Gender and radical right populism –

a comparative qualitative content analysis of party manifestoes from
the National Front and the Sweden Democrats

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Abstract

Populist radical right (PRR) parties have become a prominent feature of contemporary European politics. However, when studying these parties, the focus usually lies on definitions and explaining these parties' electoral success. Where populist radical right parties position themselves on gender issues is still quite unclear since it is an underexplored area in this research field. The aim of this thesis is to increase our understanding of the relationship between gender and populist radical right parties. This is done by the examination of party manifestoes from the National Front and the Sweden Democrats from the last three elections. Previous research has shown that this party family usually has traditional views on gender roles, while other scholars have noted that some parties take on more liberal views when it comes to gender. Both differences and similarities were found among the parties. Both parties stressed the importance of families and have conservative attitudes towards abortions. However, the Sweden Democrats seems to have more liberal views, especially when it comes to gender equality. The thesis also demonstrates that both the National Front and the Sweden Democrats have changed their rhetoric on gender issues and become more moderate in recent years.
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1. Introduction

Populist radical right (PRR) parties have become a permanent and prominent feature of today’s politics. Populism is not a new phenomenon, but in recent years it has been on the rise all over the world. There is no lack of literature on this phenomenon. However, when it comes to radical right populism, scholars tend to focus on defining what it is, why PRR parties are getting more and more support and if and how they have any influence on politics in their respective countries. The relationship between radical right populism and gender has not gotten much attention from scholars. The small body of research that does exist on this topic is generally about explaining the so-called gender-gap, that is, why women are underrepresented when it comes to voting for PRR parties (Spierings et al, 2015).

Even though this is an underexplored area of populism, scholars like Mudde (2007) have pointed out some common features that most PRR parties share regarding gender issues. They link “women’s issues” to “family issues” and tend to emphasize the “natural differences” between women and men (Mudde, 2007). Others have noticed that PRR parties that seek electoral success have recently tended to take on more “liberal” values and stress the importance of gender equality (Akkerman and Hagelund, 2007). The debate on immigration from Muslim countries has also seen PRR parties connect gender issues with their anti-immigration agenda, arguing that Islamic values are at odds with Western values, like gender equality (Spierings et al, 2015). These somewhat contradictory findings make it hard to get a clear picture of how PRR parties actually perceive gender issues.

This study focuses on the gender policies of two PRR parties, the National Front (FN) in France and the Sweden Democrats (SD). These parties are both prominent in their countries and they are also parties whose most exploited and successful issue is the one on anti-immigration (Mudde, 2007; Stockemer and Barisone, 2015). If they have the same or similar policies on gender issues is still quite unclear, since this is an underexplored area when it comes to populism. These two parties have been selected for several reasons. Both FN and SD have an explicit strategy to distance themselves from their pasts and reach out to new voters. It is thus interesting to study if their gender policies have changed, as a way of becoming more moderate and attracting more supporters. They also operate in different countries and cultures and therefore it is
worth examining if their gender policies differ. Since PRR parties have become a prominent feature of the European political landscape, it is of value to investigate their policies beyond the “obvious” issues of immigration and EU-skepticism.

By focusing on their party manifestoes, it is possible to get a better and clearer understanding of how these parties position themselves on gender issues and if there are differences between the two parties. By examining manifestoes from different years, we can also learn if their gender policies have changed over time.

The concept of gender will be explained later on, but it can be seen as social expectations and values attributed to the biological differences between men and women (Mackay, 2010). Gender can be incorporated in many policy areas – indeed, almost all policy areas have a gendered aspect to it (Bergqvist, 2008). This study specifically focuses on four policy areas connected to gender within FN and SD. They are abortion, parental leave, the role of the family and the connection between gender and immigration. In doing this, it follows the example of a number of other analyses of gender policies (see Akkerman and Hagelund, 2007; Budde and Heichel; 2017, Dingler, Lefkofridi and Marent, 2017; Kamerman and Moss, 2011).

The aim of this study is thus to increase our knowledge and understanding of the relationship between populist radical right parties and gender. By comparing two PRR parties and how they relate to gender issues over a time period of the last three elections in their respective countries, we can also see if and how that relationship differs between two countries and what the potential reasons for that might be.

1.1 Research question

How have gender policies changed in the party manifestoes of the National Front and the Sweden Democrats over the last three elections?
2. Theoretical framework

In this part of the thesis, I make a review of research on radical right populism and what scholars have noted so far when it comes to gender and PRR parties. The two parties of the study are also presented more thoroughly. One section is reserved for research on gender policies in Sweden and France.

2.1 What is populism?

Populism is one of the main political buzzwords of this century. The term is frequently used in the media and seems to appeal to both journalists and media consumers. However, the broad usage of the word has also created confusion and frustration (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Scholars have defined it as a strategy (Weyland, 2001), a political style (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Moffitt, 2016) and as a thin-centered ideology (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Despite the scholarly disagreement on the definition, most scholars agree that the concept always includes appeal to “the people” and the denunciation of “the elite” (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

In this thesis I focus specifically on one form of populism: radical right populism.

2.2 Populist radical right parties

PRR parties have been getting much attention from scholars in the past decades. The rise of PRR parties in Europe began in the 1980’s with the National Front in France, the Austrian Freedom Party, the Vlaams Blok in Belgium, the Norwegian Progress Party, Die Republikaner in Germany and others (Betz, 1994). Today, PRR parties are active in most European countries (Loch, 2017).

This party family have been given different names from scholars. Sometimes they are referred to as extreme-right, right-wing, far-right and nationalist. In this study I use Mudde’s (2007) influential definition of populist radical right parties.

PRR parties are some of the most out-spoken opponents of neo-liberalism, immigration and integration within the EU. They associate European integration with forces of globalization and the loss of national independence (Zaslove, 2008). Populist radical right parties descend from different origins. Several started out as reformed extremists, as anti-tax parties and others were formed out of regional or minority movements.
Despite their different origins, these parties now constitute a party family of their own (Zaslove, 2008).

Even though the populist radical right is not antidemocratic in a procedural sense, important values in its ideology stand in tension with liberal democracy. PRR parties share an ideology that combines at least the following three features: nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. The key concept of the populist radical right is nativism, which is a combination of nationalism and xenophobia. The nation belongs to the “natives”. Nativists strive for a monocultural state and are hostile to influences from “alien” cultures (Mudde, 2007). Authoritarianism is the belief in that society should be organized according to strict rules. People who rebel against authorities should be punished. Rule of law must be upheld no matter what. This view manifests itself in the parties’ focus on law and order. Most PRR parties are careful not to overstep the line between democracy and dictatorship. However, they feel that today’s democracies are too weak and not capable of defending themselves from outside threats (Mudde, 2007).

Radical right populism is a form of identity politics. It is based upon an “us-them” distinction, which helps create boundaries between different identities. It consists of an ingroup, “us”, and an outgroup, “them”. Scholars have pointed out that while the definition of the ingroup is vague, the identity of the outgroup is very clear and explicit. As “every country has its own favorite enemy” (Von Beyme, 1996:438, quoted in Mudde, 2007:64), the list of populist radical right parties’ enemies can vary between contexts. However, the key internal enemy for all PRR parties is “the elite”, a broad concept that includes political, economic, and cultural actors (Mudde, 2007). PRR parties take an authoritarian position on sociocultural issues, which mainly means an ethnically based form of nationalism. They want the nation to remain ethnically and culturally homogenous. PRR parties therefore hold strong anti-immigration positions and they criticize the multiculturalist society (Jungar and Jupskås, 2014).

In Europe, the PRR parties usually have an anti-immigration agenda. They see the so-called mass immigration to Europe as a conspiracy caused by “the elite” (Mudde, 2007). Especially Islam has in recent years become central to the anti-immigration agenda. PRR parties have positioned themselves as the most strident opponents to what they call the “Islamization” of Europe and this is manifested through their attempts to mobilize
against projects like constructions of minarets and mosques. This has gained them significant media exposure (Betz, 2013).

2.3 The relationship between PRR parties and gender

The relationship between populism and gender has gotten little attention from researchers. It is an underexplored research field, both theoretically and empirically. The very limited amount of literature that does exist on the relationship tends to focus on explaining the gender-gap of the electorate (Spierings et al, 2015). Harteveld et al. suggest that it is likely that men attach greater salience to issues that are traditionally associated with the radical right as a way of explaining this. They claim that men may also be less repelled than women by these parties’ reputation and political stigmatization (2015). Kitschfelt notes that PRR parties normally have a conservative ideology that is based on the traditional family, the nation state and the preservation of traditions and customs. These features, in combination with the radical right’s rejection of the left parties’ more progressive agenda, have made women hesitant to voting for PRR parties (2007).

It is likely that the populist gender model contains ideas that are contradictory. Whether populists will challenge the status quo and promote gender equality is dependent upon how gender relates to the division between “the people” and “the elite”. If women are part of “the people”, populist actors will probably try to mobilize them by including gender in ideology and policy. At the same time, if feminism is seen as part of an educated and privileged elite, populists are unlikely to work towards change in gender relations (Dingler, Lefkofridi and Marent, 2017).

European PRR parties are traditionally seen as men’s parties since they are usually led, represented and supported by men (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). However, there are several examples of radical right populist parties that are or have been led by women, for example Marine Le Pen from the National Front, Pia Kjaersgaard from the Danish People’s Party, Siv Jensen from the Progress Party and Alice Weidel and Frauke Petry from Alternative for Germany. This implies that (radical right) populist leadership can not only be attached to males (Dingler, Lefkofridi and Marent, 2017). Because of the increasing number of prominent female politicians and party leaders, the relationship
between populism and gender is currently one of the most relevant issues to study when it comes to populism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015).

Although the parties listed above have or had female leaders, they are still predominantly represented by men in parliaments and they tend to have a majority of male voters, just like PRR parties led by male party leaders. This does not per definition mean that they have a traditional view on gender roles (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015). If the leadership of the party is highly individualistic (which is the case for a lot of populist parties), what gender policies that are promoted is probably very affected by the views of that leader (Dingler, Lefkofridi and Marent, 2017).

Despite the scholarly lack of gender and PRR parties, there are some common features that these parties share when it comes to gender. They perceive “women’s politics” as “family politics” and they tend to stress the “natural differences” between men and women. Since women are the only sex that can give birth, and the fact that offspring are vital to the survival of the nation, PRR parties argue that women should be protected in their “sublime role of housewife and mother” (Mudde, 2007). They see families as core institutions of society. The parties promote traditional roles of women, are opposed to gay marriages and have negative attitudes towards abortion. Most PRR parties share these views, but some of the parties have chosen a more modern and flexible approach to these issues (Akkerman, 2015).

Populist radical right parties do not want to limit themselves to the issue with opposition to immigration. They seek to win votes on issues other than immigration (Art, 2013). Voters are more likely to endorse PRR parties if they perceive the parties as “normal” or “legitimate”, which at least means that they are democratic, effective and in line with national values (Haikiopoulou, Mock and Vasilopoulou, 2013). When competing with other parties, populists tie gender to the issues in which they have a good reputation. PRR parties will thus connect gender to issues like immigration, security, tradition and culture (Dingler, Lefkofridi and Marent, 2017).

2.4 PRR parties as defenders of gender equality?

After 9/11, religious differences, especially those represented by Islam and immigrant Muslims, have come to be seen as a threat to national security by PRR parties. For many PRR parties, gender issues have been closely tied to the issue with immigration and
integration (Akkerman, 2015). Then it is often to justify their anti-immigration agenda (de Lange and Mügge, 2015).

PRR parties are sometimes portraying themselves as defenders of women’s rights, accusing feminists and liberals of not paying attention to the discrimination of Muslim women who have immigrated (Betz, 2002). For example, several PRR parties suggest the banning of headscarves and veils in public places, arguing that they are discriminatory against women (Rosenberger and Sauer, 2012). It seems as policy issues that are usually connected to left-wing parties are now being adopted by populist radical right parties as part of their nationalist and anti-immigration agenda (Akkerman and Hagelund, 2007).

Some PRR parties argue that Islamic values stand in tension with liberal democratic values, such as democracy, emancipation of women, equality between sexes and separation of church and state (Spierings et al., 2015). Haikiopoulou, Mock and Vasilopoulou argue that PRR parties “adopt” values such as tolerance and liberalism and see these values as part of the national culture. These values are threatened by the influence of outsiders who do not share or are willing to accept these values (2013). Müller notes that in these cases, liberal values become national values, and their sole purpose is to exclude (Müller, 2014).

Although some PRR parties rhetorically support gender equality, they usually do not translate the rhetoric into actual proposals that will promote gender equality (Dingler, Lefkofridi and Marent, 2017). Moffitt argues that it is more a matter of discourse than policy. For example, the Scandinavian PRR parties see gender equality as an established fact in their countries, and not a goal that still is not achieved. By framing gender equality in this way, they come across as defenders of it while still criticizing policies that seek to “improve” gender equality. Any policy to further support gender equality is labelled “social engineering” conducted by “the elite”, a way of forcing men and women to be the same, which the PRR parties view as discrimination (2017).

De Lange and Mügge write that according to feminist scholars, the inclusion of gender issues in PRR party programs has given rise to a new form of nationalism in which rights of women and gays are seen as fundamental values of Western societies. However, de Lange and Mügge argue that the feminist argument about a new nationalism assumes
that all PRR parties have the same view on gender issues, when in fact it is very possible that they may have different approaches to gender issues (2015).

2.5 The concept of gender

Gender is both a confusing and contested concept. It is sometimes used as a synonym for sex or women. Most scholars do make a distinction between gender and sex. While sex refers to the biological differences between women and men, gender is socially constructed. It relates to social expectations, values, roles and meanings attributed to the biological differences. Gender refers to culture and what it means to be a woman or a man, what femininity is and what masculinity is (Mackay, 2010). Following Joan Scotts’ influential formulation, the concept of gender in this thesis is used as “a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes” (Scott, 1986: 1067)

2.6.1 The Sweden Democrats

The Sweden Democrats labels itself as “a social conservative party with a nationalist ideology, that considers value conservatism and the maintenance of a solitary welfare as the most important tools in the construction of a good society” (SD, 2011) The party was founded in 1988 out of several anti-immigration and nationalist groups (Jungar och Jupskås, 2013). Several of its members had been members of neo-Nazi and fascist parties (Strömbäck, Jungar and Dahlberg, 2017). Today, the party is described as a PRR party, but until recently it was considered to be an extreme-right party and therefore more militant than other populist radical right parties (Jungar and Jupskås, 2014).

Jimmie Åkesson was elected as party leader in 2005 and the Sweden democrats was the biggest party outside the parliament. The following year, the party got 2.9 percent in the parliamentary election and gained seats in half of the assemblies in Sweden’s municipalities. In the election of 2010, the Sweden Democrats managed to enter the Swedish parliament with 5.7 percent of the votes (Erlingsson, Loxbo and Öhrvall, 2013). The policy influence of the party has been limited since the other parties in the parliament created a cordon sanitaire towards the party (Loxbo, 2015). Both the current and the previous governments have claimed that they would not negotiate or seek parliamentary support from the Sweden Democrats (Strömbäck, Jungar and Dahlberg, 2017). However, this has begun to break down: even though the rest of the parties in
parliament claim they do not want to co-operate with the Sweden Democrats, the Moderates have taken steps towards SD after former party leader Anna Kinberg Batra stated that she was willing to rule with the support of the Sweden Democrats (Asplid, 2017).

The party has continued to grow since it entered the parliament. In 2014, the party had more than doubled its support and got 12.9 percent in the parliamentary election (SD, 2018). The party has gradually moderated and taken active measures to broaden its appeal. This includes prohibiting uniforms at party gatherings, the change of party symbol from a burning flame to a blue anemone and the formal rejection of Nazism and fascism in the end of the 1990’s. Under the leadership of Jimmie Åkesson, the Sweden Democrats has continued to change its image, for example by trying to resemble other more successful PRR parties, excluding members who are perceived as damaging for the party's image and by focusing on issues other than immigration, such as law and order and opposition to the EU (Erlingsson, Vernby and Öhrvall, 2014).

2.6.2 The National Front

The French party the National Front was founded 1972 after the merger of French organizations on the right. The party became associated with racism and xenophobia, but the perceived threat from Marxism was the reason for its formation (Berezin, 2009). The National Front ran in local and national elections but gained little support in the beginning. It was in the mid 80’s that the party began to have electoral success (Camus and Lebourg, 2015). It was also during this time that the party established itself as an anti-immigration party (Berezin, 2009). The immigration issue has been the party’s most exploited issue in terms of ideology, rhetoric and campaigning (Stockemer and Barisone, 2015).

In the presidential election of 2002, party leader Jean-Marie Le Pen received his best score with 17.8 percent of the votes. In 2007, Le Pen got 10.4 percent of the votes and did not move on to the second round (Berezin, 2009).

Jean-Marie Le Pen was party leader from the start until 2011, when his daughter Marine Le Pen took over the leadership. She received 17.9 percent of the votes in her first presidential election in 2012, ending up in third place among the candidates (Le Parisien, 2012). In last year's election (2017), Le Pen moved on to the second round
where her opponent was Emanuel Macron. In the end, Le Pen lost the election with 33.9 percent of the votes (Le Monde, 2017).

Just like the Sweden Democrats, the National Front has an explicit strategy to broaden its appeal. This is referred to as the “de-demonization” of the party, which includes sanitizing the party’s image and moving away from its roots (Robins-Early, 2018). Even though immigration is still the party’s most important issue, the discourse on immigration has changed under the leadership of Marine Le Pen. Instead of just talking about immigration, anti-immigration appeals are now interwoven in other policy areas (Stockemer and Barisone, 2015). As part of the strategy to change the party’s image, there are discussions about changing the party’s name. Le Pen wants for the party to change its name to Rassemblement National (National Assembly) (Robins-Early, 2018).

2.7 Gender roles and policies

In this section, I review research on gender and gender roles in France and Sweden. The purpose with this text is to give an understanding of gender roles in both countries, which can help understand similarities and differences between the National Front’s and the Sweden Democrats’ gender policies.

2.7.1 Sweden

Sweden is sometimes considered to be the world’s most equal country. When gender equality around the world is measured, Sweden places high. A high percentage of women in the labor market, paid parental leave for both parents, extensive public childcare and almost half of women in politics have contributed to the world’s perception of Sweden as a gender equal state (Bergqvist, 2008). The Swedish politics for equality between sexes began to form in the 1970’s. There were large inequalities between men and women and much discontent with women’s subordinate position in society. Sweden, as well as other states, now began to design particular politics for equality (Bergqvist, 2008).

The ruling Social Democratic Party were in favor of state influence over different aspects of society, including the private sphere (Torstendahl, 1999). It was during this time period that gender equality became institutionalized, which marked the beginning for the so-called state feminism, which means that the state now began to engage in policies regarding gender equality (Florin and Nilsson, 1999).
In Sweden, some of the reforms were abolition of joint taxation between spouses, the right to do abortions, the shift from maternal leave to parental leave and the expansion of public childcare in order to make it easier for women to combine work and family (Bergqvist, 2008). The number of places at day cares increased from 18,000 in 1965 to 125,000 in 1975. The “two-earner” family was established due to public policies that supported it. More women entered the labor market (Hinnfors, 1999).

Even though Sweden ranks high in different gender equality indexes, there are still areas where gender equality is not complete. One example is the parental leave, where the divide is unequal since mothers take out the highest share of the leave. Fathers only use about 20 percent of the total leave (SCB, 2016).

2.7.2 France

In the 1970’s, the question of how to reconcile work and family and if the state should have an active role in helping families with the reconciliation, got much attention in France. The French state saw, and in many ways still sees, the family as a fundamental social unit. The importance of demographic reproduction was a major reason for the government’s reluctance to promote better opportunities for women to combine employment with motherhood. Women’s employment had been pointed out as the biggest reason for the fall in birthrate in France. The state’s effort to support families resulted in laws that controlled women’s working conditions. Public policies are characterized by a series of compromises between the protection of the family as a unit by encouraging women to withdraw from the labour market, and the desire to let women decide for themselves if they want to work or not (Lanquetin, Laufer and Letablier, 2000).

Feminist movements have pressured the state to take on a more progressive view on the roles of women. The strong family orientation in public policies, where women were seen as just mothers and housewives, have been replaced by a more egalitarian view. In the 60’s and 70’s, new laws were adopted that gave women stronger rights and weakened the male-breadwinner model. Some of the changes were the ending of the legal subordination of women to their spouses and divorce by mutual consent. Several developments were made to make it easier for employers to recruit women. Public provisions of childcare were extended. The dual-earner model grew stronger and
somewhat weakened the male-breadwinner model (Lanquetin, Laufer and Letablier, 2000).

Fertility rates have always been a major concern for political actors in France, even though rates have been high in comparison with other countries in Europe. France has a relatively comprehensive system of reconciliation politics, but women in France still suffer from great gender inequalities because the system still favors large families (Jacquot, Ledoux and Palier, 2012). Family allowances have been available since the early 70’s. In 1977, paid parental leave was introduced in France and public child care began to expand. During this time, the state also sanctioned maternal assistants, who open their homes for children whose parents have jobs. The original parental leave was only available for mothers, but in 1984, a change was made and both parents were entitled to be on parental leave (Jacquot, Ledoux and Palier, 2012).

A new parental leave was introduced in 2014. In the old one, 10 days were reserved for fathers. The new one is six months and half the time is reserved for fathers. The law was implemented as a measure to make fathers take a greater share of the leave and thereby reduce the country’s excessive focus on motherhood (Gregory and Milner, 2015).

While these reforms have increased gender equality, the French familial policies are to this day natalist: the fiscal deduction is higher for families with more than two children and the family allowance is granted to families with more than one child (Jacquot, Ledoux and Palier, 2012).
3. Research design

In this section I present the selected method for this thesis, the qualitative content analysis. I also present what material I have used, why I have chosen that material, the study's validity and the operationalization.

3.1 Material

For this essay, I have studied party manifestoes from two European populist radical right parties, the National Front and the Sweden Democrats.

The manifestoes are taken from years when elections were held in France and Sweden. I have gone back the last three elections. The party manifestoes from the National Front are from the years of 2007, 2012 and 2017, years when presidential elections were held. The Sweden Democrats’ manifestoes are from years when parliamentary elections were held, which was in 2006, 2010 and 2014. However, the party did not design a new manifesto for the 2006 election. I have therefore included the one from 2005 in this analysis since a new manifesto was not made for the election campaign. I have chosen to focus on the last three elections. This time period makes it possible to analyze whether their policies on gender have changed. If the leadership is highly individualistic, the party's perception of gender is often influenced by the views of that leader (Dingler, Lefkofridi and Marent, 2017). Since Jean-Marie Le Pen was party leader in the 2007 election, but not in the two following ones, we can see if a change has happened during the leadership of Marine Le Pen. Same goes for the Sweden Democrats and Jimmie Åkesson. The oldest manifesto from SD (in this study) is originally from 2003, but it was updated at the congress in May of 2005. Jimmie Åkesson was elected as party leader at the same congress (SD, 2011) It is therefore possible to see if changes in the party's gender policies were made after Åkesson was elected.

I have also gathered supplementary material from the same time period as the manifestoes by the Sweden Democrats. This is to get a consistent image of the view on abortions during a specific time period, as the issue is not explicitly mentioned in the manifestoes. It would not be of value to include material from other years, if the discourse on the abortion issue is radically different from the years that have been selected. The analysis would in such case not be consistent. I specifically examined motions written by members of the parliament. A downside is that since the party
entered the parliament in 2010, I can only look at their policies after that. Therefore, it has not been possible to get knowledge about their policies prior to that. However, since there are a couple of years between the selected motions, I can still see if the party has shifted in its views during that time.

The National Front brought up parental leave in 2017. In the other manifestoes, the party focuses on something called parental income. It was not possible to tell from the manifestoes if this is their version of parental leave or if it is a complement. However, instead of turning to supplementary material, I chose to focus on this policy area since it is very similar to parental leave.

3.2 Case selection

This is a comparative case study of two European populist radical right parties and their relationship to gender issues. The two cases selected for this study are the French National Front and the Sweden Democrats. There are several reasons why I have chosen to focus on these two parties. There are both similarities and differences between these parties. They are both known as PRR parties and their single most important issue is immigration (Mudde, 2007). It is therefore interesting to examine if they share the same view on other issues, such as gender issues. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2015) argue that how PRR parties position themselves on gender issues is dependent on the culture in which they operate. Even though there are similarities between France and Sweden, there are also differences between the countries when it comes to gender. Sweden is sometimes labelled as the most gender equal country in the world and the country always ranks high when gender equality is measured (Bergqvist, 2008). France is also a gender equal country in many ways, but the French state has not taken as active measures as the Swedish state to promote gender equality. The male-breadwinner model is still relatively strong in France (Jacquot, Ledoux and Palier 2012). It is thus worth examining these two parties to see if how they position themselves on gender issues is affected by the culture in their respective countries.

Like other PRR parties, the electorate of the National Front and the Sweden Democrats consists of mostly males. Both parties are making attempts to reach out to women and make them vote for the parties (Helmerson, 2014; Smith, 2017). That is another reason to look at their gender policies, to see if they have changed in order to attract more
women to the parties. Both parties have an explicit strategy to distance themselves from their pasts and become more moderate (Erlingsson, Vernby and Öhrvall, 2013; Robins-Early, 2018). If this includes changing their gender policies has not gotten much attention in the literature. My study can therefore contribute to our understanding of whether the parties have changed their gender policies as part of their strategy to broaden their appeal.

3.3 Method

The selected method for this thesis is a qualitative content analysis of party manifestoes. This is an appropriate method for the study since it is about understanding the content of a text. The purpose of the qualitative content analysis is to bring out the essence of a text through intensive reading and understanding the different parts of the text as well as the context of it (Esaiasson et al. 2012). I follow Mayring’s (2014) definition of content analysis, which is a method of data analysis, that concerns language material which already exists. It is a family of systematic rule-guided techniques used to analyze informational contents of textual data.

Rooduijn and Pauwels argue that content analysis of party manifestoes have two particular advantages: “The first, substantive, reason is that an election party manifesto can be seen as the document that gives the clearest overview of what a party stands for at a certain point in time. The second, more practical, reason is that election manifestoes are appropriate for a cross-national study, because they are reasonably comparable across countries and over time” (2011:1274). Blaxter, Hughes and Tight note that studying documents, for example party programmes, is particularly useful for comparative studies. A lot of the significance and interest in documents is revealed when they are considered in relation to each other. We can enhance our understanding of ideas, issues and policies through comparative analysis (2001). When studying populism, content analysis is a frequently used technique used by scholars (see Jager and Walgrave, 2007; Rooduijn and Pauwels; 2011, Stockemer, 2017). By using the method of content analysis, it is possible to understand how the two parties position themselves on gender issues, and if that has changed over time.

There are several reasons why I chose not to do a quantitative study. A qualitative analysis means that the researcher assesses evidence in the form of words to determine
where the weight of it lies, while the quantitative analysis is usually based on statistics (Baglione, 2012). A quantitative study is based on so many equivalent and comparable units that they can be expressed and analyzed in numbers. That method is normally used to answer questions of how frequent different categories can be found (Esaiasson et al, 2012). If I had many cases, maybe it would have been better to use a quantitative method. Although, then it would not have been possible to analyze the manifestoes in the way that I wanted to. The aim of this study is not to investigate how often the parties mention gender, it is about getting an understanding of their gender policies. I therefore argue that a qualitative content analysis is the most suitable method for this thesis since it provides the best opportunity to thoroughly analyze the gender policies of the selected parties.

The manifestoes in this study are in French and Swedish. All translations to English are my own.

A study always strives for high validity. If the study does not contain any systematic measurement errors, it usually means that the study has good validity. Having good validity means that the researcher is measuring/investigating the things that he/she is said to measure and that there is conformity between the theoretical definition and the operational indicators (Teorell and Svensson, 2007). To get good validity, a researcher can look at what other scholars have done and draw on and “copy” their operationalization (Esaiasson et al. 2012). Since I have examined what other scholars have labeled as gender issues and thereafter constructed a codebook that will be used in the analysis, there is conformity between the theoretical definition and the operational indicators. The research question is in line with the research aim and I therefore argue that this study has good validity.

External validity is about whether it is possible to make generalizations from the investigated units to a greater population or to other contexts (Esaiasson et al. 2012). Since this is a qualitative study of only two units (two parties), it is hard to make generalizations about all populist radical right parties. This is also because there are differences between the contexts in which the parties operate. How the Sweden Democrats’ gender policies look like can be different from the gender policies of, for example, Jobbik. However, the purpose of this study is to increase our understanding of
the relationship between gender and PRR parties. This study can tell if and how there are differences between parties in their gender policies.

3.4 Operationalization

In this thesis, I investigate the relationship between populist radical right parties and gender. This is done by analyzing the sections of gender issues in the party manifestoes. Scholars have stated that gender can be a confusing concept (Mackay, 2010). What counts as gender issues? In order to answer that question, I have looked at what other scholars have done when it comes to investigating gender issues and followed their examples. The selected policy areas are abortion, parental leave and the role of the family (see Akkerman and Hagelund, 2007; Budde and Heichel, 2017; Dingler, Lefkofridi and Marent, 2017; Kamerman and Moss, 2011). Scholars have noticed that some PRR parties link gender issues to immigration (Akkerman and Haglund, 2007; de Lange and Mügge, 2015). I have therefore also investigated if and how the two selected parties link gender issues to immigration. This might not count as a gender issue of its own like parental leave or abortion, but it is still a relevant area to look at in this study, especially since immigration is the most successful and exploited issue for PRR parties (Mudde, 2007, Stockemer and Barisone, 2015). I have only focused on the sections in the manifestoes in which these issues are central, for example by looking at headings. Other areas such as employment, education, health etc. have not been analyzed.

After the policy areas were selected, an operationalization was constructed. Here, I demonstrate how I am going to do the analysis. I follow the research that Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011) have done when they have investigated populist parties and election manifestoes. The scholars have constructed a “codebook” which consists of questions that are being asked to the text. This is the operationalization. The “codebook” allows for the researcher to find what he is searching for. In order to understand the National Front’s and the Sweden Democrats’ relationship to gender issues, questions have been “asked” to the text. The questions that were asked to the text in order to collect the textual data and analyze it are found in the appendix.
4. Results from the manifestoes

In this part, the results are presented. The results are based on a qualitative content analysis of party manifestoes from the National Front and the Sweden Democrats. Each issue is presented separately.

4.1 The role of the family

4.1.1 The Sweden Democrats

In the manifesto from 2005, the Sweden Democrats writes about how important families are for the society: “since the beginning of mankind, in basically every society, the family has been the unit on which society rests upon. [...] The family is the inner core of society and the basis for the human reproduction, which above all is the foundation for the survival of every nation” (SD, 2005). The party sees the family as the cornerstone which society rests upon. They view the family as a necessary function for society. In this manifesto, the Sweden Democrats also writes about the differences between men and women: “The relationship between a man and a woman, and their children, is the necessary foundation for harmonic societies [...]. Men and women are not created the same and can therefore have different starting points and do things differently. Men and women complete each other and that is why it is important that all children are entitled to a mother and a father (SD, 2005). This is how the SD described families in the 2005 manifesto. However, the party did not write anything about of what kind of policies they advocate for the family. The section was more of a description of how they view families and why they are important units of society.

The manifesto from 2010 is slightly different when it comes to how the family is being described. Under the headline “Strong and independent families”, the party writes: “In our Sweden, there are no unwanted children. There is a loving family for all. In our Sweden, parents and children are offered genuine safety and liberty to shape their own lives” (SD, 2010:6). In this manifesto, the family is not described in the same way as it was in the 2005 manifesto. It is possible that they still view families as very important units which society rests upon, but it is not mentioned. This short description of families is followed by concrete political proposals, for example free family counselling in all municipalities and more night-open pre-schools.
When it comes to gender differences, in the 2005 manifesto, the Sweden Democrats emphasized differences between men and women. This is not done in 2010. Instead, the party writes: “In our Sweden, it is obvious that men and women have the same value and the same rights [ ]. In our Sweden, men and women should feel safe, respected and be treated fairly” (SD, 2010:7). This is written under “Gender equality and increased safety for the women of this country” and is followed by several proposals. In the 2005 manifesto, the party did not have a separate heading for gender equality, in fact, it was not mentioned at all.

The manifesto from 2014 is very similar to the one from 2010 when it comes to how the family is described. Under the headline of “Politics for strong, independent families and safe children”, the Sweden Democrats states: “The Sweden Democrats is working for a Sweden where there is a loving family for every child. A Sweden where parents and children are offered the economic and social security that is required for living a good and dignified life. A Sweden where families get support from society during hard times, but also get the freedom to shape their own lives” (SD, 2014:14). The party do not stress the importance of the family in the same way as they did in the 2005 manifesto. Gender equality is also described in this manifesto: “The Sweden Democrats works for a Sweden where it is obvious that men and women have the same rights. A Sweden where no one is discriminated based on their gender, ethnic background, sexual orientation or disability [ ] A Sweden where both women and men feel free, safe and respected”. (SD, 2014:17).

4.1.2 The National Front

The National Front stresses the importance of families in its manifesto from 2007. The party declares: “The family is the unit that is the base of our society. It is the privileged place where children are educated and are transmitted values. However, since centuries back, France has not had policies for the family [ ]. The institution of the family is in crisis and families suffer from serious social and financial regressions [ ]. The traditional family, which transmits moral and social values that structure our people, is about to disappear” (FN, 2007:15). The party describes the family as the base for society and expresses concerns about the French family policies and claims that the traditional family is about to disappear. The party also seems to be worried about demographic issues and wants to increase French birth-rates. Over all, the family is seen as important. Unlike the Sweden Democrats’ 2005 manifesto, the National Front does not mention the
differences between men and women. They write that the family should exclusively be the union of a man and a woman and that children should have a mother and a father.

The manifesto from 2012 does not contain the same descriptions of the family as a vital unit of society. In one sentence, the party states that the family is an irreplaceable institution and that marriage is between a man and a woman (FN, 2012:11). There is no talk of natural differences between men and women. In the 2017 manifesto, there is no section or separate heading reserved for the family. The party writes that they want “real natalist policies” reserved for French families. They also talk about women’s rights for the first time (compared with the other two manifestoes). The FN writes that the party wants to defend the rights of women, for example by making a national plan for equal pay for women and men (FN, 2017:4). Apart from this relatively small section, there is nothing else that specifically relates to gender equality.

4.2. Abortions

4.2.1 The Sweden Democrats

The matter of abortion was not mentioned in any of the investigated party manifestoes of the Sweden Democrats. I have therefore used supplementary material to get an understanding of the party’s position on abortion issues. It seems as if the Sweden Democrats share the same view as most other PRR parties, meaning that they have quite conservative attitudes towards it (Akkerman, 2015). In a motion submitted to the parliament in 2011, five members from the Sweden Democrats argue that the Swedish abortion law should be changed. The members write: “Between 35 000 and 40 000 abortions are performed in Sweden each year and we cannot see any tendencies that this number will decrease. An abortion needs to be seen as a last resort and it is disturbing that abortions more and more are being viewed as an alternative to birth control”. The party thinks that the Swedish abortion law is too liberal and wants for it to resemble the abortion laws in other European countries: “Sweden is the only country in Europe that allows free abortions up until week 18. Most other European countries allow free abortions until week 12, after that a special permit is required. We feel that week 12 is a reasonable
limit for free abortions and that Sweden should also adjust to that” (2011/12:So644). Party members have suggested this in several motions since SD entered the parliament.

Members of the Sweden Democrats have also submitted a motion on more preventive work in order to make “the high number of abortions go down”. The party wants a national plan on how to reduce the number of abortions (2013/14:So565).

4.2.2 The National Front

In its 2007 manifesto, the National Front states that they want policies that “respects and welcomes life”. The party considers that the French abortion law is not working: “It does not respond to its original goals: to protect life and respond to the anxiety that make women turn to abortions. Today 220 000 abortions are officially being done in France every year. It is therefore a priority to implement true familial politics that welcomes life” (2007:16) The party presents several measures that they claim will “reduce the number of abortions and revive the French natality”. The party also states: “parallel with these new measures of valorization and protection for the family, we want to engage the French people, through referendum at the end of this term, to promote a modern and caring nation with respect for human dignity by inscription in its texts, that life is sacred and that a person’s rights are protected by law from its conception until its death” (FN, 2007:16). It is clear that the National Front views the number of abortions as a problem and wants to promote natality. Even though they party does not explicitly write that they are against abortions, they do suggest that the French people should vote for an inscription in the law that a person’s rights are protected after the conception.

How the party talks about abortions is different in the 2012 manifesto. The matter of abortion got much attention in 2007 and it was described as a problem. In 2012, the tone is quite different. The party writes: “The free choice of women must also be the choice not to do an abortion: better prevention and information is essential. The responsibility of parents is necessary, the possibility to do prenatal adoption is proposed and the improvement of family benefits for large families must be established” (FN, 2012:11).
Here, the party speaks of women’s free choice and that it is important with information. Abortions are not described as a problem in this manifesto, even if they write that the free choice also includes not to abort.

In the National Front manifesto from 2017, abortions were not mentioned at all.

4.3 Parental leave

4.3.1 The Sweden Democrats

The Sweden Democrats did not write anything about how they feel about parental leave in 2005. The section that is about families does not contain any policy suggestions.

In the manifesto from 2010, the role of the family is less salient and replaced by concrete policy proposals. Strong and independent families are important for the Sweden Democrats. The party wants: “A free parental leave without forced adjustments and an increase of the paid parental leave that corresponds to 90% of the income” (SD, 2010:6). The party also wants to double vårdnadsbidraget, a benefit that parents got for staying home with their children during a longer time period.

Same view is manifested in the 2014 manifesto and the party declares: “The Sweden Democrats wants to increase the paid parental leave and get rid of the forced adjustments regarding which one of the parents should stay home with the child. It is our conviction that the country’s parents are better suited than the politicians to decide what is best for their children” (SD, 2014:14). The party wants to increase vårdnadsbidraget to a level that is in “reasonable proportion to the municipalities’ cost for a place at a daycare center” (SD, 2014:14). It seems as if the party wants parents to stay home longer with their children rather than placing them in childcare. This could be an expression of how they want parents (mothers) to stay at home and raise children rather than going to work, even if it is not explicitly stated.

4.3.2 The National Front

As previously shown in the section of the role and the family, natality is important for the National Front. As part of their will to “revive French natality”, the party suggested in 2007: “the creation of a parental income [] that is destined to offer mothers or fathers the possibility to freely choose between professional activities or educating their children” (FN, 2007:15). The idea is that parents can stay home with their child until the age of three,
and if they have more children, the time period can be prolonged with up to ten years. It is not clarified in the manifesto if this is the National Front’s version of parental leave or if this should be seen as a complement to parental leave.

A similar proposal is found in the 2012 manifesto, that will make it possible for parents to choose between working or staying home to “educate” their children. A difference between the two proposals is that in the 2012 manifesto, the time period can be prolonged with four years. There are no policy proposals about parental income in the 2017 manifesto. However, in 2017 the National Front writes that the party will establish: “Real natalist policies reserved for French families by re-establishing the universal family allowances” and “bring back the free division of the parental leave between the two parents” (FN, 2017:9).

4.4 Gender and immigration

4.4.1 The Sweden Democrats

There is no connection between immigration and gender in the manifesto from 2005. The Sweden Democrats claims that the values of different cultures may be at conflict with each other, but it is not linked to gender issues. Neither does it say nothing of which cultures that the party refers to.

However, this has changed in the 2010 party manifesto. Now the party has started to bring up gender issues and they link that to immigration. The Sweden Democrats suggests: “An increased support to women who live under religious and honor related oppression. A stop to the Islamization of the Swedish society. A ban for wearing full covering veils in public places” (SD, 2010:5). These measures are presented under the heading of “A responsible immigration policy”.

The link between gender and immigration is also found in 2014. The party wants: “stricter punishments and increased actions against genital mutilation, forced marriages and sexual and honor related violence. An increased support to the country’s women’s shelters and the implementation of shelters for people who are victims of honor related violence” (SD, 2014:17). Here, the Sweden Democrats links gender issues to immigration and customs associated with other cultures than the Swedish culture. The party also wants to: “withdraw all tax financed support to political and religious organizations that advocate or legitimize violence or negative treatment of individuals based on their gender”
These policy proposals are found under the heading “Gender equality policies for the real people”. In the manifesto from 2010, the connection between gender and immigration were found in the section on immigration but here it is found in the gender equality section. This suggests that the party sees these questions not only as part of immigration, but also as gender issues.

4.4.2 The National Front

No connection between gender and immigration is found in the manifestoes from 2007 and 2012. It is not until 2017 that the part links gender to immigration. They write that they will: “Defend women’s rights by fighting against the Islamization that is moving back women’s fundamental liberties” (National Front, 2017:4). Apart from this section, there is no link between immigration and gender issues.
5. Analysis and discussion

In this part of the thesis, the results are being analyzed and discussed. This is done through comparisons between the two parties and by comparisons between the different years within each party. Each issue will be analyzed and discussed separately.

5.1 The role of the family

The findings from all three manifestoes suggest that there has been a shift in how the Sweden Democrats talk about families. In the 2005 manifesto, the function of families was described very thoroughly and they emphasized that women and men are different. In the latest two manifestoes, the party does not emphasize the importance of families. Instead, they focus on how families should get the support they need from society, but also have the freedom to make their own choices. They did not write about the differences between the sexes. Rather, the party highlighted that women and men have the same value and should be treated equally. The results suggest that the role of the family has become less salient in the manifestoes and that gender equality has been getting increased attention from the Sweden Democrats.

When it comes to the role of the family, the pattern of the National Front is similar to the Sweden Democrats. In the oldest manifesto, the descriptions of the family took up much space in the manifesto. The party stressed the importance of the family as the base for society and expressed concerns about the “disappearance” of the traditional family. In the 2012 one, the family was still described as an irreplaceable institution, but apart from that, the role of the family was not given a great deal of attention. As for the manifesto from 2017, the role of the family did not even get its own section or heading. Instead, the party spoke of women’s rights for the first time (compared with the other two manifestoes), even if it was only a few sentences. These results indicate that the role of the family has been toned down in the latest manifestoes.

An interesting finding between the parties is that the Sweden Democrats emphasize the importance of gender equality to a much higher degree than the National Front. In the manifestoes from 2010 and 2014, the party states how important it is that women and men have the same value and rights. Why the parties differ on this matter could be related to the culture in their countries. Sweden ranks high when gender equality is
measured around the world (Bergqvist, 2008). It seems to be an important issue for citizens and political parties. Women are also more hesitant to vote for PRR parties because of the parties’ traditional views on family, women etc. (Kitschfelt, 2007). Talking about gender equality makes the party come off as “women-friendly”.

Voters are more likely to support populist radical right parties if the parties are seen as “legitimate”, which means that they are democratic and not opposed to national values (Haikiopoulou, Mock and Vasilopoulou, 2013). This could also be a reason why the Sweden Democrats seems to have embraced values of gender equality. The party wants to reach out to female voters (Helmerson, 2014). It would probably not be a successful strategy to come across as not supportive of gender equality in a country like Sweden where values of gender equality are widespread. However, FN also wants to attract more women to the party (Smith, 2017). It is therefore quite surprising that we have not seen the same development within the National Front, at least not in these manifestoes.

Research has demonstrated that PRR parties usually tend to stress the importance of the traditional family (Akkerman, 2015). We can see that this view has been expressed by the National Front and the Sweden Democrats in the manifestoes, especially in the earliest ones. A difference was that FN presented policy proposals in the earliest manifesto. SD had no concrete proposals for family policies in 2005. However, that changed in 2010. Since the party has grown in that time, they perhaps felt the need to show more clearly what policies they advocate so voters know what they stand for.

In recent manifestoes, the role of the family has become less salient. There could be several possible explanations for that. One is that when PRR parties seek electoral influence, they can change how they position themselves on certain issues (Akkerman and Hagelund, 2007). Since both parties are keen to gain political influence, it is likely that they do not want to come across as too traditional or conservative when it comes to the role of the family in order to attract supporters.

5.2 Abortion

The two parties differ when it comes to the attention they pay to the abortion issue. While the National Front brought up the matter in two of its manifestoes, the Sweden Democrats wrote nothing about it in any of the manifestoes. A possible reason for this
could be related to the culture in France and Sweden. Although PRR parties generally take on negative attitudes towards abortions (Akkerman, 2015), how they position themselves can be affected by the culture in which they operate (Din
ger, Lefkofridi and Marent, 2017). The matter of abortion might be more controversial in France than in Sweden, since the majority of the French people are Catholic, and the issue of abortion has been very debated within the Catholic church as many Catholics have conservative attitudes towards abortions (Miller, 2014). The question might be less controversial in Sweden.

However, in the supplementary material, we can see that the Sweden Democrats wants to limit the Swedish abortion law, by allowing free abortions up to week 12. Both parties described the number of abortions in their countries of being too high and that they want to implement different measures in order to reduce the number. In this matter, the parties have similar views.

An interesting finding in this thesis is that the National Front has changed the way that they talk about the abortion issue. In 2007, the party wanted to engage the French people in a referendum to vote that there should be an inscription in the law that a person’s rights are protected from the conception until its death. Abortions got a great deal of attention in the manifesto. That was not seen in 2012. Here, the party spoke of women’s free choice. They do not express that they want to “ban” abortions anymore. It is possible that they still want to reduce the number of abortions, but it is not something that they focus on in this manifesto. In 2017, abortions were not mentioned at all.

There could be several reasons for this development. If the leadership of the party is very individualistic it is likely that what types of gender models and discursive frame that are being promoted is highly dependent on the leader (Dingler, Lefkofridi and Marent, 2017). Since there is a shift between 2007 and 2012, it is possible that that has to do with the change of party leader to Marine Le Pen. After she took over, she has declared a strategy of “de-demonization”, which includes cleaning up the party's image and distance itself from its past. This also includes reaching out to “new” groups, such as women (Smith, 2017). If the party wants to attract more women, it is probable that they position themselves on gender issues in a way that is different from before. The fact that abortions were not mentioned at all in 2017 suggests that the issue is less important for
the party or that it is not something that they wanted to focus on in the election campaign.

5.3 Parental leave

Both parties express similar opinions when it comes to parental leave and similar policies. An argument that is mentioned is that parents should be allowed to spend time with their children if they want to. The Sweden Democrats write about parental leave in two of the manifestoes, while the National Front brings it up in the latest manifesto. Instead they focus on other similar policies such as parental income or family allowance.

When the manifestoes (2010 and 2014) were written, the parental leave in Sweden had a quota which meant that two months were reserved for each parent. The rest of the time could be divide freely between the parents. The Sweden Democrats do not want quotas, parents should be allowed to decide for themselves how they want to take out the parental leave. Research has demonstrated that women take out the most of the parental leave. This means that women’s career opportunities are hindered since they are the ones taking the greatest share of the leave (OECD, 2017), which is the reason why the reserved months were introduced in the first place.

If gender equality has already been achieved, then any further efforts to promote equality is seen as “social engineering”, if it means forcing men and women to be the same. That is a form of discrimination according to the PRR parties (Moffitt, 2017). This could be why the party do not want quotas in the parental leave.

As for the National Front, they do not specifically write about parental leave in the 2007 and 2012 manifestoes. Instead, the party writes that they want “parental income”, which is described as parent’s free choice to choose between professional activities or staying at home, raising children. As a new parental leave was implemented in 2014, where three months are reserved for fathers instead of less than two weeks (Gregory and Milner, 2015), the party argues that the parental leave should go back to being optional, in terms of the division. This could be related to PRR parties’ opposition to states “enforcing” gender equality (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015).

It has also been demonstrated in these manifestoes that both parties stress the importance of families. Both FN and SD have declared that families are the base of society. This could also be an explanation to why both parties want generous policies
when it comes to families. Especially FN wants policies that will revive natality. This accords with the work of Jacquot, Ledoux and Palier (2012), who have shown that natality is important for French political actors.

5.4 Gender and immigration

In the earliest manifestoes, there is no connection between gender issues and immigration. Of the two selected parties, the Sweden Democrats was the first party to make this connection in 2010. Some of the measures that the party wanted to take was to increase the support to women who live under religious and honor related oppression and to ban the wearing of covering veils in public places, as well as putting a stop to the “Islamization” of Sweden. This goes in line with what previous research has demonstrated, that several PRR parties want to prohibit the wearing of headscarves and veils in public (Rosenberger and Sauer, 2012) and that these parties are critical to the “Islamization” of European societies (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2015). The National Front shows the same tendencies when it comes to Islam, arguing that it will move back women’s rights and that the party will stop the “Islamization” of France. However, the party does not make any further connections between Islam/immigration and gender. The party does not, for example, talk about a ban for wearing headscarves, but since it is already prohibited to wear full covering burqas in public places in France (Sanghani, 2016), it is possible that the party did not feel the need to mention it.

Other proposals from SD from 2014 includes stricter punishments for forced marriages and honor related violence and the implementation of special shelters for people who live under honor related oppression. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2015) have noted that gender issues are almost always tied to the overarching issue of anti-immigration for PRR parties. Some of these parties portray themselves as defenders of gender equality and claim that Islam is incompatible with Western values (Spierings et al, 2015). Even though the Sweden Democrats make the connection, gender equality was not only tied to immigration. The same goes for the National Front, which for example connected gender equality to equal pay between sexes. However, it is clear that especially the Sweden Democrats wants to come across as “women’s defenders” when it comes to immigration. Customs that are not “Swedish” are singled out as a threat to gender equality. In line with previous research (Dingler, Lefkofridi and Marent, 2017), the party links gender to immigration and culture.
Haikipoulou, Mock and Vasilopoulou note that PRR parties have “adopted” values such as tolerance and liberalism and they see these values as part of the national culture and that they are threatened by the influence of “outsiders” who are not willing to accept them (2013). This study shows that this is applicable for especially the Sweden Democrats. The party is keen to declare that in Sweden, men and women have the same value and rights and that both sexes should be treated with respect and feel free and safe. The party wants to take active measures in stopping honor related violence and enforced marriages: practices that they see as incompatible with Swedish values such as gender equality.

A difference between the parties was that for the National Front, linking gender issues to immigration, was not common. Only in 2017, one connection was made. The Sweden Democrats made the connection to a much higher degree in 2010 and 2014. Akkerman (2015) has shown that linking gender issues to immigration is most notably seen in Northern Europe, for example in Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands. This could also be a reason to why the Sweden Democrats has done this to a higher degree than the National Front.
6. Conclusion

Populist radical right parties have become a prominent feature of the contemporary political landscape in Europe. When conducting research on radical right populism, scholars have hitherto mainly focused on defining what it is, why these parties have grown and what their electorate looks like. The relationship between radical right populism and gender has received surprisingly little scholarly attention.

The aim of this thesis has been to add to our understanding of the relation between gender and PRR parties. This has been done by examining party manifestoes from two different PRR parties, the National Front and the Sweden Democrats. I have made comparisons between the parties and also within each party by comparing different years to each other. The findings demonstrate that there are both similarities and differences between the parties. Both parties have similar views when it comes to the family, which is described as an important unit of society. This is especially manifested in the earliest manifestoes. The role of the family has been toned down in the newer manifestoes. The parties also want similar policies when it comes to parental leave. A shortage in this thesis is that the National Front only talked about parental leave in 2017. In the earlier manifestoes, they focused on a similar policy called parental income. Instead of turning to supplementary material, I decided to focus on this policy area. Therefore, I cannot make assumptions about what parental leave policies they preferred prior to 2017. However, since the parental income is similar to the parental leave, I argue that it was still a relevant issue to include in this study.

Differences between the parties were especially found when it came to abortions and the connection between gender and immigration. The National Front were strong opponents to abortions. That view has been toned down in the latest manifestoes. The Sweden Democrats never mentioned abortions in any of the manifestoes, which indicates that it is an issue of less weight for the party. However, in the supplementary material, it was found that the party wants a stricter abortion law, which is in line with earlier findings on how PRR parties view abortions. Another area where the parties differed was the one on gender and immigration. The Sweden Democrats linked gender and immigration early on and stressed the importance of gender equality, while the National Front only made one connection to the issue in 2017.
This study adds to our perception of the relationship between populist radical right parties and gender. In line with previous research (Mudde, 2007; Akkerman, 2015), it is demonstrated that both parties tend to have traditional views regarding the family and abortions. Scholars have noted that some PRR parties take on more “liberal” views (Akkerman and Hagelund, 2007; Haikiopoulou, Mock and Vasilopoulou, 2013). This has also been seen in this study, particularly among the Sweden Democrats, who brought up gender equality and men’s and women’s equal value. This was not found in the National Front’s manifestoes. This demonstrates that not all PRR parties share the same view when it comes to gender policies. The context in which they operate affects their policies (Dingler, Lefokofridi and Marent, 2017), which is also seen in this thesis. However, when comparing the manifestoes from the different years, it is clear that both parties have changed their rhetoric and want to come across as more moderate. The rhetoric of both parties has shifted from the earliest to the latest manifestoes.

The findings of this study indicate that populist radical right parties do not have consistent and coherent positions when it comes to gender issues. To add to our understanding of this, it would be interesting to compare between other countries and over time. Many studies focus on Western European PRR parties. Thus, it would be interesting to see how the relationship between PRR parties and gender look like in, for example, Eastern Europe. Since several of the PRR parties have become more moderate when it comes to gender issues, it would also be worth to examine if this goes for other policy areas as well. Since there is a gender-gap in the PRR electorate, it would as well be interesting to see if the parties’ change in policy and discourse can attract more female voters and how they perceive these parties’ gender policies.
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Appendix

The role of the family

How is “the family” described?

Do they stress the importance of families?

Do they talk about differences between men and women?

Abortions

How do they view abortions?

What policies do they prefer when it comes to abortions?

Parental leave

How is parental leave described?

What policies do they prefer when it comes to parental leave?

Gender and immigration

Are gender issues linked to immigration? If so, in what way?