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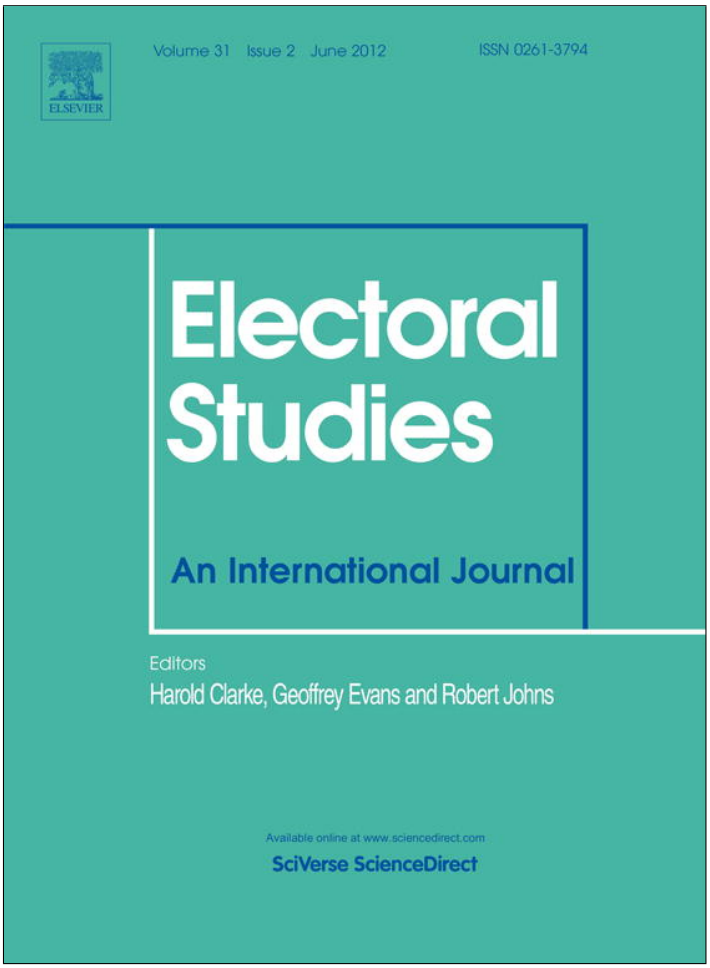

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A losing gamble. How mainstream parties facilitate anti-immigrant party success

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of anti-immigrant parties in Western Europe has provoked very different responses from mainstream parties. Some have tried to counter the anti-immigrant parties while others have tried to recapture lost voters by taking a tougher stance on immigration. Country comparative studies have tried to determine the effectiveness of different strategies, but systematic testing has been impaired by small-n problems. This paper therefore exploits sub-national variation in 290 Swedish municipalities to investigate the effect of mainstream party strategy on anti-immigrant electoral success. The paper finds that a tougher stance on immigration on the part of mainstream parties is correlated with more anti-immigrant party support, even when controlling for a large number of socio-economic, historical and regional factors. This result indicates that mainstream parties legitimize anti-immigrant parties by taking a tougher position on immigration. However, the results presented in the paper show that it is not sufficient for one mainstream party to take a tougher position; it is only when the entire political mainstream is tougher on immigration that the anti-immigrant party benefits. What is more, the toughness of the parties on the left seems to be more legitimizing than the toughness of the parties on the right.

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1. Introduction

In the past three decades, a new brand of political parties has emerged in Western Europe.[2] Today, anti-immigrant parties are represented in parliaments in countries all over Europe, although their electoral support is unstable. This paper explores one promising explanation for short-term variations in anti-immigrant party support and tests this explanation in a unique sub-national dataset. More specifically, the paper investigates whether mainstream parties' positions in the immigration issue (tough stance on immigration or not) facilitate or impede anti-immigrant party electoral support.[3]

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[3] We follow van der Brug et al. (2005, 537) and use the term anti-immigrant parties for the parties in question (see also Fennema, 1997). There are two reasons why we prefer the term anti-immigrant parties. First, as van der Brug et al. (2005, 538) point out, the immigration issue is of central political concern for all parties in this group of parties. Second, it is not self-evident that parties in this party group should be placed at the right end of the political spectrum. The Swedish case illustrates this. Both the voters of the largest anti-immigrant party in Sweden and their representatives place themselves in the center of the political spectrum (Holmberg et al., 2010, 23; Gilljam et al., 2010, 19). This makes us reluctant to choose a terminology that from the outset places these parties at the "extreme" (Carter, 2005; Mudde, 1996) or "radical" (Mudde, 2007; Norris, 2005; Rydgren, 2007) right end of the spectrum.

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Using time-variant cross-country data and pooled election studies, scholars have been able to draw stable conclusions on gender, class and other socio-economic characteristics of anti-immigrant voters (Arzheimer, 2009; Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Norris, 2005; van der Brug et al., 2005). The literature has also explored the effects of institutional settings, such as electoral systems and parliamentary thresholds (Jackman and Volpert, 1996; Swank and Betz, 2003), the history and ideological origin of anti-immigrant parties (Carter, 2002; Ivarsflaten, 2006) and factors triggering citizen demand for anti-immigrant policy, such as levels of and changes in immigration and unemployment (Arzheimer, 2009; Golder, 2003; Knigge, 1998; Lubbers et al., 2002).

However, even in the probably most comprehensive study thus far, where answers from 175,000 respondents in 18 countries over a time period of 23 years were analyzed, the author concluded, "persistent country effects prevail" (Arzheimer, 2009, 259). This underlines that we have still not reached a full understanding of the dynamics leading up to electoral anti-immigrant party success, in spite of the high sophistication in the field.

In our view, the most promising line of research in this field explores the effects of issue strategies of mainstream parties (Arzheimer, 2009; Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Bale, 2003; Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008; Meguid, 2005, 2008). The basic idea is that mainstream parties can impede or facilitate the growth of anti-immigrant parties depending on how they handle the issue of immigration. Two inter-related factors have been identified in this literature: the salience of the immigration issue and the mainstream parties' position on the issue.

Research has shown that anti-immigrant parties benefit from the high saliency of the immigration issue. These results are stable both when tested on an individual and a system level (Arzheimer, 2009; Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Bale, 2003), implying that a "dismissive" strategy that keeps the saliency of the issue low is the most effective (Meguid, 2005, 350).

However, empirical evidence is more ambiguous when it comes to the effects of mainstream party stance in the immigration issue. Two rival hypotheses can be crystallized from the literature. The first – the impeding hypothesis – says that we should expect a decline in electoral support for anti-immigrant parties if mainstream parties take a tough position on immigration, as the mainstream parties thereby take ownership of the immigration issue (Meguid, 2005, 2008; van der Brug et al., 2005). The second – the facilitating hypothesis – holds the opposite expectation. It says that if mainstream parties take a tough position on immigration, voters interpret this as a signal that tougher policies are relevant, which helps the anti-immigrant party to overcome a barrier of non-respectability and thus helps it to gain more votes (Arzheimer, 2009; Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Bale, 2003).

These hypotheses have been tested in cross-country studies, but results are hampered by small n-problems. Even in the more sophisticated studies, not more than 22 (van der Brug et al., 2005) or 24 (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006) elections are included, which makes it hard to draw firm conclusions about the effects of different strategies. This paper therefore employs a different research strategy and tests these two rival hypotheses using data on the 290 Swedish local governments in the 2010 elections.

The sub-national setting is ideal, as it keeps important institutional and cultural factors constant while it exhibits rich variation both in the strategies' mainstream parties' use and in electoral anti-immigrant party support. We have at our disposal unique data capturing the immigration policy positions among politicians at the local level in Sweden that allow us to evaluate the effects of tougher immigration issue positions among the mainstream parties.

Our main results support the facilitating hypothesis. We therefore conclude that tough policy positions of mainstream parties in the immigration issue help anti-immigrant party success. However, contrary to previous research, we demonstrate that it is not sufficient for one mainstream party to take a tougher stance on immigration. In order to affect the electoral success of the anti-immigrant party, the whole immigration discourse must become tougher, which we interpret as a legitimizing effect. We also report the perhaps counterintuitive result that tougher positions of the parties on the political left are more important for anti-immigrant party success than tougher positions of the parties on the political right.

2. Tough policy positions and anti-immigrant party support

Theories of prime interest for this paper are those that focus on the effects of strategies of mainstream parties. Both classical theories of party competition (Downs, 1957) and more recent theories of party strategies (Meguid, 2005, 2008) highlight the strategic importance of competing parties' policy positions. As mentioned in the introduction, two rival hypotheses have evolved from this discussion. In the more classical view a competing party can take voters from an anti-immigrant party by occupying a party position close to the anti-immigrant party, e.g. take a tougher stance on immigration. It has for example been suggested that the emergence of anti-immigrant parties can be explained by the inability of mainstream parties to pick up new issues, such as the immigrant issue (Ignazie, 1992, 23–24; Kitschelt, 2000, 174). From this perspective, the most probable outcome of this competition is a vote loss for the anti-immigrant party (van der Brug et al., 2005, 548).

There is also the opposite hypothesis, however. The rationale behind this is that, although voters may have anti-immigration attitudes, they do not act on these preferences on Election Day because anti-immigrant parties are not seen as legitimate alternatives. Thus anti-immigrant parties need to overcome a barrier of non-respectability before they can attract a larger proportion of the voters. This was probably the case in Sweden, for example. The general public in Sweden has much tougher attitudes on immigration than their representatives in mainstream parties. Between 1994 and 2006, the disagreement between MPs and voters in Sweden was several times larger than in any other issue. For a long time, this policy disagreement did not result in any substantial support for

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an anti-immigrant party in Sweden, which may indicate that, in spite of a large demand for anti-immigration policy, something stopped Swedish voters from voting for an anti-immigrant party (Dahlström and Esaiasson, 2011). According to this theory, tough policy positions on the part of mainstream parties help anti-immigrant parties to overcome the barrier of non-respectability because voters will interpret them as a signal that tough immigration polities are relevant. Thus, from this perspective, the most probable outcome of a tough immigration policy position by mainstream parties is a vote gain by an anti-immigrant party (Arzheimer, 2009, 264; Arzheimer and Carter, 2006, 424). We call the first the impeding hypothesis and the second the facilitating hypothesis.

Theory has been ambiguous on two key aspects of the hypotheses, however, and we take two steps to specify the theory and test the two hypotheses empirically.

First, the causal mechanism suggested by the facilitating hypothesis implies that a legitimizing process starts when mainstream parties take a tough stance on immigration, a process that eventually breaks down the barrier of non-respectability for this policy position. As anti-immigrant parties are closely associated with a tough stance on immigration, making this position more legitimate will increase their support (ibid.). However, how much does it take to break the "taboo"? Is it enough for one of the mainstream parties to take a tough immigration policy position? Or does the whole immigration policy discourse have to move in a tougher direction? This paper acknowledges both possibilities and tests them empirically.

Second, it is not clear whether it is possible for all parties to play an impeding or a facilitating role. Some studies are only geared to the positions of right parties (Bale, 2003; Arzheimer and Carter, 2006), while others also consider the policy positions of left parties (Arzheimer, 2009). As shown by Meguid (2005), party competition between mainstream parties and niche parties, such as anti-immigrant parties, is sensitive not only to the policy position of the party closest to the anti-immigrant party but also to the position of the other parties.

One argument for why the position of all parties matters is that parties may legitimize an anti-immigrant party by taking a tougher stance on immigration, but this is also achieved by not trying to delegitimize the anti-immigrant party to the same extent. Two clear examples of how mainstream parties have tried to delegitimize anti-immigrant parties are the election nights in Sweden in 1991 and 2010, when New Democracy (1991) and the Sweden Democrats (2010) first gained representation in the Riksdag. In 1991, Bengt Westerberg, leader of the Liberal Party, left the TV studio in the middle of an interview when the leaders of New Democracy entered. Left Party leader Lars Ohly also refused to remain in the same TV studio as Sweden Democrat leader Jimmie Åkesson in 2010, and has frequently been called SD racist. If parties on the left were to move towards the middle of the spectrum on the immigration issue, they would perhaps not legitimize the anti-immigrant position directly but stop delegitimizing it. We therefore include the policy positions of all parties in this study. We use this information to study whether the effects of left and right parties differ and to evaluate the effect of all parties individually.

As mentioned in the introduction, several other explanatory factors have been suggested and tested empirically (for recent reviews, see Rydgren, 2007; van der Brug and Fennema, 2007). While relevant in cross-country studies, some of the theories are not well-suited for explaining the short-term variations of prime interest in this paper. Important examples of theories highlighting fairly stable variables are theories concerning the effects of electoral systems and parliamentary thresholds and other institutional arrangements (Jackman and Volpert, 1996; Norris, 2005; Swank and Betz, 2003). Other interesting examples are theories that stress the history and ideological origins of anti-immigrant parties (Ignazie, 1992; Kitschelt, 1995; Carter, 2002; Ivarsflaten, 2006). In this paper, we will not be able to evaluate any of these theories, however, as we by way of design hold institutional and party historical factors constant.

Of more direct interest for this paper are theories that emphasize factors triggering citizen demand for anti-immigrant policy, such as levels of immigration and unemployment. Several studies have theorized the relationship between unemployment and immigration on the one hand and between unemployment and anti-immigrant party support on the other. These theories have had mixed empirical support, however. Some studies have indeed found that the number of immigrants or asylum seekers in the country positively affects the electoral support for anti-immigrant parties (Arzheimer, 2009, 269; Golder, 2003, 451; Lubbers et al., 2002), while others have failed to establish such a relationship (Norris, 2005, 172; van der Brug et al., 2005, 555). Unemployment is associated in some studies with electoral success for anti-immigrant parties (Jackman and Volpert, 1996; Golder, 2003), while other studies show a counterintuitive negative relationship (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Knigge, 1998). In one recent study, the interaction between unemployment, immigration and unemployment benefits was tested empirically, revealing a complicated interaction pattern (Arzheimer, 2009, 273).

As the unit of analysis in this paper is municipalities and not individuals, it is not designed to directly test these or other individual level factors that are associated with anti-immigrant party support, such as gender or education. We will however control for aggregate levels of immigration, unemployment, gender and education in all empirical models, although without an ambition to directly evaluate these individual level theories.

In summary, we will focus on the party positions of mainstream parties and their effect on anti-immigrant party support while holding most institutional and historical explanations constant and controlling for the aggregate levels of socio-economic explanations. We will test both the effect of the extreme position among the mainstream parties (suggesting that it is sufficient when one mainstream party takes a tough position) and the effect of the mean position of all mainstream parties (suggesting that the political discourse must be tougher). We will also analyze whether it matters whether it is mainstream left parties or mainstream right parties that take a tough

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position on immigration. Finally, we will evaluate the effect of the position of individual mainstream parties.

3. The case: Swedish local governments

Since our methodological approach differs in some respects from the convention of cross-country comparisons, some clarifications are called for. One obvious advantage of using data on the sub-national level is that these data have been less analyzed than data on the national level (see however Bowyer, 2008; Coffé et al., 2007; Kestilä and Söderlund, 2007; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2001, 2002; Rydgren and Ruth, 2011 for examples of studies on anti-immigrant parties on the sub-national level). Anti-immigrant parties in European national parliaments have been extensively studied in both a plethora of case studies and in many cross-country comparisons. Rigid theory testing is hence impaired by the fact that most theories were developed from the same data. Furthermore, the sub-national approach also provides rich variation in party strategy while keeping institutional factors, such as the electoral system, and historical factors, such as the background of the anti-immigrant party, constant.

However, for a study of local governments to address questions posed by the existing cross-country literature, the local governments need to have competencies similar to those of the national governments, albeit at a smaller scale. This is clearly the case in Sweden. The municipal councils (the local parliaments) are elected every fourth year at the same time as the national parliamentary elections, and the turnout is usually only a few percentage points lower than in the Riksdag elections (which means over 77 percent in all elections since 1973). Parties represented in the municipal councils are primarily the same as in the Riksdag, even though not all Riksdag parties are represented in all municipal councils. Many municipal councils also include a local party.

The municipal councils have vast competencies in international comparisons and are even able to set the level of taxation. This is necessary, as they are responsible for the provision of key portions of the welfare state, such as primary and secondary education, child care and care of the elderly. Moreover, Swedish local governments are the largest employer in many municipalities (Bäck, 2003).

Of special importance to this study is that the municipal councils decide on the number of refugees that will be received by the municipality. Exploiting a natural experiment situation that arises from a feature of the mandate allocation system in Sweden, Folke (2010) finds that the representation of New Democracy in municipal councils had a significant negative impact on the number of refugees received in municipalities in the 1990s. (New Democracy was a short-lived party with a tough stance on immigration, represented in the Swedish Riksdag from 1991–1994.) This shows that local politics matter in the issue of interest. General conclusions drawn from the study of local governments in Sweden should thus travel reasonably well to the national context.

Still, care must be taken in drawing conclusions from the comparison of sub-national political units. In an illuminating critique of a study by Kestilä and Söderlund (2007), Arzheimer and Carter (2009) highlight several shortcomings of that study in particular and of sub-national studies in general. For instance, it is not possible in an ecological analysis to estimate the effects of individual characteristics such as unemployment or immigrant background on vote choice. All such variables are used in our study only as controls. However, factors pertaining to party strategy are common to all individuals in a political unit and can thus be studied on the ecological level. Arzheimer and Carter (2009) also raise the issue of possible spatial correlations between sub-national units in the same region. As we discuss in the data and methodology section, we therefore include regional fixed effects, which soak up explanatory factors at the regional level.

Furthermore, one of Arzheimer and Carter's (2009) main objections to the Kestilä and Söderlund (2007) study is that they fail to take into account the ideology of the mainstream parties at the local level. Our study addresses exactly this issue, as we measure the position of the other parties on the immigration issue in each municipality.

Another important issue is how Sweden differs from other European countries and thus what limits the generalizability of our study. As recently noted by Rydgren and Ruth (2011), Sweden is now a country much like other European countries with regard to the presence of anti-immigrant parties. While we should therefore not consider Sweden an outlier by default, there are still some features we should keep in mind.

First, Sweden has a fairly short history of electorally successful anti-immigrant parties. The Sweden Democrats (the largest anti-immigrant party today) was formed in 1988, gained a broader representation on the local level in the elections of 2002 and 2006 and had its national breakthrough in the election of 2010. Sweden has also seen some local parties, with representation mainly in the southern Sweden (such as *Skånepartiet* and *Sjöbopartiet*). On the national level, New Democracy was a short-lived party with a tough stance on immigration, which was represented in the Swedish Riksdag between 1991 and 1994. Second, the Sweden Democrats party was formed form the nationalistic and xenophobic organization Keep Sweden Swedish (*Bevara Sverige Svenskt*) that suggest its having historical ballast (Rydgren, 2004).

4. Data and methodology

The dependent variable is the percentage of valid votes received by the Sweden Democrats in the municipal elections of 2010, which is logged to account for skewness. The main independent variable is the toughness of the mainstream parties on the immigration issue. Arzheimer and Carter (2006) and Arzheimer (2009) use manifesto data to determine how tough mainstream parties are on immigration. While this approach is fruitful in cross-country comparisons, it is less successful in within-country studies. Local election manifestos, especially in smaller municipalities, cannot be expected to reflect the positions of the parties as well as national election manifestos do. Instead, we utilize a pioneering

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web survey of all 13 000 local politicians in Sweden, held in the fall of 2008 during the middle of the last election period (Gilljam et al., 2010). E-mail addresses to all politicians were collected through contacts with local government offices, national, regional and local party organizations and, finally, through phone contact with the politicians themselves. After an initial e-mail containing the link to the survey together with a round of e-mail reminders, non-responding politicians were contacted by telephone. Respondents who preferred to respond on a paper questionnaire were given the opportunity to do so. The ambitious data collection strategy yielded a response rate of 70 percent, over 50 percent in 98 percent of the 290 municipalities, making it (to the best of our knowledge) the only instance of a survey of all local politicians in a country.

One potential problem in our approach, in comparison with using for example local manifesto data (if that were available), is that we are less sure that we are capturing the local policy position, and not just the attitudes of local politicians. However, we are fairly confidant that we measure local party policy positions for two reasons: (i) All respondents were asked to answer the survey as representatives for their party in the municipality council, which makes it probable that they answered with their representative role in mind, and (ii) Even more importantly, we do not use individual answers as proxies for parties' policy positions. Instead, we use the mean position for all respondents in each party. We thus take all local party elite positions into account, which in effect *is* the local party's policy position.

Respondents in the study were asked two questions about immigration, which we compiled into an index (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$) of toughness towards immigration.[4] We then calculated the position of the toughest mainstream party in each municipality, which we used as a measure of the limit of mainstream anti-immigration attitudes, similar to Arzheimer (2009). This is more inclusive than Arzheimer and Carter (2006), who instead use the position of the largest conservative party to capture the same dynamic. In general, it might be assumed that the largest party on each side of the political spectrum is the main agenda setter, but the following example illustrates that other parties may serve to legitimize anti-immigration policies.

While immigration is rarely a salient theme in Swedish election campaigns, 2002 is an exception. Late in that campaign, the Liberal Party proposed that immigrants should be required to take a language test when applying for citizenship, which drew sharp criticism from several other parties (Dahlström and Esaiasson, 2011). The Liberals were accused of being xenophobic, but still increased their vote share from 4.7 to 13.4 percent in the election. In this case, a policy proposal of a small party in the middle of the political spectrum put immigration on the agenda. It is therefore necessary to include attitudes to immigration from parties other than the largest conservative party.

However, we also calculate the mean toughness of the mainstream parties in the municipality. This measure is used to test the hypothesis that it is the immigration stance of the entire political mainstream that matters for anti-immigrant party success, rather than the position of the most extreme party. The response rate of the survey used to calculate the mean toughness of the party is high, but there are still some gaps. Average toughness in each party in the municipality is hence weighted to account for missing responses in the calculation of the municipal measure. In the few municipalities where the representatives of one party in the municipal council are completely missing in the data, toughness for that party is replaced with the average nationwide toughness of the party in the question.[5]

Our theory predicts that the level of support for the anti-immigrant party depends on the mainstream parties' toughness in the immigration issue. However, model specification must account for both the problems of reverse causality and omitted variable bias. We take several steps to reduce these problems. First, we include the level of support for the Sweden Democrats in 2006 as a control variable. This effectively means that the dependent variable is the change in support for the Sweden Democrats between 2006 and 2010. By doing so, we reduce the risk of reverse causality in the model. In order for reverse causality to be the cause of a correlation between the toughness of the mainstream parties in 2008 and the change in SD support, mainstream politicians must be assumed to anticipate the election results two years in advance, which we find implausible.

Omitted variable bias is instead the most serious caveat facing the model. It is likely that there are factors that affect both mainstream party toughness and electoral support for SD in the municipality. We include three sets of control variables to minimize the risk that possible results are spurious.

First, we include known determinants of anti-immigrant votes. Following Arzheimer (2009), we control for the mean age, squared mean age (to account for an inverse-u relationship), proportion of men, proportion of highly educated, proportion of unemployed persons and proportion of non-Nordic immigrants, as well as crime rates in the municipality. Drawing conclusions about how individuals are affected by for instance age or education on the basis of the estimated coefficients of these variables would obviously be an example of ecological fallacy. They are thus included in the analysis only as control variables, and their respective coefficients are not of interest in this paper.

Second, a possible confounding factor could be popular demand for anti-immigrant policies, driven by some kind of

[4] The questions were phrased as suggestions, one concerning the politicians' municipality and the other Sweden as a whole: "When it comes to the municipality where you live: What is your opinion in each of the following suggestions? Receive more refugees in the municipality" and "Below are a number of proposals that have been put forward in the political debate. What is your opinion in each of them? Receive fewer refugees in Sweden". Five response options were available: "Very good suggestion", "Moderately good suggestion", "Neither good nor bad suggestion", "Moderately bad suggestion" and "Very bad suggestion".

[5] The correlation between the weighted and the unweighted measure (that is, the average toughness of all mainstream party representatives that answered the survey in the municipality) is .90.

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(unknown) cultural or historical factor not captured by our first control variables. To account for this, we add two further controls to the model. To pick up long-term historical factors, we include the share of votes received by the Nationalist party in the Riksdag elections of 1936 in the municipality. The reason for choosing the 1936 election is that that was the only time that a nationalist or Nazi party was big enough to merit inclusion in the official election statistics. Data for the variable are obtained from Berglund and Dellenbrant (1986). To pick up more short-term cultural factors, the share of votes received by *New Democracy* (the short-lived party that had a tough stance on immigration and represented in the Swedish Riksdag between 1991 and 1994) in the 1991 Riksdag elections in the municipality is included in the model. Moreover, we also include vote shares of the other parties in 2006 to minimize the risk of both mainstream party toughness and support for SD being a reflection of the relative strength of the mainstream parties.

However, it is possible that there are additional omitted variables that can give rise to a spurious correlation between mainstream party toughness and SD support. For instance, it is well known that the Sweden Democrats tend to perform better in the southern regions. As a third and final test, we therefore include dummy variables for the 21 administrative regions in Sweden to capture unobserved regional differences. The administrative regions include some of the regions in which SD usually is assumed to have its strongest support, such as *Skåne* and *Blekinge*. Furthermore, there is a regional parliament in each of the regions that could possibly affect local politics; for this reason we have chosen to let our regional dummy variables follow the administrative divisions. In this final model, correlations between mainstream toughness and SD support are due to within-region effects. Summary statistics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Summary statistics.

Variable	Mean	Sd	Min	Max
Ln (SD vote share 2010)	1.34	0.68	−0.87	2.96
Ln (SD vote share 2006)	0.60	0.89	−3.05	3.10
Mean toughness	0.36	0.08	0.15	0.69
Max toughness	0.59	0.15	0.25	1.00
Percent men 2009	50.25	0.75	48.1	52.4
Median income 2009 (1000 SEK)	222.20	20.05	185.72	308.30
Ln (Proportion highly educated 2009)	3.05	0.31	2.55	4.05
Ln (Population 2009)	9.84	0.94	7.82	13.63
Ln (Area 2009)	6.49	1.25	2.16	9.87
Percent non-Nordic immigrants 2009	7.46	4.39	2.38	31.81
Crime/1000 cap 2010	99.45	29.64	35.81	210.35
Open unemployment 2008	2.79	0.72	1.02	4.81
New Democracy vote share 1991	6.79	1.88	1.5	11.7
Nationalist vote share 1936	0.80	1.36	0.00	11.75
Mean age in the population 2009	42.83	2.48	37.00	48.50
Vote shares for mainstream parties 2006				
Left	6.03	5.23	0.16	58.30
Social Democrats	36.51	9.03	8.10	60.91
Green	3.28	1.90	0.11	10.59
Centre	13.52	8.81	0.84	47.41
Liberals	6.75	3.63	0.12	22.64
Christian Democrats	6.21	4.60	0.20	44.31
Conservatives	19.67	10.03	0.46	67.36
Local parties	5.26	7.19	0.08	43.46

Comment: $N = 285$.

5. Results

The two main independent variables, maximum and mean mainstream party anti-immigration toughness, are tested in three models each, with different sets of control variables. In Table 2, models 1 and 2 control only for the support for SD in 2006. Socio-economic controls are introduced in models 3 and 4, while regional dummy variables are introduced in models 5 and 6. Models 1, 3 and 5 thus test the effect of a tougher average policy position on immigration among mainstream parties (mean toughness), and models 2, 4 and 6 test the effect of the toughest position of a mainstream party (maximum toughness).

The coefficient for maximum toughness is positive but not statistically significantly so in any of the specifications. This is not very surprising, as the result is in line with the findings of Arzheimer (2009) and Arzheimer and Carter (2006). A tough stance on immigration by one mainstream party does not seem to legitimize the anti-immigrant party.

However, the coefficient for mean toughness is positive and highly significant in all three specifications. In the most demanding specification, where the model includes both socio-economic controls and regional dummy variables (model 5), the coefficient is 0.83. The toughness scale is a 9-point scale that has been coded to range from 0 to 1. The coefficient thus describes the maximum possible effect of the variable.

What does the effect signify in substantive terms? A one standard deviation increase in mainstream party toughness is expected to have an effect of 0.07 on the dependent variable, about 0.1 standard deviations. Since the dependent variable is log-transformed, this is equivalent to an increase in support of 7 percent (not percentage points). In the median municipality, where support for the Sweden Democrats is 4 percent, a one standard deviation increase in the mainstream parties' anti-immigration toughness is thus predicted to increase support for the Sweden Democrats by 0.28 percentage points. While this effect hardly seems to be a game-changer, it is important to bear in mind that we model the change in electoral support, not the level of electoral support. And, since past electoral support has a substantial positive effect on current support, it is possible that a tough mainstream position on immigration leads to successive and cumulative gains for the anti-immigrant party.

Looking closer at the control variables, the education level of the municipal population has the strongest and most consistent effect. If the education level were to increase by 1 percent, support for SD would decrease by 0.45 percent, according to model 5. The percentage of non-Nordic immigrants has a positive and statistically significant effect in all models, while the coefficient for crime rates is insignificant. A curvilinear effect of age is

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Table 2
The effects of mean and max toughness of mainstream parties on anti-immigrant party success.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Ln (SD share 2006)	0.64*** (0.02)	0.66*** (0.02)	0.60*** (0.04)	0.62*** (0.03)	0.42*** (0.05)	0.44*** (0.05)
Mean toughness	1.08*** (0.27)		1.03*** (0.32)		0.83*** (0.27)	
Max toughness		0.16 (0.13)		0.06 (0.13)		0.02 (0.13)
% Men 2009			0.02 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)	0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)
Median income 2009 (1000 SEK)			0.00 (0.00)	−0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Ln (Proportion of highly educated 2009)			−0.44*** (0.14)	−0.42*** (0.14)	−0.45*** (0.16)	−0.45*** (0.16)
Ln (Population 2009)			0.07 (0.05)	0.03 (0.05)	0.07 (0.05)	0.04 (0.05)
Ln (Area 2009)			0.03 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.05* (0.03)	0.05* (0.03)
% Non-nordic immigrants 2009			0.02*** (0.01)	0.02*** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)	0.02*** (0.01)
Crime/1000 cap. 2010			−0.00 (0.00)	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.00 (0.00)
Unemployment 2009			−0.00 (0.04)	0.00 (0.04)	−0.00 (0.04)	0.00 (0.04)
New Democracy vote share 1991			0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	0.02 (0.02)
Nationalist vote share 1936			−0.02 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
Mean age in the population 2009			0.87*** (0.22)	0.93*** (0.23)	0.36* (0.20)	0.37* (0.20)
(Mean age)^2			−0.01*** (0.00)	−0.01*** (0.00)	−0.00* (0.00)	−0.00* (0.00)
Left party			0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	−0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Green party			0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Center party			0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Liberals			−0.01 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.02** (0.01)	−0.01** (0.01)
Christian Democrats			0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)
Conservatives			0.01 (0.00)	0.01* (0.00)	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.00 (0.00)
Other parties			0.01* (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.00 (0.00)
Constant	0.57*** (0.09)	0.85*** (0.08)	−18.42*** (5.52)	−18.71*** (5.76)	−7.49 (5.15)	−7.15 (5.23)
Regional dummy variables	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES
Observations	289	289	285	285	285	285
Adjusted R^2	0.777	0.765	0.813	0.805	0.856	0.850

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$, OLS regression, unstandardized b-coefficients, robust standard errors in parentheses.

observed in models 3 and 4 but is substantially mitigated in models 5 and 6. In the latter models, the effect of age is significant and negative when the mean age in the municipality is 42 or higher, which is true for two-thirds of the sample. Only one party variable has a significant effect in the fixed effects models: the Sweden Democrats gained less in the municipalities in which the Liberal Party was more successful in 2006.

How can the effect of mainstream toughness be interpreted? Is it merely a reflection of Arzheimer and Carter's (2006) suggestion, that it is the position of the largest conservative party that matters? To answer this question, the variable for mean toughness is split into the toughness of the parties belonging to the red-green coalition and the toughness of the parties in the centre-right coalition. Table 3 presents three regression models using the split independent variable, using the same sets of control variables as in Table 2. In model 1, the only control is SD support in 2006, while model 2 also includes socio-economic controls and party vote share variables, and model 3 includes regional dummy variables.

Both the toughness of the left and the toughness of the right have positive coefficients in all models but, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, the coefficient for the toughness of the left is larger. It is also significant in models 2 and 3, while the toughness of the right coefficient is not. It is worth noting that the coefficients for both the left and the right are smaller than the coefficient for mean toughness among all the parties, indicating that it is indeed the mainstream position that matters, rather than the position of a few parties.

However, to fully test Arzheimer and Carter's (2006) hypothesis that it is the position of the largest conservative party that matters, the toughness variable is divided into individual parties and then inserted into the regression model one at a time together with the other control variables. It is impossible to test all of the individual parties in a single model, since the smaller parties are unrepresented in many municipalities. Fig. 1 shows the unstandardized b-coefficients of the toughness variables for each party together with 90 percent confidence intervals.

Table 3
Effect of toughness among the left and right mainstream parties.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Left toughness	0.54** (0.21)	0.48** (0.23)	0.36* (0.20)
Right toughness	0.35 (0.24)	0.28 (0.26)	0.21 (0.25)
Control variables	No	Yes	Yes
Regional dummy variables	No	No	Yes

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, OLS regression, unstandardized b-coefficients, robust standard errors in parentheses.

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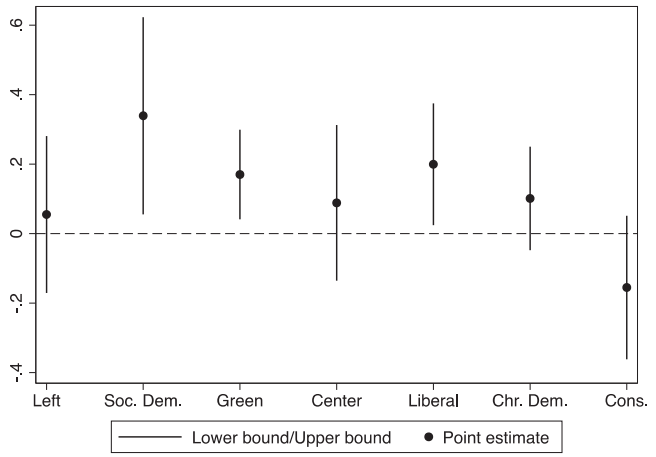

Fig. 1. Effect of toughness of individual parties. OLS regression, unstandardized b-coefficients, 90 percent confidence intervals. N: Left 222, Soc. Dem. 285, Green 184, Centre 268, Liberal 250, Chr. Dem. 238, Cons. 274.

The results can be said to give some credence to Arzheimer and Carter (2006), as the only negative coefficient is found for the Conservatives. This effect is however not significant, even at the 90 percent level, and should thus be interpreted very carefully. Effects for the Social Democrats, the Green Party and the Liberal party are significant (Social Democrats and Liberal at the 95 percent level) and positive. The Liberals is the mainstream party that since the 2002 election is probably most closely associated with a tough stance on immigration (Holmberg and Oscarsson, 2004) but is also the mainstream party with the clearest ownership of the immigration issue (Odmalm, 2011), which might be the reason why it has a stronger legitimizing effect than other parties. The positive and significant effect for the Liberal party also shows that it is not only a question of the positions of the left. It is also interesting that a tougher stance from the Social Democrats significantly affects the Sweden Democrats' electoral success. We can only speculate as to why this effect occurs, but it is possible that Social Democratic voters with an anti-immigrant attitude interpret a tougher stance on immigration from the Social Democrats as a signal that immigration is an important issue, but are at the same time not satisfied with the Social Democratic position (although it is tougher) and therefore move to the side of the Sweden Democrats. As observed by van der Brug and van Spanje (2009), there is a large group of voters that has left-wing attitudes on socio-economic issues but right-wing attitudes on cultural issues, which are not represented in Western European politics. It is plausible that these kinds of voters have voted for the Social Democrats in Sweden and at the same time are the ones most easily affected by shifts in issue strategies. This does not seem unreasonable, as the Social Democrats to a fairly large extent lost voters directly to the Sweden Democrats in the 2006 election (Oscarsson and Holmberg, 2008).

To test the robustness of the results, we tested the effect of mainstream anti-immigration toughness in a number of alternative model specifications. Without control for electoral support for the Sweden Democrats in 2006, the results point in the same direction, although the coefficients for toughness increase in size and significance. Furthermore, Arzheimer and Carter (2009) warn that spatial correlations may drive the results in studies on the sub-national level. In addition to the regional fixed effects, we therefore also included a variable indicating the mean (logged) support for the Sweden Democrats in 2006 in all neighboring municipalities. The effect of this variable was very weak and failed to achieve statistical significance. We also included other variables related to the "political opportunity structure", such as the effective number of parties and mean ideology of the mainstream parties (as measured in the survey of local politicians). None of the variables had any significant effects and did not affect the coefficient of the main independent variable.

The existence of a viable party organization for Sweden Democrats in a municipality could possibly affect both the support for SD in the following election and the toughness of mainstream parties. Unfortunately, we do not know of any data to test this claim. As a first test, we included (in addition to the vote share variable) a dummy variable indicating whether SD won at least one municipal council mandate in the 2006 election. The idea is that a seat in the council could serve as a platform for debate. The dummy variable has a positive and significant effect, but the effect of mainstream party toughness remains unchanged.

A possible objection to our model is that success among anti-immigrant parties is a result of short-term changes in the independent variables and not a result of absolute levels in the independent variables. We therefore estimated models in which we included independent variables measuring change in unemployment, education level, crime, population and non-Nordic immigrants between 2006 and 2009.[6] The coefficient for mean toughness decreased slightly in this model but remained clearly significant. We also estimated models that included interaction terms between the percentage of non-Nordic immigrants and unemployment as well as crime (and the changes in these variables). Almost all interactions were found to be statistically insignificant,[7] and the main results were substantially unchanged. To rule out outliers in the data bias results, we also reran models with jackknife and bootstrap procedures,[8] which did not affect the results.

Summing up the results, the empirical evidence seems to support the notion that a tough stance on immigration from mainstream parties legitimizes the otherwise taboo policies of the anti-immigrant parties, rather than crowd them out. Our results hence support the facilitating hypothesis. However, it is not enough that one party takes a tough stance – the variable indicating the position of the toughest party is insignificant. We only find support when operationalizing mainstream party

[6] Changes were calculated as the difference between the levels in 2009 and 2006; data for 2010 are as yet unavailable for most of the variables.

[7] The exception being the interaction between the percent non-Nordic immigrants and crime rates. The interaction was negative, which seems to indicate that the two variables act as substitutes – the existance of either benefits the Sweden Democrats, but SD does not get an extra boost if both are in place.

[8] Using the jackknife and bootstrap procedures included in STATA 12.

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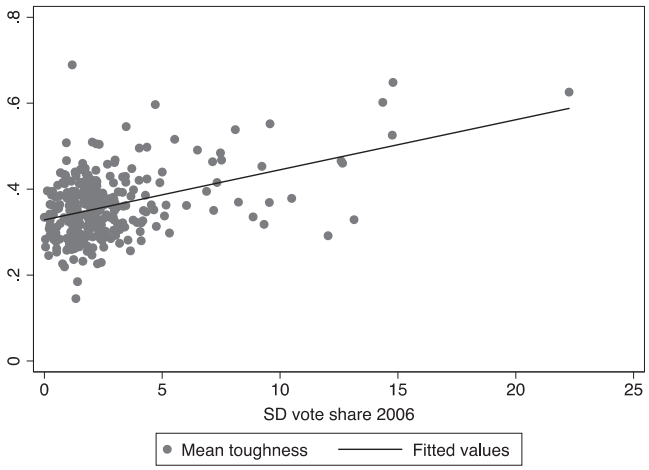

Fig. 2. Relationship between electoral success of the Sweden Democrats in 2006 and mean toughness of the mainstream parties in 2008.

toughness as the weighted mean of the mainstream parties' position. Specifically, toughness of the parties on the left seem to be more legitimizing than the toughness of the parties on the right.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we argue that short-term variations in electoral support for anti-immigrant parties are affected by the mainstream parties' policy positions on immigration. Research has suggested that a tough position can both impede and facilitate anti-immigrant parties. We tested these two competing hypotheses, using a unique sub-national dataset on the 290 Swedish local governments in the 2010 elections. The results show that, if mainstream parties take a tough position on immigration, this facilitates anti-immigrant party success. Even when controlling for a large number of socio-economic, historical and regional alternative explanations, electoral support for the Sweden Democrats (the largest anti-immigrant party in Sweden) is stronger in municipalities where representatives of mainstream parties take tougher positions on immigration. Thus, our main conclusion is that tougher policy positions of mainstream parties on the immigration issue facilitate electoral anti-immigrant party success.

Looking closer at the facilitating hypothesis, the analysis in this paper contributes three additional important observations. First, contrary to what has been argued in previous research (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006), it is not enough for *one* mainstream party to take a tough stance on immigration. In order to have a statistically significant effect on the electoral success of the Sweden Democrats, the political immigration discourse must become tougher. This indicates that voters need to see that several of the mainstream parties have tough positions on immigration in order for them to interpret it as a positive signal for the Sweden Democrats' policy position. This is probably only natural, as the barrier of non-respectability for anti-immigrant parties is difficult to overcome.

Second, and again opposing the most common position in the literature (Bale, 2003; Arzheimer and Carter, 2006), the paper suggests that it is not necessarily the political right that holds the key to the making or breaking of the success of anti-immigrant parties but rather the political left. Using the same very demanding controls as in the main analysis, we report a statistically significant and positive correlation between the toughness of the left (including the Left Party, the Social Democrats and the Greens) and the success of the Sweden Democrats. This is especially interesting as we fail to establish the same relationship between the political right (including the Liberals, the Center Party, The Conservatives and the Christian Democrats) and the success of Sweden Democrats. We can only speculate as to why the left party effect occurs, but it is compatible with the observation that a large group of voters with left-wing socio-economic and right-wing cultural preferences are not represented by any mainstream party (van der Brug and van Spanje, 2009). It might be voters of this kind that are most affected when left parties legitimize a tougher stance on the immigration issue.

Third, looking at the effects of single parties, our findings again go against important stances in the literature. Previous research has almost exclusively (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; van der Brug et al., 2005; but for an exception see Arzheimer, 2009) focused on the relationship between the largest (or most extreme) mainstream right party and the anti-immigrant party. We report statistically significant and positive relations between the positions of the Greens, the Social Democrats and the Liberals on the one hand and the electoral success of the Sweden Democrats on the other hand (none of the other parties show statistically significant coefficients). Even more interesting, the strongest and most significant relationship is between the policy position of the Social Democrats and the electoral success of the Sweden Democrats. Again, this underlines that it can not be taken for granted that the political right is at the center of the story, even though some right parties, such as the Liberals, clearly are. The Social Democrats indeed seem to have a large potential to facilitate the Sweden Democrats.

As the question of saliency effects is explored to a greater extent in the literature, we have deliberately focused on issue position rather than saliency. However, it may be that saliency plays a mediating role in the causal mechanism described in this paper. For instance, if a party were to adopt a considerably tougher position on immigration and communicate this to the electorate, the saliency of the immigration issue could increase, which previous research has shown to benefit anti-immigrant parties (Meguid, 2005; Arzheimer, 2009). However, a changed position on the issue could also serve to decrease issue saliency. For instance, a distinctly multiculturalist party could move towards the mainstream of the issue, thereby opposing anti-immigrant parties less vehemently, thus decreasing issue saliency (Meguid, 2005) but legitimizing the anti-immigrant party. The effects of issue position observed in this paper may thus to some extent be mediated through saliency effects, but the main part is likely to be caused by mainstream party legitimization of the anti-immigrant party.

The generalizability of these results is however hampered by case selection. Our design made it possible to

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directly study effects of tougher policy positions on the part of mainstream parties on electoral anti-immigrant party success in a unique way, but there are of course limits to how well the results travel to other contexts. The situation in Sweden, with a fairly new anti-immigrant party with a background in a xenophobic organization, probably makes it particularly important how mainstream parties act. Our results are thus more relevant to situations similar to the Swedish, where anti-immigrant parties are in strong need of legitimization, and probably less relevant to situations where the anti-immigrant parties are more firmly established.

Finally, after the conclusions presented in this paper, one intriguing question for future research is why the mainstream parties take tough positions on the immigration issue when it is obviously bad for them. Empirical studies have shown that the anti-immigration policies of anti-immigrant parties are "contagious", meaning that it has an effect on policies of mainstream parties (van Spanje, 2010). It can of course mirror real-world problems, but we would suggest that it can also be the result of a strategically motivated vicious circle. When the mainstream parties observe stronger support for an anti-immigrant party, a natural reaction from a Downsian perspective is to move in the direction of a tougher immigration policy position, as this is a both underrepresented and popular position (Dahlström and Esaiasson, 2011). This is probably what happened in Denmark in the late 1990s (Downs, 2002; Green-Pedersen and Odmalm, 2008) and might also be what is happening in Sweden after the 2010 election. Unfortunately, we do not have the data to test this hypothesis properly, but we will end by showing a figure that gives a crude indication that there might be something to it.

Fig. 2 shows a fairly strong positive bivariate relationship between the electoral success of the Sweden Democrats in the 2006 election and the attitudes of the mainstream parties in 2008 (Pearson's $R = 0.42$, $p = 0.000$). A possible interpretation is that the mainstream parties observed the electoral gains of the Sweden Democrats in 2006 and therefore adopted tougher positions on the immigration issue, which in turn facilitated the success for the Sweden Democrats in 2010: a losing gamble. It is up to future research to determine whether this is actually the case.

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