

Academic Writing Guide

Draft Essay – Stage 3, Part 1

Using Lukes' three dimensions of power explain the relationship between the Sweden Democrats and immigrants in Swedish society.

Since the Sweden Democrats entered the Swedish government in 2010, immigration has been a key issue on the political agenda. Sweden has long had a national pride of having one of the world's most generous asylum policies, but it has been in the Sweden Democrats' every interest to denounce it.

This essay will argue that despite not having any direct power, the Sweden Democrats still have a significant influence and a negative impact in how we view refugees, and immigrants as a whole. It will begin by explaining the inequalities in Swedish society produced by the exclusion in democracy and nationalism. This will be linked to how the Sweden Democrats' rhetoric about the already existing division between 'Swedes' and 'immigrants' works to further emphasize it and then followed by how they use it to change the minds of voters.

Sweden's history of immigration goes back to the Second World War and prides itself in its strong democracy and generous asylum policies, however the exclusion created by the welfare state has left persistent social inequalities.

(Dahlstedt/Hertzberg, 2007) The natural divide between insiders and outsiders in a nation becomes, in this case, a divide between 'Swedes' and 'immigrants', hence creating exclusion on an ethnic basis. The public narrative always considers Sweden as morally and culturally superior. Though what actually makes up Swedish culture is rather ambiguous, traits of a shared European imperial past can be seen in the way it sees other cultures as something inferior. (Mulinari/Neergaard, 2014)

Nevertheless, assimilation and integration practices create a path to Swedishness, but gaining full access to the welfare state depends on how well you integrate into

Swedish society, not only economically, but also socially and culturally. (Dahlstedt/Hertzberg, 2007) Evidently, this emphasizes the difference between Swedes and immigrants, whereas the latter is not only fundamentally different, but sometimes also problematically so. Concepts such as 'culture clashes' are often used to explain an undesirable level of integration and creates a subtle form of cultural racism. (Mulinari/Neergaard, 2014)

The issue of immigration never had a significant place in the public discourse until the late 00s, when the Sweden Democrats started gaining traction, but less than 10 years later Sweden gave up on its generous asylum policies and closed its borders. (Lee Tomson, 2020) Without any direct power, the influence they had could still be seen in the outcomes. Lukes (2005) describes how power has three dimensions, firstly dealing with direct power, whereas the second dimension is about who makes the rules or sets the agenda for decision-making. Though Swedish society sets the rules for inclusion, as has been noted, the exclusion created by the welfare state and a believed superiority of culture makes these rules somewhat vague.

This ambiguity of the rules of the game is something used by the Sweden Democrats in their attempt to limit, or even abolish, immigration. Founded through Nazi roots and later growing alongside neoliberal influence in reforms to the welfare system, the party later reinvented the its image, banning extremism and instead attempting to appeal to the common Swede. (Hellström/Nilsson, 2010) As racism is still widely believed in Sweden to only be based on biological characteristics, such as skin colour, the Sweden Democrats can use a racist rhetoric based on ethnicity, culture or religion to an extreme, without being publicly stamped as racist, or at least without acknowledging these claims. (Mulinari/Neergaard, 2014) Still the party largely racialises different groups and tend to see immigrants as a homogenous group, often using the terms refugee, immigrant and Muslim interchangeably. (Lee Tomson, 2020) This strips members of this group individuality and the actions of one individual can often be seen as a common trait for the entire group.

Furthermore, by relying on a populist rhetoric, "a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic camps,

"the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite" (p.6, Mudde/Kaltwasser, 2017), whereas they have distanced themselves from the political elite and their alleged mishandling of immigration and asylum integration, which created a threat to the security of the welfare state and to the 'Swedish identity'. (Hellström/Nilsson, 2010) Not only do they distinct themselves from the 'elite' (the Swedish government), but they also make a distinction between 'us' (the Swedish people) and 'them' (immigrants). The differences are seen to be big enough that assimilation can never be achieved but will more likely create a parallel society within Sweden, dependent on social welfare and drawn to violence, whilst still being excluded from 'the Swedish people'. (Hellström/Nilsson, 2010) Hence the shared common values of 'us' is threatened by the multiculturalism brought by 'them'.

By changing their image to a more legitimate party and problematising immigration, SD has managed to gain votes with remarkable success. A rise in crime and a strain on the welfare system has been placed solely on immigration, intensifying further with the unusual large number of asylum seekers leading up to the 2015 refugee crisis. (Lee Tomson, 220) Having created the rhetoric of 'us' and 'them', long before 2015, with the party leader claiming Muslims to be "our biggest foreign threat since World War II", (p.48, Mulinari/Neergaard, 2014)) SD's influence on the public narrative around refugee reception can be seen to have had major impact on the decisions made to close the border. (Barker, 2018) By criticising the government's response and neglect of making immigration a problem, SD effectively created a form of 'care racism', where stopping immigration not only increases the wellbeing of the 'us', but also for 'them', by saving them from the government's failure to integrate them into society and the natural 'culture clashes' which will leave them inherently excluded. (Mulinari/Neergard, 2014) SD therefore uses the already exclusionary nature of a democratic welfare state to create a form of exclusionary racism and a 'national Swedish identity', which, with the common Swede's interest in mind, they believe they have every right to do. Subsequently this proves how the Sweden Democrats practices power according to Lukes' (2005) third dimension of power, where one party influences others wants or desires, hence how we view immigrants.

As seen in the success in the politics of the Sweden Democrats, the idea that this view of immigrants as a whole is accurate is a largely common one. As the drivers of

the negative discourse, they have made the challenges facing Sweden seem to be the consequences of one problem, that of immigration. But the claims they make are often based on data that can be easily misinterpreted, especially within the links between immigration and crime, where little official data is available and that existing can be misleading. Equally important to note is the absence of mention of any other factor creating inequalities, such as lack of access to housing and job markets, as well as how use of alternative media is common among the party, where violence by immigrants is often exaggerated. (Lee Tomson, 2020)

With the use of Lukes' dimensions of power, this essay has shown how the Sweden Democrats have impacted the debate around immigration, asylum policies and a 'Swedish identity', by painting all immigrants as violent, strongly religious and conservative people with a culture and moral code inferior to that of the Swedish people. They had a significant influence in how the public responded to the 2015 refugee crisis and might have had a major impact in the debate to close the borders. Though the magnitude of their power might not be fully realised unless they are in a majority coalition in government, one is left to wonder what would have happened during the refugee crisis if the Sweden Democrats would not have succeeded in changing our view towards immigrants, and it could have been viewed as a collective challenge rather than a threat to the nation.

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