parties evinced such an interest vis-à-vis SD. Kinberg Batra also came in for severe criticism by the other *Alliance for Sweden* party leaders, as well as from the parties on the left. The decision from Kinberg Batra achieved opposition both from the former alliance partners and from factions in her own party. In August 2017, Kinberg Batra consequently announced her resignation, and Ulf Kristersson succeeded her a few months later.

The inter-party cohesion in the *Alliance for Sweden* was maintained after the 2014 election, primarily through the so-called December Agreement, by which the four centre-right parties pledged to allow the policies of the centre-left coalition government to proceed since the government’s base in parliament was larger than that of the Alliance parties. (Bjereld, Hinnfors, Eriksson 2016) The agreement was also a path to avoid a snap election and a way for the political mainstream to block SD from exerting any influence. This can most closely be likened to a *cordon sanitaire* trying to avoid increased support for SD, which had already increased from 5.7 percent (2010) to 12.9 percent (2014). The aim was for the agreement to hold up until 2022. However, there were elected party representatives, MPs, and a former government minister within M who publicly criticised the agreement right from the start. KD elected a new party leader in April 2015, and some members of the new governing board also
were highly critical of the December Agreement. The criticism was voiced publicly both before and after the election of the party leader. At the annual party congress (the so-called Riksting) in October 2015, there was a motion by local party organisations to withdraw support of the December Agreement (see further Kölln and Polk, 2019). Even though the governing board supported the agreement, and therefore encouraged the Riksting to vote no, the motion was passed and KD withdrew from the December Agreement. Shortly thereafter, Kinberg Batra also announced that M did not consider the December Agreement valid anymore. This meant two parties – whose internal opposition had gone public and thus openly argued against the decisions of their own party leadership – had exited the agreement.

Internally, there were thus strong incentives in both KD and M to question the value of the four-party alliance. Support for C had been slowly growing but consisted mainly of discontented M voters who were unhappy with the party’s new profile. Support for L, on the other hand, was declining but was not yet facing the threat of failing to meet the 4 percent threshold. In the end of 2015, the coalition that governed from 2006 until 2014 had more or less broken down. The fundamental reasons for this collapse related to differing views on how (not) to engage with SD and whether or not implementing centre-right polices should be prevented by a reluctance to cooperate with a xenophobic and nationalist conservative party in parliament. For both KD and M their low public opinion figures led to a series of intra-party arguments and left the party leadership vulnerable to criticism. The party leaders of C and L, on the other hand, had repeatedly declared that they could not, under any circumstances, accept support from SD in order to gain governing power or push through their budget (Lindvall et al., 2017; Teorell, Bäck et al., 2020). By same token, there was no strong desire to deviate from this stance amongst the C and L supporters. As we saw above (Figure 2), sympathisers of the former alliance partners were in 2015 as close to each other in their views on asylum and refugee policy as they have been during their period in government. And in 2015, public
opinion on refugee reception was less restrictive than ever before (Figure 3). And these attitudes were of course also echoed amongst the sympathizers across the political mainstream.

**Immigration as a Divisive Issue in the Parliamentary Arena: New Blocs and New Alliances**

The Swedish party system is famously characterised as ‘frozen’ (Lipset and Rokkan, 1969). It therefore represented the fundamental cleavages that characterised the nation since the breakthrough of democracy. The ‘five-party model’ (Arter, 2006) prevailed across the Nordic countries, according to which social democracy and the reformed left each represented their respective branches of the labour movement. Their main political opponents have been the conservatives in conjunction with the agrarian and liberal parties. These five party families, in various organisational forms, characterised Swedish and Scandinavian politics for a long time. When Mp and KD entered parliament (in 1988 and 1991, respectively) they challenged the traditional model, partly because they represented a new dimension of conflict and partly because they did not, at least initially, accept the old left-right cleavage as the crucial ideological orientation in Swedish politics (Oscarsson, 1998). That said, both parties relatively quickly slotted in on either side of the centre, and both became coalition partners to the dominant parties on the left or the right. The new political dimension thus became integrated or transformed into the dominant left-right cleavage. Although Swedish politics was steered by two (semi-formalized) blocs in the 1980s and 90s, it became institutionalised only after the *Alliance for Sweden* was formed. As far back as the 1950s, C acted as a coalition partner to S and had also been a supporting party to the S-led minority government in the 1990s (when the government made several major agreements with C in order to a legislative).
After 2004, Swedish politics was formally divided into two blocs as C joined the *Alliance for Sweden*. The government had its own majority between 2006 and 2010 and therefore able to implement its entire reform programme. However, after the 2010 election, the centre-right bloc did not have an overall majority in parliament even though it was bigger than the centre-left one. SD consequently held the power to tip the scale. If the government gained the support of the party, it would have a majority, but if SD instead supported the centre-left, it would be impossible to pursue its own policy. The party leadership of SD repeatedly stated that immigration and integration were the party’s key priorities, and to gain influence over those matters was SD’s ultimate ambition. With a view to impeding such a development, the governing coalition came to an agreement with Mp in 2011. The agreement provided rights for undocumented migrants to education and health care. Moreover, the agreement made family unification easier, especially for children. However, asylum applicants who were rejected would (strongly) be persuaded to leave the country by increasing the level of ‘internal controls of aliens’. The agreement gave the government a majority to pass its bills on immigration-related questions. Nevertheless, the 2010–2014 term turned out to be a difficult one since the government had to ensure the opposition was not prepared to defy it on key issues, which thereby would give SD the opportunity it needed to exercise influence. As a consequence, the second term in office became considerably less productive than the first one with regard to policy implementation. Nevertheless, L and C were relatively small parties who managed to achieve considerable success in realising their policies by means of joining the coalition government during both terms. At the same time, however, SD had politicised the issue of immigration along the GAL/TAN-dimension, which previously was a second-order-to-non-existent cleavage in Swedish politics. The increased salience of this dimension furthermore posed a challenge to the conditions under which the former *Alliance for Sweden* could generate a majority government. A coalition between the mainstream centre-right parties used to be the
only available option for non-socialist voters. But the (re)introduction of a new cleavage also created new opportunities for the smaller - and more liberal - parties to implement their policies without having to adhere to socially-conservative goals or give an ideologically distant and xenophobic party any influence. And this new condition became decisive when the former governing centre-right coalition ended up as the opposition following the 2014 election.

**Concluding discussion**

What can explain the Swedish politics of migration eventually falling in line with those developments found elsewhere in Europe? The key to understand this puzzle is to view parties as actors whose fundamental premise is to realise their policies. But this aspiration is also constrained and facilitated by the institutional context in which they compete. Each party must take into account several strategic considerations, including, its’ relative strength in parliament; its capacity to collaborate and compromise; the likelihood of achieving a governing position; the demands of its party organisation, and its capacity to formulate policies which appeal to voters and supporters. By systematically going through the strategic presumptions parties make in three key arenas – the electoral, the internal, and the parliamentary – we now reach the concluding section.

The cause of the breakdown between the centre-right parties was indeed ideological tension, but it was not laid bare until SD became a relevant party (Sartori, 1976) with which to cooperate (or not) in parliament. The party definitively brought a new dynamic into the fields of immigration and integration policies. Whilst the two areas had not previously been politicised, they managed to become wedge issues between the four centre-right parties following the entry of SD in 2010. In the past, the centre-right (as well as the centre-left) were
able to agree on a framework that, overall, also was supported by the electorate as well as by the various factions within each party. There was thus nothing to gain from strong disagreements on these issues. However, those circumstances would change profoundly once SD was in parliament. As we showed in our study, the ‘migration crisis’ in 2015-2016 primarily served as an arena for the unfolding of the ideological variances that were brought up to the surface already in the former centre-right coalition due to SD’s entry in parliament. At the same time, the draconic governmental decisions in November-December 2015 slowly altered public opinion in a more restrictive direction, which consequently made modifications of policy positions more profitable for some parties. These positions were already present in the parties but had not yet manifested itself.

The short-term effect on the Swedish party system was the remarkably swift mainstreaming of SD and its’ signature policies. KD and M, but also S to some extent, have sharpened their rhetoric on immigration control and refugee reception. And their election manifestos of 2018 did not shy away from discussing integration in distinctly socio-cultural terms and highlighting some of the benefits of assimilation. At the same time, the increased multi-dimensionality of party conflict also meant new opportunities for alliances and cooperation to emerge between parties that used to be aligned along a different cleavage. The subsequent antagonisms that developed within KD and M, and the setbacks these tensions caused the voter arena, made their respective party leaderships more inclined to realise their policies in configurations that included parties other than those of the established four-party coalition. The subsequent decision by C and L to become supporting parties to a centre-left government after the 2018 election should therefore be understood as the best available avenue to realise their own policies. This was especially the case since both parties felt ideologically prevented from making use of or cooperating with SD in any way, shape, or form. They also
did not experience any significant internal uprising at the internal arena following the decision to co-operate with the centre-left.

The question of how to successfully realise party policy was already present following the 2014 election. Against the backdrop of the ideological price M was forced to pay in order to lead the coalition government, the party had begun to waver in its relationship with SD under its new leader. In the internal party arena, several strong voices wanted a change of direction and were calling for the party to move closer to SD. The latter was a relatively large party with some similar policy goals that M, in an earlier incarnation, would have shared, such as a more restrictive immigration policy and a sharper focus on law and order. However, the party leadership had avoided that particular route to power.

Under its new party leader – Ebba Busch (former Busch-Thor) – KD became more obviously oriented towards the GAL/TAN-right than it had been when the party was in office. KD also saw an opportunity, in spite of its weak position in the electoral arena, to gain majority support for its bills in the area of migration, health care, and family policy. The coalition government was not as ideologically precarious for C and L, and the parties’ liberal ideas had been strengthened and further defined while they were in government. This development made it uninteresting (and irrelevant) to collaborate with SD. When C and L decided to support the left-green government, it was more or less an established fact that the former alliance partners had not been able to agree on what the relationship with SD should be. It was KD and M, however, who had the strongest incentives to break up the former alliance. But they chose not to break it themselves but by not granting C and L satisfactory terms for a joint coalition centre-right government.

These incentives were the following (ranked from most to least important) -
1. A new (and growing) party would make it possible for M and KD to realise their policy priorities without holding back vital ideological elements (as had been the case in the former alliance);

2. Opinion support had been falling for M as well as for KD;

3. There was a not-negligible internal opposition to the non-collaboration pact directed towards SD (mostly in support of 1.)

The long-term consequences for the Swedish party system could turn out to be profound, but there are also signs of the GAL/TAN-dimension slowly developing in the direction of the traditional left-right divide in Swedish politics. There is thus an empirical relationship between party positions on the material left-right and GAL-TAN dimensions of conflict, with the left-GAL and the right-TAN quadrants tightening up (Svensson, 2019). If this is the case, then the party system may not completely have moved away from the traditional two-bloc model. One possible scenario is the resurrection of a one-dimensional party system, in which a left and a right flank constitute the opposition to a centrist government that will be pulled to the left or to the right depending on the election outcome and the internal strengths and parliamentary powers of each party. Future research on how mainstream parties respond to the challenges from the PRR in various forms should therefore look into these strategic incentives rather than the traditional areas of electoral support. Parties act to implement their policies, and, of course, their relative strengths in the electoral arena (or in opinion support) are important, but those kinds of motivations must be seen through the lenses of party strategy, taking into consideration the internal as well as the electoral and parliamentary arenas (Odmalm, 2011). The collapse of the previously tight knit centre-right alliance began well before the migration crisis in 2015,
and well before public opinion turned more restrictive, and it is therefore best explained by the internal party dynamics.

Tackling such contentious issues as migration, refugees, and the introduction of religion, culture, and lifestyle within the party system has been a challenge for the centre-right. In particular, Western Europe as a whole is facing greater electoral instability, and party systems are said to be in flux (Chiaramonte and Emanuele, 2017). This development is a consequence of a new family entering the realm of party competition, but it also provides new opportunities for these parties to gain power. However, none of the newer nationalist conservative parties in Europe, except in Hungary and Poland, have been able to exercise power without alliances or coalitions with the traditionally defined centre-right. The issue of immigration has therefore helped to increase the salience of the GAL/TAN-dimension in European politics. However, it remains to be seen whether or not this dimension also will be influential for policy development in the medium to long term, and whether this new dimension will transform itself into a social cleavage in its own capacity. (Bartolini and Mair, 2007; Lipset and Rokkan 1969).

1 Special thanks to prof Henrik Ekengren Oscarsson for sharing data and calculations.
2 For an overview up until today, see https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/sweden-turns-welcoming-and-restrictive-its-immigration-policy
3 For an example, see an article by parliamentary leader Mattias Karlsson in the newspaper Dagens Industri, 15 May 2018.
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