

THE WELFARE STATE CRISIS AND THE STRENGTHENING OF THE FAR-RIGHT IN SWEDEN AS A RESULT OF INCREASING MIGRATION

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Abstract

This article attempts to reveal the main causes of the crisis of the welfare state and the rise of the far-right in Sweden as a result of increased migration. The article clarifies the features of the Swedish model of the welfare state, which essentially became the basis of the Northern European model, which is considered the most complete expression of the essence of the social experiment of the northern countries. Sweden has a reputation for being an extremely open and overly tolerant country towards migrants from different parts of the world. At the height of the migratory crisis, no other country in Europe had received as many asylum seekers in proportion to its population as Sweden. For many left-wing sympathizers, this was confirmation that their state was a true ‘humanitarian superpower’. Unusually generous migration policy has led to a change in the political climate and allowed more radical political forces to emerge. Stereotypes have been disrupted and relatively homogeneous Swedish society is gradually becoming multicultural. There is even a change in the attitude of Swedes themselves towards the entry, integration, permanent residence and naturalization of migrants into Swedish society.

Keywords: migration, welfare state, far-right, Sweden, migrants, Swedes.

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Introduction

Sweden is one of the developed democratic Scandinavian countries with a stable economy and a strong social system. The Swedish welfare state has gone through a certain trajectory of development and has become a model for other Scandinavian and later European states. Distinctive features of Sweden are social dialogue and partnership, a developed civil society, democratic forms and public administration, economic and political stability, and a high level of social security. It should be noted that many comparative studies focus more on the economic aspects of the welfare state in Sweden, or on its social and cultural features, but less attention is paid to the historical and political analysis of the Swedish concept of the welfare state, the genesis of the Swedish model as an integrated social strategy, designed to overcome complex political and economic crises.

“The Swedish model, which has been adopted to a greater or lesser extent by other Scandinavian countries, has thus become one of the symbols of Nordic politics. It cannot be seen only as a specific form of social and macroeconomic policy - on the contrary, it is a very complex model based on a combination of social, economic, political and societal assumptions.”(Brunclík, Havlík and Pinková 2011, 39). In addition to a strong and stable welfare state, providing a high level of well-being for its people, Sweden is also considered to have one of the most liberal and open policies towards migrants. The integration of migrants into Swedish society has been the subject of much debate and is one of the main political challenges, that Sweden is facing in recent years. In presented article, we focus on two basic research questions, namely: *Is there relevance between the increase in the number of migrants and the collapse of the Swedish welfare state? Has the increase in the number of migrants contributed to the radicalization of the political scene in Sweden and to the negative attitudes of the Swedish population towards migrants?*

On the example of Sweden, we will point out the mutual relation between migration and the new challenges of the welfare state. We will try to find out whether the increase in the number of migrants has an impact on the radicalization of an otherwise stable Swedish political scene and also on the role of the media in this process. Finally, we will focus on the attitudes of the Swedish population towards migrants. The analysis is based on the theoretical basis of the classification of the welfare state of the Danish sociologist Göst Esping-Andersen. His typology of the welfare state is considered to be one of the most important in the given area.

Recently, a significant exponential increase in the number of scientific studies and publications focusing on the issue of migration and its relationship with the welfare state can be observed. We see the connection mainly in the context of the European migration crisis, at a time when there was an increase in migrants heading to Europe. In identifying the relationship between the welfare state and migration and vice versa, we relied on the following publications: G. P. Freeman (1986): *Migration and the Political Economy of the Welfare State*, F. Boräng (2012): *National Institutions - International Migration. Labor Markets, Welfare States and Immigration Policy*, M. A. Eger (2010). *Even in Sweden: The Effect of Immigration on Support of Welfare State Spending*, K. Borevi, K. K. Jensen, and P. Mouritsen (2017): *The civic turn of immigrant integration policies in the Scandinavian welfare, which address the issue of mutual correlation between the welfare state and migration and their interactions.*

Migration expert Kristian Kriegbaum Jensen, working at Aalborg University in Denmark deals with the migration issue. M. Glavey (2017) analyses migration in the publication *New Migration Realities: Inclusive Narrative*, Czech authors M. Brunclík, V. Havlík, and A. Pinková (2012) in the publication *Scandinavia: Policy changes in the Nordic countries*.

We will also draw attention to the fact why an electorally successful radical political party was not established in Sweden in the past, the theoretical basis will be provided by the right-wing party expert Jens Rydgen. Subsequently, we will focus on the rise of the far-right in Sweden, the problematics analysed mainly by the authors, J. Rydgen, and S. Meiden (2016), D. Corine (2018), J. Bartlett, J. Birdwell, and J. Benfield (2012).

Last but not least, we will try to clarify the attitudes of Swedes towards migrants, using the study by F. Ahmadi, and I. Palm (2008) *Diversity Barometer 2018*, published by the University of Gävle on the basis of research carried out since 2005. We will also reflect the study by K. Holloway, and A. Leach (2020): *Public narratives and attitudes towards refugees and other migrants Sweden country profile* conducted by the National Institute of the Open Media Society.

The basic methodological approach in the preparation of the paper was the analysis of the relevant literature, explanation and interpretation of individual attitudes and statements and their comparison. Statistical data were drawn from official website Statista Research Department (2021).

Welfare state and its possible collapse

Migration policy and the welfare state are closely interlinked and show a high degree of interdependence. The existence of a functioning welfare state has contributed in part to the large number of migrants heading to Sweden as a destination country. According to G. Fredman, for many migrants, a strong welfare state and the benefits resulting from it are much more important in their decision-making than the stable market and job opportunities associated with a good financial reward (Freeman 1986, 51-63). Opinions that the labor market is a driving force for migration have their origins in the past. Specifically, in the period when the labor market was diametrically different from the current one and showed other dimensions, resp. based on a different economic reality.

A study by M. Johansson and M. Persson (2007) points to the declining impact of the labor market on migration in Sweden. This study already states that less than 50 percent of migrants have found employment in Sweden. It was also found that a higher proportion of those who were unemployed before migration, remained unemployed (Johansson and Persson 2007).

The rising numbers of unemployed at the time of the European migration crisis in Sweden are the clear evidence that the increased number of migrants has also meant some pressure on the Swedish welfare state, albeit only temporarily. It is true that the support and security of the unemployed depends on the existence of a functioning welfare state.

Sweden is one of the countries with a high employment rate, although the youth unemployment rate in Sweden (18,9%) in 2016 was close to the EU average (18,7%), at the same time it was two and a half times higher than adult unemployment. About one in ten young people were unemployed in Sweden in 2016. However, it is true that the long-term unemployment rate in Sweden was the lowest among the EU Member States in 2016, which leads us to believe that the above numbers of unemployed will show an increasing trend even among migrants. It is a fact that at the time of the European migration crisis, Sweden was one of the European countries that accepted one of the highest numbers of migrants. According to Frida Boräng, the generous and universal institutions of the welfare state influence the norms and values of society and therefore have a positive impact on the reception of migrants as well as asylum seekers. It can therefore be stated that the welfare state plays an important role in migration policy.

Based on the above, we consider it necessary to state the classification of the welfare state. Among the authors who deal with this issue and created appropriate typologies are Herold L. Wilensky, Charles N. Lebeaux, and Richard Titmuss. The typology of the welfare state of the Danish sociologist Göst Esping-Andersen, on which we based our analysis, is also considered to be one of the most influential. G. Andersen divided the welfare states into three basic types:

1. The social democratic type is based on the principles of universalism and decomodification of social rights, which extends to the middle classes and strives for equality of minimum needs. The universal system includes all layers and classes, but the doses are graduated according to the usual results. Social security is financed mainly by taxes. This regime is based on high population taxation, an active employment policy, a high participation of women in the labor market and a generous social policy. The most prominent countries in this type are Sweden and Norway.
2. In liberal type of welfare state, the needs of its inhabitants are met primarily through the family and through the market. State interventions in the social field are minimal and come into play only when the family and the market fail. The level of social benefits is focused only on basic existential needs, the family is supported mainly by tax breaks. Social benefits are provided largely on a property basis and are targeted at low-income clients. The social system leaves room for the market, especially in the area of childcare services. The most typical representatives of this model are the USA, Canada and Australia, in Europe the United Kingdom.
3. In the corporatist (conservative) type, the state is ready to replace the market as a source of social security. The emphasis is on maintaining status differences and the non-distributive effect is therefore negligible. The system focuses primarily on the protection of persons who are not employed due to disability, job loss, retirement, etc. Social benefits depend on the period of insurance and the amount of insurance paid. In this system, the traditional division of roles between men and women is supported. Representatives of this type are especially Austria, Germany, France and the Netherlands (Mitchell 2010, 10).

We agree with the author, who included Sweden in the first group of countries. He described Sweden as a social democratic type of state, in which the priority role is to provide social security to all residents without distinction. Funds for this are obtained by the state from high taxation, which is supported by high employment rates, women's participation in the labor market as well as generous social policy. In Sweden, all these attributes are met.

Sweden is considered an egalitarian society and applies this principle to the redistribution of funds and social benefits among the population, including migrants. It is a universal type of welfare state that applies its liberal values both in generous social policy and in equal access to employment opportunities for all, regardless of gender, race, religion or ethnicity.

“A modernizing welfare state promotes social inclusion and integrates society through equal treatment.” (Borevi, Jensen and Mouritsen 2017). It is egalitarianism that is a hallmark of Swedish society and is equally applied in the egalitarian approach to migrants. Out of 100 points, 83.8 belong to Sweden, making it the number one spot in the EU in the gender equality index. Its score is 15.9 points above the EU score (the EU achieved 67.9 points out of 100 points) (European Institute for Gender Equality 2020). Sweden maintains its leading position, despite the fact that there has been no enormous increase in the score since 2010. The Gender Equality Index in each EU country is evaluated annually by the European Institute for Gender Equality.

Since the establishment of the Swedish modern welfare state, there have been changes in the political and economic climate. Sweden's national economy is much more sensitive to changes and the effects of the world economy. At the same time, there is an increased migration of people, which is more intense than ever before, which also contributes to the change of national, social, economic and political systems. All these changes also have a direct or indirect impact on the Swedish welfare state and its functioning. To find out if it is possible to see the connection between migration and the future of the welfare state, we asked ourselves the following research question: What is the relevance of the relationship between the increase in the number of migrants and the collapse of the Swedish welfare state?

Two waves of opinion come to the fore.

One of them talks about the natural change of the Swedish welfare state that would take place regardless of the influx of migrants into the country. Its reform and a degree of innovation were required by the existence of a new political and economic reality. The Swedish welfare state was originally based on the premise that society as a whole is responsible for social security and the well-being of it for each individual. This situation has been difficult to maintain in the long run.

In addition, Sweden, like other developed European countries, is struggling with an aging population. This unfavourable demographic development, with the increasing share of pensioners in the economically active population, puts the welfare state model under increasing pressure (Brunclík, Havlík and Pinková 2011, 43).

However, the collapse of the Swedish welfare state took place already in the 1970s at a time of economic crisis. During this period, there was a decline in public finances, which was subsequently reflected in a reduction in funding for the Swedish social system and thus for the support and development of the welfare state. The Swedish

welfare state succumbed to another crisis in the 1990s. An example of this trend is the fact that the rate of social security recipients in the country increased from 5.9 to 8.1 percent in the period of 1989-1994 (Tepe 2005). It is true that even in this period, migrants came to Sweden, it was mostly labour migration, but their number was not as enormous as it was in 2015-2016 during the European migration crisis.

According to the second group of opinions, the increase in migrants coming to Sweden has caused the collapse of the existing welfare state system. Increasing pressure in the form of a growing number of migrants has subsequently led to the necessary change in the Swedish social system. The integration of immigrants into the work environment as well as into society thus poses a major challenge, as they are mostly people with a relatively low level of education, only certain skills, and zero/weak knowledge of the Swedish language. According to a 2016 OECD report, after one or two years of induction programs, only 22% of newly immigrated men were employed. For women, this represents only 8% (Bevelander and Irastorza 2016).

It is evident from the above that the proportion of migrants among the unemployed and those dependent on the social system of the state is higher than among native Swedes. It is also true that migrant women are predominantly housewives, based on their culture and religion. They often came as part of a family repatriation program and therefore did not intend to enter the labour market. They were allowed to enter the country by the Swedish migration policy, which also supported the arrival of other family members who were also dependent on state aid. From this point of view, it can be said that the migrants themselves and their family members have contributed to the instability of the Swedish social system and to the weakening of its values and strength.

Thus, with the arrival of migrants, Sweden gradually transformed from a homogeneous society to a linguistically, ethnically and culturally heterogeneous society. "In recent years, therefore, successive and relatively large waves of immigration have forced the Swedish government to adopt new legislation to protect other minority groups from discrimination and to create economic incentives for both employers and workers to integrate new immigrant populations." (Eger 2010, 204).

In addition, Sweden is a supporter of gender equality and fights hard against any such form of discrimination. Therefore, it also provides assistance to refugees who are persecuted in their country because of their social orientation or because of their gender¹.

Based on the above, we dare to say that if the rules of migration policy are tightened, the influx of migrants to Sweden will decrease. As a result, there will be less pressure on the Swedish welfare state, which will be less burdened by the payment of unemployment benefits as well as various social benefits, which are increasingly received by incoming migrants.

"Modern Swedish social policy still successfully prevents poverty and still redistributes income among the population at a relatively high level." (Lundberg and Åmark 2001). Although migration and the functioning of the welfare state interact, migration cannot be considered as the only factor that can lead to a change or collapse of the welfare state.

¹ Such a definition of a refugee has been adopted in the Swedish Aliens Act by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Sweden and the migration

Recently, the perception of migration has changed, as has the reasons for migration itself. The labor market is no longer the main driver of migration. Rather, social and environmental factors become the motivation for migration. Of all European countries, Sweden has the highest share of refugees in its total population, currently estimated at 9,9 million (Dessimirova, Grondin and Williams 2017). The overall population growth is very positive compared to other European countries. However, this is an increase caused mainly by migration. Since 2012, the annual growth of the population in Sweden has been increasing. In 2012 it was 0,74%, in 2019 the growth reached already 1,078%². The highest growth increase was in 2016 (1,256%), which was at the time of the European migration crisis, when a larger number of migrants came to Sweden and, as the result repatriation program, also with other members of their families. Sweden has always been seen as an open, welcoming, and inclusive society, based on liberal values and social cohesion, taking diversity into account in terms of migration policy. "Sweden has long been considered a universal welfare state and a pioneer in equality and equal access to social benefits for the whole population, including migrants." (Schütze 2019).

In the mid-1990s, more than 10 percent of Sweden's population was born abroad, and 13 percent were either born abroad or born in Sweden with two parents born abroad. At present, 13 percent of the Swedish population is born abroad, and 16,7 percent were born abroad, or were born in Sweden with two parents born abroad. 20 percent have at least one parent born abroad (Eger 2010, 205). The largest numbers of immigrants living in Sweden were born in Finland, Iraq, the former Yugoslavia, Poland, and Iran.

Sweden's migration policy has shown a high degree of stability and has always been considered one of the most liberal without the existence of restrictive measures against migrants, as has been the case in other European countries. Recent research shows that it is easier for migrants and their descendants to feel a sense of belonging in countries where the political discourse is more open and inclusive. It has also been shown that a political environment, in which the tone of the immigration debate is more negative, damages immigrants' faith in democracy (Simonsen 2019). For these reasons, Sweden has become a destination country for many migrants and asylum seekers from both European and non-European countries. Kristian Kriegbaum Jensen is of the opinion that Swedish migration policy shows a certain degree of otherness, which is the result of a different perception of the national identity of Swedes as such.

In Swedish politics, the identity of a nation is presented as modifiable and is formed in the processes of collective bargaining. At the level of the individual, national identity is seen as something one can choose. In other words, immigrants can become part of a dynamic Swedish nation through their active decision to belong to it. This migration policy was based on a philosophy that strives for a balance between pluralism and universalism and allows each individual the same inclusion and

² The World Bank Group. 2023. Population growth (annual %) - Sweden. Accessed March 10, 2023. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.GROW?locations=SE>.

opportunity depending on their ability, regardless of gender, skin colour, religion, sexual orientation or ethnic origin.

The system on which the reception of migrants worked and their integration into the country was already satisfactory and reached a high level even before the crisis. This system provided migrants with social assistance, gave them almost immediate work permits to support their self-sufficiency. Among other things, they were provided with comprehensive support in finding a job, providing long-term housing, as well as help to learn Swedish. The nature of migration policy in Sweden is based on a firm concept of human rights and equal treatment for all without distinction. At the same time, it supports the non-violent non-nationalist integration of migrants while preserving their cultural diversity and religious freedom. All this leads to Sweden being, so to speak, in a tolerant extreme, which means that it often limits the values of traditional Swedish society. This situation persisted mainly until 2016. Until then, Sweden had the most generous laws against migrants, throughout the EU (Waldenström 2020). However, the situation began to change as early as 2016. Migration laws were tightened, and the number of migrants gradually decreased (Table 1). “Until 2016, Sweden had the most generous asylum laws in the EU. During 2016, it tightened its asylum laws and immigration fell to approximately to 116,000 immigrants in 2019.”³

Table 1. Number of immigrants in Sweden in 2014-2019

Year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number of immigrants	126 966	134 240	163 005	144 489	132 602	115 805	82 518

Source: Statista 2023

In 2015, Sweden was forced to increase its spending on asylum seekers due to the enormous influx of migrants. This was the most spent money so far to support this area. “Sweden spent 6 billion euros in 2015, or 1,35 percent of its GDP on 162,877 asylum seekers, representing 1,6 percent of the population.” (Tomson 2020). In the last period of the 21st century, immigration from countries such as Finland, Iran, Iraq, Poland and Somalia have dominated. This influx has led to an intensified debate on migration, in which migration has been portrayed as a social and political challenge. Changes have been made in migration policies that have led to the adoption of restrictive laws and measures, such as closed borders, limited temporary residence permits and opportunities for family reunification (Schütze 2019).

Since 2017, there has been a gradual decline in migrants, but there is no relevant evidence that this reduction is the result of tightened rules of migration policy. Nevertheless, the Swedish group of immigrants is one of the largest among other Scandinavian countries. In 2020, the decline is already quite remarkable and reaches a lower value than it was in the period before the crisis. The reason may also be the situation in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly restricted the movement of people around the world and thus of the migrants themselves.

³ Statista 2023. “Immigration to Sweden from 2012 to 2022.” Accessed March 10, 2023. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/523293/immigration-to-sweden/>.

Tightening migration policy rules has become a necessity. Excessive migration caused the creation of enclaves in which only migrants or a minimal number of the Swedish population lived. In fact, the proportion of the population in some cities has changed to the detriment of the original Swedish population, which has ultimately had a negative impact on the migrants themselves. An example is the city of Malmö. It is the fastest growing city in Sweden. Its population has increased by 43 percent since 1990, growing even faster than the capital Stockholm. More than 30 percent of the people in Malmö were born outside Sweden and come from 182 different nationalities (Kirk 2018). In cities such as Malmö, which is one of the cities with the highest concentration of foreign-born inhabitants, as well as in the suburbs of these cities, uncontrollable segregation of migrants has begun. Neighbourhoods like Rosengård, Holma and Kroksback began to be considered as dangerous.

The concentration of newly arrived refugees and migrants in areas with a high density of immigrants raises legitimate concerns in hindering their socio-economic integration. “More than 95 percent of children in local schools are of foreign origin.” (Kirk 2018). At the same time, the neighbourhood may have problems providing funding, services and infrastructure. Therefore, many countries apply the regulation of the geographical distribution of migrants when accepting migrants, which is intended to prevent segregation and to facilitate the inclusion of migrants. Sweden is no exception.

Migrants are also becoming a potential solution to decline of the population, which occurs mainly in rural areas. This typical problem of developed countries such as Sweden. The Swedish Government’s position in pursuing a restrictive migration policy was not based on hostile rhetoric. The government pointed to the need for tighter border controls, which it justified as necessary for better treatment of migrants and asylum seekers. Nevertheless, the country has been able to absorb high levels of immigrants without widespread serious social and political tension.

“In response to the increase in migrants, the Swedish government introduced border controls, followed in mid-2016 by a highly restrictive asylum and unification law. It was a major political shift. The number of migrants as well as asylum applications has fallen, but the Swedish public's concerns have grown.” (Skodo 2018).

The change of the political climate and the rise of the far-right

The political atmosphere in Sweden has always been favourable to migrants and enabled them to integrate freely and fully into Swedish modern and pluralistic society. One of the reasons may have been the absence of an electorally successful right-wing party in Sweden. There is no tradition of a long-standing political culture in Sweden that would lead to high voter support for radical right-wing populist parties⁴, as was the case in other parts of Europe in the 1990s. Jens Rydgen, a leading expert on right-wing

⁴ The only exception was the New Democracy political party, which was founded in 1991, when it also entered the Riksdag. In the following elections in 1994, it did not win a single mandate in the parliament. At the same time, it was the only period when a right-wing populist party was in the Riksdag. The Social Democrats gained further representation only in 2010.

parties, says why Sweden did not have an electorally successful radical political party in the past, based on four main explanations:

1. The social class has become increasingly important in Sweden than elsewhere. The voters of the working class strongly identified with their social class and the Social Democratic Party, which prevented their radical right-wing mobilization.
2. Social and economic issues still divided most policies in Sweden, and issues of a social and cultural nature, including migration, were of little importance to voters.
3. Voters as well as major mainstream political parties still perceived clear political alternatives within the left-right division.
4. The radical right-wing alternative, the Swedish Democrats, was seen as too extreme (Rydgren and van der Meiden).

In Sweden, during the short period 1991-1994, the populist right-wing party - New Democracy (NY Democrats) - was represented in parliament for the first time. But it was not until 2010 that a new populist right-wing party - the Swedish Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna) - gained more continuous representation. The high level of extremism did not allow the Swedish Democrats to attract a wider range of voters. The party therefore decided to adopt a more moderate program (Havlík 2011).

The strategy of the mainstream parties was to isolate the Swedish Democrats, which means that all other parties actively distanced themselves from this party, and at least in the short term, its parliamentary success was not reflected in stricter migration rules, but rather the opposite (Borevi, Jensen and Mouritsen 2017). Due to the extensive factors that caused the extreme increase in immigrants to Sweden, which was also reflected in the increased interest of migrants in the benefits offered to them by the existing welfare state, the status of populist parties has strengthened. At the same time, these new challenges have led to three serious facts, namely: 1) the tightening of migration policy rules, 2) concerns about Swedish identity and culture, 3) the rise of populist parties on a political scene such as Sweden.

As mentioned earlier, Swedish homogeneous society has gradually transformed and become multicultural, based on linguistic, cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity, which has found itself in a new reality. The fears of the Swedes themselves began to come to the fore that their country would remain open, tolerant and based on liberal values. Of course, while preserving Swedish culture, national traditions and language, which are an integral part of them. Addressing these concerns has become increasingly urgent, even for the Swedes themselves. To some extent, this need was related to the growing number of migrants in Sweden. Migrants who came to Sweden came mainly from outside European countries, that means from a different culture, language, mentality, religion (they were mostly Muslims). All of these facts have raised some concerns as to whether migrants will be able to integrate into a society as diametrically different culture compared to Swedes. At the same time, whether the Swedish liberal approach as well as the nuances of Swedish culture will be acceptable to them.

The general Swedish principle of gender equality is that everyone has the right to work and support, to balance careers and family life, and to live without fear of abuse or violence. In approaching migrants and their integration into Swedish society, Swedes also relied on this principle. Nevertheless, the growing number of migrants in

Sweden caused a turnaround on the political scene, when one of the important problems of Swedish society until then became an almost marginal topic and that was migration. Until then, it replaced typical topics such as the economy, public services, and pensions. Security and integration of migrants have become central topics.

For the first time, immigration has become an everyday affair in the Swedish election campaign. Law, order, and migration have become dominant topics, says Henrik Oscarsson, a political scientist at the University of Göteborg (Corine 2018). Populist anti-immigration political parties took advantage of the situation and used the topic of immigration and the integration of migrants to raise their profile and increase their popularity. Migration became an important topic during the election campaign and also became part of the programs of many political parties.

The first parliamentary elections to the Swedish Riksdag, after the acceptance of the highest number of migrants in Swedish history and the partial tightening of migration policy rules, took place on 9 September 2018. The result showed that migration was no longer a marginal issue. The Swedish Social Democratic Party became the winning political actor, but with the lowest number of votes since 1920, when their result did not exceed 30%. Their reached 28,26% (IFES 2018), and compared to the previous elections of 2014 recorded a decrease of 13 seats. In second place, with 19,84% (IFES 2018), was the opposition political party - the Moderate Party, which also lost 14 seats compared to previous elections. Even the Green Party, a coalition partner of the incumbent political party of Kjell Stefan Löfven, the Social Democrats, whose main program was ecology, lost 4,41% (IFES 2018), which is 9 seats less compares to previous elections' result. The Swedish Democrats saw an increase in the share of votes from 12,86% in 2014 to 17,53% in 2018. In the number of seats, the party won 13 more than in previous elections and became the third strongest political party. They hoped the result would be much higher, but it still represents the highest gain of any party in the Riksdag (Deutsche Welle 2018) (Table 2).

Table 2. Partial results of the Riksdag elections in 2014 and 2018

<i>Year</i>	<i>2014</i>		<i>2018</i>	
<i>Political Party</i>	<i>Mandates</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Mandates</i>	<i>%</i>
Social Democratic Party	113	31,01	100	28,26
Moderate Party	84	23,33	70	19,84
Sweden Democrats	49	12,86	62	17,53
Green Party	25	6,89	16	4,41

Source: IFES 2014; IFES 2018

Swedish Democrats party was led by Per Jimmie Åkesson, who has been the party's leader since 2005. Åkesson, continued to remove the most visible and unacceptable signs of xenophobia and racism from the Swedish society in the party's program, which it had actually transformed into a modern and legitimate populist party (Widfeldt 2015, 213-214). Supporters of the party are united in topics such as solving problems related to immigration, Islamic extremism and multiculturalism, which they perceive too one-sidedly as a threat to state borders and their cultural identity. Swedish Democrats have more support, about twice as much among men than women. They

also have more support among people born in Sweden than among people born abroad (Vilkénas and Olofsson 2018). We believe that the far-right Swedish Democrats have seen increased support precisely because of Swedes' fears of immigration. Following the tightening of the rules, the number of migrants heading to Sweden has fallen, but fears of pressure on the social system as well as fears of rising crime have contributed to the far-right electoral victory in a politically conservative country such as Sweden.

There are certainly problems in Sweden. Especially in the peripheral areas of large cities, as presented by Jerzy Sarnecki, Professor of Criminology at Stockholm University. But there are no statistics showing that the recent increase in crime has been linked to an increasing number of migrants⁵. According to an official survey by the Statista Research Department, the most important problems that plague Swedes are health and social security (47% of responses). The second problem that worries Swedes the most is the environment, climate and energy problems (39% of responses). The third problem is the education system, which is important for 26% of Swedes. Crime ranked fourth and gained 21%. Migration has been identified as the fifth most serious problem for 20% of Swedes. Other problems included housing, the economic situation, pensions, unemployment, but with significantly lower percentages⁶.

Nevertheless, opinions that migrants are more involved in crime resonate among some Swedes, and to some extent this has also contributed to increased support for the far-right, which was only a marginal political entity, without stronger voter support. There are, however, no official statistics showing that migrants are more involved in crime than the Swedes themselves. The principle of egalitarianism and equal treatment of all, which are the basic pillars of Swedish society, are a barrier to carrying out similar surveys.

The influence of the media on the radicalization of the Swedish political scene

The media play an important role in shaping public opinion, which is one of the main sources of information, whether it is print, audio, or various types of social networks. The problem arises with the so-called alternative media. These can then influence the attitudes of the population as well as the public opinion of the whole society in a negative way. Critics of such media emphasize populist, low-quality, sensationalist ambitions, and the sometimes-hateful content found in some of them. This raises concerns that they may contribute to increased polarization, mistrust, and racism in society. Proponents, on the other hand, claim that such media provide original perspectives and new voices on key issues such as crime, immigration, and Islam, which are not covered by the mainstream press (Nygaard 2020).

Interestingly, right-wing alternative websites are the most widespread in Sweden, where they are also gaining significant support. Those who have heard of Swedish

⁵ Government Offices of Sweden. 2022. "Facts about migration, integration and crime in Sweden." *September 21, 2022*. Accessed March 12, 2023. <https://www.government.se/articles/2017/02/facts-about-migration-and-crime-in-sweden/>.

⁶ Statista. 2023. "What do you think are the two most important issues facing Sweden at the moment?" Accessed March 12, 2023. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/565816/most-important-issues-in-sweden-as-perceived-by-citizens/>.

alternative media give them a high degree of credibility from 4,10 points for Fria Tider to 5,06 points for Nyheter Idag. In contrast to the public SVT, which received support of 6,59 points (Newman et al. 2019, 111). Although the SVT received the highest number of points compared to the points received by the alternative media, its support is still low. The relatively low support of the state SVT in comparison with alternative media is also related to the decrease in the use of traditional mass media for obtaining information. Swedes get up to 84% information online, 64% from TV and 46% from print media (Newman et al. 2019, 111). We believe that the high prevalence of alternative media, as well as their credibility, is conditioned by the liberal values on which Swedish society stands. The mainstream media, in an effort to defend the existing political culture, try to eliminate social phenomena that divide society and negatively affect public opinion, where we can include the topic of migration. Ultimately, they create space for alternative media, which in turn show higher support for controversial topics. Although these are predominantly small media in terms of their scope, the impact of their information can be significant in shaping the views of public.

Mainstream and alternative media often give a different view of the problems that plague Swedish society and ways to solve them. This difference can also be seen in their attitudes towards migrants. An example is the promotion of the city of Malmö. Alternative right-wing media sharply highlight the change that immigration has brought to the city, especially in terms of crime and violence. It even called some of his areas, such as Rosengård as 'no-entry zones'. This claim, however, was rejected by the Swedish police. The mainstream media, on the other hand, describe Malmö as a city of diversity through migration (Holloway and Leach 2020, 6).

Alternative media are often linked to right-wing populist entities. The situation is the same in Sweden. The Swedish Democrats are working with Fria Tider and Nyheter Idag, through which they also addressed their supporters in the election campaign. Their mutual cooperation in promoting a negative attitude to migration has led to the strengthening of these alternative media and has also helped the Swedish Democrats as a right-wing anti-migration political entity to strengthen their position on the Swedish political scene, as evidenced in the September 2018 Rigsdag elections.

Swedish Democrats perceive migration as a negative phenomenon that harms Swedish society, as evidenced by the following statement. "We (Swedish Democrats) want a serious migration policy. We welcome those who contribute to our society, abide by our laws and respect our practices. On the other hand, those who come here to use our systems, to commit crimes or to harm our citizens, are not welcome."⁷ The alternative media have to some extent 'popularized' the Swedish Democrats, which has ultimately led to a strengthening of radicalization on the Swedish political scene. It should be added that radicalization has recently intensified across Europe. With the support of right-wing populist parties such as the Swedish Democrats, great care must be taken to avoid an increase in extremism. It is clear that Sweden will also become part of the growing trend of populist parties, which has recently become characteristic, especially for the political scenes in the Scandinavian countries.

⁷ Sverigedemokraterna. 2023. "About us." Accessed March 12, 2023. <https://sd.se/english/>.

Swedes' attitude to migration

Swedes have always been free, open and welcoming to ethnic diversity in accepting migrants. They sought the full integration of migrants into Swedish society and culture, taking into account their differences and origins. Migration and everything connected with it was not a topic that would appeal to a large part of the public. It also had only a marginal place at the time of the election campaign, and it was not at the forefront of the programs of individual political parties. The change came only in connection with the European migration crisis, which caused an enormous influx of migrants to Sweden. Subsequently, it led to the need to change Swedish migration policy.

The creation and implementation of migration policy depends on the current distribution of political parties in the political spectrum as well as on the proportion of representation of individual political entities and their influence on government policymaking. The direction in which migration policy will go also depends on whether the left-wing or right-wing government is in power. It is very important for the government to show a high degree of stability and parliamentary support, which will enable it to take decisions in such a serious area as migration policy, especially at a time of high influx of migrants, as was the case during the European migration crisis. It was then that politicians, government, opposition, parliamentary and non-parliamentary political entities turned their attention to migration, which caused a change in the dominant philosophy of migration as well as in the attitude of Swedes to this issue, which became an important part of their daily lives.

A shift in the perception of multiculturalism and migration on the part of the Swedes can be seen recently. It has become more negative than ever before. Their attitude towards migrants is different than in other European countries. Swedes do not see migrants as a threat to the Swedish labour market, nor are they less concerned about the economic impact of migration. Rather, they associate migration with the threat of crime and criminal offenses. Even according to the Diversity Barometer from 2018, opinions on migration are often given unilaterally and create negative attitudes towards migrants, which are often irrelevant. "The media, authorities, scientists and opinion leaders present relationships that are full of conflict. Unfortunately, this focus means that all well-functioning relationships between people in neighborhoods, schools and workplaces receive less media attention. Thus, the image of public opinion disseminated by the media does not cover all aspects of multicultural relations." (Ahmadi et al. 2020).

The national institute Open Media Society conducted a survey on the attitudes of Swedes to immigration and ethnic diversity. The survey shows that younger respondents show a more positive attitude towards people of foreign origin. Swedes with higher education and those who lived in cities, as well as those who had personal contact with foreigners, were also more positive (Holloway and Leach 2020, 6). These results are also confirmed by the AudienceNet surveys from 2015, 2016 and 2017, which analysed the attitudes of Swedes towards migrants over the period. The fact is that attitudes towards cultural diversity and migration are becoming more negative compared to the results of similar studies carried out between 2005 and 2014. "In 2011, only 8% of Swedes believed that migration was the most important issue the country is

facing. that changed to up to 44% in 2016.” (Holloway and Leach 2020, 6). It is therefore clear that there is a change within Swedish society, which is then reflected in the attitude of Swedes towards migration, immigration as well as multiculturalism and cultural diversity. Despite the high degree of openness of Swedish society, the Swedes themselves have recently become more vigilant and closed-minded.

Attitudes towards immigration are related to the country’s economic situation, but it is not the only factor that affects it. Attitudes towards immigration and diversity can also be influenced by factors such as security concerns, perceptions of cultural differences, values and emotional responses (Mayda 2006). An important study that maps Swedes’ attitudes towards cultural diversity is the Diversity Barometer (2018), which has been carried out since 2005.

Since 2013, it is under the responsibility of the University of Gävle⁸. The sample consisted of 613 randomly selected individuals. Data collection took place from May 2016 to July 2018 via post. The diversity attitude index reached its lowest level in the history of measurements. Now it had a value of 1,7. In 2016 it was 1.8 and in 2014 this value was even 2,5. Since the period before the migration crisis, the index has fallen by 0,8, which is a significant decline in the conditions of such an open society as Sweden. It is therefore possible to observe a negative development of this indicator. People over the age of 50 and women with both lower and higher education contributed to this result. On the contrary, people under 30 showed a positive attitude resulted in improving the index values. The reason may be that the young generation is more in contact with migrants, within school, extracurricular activities, social networks, work, etc. It is well known that increased contact and knowledge about immigrants from other countries can eliminate xenophobic attitudes as well as eliminate prejudices. It is the media and political propaganda that contribute to the strengthening of such prejudices and xenophobia (Strömbäck, Andersson and Nedlund 2017).

In the following section, based on the results of the Diversity Barometer (2018), we will try to explain the change in the attitude of Swedes to migration and cultural diversity (Ahmadi et al. 2020). Swedes do not see the arrival of migrants as a threat to their labour market, which can also be seen in their attitude to providing job opportunities. Most Swedes support equal access to employment opportunities for both Swedes and foreign-born people. 8 out of 10 respondents are in favour of this approach. Equality and equal treatment intersect throughout Swedish society, as can be seen in the research results. However, it is still true that 23% would rather choose a Swede as a colleague, while in 2016 it was only 21%. We are therefore seeing a little increase. There is also a noticeable departure from an egalitarian approach in terms of providing social rights for people from other cultures. Nevertheless, the monitored indicator still shows higher values than in other European countries, is more than 50%. Previously, the majority of the Swedish population agreed that all people should have the same social rights, regardless of where they were born or where they came from. In 2016, there was a significant deterioration and only 55% expressed their consent, while in 2014 it was 77%. In 2018, it is 61%, there was a partial increase, but it still does not reach the value as in the previous period. We see the main reason for the decline in this

⁸ No research was carried out in the period 2015-2017.

indicator as one of the consequences of the European migration crisis, which has hit Sweden very hard.

A certain shift can also be seen in terms of the perception of different types of religion. From a religious point of view, the diversity index gained the worst possible value in history, namely 2,5, while in 2016 it was 2,4 and in 2014 it reached the value 2,3 (the higher the value, the more negative the perception). The increase in this value was mainly observed with men over the age of 50 with lower or secondary education. Swedes' attitudes towards diversity have become more negative in relation to other cultures and religions, especially Islamic culture. They also express the view that not all religions are based on the same values, referring mainly to Islam. The terrorist attack in April 2017 in Stockholm, where 4 people were killed and 15 injured, may have contributed to these views. The perpetrator was Uzbek Rakhmat Akilov, an asylum seeker. In 2018, the SVT reported that up to 58% of men convicted of rape or attempted rape in Sweden in the last five years were born outside Sweden⁹.

The Swedes are strict supporters of the incoming population integrating into Swedish society, preserving elements of their own identity, but also recognizing the fundamental values on which Swedish society stands. They consider it necessary for all migrants who want to stay in Sweden to learn Swedish in order to facilitate adaptation and maintain the unity of Swedish society. As many as 71% of respondents think that Islamic private schools are against integration. This indicator also increased, as in 2016 only 54% respondents supported this statement. This is probably due to the fact that they realize that if immigrants do not learn Swedish, it is a great handicap for them, which prevents them from achieving higher education or obtaining a more qualified job. The difference is also noticeable in the perception of the position of women in the society. Gender equality is strongly rooted in Sweden. The position of women is therefore freer and more balanced with that from Muslim countries. The majority of the Swedish population is of the opinion that the position of Muslim women is worse than that of Swedes, they are more oppressed (66%, while in 2016 it was 61%). Attitudes towards women and their rights are diametrically opposed in Sweden and in immigrant countries, which is the reason for the increased indicator.

An indicator that assesses housing and the willingness of Swedes to have people from other cultures or religions reaches positive value. As for the issue of housing, the residential index is stable and reaches the value of 2.0. In 2016 it was 1,8. It is true that up to 37% of respondents would prefer Swedish neighbours. And 3 out of 10 would consider moving if someone from the Middle East moved into their apartment building, 2 out of 10 would consider moving if the potential neighbor is from Africa.

As many as 45% (2018) of Swedes consider people from the Middle East to be a threat to preserving Swedish culture. In 2014, it was 43%. 71% also think that Islamic private schools prevent integration, compared to 54% in 2016. We can observe an increase in both indicators. The reason is the Swedes' concern about preserving their uniqueness and Swedish culture. The above statement is confirmed by the following: "In today's globalized society, behind all its insecurity and fear, people tend to seek

⁹In Sweden, there are no official statistics that would confirm a higher proportion of crime among migrants than among Swedes. The principles of equal access to all, which are the basic pillar of Swedish society, prevent them from carrying out similar surveys.

security in the old local culture.” (Ahmadi et al. 2020). Concerns about Swedish culture and language can also be seen in the changing attitude of Swedes as to whether people coming to Sweden should preserve their language and teach it to their children in the context of diversity. There is still a majority, 56%, who are of this opinion (60% agreed in 2016, 61% in 2014). Those, who reject this claim have increased, but it is still a relatively stable value, 24%. A significant deterioration was noted in the attitude of Swedes to leave people born abroad the opportunity to develop their own culture. It was 46%, while in 2016 it was 49% and in 2014, 57%. Men over the age of 50 had a rather negative attitude.

The fact that Swedes often associate migration with the provision of social benefits can also be seen in the following indicator. The negative statement that many are coming to Sweden to take advantage of social benefits has polarized Swedish society. Four out of ten agree with this claim, while four out of ten reject this claim. The attitude I do not agree with the position, but I do not refuse either, worsened in the observed year. In 2018 it was 22%. We see a connection with the growing number of migrants in a given period as well as the media coverage of this problem. However, the Swedish public continues to show a more positive attitude towards immigration compared to other Scandinavian as well as other European countries.

Conclusion and discussion

Sweden has become a destination country for many migrants, thanks to its liberal and not too restrictive migration policy and quality social system. This was fully reflected in the European migration crisis when Swedes took the lead in receiving migrants and asylum seekers from other European Union countries. One of our research questions was: *What is the relevance of the relationship between the increase in the number of migrants and the collapse of the Swedish welfare state?*

We can state that, based on our findings, a clear answer to this question is not possible, as several factors affect the collapse of the Swedish welfare state. It is undeniable that increasing migration was one of them. The economic crisis, demographic changes in the structure of the population and their consequences for changes in attitudes towards migration and ethnic diversity also contributed to the collapse. Last but not least, a change in political and economic reality. These extensive factors have partly contributed to the need to change the Swedish welfare state, and their influence may have contributed in part to its collapse.

It is clear that even a high-quality and strong welfare state, such as Sweden, is under pressure after an increased influx of migrants, which will ultimately lead to its disintegration if it is not changed. So, the collapse of the welfare state, or its necessary change, is a natural part of it in certain time intervals and is dependent on the mutual correlation of many factors. Migration, as one of the factors, contributed in part to the need to transform the existing Swedish welfare state system, but it was not the only factor. Secondly, we tried to find out whether there is a connection between the increase in the number of migrants and the strengthening of the position of radical political parties on the Swedish political scene. Last but not least, we examined the

extent to which this affects the attitude of Swedes towards migrants. Our second research question was: *Has the increase in the number of migrants contributed to the radicalization of the political scene in Sweden and to the negative attitudes of the Swedish population towards migrants?*

It is true that it was migration that strengthened the position of the far-right in Sweden. The Swedish Democrats, as the main leaders and supporters of the cessation of migration to Sweden, have begun to address this hitherto marginal issue for Swedish society. Their populist and distorted presentation of migration as one of Sweden's biggest problems has meant that migration has become a central problem for Swedish society as a whole, as well as for the political scene, which has radicalized under its influence. The growth of such anti-immigration forces in Sweden reinforces negative attitudes towards diversity as well as the segregated integration that characterizes the current situation in Sweden. On the contrary, it will weaken the position of typical political parties. The presentation of migration by the anti-immigration populist political party, the Swedish Democrats, as well as the right-wing alternative media, with which they are in close contact, strengthened the negative attitudes of Swedes towards migrants. The diversity attitude index reached its lowest level in the history of measurements.

Despite some deterioration in the attitudes of the Swedish population towards migrants, their attitudes are still less negative than in other parts of Europe. Many studies suggest that feelings of helplessness contribute to negative attitudes. As a result, intolerant communities and groups are emerging that feel marginalized.

Sweden's migration policy remains open and one of the most responsive to migrants and asylum seekers. Swedish society needs to change and adapt to new challenges, these changes will depend on current political forces and their decisions. Nevertheless, their identity, culture and language will remain decisive for the Swedes and perhaps much more than ever before.

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