Radical right-wing voters from right and left: Comparing Sweden Democrat voters who previously voted for the Conservative Party or the Social Democratic Party

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As in many other European countries, the political system has undergone rapid changes in Sweden while a radical right-wing party – The Sweden Democrats (SD) – has grown from a negligible position into one of the country's largest parties. SD has been winning voters from both the right and the left sides of the political spectrum, and particularly from Sweden's two largest parties, the Conservative Party (*Moderaterna*, M) and the Social Democratic Party (S). The present study investigated the extent to which SD voters who previously voted for one of these two parties differ from each other, and compared these SD voters with current Conservative Party and Social Democratic voters. The results showed that 1) economic deprivation offers a better explanation for the past mobility from S, than from M, to the SD; 2) no group differences were found between previous M and S voters in attitudes connected to the appeal of an anti-establishment party; and 3) views on the profile issues espoused by the radical right, most importantly opposition to immigration, did not differ between SD voters who come from M and S. However, SD voters – particularly SD voters who had formerly voted for the Social Democratic party – differed from the voters of their previous parties in several aspects. It is thus possible that many SD voters will not return to the parties they previously voted for, at least as long as the immigration issue continues to be of high salience in the society.

Since the 1980s, new radical right-wing parties have emerged and become established in several stable democracies in Europe. In Sweden, the Sweden Democrats (SD) has rapidly grown from a negligible position into the country's third largest party. SD was founded in 1988 but did not enter the national parliament until the 2010 election, in which it gained 5.7 per cent of the votes. In the elections of 2014 and 2018, the party gained 12.9 per cent

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and 17.5 per cent of the votes, respectively. SD has been winning voters from both the right and the left sides of the political spectrum, and particularly from Sweden's two largest parties, the Social Democratic Party (S) and the Conservative Party (*Moderaterna*, M) (Oscarsson 2016). These two parties have different sociopolitical positions, and we do not know from previous research if the same underlying factors explain why former Social Democrat voters and Conservative Party voters are currently supporting SD.

Therefore, in this article we investigate the extent to which SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democrats differ from SD voters who previously voted for the Conservative Party. We also compare these SD voters with current Social Democrat and Conservative Party voters. These analyses aim to shed light on the reasons why SD voters have left their previous parties and to assess the likelihood that they might return to the parties they used to vote for before SD.

Re-emergence of the radical right

Radical right-wing parties, SD included, share some central characteristics (Mudde 2007; Rydgren 2007; 2018). First and foremost, they hold a nationalist ideology and their political programs aim at making the nation ethnically more homogeneous. This ethnonationalism is rooted in nostalgic myths about the past, combined with a view of a nation in decline due to immigration and internationalism. These parties also tend to be conventional and authoritarian (endorse traditional values, desire social order and conformity, and promote demands for more law-and-order: Altemeyer 1981) and use populist anti-establishment rhetoric (Mudde 2007; Rydgren 2007). At least four societal factors have been shown to enable the success of the radical right in different cultural contexts (Rydgren 2002):

Firstly, class voting has been declining throughout the Western world, enabling the radical right to mobilize working-class voters who used to vote in accordance with their social class identity (Knutsen 2001; Rydgren 2012; Oscarsson & Holmberg 2013; Oskarson & Demker 2015; Inglehart & Norris 2017).

Secondly, many countries have seen a realignment in which the sociocultural dimension has increased in salience, at the expense of the socioeconomic axis of conflict (Rydgren 2002; Kriesi et al. 2008; Bornschier 2018). This tends to benefit radical right-wing parties, as their profile issues belong to the sociocultural dimension (Oesch 2008). In Sweden, for example, there has been a marked increase in the degree to which voters consider immigration – SD's core issue – to be an important political issue. In 2010, only 19% of the Swedish voters considered immigration to be an important political issue; in 2014 this proportion had increased to 27% and in 2015 to 53% (Bergström & Oscarsson 2015; Demker & van der Meiden 2016).

Thirdly, voters are less likely to vote for alternative parties if they can easily find policy alternatives among mainstream parties (Rydgren 2002). Across the Western world parties have been converging across the left-right divide on socioeconomic issues (Kitschelt 2018). In Sweden, this process was further intensified after 2006 when the centre-right coalition Alliance[1] was established. Such converging may lead voters to perceive all mainstream parties as being very similar, thereby contributing to a depoliticization of the traditional socioeconomic issues and increasing salience of (and voting based on) sociocultural issues (Rydgren & van der Meiden 2018).

Finally, to succeed, the radical right-wing party usually cannot be perceived as being too extreme, because people may be reluctant to vote for explicitly racist or non-democratic parties even if they would support many of their core issues (Rydgren 2002). SD was founded as a successor of racist and fascist groups such as Keep Sweden Swedish (*Bevara Sverige Svenskt*) and, despite some efforts to get rid of these connotations, continued having ambivalent relations with openly racist groups through the 1990s and 2000s (Rydgren & van der Meiden 2018). Partly due to these historical roots, the party failed to reach a legitimate position in Swedish politics for a long time. This has started to change, particularly since Jimmie Åkesson became the party leader in 2005. In 2011 the party officially changed its designation from nationalist to social conservative, and in 2012 the party introduced what it called 'zero tolerance for racism', which resulted in numerous expulsions of party members who had publicly expressed opinions deemed too racist (Widfeldt 2015). One may argue that these expulsions were primarily cosmetic and designed to signal to the voters that the party had a serious desire to rid itself of its politically extreme past (obvious violations of this rule by more centrally placed Sweden Democrats did not lead to expulsion), but it likely helped to destigmatize the party in the eyes of many voters.

Sweden Democrat supporters from right and left

To explain electoral mobility, we should first consider how party preferences were traditionally structured. During the postwar period, politics tended to focus on socioeconomic issues (see e.g., Inglehart & Norris 2017). Parties on the left side of the political spectrum promoted high taxation, a large public sector to provide generous welfare services, and policies that aimed at decreasing structural inequalities. Such an agenda tended to attract voters from social classes which benefitted from a strong welfare state (e.g., working-class voters), and/or voters who held liberal values and supported state efforts to decrease inequalities in the society. Parties located on the right side of the spectrum, on the other hand, promoted lower taxation, competitive market economics, and freedom from state control when it comes to, for example, societal services and structural inequalities.

As such, they tended to attract voters from social classes which benefitted more from lower taxes and free markets than from a large public sector, valued freedom from state interference more than issues such as decreasing inequalities, and/or held conservative values and opposed attempts to alter the status quo.

Thus, individuals may vote based on their social class, attitudes on specific issues such as taxes or immigration, and/or underlying values and ideological worldviews. Importantly, recent changes in voter behaviour seem to reflect an increased prioritization of sociocultural issues in politics, rather than a shift in the values and attitudes that explain these sociocultural preferences (Ivarsflaten 2008; Mudde 2010; Rydgren & van der Meiden 2018). By being less focused – or even intentionally vague – on socioeconomic issues, radical right-wing parties can attract voters from different positions on the political spectrum, as long as voters agree that their core sociocultural issue, most notably opposition to immigration, needs to be prioritized in politics (Rovny 2013).

Here, we investigate possible explanations for why Social Democratic and Conservative Party voters have decided to leave these respective parties for a radical right-wing party (SD). Most previous studies have been based on representative samples, with relatively low numbers of SD voters, making it difficult to break down the analysis to subcategories. The unique data used in this study, however, makes it possible to address questions regarding differences between SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democrats and for the Conservative Party. Analyses based on the group of SD voters as a whole would potentially hide such differences, thereby also masking different explanations to radical right-wing mobilization.

We will focus particularly on psychological and sociological factors that may influence (1) support for the mainstream political parties: social class, socioeconomic status, and socioeconomic attitudes; (2) support for sociocultural issues driven by the radical right: ethnonationalism and immigration criticism, authoritarianism and conservatism, and nostalgia; and (3) appeal of anti-establishment parties: distrust in societal institutions and negative views on one's personal situation and relationship with the society. As discussed in more detail below, previous Social Democratic voters can be expected to more often come from the working class, have lower socioeconomic status, be more likely to report a declining personal situation and pessimism, and lean more to the left in socioeconomic politics than SD supporters who previously voted for the Conservative Party. More importantly, however, we do not expect these two voter groups to differ in their views on the profile issues espoused by the radical right: immigration, social conservatism, authoritarianism, nostalgia, and distrust in societal institutions.

Factors explaining support for different mainstream parties

Socioeconomic status

In terms of social class and socioeconomic status, radical right-wing parties have been more successful among men, the working class, and individuals with relatively low levels of education (Ivarsflaten 2005; Rydgren 2012; Oscarsson & Holmberg 2013; Sannerstedt 2014; Arzheimer 2018). A common denominator for these groups is that they have tended to lose out, in relative terms, the past few decades. The recent modernization and globalization processes have entailed an increase in, for example, gender and ethnic equality, the average level of education in the population, the importance of cultural capital and abilities to do skilled work (as compared to manual work) as determinants of life chances and status attainment, and international competition over jobs (Kriesi et al. 2006, Gidron & Hall 2017). These factors have caused political dissatisfaction and may be a contributing factor to why segments of working-class voters have reacted with decreasing political trust and, indeed, have left the mainstream parties they used to vote for. However, it should be noted that despite the overrepresentation of working-class voters among SD voters, a clear majority of them cannot be described as socioeconomically marginalized, and part of this voter group has a high socioeconomic status (Sannerstedt 2014). Considering the different social status among Social Democrat and Conservative Party voters, it seems likely that economic deprivation explains some part of the electoral mobility from Social Democrats to SD, from but not so much from the Conservative Party.

Socioeconomic attitudes

Most radical-right voters have previously voted for one of the mainstream parties (Immerzeel & Pickup 2015; Oscarsson 2016), and it is likely that they, at the time at least, shared these parties' views on socioeconomic issues. They may still share these views, while downplaying their role for party choice; in the same way as they may have previously voted according to their socioeconomic attitudes regardless of their views on sociocultural issues, they may now vote for the radical right regardless of their views on socioeconomic issues.

Another possibility, however, is that identification with a new party leads voters to alter their views in order to be in line with that party, as individuals are inclined to conform to and internalize the views signalled by the social groups they belong to (Festinger 1953). Radical right-wing parties tend to

deemphasize socioeconomic issues, but in the parliament, they nonetheless often support right-leaning economic politics and mainstream right-wing parties (Bale 2003). Consequently, previous centre-right voters may not experience large conflicts between their socioeconomic preferences and the ones their new (radical right-wing) party expresses. Previous left-wing voters, on the other hand, are likely to experience stronger conflicts and may therefore be inclined to alter their views to better fit with their new party identity. Importantly, there is also a third possibility, namely that the radical right particularly attracts voters with more centrist socioeconomic preferences, as these voters may be less attached to the mainstream parties they previously voted for (Ivarsflaten 2005).

Research on voter behaviour tends to focus on the voter groups as a whole, and results from Sweden show that SD voters can generally be described as centre voters. On average, they are placed close to the centre both in the left-right scale and in their views on socioeconomic issues (Oscarsson & Holmberg 2013; Sannerstedt 2016). This would support the notion that the party has mainly attracted socioeconomically centrist voters (cf. Ivarsflaten 2005). However, it is currently unclear if SD voters differ in their socioeconomic attitudes based on their previous party support, leading to average scores in the middle of the political spectrum while masking variations within the voter group.

Furthermore, new parties may offer alternative ways of interpreting political concepts. For instance, radical right-wing parties do not always oppose the welfare state; quite the contrary. However, their support of the welfare state is not universal but can be described as 'welfare chauvinism' (Andersen & Bjørklund 1990; Nordensvard & Ketola 2015). This is the case in Sweden, where SD is consistently emphasizing the value of the Swedish welfare system while blaming segments of the population, most importantly refugees and other non-European immigrants, for eroding and misusing this system (Norocel 2016; Elgenius & Rydgren 2017). It is possible that welfare chauvinism is most common among SD voters who previously voted for a social democratic party, as they can be expected to support the welfare state while also perceiving immigration as an economic threat.

Appeal of the sociocultural agenda of the radical right

Views on immigration and immigrants

The core issue of SD is to strongly limit immigration and almost all SD voters share this view (Sannerstedt 2014). SD's stance on foreign cultures could be described as selective xenophobia, where some cultural groups are

more readily accepted (e.g., immigrants from other Nordic countries) while others are rejected (e.g., Muslims) because their lifestyle and/or religion are considered inherently incompatible with Swedish society and a fundamental threat against the Swedish nation and culture (Elgenius & Rydgren 2018). Similar results have been found in other cultural contexts as well, and immigration-negative views unite the radical-right voters across the European countries (Oesch 2008; Rydgren 2008; Arzheimer 2018), and there are no reasons to expect that voters would differ in their anti-immigration views based on their previous party choice.

Conservatism, authoritarianism, and nostalgia

SD defines itself as a social conservative party. In line with being conservative, its members also depict Sweden as a nation in decline since the nation's golden ages, which they commonly place in the 1940s and 1950s (Elgenius & Rydgren 2017; 2018). Thus, one possible explanation for this party's emergence is mobilization among voters who hold conservative values, where immigration-negative attitudes are only one of several manifestations of these values. We know from previous research that negative views on immigration and ethnic minorities are inherently linked to other conservative attitudes (e.g., sexism and anti-vegetarianism) and underpinned by more deeply rooted conservative values and ideologies (e.g., authoritarianism: Ekehammar et al. 2004; Dhont et al. 2016). In line with this, SD voters tend to express conservative views on issues such as feminism and environmentalism (Oscarsson & Holmberg 2013; Ohlsson et al. 2016) and hold conservative and authoritarian values and ideological worldviews (Jungar & Jupskås 2014).

However, there is notable cross-cultural variation in research findings in this area: While some studies have found a positive correlation between conservatism, authoritarianism, and radical-right support (e.g., Aichholzer & Zandonella 2016), some other studies have failed to find such a correlation, and in a few countries the correlation has even been negative (Dunn 2015; Tillman 2016). Yet, this inconsistency is not surprising considering that it is not obvious that conservative and authoritarian individuals would prioritize immigration above all other political issues when deciding which party to support. They also tend to dislike societal changes and could therefore prefer a radical right-wing option only if they consider immigration to profoundly threaten the societal structures and cohesion and perceive this party to be norm-congruent rather than radical (Dunn 2015; Tillman 2016). In Sweden, the alleged threats of immigration, depicted by SD, have received a lot of attention during the past few years even by political parties that were less focused on immigration before (Strömbäck 2018). This

situation, in combination with the increased legitimization of SD, may have mobilized authoritarian and conservative voters.

Mobilization from mainstream to anti-establishment parties

Distrust in societal institutions

Like many other radical right-wing parties, SD uses populist anti-establishment rhetoric expressing discontent with mainstream parties' approach to immigration and multiculturalism, which they frame as a serious threat to the Swedish welfare system, culture, and security (Elgenius & Rydgren 2017). Populism is commonly defined as a thin-centred ideology including a view of the society being divided into two homogeneous and antagonist groups: the pure and virtuous *people* and the corrupt and self-absorbed *élite* (Mudde 2004). Being a 'thin' ideology, populism alone cannot form a political agenda – it needs to be mixed with a 'host' ideology (e.g., ethnonationalism). In line with this, radical right-wing support correlates both with factors predisposing individuals to accept the host ideology of these parties (e.g., anti-immigration and ethnic prejudice: Rooduijn 2017; van Assche et al. 2018) and with factors that increase appeal of populist parties (e.g., political cynicism and low agreeableness: Bakker et al. 2018; van Assche et al. 2018).

SD voters tend to have low trust in political and other societal institutions, such as the parliament and media (Holmberg 2007; Oscarsson & Holmberg 2013; Andersson et al. 2017), which could explain some part of SD's past voter mobilization (Oskarson 2018). However, identification with SD may have triggered and further intensified distrust in this voter group. SD commonly expresses anti-establishment attitudes, which has likely influenced their voters' attitudes as well (cf. Rooduijn et al. 2017). Moreover, SD is generally disliked among a majority of Swedes, and up until very recently all other parties have refused to collaborate with them due to their relatively extreme political agenda, which could have triggered further distrust (Hellström & Nilsson 2010).

However, political distrust does not consistently correlate with radical right-wing support (Söderlund & Kestilä-Kekkonen 2009; Rooduijn 2017). It is thus possible that populist anti-establishment attitudes are not inherently connected to radical right-wing support, or at least that they are expressed by voters of so many different parties that they are not particularly useful when explaining the appeal of the radical right specifically (cf. Rydgren 2017). Yet, SD voters' distrust in political and other societal institutions should be investigated further to explore possible reasons as to why

voters have moved from mainstream parties to SD, as well as to estimate
the likelihood that they may move back to these parties again in the future.

Declining situation and relationship with society

Parts of the Western electorates have recently been experiencing a declin-
ing relative social status and instable economic situation (e.g., Arzheimer
2018) and, at the same time, the rights of several disadvantaged groups, such
as LGBT people and racial minorities, have been progressing (Inglehart &
Norris 2017). Populist right-wing parties have utilized these circumstances
and mobilized voters by accusing the mainstream parties of neglecting the
needs of the ordinary (native) people who they portray as the real victims
in contemporary society (Mols & Jetten 2016). Moreover, Western societies
are becoming increasingly liberal (Inglehart & Norris 2017), and people
who do not share these new liberal norms could experience less social be-
longing and bonding with their social environment than before (cf. Stavrova
& Luhmann 2016). As the shift toward more liberal values has been more
common in social classes with higher education and more secure economic
positions (Inglehart & Norris 2017), people with lower economic status
may experience being 'left behind' both in economic and sociocultural pro-
cesses (Ford & Goodwin 2014), thereby increasing the likelihood that they
start supporting a radical right-wing option. Thus, it seems likely that previ-
ous Social Democrat voters, who more commonly come from the working
class, are more prone to perceiving a declining social situation.

Summary and hypotheses

The Sweden Democrats (SD) have rapidly grown from a marginal posi-
tion into one of the largest parliamentary parties in Sweden. A majority
of the SD supporters have previously voted for the Conservative Party or
the Social Democratic Party; two parties that have markedly different po-
sitions on various political issues. In this article we conducted within-group
analyses among SD voters who previously voted for either the Social
Democrats or the Conservative Party, and compared these voters with the
current voters of any of these two parties, with an aim to shed light on dif-
ferent explanations to radical-right mobilization as well as help to estimate
the likelihood that SD voters will return to the parties they used to vote for.

Previous research has shown that, although working-class voters are
overrepresented among SD voters, the voter group as a whole is not par-
ticularly marginalized (Sannerstedt 2014). It is thus possible that economic
deprivation helps explain mobilization to SD only among voters from cer-
tain societal groups, such as previous Social Democrat voters, as Social
Democrat voters more commonly come from working class and have a low

socioeconomic status (Oscarsson & Holmberg 2013). Moreover, from pre-
vious research it is unclear if SD voters, and particularly previous Social
Democrat voters who have changed to SD, have altered their stances on
socioeconomic issues (i.e., issues that tend to explain support for mainstream
parties) to be better in line with their new radical right-wing party identity
(cf. Festinger 1953). To examine these issues, we tested two hypotheses:

> *H1a: SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democrats more commonly come
> from the working class, have lower socioeconomic status, have more left-leaning socio-
> economic preferences, and more commonly express welfare chauvinism than SD voters
> who previously voted for the Conservative Party and current Conservative Party voters.*

> *H1b: SD voters who used to vote for the Social Democrats have comparable socioeco-
> nomic status as current Social Democrat voters, but differ from these voters in having
> more right-leaning preferences and more commonly expressing welfare chauvinism, while
> SD voters who previously voted for the Conservative Party do not differ from current
> Conservative Party voters.*

Secondly, the core issues of SD are opposition to immigration and so-
cial conservatism, and it is likely that voters who support SD do so mainly
because they share these views (see also e.g., Sannerstedt 2014). We find
no reasons to expect that attitudes toward immigration and immigrants will
differ between SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democrats
or the Conservative Party. Also, given the current political focus on the al-
leged threats of immigration as well as the increased legitimization of SD
in Swedish society (see e.g., Rydgren & van der Meiden 2018; Strömbäck
2018), SD has likely mobilized conservative and authoritarian voters from
both Social Democrats and the Conservative Party (cf. Dunn 2015). We thus
hypothesize that:

> *H2: SD voters, regardless of their previous party choice, express more negative views on
> immigrants and immigration as well as more conservative and authoritarian attitudes, and
> nostalgia, than Social Democratic and Conservative Party voters.*

Finally, radical right-wing parties, SD included, commonly employ anti-
establishment rhetoric to mobilize voters on their core issues and portrait
themselves as underdogs in society and politics (Hellström & Nilsson 2010;
Rydgren 2017). This has probably both mobilized some voters who have a
negative view of society and political institutions and has triggered dissatis-
faction among those who already identify with SD (cf. Rooduijn et al. 2017;
Oskarson 2018). Thus, SD voters can be expected to express distrust toward
societal institutions regardless of their previous party choice. Furthermore,
SD voters – particularly previous Social Democratic voters who more often
come from the working-class (cf. H1a) – probably also perceive their own

situation and their relationship with society in a negative light. Thus, we hypothesized that:

H3a: SD voters, regardless of their previous party choice, are more distrusting of societal institutions, and have a more negative view on their current and future situation as well as their relationship with society, than Social Democratic voters and Conservative Party voters.

H3b: SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democrats have more negative views on their current and future situation, as well as on their relationship with the society, than SD voters who previously voted for the Conservative Party.

Method

Analyses are based on a survey study conducted during spring 2018 among 1,390 supporters of the Sweden Democrats (SD), of whom 491 had previously[2] voted for the Social Democrats, and 899 had previously voted for the Conservative Party, as well as 548 supporters of the Social Democratic Party (S) and 634 supporters of the Conservative Party (*Moderaterna*, M). Party support was indicated by an answer to the question 'How would you vote if there would be an election for the Parliament (*Riksdagen*) today?'.

Additionally, 101 participants completed the survey but were excluded from the analyses because they indicated that they had marked a wrong voting option, or because they had given unrealistic responses to some questions[3] which could signal an untrustworthy response pattern.

The majority in all voter groups was male ($SD_{previously S}$: 68.2%; $SD_{previously M}$: 76.9%; S: 53.6%; M: 64.5%). Age ranged between 22/21 and 79 among SD voters (Previous S voters: $M_{age} = 55.4$, $Sd_{age} = 14.5$; Previous M voters: $M_{age} = 58.0$, $Sd_{age} = 14.1$), between 19 and 79 among S voters ($M_{age} = 54.4$, $Sd_{age} = 17.9$) and between 18 and 79 among M voters ($M_{age} = 55.9$, $Sd_{age} = 17.0$).

Procedure

Data was collected during two periods: the first between January and February 2018 ($N = 2,193$), and second (complementary data collection due to a somewhat high mean age in the first data set) in April among a younger target population ($Range_{age} = 19 – 49$; $M_{age} = 32.6$; $Sd_{age} = 7.7$, $N = 379$).

The survey was administered by the independent survey research company Novus at the request of the authors. The sample consisted of a selection of panelists from the Sweden Panel, a pool of approximately 40,000 volunteer panelists originally recruited randomly from the Swedish population. An invitation to the survey was sent to 7,711 panelists who had indicated in

the background questionnaire that they voted for SD, S, or M in the 2014 election, or had responded that they would consider voting for SD, S, or M in the upcoming election in 2018. Panelists who would vote for other options than SD, S, or M were screened out ($N = 1,601$), and 356 participants did not complete the survey. In combination with the second data collection in April, a smaller complementary data collection was conducted among 239 panelists from a market research company, Norstats, and only SD supporters were included in this data collection.

The participants filled out an online survey questionnaire including questions about their attitudes, values, and personality characteristics. Most participants completed the survey in between 15 and 25 minutes (median = 18.5 minutes). The participants received 10 points as a reward, according to the Novus reward system where participation in one study provides at least 5 points that can be used as follows: 25 points can be used to give 25 SEK to the Red Cross, and 100 points can be used for a cinema voucher or gift card selected from various options.

Measures

If not otherwise stated, participants indicated their agreement with the items in the questionnaire on a scale including six response options: *disagree completely* (1), *disagree partially* (2), *neither agree nor disagree* (3), *agree partially* (4), *agree completely* (5), or *don't know* (6). Participants who responded 'don't know' were excluded from the analyses and handled as missing values.

Social class and socioeconomic status

Social class was measured by asking participants to indicate their occupation from 9 categories (student, worker, office worker, entrepreneur, parental leave, long-term sick leave/early retiree, retiree, unemployed, other). Socioeconomic status was captured by two measures: *Education* level – by selecting one of three categories, which were further transformed into a dummy variable with two categories, 0 (elementary school or high school) and 1 (university education), – and economic situation, by indicating personal *income* per month (see Table S1 in the Supplementary material). Moreover, *subjective socioeconomic status* was measured by the question, 'Imagine that the population of Sweden could be divided on a scale where 10 is the group with highest status in the society, and 0 the group with lowest status in the society. Where would you place yourself on such a scale?' on a scale ranging from 0 (lowest status – those who have a very bad position, no job or a bad job, and a low level of education) to 10 (highest status – those who have a very good position, who have very good work, and a high level of education).

Socioeconomic attitudes

Socioeconomic attitudes were measured by four statements. Three of these items yielded a good reliability measure and were combined in a *socioeconomic index* (α = .75): 'Taxes should be reduced', 'The public sector is too large', and 'It is good to have profit-driven alternatives in the health care sector'. The fourth item – 'Income differences should be decreased' (reversely coded) – captured *opposition to reducing structural inequality.* This item was analysed separately because of its weaker correlation with the other three items. *Welfare chauvinism* was measured by a combination of both disagreement (scores 1 or 2) with the statement 'The public sector is too large' and agreement (scores 4 or 5) with the statement 'Immigration costs too many public resources'. This index was scored as 1 (welfare chauvinism) or 0 (all other combinations).

Sociocultural issues of the radical right

Attitudes toward immigration and immigrants were captured with three measures: *Immigration scepticism* by the item 'Immigration to Sweden should be reduced'; *negative attitudes toward immigration* by a three-item index ('Immigration costs too many public resources', 'Immigration leads to increased criminality in Sweden', and 'It is a problem that immigration weakens the Swedish culture': α = .90); and *negative attitudes toward immigrants* by a four-item index ('I don't want an immigrant married into my family', 'I prefer having native Swedes as neighbours', 'I don't want an immigrant as my boss', and 'It is a problem that immigrants take jobs from native Swedes': α = .88). *Opposition toward feminism* was measured by the item 'Feminism has gone too far'. Social conservative ideology was measured by a three-item index capturing the three facets of *Right-Wing Authoritarianism* (authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism: Altemeyer 1981): 'To stop the radical and immoral currents in the society today there is a need for a strong leader', 'Our society would be best off if we showed tolerance and understanding for non-traditional values and views', and 'The best way to live is in accordance with the old-fashioned values'. These items correlated weakly or moderately (rs = . 21 – .33) and yielded a poor reliability (α = .54), which is common for short measures including distinct components. Individuals who score low in Right-Wing Authoritarianism may agree with some of the statements presented above, but – importantly – those who score high in it express a consistent response pattern by agreeing with all or most of them. Thus, we formed an index despite the low alpha score.

To measure *nostalgic view on the past* participants selected one decade from a list ranging from the 1900s to 2010s as a response to the question, 'Which of these decades do you think was the best in the history of

Sweden?' To gain a clearer picture of the results, responses were clustered into five categories (≤1940s, 1950s/1960s, 1970s/1980s, 1990s/2000s, and 2010s). A more retrospective choice was interpreted as nostalgia.

Distrust in societal institutions

Distrust in societal institutions was measured by an index ($\alpha = .82$) capturing trust in the national parliament ('To what degree do you trust that *Riksdagen* manages its work?', reversely scored), trust in the courts of law ('To what degree do you trust that courts of law manage their work?', reversely scored), and trust in media measured by an index including five media channels ('To what degree do you trust news reporting from the following media?: The Swedish national public TV; (the private channel) TV4; (the tabloid paper) *Aftonbladet*; (the morning paper) *Dagens Nyheter*; the local newspaper in the area where you live', reversely scored, $\alpha = .88$).

Negative views on personal situation and relation with the society

Negative views on one's personal situation were captured by measuring experienced *deteriorated situation* ('My situation has gotten worse during the past five years') and *pessimism about one's future* ('I believe I will be doing well in the future', reversely coded). Negative views on one's relation with the society was measured by two statements that capture *societal exclusion* ($\alpha = .66$): 'I generally feel that I am a part of society' (reversely scored) and 'I generally feel that society sees me' (reversely scored).

Results

Social class and socioeconomic status

To gain a clearer picture of *social class* among voters who are currently of working age, we compared voter groups after excluding retirees from the analyses. A chi-squared analysis revealed statistically significant group differences in occupation categories, $\chi^2 (21) = 175.45$, $p < .001$. SD supporters who previously voted for the Social Democrats more commonly come from the working class (50%) compared to current Social Democrat voters (38%), as well as SD voters who previously voted for the Conservative Party (30%) and current Conservative Party (27%) voters. Also, being unemployed or on a long-term sick leave was more common in this group (12%) compared to SD voters who previously voted for the Conservative Party (9.9%), as well as current Social Democratic (6.9%) and Conservative Party (3.6%) voters. Complete distributions of occupation are presented Table S1 in the Supplementary Material.

Regarding *education*, a chi-squared analysis (excluding students) confirmed statistically significant group differences, χ^2 (3) = 72.35, p < .001. To have university education was approximately 1.7 times less common among SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democrats (25.1%) than among SD voters who previously voted for the Conservative Party (41.8%) and current Social Democratic (44.3%) voters, and twice less common compared to current Conservative Party (51.0%) voters.

Concerning *income*, a chi-squared analysis (excluding retirees and students) revealed statistically significant group differences, χ^2 (21) = 101.29, p < .001. Low income was more common, and very high income was less common, among previous and current Social Democratic voters than among previous and current Conservative Party voters: 27.7 per cent of current, and 26.5 per cent of previous, Social Democratic voters belonged to the two lowest income groups (<20,000 SEK/month), which can be contrasted with 15.6 per cent of SD voters who previously voted for the Conservative Party, and 14.7 per cent of current Conservative Party voters. Reversed patterns are observed at the other end of the income distribution: 4.0% of current Social Democratic voters, and 2.8 per cent of SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democrats, belonged to the three highest income groups (≥50,000 SEK/month), compared to 10.0 per cent of SD voters who previously voted for the Conservative Party, and 14.1 per cent of current Conservative Party voters. Complete distributions over income are presented in Table S2 in the Supplementary Material.

Finally, ANOVA analysis showed statistically significant group differences in *subjective socioeconomic status*, F (3, 2571) = 55.6, p < .001, η^2 = .06. SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democrats ascribed the lowest status to themselves (M = 5.82, Sd = 1.7), followed by current Social Democratic voters (M = 6.19, Sd = 1.7), SD voters who previously voted for the Conservative Party (M = 6.68, Sd = 1.6), and current Conservative Party voters (M = 6.92, Sd = 1.4). Bonferroni post hoc analysis confirmed that all these group differences were statistically significant (ps < .05).

In sum, these results support *hypothesis 1a* and (partly) *1b*: SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democratic party had lower socioeconomic status than SD voters who previously voted for the Conservative Party. SD voters reported lower subjective socioeconomic status than the voters of the Social Democrats and the Conservative Party, but in terms of education, income, and subjective socioeconomic status, SD voters nevertheless resembled voters of their previous parties more than other SD voters.

Socioeconomic attitudes

A multivariate ANOVA analysis revealed statistically significant group differences in the *index for socioeconomic right-wing attitudes*, F (3, 2532)

= 512.0, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .38$; and *opposition to reducing economic inequalities*, F (3, 2532) = 186.7, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .18$. As illustrated in Table 1, and confirmed in Bonferroni post hoc analysis, SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democrats have more left-leaning attitudes than SD voters who previously voted for the Conservative Party, but more right-leaning attitudes than current Social Democratic voters ($ps < .001$). However, SD voters who previously voted for the Conservative Party do not differ from the current Conservative Party voters ($ps = 1.00$). Results thus provide support for hypotheses *1a* and *1b*.

We also found a statistically significant group difference in *welfare chauvinism* in a chi-squared analysis, χ^2 (3) = 54.71, $p < .001$. Supporting hypotheses *1a* and *1b*, welfare chauvinism was roughly twice as common

Table 1. Mean Values Per Voter Group, and Group Differences Between Sweden Democrat Voters Who Have Previously Voted for Social Democratic Party (S) or Conservative Party (*Moderaterna*, M). To see the full table, including standard deviations, see Table S3 Supplementary Material.

			SD		F-test (*Bonferroni*), between SD voters
	S	M	Previously S	Previously M	
Socioeconomic issues					
Economic right-wing attitudes	2.1	3.8	3.2	3.9	***
Opposition to reducing inequality	1.6	2.9	2.2	2.8	***
Sociocultural issues of radical right					
Immigration skepticism	2.9	4.1	4.9	4.9	n.s.
Negativity toward immigration	2.6	3.8	4.6	4.7	n.s.
Negativity toward immigrants	1.9	2.4	3.3	3.3	n.s.
Opposition to feminism	2.3	3.4	4.1	4.2	n.s.
Right-Wing Authoritarianism	2.5	3.0	3.6	3.6	n.s.
Issues of anti-establishment parties					
Distrust of societal institutions	2.4	2.9	3.7	3.8	n.s.
Societal exclusion	2.4	2.5	2.9	2.9	n.s.
Worsened situation	2.2	2.1	2.8	2.5	***
Pessimism on the future	2.3	2.1	2.8	2.5	***

***$p < .001$.

among SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democrats (22.0%) as compared to current Social Democratic voters (12.9%), as well as SD voters who previously voted for the Conservative Party (10.3%) and current (9.5%) Conservative Party voters.

Sociocultural attitudes, authoritarianism, and nostalgia. A multivariate ANOVA analysis revealed statistically significant group differences in *immigration scepticism*, F (3, 2494) = 598.5, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .42$; negative *attitudes toward immigration*, F (3, 2494) = 738.4, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .47$; negative *attitudes toward immigrants*, F (3, 2494) = 266.0, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .24$; negative attitudes toward *feminism*, F (3, 2494) = 300.0, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .27$; and *Right-Wing Authoritarianism*, F (3, 2494) = 259.2, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .24$ Bonferroni post hoc analysis provided support for hypothesis *2a*: SD voters scored highest in all indexes – regardless of which party they voted for previously ($ps > .18$) – followed by current Conservative Party voters and current Social Democratic voters ($ps < .001$).

As to *nostalgic* views on the past, chi-squared analyses revealed statistically significant group differences, χ^2 (12) = 166.8, $p < .001$. SD voters chose the current decade as the best in Sweden's history 5 to 8 times less often than the current Social Democratic and Conservative Party voters (see Figure 1). Also, around 83 per cent of SD voters, regardless of which party they voted for previously, chose a decade preceding the 1990s, while the percentage choosing some of these earlier centuries was clearly lower among Social Democratic (67.4%) and Conservative Party (63.6%) voters.

In sum, these results further support hypothesis *2*. SD supporters – regardless of which party they voted for previously – express more negativity toward immigration, immigrants, and feminism and are more authoritarian and nostalgic when compared to current Social Democratic and Conservative Party voters.

Distrust, personal situation, and relationship with society

Multivariate ANOVA analyses revealed statistically significant group differences in *distrust in societal institutions*, F (3, 2451) = 456.7, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .36$, experienced *societal exclusion*, F (3, 2451) = 74.1, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .08$, experienced *deteriorated situation*, F (3, 2451) = 32.6, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$, and *pessimism* about one's future, F (3, 2451) = 49.6, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$.

As illustrated in Table 1, and confirmed in Bonferroni post hoc analyses, SD voters expressed most distrust – regardless of which party they voted for previously ($ps > .13$) – followed by current Conservative Party voters, and Social Democratic voters ($ps < .001$). SD voters also experienced a more deteriorated personal situation and pessimism than Social Democratic and Conservative Party voters ($ps < .01$). SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democrats experienced a more deteriorated situation and pessimism

Figure 1. Percentage of Participants Who Chose Different Decades as the Best in Sweden's History Per Voting Group (Social Democratic [S] and Conservative Party (*Moderaterna*, M) voters, as well as Sweden Democrat [SD] Voters Who Have Previously Voted for S or M).
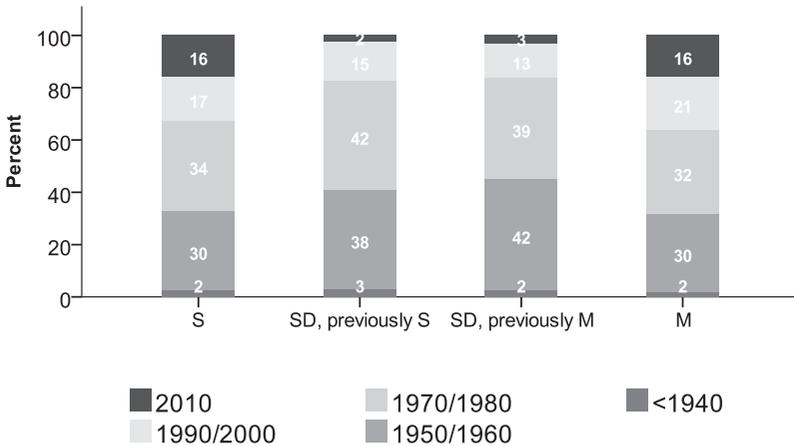
than SD voters who previously voted for the Conservative Party ($p < .01$), but current Social Democratic and Conservative Party voters did not differ from each other in either experienced deteriorated situation ($p = .31$) or pessimism ($p = .06$). Experienced societal exclusion was more common among SD voters – regardless of which party they voted for previously ($p = .61$) – than among current Social Democratic and Conservative Party voters (ps $< .001$), and current Social Democratic and Conservative Party voters did not differ from each other ($p = .18$).

In sum, the results thus support hypotheses *3a* and (partly) *3b*. SD voters had less trust in societal institutions and more negative views on their situation compared to other voter groups included in this study. SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democrats reported most negative views on their personal situation, but did not differ from SD voters who previously voted for the Conservative Party when it comes to distrust in societal institution or experiences of societal exclusion.

Interactions with social class

We reran all the above analyses, and additionally included social class as an independent variable to test potential main and interaction effects. In these analyses, we included only participants who are currently participating in working life, and occupation was dummy coded as 0 (office workers and entrepreneurs) or 1 (working-class). We found some weak main effects of social class: working-class voters expressed more left-leaning

socioeconomic attitudes ($\eta^2 = .005$), were more supportive of reducing economic inequalities ($\eta^2 = .02$), had more negative views on immigrants ($\eta^2 = .007$), were more opposed to feminism ($\eta^2 = .004$), scored higher in Right-Wing Authoritarianism ($\eta^2 = .008$), were more pessimistic about their future ($\eta^2 = .004$), and experienced more societal exclusion ($\eta^2 = .01$).

Only a few interaction effects were statistically significant. The interaction term explained a small part of the variance (1%) in the index measuring socioeconomic right-wing attitudes: working-class voters differed from other voters only among SD voters who previously voted for the Conservative Party and current Conservative Party voters (differences = 0.30), but not among SD voters that previously voted for the Social Democrats and current Social Democratic voters (differences = 0.04/0.1). An interaction term also explained one per cent of variance in opposition to reducing economic inequalities: working-class voters expressed more opposition to reducing inequality among SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democrats or Conservative Party, and among current Conservative Party voters (differences = .32/0.35/0.70), but not among current Social Democratic voters (difference = .001).

As to welfare chauvinism, statistical significance of interaction term could not be calculated as the measure is non-parametric. However, we observed that social class had a smaller influence among SD voters (former Social Democratic voters: 1% difference; former Conservative Party voters: 6% difference) than among current Social Democratic and Conservative Party voters (9% and 12% difference, respectively) (see Table 2). Welfare chauvinism was more common among working-class voters, as compared to other classes, in all voting groups except the Social Democrats.

In sum, social class explains only a small part or no part at all of the variance in the variables measured here, and only a few interaction terms were found to be statistically significant.

Table 2. Percentage of Participants with Welfare Chauvinist Views Among Participants in Working Life and Per Voting Group (Social Democratic [S] and Conservative Party (*Moderaterna*, M) voters, as well as Sweden Democrat [SD] Voters Who Have Previously Voted for S or M).

		SD			
	S	Previously S	Previously M	M	Total
Working-class	8.8	25.5	17.1	20.0	17.9
Office workers and entrepreneurs	17.9	24.7	10.9	8.4	13.2
N	*259*	*230*	*427*	*331*	*1247*

Conclusions

The present study aimed to investigate the extent to which SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democrats differ from those who previously voted for the Conservative Party. Our results revealed, firstly, that SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democrats more often come from the working class, have lower socioeconomic status, and experience a more deteriorated personal situation and pessimism about their future than SD voters who previously voted for the Conservative Party. These findings add new perspectives to the ongoing debate about the degree to which economic factors explain the recent growth of radical right-wing parties (see e.g., Mols & Jetten 2016; Dal Bó et al. 2018): Economic instability and deprivation could partially explain the electoral mobility from centre-left parties to the radical right, but do not seem to offer particularly powerful explanations for the electoral mobility from centre-right parties to the radical right. Future studies should investigate whether other processes, such as protection of one's relative privileges (cf. Jetten et al. 2015) or group relative deprivation (cf. Urbanska & Guimond 2019), could better explain the electoral mobility from the center-right to the radical right. However, it should be noted that although previous and current Conservative Party voters did not differ much in terms of income, higher education was clearly most common among the current Conservative Party voters. This could be interpreted in the light of analyses by Kitschelt and Rehm (2014) showing that anti-immigration and authoritarian political stances (i.e. core issues of the radical right) are more strongly linked to education than income level. Future studies could also investigate two additional explanations for SD support beyond education or social class: Labour market vulnerability, which has been demonstrated to be found also among voters with higher education, thereby influencing their policy preferences (Häusermann, Kurer, & Schwander 2015), and public/ private sector employment, which has been shown to play an important role in voting behaviour in Scandinavian countries (Knutsen 2001).

As a second area where differences were found, socioeconomic attitudes differed between SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democrats and the Conservative Party. As expected, SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democrats had more left-leaning attitudes than SD voters who previously voted for the Conservative Party. This is roughly in line with analyses of Ivarsflaten (2005) showing divisions in socioeconomic preferences among voters of the radical right. Importantly, however, we also found that SD voters who used to vote for Social Democrats differed even more from current Social Democratic voters (in being more right-leaning). Moreover, SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democrats were found to hold welfare chauvinist views more commonly than other voting

groups. When it comes to current and previous Conservative Party voters, however, no differences were found in any socioeconomic measures. These results could be interpreted in light of that, although radical right-wing parties often aim to tone down and blur their views on socioeconomic issues (Rovny 2013), they nonetheless tend to support right-leaning economic politics and other right-wing parties in the parliament (Bale 2003) and express chauvinist views on the welfare system (i.e., they support the welfare system but think that some groups of people, such as immigrants, should be excluded from receiving the welfare benefits: see e.g., Norocel 2016). Thus, a new party identity has likely caused more identity conflicts among previous Social Democratic voters than among previous Conservative Party voters, and many of these voters may have consequently changed their views to better match their new (radical right) party identity (cf. Festinger 1953). It is also possible that SD has attracted Social Democratic voters with more centrist views on these issues (see Ivarsflaten 2005). Unfortunately, we are not able to determine causality based on our cross-sectional data.

Importantly, however, we found no differences between SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democrats and SD voters who previously voted for the Conservative Party in the core characteristics of the radical right (anti-immigration, conservatism and authoritarianism, and anti-establishment populism: Mudde 2007; Rydgren 2007). First and foremost, regardless of their previous party choice, almost all SD voters perceived immigration as a societal threat and expressed a desire to decrease immigration. Also, compared to other Social Democratic and Conservative Party voters, SD voters had significantly more xenophobic attitudes on immigrants, although these attitudes were less common when compared to negative attitudes on immigration as a societal phenomenon (see also Rydgren 2008). Finally, compared to Social Democratic and Conservative Party voters, SD voters were more socially conservative and authoritarian, had more nostalgic views on Sweden's past, were more distrusting toward societal institutions and politicians, and experienced more exclusion in relation to the society.

Certain limitations in the present study should be kept in mind when interpreting the results. The sample was not representative of Swedish voters in general, but targeted toward the voters of a few parties only. Furthermore, the data was somewhat skewed in the sense that male voters were overrepresented and mean age was higher than in the population. However, since the primary aim was to test differences *between* the voter groups, this is less of a problem. As mean age was rather high and male respondents were overrepresented in all voting groups, these aspects cannot be expected to explain any results presented here.

In sum, it can be concluded that support for SD can above all be explained by a negative stance on immigration. Also, SD voters who came from the

Social Democrats and the Conservative Party, respectively, were found to differ only in a few aspects, and social class had only a few – and very weak – effects on the outcome variables above the effect of voting group.

Regardless of being the cause or consequence of the identification with their new party, SD voters differ from the voters of their previous parties in several central aspects that are currently determining voter behaviour in many Western countries, and this is particularly true among SD voters who previously voted for the Social Democratic party. It is thus possible that many SD voters are not very likely to return to the parties they previously voted for, at least as long as immigration-related issues continue to be of high salience in the society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NOTES
1. Alliance is a political coalition in Sweden, consisting of center-right parties the Conservative Party, the Center Party, the Liberals, and Christian Democrats. Alliance was formed to challenge the Social Democratic Party that had dominated Swedish politics almost continuously for over 70 years. The aim of Alliance was to win a majority of seats in *Riksdag* (the national parliament) and form a coalition government. To succeed in this, these parties have developed common policy statements and proposals which has required compromises and pulled them closer to each other.
2. Last time that they voted for some other party than the party they would vote for today, i.e., other than SD.
3. Participants who had indicated in three separate questions (not analyzed in the present paper) that over 50% of Swedish population are born abroad, born in Eastern Europe, or born in the Middle East, were excluded from the analyses.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of
this article at the publisher's web site:

Table S1. Percentage of Participants Across Occupation Categories
(Excluding Retirees) Among Current Social Democratic (S) and
Conservative Party (*Moderaterna*; M) voters, as well as Sweden Democrat
(SD) Voters Who Have Previously Voted for S or M.
Table S2. Percentage of Participants per Income (SEK/month) and Voter
Group (Excluding Retirees and Students).
Table S3. Full Table with Mean Values (Standard Deviations) Per Voter
Group, and Group Differences Between Sweden Democrat Voters Who
Have Previously Voted for Social Democratic Party (S) or Conservative
Party (*Moderaterna*, M).