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Constructing ‘The People’, ‘The Other’ and ‘The Elite’ in populist right-wing discourse

A qualitative case study on the Sweden Democrats

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Abstract

The research is designed as a qualitative case study, where theoretical concepts of populism and identity are employed to investigate how the Sweden Democrats construct identities in their populist right-wing discourse. To execute the study, the concepts of ‘the People,’ ‘the Other,’ and ‘the elite’ are used to analyze how these popular subjects are discursively constructed and articulated in parliamentary activities. These concepts lie at the very core of populism, used to draw upon these identities to legitimize political action. The study found that the Sweden Democrats construct a positive representation of the people through processes of differentiation, often drawing upon a working-class demographic. Contrastingly, it discursively constructs ‘the Other’ as a threat and danger to a Swedish and European identity by shifting the blame on a national and international elite. Through discursive strategies, the Sweden Democrats’ discourse is centered around the idea of a constructed “good” native identity by using exclusionary nationalistic rhetoric in their populist discourse. The research contributes by analyzing how identity plays a vital role, and how ‘the People,’ ‘the elite,’ and ‘the Other’ are constructed in parliamentary activity by the Sweden Democrats. The focus on the role of identities is essential, as it lies at the very core of right-wing populism and is used to legitimize political action, as well as exclusion. Moreover, as populism and right-wing parties have surged over the last few decades, investigating how they draw upon these discursive identity constructs can be vital to understanding their growth.

Keywords: populism, identity, discourse, Sweden Democrats, right-wing

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1. Introduction

Scholarly interest in studying populism has increasingly grown during recent decades. The term populism itself has been contested by scholars (Mudde & Kaltwesser, 2017; Brett, 2013; Moffitt, 2016; Weyland, 2017; Ostiguy, 2017), thus leading to different interpretations. However, the role that identity plays in populist politics seems to be something that scholars agree on. The identity politics exercised by specifically populist right-wing parties is exclusionary and draws upon protecting ‘the People’ from the harmful consequences of increased globalization, such as increased European integration and immigration (Noury & Roland, 2020). The effects of growing populism politics, and populist right-wing parties, are argued to be a direct consequence to modern, liberal, and cooperative politics and a danger to democracy (Müller, 2016). The exclusionary nature of populist parties often rejects the idea of open borders, international politics, and multicultural societies. Instead, populists argue for a homogenous national society, where political decisions should be decided on domestically, with ‘the Peoples’ best interest in mind first, while being suspicious and more close-minded towards international cooperation. The exclusionary nature of populist right-wing politics makes its relevance to Global Studies and globalization of great importance.

By drawing upon populist identity subjects, populist right-wing actors legitimize their policy actions. Identity groups become politically charged and significant groups of people identified by or with social markers such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, or nationality (Gou, 2019). Populistic right-wing parties draw upon an identity of ‘the People’ as a distinctive and often ethnically homogenous collective identity, juxtaposing them against a dangerous ‘elite’ to argue for political changes. Populism pits identities, more specifically ‘the People’ against ‘the elite’ and ‘the Other’ to further their political agenda as well as to exclude certain citizens in society from certain privileges (Velasco, 2020:2). Practicing identity politics is arguably not a new phenomenon and have been used by political actors for centuries. For populist actors, however, the concepts and the constructed antagonistic relationship between the pure ‘People’ and the corrupt ‘elite’ and dangerous ‘Other’ lies at the center (Mudde, 2004:543).

In Sweden, populism and right-wing politics have unexceptionally also increased their political presence. The Sweden Democrats have been on the rise since the beginning of the century and have continuously grown since then, unsurprisingly increasing scholarly interest. Previous research on the Sweden Democrats has focused on the party’s populist ideologies and

discourses, often by drawing upon other theoretical fields such as gender studies and religion (Norocel & Pettersson, 2021; Norocel, Saresma, Lähdesmäki & Routsalainen, 2020b). Right-wing politics seems only to be increasing in Sweden. Therefore, there is and should be an increasing need to study how identity plays a role in populist-right wing politics and how the construction of those identities is articulated, specifically in parliamentary activities such as speeches, debates, and interpellations. Especially since the Parliament is considered an important political institution of democratic societies (Van Dijk, 2010), as a site where political actors speak and act on behalf of ‘the People’ (Ilie, 2015). As 2022 marks the election year in Sweden, analyzing how identities are constructed in parliamentary debates is of utmost importance, as it could determine the political fate of many of these identities for the next four years. This thesis contributes to contemporary scholarly research by focusing on identity construction in the Sweden Democrats’ discourse.

This research is conducted as a case study that draws upon the theoretical populist identity concepts of ‘the People,’ ‘the elite,’ and ‘the Other.’ It also draws upon theoretical ideas of nationalism and identity to analyze the collected data. The thesis begins with a background on nationalist right-wing politics in Sweden and a background on the Sweden Democrats. It then moves on to present the aim of this thesis by introducing the research aim and question(s). It then presents previous literature on populism and populist right-wing politics in Sweden. The objective of the review is to state what is missing from preceding research on this specific topic and why it is vital to investigate identity construction in Swedish political discourse. After that, a theoretical section is presented, with the main theoretical assumptions and concepts. These are further explained and used to create an analytical framework to guide the analytical part of the thesis. Then, argumentation and discussion for the chosen research design, data collection, choice, and method of the analysis are given. Lastly, the analysis is presented, which will guide the reader to the final section of this thesis, the results, and the conclusion.

1.1. Background – the Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Sweden

There seems to be an agreement among scholars that the Nordic countries epitomize a picture of being “model societies of the modern world,” as argued by Bergmann (2017:159). Among these Nordic countries, Sweden has been argued to be the exception to right-wing populist movements and parties (Rydgren, 2006). Various factors have been found responsible for the lack of electoral success for right-wing affiliated countries in Sweden. The importance of social class, and socio-economic issues such as immigration were considered a low prioritizing issue for voters. Another factor was that there seemed to be a voting-preference for more centrist policy alternatives, making voters less sympathetic towards right-wing parties. Others have argued that the right-wing parties in Sweden were too extreme for voters (Rydgren & van der Meiden, 2019). However, since the beginning of the century, scholars have now come to agree that the rise of right-wing politics and populist right-wing parties, as Rydgren (2006) refers to them, can easily be found in Sweden as much as in the rest of Europe. Tax populism and right-wing populism have gained ground during the past fifteen years in the country (ibid). A working class, that once identified themselves with the Social Democratic party (Rydgren & van der Meiden 2019), seems to have changed their affiliation. Thus, things have seemingly shifted in the years to come. Sweden’s national identity has a history of connecting “the people” with notions such as democracy, merging both ethnos and demos into the concept of “national.” Initially, peasants were considered the heart of the people, referred to as democratic, but would later incorporate common working people into that concept (Bergmann, 2017).

Furthermore, the very concept of the People’s home was supposedly open, liberal, and tolerant in the beginning as the term was coined. Sweden had known itself for its liberal and open attitude towards migrants and refugees, which could also be seen in practice as the country took in many more than its neighboring countries. The idea of multiculturalism was deeply integrated into the Swedish societal model and picture (ibid:160). The rise of populist right-wing politics and parties in Sweden, strategically reconstructed and repainted thus liberal and open view of the People’s home and Sweden itself.

It has been argued that due to a decline of class politics in the country, the politicization of immigration, and a confusing convergence of political affiliates in Sweden, right-wing politics have been able to create itself a home in the Swedish social and political arena during the past few decades (Rydgren & van der Meiden, 2019). Thus, creating a path for growing success and voter support for populist parties in Sweden; the Sweden Democrats. By arguing for issues such as immigration, security and nationalistic unity, the party has been able to gain voters and increase their political presence in Sweden.

1.2. The rise of the Sweden Democrats

Emerging out of the remnants of the Sweden Party in 1988, the Sweden Democrats have often been closely associated with neo-Nazi ideas and beliefs (Hellström, 2016). The party made their stance regarding EU policy and integration quite clear early, expressing their anti-stance. In conjunction with their anti-attitude towards regional integration, the party also expressed their stance regarding immigration by criticizing the government's lenient immigration policy. The party argued that immigration led to increased criminality and segregation in society. That importance should lie in protecting the ethnic and culturally homogenous Swedish nation (Bergmann, 2017), which was one of their main principles for the election in 1989 (Bergmann, 2017). From here, concepts such as social cohesion, fatherland, people, and the nation came to be discursively constructed and communicated. The party constructed its self-image as speakers of ordinary citizens and the defenders of the Swedish people (Bergmann, 2017; Hellström, Nilsson & Stoltz, 2012).

Since crossing the four percent threshold, a necessity for parliamentary representation in Sweden, the party has only continued its growth in following years. From 5.7 percent of the votes in 2010 to 17.53 percent in the most recent election in 2018, the Sweden Democrats have undoubtedly given rise to right-wing politics in Sweden (The Electoral Authority [Valmyndigheten], 2022). For the upcoming election in 2022, the party's principal program starts by stating that Sweden's current political landscape has put others' interests before its citizens. It continues to argue for the insecurity that has grown over society and citizens, primarily due to the "limitless migration politics" (Party Program 2022). Thus, immigration is undeniably, perhaps unsurprisingly, an essential topic for the populist right-wing party this upcoming election, alongside policy issues such as security and gas pricings. This thesis broadens the scope, by investigating how popular identity subjects play a role in the Sweden Democrats' discourse, by looking specifically at how the concepts of 'the People,' 'the elite,' and 'the Other' are discursively constructed in parliamentary activities in contemporary times. Broadening the scope, allows for a wider analytical point of view to draw conclusions from. Furthermore, it allows me, as a researcher, to analyze wider reconstructions in the way in which the Sweden Democrats constructs identities.

1.3. Delimitations

This thesis mainly aims to analyze the construction of populist identities in parliamentary activities by the Sweden Democrats. While there are many exciting angles one can explore and investigate, this thesis is conducted to focus on the construction of the identity subjects only. The thesis draws upon the work of Hansen (2006), focusing on the theoretical framework of how identities, in general, are constructed. It also draws upon the work of Wodak (2015) and her focus on right-wing populism specifically-

Nevertheless, the research study acknowledges the importance of policy response, demands, and changes in these debates but has however chosen to focus solely on how these identity subjects – ‘the People,’ ‘the elite,’ and ‘the Other’ – are constructed by the right-wing party the Sweden Democrats in parliamentary activities. Concludingly, the research delimits itself to studying right-wing political parties solely, at a certain point in time. However, it acknowledges that there might have been a few more conservative and right-wing affiliated political parties that could have been used as case studies.

1.4. Specified Aim and Research Question

This thesis aims to analyze how right-wing actors construct the popular identity of ‘the People,’ ‘the elite,’ and ‘the Other’, using the Swedish party, the Sweden Democrats as a case study. Based on the theoretical concepts and assumptions, which will be presented later in this thesis, this thesis aims at analyzing how the Sweden Democrats construct popular identities in parliamentary motions, speeches, and interpellations. The question that this study specifically asks:

How are popular identities constructed in parliamentary activities by the Sweden Democrats?

Through the analytical framework, sub-questions will be used as a guide, to analyze the data.

- 1. How are ‘the People’ constructed in these debates by the Sweden Democrats?*
- 2. How is ‘the elite’ constructed in these debates by the Sweden Democrats?*
- 3. How is ‘the Other’ constructed in these debates by the Sweden Democrats?*

The following section intends to present previous literature on populism, identity construction and previous research done on the Sweden Democrats and their right-wing populist rhetoric.

2. Literature Review

This chapter will provide a brief theoretical background of populism in scholarly debates, as scholarship on populism tends to differ in the way in which it is approached. The aim is to provide a theoretical foundation into the field of populism, present some of its central core concepts, and relate it to the importance of identity constructions. This section will set a foundation for the next part of this chapter, which will review previous literature on populism in a Nordic context. The focus will focus on populist discourses in Sweden, and the Sweden Democrats, and how identity creations play a part in such discourses.

2.1. The Many Faces of Populism – But What is It?

Populism has increasingly grown as a subject of study for many scholars, particularly in recent decades. The debates surrounding populism and how best to define and approach it are many and can often be complex. The complexity of defining populism has led to debates on whether to abandon the term entirely. The ambiguity of populism has been referred to as a concept, theory, ideology, a communicative tool, and a policy strategy. Scholars within social and political sciences, and communication and media studies have varying contested interpretations of how to conceptualize and define populism (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

Populism has historically been associated with the late 19th century and was used to describe emerging movements such as the People's Party in North America and the narodniki in Russia (Akkerman, 2003:148, Canovan, 1982:1). Scholarly interest grew during the 20th century when a new wave of populism appeared in European countries and the Anglo-Saxon world (Akkerman, 2003:148). Today, populism can be found on the left as well as the right axis of political parties. One of the ways in which populism is approached is to define it as an ideology. Mudde (2004:543) defines *populism* as “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus the ‘corrupt elite’ and which politics should be an expression of the general will of the people.” This definition captures the people and the elite(s) as two prominent concepts. People are juxtaposed against the elite in the name of popular sovereignty (Moffitt, 2016), where one of the central arguments is to act upon democracy and legitimacy in the name of the people (Tormey,

2018:261, Akkerman, 2003:151). This antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite presents a narrow view of populism as an ideology.

However, scholars argue that as a thin-centered ideology, populism has the possibility to be combined with different (thin and full) ideologies, such as liberalism, communism, nationalism, or socialism (Mudde, 2004:544, Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008:4). Because it is thin-centered, it can be left and right and neither (March, 2007:64). Thus, from an ideational approach, populism can be understood as “a set of ideas which are characterized by an antagonism between the people and the elite, rather than a campaigning or communication style” (McDonnell & Cabrera, 2019:487). The ideational approach to defining populism has been debated, and some will argue that populism is better understood as a political argument. By appealing to common conceptions that the rule of the people is a positive thing, it transforms populism into an argument rather than a particular ideology or set of policies (Brett, 2013:410).

Populism is not only defined as having a set of beliefs in how and for whom society should be organized. It is also performed through discourses by populist actors. Brubaker (2017) builds on the notion that populism can be considered a discourse where populism is a discursive and stylistic repertoire. Populism performs something as it acts and speaks in the name of others (the people). This definition also argues for the fluidity of populism, where populism depends on the context, time, and space and draws on different elements of populist repertoires depending on such factors. Such a definition goes against defining populism as an ideology. Instead, populism becomes a discursive strategy used in times when societal and political changes such as terrorist attacks or democratic insecurities occur. It takes on the form of political expression, which is found in speeches or texts by political actors (Moffitt, 2016:21).

Furthermore, populist discourses rely on essential concepts such as the nation, the people, and national sovereignty (Noury & Roland (2020:421), where identities come into play as categories within these concepts. Identities are constructed to create borders and differentiation between an "us" and "them" (the Other) (Pelinka, 2013), and populism has been closely debated by scholars concerning other concepts such as nativism and identity politics (Noury & Roland (2020:422). Such constructions of concepts and identities play out in media and other communication channels. The media becomes the ‘stage’ on which populism and populist actors can promote certain discourses (anti-immigration, nativism, anti-elite) to the public. Thus, by adding a performative and communicative element to populism, some scholars argue

that it is a political style rather than a discourse. Political style then adds the element of performance and communication and should be understood as “the repertoires of embodied, symbolically mediated performances made to audiences that are used to create and navigate the fields of power that compromise the political, stretching from the domain of government through to everyday life” (Moffitt, 2016:36). Defining populism in this manner allows us to understand populism across regional contexts as well as ideological and organizational ones (ibid. 154).

Weyland (2017) takes on an inherently different approach to defining populism than previously presented. He presents a political-strategic conceptualization and methodology by criticizing discursive and ideological definitions of populism. By his definition, populism is to be defined and approached as a political strategy characterized by a personalistic leader who seeks, or exercises government power based on direct support from a large number of followers. This political-strategic approach emphasizes leadership's crucial role, which is sustained through mass support. This definition is opposed by Mudde (2004:545), who argues that while charismatic leadership and direct communication between leaders and the people are common among populist actors, they do not actually define populism but rather facilitate it. In turn, Ostiguy (2017) denounces both Weyland's and Mudde's definitions of populism by arguing that these approaches neglect a socio-cultural dimension to populism. Here, populism is defined as “flaunting the low,” meaning that the socio-cultural approach acknowledges that populism is a two-way phenomenon; it is relational, especially between popular socio-cultural identities. In fewer words, populism becomes more about identity creation and identities, than world views and ideology due to its relationship between people and leader as well as their relation to an “Other.”

However, one chooses to approach populism; the antagonistic relationship between ‘the people,’ ‘the elite,’ and ‘the other’ is front and center. The people are positioned as a central community in a ‘homeland’ which constructs a ‘pure’ community where the heartland is opposed to ‘others.’ The ‘others’ include elites, minorities, or immigrants. The antagonistic relationship between these identities is sustained by populism, which favors a discourse of distancing from the ‘Others’ and proximity to ‘the people’ (Wodak, 2015:26). The construction of such identity groups will always involve exclusionary/inclusionary practices and discourses. These play a central role in constructing identities (ibid:42), where these constructions will come to form an ‘imagined community’ (Mudde, 2004:546). Müller (2016) argues that

populism always involves a form of identity politics, however he emphasizes that not all versions of identity politics are populist. Understanding populism as an exclusionary form of identity politics, is to understand populism as a threat to democracy (ibid:3). Populism is a moralistic imagination of politics, which constructs fictional identities in their claims, Müller (2016:20) further argues. Thus, identity politics and identity constructions lie at the very core of populism since constructing identities means delineating the boundaries with other identities, and where these identities become popular subject constructs. Without constructing the outgroup alongside it, one cannot construct the ingroup (Mudde, 2007:63). Some have proposed that the narrow view of ideational approaches to populism raises concerns and issues regarding the construction of the people, the elite, and the ‘Other’ (Pelinka, 2013:4-5). The counterargument to such concerns argues that due to the thin-centered scope of populism, it often is combined with different concepts and ideological traditions. However, such convergence is essential in their capacity to make sense to greater constituencies (Mudde & Kaltwesser, 2017:150). Thus, studying populism in conjunction with other adjacent fields might be beneficial. Concludingly, this thesis adopts the discursive approach to populism, in conjunction with nationalistic elements, as the basis for the research. Thus, populism will be approached as a discourse, which adopts particular discursive strategies when construction subject identities.

2.2. Nordic Populism, Sweden, and the Sweden Democrats

Scholarship on Nordic populism is vast and varied and has arguably grown during the last few decades, with the upsurge of populist and right-wing parties in the Nordic countries. Some have focused on historically tracing and describing the growth of populism in the region. In contrast, others have focused on studying the ideology and discourse of populism within a variety of interdisciplinary fields. A central tenant in the scholarship on populism has been comparatively studying Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland.

Scholars do agree, to some extent, that Nordic populism came in a “wave-like process” (Fryklund, 2018:268) and has been a continuous process where different types of populisms have been present at different times (Fryklund, 2018b:29). Populism found its roots in the Nordic part of the world during the 1960s and 1970s, where populism was related to anti-elitism and to protests strong taxation. The decade after, populism targeted established parties adopting

a neo-liberal approach and further developed the decade after that, showing a robust anti-immigration stance (Fryklund, 2018, Palonen & Sunnercrantz, 2021, Herkman, 2017). The third wave of populism that came in the early twenty-first century is what made populist parties stronger (Fryklund, 2018b).

Whenever populism made its mark in the Nordic region, a common trait argued for by scholars is that such parties have adopted a nationalist-populist ideological approach, often related to solid criticism against immigration. As nationalism has no class connotation, according to Herkman (2017:481), nationalist populism can be found in Nordic countries' right- and left-wing ideologies. Exclusionary nationalist rhetoric can be located in the Nordic context, and is often intertwined with ethnicity, where suspicion of foreigners and xenophobia is present (Fryklund, 2018:273). Some scholars who have compared the Nordic countries against one another found differences in signifiers. In Denmark, Euroscepticism has been a more important signifier alongside criticism of immigration. Populist parties have argued for more substantial welfare benefits for native inhabitants than migrants. Similarly, Finland has adopted an anti-EU discourse. The EU, referred to as an outside elite group, is constructed as a threat to national sovereignty, while immigration has been labeled an expense for the welfare society and the leading cause of crimes (Herkman, 2017). Similarly, Sweden mainly related its anti-immigration agenda to social security by arguing that it poses a threat to the native inhabitant (ibid., p. 480).

Moreover, populism has been studied by combining or drawing upon other interdisciplinary fields. Such studies have often conducted case studies focusing on discursive constructions, or they have been comparative. Others have focused on the communicative aspect of populism by studying populist discourses in media outlets, by conducting case studies which focus on the reproductive populism discourses on social media channels (Åkerlund, 2020). Those studies have exemplified that populist discourses, often adopt a nationalistic, anti-establishment (anti-elite), and anti-immigration rhetoric. The "elite" and the "other", often a migrant other, are constructed and framed as a threat to the moral Swedish way of life, or how the "people's home" is articulated (Norocel, Saresma, Lähdesmäki & Routsalainen, 2020).

Others, with a slightly different analytical focus, have examined how populist self-representation is constructed, in blogs and other media outlets. Here, populist logic becomes visible in the creation of identities (Nilsson, 2012). An interesting aspect can be found in Pettersson, Liebkind & Sakki (2016:637) case study which showed how right-wing populist

politicians reconstruct their (ethnic) identities in relation to the social and political world around them. While there were competing construction of identities, discursive constructions of “the Other” were similar to their “white political” comrades, which highlights a particular political logic of populism when constructing in and outgroups. Nevertheless, studying media’s role in how populist discourses are framed, produced, and constructed by right-wing populist actors has grown saliently. Such focus often emphasizes the construction of the people, the elite and the other, and the antagonistic relationship between these groups.

Scholarship on Swedish populist right-wing parties has mainly focused on populist ideology and discourse of the Sweden Democrats, unsurprisingly as they are considered the most far-right leaning political party in the country. Authors have often descriptively studied the parties’ populist ideologies and discourses, often in conjunction with other theoretical fields such as gender studies. Norocel, Saresma, Lähdesmäki & Routsalainen (2020b) has focused much research on how gender identities are used to construct the frame of the antagonistic relationship between “us” and “them.” By employing notions of men and masculinities, discursive constructions of white masculinities are used to separate white Nordic masculinities from the racialized “other” Muslim man. The study further argued that on the grounds of racial belonging and sexuality, and social class, such discursive constructions indicated a global consolidation of the Manichean separation of the people from the other.

In another study, Sweden Democrats were argued to employ discursive rhetoric of “care racism,” which drew on gendered and religious notions to separate the modern people of Sweden from the racialized other. Care racism often involves rhetoric where parties such as the Sweden Democrats present themselves as the true defenders of the people and as saviors of “the other” (Norocel & Pettersson, 2022), showing a strong anti-elitist rhetoric. Swedish culture, and its people, are often constructed as superior, and the Sweden Democrats construct a vision of a *folkhem* to protect its citizens, which again, displays a certain construction around the people as pure.

Care racism and politics of fear are discursive devices employed by populist parties to legitimize the separation between the people and others (ibid.). Emotional imaginaries such as fear, anxieties, and uncertainty (ontological securities) play out in discourses and myths of the nation, the establishment, its people, and the immigrant others. The Sweden Democrats use such imaginaries as an argument for the restoration of Swedish people’s homes and a nostalgic, more secure past. Fear and anxiety are linked to the internal and external threats of Swedish

territory and its people and in the reproduction of framing certain others as threats, which threatens the Swedish imagined ontological security (Kinvall, 2018). Thus, concludingly, scholarship of Sweden and the Sweden Democrats, often discusses the antagonistic relationship between a (nationalist) people to the Other, often framed as a non-national. Anti-elitism rhetoric has been touched upon, but not as extensively as examining concepts such as the people and the (migrant) Other.

This section has presented a theoretical foundation into the field of populism and examined previous literature done on Nordic populism, more specifically within a Swedish context and on the Sweden Democrats. It has also aimed at shedding some light on the discursive practices undertaken by right-wing populists and how these actors discursively construct and frame identities. As presented in this chapter, scholarship on populism as a field of study has been vast and varied. Scholars have examined how right-wing populist parties aid in constructing and framing identities, as well as the antagonistic relation between “the people,” “the elite,” and the “other,” by employing different strategies and discourses. Scholars have often focused on how these strategies and discourses play out in media by analyzing right-wing populist party newsletters, newspapers, and social media outlets.

This thesis aims to contribute, empirically, to the scholarship on populism by examining how the Sweden Democrats construct popular identities in their populist discourses in a more formal setting, namely parliamentary activity. More specifically, this thesis aims to analyze how “the people”, “the elite” and “the Other” are constructed in such parliamentary activities. Scholarship on populist discourses in Sweden and on the Sweden Democrats, have often analyzed the relationship between a national people and a non-national other, or applied a narrower lens to its analytical framework, such as gender studies. Studies within this context has also often focused on how the Sweden Democrats construct a non-national Other, often migrants and foreigners, in relation to a Swedish ‘people, focusing on ethnicity and cultures as prominent signifiers. Therefore, this thesis aims to broaden the scope when analyzing how these popular identities are constructed. By broadening the scope, I hope to shed some light on how these popular identity concepts are constructed and what role popular identities play in the Sweden Democrats political discourse.

3. Theoretical Framework and Key Concepts

This chapter will establish a theoretical framework based on core concepts in populist discourses, such as ‘the People’, ‘the elite’ and ‘the Other’ and how these popular identities are discursively constructed in an antagonistic relationship. The main aspect is to lay down a theoretical foundation of key concepts of populism and how the construction of identities plays a fundamental role in right-wing populist discourses. An analytical framework will be established towards the end of this chapter, which will guide the analysis. The theoretical part of this thesis draws on the role of identities in politics as well as traditional theoretical components of popular identity subjects as aforementioned.

The chapter begins by introducing the concept of identity, and its role in representative politics. It then moves on to presenting populism and nationalism and the nexus between these two, and how these two discourses are often intertwined in populist right-wing rhetoric regarding identity construction. The chapter then continues by presenting the concepts of ‘the People,’ ‘the elite,’ and ‘the Other’, and how these identities are constructed by political actors. Lastly, an analytical framework will be presented. This thesis approaches populism to be a specific style of logic, which performs a certain identity politics. As this thesis focuses on how parties at the right spectrum of politics discursively construct identities, the focus will be on the exclusionary aspect between the people, and its antagonistic elite and Other. The construction between these identities lies in the articulation of sameness and difference, which leads to discursive constructions. Thus, constructing a discourse-theoretical and analytical framework based on linking/differentiation and other discursive strategies adopted by populist right-wing actors, is argued to be suitable for this analysis.

3.1. The Role of Identities

This thesis departs by arguing that one of the central tenets of populism is that it speaks for and against particular identities. Thus, the role of identity in populist discourses and communication is paramount and used by politicians for political mobilization. Identity, this thesis argues, lies at the very core of populist discourses. The following section aims to provide a basic, however, the central theoretical conceptualization of what is meant by identities and how they become embedded in social and political contexts, to be drawn upon for political mobilization.

In a general sense, identity can be defined as the way one understands and views themselves in relation to the world, other people, and in time and space. Perhaps more importantly, identity works in two contrasting ways; it can unite and assimilate individuals by drawing similarities to other members. Or it divides and differentiates people from others, making them unique and different (Kouhpaneenejad & Gholaminejad, 2014:201). Identificatory practices give meaning to our lives as people and define who we are as individuals and what we want. They give meaning to how we perceive ourselves and how our identities are positioned in relation to others by constructing differences and antagonisms and drawing on political frontiers between “insiders” and “outsiders” (Panizza, 2017:409.) Thus, the relational aspect of identities is of vast importance.

Personal identities are referred to attributes and meanings given to oneself by an individual and are personally distinctive to that particular person (Snow & Corrigall-Brown, 2015:174), while the social dimension of identity reflects an individual's relation with the external environment, which becomes reconstructed through interaction with society. An individual's membership in a community composes the social and shifting aspect of identity (Kouhpaneenejad & Gholaminejad, 2014:201). Such identities are generally constructed in established social roles, such as “teacher” and “mother,” or in broader and more inclusive social categories such as gender categories and ethnic or national categories (Snow & Corrigall-Brown, 2015:174). Categories such as age, religion, and profession also include or exclude one from others. They are crucial for the social and public aspects of identity constructions (Kouhpaneenejad & Gholaminejad, 2014:201). More importantly, the social nature of identities is relational. The social identity of a person is constructed in regard to a network of social relations, where identities are linked and differentiated from another. They form the foundation to reconstruct and categorize 'other' as a social subject (Snow & Corrigall-Brown, 2015:174).

While social identities are argued to be constructed in a framework of already established social roles or more broad and inclusive categories, collective identities are often considered more fluid, indefinite, and short-lived than social and personal identities. Snow & Corrigall-Brown (2015:175) state that the construction of collective identities may or may not be embedded in social identities which are already existing, mainly due to their evolving nature, which distinguishes them from being established from prior social categories. Definitions of what constitutes collective identity vary. However, there seems to be an agreement that its principal rests in a shared sense of “one-ness” or “we-ness,” which is rooted in real or imagined shared attributes or experiences among those in a collective or in relation to one or more actual

“others.” The notion of a shared sense of “we” (often against a “other”) represents what Snow & Corrigan-Brown (2015:175) calls a “collective agency.” The notion of a “we” is invigorated and mobilized cognitively, emotionally, and often morally. Perceptions or feelings, which usually revolve around a common cause, threat, or fate, motivate a collective to act together in the name of the interests of a collectivity when those perceptions and feelings are shared among a group. (ibid. 175).

While the fluid and ever-changing nature should thus be taken into consideration, it is also important to note that collective identities can vary in number. Collective identities have the power to arise among almost any grouping or aggregation in a variety of contexts. Such groupings could be relatively small cliques or gangs, or broader categories such as sexual and gender categories, religions, ethnic groups, and nations (Snow & Corrigan-Brown, 2015:175). The collective is driven by issues of shared definition, significance, and power. Collective movements and identities arise because collectives consciously coordinate action. Group members deliberately develop offenses and defenses, exclude, differentiate, cooperate, and compete, and persuade and coerce (Cerulo, 1997:393). By drawing on a group of identities, a collective can thus be created. Furthermore, collective identities are often argued to be oppositional. However, contemporary research has highlighted that the line between ‘us’ and ‘them’ is not always straightforward nor impenetrable. However, despite their nature, collective identities emerge and operate within an interactive context marked by power relationships (Snow & Corrigan-Brown, 2015:179).

How do identities then fit into a political context, and how are identities related to populism and its actors? Panizza (2017) argues that populism is a mode of political identification that constructs identities and gives meanings to subjects, more specifically ‘the People.’ The construction and the meaning of the people transform a ‘people’ into political actors. Political identities are born out of social imaginaries. In these social imaginaries, people reflect upon and imagine how they fit in with others and how these relationships materialize and are performed. (ibid:407-408). However, Panizza (2017:408) also stresses that not all identities become politicized. The politicization of identities depends on how an agent identifies with a political appeal, which stems from one's own real-life experience of political and socio-cultural life. Identity is only political insofar as it openly opposes norms of a particular practice or a system of practices (ibid:408). As societies have become more complex during the last century and a half, the politicization of previously sedimented social identities has given rise to so-called

identity politics, with social movements and actors that are calling for political demands based on gender, ethnic, religious, cultural and or other identity claims (ibid:409). These identity groups become politically significant associations of people identified with one or more shared social markers (Gou, 2019:257). Identity politics is rooted in politics of differences, which stress the disparate nature of identity groups within a political community. Identity-based movements or politics are a part of a complex network where social actors are primary characters. These social actors promote discrete political demands within the institutional context of pluralist political institutions within these networks. For populist actors, the mode of identification aspires to construct a single and homogenous identity to draw upon against an antagonistic elite and others (ibid:409).

3.2. Detangling Nationalism and Populism

Populism has often been studied in conjunction with analyzing and studying radical right-wing parties, where populism has become both a label and rhetoric for these actors. As scholarly interest in studying populism has increasingly grown over the past two decades, scholars have highlighted the blurred lines between populism and nationalism. While interconnected and somewhat similar, they are distinctively different in how these two isms manifest themselves in right-wing actors' discourses. Both perform a particular political logic and involve creating a specific homogenous group. The confusion often lies in whether the "ingroup" of 'the People' refers to the ethnos or demos, or both. However, the nature of the construction of the ingroup and how it is located in relation to the outgroup, or "constitutive outsiders" can vary to a great extent across populist parties (Rodi, Karavasilis, & Puleo, 2021:3). Constructing identities through discourse, targets as well as questions certain groups, and excludes others. It is in this dichotomous identification, which is rooted in difference, that produces a sense of collective identity and strengthens the identity of an in-group against an out-group. Due to this separation between identities, different articulations of "the people-as-underdog" and/or "the people-as-nation" can aid in a more detailed understanding of who is excluded, and who 'the elite' and 'the others' are (ibid:4). To examine and distinguish between populism and nationalism, scholars propose that one should pay attention to the construction or subject position of 'the People' that political actors claim to represent (Rodi, Karavasilis, & Puleo, 2021; De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017). Thus, this section aims to shed some light on populism and nationalism and acknowledge that while they are different, they can be found rooted in right-wing parties'

discourses and rhetoric. The aim is to present how nationalistic (exclusionary) rhetoric can play a role in populist discourses when constructing ‘the People, ‘the elite,’ and ‘the Other.’

3.2.1. The Horizontal Axis of Nationalism vs. the Vertical Axis of Populism

The primary element in the discursive definition of nationalism is, unsurprisingly, the signifier “the nation.” The nation is the nodal point of the discourse which all other signifiers such as “freedom,” “state,” “democracy,” and “culture” take their meaning (De Cleen, 2017:343; Rodi, Karavasilis, & Puleo, 2021:4). The nation is imagined as a limited and sovereign community. The imagined community, famously argued for by Benedict Anderson (cited in Putri, Nasruddin & Wahab, 2018), gives members and citizens a sense of identity and belonging. The nation is a socially constructed community, imagined by its people. Here, ‘the People’ can be called upon as a nodal point, where every other element is articulated. The subject position of this group identity is used to draw its meaning from the nation. The subject group becomes synonymous with the nation where ‘the People’ are constructed as representing the national community imaged as a sovereign entity with a shared historical past, space, culture, and tradition. It creates an outgroup that does not belong to the nation but is outside it (Rodi, Karavasilis, & Puleo, 2021:4). Thus, nationalism categorizes individuals into exclusive groups spatially, between the people within a nation to people of another nation by differentiating the ingroup to the outgroup with specific characteristics such as shared languages and customs, alongside borders (De Cleen, 2017:344).

The idea of the nation, or “nationhood,” has often been associated with xenophobia, chauvinism, and authoritarianism, particularly when it comes to the right-wing politics, and the very concept of “the nation” or “nationhood” has been linked to democracy identity, self-determination, and political legitimacy (Bruker, 1999). The exclusionary component of nationalist discourses is often articulated by making distinctions between a “good” versus “bad” national people, often using strong cultural rhetoric (Brubaker, 1999:68), constructing identities as being in/out.

While nationalism’s nodal point is the nation (people-as-nation), populism’s nodal point is ‘the People,’ which are constructed as the underdog in relation to a powerful and illegitimate ‘elite.’ Rather than constructing people-as-nation, populists construct people-as-underdog. Within

populist discourses, the identity of ‘the People’ is often constructed in binary opposition to an elite. It vertically constructs an antagonizing relationship between groups in society by positioning the people on the low end of a vertical axis and the elite on the higher end of the axis. The latter is often referred to as powerful groups within the nation, such as national politicians, intellectuals, and mainstream media (De Cleen, 2017:344, 346, 348). Populism is thus positioned on a vertical axis, up/down or high/low, and is based on socio-economic or socio-cultural coordinates (Rodi, Karavasilis, & Puleo, 2021:4). It is worth mentioning that populism does not only focus on the word ‘the People’. References such as “the common man” or the “ordinary people” can also be utilized if the term used constructs ‘the People’ as being subordinate to “the ruling class” or “the establishment” (Rodi, Karavasilis, & Puleo, 2021:4).

Concluding, populism constructs ‘the People’ as revolving around a down/up (vertical) axis, while nationalism constructs the people as revolving around an in/out (horizontal) axis (De Cleen & Stavrakakis (2017:301). However, De Cleen (2017:349-350) argues that while populism constructs people on the vertical axis, it can also identify the people in opposition to an international or foreign elite and not against a national one. Populism can exclude individuals from its construction of the people, often by excluding migrants (p. 349, 350). Such articulations of exclusionary nationalism within populist discourses have led some authors to argue that populism works in a double vertical structure; upwards between the people and the elite, downwards between the good people and foreigners. The up/down way in which populist discourse operates strengthens the nationalist discourse. The identity of ‘the people’ is constructed by drawing on nationalistic rhetoric, by situating this group as a relatively homogenous group that shares a nation and cultural heritage and is hostile towards an “outside immigration group.” The “outsiders” are constructed as a threat to the unity of the particular homogeneous people. It constructs different kinds of people in relation to another, not just a national elite (De Cleen, 2017:351). Thus, in populist discourses, nationalism may not be a central discursive logic; however, in/out distinctions can play a vital role in constructing popular identities. It can provide richer and thicker analytical opportunities by acknowledging exclusionary nationalism rhetoric when constructing identities such as ‘the People,’ ‘the elite,’ and ‘the Other’ in populist discourses. As presented in the previous chapter, studying populist discourses with other adjacent fields might be analytically fruitful (Mudde & Kaltwesser, 2017:150).

3.3. The People and its Populist Representatives in Populist Discourses

Whether one argues that populism is a style, logic, or discourse, one of its central tenets is the construction of identities. If we use Panizza's (2017) definition, he argues that populism is a mode of political identification that constructs identities and gives meanings to subjects; identity is an essential element. Particularly the identity of 'the People.' Populist actors' mode of identification aspires to construct a single and homogenous identity. This identity construct of 'the People' is first differentiated from an antagonistic other and becomes a way of political mobilization. 'The People', the nodal point in populist discourses, is often expressed as sovereign and morally pure. As identities are given meaning through their relationship with others, it is no surprise that the same goes for this subject group. Actors that employ a populist logic aim to construct this group as a single and homogenous identity through a logic of equivalence. Ideas, practices, and demands are used in discourse and are reinforced by their commonalities, meaning their equivalence or sameness. The commonalities, however, can only be articulated in antagonism to a particular other (often the elite). The antagonistic relationship between 'the People' and the 'other' is what creates the construction of an "us" and "them" (Panizza, 2017:409). The former is constructed as a collective against an identified threat or insecurity. Through this imagined, constructed "we," populist actors can bring together various groups, identities, and demands in a chain of equivalence, which constructs a sense of homogeneity (De Cleen, 2019:346). This relationship between sameness and antagonism is how populism constructs the identity of the people, and these identities are impossible to build without a difference from another (Stavrakakis, 2017:538), making identity politics a vital feature of populist discourse (Mudde, 2007:63).

As previously mentioned, the articulation of 'the People' can take on various forms and definitions from "the people" and "the common man" to "ordinary folks," "the white working class," "the 99 percent," or "the British people" (Panizza, 2017:410; Rodi, Karavasilis, & Puleo, 2021:4). Such references result in very general and open construction, and some have argued that the very articulation and construction of 'the People' is deliberately broad and, in many cases, vague. Although Aslanidis (2017:306) refers to populist movements in his argument, he states that populist movements differ from other types of mobilizations when constructing the identity of 'the People'. The difference lies in that populist movements claim to represent a social whole rather than the interest of a particular group. Therefore, his argument denounces that populist actors represent the interest of groups such as working-class movements or

LGBTQ rights movements. Bergem (2022:2) argues against Aslanidis (2017), noting that social movements can represent a demographic group that shares common interests due to specific political opportunity structures and class structures, which are continuously changing. This thesis mainly leans toward Bergem's argument that populist political actors do not necessarily have to refer to the people as a whole. Rather, they can represent "a people," where these subjects are constructed into a wider collective. As argued previously, in the section on identities, those collective identities are not only fluid and ever-changing, but they can also vary in size and scope. Thus, the collective does not have to represent the whole. Instead, it would be surprising to find that 'the People' aren't often a particular group represented by populist political actors, which are then mobilized as a "we."

While the construction of right-wing actors' 'the People' can be undefined, vague, and broad, some argue for more specific constructions and articulations. Those argue that populism constructs a homogenous people in the form of a politicized national, religious, ethnic, or racial identity, which means that the people are constructed as a national "us" to a nationally, religiously, or culturally different "them" (Espejo, 2017:614). Drawing on these identity categories can often entail a more detailed and narrower inclusion in this particular group. Furthermore, drawing on these identity categories again exemplifies and shows how populists can draw on exclusionary nationalism rhetoric when constructing 'the People'. However, defined, the construct of 'the People' is usually attached to people-centrist discourses, naturally related to anti-elitist ones where exclusion is clearly visible (Reveilhac & Morselli, 2021:3). Thus, 'the People' are constructed by drawing similarities between subjects within that collective, with differentiation against 'the elite' and 'the Other.'

The collective construction of 'the People' often includes the political actor representing them. However, the identity of 'the People' is constructed, and whoever is included in this representation, populist actors, always need to say something about what the morally pure and authentic people want. Thus, actors such as politicians or political parties construct their own identities simultaneously, as being one with the people. Therefore, there is a link between these popular subjects and their representatives. By speaking for the people, populists rely on a symbolic representation of the real people. Ultimately, people exist outside of democratic procedures, and the populist leader "becomes" one of them as they speak in favor of them (Müller, 2016:25, 27). As the true and lone representatives of the people, populists identify themselves and not the other corrupt elite. It draws on similarities with the people and

differentiates their own identities from the elite others. The construction of these identities is part of a broader political logic, according to (Müller, 2016:29). Its construction is embedded in an anti-pluralist logic. Such logic does not mean that populist political actors are necessarily against representative politics. On the contrary, they endorse and encourage such representation if they are the representatives that are the leader of the people (ibid.).

It is through “low” appeals and this “flaunting of the low” that populist leaders position themselves outside of the “elite,” adopting an anti-elitism style of logic (Panizza, 2017, Müller, 2016), by resonating with the people who are on the lower end of the vertical axis, and where anti-elitism becomes logically related, and relational, to people-centrism (Reeveilhac & Morselli, 2021:3). Müller’s (2016) definition of populism as a political logic, which in turn exercises a specific form of identity politics where populist actors are critical of elites and pluralism, can help analyze identity constructions within populist discourses. Populist leaders adopt a particular political logic, where constructions of who belongs to the people (and the dangerous elite/other) are constructed by populist parties and actors. It draws on this logic when constructing identities and how these constructions are articulated in political rhetoric.

Unsurprisingly, the element of exclusion is essential in populist discourses. Actors include some people in the broader collective, alongside themselves, while excluding others. These “others” could be the elite, national or non-national, and other groups of people within the society. Exclusion lies at the core of right-wing populist identity construction and discourse. Such exclusionary discourses are often conveyed through articulations of a nostalgic past, where times were different or better. Nostalgia defines and unites “the pure people,” aiding in positive ingroup identity constructions in relation to a negative outgroup construction (Smeekes, Wildschut & Sedikides, 2021:92). Thus, temporal dimensions can be used by populist actors in how they discursively construct the people. Hansen (2006) also argues for the temporal construction of identities adopted by political actors. Temporal identities are articulated through a mythological origin of the group, and the boundaries between an “us” versus a “them” are constructed in temporal terms. Most importantly, ‘the People’ as a popular identity construct serves as a collective in politics. Populist discourse draws upon ‘the People’ to suggest and demand political changes.

3.4. The Elite and the Others in Populist Discourses

As argued for and demonstrated in this thesis so far, “exclusion” and “othering” are a vital part of populism, its discourse, and how populist actors draw upon exclusionary rhetoric when constructing identities. ‘The elite’ and ‘the Other’ are excluded from the morally pure and sovereign people. As actors draw on populist discourses that construct the “good” people (and themselves as their defender), they must simultaneously construct their antagonistic counterparts. While these villains can be many, as will be presented as this chapter goes on, perhaps the most central one is ‘the elite.’ Within their anti-elitism point of view, populist actors unsurprisingly mobilize a collective people by stimulating or reinforcing dissatisfaction with the ruling elite. Such constructs draw on real or perceived frustration, where the elite is most likely to be framed as endangering the demands, interests, and identities of a true people (Cleen, 2017:346).

On the one hand, articulating such dissatisfaction and endangerment constructs the elite as an outgroup. On the other hand, it enters the relations of equivalence between the people and the populist leader and differentiates between representatives. More importantly, what such linking, and differentiation does, according to Stavrakakis (2017:542), is that it reinforces heterogeneity and constructs a common enemy.

While some argue that the concept of ‘the People’ and the homogeneity of this group is often undetermined, vague, and sometimes even neglected (Espejo, 2017:607), ‘the elite’ is often, arguably, more easily defined. ‘The elite’ is constructed by drawing upon identity subjects such as a politically incorrect elite, mainstream media, and cultural and intellectual elites (Cleen, 2019:38) within a national context. However, as previously highlighted in this chapter, the construction of the antagonistic elite may not always be found on a national level. Instead, the exclusionary dimension of constructing the dangerous elite moves outward on a horizontal axis, as well rather than only upwards. Meaning, that populist leaders also criticize leaders of other countries and supranational organizations, taking on populist-nationalist arguments to fight for popular-national sovereignty from larger or foreign state structures in the name of the people (Cleen, 2017:353).

Others have followed this argument, such as Pelinka (2013:8), who presents a similar argument. He states that contemporary populism mobilizes against a perceived enemy from abroad, rather

than one from above, whether the enemy is deemed an elite or a particular non-elite other. Rydgren & van der Meiden (2006) have also observed international anti-establishment rhetoric in right-wing populism, often situated in an EU skepticism, for example (Wodak, 2015). Wodak (2015:4) further argues that how right-wing populist parties construct these identities of the elite and others are dependent on historical traditions. National, regional, and local contexts shape the constructions of those identities. Hence, in some countries, specific NGOs, the EU, the UN, and specific nations such as the US or national governing parties are considered 'the elite' and framed as enemies. In other contexts, the enemy grows from only referring to an elitist group to 'the Other' where different ethnic minorities are constructed as a danger (ibid.). Such arguments solidify that whoever these 'the elite' and 'the others' are, they can also be found, spatially, outside the nation's scope. Furthermore, it also highlights the temporal dimension of how identities are constructed. An enemy from the past may not be constructed as the same enemy in the present or future times.

While scholars often emphasize the people and the elite as the two main concepts which aid in specific constructions of identities (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013, 2017; Müller, 2016), non-elite 'Others' play a vital role within right-wing populist discourses, as just mentioned. Unsurprisingly, the elite is part of the construction as the 'Other.' However, the 'Other' can also be migrants, criminals, and drug dealers. Hansen (2006:34) draws on security and critical studies to argue that constructing identities such as other countries, immigrants, and communists as Others is historically enacted by political leaders. These are often constructed as being a threat to the security and social fabric of the collective. While this thesis does not explicitly draw upon security or foreign policy analysis, it does acknowledge that constructing identities of the Other as a threat to security and social fabric can be visible. Such rhetoric is often employed to legitimize and argue for specific demands, policies, and agenda settings. Therefore, it is mentioned in this thesis as this can be seen as a visible strategy when constructing identities within populist right-wing discourses. Wodak (2015) claims that almost all right-wing populist parties construct, most often, ethnic, religious, and linguistic political minorities as a scapegoat. Right-wing parties successfully construct fear, which is related to real or imagined dangers. Out of fear, scapegoats are constructed and proposed and are blamed for threatening or damaging societies and their people. In turn, this leads to exclusionary identity constructions where a particular group of "them" are claimed to be a threat to the "us." Wodak (2015:2) refers to this phenomenon as a "politics of fear."

Identities are not always clear, do not always entail a singular construct, and are not static nor stagnant. Instead, they are fluid, dynamic, fragmented, and complex (Panizza, 2017; Snow & Corrigan-Brown, 2015; Wodak, 2015; Hansen, 2006). It is a complex struggle of belonging and is never once and for all defined. Identity becomes open for renegotiation, depending on socio-political contexts and global social changes. Their construction can be recreated depending on these specific contexts (Wodak, 2015:70). While this chapter has argued and presented how populist actors often refer to themselves as belonging to the people and how national and foreign elites are demonized as villains, those constructions are ambiguous. Actors can create positive constructions of difference, where for example, a “Nordic identity” construction was used by politicians to create an us-them divide (Hansen, 2006:35.). Such constructions show how reconstructions and articulations of identities can be present, and arguably, in populist right-wing discourses, but also how populist and nationalist exclusionary rhetoric can reconstruct the boundaries between “us” and “them,” depending on the context. Linking several (transnational) identity constructs against a differential “Other” can thus be a possibility.

Concludingly, identity politics is arguably an essential feature of populist politics, where it has been argued that “new” identity politics, which is visible mainly in Europe, rests on the exclusion of particular identity groups rather than being inclusive. In recent decades, identity politics and constructions by right-wing political actors have been very much based on ascriptive characteristics, not only tied to class connotations and gender but also to race, ethnicity, and religion (Noury & Roland, 2020:423). Right-wing populists’ parties seemingly present clear and straightforward arguments for who these enemies are, whether they are an elite group or an Other. However, the construction of these identities is complex, and subjects are constituted at particular times within specific contexts, making their construction important to that context. It also means that such constructs of identities are open for reinterpretation and reconstruction (Hansen, 2006:43). The importance should lie in analyzing and explaining how right-wing populist parties articulate and communicate and construct these identities against one another because only then can we understand their success (Wodak, 2015:4).

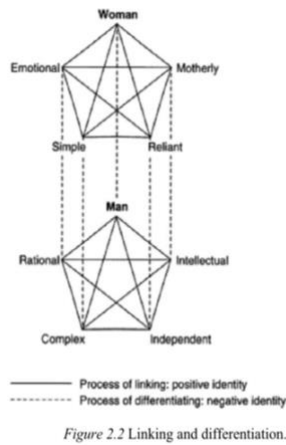
3.5. Approaching Theory - Analytical Framework

This thesis aims to analyze how identities are constructed in the Sweden Democrats’ discourse. By using a discourse-theoretical approach, this section seeks to conclude the theoretical

concepts presented to create an analytical framework. The analytical framework will guide the analysis, using the main theoretical concepts, and will function as a tool for the analysis to come.

3.5.1. Construction through linking and differentiation

Firstly, this thesis departs from the arguments that identities are relational. Identities co-construct each other by drawing upon similarities or differences of others (Panizza, 2017; Wodak, 2015; Hansen, 2006; Kouhpaneenejad & Gholaminejad, 2014). These similarities and differences include and exclude subject individuals or groups in societies from the social, but more importantly, political arena. This thesis thus emphasizes the important aspect of linking and differentiating between identities in how populist right-wing actors construct identities. Therefore, looking at positive self and negative other-presentation through discursive strategies is essential to be able to analyze how identities are constructed in the Sweden Democrats' discourse. Wodak (2015:52) suggests focusing on how objects/people are referred to and what characteristics are attributed to them in this construction. These representations of identities are arguably built upon linking some identities to particular features while simultaneously differentiating between others. In addition to Wodak's discursive strategies of assimilation (sameness) and discursive strategies of dissimilation (differences), Hansen's (2006) framework for identity construction between processes and linking is therefore considered helpful for the analysis of this thesis. The construction of identities is, arguably, only possible through utterances and delineations of something deemed to be different. Exemplifying, the identification of a "terrorist" only occurs through the differentiation from a legitimate "freedom fighter" (ibid:17). Thus, employing Hansen's (2006) framework on the process of linking and differentiation, presented below, will help identify these representations of identities. The framework is utilized to distinguish how identities are constructed by drawing upon similarities or differences. Exemplifying, Swedish is constructed as being respectful while a 'Other' is constructed through process of differentiation such as disrespectful.



3.5.2. People as “Underdog” and People as “Nation”

Identities are constructed by political actors and can serve as a meaningful and powerful tool in forming demands and policies. The very exclusion of identity construction has been closely linked to right-wing populism. Populism draws upon the collective identity of ‘the People,’ which are juxtaposed against ‘the elite’ and ‘the Other.’ This thesis argues that identity construction and identity politics lie at the very core of populist rhetoric. Furthermore, identities, as contended, are rarely static nor stable. Thus, this thesis agrees with the argument that they are fluid, changing, and unstable. Depending on the context, and the socioeconomic, sociocultural, and sociopolitical environment, the identity construct can be ambiguous and reconstructed.

Nevertheless, the exclusionary component of identity constructions within populist discourses is vital and should be closely separated from nationalist discourses. However, this thesis also argues that nationalist exclusionary rhetoric can and does play a crucial role in how populist right-wing actors construct ‘the People’ and its antagonistic ‘elite’ and ‘Other.’ Therefore, I hypothesize that ‘the People’ could be articulated and constructed by drawing on larger national identity constructs that will be visible in the Sweden Democrats’ discourse. Such a hypothesis does not denounce that ‘the People’ can also be constructed as “an “underdog.” However, including the adapted framework by Rodi, Karavasilis, & Puleo (2021:5), opens up the analytical opportunity of studying how the identity of ‘the People,’ ‘the elite,’ and ‘the Other’ are constructed and who they are. It will also assist the analysis of this thesis by separating “pure” populist discourse from nationalist exclusionary one. I argue that nationalist

exclusionary rhetoric is an integral part of contemporary populism. The framework will help guide the analysis, by answering who these subject identities are. Then, one can analyze the ways in which they are analyzed through processes of linking and differentiation. The adapted framework will be utilized to distinguish who ‘the People’, the ‘Other’ and ‘the elite’ are in the discourse. Exemplifying, people articulated as “working class”, the other being articulated as “migrants” and the elite being “the liberals.”

Table 1. Conceptualisation of nationalism and populist discourses.

Criterion	Nationalism	Populism
Axis	Horizontal in/out	Vertical up/down
In-group claim to represent	The nation and/or the people-as-nation	The people-as-underdog
In-group subject	Citizens of ‘the nation’	Members of ‘the people’
Out-group	Dangerous others: non-members and/or other nations and entities	The elite/establishment
In-group vs. out-group	Horizontal: in/out (people with same ‘membership’ and identity related to shared territory, time, culture and history)	Vertical: Down/up (the people as a large powerless group vs. the elite as a small and illegitimately powerful group)

Source: Adapted from De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017).

3.5.3. Populist Right-Wing Strategies and Identity Construction

Lastly, the discursive strategies that populist right-wing parties utilize when speaking for ‘the People’ and constructing the identities of ‘the elite’ group and ‘the Other’ is an essential feature. Thus, not only who but how these identities are constructed using such strategies must be considered for the analysis. As right-wing populist rhetoric creates a world divided into good and evil and into “us” versus “them,” insiders versus the outsiders, populist right-wing actors draw on the construction of scapegoats to blame certain groups in this worldview for the social, economic, and political problems. Shifting the blame, or scapegoating, is, therefore, a systematic discursive strategy employed by populist right-wing actors to construct “them,” “the outsiders,” and “the enemy” (Wodak, 2015:67). Furthermore, contemporary populism often draws upon rhetoric such as times of “crises” and “security” in their discourses. Moffitt (2016:45) states that populist actors draw on crises between citizens and their representatives and other areas such as immigration, economic hardships, imagined injustices, social changes, and others. Therefore, exclusionary identity constructs and exclusionary measures are legitimized by appealing to (in)securities (Wodak, 2015:54) and should be emphasized as a likely discursive strategy. The discursive strategies employed by populist right-wing actors when constructing identities, serves as an importance communicative feature.

4. Methodology

This section will present the research design and methods. To analyze and describe how the Sweden Democrats construct popular identities, this thesis will use qualitative methods. It will employ discourse analysis to analyze the collected data, which are parliamentary motions, speeches, and interpellations, by the Sweden Democrats. The data has been collected via the Sweden Democrats YouTube channel. The focus has been on the analyzing the parts in these parliamentary activities which the political party, is in focus. Thus, the comebacks and discussions from the opposers in those debates have not been analyzed.

This chapter will start off by presenting the qualitative case study design, which has been selected as the research design for this study, and a presentation of the selected case which are the Sweden Democrats. The chapter then moves on to discuss Critical Discourse Analysis, and a brief presentation of Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis. The next step discusses how the data will be analyzed as well as the selection and collection of it. The chapter is concluded with a discussion on reliability and validity, and finally, on the ethical consideration and the positionality of the researcher.

4.1. A Qualitative Single Case Study

This thesis is designed as a qualitative single case study. The choice is motivated by the in-depth knowledge this analysis hopes to acquire of how ‘the People,’ ‘the elite,’ and ‘the Other’ in parliamentary activities. As case studies have been defined as “... an intensive, in-depth study of a single unit ...” (Gerring, 2004:341) and involve a detailed and intensive analysis of the case itself (Bryman, 2016:60), I argue that the research design’s reasoning and choice fit the aim and the knowledge I wish to gain from this study.

A case, which is composed of a unit that the researchers wish to study more intensely, can entail the study of a nation-state, revolution, political party, or election (Gerring, 2004:342). This thesis looks at the Swedish right-wing political party Sweden Democrats, over a limited period of time. I want to clarify that this thesis departs from looking at the Sweden Democrats as a whole. While the parliamentary activities (speeches, motions, interpellations) that have been collected as data for this thesis are performed by different representatives from the party depending on the problem it wishes to raise, I argue that this reflects the political party’s overall

stance on these questions. Thus, this study analyzes the overarching identity construction in the parliamentary activities, and not how single individual representatives construct identities.

Furthermore, the interest behind this thesis stems from studying how populist actors from a right-wing political affiliation aid in the construction of identities. With the Sweden Democrats being the only, arguably, purely populist right-wing party in Sweden in contemporary times, the case selection was self-explanatory. I am, however, aware of the possible pitfalls of conducting my research in a qualitative, single case study. Therefore, questions concerning reliability and validity will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

4.2. Critical Discourse Analysis and Post-Structuralist Discourse Analysis

As this thesis aims to analyze how the populist identity subjects ‘the People,’ ‘the elite,’ and ‘the Other’ are constructed in the Sweden Democrats’ political discourse, discourse analysis is an appropriate choice of method. Discourse analysis is an interpretive and constructivist form of analysis (Halperin & Heath, 2017:336). It emphasizes language and its role as a source of power, often related to both ideology and socio-cultural change (Bryman, 2016:540). Various texts and actors produce a social reality within discourses and through language (ibid.). As this thesis approaches identities as fluid and multidimensional, where specific identities are given meaning through construction by actors such as politicians, a discourse analytical approach to analyzing how these are constructed is a fitting choice. Through processes of articulation and a chain of discursive elements, discourses construct identities of subjects and objects (Halperin & Heath, 2017:343). A discourse then can be understood as “a system of statements expressing rules, roles and boundaries that form a body of knowledge” (ibid:338).

This thesis draws on Critical Discourse Analysis (from here on, referenced as CDA) as its main analytical tool. The reasoning behind this choice is due to its critical nature. CDA is first and foremost concerned with the role of discourses and how these are enacted, reproduced, and resist social power abuse, dominance, and inequality (Halperin & Heath, 2017:339). Furthermore, it focuses on how members of powerful social groups and institutions aid in this reproduction. They are argued to have more exclusive access to and control over one or more types of discourses (ibid.). Thus, employing CDA for this specific study can help uncover how identities are constructed in parliamentary activities, and what values are attached to these identities.

In addition to CDA, this thesis draws on post-structuralist discourse analysis, mainly as this thesis employs Hansen's (2006) analytical framework to uncover processes of linking and differentiation when constructing identities. Post-structuralist DA then assumes that the way people think and act according to those thought processes can reinforce power and coercion regimes (Halperin & Heath, 2017:338). Through language, things, whether that be objects, subjects, states, living beings, or material structures, are given their meaning and bestowed with a particular identity (Hansen, 2006:16). To be able to understand language as political, it must be viewed as a site that firstly produces and reproduces certain identities while simultaneously excluding others. The meaning that one attaches to certain identities, only makes sense, by their difference from other signs (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002:11). Through linguistic practices, certain political subjects are constructed as more privileged. However, these identity constructs are reinforced through political and economic practices, such as excluding certain individuals from political, economic, legal, and cultural rights (ibid:16-17).

Lastly, this thesis draws on post-structuralist DA as it holds the argument that while discourses seek to fix meaning around a closed structure, an absolute fixed meaning is not possible (Hansen, 2006:18). For example, while the discourse on the construction of "migrants" might try to fix its meaning around a closed structure of being a danger, "migrants" can have different meanings depending on the context. Context plays a central role in any discourse analysis, as DA studies language used in a specific context. When speaking of context, it refers to a local context - an immediate task, situation, message - or a broad context that refers to the cultural norms, assumptions, beliefs, and values that are characteristics of a collective overall cultural discourse (Halperin & Heath, 2017:340). By combining the two discourse analytical approaches, one can begin to uncover the construction of identities, in these parliamentary debates by the Swedish Democrats.

4.2.1. Analyzing the Data

Conducting a critical discourse analysis entails different theoretical levels, where this thesis draws on so-called "middle-range" theories, or more specifically theoretical concepts which have been drawn upon. These theoretical concepts are embedded in theories on identity, populism, and nationalism mainly. The theoretical component in this thesis has been used to create an analytical framework, which acts as a guide when analyzing the constructs of identities in parliamentary debates by the Sweden Democrats. As the theoretical foundation was

established prior to the data collection, this thesis employs a deductive analytical approach, starting with theory, to data collection, the analysis and lastly presenting the results (Bryman, 2016; Halperin & Heath, 2017). However, CDA often works continuously between analysis and data collection, where data collection is not a phase that must be completed prior to conducting the analysis (Wodak & Meyer, 2001:16-18). Nevertheless, this thesis collected all its data prior to starting the analytical part of the investigation, and used the analytical framework presented in the previous chapter as a theoretical framework.

While the previous section has presented the analytical framework, a brief clarification on how it will be utilized will now be discussed. The framework by Rodi, Karavasilis, & Puleo (2021) will be drawn upon to distinguish whether or not ‘the People’ are constructed as “underdog” or by using nationalistic articulations such as “Swedish,” “European,” “Western,” and so forth. Such an analytical framework will help to analyze the values attached to identities, centered around nodal points of the ‘the People.’ Wodak’s (2015) and Hansen’s (2006) positive and negative representations are essential components to the analysis of this thesis, as it argues that identities are relational. Thus, the process of linking and differentiation framework will guide this analysis by looking at how identity subjects are constructed in relation to another—exemplifying how ‘woman’ is constructed as “motherly, sensitive” and ‘man’ as “strong, competent” (Hansen, 2006). Naturally, this thesis looks at the construction of other previously presented identity subjects. Furthermore, while the construction of these identity subjects is of essence for this thesis, also asking *who* these identities are, or are articulated as, will help deconstruct how these identities are drawn upon by the Sweden Democrats. Wodak (2001:72) applies simple questions when investigating identity constructs which will help detangle who these subject identities are and what their role is. More specifically, she asks a) how people are named and referred to linguistically, b) what traits, characteristics and qualities, and features are attributed to them, and c) what strategies, arguments, and argumentations are used to specific individuals or social groups to justify and legitimize exclusion. Having these questions in mind when “looking” for who ‘the People,’ ‘the elite,’ and ‘the Other’ are and how they are constructed serves as applicable. Then, when we have identified who these subjects are and how they are constructed, can we also add the layer of which discursive strategies are used to legitimize their identity constructs, exclusion, and inclusion.

4.3. Data - Selecting and Collecting

As this thesis applies discourse analysis as the analytical and methodological tool, it can be applied to a broad spectrum of communication forms (Bryman, 2016:531). Analyzing data could be analyzing written documents such as government documents, autobiographies, and social media posts, to verbal “texts” such as speeches from politicians (Halperin & Heath, 2017:161). The primary data analyzed in this study are parliamentary activities by the Sweden Democrats. By parliamentary activity, I refer to speeches, motions, and interpellations performed in the Swedish Parliament (*Riksdagen* in Swedish). Parliaments are considered one of the most dynamic political institutions of democratic societies. Within the walls of the Parliament, representatives are involved in discourses that react to political, social, and cultural configurations. Parliamentary discourses are argued to be a specific form of political discourse (Van Dijk, 2010:42) that contributes to shaping these configurations discursively. The Parliament becomes essential for political parties and representatives, as it serves as a site to speak and act on behalf of the people they claim to represent (Ilie, 2015:1). Parliamentary debates as the data selection for this thesis are therefore considered relevant, explicitly, as identities are discursively constructed in these debates by political parties.

This thesis will be focusing on the verbal activities and not on the written interpellations and motions, which can be found on the Swedish Parliament’s website. Thus, the latter will not be included in the analysis of this thesis. Initially, the objective was to analyze the party’s election manifesto for 2022, as this year is the election year for Sweden. However, when this study was conducted, the election manifesto for this year’s upcoming election had not yet been released by the Sweden Democrats. As the intention was to study how identities are constructed in parliamentary activities by looking at current and present-time discourses surrounding these, I, therefore, opted out of using earlier election manifestos as data. It could have been fruitful to analyze both previous election manifestos and current parliamentary debates, which would have added a comparative element to the study. Also, analyzing multiple data sources allows for “triangulation,” which could have enabled me to cross-check the results and aided in more credible findings (Halperin & Heath, 2017:161). However, due to the number of parliamentary debates available for analysis, it was simply not within the scope of this thesis.

The initial idea was to analyze parliamentary speeches, motions, and interpellations from the years 2021 and 2022. These were collected by the most recent and then going backward in time.

However, quickly realizing that there was substantial data to be collected, therefore, the collected data is only from 2022. More specifically, parliamentary debates from January until May were analyzed, as collected during the months the thesis was written. Including activity from the year, prior would undoubtedly have been more fruitful for the study and the findings. However, due to the scope of this thesis, it was not viable.

Lastly, the data was collected through the Sweden Democrats' YouTube channel, arguing that by collecting the data from the party's own channel, it provides a true and pure version of how the Sweden Democrats' wants to present themselves, and these parliamentary debates that are uploaded aid in painting this representation. Pointing out, as this thesis is only focused on how the Sweden Democrats discursively construct identities in parliamentary debates, the comeback responses, and arguments from other parties were not analyzed nor considered. Including other parliamentary members' responses to, specifically interpellations, could have contributed to exciting findings regarding identity construction in these debates. Furthermore, also acknowledging that this might come off as both subjective and biased and might entail some loss of both cohesion and context in those debates. However, this should not alter the result of this study, as I argue that the theoretical concepts and analytical framework works as a stable foundation, but also due to the broader research aim of this thesis. If one were to also analyze the opposing political parties' responses to the Sweden Democrats, and how they aid in constructing identities in these parliamentary activities as well, then both the data itself and the data collecting process would be different. Regardless, it was not feasible for the space in this thesis.

Clips and videos that did not represent speeches, motions and interpellations performed within the Parliament's setting were disregarded. Other speeches in other locations were not included under different circumstances, such as speeches done in the European Parliament or news channel interviews. Furthermore, all parliamentary debates from 2022 were analyzed, reviewed, and rewatched to minimize selection bias. Therefore, parliamentary debates were not chosen based on a policy or issue area (such as immigration, climate change, crime, foreign policy) but were all included to include a broader perspective on how identities are discursively constructed in these debates.

4.4. Reliability and Validity

The benefits of a case study is the ability to examine a chosen case intensively and gain a deeper understanding and knowledge from it. Nevertheless, there are pitfalls in any research design. Halperin & Heath (2017:171) argue that a researcher will always have to confront questions of reliability and validity, no matter the design or data. However, case studies have been questioned for reliability, validity, and generalization. Generalization based on this specific study is limited to the discursive nature of the research design, and that it only looks at a specific political party in a particular space during a limited time. Despite this, I argue that the lack of generalizability does not take away the importance of the study itself, as these findings contribute to the knowledge of a particular space, a specific time, and a particular group. The empirical results of this thesis can serve as a backdrop for future studies to see if there are any changes in identity constructions and to develop the analysis even further.

Contrastingly, external reliability refers to the degree to which a study can be replicated (Bryman, 2016:383). In qualitative research, achieving high external reliability is difficult to reach, as one cannot freeze social settings. However, I argue that the study can be replicated, however yielding different results due to the social and fluid nature of identities within political spaces, and across different contexts. The analytical framework presented in the previous chapter can be used to replicate the same study, albeit achieve different results. For researcher employing discourse analysis, the purpose of a research is not necessarily to find out what people really mean when making statements, what is right or wrong or to discover an ultimate reality behind a discourse. The objective is to analyze what has been said or written, and to explore certain patterns in statements and to identify social consequences of these discursive representation of “reality” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002:21). Not accessing or establishing a true “reality”, might reduce the external reliability of the study, however, I further argue that this does not diminish the importance of findings in how identities are constructed in populist discourses.

Lastly, internal validity refers to the degree to which the research findings correspond with the theoretical concepts drawn upon (Bryman, 2016:384). The analytical framework could arguably aid in a higher internal validity of this study. Using the same steps, I have for this thesis; I argue that another researcher could accept some of same conclusions and results. However, more importantly, their results may add to the study and the findings. Concludingly,

I have done my utmost to explain every step of the process when conducting this research. Therefore, my openness and transparency as a researcher will hopefully result in a higher internal validity during the writing process of this study.

4.5. Ethical Considerations and Positionality

After careful examination, I argue that this thesis has no significant ethical considerations. As this study uses data that is open for public access, it does not violate any rules or guidelines. The data analyzed in this thesis are parliamentary debates, which entail political speeches, motions, and interpellations. However, collecting the data has meant using the Internet as a source and can be considered “electronic communications.” “Electronic communications” should be used for research if publicly archived and readily available. There are no password requirements to access the content. The material is not sensitive nor breaches any laws, and no stated site policy prohibits the use of the material (Bryman, 2016:139). Considering this argument by Bryman (2016), I argue that no ethical codes were violated when conducting my research.

While no ethical rules of conduct have been violated when writing this thesis, I acknowledge that values should be considered in the writing process. For researchers, values can invade all parts of a research process (Bryman, 2016:141), thus Values, become unavoidable in the practice of social science and the process (Halperin & Heath, 2017:57), and especially for those researchers who adopt a discourse analytical approach (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002), where reflexivity is higher throughout the research process (Halperin & Heath, 2017). By being fully transparent during the whole research process of this study, I have tried to remain as neutral as I possibly can while also motivating my choices. I acknowledge my morals and values stemming from my personal cultural, political, and social experiences. I have done my best to create a foundation for this thesis in the hope that it shall remain objective. It is, in fact, the researcher’s own obligation to present their research honestly and transparently, from beginning to finish (Swedish Research Council, 2017:69). I stand by that this thesis has been conducted honestly, self-critically, and transparently.

5. Analysis

The analysis begins by presenting who and how ‘the People’ are constructed in the Sweden Democrats’ populist discourse in parliamentary debates. It moves on to presenting how ‘the elite’ and ‘the Other’ are constructed in these debates by the Sweden Democrats. The chapter ends by concluding the findings with the analytical framework which was previously presented in the theoretical chapter.

5.1. The Hardworking and Economically Vulnerable Worker

The first part of the analysis focuses mainly on who ‘the People’ are in the Sweden Democrats’ discourse within parliamentary debates and how these are constructed. The identity of ‘the People’ comprises a working-class facing economic struggles largely in light of increased fuel and electricity prices. Furthermore, in debates surrounding immigration and security issues and policies, ‘the People’ are constructed using nationalistic descriptions, drawing upon cultural values and norms. The analysis also exhibits that a Swedish national identity (people-as-nation) is linked to wider positive self-representations of Nordic, Scandinavian, and European identity constructs.

This part of the analysis clarifies how the identity subject ‘the People’ are constructed. Nonetheless, reference to other identities will be touched upon but will be further developed later in the analysis.

A prominent theme in the construction of ‘the People’ in the Sweden Democrats’ (from here on out, SD) populist discourse centers around the working population, positioned against an irresponsible elite. In debates surrounding the environment, and industrial and agricultural policies, the right-wing political party draws upon individual identities to make up a collective within a broader population. The collective comprises a working population of companies, consumers, taxpayers, and people working within the forestry, agriculture, and transportation industry. These constructions are encompassed in rhetoric centered around socio-economic crises, insecurity, and vulnerabilities. This articulation of ‘the People’ draws on prior social categories, mostly centered around the Swedish working class.

Swedish taxpayers, as a collective of ‘the People’, are, according to SD, constructed as suffering under the hands of national and regional actors and their policies on national and EU levels. Such a construction of taxpayers is further articulated as “regular people” who are now

experiencing economic insecurity due to the “incompetence and uninterest that this and all other Social Democratic governments during previous terms of office have exhibited” (SD, 2022a).

“...for regular people that live in regular houses and live off of regular salaries, electricity is quite expensive now, where many people cannot afford to warm up their houses at home...” (SD, 2022a)

Such an articulation of ‘the People’ draws upon a collective we-ness, which draws upon a shared feeling of economic insecurity. This shared sense of “we” is what Snow & Corrigan-Brown (2015) calls a collective agency, which draws upon emotions of betrayal and threat to motivate collective action. Furthermore, such a construction not only attributes positive values such as being hard workers to ‘the People’, but it also constructs the subject identity of ‘the People’ on a vertical axis. This representation constructs taxpayers and regular people as underdogs, hardworking but suffering, against the national and non-national elite.

The economic insecurity people are experiencing is further exemplified in an interpellation regarding increased fuel prices. National anti-elitism becomes prominent as Swedish politics under the ruling government is negatively framed. In interpellations surrounding the increase in fuel prices, haulers, farmers, and foresters make up a ‘People,’ which are portrayed as an essential part of a more comprehensive societal structure.

“... the haulers are not out driving on the roads because they think it is that nice to drive a car, they make sure that we have food in the shops, that there are clothes that we can wear on the body, that we have houses to live in, that there are medicines in pharmacies, that our industry functions properly ...” (SD, 2022b)

Once again, this group in society is framed in a broader construction of we-ness and is articulated as a collective that makes up a more significant part of society. It places “people” on a vertical axis, as a group of members within ‘the People.’ The articulation of ‘the People’ also takes on various forms, moving from general and open constructions to more specific identities (Panizza, 2017:410; Rodi, Karavasilis, & Puleo, 2021:4). In SD’s populist discourse, such articulations range from “we” and “people” to specific collectives within society such as “haulers,” “taxpayers,” and “Swedish workers,” which supports Bergem’s (2022) argument that identities can represent a specific demographic group that shares common interests.

Moreover, these identity subjects are underrepresented in both a national context as well as a regional one, according to SD. People-centrism is often constructed in relation to anti-elitism, as seen in the abovementioned examples. Haulers and taxpayers make up a part of ‘the People’ in these debates, as regular people who are seen as vital for the overall structure of Swedish society. These groups of people are now in a “situation of crisis,” “in a state of emergency,” and are facing economic insecurities such as “unemployment” and facing the closure of livelihoods, showing how strategies such as expressing and drawing upon fear and insecurity are used to mobilize collective action (Moffitt, 2016, Wodak, 2015). Expressive and urgent articulations such as “emergency situation” (SD, 2022c) and “on their way to killing (the haulage industry)” are used to paint a dire reality due to the domestic and non-domestic political decisions affecting ‘the People.’ Concludingly, while the ‘the People’ are constructed as being underrepresented in Swedish politics, vulnerable and as suffering, they are also subduedly constructed with positive attributes as being hard workers, and important pillars of a functioning society.

5.1.1. The Ideal Swede and “the Nordic Gold”

While the previous section exemplified how SD draws upon a demographic to construct ‘the People’ as the underdog who are suffering under the current government’s rule, they also draw upon nationalistic and cultural constructions of ‘the People’. In debates regarding migration and citizenship, SD draws upon a positive representation of ‘the People’ by linking Swedishness to a particular set of values, norms, and behaviors.

“... to be a Swedish citizen is not to be just anything, to be a Swedish citizen is to be a part of the story of Sweden, of equality and parity, of democracy, of the right to one’s own body and sexuality, of one’s own development and own life choices ... to be Swedish is to be a part of a collective community, where one still has a right to their own individual choices...” “...this is something that we have built up over centuries, our ancestors and us together and it is something to cherish...”
(SD, 2022d)

This construction of “Swedishness” is linked to values such as individual freedom, equality, and openness, embedded in a larger collective of unity by drawing on nationalistic rhetoric to construct a positive self-representative of the Swedish people. Such a construction operates on a horizontal axis by linking Swedish values and norms, constructing an honorable and proud

national identity against others. Constructing people-as-nation is also embedded in a broader positive Scandinavian and Nordic identity. As argued by Wodak (2015), populist right-wing actors may link several transnational identity constructs, thus reconstructing the boundaries between “us” and “them.” The Sweden Democrats draw upon more significant collective identity constructions, linking positive attributes.

“...we can speak of norms or values, where many are incredibly distinctive Swedish, or Scandinavian or Nordic ... our ways of being, ‘lagom,’ attitudes towards queuing systems, trust towards agencies, specifically trust is described as the Nordic Gold ...” (SD, 2022e)

Here, a visible positive construction is linked to a Swedish, but moreover, a wider Scandinavian and Nordic identity. Traditional positive values are articulated by differentiating Swedishness from other cultures in a statement that led “... in Swedish opposed to those visible from other parts of the world...”. The difference between a Swedish national identity against a foreign one is constructed as far more barbaric, backward developed. It is expressed as “medieval” and a threat to the Swedish and overall Nordic Scandinavian fabric of society (SD, 2022e-f).

“...those cultural expressions bring about honorary oppression, the view on women, on homosexuality, on genital mutilation, on a trust to agencies and judiciary systems, etc. is highly problematic...” (SD, 2022e)

The construction of ‘the People’ draws upon socio-cultural characteristics, such as shared values, norms, beliefs, and behaviors, to differentiate a Swedish people from a non-Swedish other. The political party further stresses it by drawing upon moral obligations that “we” must make it clear that such behaviors are unacceptable in “our” country through stricter migration policies, to protect “women and girls” from foreigners that bring honor cultures, cousin-marriages and clan structures with them (SD, 2022f). By drawing on nationalistic exclusionary rhetoric, SD simultaneously constructs a virtuous and pure national identity of ‘the People’. Such articulation is embedded in a wider anti-immigration discourse, which will be further presented in the construction of ‘the Other’ later in this analysis.

5.1.2. A United Europe and the “Good” Guys

In light of the ongoing war in Europe, SD draws upon a collective European identity characterized by economic and industrial prosperity and democratic stability. Temporal positive

self-presentation of not only Sweden but of the West and Europe is constructed in relation to a negative construction of non-European values. Visible in this construction is a more comprehensive collective European “we,” which is geographically located and includes Sweden in this broader construction. A people-as-nation is drawn upon to link values such as democracy, unity, and optimism.

“... this full-scale attack on Europe’s second-largest country came as an emotional shock to us all ... the time after the Second World War, with the exception of the Soviet Union’s death knell in the early 1990s, in our part of the world has been characterized by detente, prosperity and an optimism for the future, this until a few years ago ... once again, like an old echo from the time before the world wars, is power defined by some in the form of territory, suppressed countries and military capability, instead of economic welfare built on successful businesses, technological competitiveness, industries, and international trade ... this is not a development we wanted, but is a reality we must identify with ...” (SD, 2022g)

Belonging to a broader European collective is positively identified by SD. It is articulated with pride concerning non-European and Western behaviors, which characterize Russia and other unspecified nations in these debates. SD’s articulation aids in an “us” versus “them” antagonism, where two colliding worldviews are fighting one another. Western values such as freedom and human rights are being challenged by a nation part of this Western construction geographically. However, it is constructed as non-Western at the same time. Further, a clear divide between the morally “good” and “evil” is constructed by the political party.

“... what Sweden and our part of the world need now, is spelled unity ... (the war) is about two fundamental ways of looking at the world, on the view of democracy, independence, self-evident freedom and rights such as freedom of speech, human rights ... it is about the ability of Western democracies to stand up for themselves and for the foundation which we rest on ... there are other countries in Europe now, which have chosen to try and stay outside of this conflict, saying that they do not want to be involved, and they are the ones that must stand shameful today ... the only thing evil needs to win, is that the good does not succeed in stopping them ...” (SD, 2022h)

This statement conveys a “good” European identity construction, which Sweden and its people are a part of. It is differentiated by those who do not follow or uphold the same values. It also stresses the need for collective unity to succeed in defeating the “bad” guys. People-as-nation is drawn upon to positively construct Sweden as being a part of a “good” Europe/the West, proving the ambiguous and fluid nature of how identity constructs can be drawn upon in populist discourses and by the Sweden Democrats.

5.2. The Incompetent Social Democrats versus the True Defenders of the People

In relation to constructing ‘the elite’ in parliamentary debates, the data shows how SD simultaneously differentiates itself from the ruling government. The Sweden Democrats position themselves as having the best interests of ‘the People’, whereas ‘the elite’ are blamed for the economic suffering and the insecurity that people are experiencing. Constructing ‘the elite’ often draws on the Social Democrats and their representatives as a significant subject identity to argue for failed political measures and their consequences. The current Social Democratic government and previous Social Democratic governments are constructed as deviant and nonchalant, going against not only the people of Sweden but also the elected parliament (SD, 2022i). Through strategies such as shifting the blame, SD further argues that it is in light of Social Democratic that Sweden is experiencing lieu of social, economic, cultural, and political consequences.

“... Sweden has during recent years become known as one of the world’s biggest exporters of terrorists ...” (SD, 2022j)

This temporal construction of Sweden as a nation under the rule of the Social Democratic government is further present in the Sweden Democrats’ populist discourse. While the previous section of this analytical chapter presented the construction of a positive identity linked to a Swedish national identity, the populist right-wing party also expresses contemporary Sweden as having gone backward during recent decades.

“... Sweden has a long tradition of equality and has for centuries taken step by step for equal rights between genders ...” continuing by arguing that “... Sweden has gotten a new gender equality issue ... how is it possible that in today’s Sweden 2022, that this type of medieval values exists ...” (SD, 2022f)

Contemporary Sweden and its current socio-economic and socio-political status is referred to as being “like an episode taken out of the Twilight Zone, the slightly crazy series, but it is not, this is Sweden year 2021, 2022” (SD, 2022k). Apparent from the data analyzed, drawing upon temporal discursively negative representations of Sweden is used by SD to blame the Social Democratic government for the path that Sweden is heading in. The government’s lack of will to change the situation is further stressed in these debates by drawing upon ‘the People.’

“... people are getting shot at on our streets, people dying in health queues, people having to take out loans to be able to pay the electricity bill, people who have done right for themselves a whole lifetime but who still live in poverty, there are so many extremely serious problems in our country today...” (SD, 2022l)

What becomes conspicuous is anti-elitist rhetoric, positioned on a vertical axis, articulated by shifting the blame on predominantly the Social Democratic government. However, scapegoating specific political individuals and other parties is also used to convey disdain for the elite (SD, 2022m; SD, 2022n). Morgan Johansson is drawn upon as an identity subject apart from ‘the elite’ who, alongside “other ministers,” are trying to restrict media freedom for the people, acting with bias (SD, 2022o). It is wrapped in a discourse of dishonor, deceit, and mistrust.

A strong anti-elitist stance is apparent in SD’s populist discourse, constructing an “us” and “them” divide between the representative parties of the people. Through the negative construction of ‘the elite’ as an enemy of the people, SD differentiates itself from other political actors in these debates by positive self-representation. While the identity of the elite is surrounded by articulations such as naivety, carelessness, and nonchalance, the SD position themselves closer to the people. Through telling stories, SD constructs themselves as one of the people, as being more attuned with ‘the Peoples’ needs and wants and responsive to those needs. The previous section of the analysis presented how SD draws upon a specific demographic representation of ‘the People’, namely workers. Drawing upon these identity subjects, SD constructs the national elite as living in a bubble in the bigger cities, disconnected from the “real world” (SD, 2022p; SD, 2022b). What this does, is that it simultaneously aids in a positive self-construction, linking SD to the people and vice versa. Moreover, it suggests a sense of collective “us” and as the true defenders of ‘the people’ against a national and a non-national elite.

“... (Swedish taxpayers) has, per usual, no one to defend their interests in Brussel ...”

“...the normal order is that every member nations’ government will try to defend their own citizens, and their economic cause, however, there are exceptions and that is Sweden’s government...” (SD, 2022a)

In a national and international context, SD identifies themselves as standing with the people through discursive strategies such as shifting the blame on other elite members. It is through these discursive strategies that construct an “us” versus “them.” Essentially, what the Social Democratic government represents, based on these articulations and constructions, is a failed, naive and irresponsible representative politics. Constructing the government in such a manner will essentially be reversed by a Swedish Democratic government, which will guide Sweden and its citizens on the right path again.

5.2.2. The Non-National Elite and “the Giants” - A threat to Swedish Sovereignty

An anti-elitism logic has been presented and argued for in the previous section of the analysis. In parliamentary debates by SD, ‘the elite’ move upwards and outwards by constructing the non-national elite. While linking a European identity to positive values such as prosperity, democracy, and unity, the European Union as a political identity subject is negatively constructed, as it threatens the people’s livelihood and the sovereignty and democratic decision-making of Sweden as a nation. The European Union is articulated as “... a straitjacket named EU on us ...” which has detrimental consequences, leaving domestic farmers and foresters in a crisis (SD, 2022c). Furthermore, the EU’s migration and immigration policies and laws, which are imposed on Sweden as they are a part of the Union, are a direct threat to Sweden and other nations in the Union.

“...the drama that has unfolded in the border area between Belarus and Poland, illustrates how EUs asylum-system undermines the Union's diplomatic ability to take action ... it undermines our stability internally, and it attracts people to carry on with life-threatening journeys...” (SD, 2022q)

Through this articulation, the EU is constructed as an enemy, which acts against security and stability within the borders of Sweden and its citizens. Also noticeable in this argument is a construction of the EU that hinders the autonomy of the domestic Swedish government from exercising its self-rule. By drawing upon the rhetoric of threat and (in)security, a solid anti-EU logic is present in their populist discourse. It is further exemplified by linking the EU, the national government, and other non-elite ‘Others’ to each other. The EU’s power to propose laws regarding information and disinformation in Sweden is expressed as “an invasion of Sweden’s sovereignty” and a threat to freedom of speech to Swedish citizens (SD, 2022s; SD, 2022r). By drawing on values and constructions of freedom and sovereignty, the political party constructs a negative self-representation of these “tech giants,” which are threatening the freedom of speech that Sweden has “fought for centuries” to achieve (SD, 2022t). EU skepticism, alongside negative constructions of other non-elite members, is thus portrayed through discursive strategies such as threatening Sweden and its people. Therefore, anti-elitism discourse has a double-ended structure of the elite in the Sweden Democrats’ populist discourse. It constructs the elite upwards and outwards; The national Social Democratic elite, rooted within a national context and a non-national one, the EU, undermines ‘the People’ on a vertical axis.

5.3. The Ambiguous Migrant Other

The theoretical part of this study acknowledged that populist right-wing parties’ construction of ‘the Other’ has the potential to move outwards, using nationalistic exclusionary rhetoric to create an antagonistic “them.” When constructing non-elite others, often migrants in these parliamentary debates, the SD inarguably differentiates between a Swedish identity to a foreign one. Often, ‘the Other’ is referenced to “foreigners” and “migrants,” and in some cases, it draws on specific social identity attributes such as location, ethnicity, and religion.

The construction of these identities is tied to a particular spatial space, in the rhetoric of skewed morals, values, and norms that clash with Swedish ones. The spatiality of these identities can be located in geographical locations in the Middle East and Africa, which are constructed as having vastly different values attached to their cultures. In stating that “being Swedish is something to be proud of,” it implies that coming from Somalia is the opposite. By drawing upon a fictive example of Mohammed, the SD tells the story of how life could be for migrants coming to Sweden. By leaving values such as “clan mentality” and “honor cultures” at “home,” Mohammed could find himself becoming a part of Sweden (SD, 2022d). Simultaneously, they

shift the blame on the Social Democratic government, by stating that due to the current political climate in Sweden, migrants such as Mohammed can come to Sweden and “lie on the couch for a few years, and fiddle with his navel” which constructs a picture of laziness and unwillingness of migrants, to contribute to society. Clear differentiation between identities is visibly in this statement.

Furthermore, it also draws upon a collective “them,” where Mohammed becomes a systematic example of constructing a majority of migrants from Somalia “or other countries” tied to negative and non-Swedish values and norms. Thus, drawing upon a collective “them” to argue for nationalistic exclusionary measures rather than the construction of a positive and collective “us” is present according to the data. The construction of Mohammed, and the unspoken “others” which are implied in this statement, are tied to signifiers such as “homophobia,” “misogyny,” and “anti-Semitism” (SD, 2022d).

Furthermore, the data presents that the migrant ‘Other’ construction is articulated in the rhetoric surrounding security. The migrant Other is constructed as a threat to Swedish norms and values and a physical threat to the citizens of Sweden. Migrants are constructed as bringing traditions and values such as honorary oppressions and crimes, genital mutilation (SD, 2022e), cousin-marriages, and clan structures (SD, 2022f). These values are expressed as non-Western like and are imported from geographical locations such as the Middle East, Northern Africa, and Central Asia (SD, 2022u). These traditions are expressed as being a threat to not only Swedish values but to Western ones as well and are a threat to the values that “we” hold dear in “our” part of the world. More specifically, they are expressed as “destructive to our society” (SD, 2022e).

While constructing the migrant ‘Other’ as a threat to Western and Swedish values, norms, and traditions, articulating the migrant as a physical threat is also apparent in the data. Migrants are often constructed as violent and are expressed as being “war criminals” (SD, 2022v), terrorists (SD, 2022j), and “criminals” (SD, 2022w). Migration, thus migrants, are one of the “reasons for the rampant criminality” in Sweden. Drawing on security rhetoric, SD constructs migrants as physical threats to citizens, using nationalistic exclusionary rhetoric to legitimize the exclusion of others.

Interestingly, the SD differentiates between migrants, making the construction of ‘the Other’ ambiguous and fluid. While there is a solid anti-immigration logic when constructing migrants from the African and Middle Eastern part of the world in the SD discourse, they are seemingly

more open to European migrants, more specifically migrants from Ukraine, in the light of the ongoing war. Thus, by including one ‘Other,’ the SD simultaneously excludes another. Ukraine, as a nation, is constructed as “a strong, free and proud nation,” and its people are constructed by drawing upon values such as unity and strength (SD, 2022h). An increasingly positive representation of ‘the Other’ is constructed when referring to Ukraine migrants and refugees than non-European ones. Once again, by drawing upon nationalistic exclusionary rhetoric, however, between non-national groups of people, SD tries to legitimize stronger migration policies against non-Western migrants.

“...to have a reasonable opportunity to be able to receive more Ukrainian war refugees, we must at the same time make sure that foreigners that are lacking the legal rights to be in the country (Sweden) also leave it...” (SD, 2022x)

Visible in this example are discursive strategies such as shifting the blame and scapegoating to create an “us” and “them” rhetoric. By allowing “men without identity documents or passports, without protection reasons from countries far, far away” into Sweden back in 2014 and 2015, where they are not interested in returning “for any other reason than going back on holiday” (SD, 2022x), the Social Democratic government alongside those migrants who came to Sweden during the previous migration crises, are blamed for not having the capabilities to provide shelter and security for those who need it. Differentiating between the migrant ‘Other’ also becomes apparent in another debate, where European Belarusian migrants are compared to migrants from Northern Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan. It also becomes clear that there is an anti-Islamist/Third World discourse when it comes to refugees and immigration as opposed to an overall anti-immigration logic as SD states that:

“...those people who are lined up, or were, and tried to cross the border to Poland, are migrants from mostly Northern Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan, and not Belarusian migrants fleeing the Belarusian regime...” “...our party has never said that those people who are fighting against the regime in Belarus should not be allowed to enter the EU, but these migratory currents that we are talking about now, those are people who come from different countries in the Middle East...” (SD, 2022q)

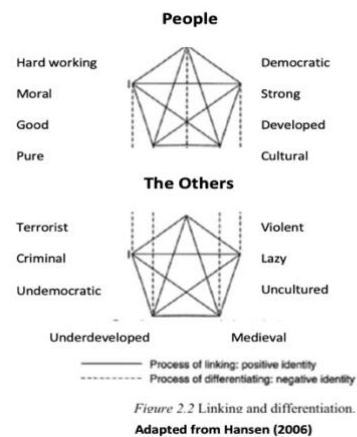
What becomes apparent in the analysis is that the construction of a non-national ‘Other,’ often migrants, is quite ambiguous and fluid. European ‘Others’ are often articulated through more

inclusive, open, and positive constructions, while non-European and non-Western ‘Others’ are usually constructed using negative constructions. Such constructions present a stronger anti-Islam and anti-Third World logic to their discourse in these parliamentary debates, rather than an overall arching anti-immigration logic. The SD includes groups of migrants in their discourse by differentiating between the different migrants ‘Others’.

Table 1. Conceptualisation of nationalism and populist discourses.

Criterion	Nationalism	Populism
Axis	Horizontal in/out	Vertical up/down
In-group claim to represent	Swedish, European, Scandinavian, Nordic, Ukrainian citizens	Workers, haulers, farmers, families, people, citizens
In-group subject		
Out-group	"Tech giants", the European Union, Russia, migrants/refugees/foreigners	Social Democratic Party, individual representatives of Social Democratic government
In-group vs. out-group	Swedish/Ukrainian/European vs. Middle Eastern/African	Unrepresented working demographic vs. Social Democratic elite

Adapted from Rodi, Karavasilis and Puleo (2021)



6. Results and Conclusion

This analysis argues that in the Sweden Democrats' populist discourse in parliamentary debates, various identities are constructed and drawn upon depending on the context and the issue at hand.

The construction of 'the People' firstly represents a demographic of a working, middle class people. Workers, farmers, haulers, taxpayers, and families create a collective identity of well-being. This identification places 'the People' on a vertical populist axis, as underdogs and are constructed as suffering economically and being in the midst of a crisis due to the current political decisions. Furthermore, they are constructed as being important pillars of a well-functioning, Swedish welfare society. The analysis further found that 'the People' were also constructed by drawing upon a positive "Swedish People", by linking 'the People' to positive Swedish self-representation, and through differentiation of other nationalities. "Swedish People" were articulated as having norms, values and traditions which are articulated in expressions of modernity, democracy, unity, openness, and equality. The positive self-representation of the identity subject 'the People' also links its identity construct to a broader positive representation of differences. Positive Swedish identity was linked to a broader Scandinavian and Nordic identity. This positive construction of difference was differentiated from other non-Scandinavian and non-Nordic identities, creating a negative identity through the process of differentiation.

In addition to constructing a positive Swedish, Scandinavian and Nordic identity, this analysis also found that the Sweden Democrats constructed a positive construction of difference of a European identity. While being a part of the EU was directly seen as a threat economically to 'the People,' a positive identity was constructed when debating the current security situation in Russia and Ukraine. The analysis shows that the Sweden Democrats linked their Swedish identity to a positive European and Western identity, which was used to differentiate an "us" from a "them," in this case, Russia. Thus, 'the People' were articulated by referring to people-as-nation rather than people-as-underdog, placing their construction on a horizontal axis, by using exclusionary nationalistic rhetoric to create an "us" versus "them".

The analysis found that the 'the People' are juxtaposed in antagonism with a ruling national elite and non-national elite, which in these debates constitutes the EU, in the Sweden Democrats' populist discourse. Ordinary working citizens act as a collective identity group positioned in an (economic) crisis due to the "irresponsible" and nonchalant national

government. Here, the elite are positioned upward (national 'elite as other') and outwards (international/regional elite other). The Social Democratic government is systematically drawn upon to place blame for a failed, representative politics in the country. In conjunction with the EU, a non-national elite, the government is constructed as prioritizing the people of other regional communities before their own. In a wider context, identification as being "a part of the EU" directly affects 'the People' in Sweden. Thus, the construction of 'the elite' moves upward and outwards in the Sweden Democrats' populist discourse, creating an anti-EU logic. By discursive strategies such as shifting the blame and scapegoating, the SD constructs the EU as a threat to the social and economic security of 'the People.' Furthermore, the EU and international tech giants are discursively constructed as a threat to Swedish sovereignty, democracy, and freedom of speech, drawing upon a rhetoric of people-as-underdog.

Lastly, the construction of 'the Other' is ambiguous and fluid in the Sweden Democrats' populist discourse in these parliamentary debates. The data analyzed, presents a strong anti-Islamist and anti-Third World discourse. Migrants are often constructed as a threatening and violent 'Other,' who are undermining Swedish values, traditions, and norms. The migrant 'Other' is often constructed and tied spatially to geographical locations such as Africa and the Middle East. This analysis does not argue for a complete anti-immigration logic because the Sweden Democrats differentiate between non-national 'Others' in their populist discourse in these parliamentary debates. Results show that refugees and migrants from Europe are often constructed more mildly and articulated with more openness and inclusivity, hence the Islamist and anti-Third World logic in these construction of migrant 'Others.' Refugees from Ukraine, for example, are embedded in the rhetoric of being genuine refugees. In contrast, migrants, and refugees from geographical locations outside of Europe are constructed as immoral and often used as examples to legitimize exclusionary measures and create negative identity constructions through processes of differentiation. Thus, 'the Other' is not only negatively constructed through processes of differentiating between 'the People' but also against a different 'Other.' By drawing on differences between 'Others', the Sweden Democrats presents a more positive identity construct regarding some groups, and systematically creates an "us" and "them" through these differences between them. Such constructions show how identity constructs are fluid and ambiguous, as well as how the Sweden Democrats can draw on different representations and constructions to create an "us" and "them."

Previous literature shows that identity construction by right-wing actors using various platforms is nothing new, and they are also not few. As populist right-wing parties seem to only grow in

strength and numbers across the globe, studying how identities are constructed and drawn upon for exclusionary measures and legitimization is seemingly as important as ever to understand how and why these political parties are gaining ground. Political actors across the globe are increasingly using identity politics. More so, it has often become tied to populist right-wing parties in Europe. The core behind populist right-wing identity politics is known for its exclusionary practices. With increased globalization, economic insecurities, and multicultural societies, the call for more exclusionary measures regarding policies and politics has surged (Velasco, 2020). Based on promises to protect a ‘People’ from harmful ‘Others, it has led to demands and calls for stricter national self-rule, increased integration, and stricter immigration (Noury & Roland, 2020). By drawing upon different identity constructions, positive and negative, alongside discursive strategies such as fear, scapegoating, and shifting the blame, populist right-wing actors are creating divides between an “us” and “them” where exclusion seems to lie at the very core (Wodak, 2015). What this does, is that it separates people from people, creates an ever-stricter Manichean division between Us and Them and privileges some over others.

In the Sweden Democrats’ discourse, this thesis argues that the construction of these identities’ aids in an overall creation of the preservation of a Swedish, and a European, identity. The discourse divides different people, thus different identities, into categories of good and bad. The analysis presents that Swedish people, and to some extent European people, are constructed as value-laden, developed, and respectful of values and norms. In contrast, populations, and people from other geographical locations, are constructed as harming, threatening and as villains, which are destructive to the Swedish nation and its citizens. The findings also point to the fact that by drawing upon the articulation of identities, the party intends to mobilize a particular group of white-collar, hardworking, true Swedish followers, as ‘the People’ are often constructed by drawing upon this particular demographic. Furthermore, it shames the political elite ‘others’ political decisions, as going against the interest of Sweden’s national identity and Swedish citizens, and as being naïve and incompetent. Contrastingly, it aids in the construction of the Sweden Democrats as being the voice of reason, and as the true defenders of ‘the People’ and their interests. With these results and findings, it would have been interesting to investigate if party-voters of the party agree with these identity constructs, as well as the demographic of the party’s followers. A more in-depth investigation of proposed policy changes and responses by the Sweden Democrats could also be built upon, connecting identity construction to policy analysis. These are inquiries to consider for future research in this field.

This thesis contributes to the contemporary scholarly literature on the construction of identity subjects by the Sweden Democrats in Sweden. Particularly in Swedish parliamentary activities, where the party is “speaking for the People who cannot.” As the Sweden Democrats are arguably growing bigger year after year and might be for the first time be in government after this years’ election, research shedding light on the current discourse of one of the biggest populist right-wing parties, is also increasingly important. Furthermore, it also contributes empirically through its theoretical and analytical foundation. While methodological limitation of this thesis is the lack of generalization since it limits its findings to the Sweden Democrats, in Sweden, at a given time and due to the discursively practical element of the research design, its contribution is still valuable to comprehending the role these identities play in the success or the success of populist right-wing parties and actors.

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