Friend or Foe?

A study analyzing ideas held by the Sweden Democrats concerning LGBTQ+ topics

Ellen Breuer

Bachelor Thesis, Political Science, 15 Credits, Autumn 2023
Department of Government, Uppsala University
Supervisor: Anthoula Malkopoulou
Word Count: 12 406
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1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, populist radical right (PRR) parties have risen all over Europe, and in the 2010s they started to gain the political support we see today (Norocel & Giorgi, 2022, p. 417). Currently, PRR parties have been elected to national parliaments in an array of countries, such as Austria, Croatia, Germany, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, and Sweden (Rooduijn et al., 2023). PRR parties are known for forming anti-immigration policies, advocating law and order, having nationalist values, and using rhetoric in which the political elite is put against “the people” (Akkerman, 2015, p. 37; Mudde, 2007, p. 22-23). In addition to these characteristics, researchers have observed a tendency among PRR parties to take anti-gender stances (Graff & Korolczuk, 2021, p. 6; Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 8-10). This includes opposition against the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and otherwise non-normative gender or sexual identities (LGBTQ+).

While there is a tendency among PRR parties to promote anti-LGBTQ+ claims, PRR parties do not necessarily have to oppose LGBTQ+ rights (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 13). Instead, researchers suggest that PRR parties adapt their stances to the cultural context in which they operate (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2015, p. 17). Thus, to understand how PRR parties relate to LGBTQ+ topics, different cultural contexts have been studied. One cultural context, that has been profoundly studied, concerns countries where religious or conservative actors and influences are prominent. This includes cases such as Austria, Hungary, Italy, and Poland (e.g. Graff & Korolczuk, 2021; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017). Another context, which has been studied to a lesser extent, is countries where progressive values, such as promoting LGBTQ+ rights, are dominant. This includes cases such as Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden (e.g. Duina and Carson, 2020; Moffitt, 2017).

Concerning the progressive context, Sweden presents an interesting case. In Sweden, the Sweden Democrats (SD) have been represented in the national parliament since 2010 (Towns, Karlsson & Eyre, 2014). By researchers, the SD are often categorized as a PRR party (e.g. Mudde, 2007, p. 307; Moffitt, 2017, p. 113). In the 2022 elections, the SD became the second-largest party in the national parliament (The Swedish Election Authority, 2022). This was also the first time that the SD became an official collaborative partner with the Swedish government (The Moderate Party, 2022). Moreover, Sweden is often perceived as a progressive country where LGBTQ+ rights are included as national characteristics in the constructed image of the Swedish nation (Lagerman, 2023, p. 5).

Previous research on the SD presents conflicting results concerning how the SD relate to LGBTQ+ topics. On the one hand, research suggests that instead of attacking LGBTQ+ rights, the SD advocate LGBTQ+ rights as part of their anti-immigration claims (e.g. Duina & Carson, 2020; Moffitt, 2017). On the other hand, research suggests that the SD do oppose LGBTQ+ rights, but not through taking an outright anti-LGBTQ+ position, instead, the SD promote heteronormativity (e.g. Liinason, 2023).
Moreover, by the general public, the SD are often perceived to be homophobic (see Romson, 2022). Recent events that have contributed to this general perception are for example the SD imposing a ban on hoisting the Pride flag at Sölvesborg City Hall (Hagman, 2019), and a post published on X (formerly known as Twitter) by the SD politician Björn Söder, in which he connected the Pride event to pedophilia (Söder, 2023a).

The case of Sweden offers the possibility to study how PRR parties relate to LGBTQ+ topics when operating in a context characterized by progressive values. Moreover, since previous research on the SD present conflicting results, and the SD since the 2022 election has had a greater possibility than ever before to influence governmental politics, it is important to understand the SDs’ views concerning LGBTQ+ topics.

Politicians express political messages through an array of mediums, such as political debates in the parliament or traditional media (e.g. newspapers and TV), party programs, policy proposals, and new media (e.g. internet and social media) (Bergström & Svärd, 2018, p. 138). However, many populist actors utilize the possibility of social media to speak “directly” to their audience (Moffitt, 2016, p. 88). Given this, it is particularly interesting to study the political messages the SD express on social media concerning LGBTQ+ topics.

1.1 Aim and Research Question

Given the tendency of PRR parties to form anti-LGBTQ+ claims, this thesis aims to explore how a PRR party operating in a context characterized by progressive values, relates to LGBTQ+ topics in their political messages on social media. Thus, the research question is as follows: What ideas concerning LGBTQ+ topics do the Sweden Democrats convey on the social media platform X?

To answer this research question, an idea analysis is conducted. More specifically, the subjects of analysis are ideas expressed through posts published on the social media platform X by SD politicians who were members of the national parliament. The analysis covers posts published one year following the 2022 election.

1.2 Disposition

In the section following this introduction, previous research on both PRR parties’ and the SDs’ stances on LGBTQ+ topics are described. Then, the theoretical framework, which emerged from the previous research, is provided. This is followed by a description of the utilized methodology and a presentation of the research design. After this, the results of the study are analyzed and presented. This is followed by a discussion of the results. Lastly, the thesis is finished with a concluding section.
2. Previous Research

In this section, previous research on PRR parties' stances on LGBTQ+ topics is presented. This is followed by a short description of the view on LGBTQ+ in Sweden. Then, research on how the SD relate to LGBTQ+ topics is presented. Finally, this thesis' contribution to the existing field of research is discussed.

Since this thesis aims to analyze the SDs’ ideas concerning LGBTQ+ topics, some conceptual clarifications might be necessary. LGBTQ+ rights involve the rights of people who have non-normative sexual orientations, people who are transgender, queer, and have otherwise non-normative identities. For instance, people who are transgender do not identify with the gender identity and expression they were assigned at birth. Gender identity is a person’s perception of their gender, whereas gender expression is a way a person expresses their gender identity. Furthermore, queer is a term that describes people who do not conform to dominant social ideas concerning gender, sexual orientation, or relationships (RFSL, 2023).

2.1 PRR Parties Stances on LGBTQ+ Topics

There are three ideological core concepts characterizing PRR parties. These are nativism, authoritarianism, and populism (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2015, p. 20). The first concept, nativism, combines the ideas of nationalism and xenophobia. The state is viewed as being exclusive to a homogeneous group of people, and nonnative elements, that is both people and ideas, are seen as threats that should be excluded from the nation-state. The second concept, authoritarianism, involves a conviction that society is to be strictly ordered and that violations against authority should be punished (Mudde, 2007, p. 22-23). The final concept, populism, revolves around the idea of an antagonistic relationship between the two main societal groups, “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite”, as well as the importance of the “general will” of the people being realized through politics. Mudde describes populism as a “thin-centered ideology”, in the sense that the ideology is limited to the core concept of “the people”. Thus, populism is easily combined with other ideologies, such as nationalism (Mudde, 2004, p. 543-544).

Research demonstrates a compatibility between PRR parties and anti-gender activists (i.e. activists promoting anti-LGBTQ+ views) (e.g. Graff and Koroleczuk, 2021; Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018). For instance, the anti-gender discourse is similar to the populist discourse, in that anti-gender activists position the “innocent, gender-conservative people”, whom they allegedly represent, against the elite, who are perceived to spread pro-LGBTQ+ ideas (Graff & Koroleczuk, 2021, p. 7). This is also observed in the anti-gender activists and PRR parties’ rhetoric, in that they utilize the “politics of fear”. That is, they use selected social groups as scapegoats whilst playing on people’s emotions, to cause a feeling of fear of real, or imagined, threats. Further, PRR parties are either the essential actors participating in anti-gender campaigning (e.g. in Austria and Germany) or allies with prominent anti-gender actors (e.g. in
Hungary, Italy, and Poland). However, both groups use social media, criticize traditional media, and advocate referenda, as part of their action repertoire (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 12-13).

Even though the above-mentioned research provides a picture of PRR parties and anti-gender campaigning being closely connected, PRR parties do not necessarily oppose LGBTQ+ rights (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 13). Indeed, populism is not inherently anti-gender. Instead, the accompanying ideologies are suggested to influence the populist party's stances on gender politics (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2015, p. 17). In particular, the nationalist ideology is suggested to be compatible with anti-gender ideas, since the nativist belief system generally includes values related to traditional patriarchal ideas (Graff & Korolezuk, 2021, p. 87). However, while some PRR parties incorporate conservative ideas in their political agenda, these values are not a core feature of PRR parties as such (Mudde, 2007, p. 28).

Furthermore, the cultural context in which the party operates also is suggested to influence their position on gender politics (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2015, p. 17). When studying the role that gender plays for PRR parties in contexts characterized by progressive values, scholars such as Browne and Nash (2017; 2020) suggest using the concept of “heteroactivism”, instead of anti-gender campaigning. They describe heteroactivism as both an ideology and a set of practices, which consists of resistance against non-heteronormativity and that perceive heteronormativity as “best” for society (Browne & Nash, 2017, p. 645; Browne & Nash, 2020, p. 73). Browne and Nash argue that scholars have focused too much on “anti-gender” when studying PRR parties. Instead, they suggest that heteroactivism is a more fruitful concept to apply when analyzing resistance against LGBTQ+ rights in contexts where LGBTQ+ rights are perceived to have been achieved (Browne & Nash, 2020, p. 72). Browne and Nash have found that in such contexts, actors opposing LGBTQ+ rights do not necessarily utilize “anti-gay” rhetorics, instead, they seek to strengthen the role of heteronormativity in society (Browne & Nash, 2020, p. 77). Browne and Nash emphasize that while heteroactivism can be utilized by PRR actors, heteroactivism is not exclusive to or always utilized by PRR parties (Browne & Nash, 2017, p. 648).

2.2 The View on LGBTQ+ in Sweden

LGBTQ+ rights are a prominent part of the Swedish national identity. In the past, scholars have emphasized gender equality as a national cultural symbol (Martinsson, Griffin, Gititli Nygren 2016; Towns, Karlsson & Eyre, 2014). While citing several studies on the subject, Lagerman (2023) points out that LGBTQ+ rights are being recently included in this national identity as well (Lagerman, 2023, p. 5).

Internationally, Sweden is also considered a country that values LGBTQ+ rights. For example, every year, the international non-governmental organization European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans & Intersex Association (ILGA-Europe) tracks the development of LGBTQ+ equality and human rights in Europe. They present their findings via an index that consists of a gradual scale where zero percent equals “gross violations of human
rights and discrimination” and 100 percent means “respect for human rights and full equality” (ILGA-Europe, n.d.). In 2022, Sweden scored 68 percent on the index and was ranked 8th place when compared to other European countries (Rainbow Europe, n.d.a). The main reason for Sweden not being higher in the ranking revolved around somewhat weak transgender rights (Rainbow Europe, n.d.b).

2.3 The Sweden Democrats on LGBTQ+

The Sweden Democrats position themselves as a social conservative and nationalist party (The Sweden Democrats, 2019, p. 2). Nonetheless, researchers often categorize the SD as a PRR party (e.g. Mudde, 2007, p. 307; Moffitt, 2017, p. 113). Founded in 1988, the SD have roots in the Nazi movement. Since then, the party has gone through a transformation regarding both its political program as well as its party members. Hence, party members who openly show their Nazi sympathies have been removed (Towns, Karlsson & Eyre, 2014). Thus, like other PRR parties in Northern Europe, the SD have tried to move closer to the mainstream parties to become more “acceptable” in the political arena (Moffitt, 2017, p. 117). Regarding the SDs’ party platform, the SD particularly advocate claims about anti-immigration, a strong welfare state, EU skepticism, law and order, and the role of the family (Finnsdottir & Hallgrimsdottir, 2019, p. 6-8).

As aforementioned, PRR parties adapt their political ideas to the context in which they operate. In earlier research, two viewpoints are discerned regarding the SDs’ ideas concerning LGBTQ+ topics. The first viewpoint suggests that the SD combine advocating LGBTQ+ rights with anti-immigrant claims. That is, the SD utilize LGBTQ+ rights as a means for their anti-immigrant stances (e.g. Duina & Carson, 2020; Moffitt, 2017). The second viewpoint suggests that the SD take part in “heteroactivism”. That is, the SD do not take an outright anti-LGBTQ+ position, instead, they promote heteronormativity (e.g. Liinason, 2023).

Regarding the first viewpoint, most of the available research has been focusing on topics related to the SD advocating LGBTQ+ rights in combination with anti-immigrant claims. Combining LGBTQ+ rights with anti-immigrant claims is something Moffitt (2017) calls “liberal illiberalism”. Liberal illiberalism is described as parties using aspects of liberal ideology and discourses while adjusting them to fit their policy platforms. PRR parties apply liberal stances in their politics so that they can defend their otherwise illiberal position, such as their xenophobic, nativistic, and racist stances (Moffitt, 2017, p. 114-115). Moffitt mostly focuses on the SDs’ position concerning gender equality, but also mentions LGBTQ+ in his study. He emphasizes the SD utilizing liberal notions when presenting their anti-immigration policy agenda (Moffitt, 2017, p. 115). Moffitt suggests one reason for utilizing liberal illiberalism is the PRR parties’ need to conform to the national progressive and liberal context, hence they appear to comply with the national values. Furthermore, in this way, they are also able to frame their islamophobia in a more sophisticated way. This, Moffitt suggests, also helps with their electoral success, since this is a way to be perceived as a party closer to the mainstream and thus become accepted (Moffitt, 2017, p. 117).
Moffitt’s findings are in line with Duina and Carson’s (2020) research, which also finds that PRR parties utilize liberal ideas in their political messages. Following the literature on PRR parties combining progressive values and conservative positions in their programs, Duina and Carson study PRR parties’ rhetorical logic. They suggest that nationalism and ideas about European superiority are the foundation of PRR parties’ rhetorical logic. Regardless of gender and sexuality, as long as people are of the nation or Western civilization, they are included in the nation and deserving of protection from what they view as “the backward ideologies” of immigrant “others”. However, Duina and Carson point out that this rhetoric is not necessarily embraced by all party members or implemented in party policies and actions (Duina & Carson, 2020, p. 6-7). Their study suggests that PRR parties' rhetoric depends on the cultural, institutional, and political context of the specific country. Regarding the case of Sweden, Duina and Carson find that the SD, in their rhetoric, emphasize the need to protect the Swedish LGBTQ+ rights among others, which are under threat from Muslim immigration (Duina & Carson, 2020, p. 15).

Moreover, the phenomenon of describing other populations as threats against LGBTQ+ rights in Sweden can be connected to a phenomenon called “homonationalism” (Puar, 2017). Homonationalism is a discourse that combines nationalism and a nation’s perceived sexual progressiveness. The discourse is used as an instrument to portray a nation as “exceptionally sexually progressive” when compared to other nations. Thus, homonationalism is a way to divide the LGBTQ-friendly “us”, from the homophobic “them” (Lagerman, 2023, p. 1; 5). Studies on homonationalism draw contradictory conclusions regarding which actors pursue a homonationalist discourse in Sweden. On the one hand, Kehl (2018) suggests that PRR actors in Sweden use homonationalist narratives in their rhetoric against Muslim immigrants. On the other hand, Lagerman (2023) suggests that the SD during the past years have started to oppose homonationalist ideals. Instead, she suggests, the homonationalist discourse is mainly used by politicians, journalists, and non-governmental organizations. These actors pursue the discourse when they comment on attacks made by the SD and neo-Nazi organizations on LGBTQ+ people and symbols (Lagerman, 2023, p. 16).

Regarding the second viewpoint, that is, research on the SD concerning the concept of heteroactivism, less extensive research has been conducted. However, the research that has been conducted, argues in line with Browne and Nash (2020), namely, that the concept of heteroactivism is particularly fruitful when aiming to understand PRR actors’ stances on LGBTQ+ issues in a progressive context (e.g. Liinason, 2023). For instance, in her study of the SD, Liinason (2023) separates anti-gender movements and far-right movements, arguing that these movements respectively have narrow one-goal agendas. She argues that heteroactivism should be understood as a broader ideology, which combines the political programs of anti-gender and right-wing movements and is expressed through heteroactivist networks (Liinason, 2023, p. 1051). Liinason suggests that heteroactivist, while working from within the context of progressive values corresponding to national values, aim to change this national identity as well as who is seen to be a part of the nation. This is done by using exclusionary discourses
surrounding protection, care, and love, in that some people are seen as worthy of protection, while others (e.g. LGBTQ+ rights activists, Muslims) aren’t (Liinasson, 2023, p. 1063).

2.4 Contribution

Previous research on PRR parties’ views of LGBTQ+ issues suggests that there is a tendency among PRR parties to oppose LGBTQ+ rights. However, it is also clear that PRR parties adapt to the context in which they operate. Research on PRR parties operating in a context characterized by progressive values shows contradictory results. Some researchers argue that PRR parties adapt to the progressive context by embracing LGBTQ+ rights. Thus, PRR parties defend their xenophobic agenda, while appealing to a pro-LGBTQ+ public. Other researchers suggest that PRR parties do have an anti-LGBTQ+ agenda and adapt to the context by downplaying their anti-LGBTQ+ stances through heteroactivism. Following this, my thesis aims to extend the previous research and analyze what ideas a PRR party operating in a progressive context conveys concerning LGBTQ+ topics on social media. While PRR parties do not necessarily have to adopt an anti-LGBTQ+ agenda, the tendency among PRR parties to do so makes it interesting to further study which ideas the SD express about LGBTQ+ topics as the party operates in a progressive context.
3. Theoretical Framework, Methodology, and Research Design

In this section, first, the theoretical framework is presented. This is followed by a description of the methodology and the research design. Finally, the limitations are discussed.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework emerged from previous research on ideas concerning LGBTQ+ topics in relation to PRR parties operating in contexts characterized by progressive values. As aforementioned, there is no clear consensus in previous research regarding which approach the SD primarily take concerning LGBTQ+ topics. One side suggests that the SD promote LGBTQ+ rights when taking a stance against immigration, while the other side suggests that the SD take part in heteroactivism. To understand what ideas the SD convey on social media, both approaches will be applied in this thesis. Thus, the theoretical framework consists of two concepts: homonationalism and heteroactivism.

3.1.1 Homonationalism

Homonationalism refers to a discourse where LGBTQ+ rights are used to portray a population as progressive or modern while constructing a narrative of the racialized “others” as non-progressive. It involves portraying some nations and nationalities as “LGBTQ-friendly”, while others are seen as “homophobic” (Puar, 2013, p. 337). Hence, LGBTQ+ rights are included as national characteristics in the constructed image of a nation, while the racial “others” are excluded (Puar, 2017, p. 38). Moreover, ideas about the exceptionalism of Western society are often interwoven in the homonationalist discourse (Lagerman, 2023, p. 1). In addition, LGBTQ+ people are perceived as potential victims of external violence, and in need of protection from the “others” by the nation-state (Lagerman, 2023, p. 1-2).

3.1.2 Heteroactivism

Heteroactivism is a term that describes both an ideology and a set of practices that revolve around the idea of heteronormativity as a fundamental pillar in a healthy and sustainable society. Heteronormativity is understood as a belief in traditional gender roles, normative heterosexual relationships, and normative biological sex (Browne & Nash, 2017, p. 645). The rhetoric of heteroactivists is adapted to the context of operations. Consequently, the argumentation does not involve explicit “anti-gay” rhetoric. Instead, the importance of heteronormativity for both individuals and society is emphasized. Thus, heteroactivists can combine stances promoting sexual equality with stances opposing further liberalization of LGBTQ+ people (Browne & Nash, 2020, p. 76). Furthermore, heteroactivists do not want to be
perceived as homophobic or transphobic in contexts where this is usually frowned upon. Therefore, to avoid being accused of homophobia or transphobia, heteroactivists reframe these words into only meaning a “personal dislike or ‘fear’ of LGBTQ+ people”, thus claiming that they do not mean any harm to LGBTQ+ people as a whole. This opens up the possibility for heteroactivists to distance themselves from accusations of homophobia and transphobia (Browne & Nash, 2020, p. 75).

3.1.3 Expected Findings
To understand what ideas the SD convey regarding LGBTQ+ topics, these two theoretical concepts are applied to guide the analysis of the selected material. Previous research has found these concepts to be fruitful when analyzing a context characterized by progressive values. I imagine that the Swedish context, being pro-LGBTQ+, creates conditions that PRR parties, such as the SD, respond to by pursuing heteroactivist and homonationalist discourses. By pursuing such discourses, the SD would be able to adapt to the progressive context while still being true to the PRR party’s characteristic nativist ideological core. Thus, I expect to find ideas that can be understood as expressions of the SD taking part in heteroactivism, as well as the SD pursuing a homonationalist discourse. However, since previous research has been conflicting, additional unexpected ideas that do not fit into this theoretical framework might appear when analyzing the results. If so, this will be acknowledged in the discussion.

3.2 Methodology
In this section, the methodological approach to analyzing ideas is presented. This is followed by a presentation of the analytical framework, and finally, the operationalizations of the theoretical concepts are provided.

3.2.1 Analysis of Ideas
To answer the research question, I have conducted an idea analysis. Specifically, I analyzed the ideas that are conveyed in statements written on the social media platform X by politicians who represent the SD in the national parliament of Sweden.

I chose to conduct an idea analysis since it is a type of qualitative content analysis suitable when studying political messages (Beckman, 2005, p. 11-12). It is specifically useful when a study aims to “understand and explain the worldviews, motivations, and goals of people” (Bergström & Svärd, 2018, p. 138). Ideas consist of notions describing what society is, as well as notions about what society should be (Bergström & Svärd, 2018, p. 133). Following Lindberg’s definition of ideas, ideas are also action-guiding thoughts. That is, ideas consist of “thinking that motivates and guides social and political action and interaction” (Lindberg, 2017, p. 86). Moreover, political parties uphold and promote ideas, thus aiming to influence people and motivate them to pursue political and social action (Lindberg, 2017, p. 88). Since PRR parties
adapt to the context in which they operate, and PRR parties have a tendency to oppose LGBTQ+ rights, analyzing the ideas held by the SD opened up the possibility of identifying which political and social actions the SD advocate regarding LGBTQ+ topics.

Since ideas are expressed through communicative practices, it is possible to study ideas empirically (Bergström & Svärd, 2018, p. 139). Hence, this thesis studies ideas expressed through short statements posted on X. The ideas a person chooses to communicate only make up a small portion of their underlying system of ideas. Thus, the analysis of ideas involves proposing a description of the underlying system of ideas, and how the ideas are constructed and connected, for the communicated statement to make sense (Bergström & Svärd, 2018, p. 139). For the underlying ideas to appear to the reader, the material is read thoroughly, with the use of analytical tools (Esaiasson et al., 2017, p. 211). Following this, to gain a deeper understanding of statements expressed by the SD concerning LGBTQ+ topics, I applied an analytical framework that is described in the following section.

3.2.2 Analytical Framework
To analyze the selected material, I utilized a framework for analyzing ideological content that was inspired by a framework proposed by Lindberg (2017). The framework is based on an assumption that all ideological content in political communication, explicitly or implicitly, is composed of three kinds of ideas: values, descriptions, and prescriptions. These ideas, in turn, are expressed through value-statements, descriptive statements, and prescriptive statements (Lindberg, 2017, p. 91-92). Thus, the analytical framework revolves around identifying these three kinds of statements in the material that is analyzed (Lindberg, 2017, p. 107).

The first kind of statements are value-statements (V), which express moral, social, cultural, or political values. The second kind of statements are descriptive statements (D), which express descriptions of situations or problems, as well as more philosophical assumptions of society or human nature. Finally, the third kind of statements are prescriptive statements (P), which express principles of political and social action (Lindberg, 2017, p. 107). Altogether, all political communication follows a practical reasoning in which value statements and descriptive statements result in prescriptive statements (Lindberg, 2017, p. 92).

When analyzing the material, the analytical framework was used as a tool to identify which kinds of ideas were present in a given political statement. This involved identifying single ideas and detecting how different ideas interacted with and related to each other (Lindberg, 2017, p. 107). This meant that every kind of idea was not necessarily present in every single text analyzed. When a kind of idea was missing, the material had to be interpreted and complemented with a discussion on how the missing ideas could have been expressed for the practical reasoning to make sense. This involved complementing the analysis with other texts or interpreting what was expressed implicitly in the text (Lindberg, 2017, p. 107).
3.2.3 Operationalizations

To distinguish which ideas the SD expressed concerning LGBTQ+ topics, and thus be able to answer the research question, I operationalized this thesis’ two main theoretical concepts: heteroactivism and homonationalism.

First, I defined the theoretical concepts (see section 3.1), to be able to operationalize them (Esaiasson et al., 2017, s. 55). Thereafter, these theoretical definitions were assigned one operational indicator (i.e. descriptions of how the concepts are observed in the empirical material) for each of the three kinds of statements, e.g. value-statements, descriptive statements, and prescriptive statements (Esaiasson et al., 2017, s. 56). In addition, to make the analytical framework clearer, I present made-up examples of statements corresponding to each of the operational indicators. These examples serve as a help to demonstrate how I identified the operational indicators and how I interpreted the different kinds of statements in the material. Altogether, the theoretical definition, operational indicators, and example quotes are presented in Table 1 for the concept of homonationalism and Table 2 for the concept of heteroactivism below.

Table 1. Theoretical definitions, operationalizations, and examples of statements of the concept of homonationalism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Definition</th>
<th>Operational Indicators: Statements that express…</th>
<th>Examples of Statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A discourse where LGBTQ+ rights are utilized to portray a population as progressive or modern while constructing a narrative of the racialized “others” as non-progressive (Puar, 2013, p. 337).</td>
<td>…ideals, long-term goals, and preferences regarding LGBTQ+ rights placing the West above the non-West (V). …narratives, descriptions, analyses, explanations, and evaluations regarding LGBTQ+ rights in Sweden and non-Western nations (D). …recommendations, orders, rules, and policy suggestions in relation to the racialized “others” (P).</td>
<td>“The exceptionalism of Western society” (V). “The backward ideologies of Muslim immigrants are a threat to LGBTQ+ rights in Sweden” (D). “Reduce Muslim immigration to Sweden” (P).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Theoretical definitions, operationalizations, and examples of statements of the concept of heteroactivism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heteroactivism</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theoretical Definition</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activism that is centered around the idea that heteronormativity (e.g. traditional gender roles, normative heterosexual relationships, and normative biological sex) are fundamental pillars in a healthy and sustainable society (Browne &amp; Nash, 2017, p. 645).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Research Design

In this section, the selection of the SD as the case of study is motivated. This is followed by a motivation for the selected material studied.

3.3.1 Selection of Case

To answer the research question, I conducted a single case study. As aforementioned, this thesis aims to study ideas held by PRR parties operating in contexts characterized by progressive values concerning LGBTQ+ topics. I perceived the ideas held by the SD and the context in which they operate to be an example of this. Thus, the SD in Sweden was selected as the case of study.

Compared to other Western and Northern European countries, Sweden is often perceived as particularly progressive concerning LGBTQ+ rights. For example, support for LGBTQ+ rights is often included as a national characteristic in the image of the Swedish nation (Lagerman, 2023). In addition, Sweden is ranked high concerning the situation for LGBTQ+ people, when compared to other European countries (Rainbow Europe, n.d.a). Moreover, previous research has found contradictory results regarding the way the SD perceive and utilize LGBTQ+ rights in their political messages in Sweden. Thus, making it interesting to further study the SD as a
PRR party operating in Sweden. Finally, the choice of Sweden opened up the possibility for me to access a greater amount of potential material to study, since Swedish is my first language. Thus, the selected material was not restricted as a result of language barriers, and the risk of translation software affecting the material, and thus the analysis, was absent. That is, other countries are more liberal than Sweden concerning LGBTQ+ rights, such as Denmark or Finland (Rainbow Europe, n.d.a), but since I do not speak Danish or Finnish, choosing them as the case of study would limit the potential material for analysis.

3.3.2 Selection of Material
The material selected for this study was posts published on X that were written by politicians who represent the SD in the Swedish national parliament. Furthermore, the period of interest was posts published between 12 September 2022 and 11 September 2023, which is one year following the 2022 election.

The use of new media has been pointed out as a prominent method of political communication for all political actors (Dalton, 2020, p. 60). Although, the new media format is particularly compatible with populist actors’ strive to speak to and for “the people” (Moffitt, 2016, p. 88). The new media format thus allows the populist actors to appear “as more ‘direct’, ‘immediate’ and accountable to their ‘people’” (Moffitt, 2016, p. 92). Since the SD is regarded as a populist party by many researchers, the SDs’ use of new media to express ideas is thus important to study.

Posts published on X were selected as the material for this thesis. The format for posts on X allows short messages containing a maximum of 280 characters (X Developer Platform, n.d.). Hence, the X user cannot write long, well-articulated posts to express ideas, as opposed to other social media platforms. X posts are generally focused on the written word, although pictures also can be attached to the post. The interests of this thesis are ideas expressed through words, which made X posts more suitable to study than, for instance, image-rich Instagram posts.

In this thesis, the subjects of interest are ideas held by politicians of the SD who were members of the national parliament the year following the 2022 election. This period marks a shift in the national politics of Sweden, since the SD serve as official collaborative partners to the parties in government. This means that the SD get access to influence public policies by both deciding which topics are placed on the agenda, as well as having a greater say regarding policy decision-making, than before (Knill & Tosun, 2020, p. 91).

The process to select the specific units of analysis for this study was conducted as follows: Initially, I discovered that 55 politicians, out of the SDs’ 72 members of the national parliament, had an account on X. Out of those with an account, 44 politicians were active on X the year following the 2022 election. I systematically went through all of the active accounts and used the search words that are described below to find what the politicians wrote about LGBTQ+ topics. I found that 18 politicians had mentioned LGBTQ+ topics in 102 posts. Out of these posts, I chose to analyze 44 posts that were not in the middle of an X “thread”, that is, posts
from several actors discussing a topic. If the post was part of a thread, the selected post had to be the post starting the discussion. This selection also included politicians posting direct answers to other posts, since I viewed such posts as part of a thread, as well as reposts. Nevertheless, I did include posts that referred to other media such as newspaper and debate articles, videos, and parliamentary debates, since those posts provided a context that facilitated the possibility of analyzing implicit statements with more certainty.

Posts of interest were found by using the advanced search function on the X website. Recent debates in the Swedish media landscape concerning LGBTQ+ topics have revolved around Pride events (The Board of RFSU Stockholm, 2023), the rainbow flag (i.e. a symbol for the LGBTQ+ movement) (Karltun, 2023), and the “Drag Story Hour” (i.e. drag queens reading books for children at libraries) (Rådegård, 2023). Thus, when searching for posts, in addition to the search words involving variations of the words LGBT, homosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex, I also chose to include variations of the search words pride, rainbow flag, and drag queen. In addition, to capture statements about trans people’s rights, I also included search words about gender, such as gender identity, gender-affirming, sex change, and gender dysphoria.

3.4 Limitations

The selection of material could potentially be seen as a limitation. I have studied 15 SD politicians’ ideas concerning LGBTQ+ topics while aiming to compile the ideas held by the SD as a whole. However, I did analyze all the posts of those who expressed ideas regarding the subject. The fact that not all 72 SD politicians who are members of the national parliament expressed such ideas, could be an indicator that this subject is not prioritized on the SDs’ agenda. Notwithstanding this, there were several recurring ideas shared among SD politicians, indicating that these were not isolated views.

Another possible limitation is that the analyzed material is limited to statements published on X, thus disregarding ideas from alternative sources, such as traditional media or policy proposals. However, in line with Moffitt (2016), I suggest that the format of X enables the SD to be more direct in statements. Thus, the SD might express ideas more directly on X, without considering what the party leadership wants to convey to the public.

When analysis involves evaluating ideas expressed both implicitly and explicitly there is a risk of inconsistencies in the assessments made, leading to low reliability due to many unsystematic errors (Esaiasson et al., 2017, p. 64). To mitigate such a risk, an established coding scheme (Lindberg, 2017) was utilized.

Likewise, abstract concepts, such as homonationalism and heteroactivism, increase the risk of validity problems (Esaiasson et al., 2017, p. 60). Validity refers to how such theoretical definitions correspond to the chosen operational indicators, described in section 3.2.3. When these correspond well, the validity is high due to few systematic errors (Esaiasson et al., 2017,
In this study, posts from X published during a larger period (within one year before and after the 2022 election) were reviewed. This allowed relevant operational indicators to be carefully considered and thoroughly defined to maximize validity.

In addition, the risk of confirmation bias has to be considered, meaning that one might selectively find results that favor expected outcomes (McSweeney, 2021, p. 1064). Previous research has shown contradicting results, and hence no established hypothesis needs to be proven or refuted. As for confirmation bias, this study was undertaken bearing in mind that previously overlooked concepts might also come into play. In addition to this, the nature of this study is exploratory, rather than confirmatory.
4. Results and Analysis

When analyzing the material, four themes became apparent. The first theme is the Pride Movement, with a focus on Pride parades in particular. The second theme is Non-Normative Gender Identities, which regards individuals choosing their own gender identity. The third theme is the Drag Story Hour, with drag queens reading books for children. The fourth and final theme is Muslims on LGBTQ+, where Muslims are portrayed as opposing LGBTQ+ rights. In the following sections, I will present the findings related to the four themes. Moreover, in the analysis, I have focused on representative posts. That is, I have chosen to include posts that presented recurring ideas. This was done to be able to show the general ideas the SD expressed concerning LGBTQ+ topics. Thus, posts about single subjects that do not fit into the general themes are not subject to analysis.

4.1 The Pride Movement

The Pride movement is a global movement that advocates LGBTQ+ rights. The movement operates to improve the situation for LGBTQ+ people, to make LGBTQ+ people visible in society, and to create a sense of community. This involves organizing Pride festivals, which often include Pride parades (RFSL, 2017, p. 4-5; Stockholm Pride, n.d.a). The organization Stockholm Pride describes the parade as a “manifestation of love for human rights, and a demonstration for everyone's right to love and be who they are” (Stockholm Pride n.d.b). Furthermore, Pride festivals are generally not party-political. However, this does not necessarily mean that they are politically neutral (RFSL, 2017, p. 7). A rainbow flag, often called the Pride flag, is frequently used to symbolize LGBTQ+ rights and the Pride movement (Swedish Pride, n.d.).

In the analyzed material, the debate revolving around the Pride movement particularly involved opposition to Pride parades, with less focus on the subject of Pride flags. Moreover, while opposition to the Pride movement was a recurring theme, different ideas explaining this opposition were discernible.

The most prominent idea in the posts was that the SD accept LGBTQ+ people, while not supporting the activism of LGBTQ+ people defending their rights. For example, the Pride movement was described as representing more than just support for LGBTQ+ rights. This description involved relating the Pride movement to the political left, thus presenting the value of politicization. This could be seen in a post stating that:

> Journalists and others wonder what I (and some others from SD) have against Pride, [since the Pride movement] just supports the rights of LGBT people.

> I answer that [Pride] is an organization on the political left. If not, how come it is the Green Party that is waving Pride flags during the election watch party? (Stenkvist, 2022a)
In this post, the SD perceived the “left-wing” Green Party waving rainbow flags as an indicator of the Pride movement representing views on the political left. Another post pointed to the fact that Pride organizations have excluded the SD from participating in Pride festivals (Andersson, 2023). When Pride is perceived as a political organization, the practice of defending LGBTQ+ rights is perceived as people advocating for a political opinion, as opposed to advocating for human rights. This, in turn, opens up the possibility for the SD to oppose Pride without explicitly taking a stance for or against LGBTQ+ rights by itself.

Another example of the SD advocating opposition against LGBTQ+ activism, but not LGBTQ+ people, was through portraying Pride as not being necessary for LGBTQ+ rights in Sweden. For instance, when referring to a Party leader candidate for the Centre Party not being clear about whether he wanted to attend a Pride parade or not (Olsson & Runblom, 2022), one post argued that not “all rights of LGBTQIJKLMNOP… people would be threatened if one party leader does not want to dance in leather clothes in the front of the parade” (Stenkvist, 2022b). This description of the Pride parade mocks and diminishes the Pride movement's activism and the diversity of LGBTQ+ people. Thus, the value conveyed promotes non-diversity and compliance to the status quo regarding the situation of LGBTQ+ people.

Furthermore, the SD advocating opposition against LGBTQ+ activism, but not LGBTQ+ people, is also conveyed through an underlying idea claiming that the defense of LGBTQ+ rights is not a state concern. For instance, one politician wrote that he was fine with Pride parades, but he opposed “that a fraction of the LGBTQ group should get taxpayers’ money to parade and announce that they are LGBTQ people” (Gholam Ali Pour, 2023). When claiming that public funding should not benefit only a small group of people, the base of the financial funding of this kind of LGBTQ+ activism is questioned. Thus, proclaiming that the public should not take part in defending LGBTQ+ rights. Another example of this idea was exemplified through the SDs’ opposition to municipalities hoisting the Pride flag. The SD claimed that municipalities should be impartial from interest groups, “no matter what [the organizations] stands for” (Eklöf, 2023a). That is, even if the Pride movement was perceived as explicitly supporting LGBTQ+ rights, the underlying value claiming that the state, or the local government in this case, is not defending LGBTQ+ rights still stand.

A second prominent idea in the posts was that the SD wanted to appeal to the general public while defending their stances regarding LGBTQ+ activism. For example, one post made clear that Björn Söder's claim concerning the connections between Pride and pedophilia (Söder, 2023a) was not a view shared among the SD as a whole. This acknowledgment was accompanied by a claim that Söder “has nothing against homosexual [people]” and that “every open homosexual [person] in our organization can testify for [that claim]” (Karlsson, 2023). The underlying value conveyed was the importance of appealing to the general public in Sweden. Since homophobia is not approved by the general public in Sweden, the SD showed that they were wrongfully accused of being homophobic. Thus, the SD claimed to accept LGBTQ+ people and made sure not to be accused of homophobia, whilst opposing LGBTQ+ rights activism.
4.2 Non-Normative Gender Identities

In Sweden, there is an ongoing debate concerning transgender people’s rights which mainly revolves around legal gender recognition. In Sweden, a person does not have the power to decide their legal gender without the involvement of medical professionals and the National Board of Health and Welfare. However, a recent debate on legal gender recognition was sparked by a policy proposal advocating to lower the required age for a person to be able to go into the process of changing their legal gender (RFSU, 2023).

In the analyzed material revolving around the debate on gender identity and legal gender recognition, the SD clearly expressed ideas opposing non-normative biological sex and gender identities. The prominent underlying values conveyed in posts on this theme portrayed normative gender identities and normative biological sex as superior to non-normative alternatives. Altogether, these ideas were based on different descriptions of challenges regarding legal gender recognition, the recurring principle of action was to oppose people deciding their own gender identity or legal gender.

An example of showing no acceptance for non-normative gender identities was conveyed in a post where one politician wrote “Since it nowadays is okay to switch gender according to matters of taste, I think I should change my age” (Söder, 2023b). Comparing people deciding their gender identity to them deciding their age shows how strong the ideas concerning gender norms and perceptions of normative biological sex are among the SD.

Another prominent expression of these values is exemplified through ideas pointing out the consequences more liberal legislation concerning legal gender recognition would have for society. For instance, one post claimed that “gender equality is threatened if everyone gets to decide their own legal gender” (Rubbestad, 2023). This claim was strengthened by referencing a debate article written by a women’s rights organization, in which the organization brought forward arguments as to why a more liberal legislation would threaten gender equality (Sjöberg & Berglund, 2023). Thus, in addition to the previously mentioned underlying values, this post also shows the SD perceiving gender equality as important for society.

4.3 The Drag Story Hour

During the autumn of 2022, the attention given to the Drag Story Hours, which are events where drag queens read books for children, increased in the media and the political debate. A politician representing the SD in the municipal council of Kalmar openly opposed the event (Edliden, 2022), resulting in a still ongoing debate. According to The Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex Rights (RFSL), dressing up as a drag queen is a way for a person to play with, and exaggerate, feminine gender expressions. This is done as an art form, a type of activism, or for entertainment. While transgender people can take part in the drag queen practice, dressing as a drag queen is not equivalent to being transgender.
(RFSL, 2023). When reading the posts on X, it becomes apparent that drag queens are sometimes mistaken for transgender people.

In the analyzed material, ideas opposing the Drag Story Hours are discernible. The opposition is expressed through ideas opposing non-normative gender expressions. Underlying values discerned expressed ideas promoting the affirmation of normative gender expressions and identities as well as overall conformity to gender norms. That is, the SD viewed non-normative gender expressions, such as people dressing as drag queens, as something that should not be promoted. In addition, promoting norm conformity concerning the best interests of children was also discerned as a prominent idea.

An example of ideas focused on opposing non-normative gender expressions was observed in a post that claimed that drag queens try to normalize gender identities through “sexualizing children's literature” (Gholam Ali Pour, 2022a). For clarification, based on context, this post referred to the Drag Story Hour. Also, this example shows that the SD perceived non-normative gender expressions, such as people dressing as drag queens, as an expression of gender identities, such as transgender people expressing their gender identity. Thus, the SD relate drag queens to non-normative gender identities. The idea that children should not be exposed to non-normative gender expressions or identities was further developed in another post, which placed non-normative gender identities in opposition to “childhood”. This was expressed through a claim stating:

Your gender identity is your gender identity. That should be respected. But your gender identity is not all the children's gender identity. You should have your gender identity. They should have their childhood. It is not more difficult than that. (Gholam Ali Pour, 2022b)

Altogether, the SD promote norm conformity, as they claimed to accept non-normative gender identities, as long as these identities not were expressed in front of children.

Furthermore, the SD emphasized the idea that drag queens have an agenda to influence children to break norms. For instance, the Drag Story Hours were described as being norm-critical. This was exemplified by a post stating:

[It is] good that the SD reprehends [the Liberal party] about the inappropriate Drag Queen Story Hours. It is obvious that these story hours with sexual framing not primarily are for the children and their best [interests], but instead for adults who want to involve children when breaking norms. (Andersson, 2023)

Through this description of drag queens promoting norm criticism, the SD place the Drag Story Hour in direct opposition to norm conformity.
4.4 Muslims on LGBTQ+

As aforementioned, the SD are known for their anti-immigration claims in general, and their anti-Muslim stances in particular. In the debate revolving around Islam, and Muslim integration in Swedish culture, the SD have been influential. Since the subject of interest in this thesis is about ideas the SD held regarding LGBTQ+ topics, it was considered important to also analyze posts where such ideas were combined with ideas about Islam and Muslims.

In the analyzed material, ideas expressing opposition against Islam in general, and Muslim integration in Sweden in particular, were discernible. The core value conveyed in these posts suggests that the SD perceived Swedish ideals as being superior to those of Muslims. This core value was accompanied by ideas describing Muslims as homophobic. Further, the SD perceived Muslims as a threat to LGBTQ+ people in both Muslim and Western countries.

A prominent idea conveyed in the material was opposition against Islam in general. This involved the SD expressing ideas where Islam and Muslim culture were portrayed as representing anti-LGBTQ+ views. For instance, in a post, the telecom company Ericsson was criticized for rejecting Quran burnings:

Would it not be suitable if Ericsson, instead, rejected the burning of the Swedish flag, executions of homosexuals, lashings of women who do not wear a [hijab], the storming of the Swedish Embassy, funding the IS? No, that is not included in the company’s values.

(Söder, 2023c)

This example shows that the SD associated the Quran, and thus Islam, with events that occurred in Muslim countries and that threatened the freedom of LGBTQ+ people. In addition, this idea of Islam promoting anti-LGBTQ+ views was also discerned in a post opposing the Swedish government prohibiting the burning of the Quran. The post stated that the Swedish government “should not go down this slippery slope. For [the sake of] us, our children, women, homosexuals, and others who will be affected” (Eklöf, 2023b). Thus, the SD accompanied the value of protecting the rights of LGBTQ+ people with ideas about Islam as a threat to such rights.

Moreover, the SD conveyed ideas that the protection of the rights of LGBTQ+ people in Muslim countries was more important than further liberalization of LGBTQ+ rights in Sweden. This was exemplified in a post that referred to a debate article written by a Social Democrat, in which the SD were criticized for being anti-LGBTQ+ and opposing gender pedagogy in children’s education in Sweden (Romson, 2022). The post stated that a Social Democratic politician thought it was worse to question gender pedagogy than to “criticize how Islam perceives homosexuality in a world where homosexuals are hung in lampposts in Islamic countries” (Söder, 2022). The SD, thus, prioritized the situation for LGBTQ+ people in Muslim countries higher than the situation for LGBTQ+ people in Sweden. By doing this, on the one hand, the SD opposed Islam while advocating LGBTQ+ rights in Muslim countries. On the other hand, the SD neglected the situation in Sweden and conveyed that LGBTQ+ rights were not an
important issue here. Thus, the SD claimed to stand up for LGBTQ+ issues (e.g. the situation for homosexual people in Muslim countries), which opened up the possibility for the SD to distance themselves from accusations of being homophobic.

Another prominent idea conveyed in the material was opposition to Muslim integration in Swedish culture. An example of this was a post that referred to a debate article written by Anders Lindberg, in which it was claimed that mosques’ call to prayer was a part of Swedish culture (Lindberg, 2023). To the same post was a video attached that showed a woman in Canada, wearing a hijab, encouraging two children to stamp on rainbow flags. This was accompanied by a joke that said: “Now I am only waiting for the Islamist-hugger Anders Lindberg […] to argue that ‘of course stamping on the rainbow flag is a part of Swedish culture’” (Rashid, 2023). Thus, the SD expressed ideas of Muslims being homophobic and related this to Muslim integration in Sweden, such that views of Muslims were not compatible with the Swedish values promoting LGBTQ+ rights.
5. Discussion

Given the tendency of PRR parties to form anti-LGBTQ+ claims, this thesis aimed to understand how a PRR party operating in a context characterized by progressive values, relates to LGBTQ+ topics in their political messages on social media. This was to be achieved by answering the research question: What ideas concerning LGBTQ+ topics do the Sweden Democrats convey on the social media platform X?

The results of this thesis suggest that the SD expressed conflicting ideas concerning LGBTQ+ topics. On the one hand, the SD conveyed ideas advocating for LGBTQ+ rights in Muslim countries, protecting LGBTQ+ rights in Sweden, and claiming to accept LGBTQ+ people. On the other hand, the SD conveyed ideas opposing LGBTQ+ rights activism in Sweden, and promoting normative gender identities and expressions. To understand these results, I apply two theoretical concepts, homonationalism and heteroactivism, in the following sections. In addition to this, I also provide further reflections concerning the findings.

5.1 Homonationalism

The results suggest that the SD held ideas concerning LGBTQ+ topics that can be understood as the SD pursuing a homonationalist discourse. This was observed in statements where the SD claimed that Islam promotes anti-LGBTQ+ views and Muslims are perceived to take anti-LGBTQ+ stances. These ideas are placed in contrast to a portrayal of Sweden as a LGBTQ-friendly country, where LGBTQ+ rights have been fulfilled. Thus, the SD include LGBTQ+ rights as a national characteristic in the constructed image of the nation. In line with previous research, the results suggest that SD perceive Muslims as a threat to LGBTQ+ people in Sweden. However, the results also suggest that the SD claim to stand up for LGBTQ+ people in Muslim countries. Therefore, the SD not only advocate LGBTQ+ rights when they oppose Muslim integration in Sweden, but they also utilize LGBTQ+ rights as an argument to oppose Islam in general.

Previous research on the homonationalist discourse has shown contradictory results. Some have suggested that the SD do take part in a homonationalist discourse (Kehl, 2018), whereas others indicated that the SD oppose homonationalist ideals (Lagerman, 2023). The results in this thesis add to that research, by suggesting that the SD indeed do pursue a homonationalist discourse.

In contrast, other researchers do not regard the SD utilizing LGBTQ+ rights in their anti-Muslim agenda as an expression of homonationalist discourse, but rather an adoption of liberal ideas (e.g. Duina & Carson, 2020; Moffitt, 2017). Therefore, it is tempting to suggest that the results of this thesis also support the adoption of liberal ideas by the SD. However, the concept of homonationalism provides a more complete framework for understanding the ideas voiced
by the SD and fits well with the results of the analysis, as opposed to selected isolated liberal ideas.

5.2 Heteroactivism

The results also suggest that the ideas held by the SD can be perceived as indicators of the SD taking part in heteroactivism. This was observed in ideas advocating opposition against LGBTQ+ rights activism, which were often combined with claims about the SD accepting LGBTQ+ people. That is, the SD adapt to the Swedish context in that they claim to accept homosexuality while questioning people wanting to defend LGBTQ+ rights in Sweden. In line with previous research, the results indicate that the SD promote heteronormativity. In view of this, the ideas expressed by the SD can be interpreted as the SD opposing the defense of LGBTQ+ rights, since such defense questions heteronormativity. However, the SD cannot attack people defending LGBTQ+ rights without attacking the rights themselves. Thus, while the SD claim to accept LGBTQ+ rights, other ideas expressed in the posts indicate that the SD favor heteronormativity above non-normative relationships, gender identities, and gender expressions.

Moreover, while the SD claim to accept LGBTQ+ people, this mostly involves acceptance of people with non-normative sexual orientations. Concerning non-normative gender identities and expressions, the SD expressed ideas promoting normative gender identities and expressions, and biological sex. This could be observed in posts related to the themes of Non-Normative Gender Identities and the Drag Story Hour. For example, the SD expressed ideas in which more liberal legislation regarding people deciding their legal gender was perceived as a threat to gender equality. In addition, non-normative gender expressions were perceived as harmful when exposed to children. These ideas can be understood as an expression of heteroactivism, since heteronormativity is promoted to be what is “best” for society.

Furthermore, in line with previous research, this thesis also shows that the SD are careful not to be accused of homophobia, albeit their ideas concerning transgender people’s rights are more outspokenly transphobic. This is observed through ideas where the SD advocate normative biological sex and oppose people deciding their legal gender. This is in contrast to previous research stating that heteroactivists do not want to be accused of transphobia (e.g. Browne & Nash, 2020). One possible explanation for the SD expressing ideas that explicitly oppose non-normative gender identities could be that transgender people’s rights are not as far-reaching in Sweden, as compared to homosexual peoples’ rights. Thus, the general public might not be aware of, or do not have that much knowledge of, topics revolving around gender identities. While the SD cannot risk being accused of homophobia, the stakes might be lower concerning the risk of being perceived as transphobic, in that the general public might not even notice or perceive such ideas as transphobic.
Further Reflections

In line with my expectations, which were based on previous research, the findings of this thesis suggest that the SD take part in heteroactivism, as well as pursue a homonationalist discourse. Moreover, the results also show that the SD carefully adapt to the progressive context of Sweden. That is, the SD adapted criticism against LGBTQ+ activism and opposed non-normative gender identities and expressions to accommodate acceptance by the general public. For instance, when Björn Söder got criticized for relating the Pride movement to pedophilia, the SD acknowledged this criticism and made sure the public knew that the SD accepted homosexual people. Altogether, the SD perform a balancing act, weighing their heteronormative ideals against the acceptance of a general public that supports LGBTQ+ rights.

In this thesis, the SD were chosen as an example of a PRR party operating in a progressive national context. Since I have only studied a single case, there is a risk that the results cannot be generalized to other PRR parties operating in progressive contexts. For instance, LGBTQ+ rights are included as a national characteristic in the constructed image of the Swedish nation. In other contexts, while still being liberal concerning LGBTQ+ rights, such rights might not be as incorporated into the national identity as they are in Sweden. For instance, in a more religious country than Sweden, a PRR party might express ideas based on religious values. Alternatively, in a country where there is little debate concerning the Drag Story Hours, this theme might not at all have been visible in the analysis. Notwithstanding this, as has been established in previous research, PRR parties do adapt to the context in which they operate. Thus, PRR parties operating in different contexts might express different descriptions of a situation or problem, or advocate different principles of action to favor their cause. Taken together, the findings of this thesis provide novel insights on this subject and thus contribute to further understanding of how PRR parties in progressive contexts relate to LGBTQ+ topics.
6. Conclusion

Previous research on how PRR parties relate to LGBTQ+ topics shows that there is a tendency among PRR parties to form anti-LGBTQ+ claims. Research also shows that PRR parties adapt their stances to the context in which they operate. Thus this thesis aimed to understand how a PRR party operating in a context characterized by progressive values, relates to LGBTQ+ topics in their political messages on social media. The research question guiding the thesis was: What ideas concerning LGBTQ+ topics do the Sweden Democrats convey on the social media platform X? To answer the research question, ideas held by the SD during the year following the 2022 election were examined. This was done through an analysis of ideas expressed in posts published on the social media platform X. Two theoretical concepts, homonationalism and heteroactivism, were applied to understand the ideas conveyed.

The results of this thesis found that the SD express ideas concerning LGBTQ+ topics related to four themes: the Pride Movement, Non-Normative Gender Identities, the Drag Story Hour, and Muslims on LGBTQ+. Further, the results show that the SD conveyed ideas promoting the protection of LGBTQ+ rights in Sweden and the liberalization of LGBTQ+ people in Muslim countries. The SD also expressed that they accept LGBTQ+ people. However, these claims were accompanied by ideas opposing LGBTQ+ rights activism in Sweden, and promoting normative gender identities and expressions.

Altogether, the results of this thesis indicate that the SD adapt to the Swedish context by downplaying their heteronormative ideals to avoid presenting outspoken homophobic statements. Moreover, previous research focusing on the SDs’ liberal illiberalism, suggests that the SD promote selected isolated liberal values. However, this thesis finds that the SD promote liberal values concerning LGBTQ+ rights only when they take anti-Muslim stances. That is, when the SD solely focuses on Sweden, the SD do not express ideas promoting LGBTQ+ rights. These findings provide novel aspects to previous research on heteroactivism. Thus, the results of this thesis contribute to research on PRR parties operating in contexts characterized by progressive values in general, and research on the SD concerning LGBTQ+ topics in particular.

The selection of material for this thesis was limited to posts published on X written during the year following the 2022 election by politicians of the SD who were members of the national parliament. There is a possibility that other ideas might be discerned in other material, such as in debates in traditional media, policy proposals, or political programs. For instance, in other material, other ideas might surface which cannot be expressed in a post on X. The period also limits the results to only present ideas expressed during one year. A different period might have resulted in other ideas expressed. For instance, the Drag Story Hour theme was discerned since this was a hot topic during the period studied. In view of the case and material selected for this thesis, future research on the subject might benefit from broadening the material subjected to analysis. This would facilitate a more extensive understanding of the ideas the SD express concerning LGBTQ+ topics. To further elucidate how the SD adapt to the context in which they operate, it would be interesting to compare ideas held by the SD at different times. For instance,
by comparing the results of this thesis with ideas that the SD held when they first got elected to the national parliament in 2010.

To my knowledge, previous research on PRR parties in relation to LGBTQ+ topics has mostly focused on the rights of people with non-normative sexual orientations, whereas less focus has been placed on transgender people’s rights. The findings in this thesis show that the SD incorporate these topics when expressing ideas promoting heteronormativity. These results indicate that PRR parties’ ideas concerning topics revolving around transgender people’s rights are important themes for future research.
7. References


X Developer Platform (n.d.). Counting characters. X Corp.