DEPARTMENT
OF POLITICAL AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES

# Challengers in Check

## Local Government Participation of Challenger Parties in Norway and Sweden

Jørgen Eikvar Axelsen

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to
obtaining the degree of Doctor of Political and Social Sciences
of the European University Institute

Florence, 10 September 2024

European University Institute
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**Department of Political and Social Sciences - Doctoral Programme**

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## Abstract:

This dissertation presents a version of the inclusion-moderation thesis to examine the association between local government participation and mainstreaming among four challenger parties in Norway and Sweden. The thesis employs a mix of quantitative analyses and qualitative case studies to examine the causal model. Overall, it shows that while the challenger parties pursue their preferred policies in power, they are constrained by policy proximity as a precondition to join government, compromises within the alliance, budget sizes, national rules and policies, and their own reputation building efforts. The degree to which each of these moderating mechanisms affect the profile and development of a local branch depends in turn on factors such as bargaining power within the coalition, local organizational strength, and the balance between pragmatists and ideologues within the local branch. It also depends on the degree to which the branches are conscious of the constraints and employ strategies such as 'role playing' to minimize the tradeoff between ideological purity and cohesion within the alliance. Beyond the local level, the thesis considers whether local moderation or systemic integration may 'trickle up' to the national level. It shows that two sources of multilevel spill-over are present for the parties. Firstly, politicians with executive experience from the local level frequently move into central positions in the party. These politicians join parliamentary committees and communicate with voters based in part on the personal political profiles developed in local government. Additionally, prior to joining national coalitions, the local level serves as proving grounds for the challenger parties. The parties deliberately use successful local coalitions as showcases. The thesis contributes to the literature by developing a causal model of inclusion and moderation in (local) government, as well as a 'trickle-up effect' whereby local participation may impact the political system overall.

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## List of Political Parties - Abbreviations

| *Abbreviation* | *Name (English name)* | *Party family* | *Country* |
|---|---|---|---|
| R | Rødt (Red) | Far left (communist) | Norway |
| SV | Sosialistisk Venstreparti (Socialist Left Party) | Far left (new left) | Norway |
| AP | Arbeiderpartiet (Labor Party) | Social Democrat | Norway |
| SP | Senterpartiet (Center Party) | Agrarian | Norway |
| MdG | Miljøpartiet de Grønne (Greens) | Green | Norway |
| V | Venstre (Liberals) | Social liberal | Norway |
| KrF | Kristelig Folkeparti (Christian People's Party) | Christian Democrat | Norway |
| H | Høyre (Conservatives) | Conservative | Norway |
| FrP | Fremskrittspartiet (Progress Party) | Far right | Norway |
| V | Vänsterpartiet (Left Party) | Far Left | Sweden |
| S | Socialdemokraterna (Social Democrats) | Social Democrat | Sweden |
| MP | Miljöpartiet (Greens) | Green | Sweden |
| C | Centerpartiet (Center Party) | Agrarian | Sweden |
| L | Liberalerna (Liberals) | Liberal | Sweden |
| KD | Kristdemokraterna (Christian Democrats) | Christian Democrat | Sweden |
| M | Moderaterna (Moderates) | Conservative | Sweden |
| SD | Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats) | Far right | Sweden |

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Jørgen Eikvar Axelsen
Oslo,
18.12.2023

## Introduction

### The puzzle

In a 2018 radio debate ('Rødt + AP=?', 2018) between the leader of the Norwegian Labor Party (AP), Jonas Gahr Støre, and the leader of the far-left party Red (R), Bjørnar Moxnes, an interesting tension was revealed. The background for the interview was a recent statement by Støre where he claimed to feel a closer political kinship with the leader of the Conservative Party than with Bjørnar Moxnes. According to the Labor leader, he felt this way because Red had authoritarian roots, a trait that could still be discerned in the party's manifesto. The radio host confronted him with the fact that Red and Labor collaborated at the local level and that Red functioned as a support party for a Labor government in Oslo, the largest municipality in Norway. The following exchange ensued:

> Q: "With what you are saying about Red's authoritarian roots, which is still part of their manifesto, how can you collaborate with them and have them as part of your parliamentary support in Oslo?"
>
> A: "That works perfectly well."
>
> Q: "But then you can surely do it in parliament as well?"
>
> A: "No, there is a difference"
>
> Q: "Why? If this has no impact on practical politics?"
>
> A: "The difference concerns governing a country; being part of Norway's profile abroad; what we stand for and where we come from."
>
> Q: "But how would this concretely affect policy? If you were to have Red as a parliamentary support party?"
>
> A: "That is because the main direction in our daily politics… I said before the election that a government together with Red is not on the table, and that is partly because of the reasons I just stated. It is possible that this trust can be built over time. You [Red] can change the contents of these texts. But at the local level in Norway, in municipal politics, one collaborates in every way based on local circumstances. I am proud of what we have achieved in Oslo. Red has been a part of it, and that is a good thing."

This discrepancy seems to be fairly typical for *challenger parties*. These are parties, like Red, that challenge the mainstream consensus by representing radical or niche positions that have

been neglected or abandoned by mainstream parties, and through anti-establishment or populist messages about the political elites. These features tend to reduce the national coalition potential of these parties (Capoccia, 2002; Marcos-Marne, Plaza-Colodro, and Hawkins, 2020). However, parties with a low coalition potential in parliament will more easily engage in (sometimes extensive) local coalition building (De Lange, 2008, p. 82). This is certainly true for the four Scandinavian parties studied in this thesis. Red was excluded on principle at the national level based on its roots, and the contents of its manifesto. It has nevertheless been part of several municipal and city governments. The Norwegian Progress Party (FrP) collaborated with the mainstream right at the local level long before it was accepted as a parliamentary partner (Art, 2011: p. 162). In 1998, the Swedish Left Party (V) began actively collaborating in parliament with the Social Democrats for the first time (though it has not as of the time of writing joined a national government), after previously having engaged in extensive local coalition building. The Sweden Democrats (SD), so shunned by the mainstream parties that for a long time after the 2018 election nobody was able to form a government with sufficient parliamentary support, cooperated with the mainstream right in several municipalities in the Skåne and Blekinge regions following that same election.

This is the background of the overarching puzzle in this thesis. Scholarship on challenger parties tends to focus on their activities at the national level (for a valuable exception, see Paxton (2023)). However, there is a whole arena of political participation that often precedes and coincides with national government participation, which occurs at the local level. The importance of this participation in the development of these parties remains an unresolved empirical question. Participation in local coalition government is arguably an important activity for political parties, where they can influence policies that matter to the daily lives of citizens. Political parties care about the outcomes of these elections and put considerable resources into gaining local power. This is reflected in campaign spending. In Norway, which alternates between local and national elections every two years, the data show similar levels of campaign spending in national and local election campaigns (SSB, 2023). Not only do local governments offer a pathway to executive power in the short term (the only such pathway for parties with a low national coalition potential), but they can also affect the national role of the party in the longer term. As I argue in this thesis, local governments can serve as showcases of governing ability (this is especially important for nationally excluded parties), aids to the development of national cooperation strategies (serving as blueprints or

cautionary tales in lieu of direct experience in national coalitions), and as training grounds for prospective parliamentarians. In the next chapter, I detail how the effects of local government participation can spill over to the national level through these multi-level mechanisms.

What outcomes might we expect from local government participation? The theoretical expectations in this thesis are largely derived from studies of challenger parties and their behavior at the national level. The literature on challenger parties in government suggests that government participation may put pressure on challengers of all flavors to moderate their ideology, rhetoric, and behavior (Heinisch, 2003; Van Spanje and Van Der Brug, 2007; Berman, 2008; Elman, 2008)[1]. This thesis explores whether such a process occurs at the local level, and if it has a spill-over effect on the national level. Local government participation may be important for broader moderation processes, and it tends to happen before any measurable national-level systemic integration.

As I explain in the theory chapter, participation in coalition governments at the local level is theorized to cause individual politicians and local branches to moderate through similar mechanisms as on the national level. These include the selection of moderate or cooperative branches into local coalitions, compromises with coalition partners in office, the 'pothole-mechanism' (whereby radicalism is abandoned due to time-consuming, practical governance tasks (Berman, 2008)), role constraints, reputation-building efforts, and a winner's boost in democratic satisfaction and pro-system attitudes. In fact, certain of these mechanisms, such as the 'pothole mechanism' may be more important at the local level given that this level is more oriented towards practical issues, and more formally constrained by national policies, smaller budgets, and a narrower policy space (Paxton, 2023: p. 45). These effects may spill over to the national level through multilevel learning effects (Downs, 1998) or the movement of politicians between levels of government (Binderkrantz *et al.*, 2020). Even after government participation occurs at the national level, local government participation is likely to impact the trajectory of the challenger party. National government participation does not seemingly present a barrier to most of the moderating effects theorized to result from local government participation. I argue that local politicians are still likely to reduce policy distances between themselves and potential and actual coalition partners, and they are still subject to the obligations and role restrictions that come with holding office. However, as I explain in the section on the trickle-up effect, parties are likely to value

[1] Though, as I explain in the theory chapter, the empirical record on this question is mixed, and there is by no means a scholarly consensus on the issue.

information regarding the (lack of) success in local coalitions much more highly before national government participation. The movement of politicians from the local to the national level will still occur, however, mediating a multilevel spillover effect.

The impact of processes at the sub-national level on the transition challenger parties sometimes make from the margins to the mainstream core of the political system is often claimed or assumed (Kitschelt, 2007: pp. 1190-1191; Akkerman, de Lange and Rooduijn, 2016: p. 12), but rarely explored. This thesis is an attempt to address this claim. It explores the causes and effects of local government participation for challenger parties at the local level.

The central objective of the thesis is to gauge *whether and in what way participation in local government is associated with more moderate positions, more loyalty to the institutional status quo, and more cooperative behavior for challenger parties*. This can happen both as a precondition to join government and as a consequence of the pressures and constraints faced by the challenger while in power. It also seeks to determine *whether challenger parties are significantly constrained from pursuing their preferred policies in local office*. This relates strongly to the first question. Finally, the thesis examines whether *local participation can impact integration and mainstreaming processes at the national level through multi-level learning and the movement of politicians between levels of government.*

**The context**

These processes have been examined extensively at the national level (Van Spanje and Van Der Brug, 2007; Olsen, Koss, and Hough, 2010; Akkerman and Rooduijn, 2015; Akkerman, de Lange and Rooduijn, 2016), without any clear scholarly consensus about the impact of isolation and government participation respectively on the ideology and behavior of challenger parties. As I will explore in detail in the theory chapter, much scholarship has been devoted to the thesis that participation in ordinary political processes, such as elections and national government formation has a moderating impact on radical parties. Participation in government at the local level has been given much less attention, however (but see Paxton, 2023).

In the methods and design chapter, I highlight several reasons to study local government participation alongside national-level processes. Firstly, I argue that local politics is an important object of study in and of itself. The local level is arguably a valuable

democratic arena. More than national politics, it serves to make politics accessible to ordinary citizens, and it can be an important training ground for democratic participation. Moreover, by granting individual citizens a measure of control over issues that matter greatly in their daily lives, it can serve to counter democratic ills, such as the unresponsiveness of distant politicians or a sense of powerlessness among citizens (Dahl, 1994). Moreover, large proportions of the political activities, elected officials, and public spending in modern democracies exist at this level of government (Trounstine, 2009). There is a reason why political parties invest significant resources in gaining power at the local level.

Secondly, local politics is not isolated from the national level. A large proportion of national politicians are first recruited and socialized in local branches and are active in local politics before moving on to the national level[2]. There is also (to varying degrees) interaction, communication, and learning between local branches and their central parties. These processes are discussed in detail in the theory chapter. Finally, there are methodological reasons to study parties and governments at the local level. Crucially, it allows the researcher to study a large number of cases while limiting the amount of unobserved heterogeneity (e.g., in terms of political culture and history). I argue that local politics in Norway and Sweden is largely analogous to national politics, and the findings from the local level can therefore inform theories of coalition formation and moderation for challenger parties at the national level.

The thesis examines these questions in a particular institutional and systemic context: Norway and Sweden, two countries with multiparty systems and a tradition of coalition formation. The two political systems share several features that make them highly comparable, but which limit the generalizability of the findings. Firstly, each country has a similar number of relevant parties, with the same party families represented in parliament. The same party families (Social Democrats and Conservatives) have been dominant on the left and right in each case. This is largely a result of the similar political institutions and similar political histories in the respective countries over the last century. Each country was for a long time a multiparty system dominated by a social democratic party, which tended to form single-party majority and minority governments. This meant that on those occasions when the social democratic party was ousted from government, it was by a large coalition of

[2] This has been shown to be the case among parliamentarians from a variety of countries, including different political systems, such as Germany (Ohmura *et al.*, 2018), the U.K. (Allen, 2013), and the Netherlands (Turner-Zwinkels and Mills, 2020).

non-socialist parties. This is sometimes referred to as a '*working* multiparty system' (Gallagher, Laver and Mair, 2011, p. 231). With the recent electoral decline of the Social Democrats in both countries, governments on the left are now also dependent on the support or participation of smaller left-wing parties. The coalition game in the two countries is now most aptly described as two-bloc politics, characterized by fairly stable multiparty alliances on the left and right competing for majority support (ibid., p. 197)[3].

The local levels in the two countries share many characteristics. In most municipalities (except those with a very small population) a large subset of the parliamentary parties is present and relevant. Although cross-bloc coalition formation occurs locally, parties seem in general to prefer to collaborate in ideologically compact coalitions and to avoid bloc-crossing coalitions where possible (Gilljam and Karlsson, 2012). As I explain below, there is a good case to be made that local politics in Scandinavia, more than many other contexts, is "national politics in miniature". Other political systems have more pronounced differences between the national and local levels, either because local-only parties are more dominant locally, because the parties are less vertically integrated (leading to large discrepancies in the ideological profiles between levels of government and between different subnational branches of the same party), or because powers delegated to the local level are very limited (pre-empting the need for compromise and concessions). On the one hand, this means that the findings in this thesis will not be directly transferable to studies at the local level in many other countries. On the other hand, it means that the findings at the local level constitute a good analogy for similar processes at the national level across European coalition-based systems, and thus a good basis for using the findings as the foundation for theorizing beyond the local, Scandinavian context.

## Situating the thesis in the literature

This thesis relies on and informs several strands of the literature. In this section, I will highlight three in particular: The literature on coalition formation, the literature on local and multi-level politics, and the literature on challenger parties[4].

[3] Although the growth of the Sweden Democrats has certainly impacted this system in Sweden, as the coming chapters will show.

[4] I consistently use "challenger parties" throughout the thesis, but often rely on models and findings from contributions that classify these parties differently (e.g. radical parties or anti-establishment parties).

*Coalition formation*

The first three empirical chapters focus on how challenger parties make it into government. Of particular interest is whether policy proximity to the mainstream is a precondition for local coalition membership of challenger parties. Should this be the case, it indicates that branches of challenger parties with designs on local office are incentivized to moderate and cooperate already before entering office. The chapters employ an empirical, or non-formal, methodological approach, as opposed to using a priori logical, or formal, modeling (Laver, 1998). This choice enables me to empirically examine the relative importance of the various explanatory variables theorized to impact coalition membership. These explanatory variables are all at the micro-level (the level of individual party branches). The thesis looks at the goals and strategies of these actors and, through the similar systems design and local-level focus, keeps macro-level variables related to systemic features, 'time,' and political culture more or less constant. The outcome of interest is the binary variable of coalition membership for each respective challenger party, rather than coalition composition. All-in-all, this design allows for a study of the branch characteristics that tend to enable coalition participation. A very similar model was employed by De Lange (2008: Chapter 4) to explain the coalition membership of radical right parties in Western Europe. This ensures that I have a good basis for comparing the local-level results with similar results at the national level. One expectation is that ideology is less important as an explanatory factor at the local level, compared to the national level. As Debus and Gross (2016: p. 835) explain the local level is "often seen as a less politicised part of the political system and where decision-making is assumed to follow a more pragmatic, consensual way".

Regarding party goals, a key assumption for the statistical analyses is that parties decide on matters of coalition formation based on their pursuit of policy, office, votes, or some combination of the three (Strøm and Müller, 1999). This is a common assumption in the literature. The behavior of politicians, including in coalition formation processes, is motivated by receiving the spoils of office (power, status, fame, etc.), implementing their preferred policies, or securing votes in the next election. As Strøm and Müller (1999) point out, vote maximization stands out from the rest by being an exclusively *instrumental* goal. Parties pursue votes to get into office, implement policies, or both. In a sense, vote-seeking entails the rejection of office or policy maximization in the short term to maximize these goals in the longer term. For instance, we can say that a politician is vote-seeking when she rejects a coalition agreement that would make the party unpopular in the next election, and hence limit its chances to pursue policies and join governments in the future. All the

explanatory variables included in the coalition formation models are related to one of these three party goals. In the theory chapter, I discuss the relationship between these goals in detail, as well as the unusual tradeoffs challengers are thought to face when making strategic choices.

A limitation of the statistical model used in Chapters 4 and 5 is that it assumes parties to be unitary and does not take into account the role of other actors in the coalition game. Moreover, it cannot account for the various scope conditions that may change the impact of each of the variables included in the model. For example, we can expect a dominant pragmatic faction, and pressure from local unions to increase the size of the policy concessions accepted by a left-wing challenger considering government participation. On the other hand, a mainstream-left party that values office over policy (i.e. is willing to concede many big issues to gain the mayor-post) will reduce the number of concessions necessary for participation, and hence lower the threshold for joining government. The case studies in Chapter 6 (as well as the comparative accounts of Red and SD in Chapters 4 and 5) work to remedy these limitations of the statistical approach. They allow me to take more of the complexity into account, and to include factors not operationalized in the logistic regression analyses that describe the coalition formation of the challenger parties. In this sense, the thesis is part of a strand of literature that seeks to combine the analytical leverage of quantitative and qualitative analysis to examine coalition formation (Bäck and Dumont, 2007).

*Local and multi-level politics*

This dissertation also follows in the footsteps of a growing number of studies that explore coalition formation and party development at the local level, as well as party politics in multilevel settings (Downs, 1998; Backlund, 2020; Paxton, 2023). The methodological advantages – a large N and unit and contextual homogeneity – have prompted many researchers to apply coalition formation theories at the local level (Denters, 1985; Steunenberg, 1992; Bäck, 2003; Skjæveland, Serritzlew and Blom-Hansen, 2007; Serritzlew, Skjæveland and Blom-Hansen, 2008; Loxbo, 2010; Shikano and Linhart, 2010; Olislagers and Steyvers, 2015; Debus and Gross, 2016; Backlund, 2020). As Debus and Gross (2016, p. 835) point out:

> All in all, the study of local coalition formation is one way to solve the problematic, 'incestuous' relationship in coalition research between theory development and data since there is only a limited number of national and regional coalitions.

Put simply, coalition formation theories have generally been tested on the data from which the theories derived in the first place (Skjæveland, Serritzlew, and Blom-Hansen, 2007). This circularity is not ideal and can be remedied by using data from the sub-national level. Beyond the exploration of the determinants of coalition formation with challengers at the local level in Scandinavia, these chapters contribute by testing the robustness of national-level findings on new data.

The thesis is also part of the scholarship that puts parties and power struggles at the center of multi-level studies. As Deschouwer (2003) points out, studies of multi-level governance were long focused on non-party actors, decision-making, and implementation of policies, which made the field of study 'very much a party-free zone' (p. 213). Similarly, Kübler (2015, p. 55) highlights the absence of 'power struggles' from studies of multi-level governance. The parties studied here are multi-level organizations, and I argue that the relationship between the local and national levels is crucial to understanding their development and interactions. Some recent studies (Backlund, 2020; Paxton, 2023) have brought the multi-level perspective to bear on studies of radical parties. However, they have mainly been focused on the influence exerted by the central party on municipal branches. This thesis stands out by emphasizing bottom-up processes. It looks at two mechanisms that mediate a 'trickle-up effect'. Firstly, it looks at multi-level learning effects, borrowing in part from Downs' (1998) model of coalitional learning across levels of government. According to Downs, national parties use information about the (lack of) success (popularity, efficiency, and quality of collaboration) of subnational coalitions when considering untested coalitions at the national level. The thesis also considers multi-level learning *within* the challenger parties, where they may use experiences from local coalitions as cautionary tales or blueprints for or against similar arrangements nationally. Secondly, it looks at the movement of politicians between levels of government. Politicians are commonly recruited at the local level (Allen, 2013; Ohmura *et al.*, 2018; Binderkrantz *et al.*, 2020; Turner-Zwinkels and Mills, 2020). This is where they have their formative political experiences and are socialized into the party culture (Binderkrantz *et al.*, 2020). If there are systematic differences between the branches that participate in local coalitions and those that do not, then it follows that these municipalities might turn out different national politicians once they advance to the central party or parliament. This effect is likely amplified if challenger parties use local government experience as a criterion to select national candidates (Cirone, Cox, and Fiva, (2021) indicate that this is the case in Norway).

*Challenger parties*

Finally, this thesis draws heavily on the literature on parties that challenge the mainstream consensus ideologically and attack the political elites. There is scholarly disagreement about how to classify these parties. To take one example, the Norwegian Progress Party has variously been classified as a (right-wing) populist party (Golder, 2003; Jupskås, 2015; Bjerkem, 2016; Heinze, 2018; Capaul and Ewert, 2021), neoliberal populist party (Mudde, 2007), radical right party (Kestilä and Söderlund, 2007; Rydgren, 2008a; Art, 2011), populist radical right party[5] (Jupskås, 2016c; Otjes *et al.*, 2018), extreme right party (Ignazi, 1992; Downs, 2001, 2002), anti-immigration party (Bjørklund and Andersen, 2002), and challenger party (Kriesi and Schulte-Cloos, 2020). I argue that *challenger party* constitutes the most fruitful classification for this thesis (see the theory chapter for a full elaboration). This is because the concept, as defined here, captures important traits that relate directly to the main questions of the thesis. They are characteristics identified by the literature as incompatible with central aspects of government participation (see theory chapter).

In the literature, there is some disagreement on the definition of challenger party. One popular contribution (De Vries and Hobolt, 2020) defines it simply as a party without executive experience. However, I argue that this definition does not precisely cover the phenomenon of interest. As Zulianello (2020) points out, we get into trouble if we use this definition expecting to (indirectly) capture the type of party that challenges the mainstream consensus and attacks the political establishment. Firstly, this definition is *too broad*, because it includes parties with a completely moderate ideological profile and non-confrontational style, as long as they have not participated in government. In the theory section, I describe such an example from Norwegian politics (the party Sentrum). Secondly, I argue that it is *too narrow* because it excludes actors that continue to challenge the mainstream after government participation at the national level. The core of the challengers' challenge is their ideological positioning in relation to the mainstream (holding positions that have been abandoned or neglected by mainstream parties) and their confrontational behavior and rhetoric toward the political establishment. The definition used in this thesis therefore emphasizes these traits and leaves national government status out.

More specifically, the thesis relies on the literature on *challengers in government*. The key questions addressed by this literature include: How do they get in (e.g. De Lange, 2008; Olsen, Koss and Hough, 2010; Fagerholm, 2021)? How do they affect policy output in a

[5] The ordering of these descriptives varies, so that sometimes the term is "Radical Right-Wing Populist", and elsewhere it is "Populist Radical Right". These are treated as the same classification here.

coalition (Heinisch, 2003; Zaslove, 2004; Luther, 2011; Akkerman, 2012; Paxton, 2023)? How are they affected electorally by government participation (Heinisch, 2003; Akkerman and de Lange, 2012)? How do they adapt (strategically) to government responsibility (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005, 2010; Olsen, Koss and Hough, 2010)? How are their ideological profiles affected by their time in government (Heinisch, 2003; Akkerman and Rooduijn, 2015; Akkerman, Lange, and Rooduijn, 2016)? Several of these questions are examined in this thesis, but only in so far as they relate to the overarching research question. The question of how challenger parties get into government is explored in the first three empirical chapters. Given that policy proximity to the mainstream is an important factor (relative to other explanatory factors), office-oriented branches of the challenger parties are incentivized to moderate to join coalitions. Moreover, to the extent that government participators are advantaged in terms of career progression to the central party, this would also tend to present a barrier for radical dogmatists attempting to advance to the national level. I examine how these parties adapt to power and affect the government's policy output because it reveals something about the relative bargaining power, motivations, and constraints faced by challengers in local office. Most directly, however, this thesis builds on the scholarship that studies the changes to challenger parties' ideological profiles and attitudes of politicians associated with government participation. This literature largely forms the basis of the theoretical expectations.

The key question of the thesis is whether and how a particular type of political participation (joining local coalition governments) impacts the ideology and attitudes of challenger parties and their politicians. As such, the thesis is part of *the 'mainstreaming' literature*. Broadly, this literature looks at the blurring of the boundaries between the mainstream parties on the one hand and challengers on the other. The term 'mainstreaming' has especially been applied to these processes as they relate to the radical right (see for example Akkerman, de Lange, and Rooduijn, 2016), but ideological moderation and integration into the mainstream has been the topic of studies covering radical parties of all flavors, including radical left (e.g. Bale and Dunphy, 2011) and orthodox religious parties (e.g. Schwedler, 2006). As I discuss in the theory section, ideological moderation and a reduction in anti-establishment sentiment are among the potential consequences of participation in 'ordinary political processes,' including government formation. The thesis follows in the footsteps of a growing number of studies that investigate this relationship (for some good examples see Schwedler, 2006; Akkerman, De Lange, and Rooduijn, 2016; Paxton, 2023). It goes beyond most of the existing literature by exploring this relationship at

the local level, comparing left- and right-wing challengers, and by taking multi-level processes into account.

On the question of why parties (in general) change positions, the literature emphasizes leadership changes, electoral decline, positional shifts by neighboring parties, shifts in public opinion, altered economic conditions, and government participation (for a review of this literature, see Fagerholm, 2016). The subset of contributions that looks at participation in coalition government as a source of changes in ideology for challenger parties generally emphasizes moderating mechanisms, such as the systematic exclusion of dogmatic and overly radical parties from government in the first place (Fagerholm, 2021), compromises in office (Akkerman, de Lange and Rooduijn, 2016: p. 15; Capaul and Ewert, 2021), the incompatibility between devotion to radical policies on the one hand and the role of the responsible governor (Mair, 2009; Lefkofridi and Nezi, 2020) who delivers on valence issues (Berman, 2008) on the other, reputation building (Paxton and Peace, 2021), and increased loyalty to the status-quo and satisfaction with the system as parties improve their position and power (Gilljam and Karlsson, 2015). On the other hand, empirical studies that have found a lack of moderation among challengers in government typically posit ways around these mechanisms, such as "one-foot-in, one-foot-out" strategies (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005, 2010; McDonnell and Newell, 2011) and logrolling on policies in cases where the challenger and the mainstream partner do not emphasize the same ideological dimension (de Lange, 2008, p. 192; Akkerman, 2016). Such strategies are often motivated by the wish to avoid electoral punishment or to avoid betraying key ideological principles. The causal model presented in the next chapter will build largely on this strand of the literature.

A handful of recent studies have looked at the impact of *local government* participation on the ideological profile of challenger parties (Paxton, 2023) and the attitudes of politicians (Esaiasson, Gilljam and Karlsson, 2013; Gilljam and Karlsson, 2015). Paxton's contribution, while thematically comprehensive and impressively detailed, is limited to the *radical right* in local power and relies on a small-n design with case studies of four radical right-led municipalities across different countries (each paired with a mainstream-led municipality in the same country). By contrast, this thesis covers challengers on both sides of the ideological spectrum and combines large-n analyses with single municipality case studies. By doing so, it reaps the analytical benefits of qualitative and quantitative analysis. The case studies are based on detailed descriptions of political processes in four specific municipalities and enable the analysis to account for factors that are difficult to model statistically, such as time ordering, context, and complex interactions between key variables. They also allow me

to reveal and consider variables beyond those identified by the literature on challenger parties in government. The statistical analysis allows me to isolate and quantify significant associations between variables, estimate the relative magnitudes of these, and maximize generalizability beyond the cases examined. The broader scope and methodological pluralism are among the key contributions of the thesis.

In summary, the thesis builds on and contributes to several branches of the literature. The first three empirical chapters build heavily on the coalition formation literature. It uses a specific (non-formal, empirical, micro-level) model, that has been employed successfully at the national level (De Lange, 2008) to account for features of challenger parties that are associated with participation in government. It contributes to this literature by testing some of its key findings using new data, and by examining their relevance at the local level. It also contributes to the literature on local and multi-level politics. It uses insights from this literature to examine hitherto underexplored arenas for party development and examines the sub-national relevance of models developed to describe important party processes at the national level. Finally, the thesis relies heavily on the literature on challenger parties. This literature is used to define key concepts and as the basis for the causal model employed in the thesis. The thesis builds most directly on the contributions that use the ideological development of challenger parties as a dependent variable, and government participation as an independent variable. The thesis addresses a clear research gap in this scholarship by examining the impact of government participation for challenger parties at the local level. I argue that this is an important political arena in and of itself. It is also theorized to impact the national level through several multi-level spill-over mechanisms. Moreover, I argue that local politics in Norway and Sweden constitute a strong analogy for national politics and that the findings at the local level therefore have implications well beyond the context of this study.

**Research design, methods, and data**

The methods and design chapter will elaborate on the initial set-up of the study, issues of case selection, the merits of the multi-methods approach, and details about the large-N and case studies (measurement, data sources, and analytical techniques). I will therefore only briefly summarize these issues here and refer the reader to Chapter 2 for further details.

In terms of the initial set-up of the thesis, analytical leverage and scope are maximized by examining challenger parties per se, rather than left-wing or right-wing challengers in particular, by focusing on the local level, allowing for quantitative and qualitative analyses of a small number of parties, and by addressing both the causes and the

consequences of government participation, as well as a trickle-up effect. The particular features of Norwegian and Swedish local politics ensure that the thesis has relevance well beyond the context of the study.

In terms of case selection, Norway and Sweden are chosen as two highly comparable political systems, each with one challenger party that has a relatively long history in parliament, a history of extensive local government participation, and has formed alliances with other parties at the national level (The Left Party and the Progress Party), and one challenger with a short history in parliament, a small number of local government experiences, and very little experience of inclusion in national alliances (Red and the Sweden Democrats)[6]. Chapter 2 will situate these cases in a broader context and describe the criteria for selecting municipality cases.

The thesis' multi-methods approach is justified as a means of strengthening the robustness of the conclusions in this thesis. The large-N analyses comprise a series of logistic regressions examining the determinants of coalition membership, and OLS regressions, descriptive statistics, and T-tests assessing the effects of government participation on the ideological profile of the challengers and the attitudes of their politicians. These analyses allow me to isolate associations between distinct variables, assess their relative magnitudes, and draw generalizable conclusions. To complement this, the case studies allow me to examine the mechanisms theorized to mediate these relationships, specify complex relationships between the variables and contextual factors beyond the statistical models, and identify the scope conditions that amplify or undermine each mechanism, which helps to explain the variation in the outcome.

In terms of data, measurement, and materials, chapter 2 describes the sources and operationalization of key variables for the quantitative analysis. Significant space is devoted to a discussion of the newspaper surveys (Voting Advice Applications) that form the basis for the measurement of ideology through large parts of the thesis, and how this compares to other measurements of party ideology, such as expert surveys and manifesto coding. The chapter also provides descriptions of the other datasets employed throughout the dissertation and the variation in access to materials across the four case studies.

Finally, limitations of the study are also discussed, especially in terms of a lack of strict comparability that follows from the different histories of the parties, the relatively small

[6] Note that the Sweden Democrats currently operates as a support party for a right-wing government, but that until the 2022 election, they were systematically excluded at the national level, and faced a cordon sanitaire in most municipalities.

geographic scope of the thesis, and the absence of normative analysis despite significant normative implications.

**Outline of the thesis**

The dissertation will proceed as follows: Chapter 1 introduces the key concepts, causal model, and mechanisms of the thesis. It also discusses the empirical record on the inclusion-moderation thesis.

Chapter 2: See previous section on design, methods, and data.

Chapter 3 introduces the four parties. For each party, it outlines its origins, ideological development, electoral success over time, the ideological and demographic make-up of its electorate and membership, its relationship to the political mainstream, and its development at the local level.

Chapter 4 is the first empirical chapter of the thesis. It examines the determinants of coalition formation for the two Norwegian parties. Of particular interest is whether mainstreaming is a precondition for challengers to participate in government. In the case of the Progress Party, which has a large number of local coalitions, a quantitative approach is employed. Logistic regression analysis is used to estimate the effect of (sociocultural and socioeconomic) policy proximity, vote shares of the Progress Party and the mayor party, and the Progress Party's vote increase since the last election on the probability that FrP will join a local government as a junior partner. Policy positions are simplified to two main dimensions using PCF analysis. This is a type of factor analysis used to simplify a large set of variables (in our case, survey questions about political opinion) to a smaller set of factors (in our case two ideological dimensions), based on how various opinions go together empirically. I find that two variables are significantly associated with government participation: (socioeconomic) policy proximity, and electoral success. In the case of Red, which has a much smaller number of local coalitions, each case is examined in detail. I use a combination of media sources (national and local newspaper accounts and interviews) and internal party documents (member's magazine, party website, recordings of strategy conferences) to gauge the causes of coalition formation in each case. Also in Red's case, policy proximity and electoral strength are important determinants of coalition formation.

Chapter 5 examines the same question as Chapter 4 but for the Swedish parties. Again, for the Left Party, with its extensive participation in local government, I use logistic regression analysis on a dataset including coalition participation, policy positions, and election results. Like Red, the Sweden Democrats' cases of local government participation before 2022 are each examined in detail, mainly using media sources. After 2022, when SD's number of local governments grew substantially, however, I used the same procedure to examine the determinants of coalition formation for SD as I had for the Left Party. The results from Sweden are similar to the Norwegian findings. Policy proximity, in this case on both policy dimensions, is an important predictor of coalition formation in the case of the Left Party. Again, however, proximity on the socio-economic dimension was more closely associated with coalition membership. Based on the significance of the seat-share variables, I also conclude that office-seeking is an important motivation for including the Left Party in government. However, the Left Party seems to be invited into government when the Social Democrats are electorally large and do not rely on coalition partners in the center. Centrist parties are generally quite averse to collaborating with the Left Party. Office-seeking Social Democrat branches therefore tend to exclude the Left Party when they must appeal to centrist parties to gain office. Due to the cordon sanitaire against the Sweden Democrats, even instances of low ideological distance and high electoral representation have ended in exclusion. This seems to have changed after 2022 when SD formed a national alliance with three parties on the right. Since then, SD's local coalition formation has been more similar to that of other parties, with a significant impact of size and (sociocultural) ideology variables.

Chapter 6 examines the determinants of coalition formation through four single case studies of coalition formation. Due to the most similar design of the thesis, both in terms of country-selection, and municipality selection, the four cases face very similar institutional constraints, and the four parties are similarly positioned (as junior partners entering government after a long period in opposition). Since the outcome in this chapter is identical in all cases and known prior to the analysis, the main functions of the chapter are to identify equifinality (different paths to power), important variables not accounted for by the model, as well influential contextual features and complex interactions between variables that are not well accounted for in the statistical models of the previous chapters. Here, each party branch's path to local power is examined using data from interviews, newspaper sources, local manifestos, and the newspaper surveys cited above. I examine each of the factors identified as important determinants of coalition formation in Chapters 4 and 5 and describe

how their operation varies depending on the context and particulars of each case. This allows me to make stronger causal claims about the relationship between explanans (vote-shares and relative issue positions) and explanandum (coalition membership) because I can observe the causal chain between them, and describe precisely *how* each variable matters, and under what circumstances.

Chapter 7 employs data sources similar to those in Chapter 4. Here, the impact of local government participation on the profile and development of party branches is examined in Norway. For the Progress Party, two successive Voting Advice Applications are used (2019, 2023) to estimate changes in policy preferences for branches in local coalition government, compared to in opposition. The further analysis is based on newspaper accounts and municipal council protocols. The analysis shows that the Progress Party changed significantly more in government on the question of refugees. I attribute this mainly to the difficulty in building a voting majority around FrP's position on this issue in municipal councils (the compromise mechanism). Again, Red's cases are all examined in detail using media sources (national and local newspaper accounts), internal party documents (member's magazine, recording of strategy conferences), and the newspaper survey cited above. A systematic comparison of the VAA responses of Red branches that have been in government and similar municipalities where it has not is also presented. Red is constrained in government in several ways, including by the demands of coalition partners (compromise), budgets, policy investments of previous governments, and central government policies (responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff). Red abandoned certain important campaign issues due to these constraints. These included key issues related to social aid, public ownership, and taxation. On the other hand, Red has been highly conscious of these constraints and engaged in strategies to mitigate them.

Chapter 8 examines the impact of local government participation on challenger party branches in Sweden. The analysis of the Left Party is based on two rounds of the Swedish Local and Regional Councils Survey (KOLFU, 2008; 2012) to assess whether government participation is associated with more moderate policy positions and more pro-system views. The unit of analysis in this section is individual politicians. Differences between politicians in power and politicians in opposition are assessed using OLS regression analysis and a series of t-tests. I find that Left Party politicians in local power are systematically and significantly different from those in opposition. They are more moderate on all policy dimensions, more pro-system, and less anti-establishment. Having completed a government period in only a

handful of municipalities, the Sweden Democrats' local governments are examined in detail mainly using data from media accounts (newspaper articles, interviews in newspaper/radio/TV). I also summarize changes in responses to the VAA between the two elections. I find that due to the electoral strength of SD in the cases where it was able to participate in government between 2018 and 2022, it has been much less constrained by the demands of coalition partners, compared to the other parties examined in this thesis. On the other hand, it has been constrained by national policies and regulations, to a greater extent than the other party cases.

Chapter 9 examines the municipality case studies and uses a similar source material as in Chapter 5 (Interview data, party material, radio interviews, and newspaper sources. The key question in this chapter is whether and how each branch was constrained and moderated by its time in power. In this chapter, municipal council protocols are also examined in detail, to analyze the degree of unity within the coalition. The chapter informs the theoretical model presented in Chapter 1 by clarifying the scope conditions under which each of the theorized mechanisms operates. It shows that while the impact of each mechanism is determined by further factors, such as initial policy proximity, relative bargaining power, awareness of the tradeoffs in government, and organizational strength of the party branch.

Finally, chapter 10 examines the trickle-up effect. This chapter uses a variety of sources. Surveys are used to assess the relationship between actors at various levels within the party and to describe differences between locally rooted politicians and those without a local background. For the two cases with an extensive history of local government participation (V and FrP), datasets were constructed, recording the pre-parliamentary careers of members of parliament. Specifically, I recorded whether each MP had a background in local politics and local coalition government. To examine the differences between the groups of national politicians, I looked at records of parliamentary activity (proposals, questions, interpellations). The practice of coalitional learning and strategic showcasing were examined for all cases using newspaper sources and party documents (e.g., campaign materials). I show that all the parties engage in strategic showcasing of local coalitions. The parties use local governments to signal their governing ability (to voters and potential coalition partners), in lieu of direct national evidence. The cases of the Progress Party and the Left Party also show that local government experience is very common among national politicians. While these politicians tend to be about as active in parliament as their colleagues without local executive experience, they also tend to flock to parliamentary committees that deal with local issues.

This in turn determines their issue emphasis. The case of the Progress Party also demonstrates that locally anchored politicians communicate with voters in a different way than other politicians. They emphasize the representation of local communities and deemphasize far-right issues, such as immigration and law and order.

In chapter 11, I present a reassessment of the causal model. I conclude that challengers in power generally get to pursue their preferred policies, but only in a constrained way. I describe whether and how each mechanism and causal relationship should be refined, given the findings in the previous chapters. I conclude that each of the mechanisms identified in the theory chapter is moderated by further factors. Role constraints related to national rules and policies depend on how radical the challenger's goals are relative to the national mainstream. Budgetary constraints on policy are moderated by the cost of the challenger's policies and are generally a greater limitation for left-wing parties. The pothole mechanism is moderated by electoral representation and organizational strength. The compromise mechanism depends on the degree of bargaining power obtained by the challenger within the coalition (e.g., as a function of the level of representation in the municipal council). I also describe how the trickle-up effect is conditional in part on the degree of national inclusion, the degree of representation in local government over time, and the success of local incumbents. I also consider the implications of the thesis for future research and the broader discussion of the relationship between the mainstream and radical challengers. I conclude that future research on the development of challenger parties needs to take the local level into account, given that this is an arena where politicians pursue radical policies, are constrained by moderating mechanisms, are recruited to further careers in national politics, and are used as cautionary tales, blueprints, or showcases by national actors. I also argue that, given the politicized nature of local politics in Norway and Sweden, the findings presented here have direct relevance to studies of government participation at the national level in other coalition-based systems.

## Chapter 1: Theory

This chapter will outline and describe the key concepts in this thesis. It will also outline the causal relationship between local coalition membership and mainstreaming for challenger parties, as well as a trickle-up or spill-over effect from the local to the national level. Based on previous work on the topic, the chapter defines challenger parties, accounts for key aspects of these parties, discusses the dimensionality of the West European political space, conceptualizes mainstreaming, outlines the central mechanisms theorized to mediate local coalition membership and mainstreaming, outlines potential strategies challengers can use to avoid the moderating effects of incumbency, and proposes two pathways of 'trickle-up mainstreaming,' whereby local mainstreaming and inclusion spills over to national politics. The chapter ends with a summary of the theoretical model.

### *Challenger party*

The first theoretical task of this chapter is to establish what kind of party I am describing and enumerate its characteristics. In this thesis, I am interested in the kind of party that challenges the mainstream consensus through its ideological positions and rhetoric. I want to know what effect a particular kind of democratic participation, local coalition membership, has on these parties. These parties, occupying a position beyond the mainstream, are theorized to face particular constraints in coalition government, which is at the root of the overarching puzzle in this thesis.

There are two main approaches to defining and classifying 'challenger parties' in the literature. The first approach is empirically driven. It includes all parties that have not yet participated in national government and excludes all parties that have participated in government. This was employed in a popular contribution by De Vries and Hobolt (2020) who define challengers simply as:

> Those parties that have not yet held the reins of power: the parties without government experience (p. 17).

The key argument in favor of such a definition is parsimony. Studies that rely on this definition readily admit that they are interested in something beyond the mere absence of governing experience. For instance, Hobolt and Tilley (2016), who employ the same definition, place their contribution within the literature on parties that "defy existing patterns of party competition by rejecting the traditional economic dimension of politics and mobilizing on new issues or adopting more extreme positions on existing issues" (p. 974).

They also emphasize populism and a rejection of the political establishment as central features of interest. As such, defining challengers as "parties without government experience" is a mere operationalization, which is meant to capture radical, niche, populist, and/or anti-establishment parties indirectly (ibid.). However, researchers run into some problems if they use such an operational definition.

As Zulianello (2020) points out, using this definition involves excluding a whole host of parties that may continue to challenge the mainstream consensus through radicalism, nicheness, populism, and/or rejection of the establishment after participating in government. He highlights the fact that around 41 percent of contemporary populist parties (according to his classification) have been in national government. In fact, several studies highlight the fact that such parties sometimes maintain radical, anti-establishment profiles *while in office* (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005, 2010; McDonnell and Newell, 2011). On the other hand, this operationalization means including parties with completely moderate, pro-system profiles, if they are without government experience at the national level.

Consider the following example: In 2020, a new political party called Sentrum was established in Norway by former members of the Labor Party (AP) and the Christian People's Party (KrF) (Garvik, 2024). This party would be included in the challenger category according to DeVries and Hobolt's single defining feature, lack of executive experience. However, it presents no real discursive or metapolitical challenge to the mainstream. It has not engaged in issue entrepreneurship or taken any ideological positions far from the mainstream. In fact, it has run on a fairly mainstream platform (by current Norwegian standards), emphasizing green growth, solidarity with underprivileged groups (refugees, low-income people, unemployed, etc.) and globally furthering the UN sustainable development goals (Partiet Sentrum, 2021). Nor has it employed anti-establishment rhetoric against the dominant parties. It has so far not been electorally successful, gaining only 0,3 percent of the vote in the 2021 general election, despite having recruited experienced politicians from established center-left and center-right parties (Garvik, 2024). This party is hardly of interest to the literature on 'parties that challenge the mainstream consensus.'

On the one hand, then, the empirically driven definition is too narrow because it excludes parties that continue to challenge the mainstream after having participated in government, or even while holding office. On the other hand, it is too wide because it includes parties that pose no discursive or behavioral challenge to the established 'cartel' of parties, despite having no executive experience.

The other approach, to which this thesis subscribes, is to construct a theoretically driven definition that highlights central characteristics of the parties of interest (Hino, 2012). Several contributions to the challenger party literature use this approach. Ignazi (2021), for example, defines challengers in terms of (a) a radical opposition to the mainstream, and (b) the practice of contesting the mainstream's 'right to govern.' Van Spanje and De Graaf (2018) use the term to refer to anti-immigration and communist parties, as the main party families offering radical or anti-system discursive challenges against the mainstream. Similarly, Schulte-Cloos (2018) uses the term to refer to parties outside the ideological mainstream (she includes green, radical left, and populist radical right parties). Hernández (2018) attempts to resolve the 'narrowness' problem of the empirically driven definition by including both the parties that "do not ordinarily lead or participate in national cabinets" and those that "adopt an anti-elitist and critical stance about established national political parties" (p. 464)[7]. He defines mainstream parties as the inverse of this (i.e. those that ordinarily participate in government and do not adopt anti-elitist stances).

Some common features of these theoretically driven definitions can be outlined. Firstly, scholars agree that the challenger challenges the mainstream from the outside. In other words, challengers are non-mainstream parties. This means that a good definition of 'challenger party' relies on a clear conception of 'mainstream party'. Second, and related to this, the contributions emphasize that the challenge goes beyond ordinary competition on established policy issues. Most of the accounts of challenger parties outline some combination of radicalism, nicheness, anti-establishment outlook, and/or populism as key features. Note that none of these features are binary. There are degrees of radicalism, nicheness, anti-establishment outlook, and populism. Where one draws the definitional line depends on the judgment of the researcher, as well as the mainstream establishment against which the specific challenger party is defined[8].

Mainstream parties are seldom explicitly defined in the literature. As Moffit (2022) points out, they often function as a 'norm' against which other, "more exotic" party types can be defined and contrasted. We can therefore get a good sense of what mainstream parties are *not* from the literature. Mainstream parties are not single-issue, niche, anti-establishment, extremist or populist (ibid.). Akkerman et al. (2016: p. 7) define a mainstream party

[7] Note that this would not resolve the problem illustrated by the example of Sentrum. One would still have to include parties that offer no discursive challenge to the mainstream as long as they do not ordinarily participate in government.

[8] A run-of-the-mill Republican in the U.S. would be considered radical in a Scandinavian ideological context, for instance.

(positively) as one with centrist policy positions, high salience of socioeconomic issues (as opposed to sociocultural ones), and loyalty and commitment to the (liberal democratic) institutional status quo[9]. There are three components to this definition: positionality (centrist), dimensionality (socioeconomic), and systemic outlook (pro-system/pro-status quo). This largely mirrors the elements of challenger parties enumerated above.

In summary, the thesis studies *challenger parties* defined as political parties discursively challenging the mainstream from without through radical or niche policy positions and anti-establishment rhetoric. The methods and design chapter contains a discussion of how the four parties in this thesis were chosen in light of this definition, which Norwegian and Swedish challengers were excluded, and why.

*Challenger parties' goals and tradeoffs*

As many previous studies (e.g., Dunphy and Bale, 2011; Akkerman, De Lange, and Rooduijn, 2016), this thesis assumes that challenger parties, like other parties, are motivated by the pursuit of office, policy, and votes in some combination (Strøm and Müller, 1999). The literature gives us an idea of challenger parties' weighting of these goals. It also tells us that they face special tradeoffs that mainstream parties do not experience to the same extent.

First, we can note that challenger parties are interested in joining governments. Generally, parties are interested in joining governments both for the spoils of office (cabinet portfolios, status, prestige, influence, etc.) and for the chance to influence government policies. Challenger parties on the far left and far right generally do not choose to stay out of the national coalition game despite the substantial tradeoffs involved (Dunphy and Bale, 2011; Akkerman, De Lange, and Rooduijn, 2016). March (2008: p. 13) notes that:

> Since 1989 there has been no example of a left party in advanced liberal democracy that has turned down a realistic offer to join a government coalition

Similarly, Akkerman and Rooduijn (2016: p. 12) highlight that:

> Radical right-wing populist parties have rarely declined offers to participate in government coalitions.[10]

Beyond the spoils of office and the chance to impact policy, challenger parties often have a reputational motivation to participate in government. For challenger parties, burdened by

[9] Note that this definition, while highly functional in terms of operationalization, is contingent on the predominance in politics of socioeconomic issues, and the presence of a liberal democratic status quo. This limits the scope somewhat in terms of which countries and time periods the definition applies to.

[10] We should note, however, that offers to join a coalition are unlikely to be made if it is clear that the recipient will reject the offer.

reputations as protest parties unfit for office, joining a government enables them to show voters and other parties that "they can handle it and stay the course" (Dunphy and Bale, 2011: p. 494). On the other hand, it is often claimed that challenger parties are less office-oriented than mainstream parties (e.g., Akkerman and Rooduijn, 2016: p. 12). As I elaborate below, this has to do with how challenger parties pursue policy, their position within most coalitions, and the outsized electoral punishment they are likely to experience if they moderate in office (Van Spanje, 2011).

Challenger parties also pursue policies. Formulating and impacting public policy is a raison d'etre for all political parties. Standard models of 'policy-seeking' parties posit that a party will join coalitions if its inclusion in government would secure government policies that are closer to its policy preferences (Pedersen, 2012). As a refinement of this model, some scholars distinguish between policy influence and policy purity as two policy-related goals that must often be traded off against each other (ibid.). Thinking about them as ideal types, the policy-influencing party will be flexible and accept large concessions, while the policy-purifying party will be ideologically rigid and view compromises as 'selling out' its principles. Challenger parties are often described as closer to the latter type (e.g., Akkerman and Rooduijn, 2016). Governing in a coalition is much more compatible with goals of policy influence than of policy purity. The tradeoff challengers experience between office and policy is therefore thought to be greater than for other parties. Moreover, compared to a policy-influencing party, the policy purifier is incentivized to grow much larger electorally before joining a coalition. This is because the tradeoff between purity and influence is smaller for parties with a great deal of bargaining power within a coalition. From a vote-maximizing perspective, there are also strategic reasons to be ideologically rigid for a challenger party. Adams et al. (2006) find for instance that unlike mainstream parties, radical right, communist, and green parties are punished by voters whenever they moderate their policy positions. They also find that these parties do not respond to shifts in public opinion, unlike their mainstream counterparts. In short, while both mainstream and challenger parties pursue policies, challenger parties have a smaller 'policy horizon' (Warwick, 2005), or at least one that largely does not overlap with the demands likely to be placed on them in government coalitions. This means that in their case compromise and concessions are more painful, and more severely punished by voters.

Besides office and policy, challenger parties pursue votes. As argued by Strøm and Müller (1999) this is never anything but an instrumental goal. Votes have no intrinsic value

for political parties, but they are instrumental in maximizing government participation and policy influence. Nevertheless, parties sometimes forego chances to join governments or influence policies because it would be electorally costly. In these cases, they are prioritizing long-term prospects over short-term rewards. Being on the ideological fringe, challengers on the far left and far right tend to have fewer options in coalition building compared to a centrist mainstream party of the same size, which may collaborate to the left and the right. Akkerman et al. note this and argue that:

> To compensate for this handicap, they are likely to strengthen their bargaining position through electoral growth (Akkerman et al., 2016a, p. 14).

This means that parties on the fringes are incentivized to weigh vote-seeking strategies more heavily than centrist parties and attempt to maximize bargaining power through a high seat share in the legislature before joining a coalition. On the other hand, parties that emphasize a different ideological dimension than their coalition partners have the option to logroll in policy negotiations (see discussion below). Parties that prioritize the immigration issue, but not economic policies can happily make concessions when it comes to taxation or economic development, in exchange for more influence over refugee policy, for instance. The perceived reduction in responsiveness to voters that comes with governing in a coalition can also be mitigated through strategies such as 'one-foot-in, one-foot-out' and agreements to disagree on issues central to the party identity. These will be described below.

In summary, while challenger parties, like mainstream parties, are motivated by the pursuit of office, policy, and votes, they do weigh these goals differently and face more severe tradeoffs between them. Specifically, challenger parties are theorized to experience a more acute incompatibility between office-seeking on the one hand and the pursuit of policy and votes on the other. This is because challenger parties generally place a greater value on policy purity and are punished more severely by voters if they adjust their policy positions in a more moderate direction. As we shall see, governing in a coalition is theorized to constrain the challenger's pursuit of policy and pressure it to moderate.

### *The Dimensionality of West European Politics*

Throughout the thesis, the term 'ideological dimensions' is used in discussions of how parties are positioned in relation to each other. Political parties appeal to voters and take stances on a wide variety of issues. When describing and theorizing about party politics, it is common to

aggregate these stances into broader policy dimensions of issues that go together thematically and empirically. Any description that places parties on policy dimensions is, by necessity, a simplification. No two policy questions are perfectly correlated among voters and politicians. It does, however, rely on the notion that parties or voters that hold one opinion also tend to hold a series of related opinions.

For example, politicians who promote welfare expansion also tend to hold other economically 'left-wing' positions, such as increased taxation of high incomes, expansion of workers' rights, or opposition to private education and healthcare. The idea is that there is a latent dimension (economic ideology) causing individual politicians, voters, or parties to take each of these positions. To a lesser extent, however, these socioeconomic positions have also been associated with specific positions on law and order, traditional morality, and the national way of life. An even broader and more stylized description of political spaces can therefore aggregate all these policy positions into a single dimension. How many dimensions one includes in an analysis depends, firstly, on how much one wants to simplify "the splendid complexity of tastes in any real political system" (Laver and Hunt, 1992: p. 15). This decision must be guided by the research objectives. There is a tradeoff here between parsimony and accuracy or nuance.

A second consideration when describing the dimensionality of political systems is the salience of the various dimensions for the voters and the parties themselves. We could ask ourselves what kind of issues parties in a given system need to agree on to form durable alliances for example. If parties attach no importance to a dimension, there is no reason for a researcher to include it in the analysis. If party competition and cooperation are completely dominated by economic questions, then the researcher does not necessarily need to include other dimensions.

There is scholarly disagreement on the question of how many dimensions structure party competition in Western Europe. Some argue that party competition in Western Europe can be described in terms of positions on a single, broad, left-right dimension (e.g., Knutsen, 1998; Van Der Brug, 1999; Gabel and Huber, 2000). These authors believe that a single collection of empirically related positions is foundational to political behavior in Western Europe. In other words, there are no secondary dimensions that systematically determine how citizens vote, and how parties form alliances; or if there are any such dimensions, they vary across time and space to such an extent as to be impractical for general or comparative theories of political behavior (Huber and Inglehart, 1995). The primary dimension is invariably described as dominated by socioeconomic issues (economic or class conflict). This

speaks to the historical importance of the class cleavage in West European politics. The class cleavage has been important to central political actors (i.e. used to mobilize voters and distinguish between allies and rivals in the coalition game), and it has been central in almost every European country (Gallagher, Laver and Mair, 2011: p. 285). Other cleavages, such as center-periphery, rural-urban relations, and church-state "emerged in ways that were specific to particular countries" (ibid.). Even though political parties disagree and compete on a number of dimensions that are not directly related to economic or class conflict, it has not been unreasonable for researchers to simplify the political space to a single dimension dominated by socioeconomic questions, especially in comparative analyses covering Western Europe.

On the other hand, several scholars have identified a secondary dimension that is fairly stable over time and that describes political competition across many national contexts. In particular, significant space has been devoted to describing a new cultural, or value-based dimension. Earlier contributions that operated with two key dimensions also tended to distinguish between a cultural and an economic dimension (Rokkan, 1999). However, the cultural dimension was previously dominated by religious conflicts, between Catholics, Protestants, and secularists in various constellations. The new cultural dimension ranges from positions associated with New Left parties to those associated with New Right parties (Kriesi, 2010). Hooghe et al. (2002) refer to this dimension as GAL/TAN, as it ranges from green, alternative, and libertarian to traditional, authoritarian, and nationalist. Simon Bornschier (2010) refers to it as the libertarian-universalistic vs. traditionalist-communitarian dimension[11]. This transformed cultural dimension was defined, first, by the New Left mobilization and "rising diffusion of universalistic values" from the 1960s, and second, by populist right-wing parties as the driving force of traditionalist and communitarian value diffusion, particularly from the 1990s (ibid.). Kriesi et al. (2006) argue that this new, second dimension is part of a structural cleavage, between the 'winners' and 'losers' of globalization. New Left and New Right parties have worked to increase the salience of value- and culture-based issues related to globalization. The argument goes, then, that since the rise of new challengers on the left and right, political competition in Western Europe is satisfactorily described in terms of *two dominant ideological dimensions*. One is economic, and the other is

[11] In many party systems, the two dimensions are orthogonal and parties and voters can in principle take on any combination of positions on the two scales. For instance, in Sweden SD is socioeconomically centrist and TAN, the Christian Democrats are socioeconomically right-wing and TAN, the Center party is socioeconomically right-wing and GAL, the Greens are socioecomically left-wing and GAL.

cultural, and value based. If we can place parties and voters on these two dimensions, we are well-placed to describe electoral and coalition politics in Western Europe.

This thesis operates with two orthogonal dimensions: one socioeconomic and one sociocultural. On the socioeconomic dimension, the left pole is characterized by positions that are pro-redistribution, high public spending, expansion and protection of workers' rights, and anti-privatization. On the right, individual economic rights and freedoms are emphasized. This position entails resistance to taxation for the purpose of redistribution and poverty relief, rights of businesses to organize and operate (more) freely and favoring privatization of public services. On the sociocultural dimension, one pole (GAL) favors liberal policies in terms of lifestyle, expansive civil liberties, environmental protection, and multiculturalism. The other pole (TAN) favors law and order, assimilation of immigrants and cultural minorities, traditional values, and the preservation of national character and identity. The factor analyses in later chapters confirm the presence of two orthogonal factors among politicians in each country – one dominated by economic issues and one by cultural issues.

*Locating the challengers in a two-dimensional space*

The two types of challenger parties treated in this thesis (far left and far right) can be broadly described in terms of the salience and positions they occupy on these two dimensions. The far right is characterized by the high salience they give to the sociocultural dimension. Issues such as immigration and law and order are generally the most important to their voters (e.g. Sipma and Berning, 2021). The parties tend to prioritize these issues in policy negotiations (Akkerman, 2012), voter communications (Rydgren, 2018), and give them significant space in their manifestos (Lehmann and Zobel, 2018). In terms of positioning, they are clearly on the TAN end of the spectrum, promoting stricter immigration policies, favoring assimilation over diversity on the question of integration, and the preservation of traditional and national values. In fact, challengers on the far right were in large part responsible for raising the salience of this dimension in Western Europe and for defining its content.

On the other hand, far right challengers give much less importance to the socioeconomic dimension. There is, moreover, much more scholarly disagreement about the contents of their economic agendas. In an early, influential comparative study of radical right challengers, Kitschelt and McGann (1995) argue that they owe their electoral success to a combination of cultural authoritarianism and neoliberal economic policies. However, since the mid-1990s, there has been a marked decline in the neo-liberal preferences of these parties

(Eger and Valdez, 2015). De Lange (2007) suggests that a combination of more centrist economic positions and authoritarian cultural positions became a 'new winning formula' to replace the combination of pro-market and culturally authoritarian positions that previously characterized these parties. Empirically, challengers on the right are spread out across the socioeconomic dimension (Mudde, 2007: p. 123; Otjes *et al.*, 2018). As Otjes et al. (2018) point out, this is in part because the socioeconomic dimension is not central to the character of these parties. They are therefore more flexible on this dimension and can occupy and abandon specific positions according to voter preferences.

Some argue that due to the high salience of the cultural dimension for far-right challengers, their economic positions derive partly from sociocultural considerations. Häusermann and Kriesi (2015) for instance show that certain economic questions have been subsumed into the cultural dimension in a conflict over 'distributive deservingness' (e.g. welfare chauvinism). Similarly, Ennser-Jedenastik (2016) and later Otjes et al. (2018) argue that the socioeconomic policy positions of far-right challenger parties are structured by their core, cultural positions. In this perspective, the parties on the far right are united in their socioeconomic positions by promoting economic nativism (expressed as welfare chauvinism and economic protectionism), economic authoritarianism (identifying fraudsters and scroungers on the welfare state and distinguishing them from deserving recipients of social support), and economic populism (proposals to cut spending on the 'political elites' and limit the role of managers and civil servants).

Contrary to right-wing challengers, left-wing challengers are united by their positions on the socioeconomic dimension. We can divide these left parties broadly into two categories: a traditional section (old-left/communist parties) and a New Left section (see Gomez, Morales and Ramiro (2016)). These two groups share a desire for social equality, a wish to transform the (neo-liberal) capitalist economic system, Marxist (inspired) analysis of class relations, and a self-image as a party '*to the left of*, and not merely *on the left of* social democracy' (March, 2008: p. 3). They differ in their emphasis on New Left (GAL) issues, such as feminism, environmental protection, anti-racism, and cultural diversity (Gomez, Morales and Ramiro, 2016).

It is not the case that 'traditional' left-wing challengers are all continuations of 'old' communist parties, while all New Left challengers have more recent roots. Several of the parties examined by Gomez et al. (ibid.) have gone through transformations from traditional to New Left. Moreover, the distinction is more related to salience than position. There is broad agreement among far-left parties on the vision of an economically equitable society, as

well as support for feminism, ecology, and multiculturalism. The difference is in terms of how highly these issues are prioritized among voters, in policy negotiations, and in their respective manifestos. It is also important to bear in mind that these categories are ideal types and not real-world binaries where each party falls neatly into one category or the other. Overall, however, left-wing challengers emphasize the economic dimension more heavily than right-wing challengers. They articulate "a renewed version of the old class conflict" (Kriesi and Schulte-Cloos, 2020: p. 3).

***Mainstreaming***

A key concept in this thesis is that of mainstreaming. This is the dependent variable in the empirical chapters. Compared to the related concept of moderation, mainstreaming (as used in the literature on the development of radical parties) is more clearly developed as an analytical concept. Broadly, mainstreaming refers to the dissolving of boundaries between parties outside and inside the political mainstream.

There are competing and non-complementary definitions of this concept in the literature, however. One set of studies uses the term to describe how radical or previously stigmatized political ideas and discourses become normalized and widespread within a society or political system (Kallis, 2013; Herman and Muldoon, 2019). Stated differently, these studies define mainstreaming as the process whereby mainstream parties (or indeed the 'mainstream' more generally) become more like challenger parties in terms of rhetoric and ideology. Sometimes, studies will employ the term 'contagion' (Van Spanje, 2010) to describe this process (e.g. 'far-right contagion').

Another set of studies uses the concept to describe how parties outside the mainstream change over time to become more like their mainstream counterparts (Akkerman, de Lange and Rooduijn, 2016). Akkerman et al. (ibid.) use it to describe a reduction in precisely the features described above as defining a challenger party: radical positions (non-centrism), 'nicheness' (dimensionality), and anti-establishment outlook. In this conceptualization, mainstreaming describes the process whereby the boundaries between challenger and mainstream are broken down through changes on the part of the challenger. According to the authors, the opposite process, whereby mainstream parties adopt the positions and outlook of challenger parties, is more aptly described as radicalization. Another aspect of mainstreaming that is sometimes emphasized is the softening of the party's image, making it more palatable for the general public (e.g. Ben-Shitrit, Elad-Strenger and Hirsch-Hoefler, 2022). This, I argue, is better understood as a (desired) consequence of mainstreaming than as an aspect of

mainstreaming itself. Parties will often soften their rhetoric and moderate their ideology hoping to improve their reputation among voters and other parties. This goal is described below as one of the mechanisms mediating coalition membership and mainstreaming.

This thesis will adhere to the latter conceptualization of mainstreaming. A challenger party is said to undergo a process of mainstreaming when it grows closer to the mainstream ideologically, increases its support for the institutional status quo, and reduces its delegitimating messages against the mainstream. Given the definition of challenger party presented above, 'full mainstreaming' is synonymous with a transformation from a challenger to a mainstream party. We should bear in mind, however, that this definition of mainstreaming highlights aspects of the parties that are not binary. There are degrees of radicalism, nicheness, and anti-establishment outlook. Moreover, the challenge from the challenger is multidimensional: it is an ideological distancing from the mainstream, a self-identification among members as an anti-establishment outsider party (resulting in internal resistance to change), as well as a rhetorical and strategic style of politics where other parties are charged with being illegitimate. We may therefore refer to degrees of mainstreaming, both in terms of the degree of change on these dimensions, and in terms of movement on some, but not others.

The expectations in this thesis derive from the idea that challenger parties participating in local government will be constrained in such a way that they go through a process of mainstreaming. The mechanisms mediating this relationship will be enumerated and discussed below.

### *Theorizing the impact of local government participation*

In this section, I present a theoretical model describing the expected impact of local government participation on the profile and development of challenger parties. These expectations are largely derived from studies carried out at the national level. As such, a central function of this thesis is to determine whether local-level participation has a similar impact on challenger parties as government inclusion on the national level. There are three parts to this model: the determinants of coalition membership, the consequences of government participation, and a 'trickle-up effect' whereby local inclusion and mainstreaming have national-level consequences. The section below enumerates the variables and mechanisms that are relevant in each.

*Challenger Parties and Coalition Membership*

A puzzle for those who study challenger parties is how these parties make it into government coalitions in the first place. As Fagerholm (2021) explains, it is puzzling that these parties play an increasingly large role in coalition formation processes across Europe, given their radical positions and anti-establishment outlook. Such parties should be disincentivized from joining coalitions. Van Spanje (2011) shows for instance that such parties receive more severe electoral punishment as a result of governing. As he explains,

> This is because, if such a party participates in a coalition, it loses the purity of its message by being seen to cooperate with the political establishment (p. 609)

Similarly, mainstream parties will sometimes avoid such coalitions, fearing negative reactions from their own voters (Kelemen *et al.*, 2023). Given these factors, we might expect challenger parties to have a very high threshold for coalition membership, both because they are disincentivized to join and because mainstream parties are disincentivized to invite them in.

In fact, however, it seems to be the case that challenger parties generally join coalitions whenever they can. Across studies, two sets of variables are frequently theorized to affect a party's chances of becoming a coalition member: size variables and policy variables. These correspond broadly to the models of the office-seeking and policy-seeking party described above. Coalition theories using a pure model of the office-seeking party (e.g. Riker, 1962) take the relative sizes of parties into account and posit that parties will form 'minimal winning coalitions'. Later theories of coalition formation go beyond this policy-blind perspective and consider the relative policy positions of the parties in the coalition game. Positing that parties join coalitions to formulate public policy, these theories predict that parties will form 'minimal connected winning coalitions' (Axelrod, 1970) where coalitions consist of ideologically adjacent parties, or ideologically compact (minimal range) coalitions that will implement policies that are as close as possible to their own preferences (De Swaan, 1973).

Studies of challengers on the far right and far left (De Lange, 2008; Olsen, Koss and Hough, 2010; Fagerholm, 2021) show that size and ideology matter for coalition membership also in these cases. De Lange (2008) also includes electoral growth/decline since the last election as a measure of vote-seeking behavior in her theoretical model. The logic is that mainstream parties will want to manage the electoral growth of the challenger by including it in government. A challenger in opposition is well placed to collect votes at the expense of the government. In order to neutralize this threat, a mainstream party may want to tie the

electoral fortunes of the challenger to that of the government. She finds, however, that the key variables explaining coalition membership for radical right parties in Europe are the size of the radical party and its policy proximity to the mainstream.

In the context of this thesis, it is of particular interest to determine the importance of policy proximity to the government participation of challenger parties. Given that some describe the local level as a less politicized space, more geared towards pragmatism and consensus (Debus and Gross, 2016: p. 835), we might expect ideology to matter less when parties form coalitions here. Should this be the case, it would undermine an important moderating mechanism. If, on the other hand, ideology matters to local coalition formation, challenger branches with designs on local office are incentivized to moderate and bridge the policy gap with potential partners.

*Inclusion in government for challengers: key variables*

To ensure comparability with findings from the national level, the large N analyses in the first two empirical chapters will largely emulate the theoretical model and methods of De Lange's (2008) thesis (Chapter 4). This means that the chapters will include variables related to party size, ideological proximity to the formateur party (mayor party or largest party in government), and electoral growth. Hypotheses are related to three party motives: office, policy, and votes. This is also elaborated in the individual chapters.

As indicated in the introduction, there are several possible approaches to studying coalition formation. One approach, a priori logical (formal) modeling, has game-theoretic foundations and attempts to create a mathematical model that accounts for the characteristics of governments. This approach comes in two main variants: office-oriented theories, and policy-oriented theories. As indicated above, they attempt to predict the composition of parties in winning coalitions as functions of relative legislative weight (Von Neumann and Morgenstern, 1944; Riker, 1962) and/or policy proximity (Axelrod, 1970; De Swaan, 1973).

This thesis does not use formal modeling to predict coalition composition (minimal winning, minimal connected, minimal range, and so on). Instead, it uses coalition membership theories and logistic regression to examine the factors that impact the probability that each party branch will enter a local coalition (Warwick, 1996). The statistical models in chapters 4 and 5 examine explanations of coalition membership related to office-, policy-, and vote-seeking on the part of the formateur party (De Lange 2008: p. 95). These explanations have a similar theoretical foundation as those employed in formal modeling but are probabilistic, rather than predictive in character.

Coalition membership theories distinguish sharply between formateur parties (mayor/prime minister party or largest party in government) and junior coalition members (Dumont and Bäck, 2006; De Lange, 2008). The challenger parties examined statistically in chapters 4 and 5 are most commonly junior partners to a larger mainstream party, even at the local level. This has been the case more broadly of challenger parties on the far left and far right at the national level (March, 2012: p. 335; Akkerman and Rooduijn, 2016: p. 15). The outcome of interest in chapters 4 and 5 is therefore limited to cases of junior coalition membership.

Firstly, then, the chapters will test hypotheses related to the size of the challenger and the size of the dominant government party. These hypotheses correspond to the office-seeking motivations of the formateur party. The logic is that when the formateur invites parties to join it in government, it is motivated by the desire to maximize its control over the spoils of office. This can be done by minimizing the number of coalition partners or maximizing its own legislative weight relative to the other coalition members. Some argue that small parties are more likely to be invited to join the government as a junior partner (Warwick, 1996). Others find that, below a certain threshold, larger legislative weight increases the likelihood that a party joins a government as a junior partner. For example, Mattila and Raunio (2004) show that while party size is positively related to becoming a coalition member, party size squared is negatively related to the same outcome. This indicates a non-linear relationship between the two variables, where a given increase in party size increases the likelihood of joining the government until you reach a threshold, after which a larger seat share decreases the likelihood of becoming a coalition member. This can be expressed graphically as an inverted U-curve. Following De Lange (2008), I also hypothesize that a smaller seat share for the formateur party is associated with greater chances of the challenger becoming a junior partner. The logic is simple. When the formateur party is smaller, it relies on a larger number of votes from other parties to form a government. The higher the proportion of out-party seats it needs, the higher the chances that any given party will be recruited to support it.

Second, the chapters will test hypotheses related to policy-seeking behavior. Here, the logic is that formateur parties invite parties into government intending to implement public policies that are as close to their preferences as possible. We should therefore expect formateur parties to exclude potential partners if they represent positions that are too distant from their own. By including proximate partners, parties can limit the size and number of compromises. A robust finding in the literature is that policy proximity to the formateur party

has a significant and positive impact on the likelihood of junior coalition membership (Warwick, 1996; Mattila and Raunio, 2004; Isaksson, 2005; Dumont and Bäck, 2006; De Lange, 2008). Following the above discussion of dimensionality, I examine the impact of policy proximity on the socioeconomic and sociocultural dimensions separately. This is a departure from De Lange's (2008) model. She operates with a single, broad left/right dimension. Disentangling socioeconomic and sociocultural policy distance does, however, improve the precision of the conclusions we may draw about the impact of ideology on the coalition membership of challenger parties.

Finally, the chapters test for vote-seeking behavior by looking at the impact of the challenger's electoral growth. The logic of this explanation is that the formateur party chooses coalition partners to limit its own electoral losses (De Lange, 2008: p. 98). If a party experiences significant electoral gains at the cost of the formateur, the formateur may attempt to neutralize this party by including it in government. This rests of course on the assumption that a challenger party in opposition is well-placed to make further electoral inroads at the government's expense. It also rests on the assumption that inclusion in government will prevent further growth for the party, or even reduce its electoral support. There is evidence to support these assumptions. Nannestad and Paldam (1994) find an average electoral cost of around two percentage points for governments. Such a cost of ruling could be due to an 'asymmetric voter reaction' where voters punish incumbents more for failures than they reward them for successes in office (Mueller, 1970). Beyond this, Van Spanje (2011), shows that parties with an anti-establishment profile suffer a more severe punishment for governing than other parties (about three percentage points more, all else equal). In other words, incumbents generally suffer a net loss of voters, and anti-establishment incumbents even more so. It is therefore not unreasonable to hypothesize that challengers may be included in government to neutralize them as electoral competitors.

Of particular interest in this thesis is whether the same variables matter at the local level as at the national level, and whether the various motivations are weighted differently at the two levels of government. The role of policy proximity at the local level is especially important. It is for instance conceivable that parties at the local level disregard ideology and look only at seat-shares when making decisions about coalition formation. Should this be the case, there is no reason for the challengers to moderate ideologically before joining the

government even if they prioritize office above policy[12]. If, on the other hand, ideology matters as it does nationally, the office-driven challenger is highly incentivized to moderate and bridge the policy gap with potential partners.

In sum, the first section of the overall causal model occurs prior to government inclusion. If ideological proximity to the formateur is an important determinant of local coalition membership, it would push the challenger parties on the far left and right to adopt more centrist positions, assuming they want to govern.

### *The effect of government participation*

*The inclusion-moderation thesis*

The 'inclusion-moderation thesis' was originally used to explain how extreme religious parties transform into more moderate democratic parties (Tepe, 2019). A similar model has been applied to examine the moderation of socialist parties (see for example Przeworski and Sprague, 1986) and far-right parties (e.g., Akkerman, De Lange and Rooduijn, 2016; Paxton, 2023) over time. The basic idea is that deeper integration into the political system, through participation in ordinary political processes, such as elections, party building, and government formation/participation, pushes challenger parties away from the extremes.

Some applications of this theory look broadly at democratic participation (Berman, 2008; Akkerman, Lange and Rooduijn, 2016), while others look at the impact of electoral dynamics (Wagner, 2012; Krause, 2020) or government participation (Paxton, 2023) in isolation. This thesis limits its focus to one specific form of democratic participation: joining multi-party governments at the local level. As such, the theoretical model presented below includes a series of mechanisms directly related to this practice.

As indicated above, rather than moderation, the thesis employs the concept of mainstreaming to describe the changes that are theorized to follow from government participation. The mechanisms described below relate both to ideological distance and attitudes about democracy and the political system. Most contributions acknowledge that the impact of democratic participation is not uniform. Some parties mainstream significantly over time, some hardly at all, and some even radicalize their profile. A theoretical task in this thesis is to specify the mechanisms theorized to mediate government participation and

[12] Assuming that moderation does not provide an electoral advantage, which in turn could improve the party's chances of joining a government.

mainstreaming and to consider the scope conditions under which these mechanisms (mal)function.

*Anticipatory moderation*

The key question in this thesis is whether challenger parties are 'tamed' by local government participation. The previous section highlighted one constraining mechanism, according to which the challengers may be excluded from government if they are too ideologically distant from potential mainstream partners. Government participation in multiparty systems may moderate challengers because the party has to bridge the policy distance with the mainstream in order to participate in and sustain coalitions. This is, of course, a general constraint for parties operating in a coalition-based system. Parties form coalitions partly to pursue policies. Therefore, they generally try to maximize policy proximity within the coalition. This is a fundamental insight of popular theories of coalition formation, including the theory of minimal connected winning coalitions (Axelrod, 1970), and the theory of minimal range coalitions (de Swaan, 1973). At the national level, the evidence indicates that policy proximity is an important predictor of government participation for challenger parties on the left and the right (De Lange, 2012; Twist, 2019; Fagerholm, 2021). As Luther (2011, p. 453) points out, parties that switch their "primary goal from populist vote maximization to office" are incentivized to adapt their policy positions in anticipation of coalition formation. This was also a point of departure for Akkerman, De Lange and Rooduijn (2016) in their study of the mainstreaming of populist radical right parties in Europe. To be desirable coalition partners for mainstream parties, radical challengers are motivated to bridge the policy gap between them (pp. 14-15). In fact, the pursuit of office in coalition systems has been used to explain the moderation of radical parties in, for instance, Austria (Luther, 2011; Heinisch and Hauser, 2016), Norway (Jupskås, 2016), and Sweden (Jungar, 2016). Programmatic adaption to office is, therefore, likely to occur prior to government participation, to the extent that parties use policy proximity as a criterion for inclusion in coalition government.

As Heinze (2018) notes, challenger parties are often invited into coalitions for tactical reasons "for instance, to avoid being the junior partner in a grand coalition" (p. 290). The mainstream party does rely, however, on the efficacy of the taming effects described below. Relevant variables to explain a transition from exclusion to engagement include election results, the degree of strategic unity among the mainstream parties, the salience of the challenger's core issues, and the radicalness of the challenger (ibid.). De Lange (2008) has argued that radical right parties are invited to collaborate with the mainstream for the same

basic reasons as other kinds of parties. She finds that the most important variables to explain inclusion in executive power are the vote share of the radical party and the policy distance between the challenger and the prime minister party. The local level is often described as a less ideological space, where solutions to practical issues define the agenda. As I argue in the methods and design chapter, however, there are good reasons to expect the local level in Norway and Sweden broadly to mirror the national level.

*Regular compromises in office*

Secondly, the challenger may moderate in government following regular compromises and concessions. This has been emphasized as a key mechanism in previous studies. For instance, Capaul and Ewert (2021) show that being a junior coalition partner is associated with moderation for populist radical right parties. They attribute this to the compromise mechanism:

> To stay in power, a junior-rank RRPP needs the approval of the dominant coalition member. This implies that RRPPs need to accept compromises and, consequently, become less radical. Hence, the deciding factor is not whether an RRPP obtains governmental powers or has to bear governmental responsibilities. Instead, the question is what kind of compromises such a party has to agree to during its stay in government (p. 793)

In short, radical challengers are, like other parties, constrained in terms of policy pursuit by the demands of their coalition partners. This involves pursuing and defending policies that diverge from their own policy programs. This can have a socializing effect on radical parties in government (Akkerman and Rooduijn, 2016, p. 15). Parties participating in government for the first time or after a long period in opposition also get a better sense of which policy goals are realistic. Wanting to avoid broken campaign pledges, which voters often punish (Naurin, Soroka and Markwat, 2019), they are likely to moderate their promises to voters in the subsequent election (Heinisch, 2003: p. 101). The more divergent a particular position is from the majority position within the coalition, the more likely it is that the party must abandon or adjust it in negotiations. Radical parties are, therefore, more constrained by this mechanism than most other parties.

*The responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff*

Beyond concessions to alliance partners, challenger parties in government are constrained by what Peter Mair (2009) describes as a tradeoff between responsiveness and responsibility. As

he explains, parties in government are expected to adhere to two (increasingly) incompatible roles. First, the party is expected to be responsive to the electorate. This entails aggregating, understanding, and responding to demands by citizens or groups. On the other hand, the party is expected to be a responsible governor. The role of the government involves several obligations that directly countermand the vigorous, uncompromising pursuit of policy. Firstly, government parties are expected to fulfill obligations to principals beyond the voters. These include adherence to domestic and international constitutional rules and regulations and prudent fiscal governance. Governments are forced to heed veto players such as courts, central banks, and intergovernmental organizations.

Additionally, as Mair points out, governments inherit legacies from past governments that constrain the government party's free pursuit of policies. Only a small share of the policies funded by even radical governments are newly created programs. Mair uses the Thatcher government as an example, pointing out that her government maintained and funded 207 out of 227 policy programs inherited from the previous Labour government and that in six years of ruling, it introduced just 28 new programs. While government parties may want to respond freely to citizen demands, acting responsibly in government means adhering to external constraints. In Mair's interpretation, this incompatibility between responsiveness and responsibility has resulted in a bifurcation of the party system. On the one hand, there is the political mainstream, characterized by their participation in government and adherence to the obligations associated with responsible governance. On the other hand, there is a group of parties that do not govern but strongly emphasize representation and responsiveness to voters.

Kriesi (2014) largely agrees with this fundamental analysis, but suggests that Mair's assessment of the state of the party systems is overly static. On the one hand, challengers may change, and on the other, the party system may transform, allowing 'governing parties' to reclaim their representative function. In his own words:

> As representatives of such anti-parties get elected, as they are socialised into the governing function of parties (at the local level first, at higher levels later on), these groups may be transformed into regular parties, even if they keep their populist characteristics to some extent. And even if they do not transform themselves into regular parties, such anti-parties may serve as the catalysts that transform the party system in a way that restores the representative function to the mainstream parties (p. 371)

In their period of perennial opposition, challengers can disregard responsibility and maximize perceived responsiveness. As soon as they take office, they have to deal with a

whole host of responsibilities (obligations to new principals) that prevent them from devoting their energy to the wishes of their base. We may expect, therefore, that when a challenger party becomes more office-oriented and participates in government, it will de-emphasize responsiveness in favor of responsibility. In other words, it will abandon policies that are incompatible with constitutional rules and regulations, prudent fiscal governance, or inherited policy programs that are difficult to discard. We should add that many of the rules and policies local governments simply must adhere to are formulated at the national level. If the local party's preferred policies deviate significantly from the national mainstream, it will have difficulties implementing them.

*The 'pothole' mechanism*

Related to the role of responsible government is what Sheri Berman (2008) calls the pothole theory of democracy. The logic of this mechanism is similar: parties that participate in government face new obligations that cannot be abandoned lightly. The pothole theory is focused on practical civic management. There are certain demands that voters across the ideological spectrum have of their governments. A government that does not get the trash picked up is considered a failure, regardless of the contents of its manifesto. Berman's argument is that these kinds of management tasks take focus and resources away from the pursuit of a radical policy program. In her phrase:

> "Parties that are busy filling potholes, fixing cracked sidewalks, and upgrading faulty sewage systems tend to have little time left over for ideology, political rigidity, and radicalism" (p. 6).

Given that the local level is particularly geared towards civic management and less involved in the large ideological issues that separate voters and parties at the national level, we may well expect this effect to be particularly strong here (Paxton, 2023: p. 45).

*Reputation building*

A fifth mechanism is reputation building. The parties under study in this thesis are, to varying degrees, perceived as irresponsible or unfit for government. These reputations are partly a result of the parties' emphasis on ideological purity over pragmatism, their inexperience in government, and the behavior and profile of their activists. This aspect of the challenger parties is related to the responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff. To the extent that these actors have built their electorates on the promise to represent, rather than to govern, they lack

credibility as a governing party. An image as irresponsible may give the party problems with membership recruitment, mainstream voter appeal, and participation in coalitions. This was a key insight in David Art's (2011) study of radical right parties and the supply-side factors that determine their success. Moving from opposition to the government at the local level, especially when there are few examples of this in other municipalities or on other levels of government, is an opportunity to remedy this image problem, both within the municipality, for other municipal branches, and between levels of government. In short, parties with a bad reputation have a strong incentive to improve it by highlighting pragmatism, prudence, and cooperation in government.

*A winners' boost in democratic satisfaction and pro-system attitudes*

Finally, we can expect the transition from opposition to government to cause an increase in pro-system attitudes and democratic satisfaction among politicians. Esaiasson, Gilljam and Karlsson (2013) find a difference between government and opposition among politicians at the local level in Sweden in terms of democratic satisfaction. Similarly, a 2015 study of local councilors in Sweden found that independently of party, members of the government are more supportive of the institutional status quo than their co-partisans in opposition (Gilljam and Karlsson, 2015). They are more in favor of representative democracy and less in favor of participatory government. Such a winner's boost has been widely documented among voters as well (Anderson *et al.*, 2005; Haugsgjerd, 2019; Kriesi and Schulte-Cloos, 2020). In general, it seems that exclusion from power leads to disaffection with democracy and a desire to change the status quo. If self-interest is the cause of the 'winner's boost' as suggested by previous research, we might expect the 'winner's boost' to be stronger if the party in question has a larger measure of bargaining power within the coalition. Bowler et al. (2006) find, for instance, that politicians who win elections are more in favor of the institutional status quo. They suggest a simple explanation, where those who benefit from the current institutional set-up support the status quo, while those who do not benefit are more critical.

*Relationship between the mechanisms*

The mechanisms described in the above section are, to some extent, sequential. We can think of them, fruitfully, as successive constraints, where the success of one mechanism makes the later mechanisms redundant. On the other hand, the failure of a mechanism makes the later mechanisms important. We may call this the fail-safes of the mainstream consensus. The earliest mechanism in the structure is the pre-incumbency bridging of the policy gap. Given

the temporal order here, one might object that this is not a case of government participation causing mainstreaming, but rather the other way around. However, the prospect of government is an important motivation to moderate and bridge the policy gap. In that sense, coalition membership should come first in the causal model. Given that vote share is also an important predictor of coalition membership, we might expect lower levels of moderation and mainstreaming at this point if the vote share of the challenger is higher (or within an ideal range, where the party is most attractive as a coalition partner). Being attractive in other ways means that less policy proximity is required to participate. The reputation-building mechanism will also set in at this early stage, with the party attempting to convince voters and potential partners of its competency and reliability in government.

The next mechanism in the chain is the compromise mechanism. Much of the government's policy is negotiated and formalized at the beginning of a government period. A challenger that has retained much of its radical profile but has still been invited into government (e.g., due to its legislative weight or growth) may nevertheless need to make great concessions when coalition partners are negotiating a shared platform and budget at the beginning of the government period. Should both these mechanisms fail (for instance if the nearest mainstream party agrees with the challenger on important issues), the challenger may still be constrained through the pothole mechanism and the responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff. Even a challenger with a voting majority behind it does not necessarily get to implement all (or even most) of its preferred policies. Governing means facing obligations that cannot be abandoned lightly, including adherence to national and constitutional laws, working within a constrained budget, and prioritizing basic services for citizens. The 'winner's boost' in democratic satisfaction and pro-system attitudes should set in at the beginning of the period in government and persist for as long as the party is in power. It is, however, likely to be muffled if the party is overly restricted by the other mechanisms outlined in this chapter. If the party is prevented from pursuing important policies in government, this will muffle the 'winner's boost'.

*Ways around moderation*

Taken together, the mechanisms presented above offer office-oriented challenger parties something of a dilemma. Much of their electoral appeal has been based on representing a distinct ideological alternative (beyond the mainstream), as well as convincing voters that the current elites do not have their best interests at heart and that the institutional status quo is not serving them well. These challengers face constraints and pressure to moderate in

government, but adhering blindly to these constraints comes with serious pitfalls. Downs, Manning and Engström (2009) highlight the divisive effect adaption to the government role can have on a challenger party. To the extent that the party moderates and begins to prioritize the parts of its agenda that have a realistic chance of implementation in a coalition government, this will:

> prompt new internal rifts (or exacerbate existing ones) between ideological fundamentalists and pragmatic realists (p. 158).

Similarly, in their summary of the pitfalls for radical left parties in government Dunphy and Bale (2011: p. 492) note that:

> a failure to maintain the balance between steady and reliable participation and fidelity to member-ship beliefs and expectations can prove disastrous in a variety of ways, from paralyzing the party through internal divisions to sacrificing party identity on the altar of democratic legitimacy to the point where its ministers are widely praised as effective politicians, while the party itself withers on the vine.

In other words, challenger parties in government face contradictory pressures. On the one hand, they want to participate as reliable, legitimate partners who can impact policy through negotiation and compromise. They want to prove to voters and other parties that they can handle the pressures of government and act responsibly. On the other hand, they have an identity, membership, and electorate to preserve. This has prompted some challengers in government to strategize about how to minimize or circumvent the moderating pressures involved. There are several strategies available to challengers who wish to preserve their party identity and internal cohesion while in government.

*One-foot-in, one-foot-out*

Certain challenger parties pursue a 'split strategy' in government to mitigate the loss of identity, votes, and internal cohesion that may follow from coalition membership. In a set of case studies of the strategic communications of Swiss and Italian populists in power, Daniele Albertazzi (2009) finds little support for the notion that such parties become moderate through government participation. Instead, he finds that the parties act as the 'opposition within government' or otherwise engage in 'role-playing' to reconcile their role as ruling party with their anti-establishment profile. He describes the content of the two strategies respectively:

> In the first case, parties access government, turn into the 'enemy within', continue attacking (some of/all) their coalition partners, criticise the policies adopted by 'their' executives and refuse to tone down their rhetoric. In the second case, the roles of the 'responsible' member of government and that of the 'radical' leader are taken on by different people within a party or alliance (p. 2)

As Bernhard et al. (2015) note, the Swiss People's Party employed direct-democratic instruments to pursue such a hybrid strategy. In other words, the peculiarities of the Swiss system of government help to explain why representation in government did not lead to moderation in that case. Albertazzi and McDonnell (2005) describe how the Lega Nord managed to retain its far-right identity within the second Berlusconi government by keeping 'one foot in and one foot out'. On the one hand, it functioned as the 'internal opposition' within the government, while on the other it participated in and defended the government. Frölich-Steffen and Rensmann (2007) argue the same point, namely that the most successful way to balance responsiveness to an electorate driven by anti-establishment attitudes and the responsibilities of office is "to be an oppositional force while executing governmental power and influence" (p. 132).

Such a strategy is not without risks, however. As Dunphy and Bale (2011) point out, a challenger in a coalition faces "the danger of being portrayed in the media as irresponsible and amateurish if the party tries to be 'in government' but not 'of government' (p. 501). In other words, there is a balance to be struck, where real damage to the reputation of the party and its relationship with other parties can occur if it acts too 'irresponsibly' in office. Moreover, the scope conditions that facilitate or hinder the use of such a scheme remain unresolved empirical questions, which will be explored in this thesis. One aspect to consider is organizational strength. At the local level, strategies such as role-playing require a level of competency, experience, and manpower that may not be available to all party branches.

*Agreements to disagree*

Parties in a coalition may come to agreements on a broad range of policies but have specific disagreements on issues that are considered non-negotiable. In such cases, the coalition partners may make agreements where they allow each other to vote differently, seek their own voting majorities among opposition parties, and voice their disagreements in public. Parties may be motivated to construct such an agreement if a concession to the coalition

partner is seen as particularly damaging to the party's identity, popularity, or internal cohesion. There are advantages to this strategy of managing dissent. It allows for a cohesive and tightly disciplined coalition, despite the presence of certain issues where the parties' policy horizons do not overlap. For the junior partner, it functions as a sort of safety valve to avoid concessions that are viewed as 'unacceptable' (Boston and Bullock, 2012).

Despite the advantages, this is not a very common practice for coalition governments, in large part because dominant coalition partners have less to gain from them than junior partners. Parties with a large degree of bargaining power are not incentivized to accept significant departures from collective responsibility, as negotiations and concessions tend to favor them. If having a secure majority on an issue is of importance to the dominant party, and if they cannot muster the necessary support outside the coalition, an agreement to disagree is, therefore, unlikely to materialize.

When they do occur, these agreements are a way for junior coalition partners to save face, by not publicly agreeing with a policy that goes against its core beliefs. There are not that many issues that are simultaneously so important to a party's political identity as to require it to refrain from compromising, yet not so important that disagreement on the issue rules out a coalition in the first place.

*Logrolling*

A way for parties to minimize the significance of the policy gap for coalition formation is the practice of logrolling (Akkerman and De Lange, 2012). This practice is only a viable option when the parties in government emphasize different policy areas. It is a form of quid-pro-quo where major concessions are given by each party on the policy dimension where the other party has issue ownership. For example, a radical right party may let a Conservative partner implement most of its economic policy (which is most salient for the Conservatives) in exchange for significant concessions on immigration control (which is prioritized by the radical right party). This gives parties with a niche profile opportunities to form coalitions, despite substantial policy distance from the nearest party. It creates a win-win situation where neither party has to compromise in the policy domain that they care most about (Dumont *et al.*, 2024). This option reduces the need to bridge the policy gap between coalition partners with tangential policy priorities. This, in turn, would reduce the incentives for the office-oriented challenger to moderate its core positions and increase the incentives to close the gap on the dimension prioritized by potential partners.

On the other hand, there are good reasons for a formateur party to choose coalition partners with similar policy priorities. As Dumont et al. (2024) point out, the government has limited time and resources. To ensure that a given policy is implemented, it is therefore an advantage if it is similarly prioritized by all the government members. Moreover, issue areas are perhaps not as distinct as they may appear. For example, environmental regulation may have an impact on businesses, and stricter immigration policies may affect geriatric care if a large share of care workers come from other countries. A government's positions in one area must therefore be compatible with its positions in another. Logrolling over policy may therefore be most likely to occur when the policies proposed by the junior partner are inexpensive and compatible with positions of the dominant government party in its most salient issue area.

***A trickle-up effect?***

While the sub-national level is often assumed to play a role in the systemic integration and mainstreaming process of challenger parties (see for example Akkerman et al., 2016a; Kitschelt, 2007), there is little systematic evidence of a trickle-up effect, whereby the local government participation of challengers might affect processes of integration at the national level (but see Downs, 1998; Paxton, 2023). This section deals with how local government participation may impact national systemic integration, conceptualized as increased coalition potential and moderation. It outlines two paths to such a spill-over effect. The first is a multilevel learning effect, and the second is the movement of politicians from the local to the national level of government.

*Multilevel learning through showcasing*

Multilevel coalitional learning has been examined previously by William M. Downs (1998). He posits that coalition formation in the subnational arena can work as 'proving grounds' for national parties. According to the model, local coalitions (particularly in constellations hitherto untested at the national level) should be valuable sources of informational feedback in three main respects. First, it should give information about the (in)compatibility of the parties. Secondly, it lends insight about their (in)efficacy in governing. Thirdly, it gives an indication of the electoral (un)popularity of a given partnership (p. 221). These learning

effects are especially salient at those points in time when established coalitions at the national level become unviable, for instance, due to the rapid growth of a new political party. At these junctures, parties will look to the local level for examples of coalitions that, while untested at the national level, have a subnational track record. Downs' study of coalitional learning in France, Germany and Belgium concludes that:

> coalition experience in the periphery does supply part of the informational feedback needed by party leaders forming governing alliances in the national arena (p. 266).

Some challenger parties are acutely aware of this potential spill-over effect. For example, Paxton (2023) shows that the Rassemblement National in France used the municipality of Henin-Beaumont as a local showcase of its moderation and governing ability. In the study, Paxton shows that this local government is highly influenced by the central party, which pushed the branch to act responsibly with the aim of projecting this image. National influence is not a necessary condition for multilevel learning to occur, however. Even if local branches act more or less independently, the national party may use them as showcases of moderation and governing ability. In lieu of national evidence of the success of a potential coalition between the challenger and the mainstream, the challenger may point to these local governments as evidence that the parties are compatible, and that the constellation can be effective and popular among voters. The practice of showcasing is directed at voters and potential coalition partners at the national level. It is meant to dispel doubts around the party's abilities to collaborate and act responsibly.

*Multilevel learning: pitfalls and promises*

A second form of multilevel learning is also possible. The challenger may take lessons from the local level on the opportunities and pitfalls of government collaboration. Prior to national government inclusion, these parties lack first-hand national experience of how to maximize influence and avoid potential pitfalls in government. How should the party prevent the larger mainstream partner from claiming credit for policy achievements? How can it maximize policy influence? How should the party prevent identity loss, voter flight, and disruption to party unity? To what extent are one-foot-in, one-foot-out strategies, logrolling, and agreements to disagree advisable as remedies to these dilemmas? Lacking national experience in these challenges, the party can look to the local level to determine best and worst practices in alliance formation. On the one hand, this kind of multilevel learning may

hinder national mainstreaming because the party develops strategies to avoid moderation or to retain an anti-establishment profile in government. On the other, it helps to remove barriers and reservations to national alliance formation, which in turn can have a moderating effect.

In order for this model to work, the kinds of coalitions available to the parties at the subnational level must be different than those permissible at the national level. In our case, the relevant question is simply whether challenger parties are included at the local level while being excluded at the national level. I have already cited evidence to this effect. Additionally, national politicians need to view the subnational level as a fair equivalent to the national level. In other words, if national politicians view the goings-on at the local level as completely incommensurable to national politics, the value of the information gleaned from the subnational level is close to zero. For this reason, we can expect coalitions in larger municipalities to have a higher informational value. Moreover, the challenger party is more likely to showcase and take lessons from coalitions they want to emulate at the national level.

*Multilevel career progression*

The second mechanism occurs at the level of the individual politician. If local government participation is associated with moderation for individual politicians, then it follows that local government participation may, over time, impact ideological profile, positions, and rhetoric at the national level in a moderate direction if politicians move between levels of government. This is assuming of course, that mainstreaming that occurs at the local level is not countermanded by the more ideological and conflictual national political context as soon as one makes it into parliament. This effect is independent of the level of national inclusion for the challenger party. Politicians that have a background from local government are expected to be more moderate than those with careers as central party-functionaries, local opposition politicians, and political outsiders regardless of whether the party forms alliances at the national level.

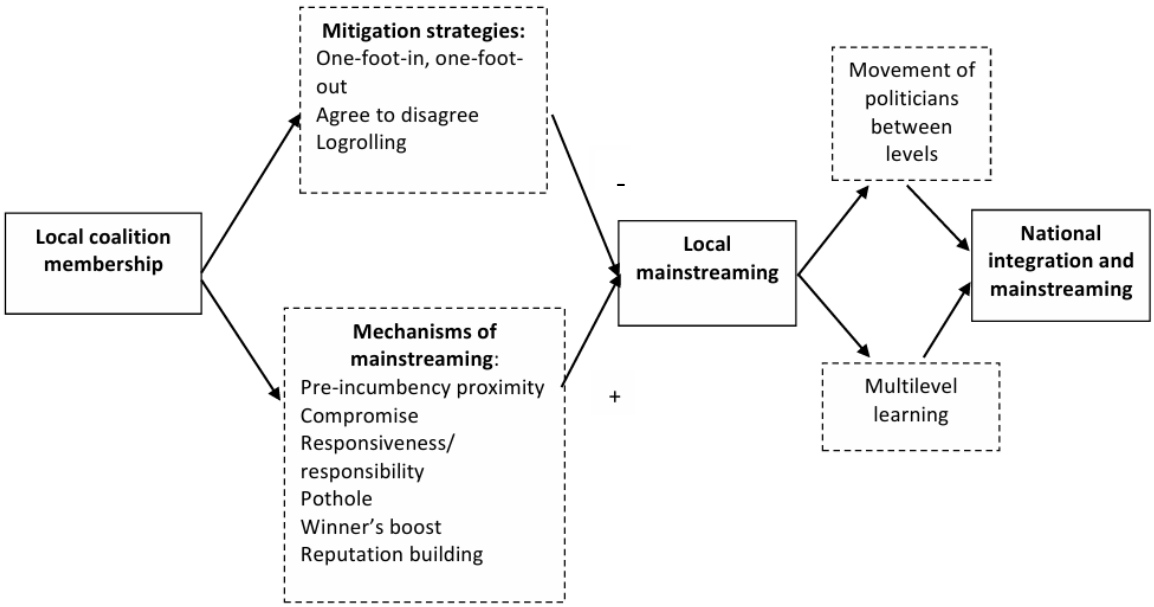
Research on pre-parliamentary careers among MPs across Europe shows that local government is a common pathway to national politics (Binderkrantz *et al.*, 2020; Turner-Zwinkels and Mills, 2020). Evidence from Norway indicates that executive local experience is an advantage in the candidate selection process for parliament (Cirone, Cox and Fiva, 2021). There is also some evidence to suggest that local political experience impacts the views and behavior of parliamentarians. Binderkrantz et al. (2020) show that Danish MPs

who begin their careers at the local level have built strongly localized political profiles that make them diverge from their party's official positions to a greater extent than other MPs. In other words, there are good reasons to expect that the politicians from challenger parties that have been socialized in local government diverge from their colleagues by having more moderate, diversified ideological profiles, more democratic satisfaction, and less resistance to the political establishment.

***Summary and full conceptual model***

In sum, then, this thesis will examine challenger parties, defined as political parties discursively challenging the mainstream from without through radical or niche policy positions and anti-establishment rhetoric. It will look at the impact of a particular kind of democratic participation, local coalition membership, on the mainstreaming of these parties both at the local level and, through the trickle-up effect, at the national level. It theorizes six mechanisms by which local coalition membership could lead to mainstreaming: bridging the policy gap in order to participate, reputation building, regular compromises in office, the 'winner's boost' in democratic satisfaction and pro-system attitudes, the responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff, and the pothole mechanism. All these mechanisms work in the same direction by placing constraints on the radical ambitions of challengers in government. They are theorized to have a temporal structure, however, and can fruitfully be thought of as successive fail-safes preserving the mainstream consensus. Given that blind adherence to these constraints involves large tradeoffs in terms of party identity, voter support, and internal cohesion, the chapter has also outlined three strategies parties can employ to limit mianstreaming in power: one-foot-in/one-foot-out, logrolling, and agreements to disagree. An important task in this thesis is to determine the scope-conditions that muffle or amplify the mechanisms, and that facilitate the mitigation strategies. These are under-explored in the literature and will be given special attention in the case analyses. This chapter has also outlined two paths by which local participation and mainstreaming may spill over to the national level: multilevel learning (both using local coalitions to showcase ruling ability and to learn the possibilities and pitfalls of coalition government), and the movement of politicians between levels of government. The full conceptual model is illustrated in Figure 1.1. The next chapter will describe the research design and methods used to examine these theorized relationships, as well as the scope conditions that muffle or amplify these effects.

**Figure 1.1**: Causal Model



# Chapter 2: Methods and design

This chapter is devoted to a discussion of research design and methods. Detailed descriptions of variables and models can be found in the individual empirical chapters. This chapter will give an overview of the key decisions that have structured the empirical strategy in this thesis. First, I will account for the mixed methods approach used to answer the research questions. Next, I will discuss the logic of the case selection, regarding the countries, parties, and municipalities studied. Third, I will briefly introduce the statistical techniques that are central in the large N analyses. Finally, I will discuss how ideology is operationalized throughout the thesis, before discussing some limitations to this study.

### *The mixed methods approach*

There is a long-standing distinction in social science research between the quantitative and qualitative research traditions. Some describe the two traditions as so different in their assumptions, goals, ontology, and epistemology as to constitute separate 'cultures' (Mahoney and Goertz, 2006). In an important contribution, Mahoney and Goertz (2006) point to no less than ten areas where the two traditions differ markedly in terms of their approaches and assumptions. Where the goal of the qualitative tradition is generally a full explanation of the outcome in individual cases, the quantitative scholar wants to establish the average effect of an individual variable across many cases. The qualitative scholar operates with necessary and sufficient causes, while the quantitative scholar deals with correlations and probability. Where the qualitative approach involves a narrow scope, explicit causal paths, equifinality, and complex interactions between variables, the quantitative approach involves a broad scope, additive causality (with occasional interaction effects), and random selection of cases. These differences between the traditions determine the scope and research questions that can be meaningfully addressed within each. Quantitative methods allow us to isolate effects and generalize across a large set of cases. A qualitative approach allows us to account for causal complexity and mechanisms within a limited set of cases.

Increasingly, scholars are attempting to maximize analytical leverage by combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. This is referred to as the mixed methods, or multi-methods, approach. Here, cross-case analysis is combined with within-case causal mechanism analysis (Goertz, 2016). In such a design, the statistical approach can be used to establish correlations, and the case studies can be used to investigate whether the theorized processes behind these correlations did indeed take place (Bennett and Braumoeller, 2022).

Moreover, the case studies serve an exploratory function, helping to identify conditions and variables beyond the model that amplify, muffle, or undermine each mechanism.

The thesis asks two questions that can be meaningfully addressed using this approach. This first set of large-N studies examines the determinants of local coalition membership using logistic regression. This is complemented by a qualitative analysis of the road to power for each challenger party in a single municipality. While the goal of the large N studies is to estimate the average effects of the various theoretically identified causes of government membership across a population of cases, the case studies seek to give a fuller account of the outcome in each of the four municipalities (Mahoney and Goertz, 2006). These case studies allow me to go beyond the simple associations identified in the logistic regression analyses, and to specify the complex relationship between the sets of variables and contextual factors beyond the statistical model.

The second set of statistical analyses looks at the effects of government participation on the ideological profile of the challengers and the attitudes of their politicians. Again, these analyses allow me to isolate associations between the key independent variable (government participation) and the outcomes of interest (approaching the mainstream in terms of attitudes and ideology). To complement this, the case studies examine the various mechanisms theorized to mediate the relationship and specify the scope conditions that amplify or undermine each mechanism. This complementarity strengthens the robustness of the conclusions in the thesis.

Many scholars use a 'nested design' (Lieberman, 2005), where the statistical analysis guides the selection of case studies. Choosing a case that is predicted by the statistical model (X=1, Y=1) is ideal for examining whether the theorized mechanisms are present and how they function. Choosing a case that is not predicted (X=0, Y=1 or X=1, Y=0) is ideal for theory development. These cases will let us identify the variables not accounted for in the model that impact the outcome, either in terms of alternative causal paths (X=0, Y=1) or processes whereby the mechanism is undermined (X=1, Y=0). As Goertz (2016) points out, intensive case studies of instances where neither the causal mechanism nor the outcome of interest are present (X=0, Y=0) do very little to inform the theory.

In the present study, four cases of coalition membership were chosen. In the first half of the thesis, coalition membership is the dependent variable. Therefore, these cases either let me "see the causal mechanism in action" (X=1, Y=1, (Goertz, 2016: p. 14)) or examine alternative causal paths that enable inclusion in government under conditions of larger policy distances (X=0, Y=1). As the policy proximity variable is continuous, we cannot speak of all

cases being either ideologically close or ideologically distant. As I show in Chapter 6, the cases are all spread out across this variable. The highest policy proximity is in Staffanstorp, where the data indicates that the Sweden Democrats and Moderates are hard to distinguish in terms of policy positions and emphasis (pre-incumbency). In Grimstad, there is a fairly high degree of proximity between the Progress Party and the Conservatives, but with some salient issues of disagreement. In Kragerø and Mörbylånga the challengers stand apart from their mainstream partners more clearly in terms of positions and emphasis. This allows for an examination of the causal path from policy agreement to government collaboration, as well as an assessment of the conditions that enable coalition membership even when policy distances are more pronounced.

In Chapters 7, 8, and 9, coalition membership is the independent variable. Here too, we see various levels of mainstreaming among the four cases (following incumbency). These cases let me examine the conditions that enable each successive mechanism and those that undermine them. In this way, the case studies facilitate theory development well beyond what is possible through the cross-case, large N analyses alone.

***Case selection***

The thesis is a comparative study that compares two countries (Norway/Sweden), two party families (far-left/ far-right), four parties (R/ FrP/ V/ SD), and four municipalities (Kragerø/ Grimstad/ Mörbylånga/ Staffanstorp). This section will account for each of these choices. For the countries and municipalities, the logic of case selection is 'most similar'. The idea is that incidental differences between the geographic units should be as small as possible. For the parties, the logic is broad coverage. I have selected challenger parties at either end of the ideological spectrum and with varying degrees of integration in the national party systems. Such a setup increases the likelihood that differences between the cases are due to the variables of interest, rather than variation that cannot be accounted for by the theoretical model.

*Countries*

This thesis deals with the consequences of local inclusion of challenger parties in two Scandinavian countries: Norway and Sweden. These countries are similar in culture; they are both high-trust societies with social democratic regimes and similar party systems. They are, in a word, comparable. The key difference between the two countries is the level of current far-right and far-left inclusion at the national level. In Norway, the Progress Party has reached a high degree of national inclusion, while Red is not accepted as a parliamentary partner. In

Sweden, the opposite is the case – with the inclusion of the Left Party and, until very recently, the exclusion of the Sweden Democrats. All challenger parties in both countries have been included in local coalitions to various degrees.

Placing Norway and Sweden in a broader comparative context, the similarities between the two political systems are much more striking than the differences. Here, I present a quick overview according to Lijphart's (2012) scheme, based on the distinction between majoritarian and consensus democracies. An account of how the two countries compare to each other and other political systems matters to the question of generalizability. I will also show how certain features of local politics in the two countries ensure the relevance of the thesis well beyond the context of the study.

On Lijphart's "executives-party dimension", both countries belong to the group of highly consensual as opposed to majoritarian political systems. They have a large number of parliamentary parties, a high prevalence of multi-party and minority cabinets, parliamentary systems (collegial executive, selected by legislature and dependent on legislative confidence), a highly proportional electoral system, low electoral thresholds (4%), and a corporatist, as opposed to pluralist, system for organizing interest groups (i.e. a very low degree of interest group pluralism). The institutional set-up means that political power is diffused within a cooperative multiparty system. This is in contrast to pluralist systems which "concentrate power in the executive and foster adversarial two-party politics" (Cairney and Widfeldt, 2015: p. 3). This matters because the government is more constrained within a consensual system than in a majoritarian system. Parties are forced to concede and compromise to a greater extent in government. On this dimension, Norway and Sweden are most similar to other Nordic countries (Iceland, Finland, and Denmark) as well as Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, and Switzerland. We should note that it is easier for a challenger party to establish itself electorally within such a system (Hakhverdian and Koop, 2007). Once in power, however, a challenger will likely face more constraints on its political will in a consensus-oriented system, where power within institutions is shared.

Norway and Sweden are both unitary states, in the sense that they do not have federalist constitutions or powerful, autonomous regions with representation in the national legislature (e.g. an upper chamber). On the other hand, they are fairly decentralized to the local level, with separately elected municipal governments that administer a relatively large share of the public budget, and are responsible for key areas of public policy. For this reason, Lijphart places the Nordic countries (along with Japan) in the small category of 'unitary and

decentralized systems'. This setup makes Norway and Sweden ideal case studies if the goal is to generalize to similar processes at the national level.

The direct relevance of findings from the local level to studies of similar processes at the national level depends on the local level being a fair equivalent of the political system overall. This is arguably the case in Norway and Sweden and is evidenced by several factors. Firstly, the Nordic countries all have high levels of local-level public spending. As a percentage of a country's total public expenditure, the countries with the highest spending in Europe are Denmark (64.6%), Sweden (48.6%), Finland (40.8%) and Norway (32.7%)[13]. In fact, in terms of total subnational spending (as a share of GDP), the Nordic countries are much more similar to the federations and quasi-federations (Austria, Belgium, Germany, and Spain) than they are to other unitary countries (OECD, 2018). Moreover, they have a high degree of party politicization at the local level, in the sense that few local councilors are independents or represent local-only parties, and the presence of national parties is very high. They have this in common with countries like Croatia, the UK, Austria, Switzerland, and Germany (Aars and Offerdal, 2012). In countries like Poland, France, and Greece, local lists are much more prevalent (ibid.). Gendźwiłł, Kjaer, and K. Steyvers (2022) distinguish the Nordic countries as political systems with "a strongly nationalized frame on local elections and voting, (where) the patterns and dynamics at both tiers are (…) more likely to mirror or mimic one another" (p. 519). In other words, the findings presented below regarding local effects of government participation may be of interest to those who study similar processes at the national level. Moreover, given that local politics in Scandinavia is "national politics in miniature", the parties are more likely to gather and value information about the success of local coalitions between parties that have not governed together at the national level.

On the other hand, there are certain differences between the local and national levels that we need to be mindful of when generalizing. Firstly, the two levels of government deal with different issues. Many of the large, contentious issues that separate the parties at the national level are not directly decided at the local level. This includes some of the key issues for the challenger parties, like immigration and foreign policy. However, while the issues over which the parties may disagree are different compared to the national level, coalitions are still more likely to occur between parties that agree on salient local issues. These local policy positions often follow from the same basic ideological views as those on the national level. For example, the immigration issue will be salient in Norwegian municipalities when

[13] These numbers are from the OECD Government at a Glance report (2023).

municipal councils vote on how many refugees to house in the year to come. Similarly, international solidarity with Palestine can be expressed through a municipal boycott of Israeli goods[14]. A more mainstream view on these local issues may, in turn, reflect broader moderation on the dimensions that structure disagreement at the national level.

*Parties*

A full account of the profile and development of the four parties will be presented in the next chapter. This section focuses on why the four parties were chosen, and why other potential parties were excluded.

Certain parties in Norway and Sweden are clearly in the mainstream. These include the Social Democrats (S) and Moderates (M) in Sweden and the Labor Party (AP) and Conservatives (H) in Norway. For decades these parties have competed for a dominant position in the party system, defined the contents of the hegemonic political discourse, and influenced the design of key social and political institutions. Their voter appeal is broad, and no longer limited to distinct social groups (Allen, 2009). To the extent that there is a 'cartel' of established parties in Norway and Sweden, these parties are at the center of it.

Other parties typically counted within the mainstream in these party systems include the Liberals (Liberalerna and Venstre), The agrarian parties (Centerpartiet and Senterpartiet), and the Christian Democrats (Kristdemokraterna and Kristelig Folkeparti). These parties are generally pro-system and have exerted significant influence over the institutions and policy legacies in the respective countries through alliances, cooperation, and a negotiated consensus. The agrarians and the Christian democrats do, however, have a narrower social and ideological appeal than the conservatives and social democrats.

There is an argument to be made that the Norwegian Center Party and the Swedish Christian Democrats are borderline cases if we take recent upsurges in populism or anti-establishment rhetoric into account. Regarding the former, a certain level of agrarian populism can be observed. This involves an idealized view of the countryside and harsh criticism of the cultural and political elites of the cities. It has been manifested in the party programs and rhetoric of the Center party as opposition to a self-conscious urban elite. This group is often caricatured as hilariously oblivious to the lives of ordinary people. In the V-Party dataset (Lührmann *et al.*, 2020), the Center Party is counted as increasingly populist (since 2009), only barely surpassed by the Progress Party. Other expert surveys, such as the

[14] Both of these are real examples taken from discussions in the municipal council of Arendal in Norway.

Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Jolly *et al.*, 2022) give similar estimates. Several scholars (Serdar, Öztürk and Nygren, 2023; Viklund, 2023) have also argued that the Swedish Christian Democrats have increasingly begun to use divisive populist rhetoric. On the other hand, these parties are unlikely to face all the constraints of coalition government outlined in the previous chapter. In most policy areas, they are in broad agreement with a bloc of potential coalition partners. This means that significant policy moderation is not necessary to participate in government and it is not a likely outcome of regular compromises in office. Moreover, as parties without a reputation as irresponsible or otherwise unfit to govern, these parties are not particularly motivated to show off their ability to function as a normal, responsible party in government. As borderline cases, these parties fall outside the scope of the present study.

Another pair of borderline cases is the Greens. As parties with a clear niche profile, these are obvious candidates for inclusion in this thesis. Some comparative studies of challenger parties include the Green party family (e.g., Schulte-Cloos, 2018). However, the Norwegian and Swedish Greens make for poor examples of challenger parties due to the relative absence of anti-elite or anti-establishment sentiment. In the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, both parties are classified as supportive of a representative system of government (as opposed to one where 'the people' decide directly) and with little use of anti-elite rhetoric. In the Swedish case, this represents a clear change in profile. Berlin and Lundquist characterize their original stance as "an eco-fundamentalist and ultra-democratic anti-party" (Berlin and Lundqvist, 2012). Most accounts of the Swedish Greens describe an extensive process of 'normalization' since its entrance into Swedish politics (Ljunggren, 2010; Berlin and Lundqvist, 2012). Over the past few decades, neither the Swedish nor Norwegian Greens constitute clear-cut cases of challenger parties.

Finally, the Socialist Left Party (SV) was excluded from the analysis, but not mainly for theoretical reasons. This party arguably fits the definition of a challenger party. It is routinely classified in the literature as a radical left party (March, 2011; Jupskås and Langsæther, 2023). Moreover, previous studies emphasize the difficulties SV had adjusting to the role of government party, after a 'policy purist' and critical profile in opposition (Allern, 2010). Rather, Red was chosen over SV as the Norwegian left-wing challenger because SV has both a similar ideology and a similar position in the party system as the Swedish Left Party. In other words, using Red allows me to study two parties with a history of alliance formation at the national level, and two parties without such a history. It allows for a broader

and more balanced coverage of cases. In other words, Red completes the comparative design, while choosing SV would have skewed the selection toward better-integrated challengers.

*The municipalities*

Four single-municipality case studies were chosen to complement the large-n analyses and broad comparative overviews. These cases are similar in terms of population size, geography, the position of the challenger party in the coalition (junior partner to a larger mainstream party), and the local history of the challenger (entering government after being in opposition for an extended period). The purpose of these case studies has already been discussed. By allowing for a detailed examination of each of the mechanisms theorized to mediate inclusion in government and mainstreaming, as well as an assessment of the contextual factors that amplify or muffle the impact of each mechanism, a more refined causal model can be posited.

The case studies offer an empirically rich, and holistic account of how each challenger functions in a local coalition, and whether and how each mechanism theorized in Chapter 1 plays out. Beyond taking account of the mechanisms that mediate local government participation and mainstreaming for challenger parties, they allow me to specify scope conditions for the operation of each mechanism. For example, I have theorized that government participation affects policy moderation through the compromise mechanism. Beyond establishing whether this is the case, I also want to determine the conditions that can amplify or muffle this effect. These cases are longitudinal, covering the party branches from the period before government participation and through a government period. This allows for within-case comparison, gauging the impact of government participation by comparing parties and politicians before government participation with the same units in government. The pre-government period provides the analytical baseline of comparison. Each case study looks at the transition from opposition to government party.

These single-case studies were selected based on a set of criteria. Firstly, to study how parties change in government, each branch must have been in opposition for an extended period before government inclusion. Relative recency was also a requirement, to ensure the availability of written sources (newspaper articles, council protocols, etc.) and interviewees. I also wanted to reduce the incidental differences between the municipalities as much as possible to ensure that the findings of the case studies could be meaningfully compared. I therefore selected four southern, coastal municipalities of similar size (all the municipalities have between 10 000 and 20 000 inhabitants). In all four cases, the challenger party was a

junior coalition partner.[15] This means that each local government has similar political challenges and similar budget sizes to deal with them and that the challenger parties are positioned similarly relative to their partners.

The cases are listed in table 2.1. From each municipality, I went through municipal council records, local and national newspaper accounts, internal and external party documents (e.g., manifestos, members' magazines), and conducted a handful of semi-structured interviews with local politicians (and one journalist) who were included based on their presumed knowledge of internal party processes, politics in the municipality and the relationships between the local parties. Fifteen interviews were conducted in total. Each interview lasted for about one hour on average and covered a range of topics including how and why the parties joined the local government, priorities and outsider status of the challenger, balancing responsibilities in government against the wishes of voters and policy influence, the composition of the party branch (pragmatists versus ideologues), concessions and moderation in government, communication with the central party, and movement of politicians between levels of government (see interview guide in the appendix).

Regarding the written sources, there is some discrepancy regarding the amount of material available for each case. Firstly, compared to the other cases, Red in Kragerø seems to be a more important showcase for the party itself. This is partly because of the low rate of coalition membership for the party nationwide, and partly because Red was rather satisfied with its level of influence and support in the municipality. Moreover, Red is the party among my cases that has the most deliberate approach to using insights from the local level to inform national strategy. Therefore, Kragerø is mentioned, assessed, and described in national internal party sources to a greater extent than the other municipalities studied. It was described several times in the members' magazine, and Red's deputy mayor was invited to strategy conferences and interviewed in Red's newsletter about how they made the coalition work.

Secondly, Red, and more prominently SD, receive more national press attention regarding the state of their local governments. When these parties joined their local governments in Kragerø and Staffanstorp they had never made national alliances, and only a handful of local ones. SD was the object of a strict cordon sanitaire, and generally portrayed

[15] Staffanstorp was the only municipality where SD had participated as a junior coalition partner for a full government period. Given the other selection criteria, this helped to limit the selection pool for the other municipality case studies.

in the press as racist, extreme, or a threat to democracy (Art, 2011, p. 96). In short, their local governments had higher news value than those of FrP and V. This means that national news stories are more prevalent in these cases. Local newspapers and municipal council protocols are more constant sources of data. However, the political interest of local editorial teams varies across cases, and the Norwegian cases happened to receive more constant in-depth coverage during the period of study. For instance, in Grimstad, there are frequently lengthy descriptions and quotes from debates in the municipal council. When it comes to council protocols, there is variation regarding how activities are recorded. In Grimstad, the norm has been to record the party affiliation of those who vote in favor and against a motion[16]. In Staffanstorp and Mörbylånga, the votes are recorded on lists containing the names of the council members and whether they voted for or against the motion. In Kragerø, the protocol only contains the number of members in favor or against the motion. Therefore, in Kragerø, the study relies on local newspaper accounts to describe important instances of disagreement between the governing parties and dissenting votes.

**Table 2.1:** Overview of Municipality Case Studies

| Party | Municipality | Government period(s) | Affiliation of interviewees |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Red** | Kragerø | 2015-2019 | 1. Red<br>2. Red<br>3. AP<br>4. SV |
| **Progress Party** | Grimstad | 2019-2023 | 1. FrP<br>2. FrP<br>3. H<br>4. Journalist |
| **Sweden Democrats** | Staffanstorp | 2018-2022 | 1. SD<br>2. SD<br>3. M<br>4. S |
| **Left Party** | Mörbylånga | 2018-2022 | 1. V<br>2. S<br>3. M |

[16] Typically they are recorded in the following format: Proposal from [Name of council member] was defeated with 13 votes (3 [party A], 1 [party B], 5 [party C] and 4 [party D]).

***Statistical techniques***

Statistical techniques of varying sophistication are employed throughout the thesis. Specifics about variables, units of analysis, number of observations, and so on will be given in the empirical chapters. In this section, I will simply give a short overview of the different techniques and how they are used to answer the research questions. Three statistical techniques are central in this thesis, and this section will address each in turn. PCF analysis is used to generate key variables, while OLS and logistic regression are used to examine the relationship between variables.

In several empirical chapters, this thesis employs Principal Components Factor (PCF) analysis. This is a " set of procedures used to simplify complex sets of quantitative data by analysing the correlations between variables to reveal the small number of factors which can explain the correlations" (Foster, 2006). In this thesis, the technique is used to simplify the collection of answers to narrow policy questions into positions on broader ideological dimensions. The ideology variables employed in this dissertation all rely on this statistical technique. The correlations between each question and the underlying factor are expressed as 'factor loadings' ranging from -1 to 1. The stronger (further from 0) the factor loading, the stronger the relationship between the variable and the underlying factor. The outcome of such an analysis depends to a large degree on the variables that are included in the analysis. In the subchapter below, I discuss how the structured nature of party positions and politicians' views mitigates the contingent nature of factor analysis somewhat. The details of each PCF analysis are laid out in the individual empirical chapters.

This thesis employs Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analysis. This method for estimating a linear relationship between variables has been described as a 'workhorse' of political science research. In a (2008) review, Krueger and Lewis-Beck found that OLS regression made up 31 percent of statistical analysis in top political science journals. It is a way of estimating a line of best fit between independent and dependent variables. This method depends on a continuous dependent variable. Therefore, it cannot be used to analyze the determinants of coalition membership, which is a dichotomous variable. OLS is employed in the large N analysis where ideological position, measured on a continuous scale (left/right, GAL-TAN), is the dependent variable. An advantage of OLS, compared to simpler statistical techniques such as T-tests and simple bivariate correlations, is that it allows us to hold potential confounders constant. The technique generates an easily interpreted output which includes effect sizes and significance levels.

In the large N analyses of chapters 4 and 5, the dependent variable is not continuous. The outcome is binary (in or out of coalition), and a different method should be used to estimate the relationships between independent and dependent variables. An OLS analysis of a binary outcome is not appropriate for several reasons (Chatterjee and Simonoff, 2020). The data necessarily violates the normality assumption underlying OLS regression. Moreover, an OLS model with a binary outcome variable can imply probabilities outside the 0-1 range if predictor values are large enough. Finally, an OLS analysis posits that a given change in X is associated with the same change in Y regardless of the value of the predictor. This is not an appropriate assumption when the outcome modeled is the probability that Y=1. When dealing with probabilities, there are ceiling effects, since the probability can never exceed 1. Chatterjee and Simonoff (2020: p. 146) use the example of a company's debt and the probability of bankruptcy. If the company already has a high level of debt, it already has a high probability of bankruptcy, and an additional one million dollars of debt will therefore not be associated with a large increase in the probability that it will go bankrupt. The relationship between X and the probability that Y=1 is S-shaped.

The goal of chapters 4 and 5 is to estimate the degree to which a change in the independent variables (ideological proximity, legislative weight, electoral growth) is associated with a change in the *probability* that the outcome of interest (coalition membership) occurs. To achieve this, I employ logistic regression analysis. This technique relies on a logarithmic transformation of the odds that Y=1. These log-odds have a linear relationship to the independent variables in the model. The coefficients are calculated using Maximum Likelihood Estimation. The output of the logistic regression analysis can be difficult to interpret directly. Negative coefficients mean that increasing values of X are associated with decreasing probabilities that Y=1. Positive coefficients mean that higher values of X are associated with higher probabilities that Y=1. We can say something about the directionality and significance level of the coefficient, but we cannot directly determine by how much a given increase in X increases the probability that Y=1. Substantive interpretation is facilitated by exponential transformation. This is a procedure to obtain the odds and odds ratios from the log-odds.

***Measuring ideology throughout the thesis***

Ideological positions are at once a key variable in this thesis and the most challenging to measure. In this study, I operate under the assumption that 'the party line' is simply the opinions of party members, aggregated, and adjusted to maximize real impact on policies,

participation in government, and electoral success. The thesis is advantaged by a direct, low-cost measurement of the ideological positions of local branches across the municipalities in both countries. It has often been difficult or costly to measure the policy positions of local branches across entire countries. Consider Sweden as an example. It has 290 municipalities. If we assume the presence of all eight parliamentary parties in every municipality, the researcher would need to collect data on 2320 branches for every election studied. Even in the age of online campaigning, a manifesto-coding approach would likely leave us with a lot of missing data, and a very costly collection and coding process[17]. The thesis relies on data from newspaper surveys (Voting Advice Applications) answered by almost all local branches in the run-up to recent elections. These have the practical advantages of great comprehensiveness (geographic coverage) and low costs involved in data collection.

The Voting Advice Applications (VAAs) that form the basis of a key measurement of ideology in this thesis are designed like a survey, where party branches or politicians have indicated their level of agreement with a series of salient political questions. The context of these surveys is important. Politicians or branches have responded to the VAA to communicate with voters. Compared to an anonymous survey, the responses are therefore less likely to reflect the private beliefs of politicians, where these conflict with the party line. It is, however, more likely to correspond with the parties' voting behavior in municipal councils and the policy agenda of politicians in elected positions.

For this thesis, it is essential to account for variations in ideology between different local branches of the same party. Using, as some studies do (e.g. Denters, 1985; Steunenberg, 1992), national policy positions as a proxy for local positions is therefore not an option. In the literature, the most common ways to measure the policy positions of political parties are through manifesto data and expert surveys. There are several reasons for using the Voting Advice Application data for this thesis. As already mentioned, comprehensiveness and cost are two key advantages. The VAA data is already collected and published in a standardized survey-style format and can be used directly in a statistical analysis. Moreover, while there are some instances of missing data where a local branch has refrained from answering the survey, the VAA data is more comprehensive than alternative data sources. Local manifestos, for instance, are often not available online, and some local branches publish only short leaflets with a handful of bullet points or use a template from the national party, making it difficult to distinguish local variation.

[17] This is especially the case for a manual coding approach. Costs could be saved through computer assisted coding, but the problem of missing manifestos would remain.

Compared to hand-coded manifestos, the VAA data is also highly reliable. Firstly, since branches are asked to fill out a standardized questionnaire, the data does not rely on subjective interpretations on the part of the researcher. Moreover, given this structured format, the data is not affected by the stylistic idiosyncrasies of an author. A drawback of this structured format is that it is difficult to capture nuances in the views expressed by politicians. For instance, if a branch indicates complete agreement with the statement "The municipality should receive fewer refugees" this could mean anything from a slight reduction to a complete halt. This issue is also present in standard approaches to manifesto coding. Following the codebook of the Manifesto Project, for instance, the statement "We should allow no more refugees to come to Sweden" and "We should look into a slight reduction in the number of refugees accepted to Sweden" would both be classified under the category "Immigration: Negative." This would tend to be less of a problem in expert surveys, where a coder could use their extensive knowledge of the political system in question to classify one party as much more restrictive than the other.

One challenge with these newspaper surveys is that the set of policy questions is predefined (in this case by journalists). This means that the dimensions and scales used in the analysis do not necessarily cover the full spectrum of socioeconomic and sociocultural questions that separate or bring parties together as they appeal to voters, make policy, and form coalitions. In other words, a radical party or politician may seem much less radical if the set of questions in the survey does not touch upon their most radical views. If a revolutionary Marxist is not asked about revolution, it may be hard to distinguish her from a democratic socialist in this kind of survey. This is arguably sub-optimal. It is mitigated by the fact that the surveys are developed to cover issues that are important to the relevant political parties and their voters and to distinguish the different parties from each other. In both the Norwegian and the Swedish surveys, the questionnaire was developed with input from the parties themselves and local journalists (Sjöholm, 2018; VG, 2019). In Sweden, there was also input from academics.

A common concern regarding the use of VAAs to estimate party positions has been "the presumed arbitrariness of the item selection by the curators of VAAs" (König and Nyhuis, 2018: p. 455). However, König and Nyhuis (2018) show that varying the weighting of the items in a typical VAA according to various perceived salience structures[18] does not

[18] For instance, a VAA may contain three questions related to property tax and only one related to social security spending. The worry is that in that case, an unweighted estimate of the party's socioeconomic position would

result in estimations of party positions that are substantially different. In other words, party positions are so highly structured that given enough relevant policy questions in a VAA you can generate estimations of their positions in a two-dimensional space that are robust to different weights and dropping items from the estimation (ibid.: p. 455). This would tend to mitigate the problem of arbitrary item selection.

An advantage this data shares with manifesto data is that parties use these surveys to communicate with the public. In much the same way as with election manifestos, parties can be held accountable for their positions in these newspaper surveys. In fact, because taking the newspaper survey is much less time-consuming than reading all the competing manifestos, more voters get information about the parties' positions from these surveys than from studying party programs. Parties are incentivized not to misrepresent themselves when answering the survey, and to keep these positions as they get on with policy- and legislative deal-making.

While expert surveys are often ambiguous in terms of the timing of the measurement, these newspaper surveys are answers given at a specific point in time. When an expert assesses the position of a political party, it is often a synthesis of statements and actions by politicians over several years. In other words, the data employed here allows for a more precise measurement of dynamic variation. This is important when examining the same actors over time and using ideology as a dependent variable.

A difference between the Swedish and Norwegian VAA data is that in Norway, the newspaper in question surveyed individual politicians (several per party branch). In Sweden, local party branches were asked to give one official reply. These data were made comparable by aggregating the Norwegian responses to the branch level. This was done by calculating the unweighted average of all responses in a branch. One challenge with the Norwegian data concerns measurement validity. The thesis purports to measure the policy positions of each branch. However, measuring the opinions of groups is not necessarily straightforward. As Herbert Blumer (1948) noted in his essay on public opinion, society has an organization. Not all individual opinions carry the same weight within a group. Some members are indifferent, do not participate, or are in weak positions, while others hold strong opinions, are activists, and hold positions of power. When we speak of 'the opinion' of a group, an unweighted average of members' views may not give a good estimate of its effective positions, those it acts according to. In the scholarship on party politics, this is pertinent to the discussion of

give a skewed result. If a party wants less property tax and more social security spending, it is counted as much more left-wing than a party that wants more property tax and less social security spending.

whether to treat parties as unitary actors. Scholars often do this for pragmatic reasons. However, like other groups, political parties are sometimes internally divided over issues. However, because parties exert considerable effort to foster loyalty and party discipline, the unitary actor assumption is justifiable in party politics studies. Moreover, within a single local branch of a political party, we are likely to see less variation in terms of influence, level of activism, and outspokenness compared to society as a whole. Active local politicians can be expected to hold strong, crystalized political views and engage in extensive activism, and they are all in a relatively strong position to influence public policy. However, some, such as the local party leader, generally have a greater influence on the party line than others. The Swedish VAA data is less hampered by this challenge than the Norwegian data. In the Swedish case, each local party branch has given its 'official' response to the survey. The Swedish responses are likely either a result of internal discussions in the branch, or the person answering the survey has done so on behalf of the entire branch, and limited the presence of personal views that diverge from the party line. In the Norwegian data, each politician answered individually (i.e. each party branch typically had several responses from individual politicians). Given the challenge just discussed, a simple average of all the responses in a party branch gives a slightly inaccurate view of the effective position of the branch (if there are diverging views in the branch). However, it is a daunting task to determine precisely whose opinion matters more within each branch, and precisely how much more it matters. Therefore, an unweighted average was employed in the Norwegian measurements.

In Chapter 8, another measure of ideology and attitudes is employed in the case of the Swedish Left Party. Here, I use two rounds of the Swedish Local and Regional Councils Survey (KOLFU, 2008; 2012) to assess whether government participation is associated with more moderate policy positions and more pro-system views. The unit of analysis in this section is individual politicians. Policy positions are simplified to two main dimensions using Principal Components Factor analysis. Differences between politicians in power and politicians in opposition are assessed using OLS regression analysis and a series of t-tests. This source is similar to the VAA data in key respects. It measures ideology through a survey of the same party elites as those who responded to the VAA. Previous studies have successfully used such surveys of party elites to measure party ideology (Carroll and Kubo, 2019).

A key reason to employ this survey, rather than the VAA data, is the wider range of questions. The survey contains questions about local politicians' opinions of democracy, representation, other political actors, and the functioning of the political system. Therefore,

this dataset enables a fuller assessment of the degree of mainstreaming associated with government participation. It is, however, an exclusively Swedish survey conducted at a time when the Sweden Democrats had not yet participated in local government. Therefore, while it constitutes the best available data on inclusion and mainstreaming, it is limited to only one of the parties studied here. The Progress Party is examined using two consecutive VAAs, allowing us to assess the changed positions of individual branches. SD and Red, having only a small number of local government experiences, are assessed using comparative overviews, taking all cases into account.

***Limitations***

Before outlining the profile and development of each party studied, I will briefly outline three limitations of this study. First, the four parties have varied experience with local government participation. As mentioned, this provides broad coverage and improves the robustness of the findings in this thesis. On the other hand, it means that the results are difficult to compare directly. Most strikingly, Red and the Sweden Democrats have previously participated in a very low number of local governments. Therefore, while the Left Party and the Progress Party can be studied using statistical analysis, Red and SD cannot. The same questions are addressed for each party, but the results are not strictly and directly comparable.

Second, given the selection of two such similar countries, as well as the focus on the local level, the generalizability of my conclusions is in question. I make the argument that the two countries share key systemic features with several other countries and that the nationalized political frame that characterizes local politics in the Nordics makes the (local) findings of direct interest for future studies at the national level. However, the veracity of these assertions can ultimately only be determined once similar studies are conducted elsewhere.

Finally, the thesis has normative or prescriptive implications. This is part of what makes it a worthwhile topic of study. It underpins the reason why citizens and democratic actors should care about the results of this study. This aspect is, of course, not unique to this study. All studies with a broader social relevance touch on normative questions, yet few take the time to undertake substantial normative analysis (Gerring and Yesnowitz, 2006). The looming normative question relating to this thesis is ‘Should challenger parties on the far left and right be included in democratic processes, such as ruling in a local coalition?’. The answer to this question hinges on several empirical questions: Do these parties have the

ability to change or dismantle democratic institutions if they get into power? Are these parties fundamentally changed by their inclusion in democratic processes? While the thesis spends little time engaging with the fundamental normative question directly, it does address these related empirical questions. I return to this normative question in the conclusion, but it falls beyond the scope of this thesis to give a full and direct answer to it.

## Chapter 3: The profile and development of the challenger parties

The previous chapter described the basis for the selection of the four parties examined in this thesis. This chapter describes the development and profiles of the parties. The purpose of the chapter is to provide the reader with sufficient context and background knowledge to appreciate the significance and meaning of the subsequent empirical findings. For each party the following dimensions will be discussed: the origins of the party, its ideological development, its support, voters, and members, its relationship to the political mainstream, and its development at the local level. The table below shows the parties according to their national and ideological affiliation.

**Table 3.1**: Parties Under Study

| | **Norway** | **Sweden** |
|---|---|---|
| **Left-wing** | Red (R) | Left Party (V) |
| **Right-Wing** | Progress Party (FrP) | Sweden Democrats (SD) |

***The Progress Party***

*Origins and early development*

Like its Danish namesake, the Norwegian Progress Party broke through in the so-called earthquake election of 1973. It was initially called *Anders Lange's Party for a Serious Reduction in Taxes, Duties and Public Interventions* (ALP). As the name indicates, ALP was an entrepreneurial issue party with a neoliberal populist profile, which it maintained until the late 1980s. At that time, the party became more defined by its anti-immigration stance. The initial electoral breakthrough was arguably due to a policy shift toward the center on the part of the Conservative Right party (H) while in coalition governments with parties in the center throughout the 1960s. During these center-right governments, taxes and public expenditures increased and right-wing voters looked for an alternative party to balance out the increasingly moderate consensus of Norwegian politics (Valen, Aardal and Vogt, 1990). Moreover, the EU referendum of 1972 "produced turbulence in the Norwegian political system that allowed for the creation of a new party" (Art, 2011, p. 159).

However, the party's founder died in 1974. The lack of a charismatic leader, in combination with a weak party organization led to a poor election result in 1977, where the party did not achieve any parliamentary representation. In 1978, Carl I. Hagen was elected party leader. His leadership style has been described as "representative of West-European populist radical right parties and their reliance on charismatic, media-savvy leaders" (Mjelde,

2019, p. 92). Hagen enjoyed a 28-year tenure as party leader and became strongly associated with the party itself. After a somewhat turbulent start, falling below the electoral threshold again in 1985, the party has remained well above the threshold since 1989.

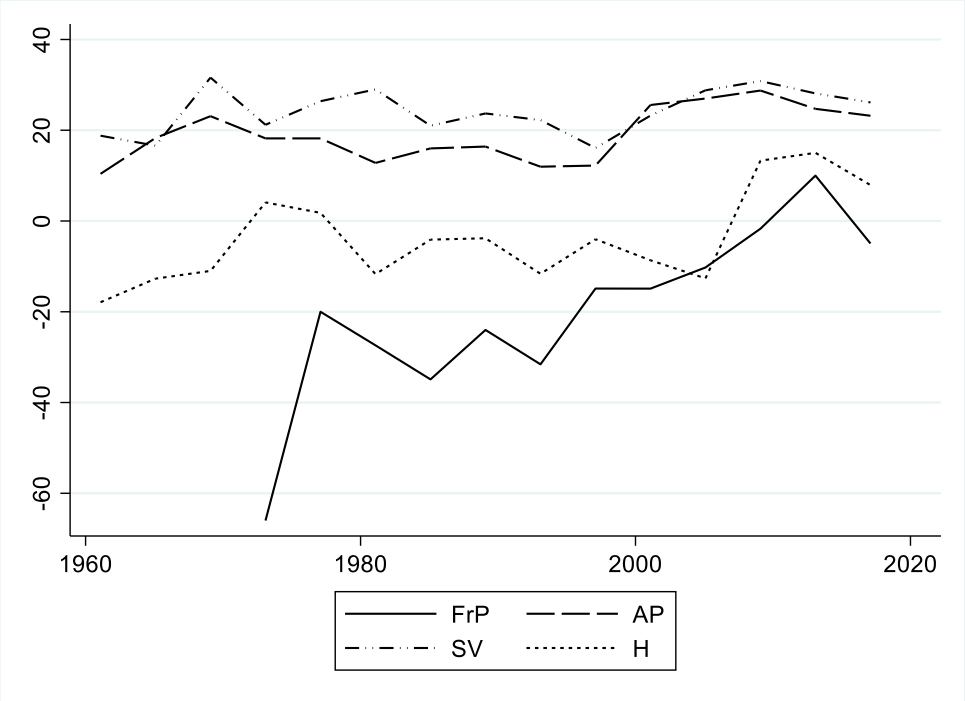
*Ideology*

Until 1994, the party was plagued with internal factionalism between libertarians, Christian conservatives, and nativist populists. This culminated in what has been described as a "battle over the soul of the party" (Jupskås, 2016) which was most dramatically played out at the 1994 party convention. Here, the libertarians lost out and the more nativist faction retained control of the party. Since that time, the party had a more typical populist radical right profile (see Mudde (2007) for a full overview of the characteristics of such parties), although not quite as radical as other members of this party family. This shift let them stay afloat electorally and formed a basis for further growth. First, it espouses populism, appealing to 'ordinary people' and attacking the establishment. This is for instance reflected in the party's slogan "for folk flest", which literally translates to "for most people", but which has connotations that are better covered by the translation "for the common man". The party is also nativist, consistently maintaining a clear anti-immigration profile. The salience of this issue is reflected, for instance, in the fact that its voters, members, and candidates regularly name immigration as one of the most important issues in Norwegian politics. The party is also authoritarian, promoting a less liberal approach to law and order, including stricter sentences for criminals.

Over the years, the profile, goals, and priorities of the party have developed. In the period just after the 1994 formative split, the party radicalized its policy and rhetoric, becoming increasingly associated with the immigration issue (Jupskås, 2016: pp. 171-173). At this time, the party prioritized vote maximization, pursuing a pure oppositional strategy. Since the turn of the millennium, the Progress Party has become more mainstream, increasingly pursuing office, as well as votes. In the early 2000s, it started viewing gradual, rather than immediate policy change as an acceptable way forward. It also began broadening its programmatic appeal, mobilizing on welfare, especially geriatric care, as well as immigration (Jupskås, 2016). Moreover, its leadership took pains to improve the party's image among the other parties and to appear more serious.

The graphs below are based on data from the comparative manifesto project (Volkens *et al.*, 2019).[19] Negative values indicate a right-wing position, and positive values indicate a left-wing position. They show quite clearly the transition of the Progress Party from a neoliberal populist party diverging loudly and clearly from the mainstream on the socio-economic dimension, to a party characterized by nativism, populism and authoritarianism, where they stand apart on the sociocultural dimension. They also show how the Norwegian parties have converged on the socioeconomic dimension and diverged on the sociocultural dimension over time.

**Figure 3.1:** Socioeconomic Positions, Norwegian Parties




*Source*: Comparative Manifesto Project
*Note*: Negative values indicate a right-wing position, and positive values indicate a left-wing position.

Figure 3.2 shows how the FrP radicalized on the sociocultural dimension during the 1990s. It cannot show the full extent of the mainstreaming efforts of the party that took place between 2000 and today, however. As Jupskås (2016) points out, the party largely kept its radical positions in the manifesto and instead worked toward systemic integration by toning down its

[19] In addition to showing the Progress Party's ideological development, these graphs are intended to show the level of polarization in the Norwegian party system over time. Therefore, they include the two dominant mainstream party of the left and right, as well as the two parties in parliament that are closest to the ideological margins. Including more parties would have impacted the visual clarity of the table and would not have given much more useful information. It gives an indication of FrP's contribution to the overall level of socioeconomic and sociocultural polarization among Norwegian parties. The same logic holds for tables 3.6 and 3.7 later in the chapter.

rhetoric in public, building relationships with other parties, and changing its way of operating in parliament.

**Figure 3.2:** Sociocultural Positions, Norwegian Parties


*Note*: Negative values indicate a culturally conservative position, and positive values indicate a liberal position.
*Source*: Comparative Manifesto Project

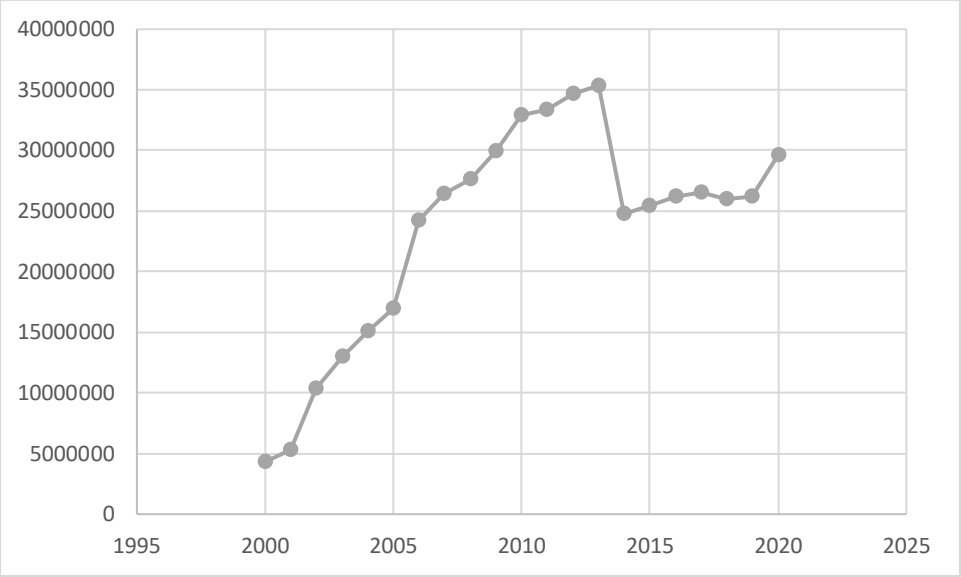
*Support, Members, and Voters*

From 1989 onwards, the Progress Party could be described as an electorally large party. In that parliamentary election, it received 13 percent of the vote. Since then, FrP experienced fluctuations in support, peaking in 2009 at around 23 percent, but never in danger of dipping below the electoral threshold. There have been three parliamentary periods in which the Progress Party was the largest party on the right: 1997-2001, 2005-2009, and 2009-2013. In every election since 2009, the Progress Party has experienced a decline in support. In 2021, it received 11,6 percent, its weakest result since 1993.

The electoral advancement of the Progress Party in the 2005 and 2009 general elections granted the party access to greater financial resources than previously. Figure 3.3 shows the amount of money granted to the party by parliament over time. These increased financial resources helped to facilitate the FrP's transition to a more 'electoral professional

party' model (Panebianco, 1988) where the contact between politicians and voters is to a larger extent managed by outside consultants (e.g. pollsters, PR firms, campaign organizers).

**Figure 3.3:** Money Granted to FrP over Time (NOK)




Source: Parliamentary groups' accounting reports 2001-2020

In terms of membership demographics (for a full overview see Heidar et al's. 2017 report, based on the party member survey from 2016), the FrP stands out from the other parties by having the highest share of people employed in the private sector (73 percent). It also has the lowest share of members with a tertiary education (36 percent), as well as the highest share of male members (81 percent). Not surprisingly, the Progress Party members place themselves further to the right than those of any other party, with an average score of 9,3 on a ten-point scale (ten being furthest to the right). Their members are least prone to agree that we should develop public services rather than reduce taxes. They are also the least 'green' party, with only 15 percent of its members agreeing that we should introduce stronger measures to protect the environment. The Conservatives (H) make a distant second to the Progress Party, with 50 percent of its members agreeing to the statement (all other parties had a share higher than 70 percent). Furthermore, the FrP members are the least 'feminist', with only 40 percent agreeing that we should facilitate more equality between the sexes (compared to 78 percent agreement among all party members). Finally, and not surprisingly, the FrP members are the most anti-immigration, with 83 percent agreeing that immigration is a serious threat to the national character.

Regarding FrP's voters, their profile has changed over time[20]. From the 1970s until 2001, the party had higher support among voters under 30 years of age. More recently, the over-60s have been the group with the largest support for the party. Similarly, FrP has changed its support in urban versus rural areas. Before the turn of the millennium, it received more support in densely populated areas. In more recent elections they have been more popular in the countryside. Since 2001, people with a shorter education have been overrepresented among FrP's voters. Before the turn of the millennium, people with no secondary or tertiary education were underrepresented in FrP's electorate. Some things have remained fairly constant, however. Men have been constantly overrepresented among FrP voters since its inception. Likewise, respondents with lower incomes have been consistently overrepresented. Moreover, since the late 80's FrP voters have named immigration as one of their 'most important issues'. This squares well with the graphs from the manifesto project data displayed above. FrP changed its emphasis from taxes and public interventions to sociocultural issues like immigration around that time. At present, then, an FrP voter is more likely than the average voter to be rural, low-income, male, have a short education, and care about immigration. This profile fits well with previous studies on the sociology of far-right voters (Coffé, 2012; Ivarsflaten and Stubager, 2012; Givens, 2016; Rickardsson, 2021).

When it comes to the level of trust in democratic institutions and actors FrP voters have generally been significantly below the average voter. Bjånesøy and Dahl (2024) show, based on data from the Norwegian Citizens' Panel, that since 2013 (the first year of measurement) FrP voters have consistently exhibited lower levels of trust in politicians, parliament, the media, and fellow citizens, compared to other voters. While democratic satisfaction seems to have been higher among FrP voters at the time the party joined the government in 2013, it never exceeded that of the average voter, and it dropped significantly during the party's time in government.

*Relationship to mainstream*

According to Jupskås (2016a) the Norwegian mainstream parties pursued a dismissive strategy for a long time when it came to FrP's nativist policies. Only in 2005 did the Norwegian Conservatives (H) begin to approach FrP's anti-immigration stances, and even then, the issue had a low salience for H, and the party did not copy FrP's inflammatory

[20] The numbers referenced in this section are all from the Election Studies published by Statistics Norway. For details, see the following reports (Aardal, Valen and Berglund, 1995; Aardal *et al.*, 2003; Kleven *et al.*, 2015)

rhetoric on the immigration issue. In terms of collaboration, the approach has gone from soft exclusion to inclusion. Before the turn of the millennium, the Progress Party was excluded from national alliances but included at the local level. In the early 2000's it provided parliamentary support for a center-right government, and helped it pass several national budgets (Jupskås, 2016c: p. 174). In 2006, it began fostering stronger alliances with the other non-socialist parties in parliament. Finally, in 2013, it took part in a national government coalition with the Conservative Party. As outlined above, these developments are also associated with certain ideological developments for the FrP. We should, however, consider the developments within the Progress Party, in terms of leadership and party organization, that facilitated this transition.

When the founder Anders Lange was the party leader, the Progress Party was a "self-declared pariah in Norwegian politics" (Art, 2011, p. 162). During Carl I. Hagen's leadership, the long-term aim changed to "overcome the party's marginalization and to enter into national-level coalitions" (ibid.). This shift in priorities, especially from the turn of the millennium, involved squeezing out some of the politicians who distinguished themselves as particularly populist. The deputy chairman, Vidar Kleppe, was for instance pressured to leave the party ahead of the 2001 election (Jupskås, 2015).[21] Moreover, as Jupskås (2016a) suggests, the shift in priorities was accompanied by significant developments in party organization, whereby the Progress Party became more organizationally similar to the established mainstream parties in terms of structure and complexity, with national coverage of branches, auxiliary organizations, and greater ideological cohesion.

When Siv Jensen took over as party leader in 2006, the party became less anti-establishment, developing a more mainstream manifesto and voting more in line with the other parties in parliament. The Progress Party also began building better working relationships with the other parties, trying to forge alliances that might translate into a government coalition. In 2013 the party joined a national government coalition for the first time with the mainstream right. In government, it has consistently voted in line with the conservative party (H) and toned down its radical and anti-establishment rhetoric further (Jupskås, 2016d).

We should not overestimate FrP's transformation, however. It has maintained radical positions on issues like immigration and law and order throughout. Even while in

[21] He has since founded a new, more radical anti-immigration populist party named the Democrats (later renamed the Norway Democrats). This party has since been a haven for prominent Progress Party members who have been excluded from the party.

government, it has sustained a "one foot in, one foot out" strategy in its attempts to balance the responsibilities of office and responsiveness to the wishes of its voters. Anders Jupskås (2016: pp. 178-179) refers to this as Janus face of the party, where certain government ministers are behaving responsibly, while others engage in more radical rhetoric and voice radical positions. This strategy amounts to what Albertazzi called 'role playing' (2009, p. 2). Recent evidence suggests that the Progress Party has managed to establish a level of legitimacy as a political actor that is similar to that of the mainstream parties, and far higher than that of extra-parliamentary anti-immigration groups (Berntzen, Bjånesøy and Ivarsflaten, 2017).

As indicated, FrP's designs on office have resulted in greater wielding of control by the national party committee over members and local branches. An example of this is cited in Art's *Inside the Radical Right* (2011). He describes how measures such as banishment from the party and dissolution of local branches were used very rarely in the early days of the party, but used actively later on, as the party's reputation and ambitions grew. In 2000 for instance, the leader and sixteen members of the Oslo branch were excluded from the party for disloyalty. As Art explains:

> This purge was widely viewed as an attempt to increase the FrP's chances of becoming a coalition partner, for the Oslo branch contained some of the more extreme elements in the party (Art, 2011, p. 162).

Furthermore, sanctions in cases of disloyalty to the leadership were formalized in the party statutes in 2001 through the rule known as "resignation by action" (ibid). Should any party member publicly attack the party or its leadership, this would be interpreted as a resignation from the party, and the member would immediately be expelled. 2001 is also the year wherein Art (2011, p. 164) claims the national *cordon sanitaire* (to the extent that ever there was one) effectively ended. In the 2001-2005 period, the Bondevik government regularly depended on FrP's support to pass national budgets.

In sum, the Progress Party has moved away from the prototypically populist organization that characterized it in the early stages. It went from a leader-centered party with low geographic coverage and weak ties to the grassroots and civil society to a structured and complex organization more like that of the established parties. It also developed centralized instruments of party discipline. These organizational features aided the party in its electoral persistence and its attempts to develop alliances with mainstream parties.

Despite these developments, the Progress Party has retained a significant portion of its populist and anti-immigration profile. Andersen and Trondal (2024) show that accompanying

the transition whereby FrP grew closer to the political establishment was a large tension between ideologues and pragmatists within the party. After Jensen's tenure as party leader, the FrP took a decisive step in a more hardline direction with the leadership of Sylvi Listhaug. Besides representing a step away from pragmatism, and towards ideological purity, Listhaug has distinguished herself through scandalous rhetoric directed at other political parties. For instance, she came under fire in 2017 for accusing the leader of the Christian People's Party (KrF) of "licking the backs of Imams"[22] instead of standing up to extremists (Furuly and Randen, 2017). In 2018, she resigned from the post as Justice Minister, facing a vote of no confidence. The no-confidence motion was raised in reaction to a Facebook post where Listhaug accused the Labor Party of believing the "rights of terrorists are more important than the security of the nation" (Thanem, 2018).

*Development at the local level*

Most municipalities in Norway have a so-called alderman system of government, where an executive council is formed automatically based on the proportion of members each party has in the municipal council. The exceptions are Oslo, Bergen, and, for a single government period, Tromsø. These municipalities have parliamentarian systems. The posts of mayor and deputy mayor, however, are instated based on a simple majority vote in the municipal council. Here, there is room for coalition politics at the local level in Norway. Because majority coalitions can include parties besides those who gain the mayor or deputy mayor posts, this variable does not give a full picture concerning government and opposition. The posts nevertheless tend to give a good picture of which parties stand strongest within the governing alliance. Operationalizing government participation in terms of these positions, rather than including everyone who voted for the mayor and deputy mayor (a group that may be very loosely connected indeed), also lets us assume a closer working relationship between the coalition partners.

The FrP gained its first deputy mayor in 1983 in Frogn, a relatively small municipality in Viken county (previously Akershus) near Oslo. In the subsequent local election (1987), it increased its local government participation substantially, gaining one mayor and 11 deputy mayors. Already from the late 1980's, the party was able to cooperate with the mainstream at the local level to form governments. From 1983 to the present, it has had a mayor or deputy mayor in 152 different municipalities. Among these, we find large

[22] An unusual idiom also in Norwegian. From context, the meaning is clearly "sucking up to Imams".

cities such as Oslo and Bergen. Some municipalities have emerged as local strongholds for the party. For example, in the two south-eastern coastal towns of Sandefjord and Nøtterøy, the FrP was in power for seven out of eight government periods from 1987 to 2019, mostly holding the deputy mayor position. An important local showcase for the party has been the municipality of Os, near Bergen. Here, the Progress Party's Terje Søviknes held the post of mayor for nearly 20 years and implemented many of the Progress Party's preferred policies. This case will be described further in Chapter 10. The table below shows the degree of local government participation as well as the country-wide vote share in the local elections for the party between its first deputy mayor (1983) and the government period 2023-27:

**Table 3.2:** Development of FrP's Local Government Participation

| Government period | N mayors | N deputy mayors | Frp vote share |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1983-87** | 0 | 1 | 5.3 % |
| **1987-91** | 1 | 11 | 10.4 % |
| **1991-95** | 0 | 4 | 6.5 % |
| **1995-99** | 0 | 11 | 10.5 % |
| **1999-03** | 1 | 20 | 12.1 % |
| **2003-07** | 13 | 38 | 16.4 % |
| **2007-11** | 17 | 36 | 17.5 % |
| **2011-15** | 11 | 48 | 11.4 % |
| **2015-19** | 5 | 23 | 9.5 % |
| **2019-23** | 3 | 17 | 8.2 % |
| **2023-27** | 14 | 63 | 11.3 % |

Source: Fiva, Halse and Natvik (2020), for 2023: the Employer's organization of Norwegian municipalities (KS)

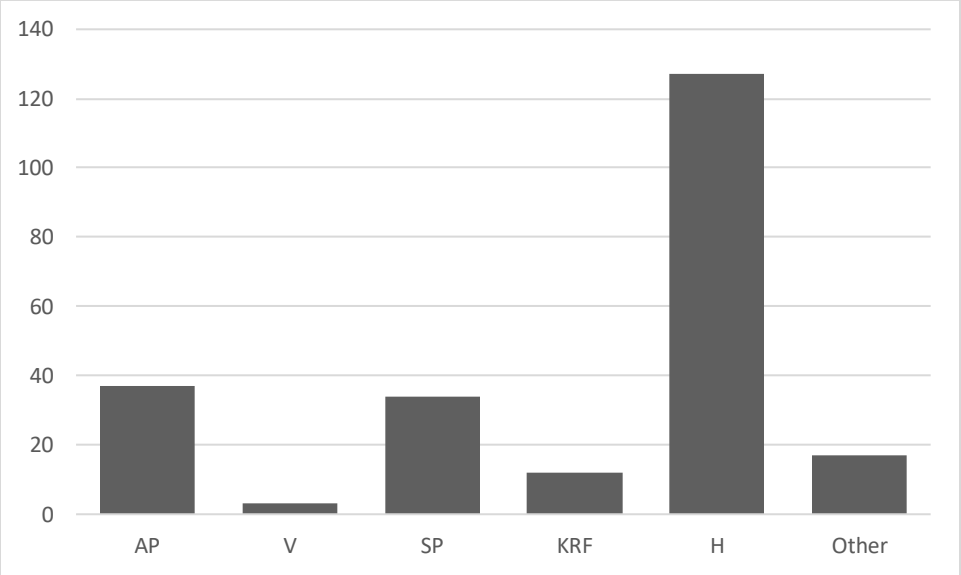
It is interesting to note that the relationship between votes and office is not constant for the Progress Party over time. In 1999, it received a higher vote share than in 2023, yet in the government period 2023-2027, it has a much higher degree of local government participation. This could indicate a higher degree of integration over time. The FrP became a more attractive coalition partner, or more willing to cooperate, and so could increase its local government participation without increasing its vote share[23].

Regarding FrP's local coalition partners, there is a significant ideological spread, but with a clear overrepresentation of the Conservatives (H). In more than half of all instances

[23] Of course, it could also indicate a more ideal geographic distribution of the vote, where more municipalities had the option to form right-wing majority coalitions.

where FrP has had the Deputy Mayor, H has had the Mayor (excluding the cases where FrP held both positions). The partisanship of Mayors collaborating with FrP has also varied over time. In the 1980s H was the only party to include FrP in coalition in the Deputy Mayor position. In the 1990s, we saw a handful of collaborations with other typical Mayor parties like AP and SP. In the 2000s and 2010s, parties beyond the Conservatives make up a substantial share of FrP's local coalitions.

**Figure 3.4:** Mayor Parties when FrP has the Deputy Mayor, 1983-2022




Source: Fiva, Halse and Natvik, 2020.
Since the purpose of this graph is to give an overview of coalition practices, cases where FrP had both the mayor and deputy mayor have been excluded.

*Summary*

In short, the Progress Party had its beginning as a neoliberal populist party. Over time it has gained a more typical populist radical right profile (although less radical than many other members of this party family). A defining moment was the 1994 party congress, where the nativist faction gained de facto control of the party, at the expense of the libertarian wing of the party. Since the turn of the millennium, the party has gradually moderated its ideological profile, broadened its programmatic appeal, and improved its relationship with other parties. In 2013, the party entered national government for the first time. It managed the accompanying tension between responsiveness and responsibility through a division of labor between ‘responsible’ and responsive national politicians. At the local level, there has never been a cordon sanitaire against the party, although it seems to have integrated more over time

– gaining more mayor and deputy mayor positions, despite a lack of electoral growth. So far, the Progress Party seems to have reached its electoral peak in the parliamentary election of 2009 (22,9 percent). Since then, it has declined electorally, gaining around 11 percent of the vote in the last election.

***Red***

*Origins and early development*

Red was formed in 2007 as a merger of the Workers' Communist Party (AKP) and the Red Electoral Alliance (RV). These roots, sometimes described as extreme or authoritarian, have been a barrier to Red's integration into the Norwegian party system. AKP in particular promoted the "dictatorship of the proletariat" and "armed revolution" in its manifesto well into the 1990s. RV was created as the parliamentary branch of the communist movement and its only representation in parliament was a single representative from 1993 to 1997. These organizations both belonged to the Marxist-Leninist and Maoist movements of the 1970s. Although Red is self-consciously distinct from AKP and RV, it is clear that Red would not exist were it not for the "M-L-movements" in the 1970s (Bjørklund and Fjeldavli, 2023: p. 246).

The participation of the Socialist Left Party (SV) in a red-green government in 2005 became a catalyst for establishing a new, strong, and cohesive oppositional party on the far left (Løset, 2017). From a strategic perspective, the formation of the government provided an opportunity to siphon off dissatisfied voters on the left wing of SV (Lyngvær, 2006). From a normative perspective, the lack of an opposition party on the left would have left socialist policy purists without representation as SV's positions were potentially watered down through compromise in government.

Red ran for election for the first time in the municipal elections of 2007[24]. From its inception until the 2021 election, Red was a fairly marginal force in Norwegian politics at the national level. In 2009 and 2013, Red ran for parliament without winning a single mandate. In 2017, party leader Bjørnar Moxnes was elected from Oslo, and in 2021, Red passed the electoral threshold gaining eight MPs.

*Ideology*

[24] Because it failed to register under the name Red in time, it had to run under the label Red Electoral Alliance (RV) in 2007.

Among the parties represented in the Norwegian parliament, Red is furthest to the left. Some classify it as a left-wing extremist party, due to the revolutionary ambitions it expresses in its manifesto. Unlike its predecessors, however, it does not explicitly advocate *armed* revolution.

Red has moved steadily and slowly towards more moderate (although still distinctly radical) positions and has tried to establish itself as a more legitimate player in Norwegian politics. This is especially the case after Bjørnar Moxnes took over as party leader in 2012. He was for instance a part of the sizable minority within the party that wanted to remove the word "communism" from the manifesto at the 2019 party conference (Cosson-Eide and Hirsti, 2019). He lost that vote, but the program of principles was adjusted in many other ways, making the rhetoric less radical and confrontational. The derogatory term "pampeveldet" (rule of the "pamp") to describe the party elites in the Socialist Left Party and Labor Party was removed. The term "pamp" is difficult to translate precisely, but it denotes a leader of a labor organization or labor party who has abandoned their commitments to the grassroots and become more concerned with their own power and personal gain. They also discarded a paragraph that had been criticized as being a defense of armed revolution:

> oppositional forces will not accept a popular, democratic seizure of power, and there is a great risk that they will use unacceptable means to stop the revolution. The people must be prepared for this (cited in Cosson-Eide and Hirsti, 2019)

Moreover, Red moved away from certain phrases that were perceived as old-fashioned or belonging to the old communist movement. The word "bourgeoisie" was for instance replaced with "capitalist class".

Among Red's current key issues are improved conditions and rights for (low-end) workers, the environment, feminism, international solidarity and the global fight against oppression, war, and racism. It often describes its purpose as a struggle against "the Norway of disparities" (Rødt, 2021a). Although it still maintains ambitions of a socialist revolution in its program of principles, it emphasizes that this must happen by peaceful and democratic means. In public discourse, it has focused more on concrete policy issues than on "ending capitalism". It is, in other words, committed to working within the boundaries of liberal democracy to achieve its political goals, despite being a revolutionary party on paper (Bjørklund and Fjeldavli, 2023: p. 247).

Despite many similarities, Red stands apart from SV, the other far-left party in parliament on several issues. Recently, SV has changed its position on Norwegian NATO membership, from leave to stay. Red remains firmly opposed to NATO membership. Moreover, while SV is driven by a 'green perspective' on many issues, Red's positions are

more clearly governed by the goal of reducing economic inequality. This is evident from the reasoning behind Red's rejection of certain green initiatives promoted by SV (Rødt, 2023a). For instance, Red rejects 'zero emission zones' in cities on the grounds that it is unfair if those who can afford electric vehicles are given special privileges. Red also opposes the construction of windmills for power production, which they argue would be damaging to flora and fauna, as well as violating the rights of the indigenous Sami people in certain regions. In terms of salience, SV tends to emphasize new left issues, especially the environment, more than Red, which emphasizes economic equality.

*Support, Members*[25]*, and Voters*

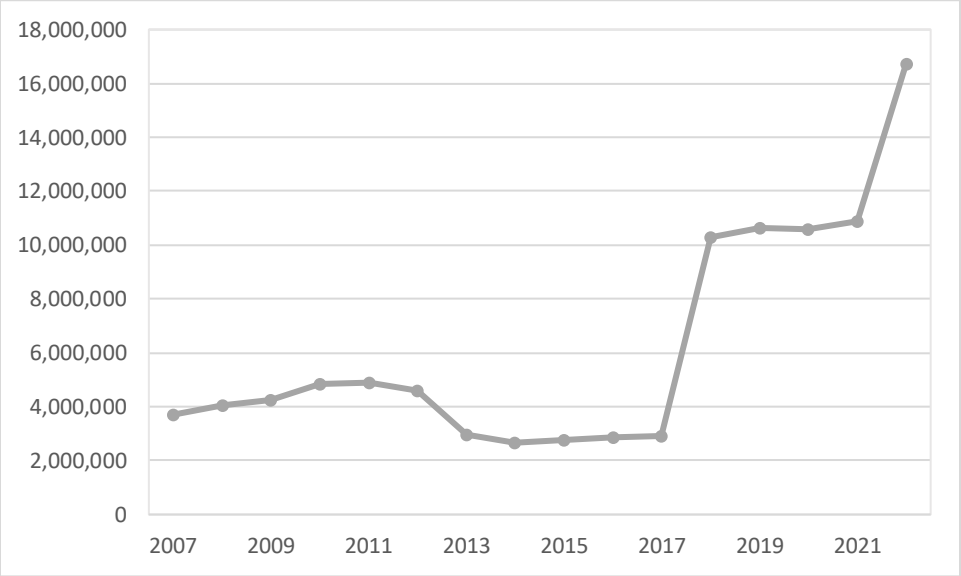
In 2017, the Party leader Bjørnar Moxnes was elected to Parliament from Oslo, and in 2021 Red made it past the electoral threshold of 4 percent for the first time and gained 8 out of 169 MPs. It did better in that election than many of the more established parties, including the Liberals (V), the Greens (MDG), and the Christian Democrats (KrF). A key reason for this increase was the heightened salience of social inequality among voters. In 2017, only 4 percent of voters mentioned this issue as one of the two most important to their vote. In 2021, the number was 16 percent (Institutt for Samfunnsforskning, 2024b). Another (and related) factor was the fact that there had been a right-wing government for two successive government periods. Some of Red's votes were therefore likely cast in protest against the government.

This recent growth in support and influence is reflected, moreover, in Red' steadily growing membership numbers. In 2011, it had around 2000 members[26]. By 2016, it had grown to 3000. After that, it had a growth spurt, reaching 4500 members in 2017[27], 6900 in 2018[28], and 9700 in 2019[29], passing the 10,000 mark in 2020[30], around 13,000 by the end of 2021[31], and 14,200 by the end of 2022[32]. By comparison, the social liberal party Venstre (the oldest party in Norway, along with Høyre) had 7219 members by the end of 2022.

[25] Due to Red's short history as a relevant parliamentary party, there is not much information available on the stances and sociology of its party members. They have not yet been included in surveys of Norwegian party members.
[26] (NTB, 2012)
[27] (Ripegutu, 2018)
[28] (Rødt, 2019)
[29] (Fri Fagbevegelse, 2020)
[30] (Rødt, 2020)
[31] (Rødt, 2022)
[32] (Rødt, 2023b)

In terms of funding, two developments have significantly affected party finances. The first was in 2017 when Red received its first MP, Bjørnar Moxnes from Oslo. Funds allocated to the party by parliament more than tripled at this time. The second event was when Red passed the electoral threshold in 2021. Public funding of the party increased from around eleven million kroner to around seventeen million. In terms of spending, this also had a marked effect. Comparing the election years, Red spent about 260,000 kroner on political advertising in 2017. This increased to almost 8.2 million kroner in 2021[33].

**Figure 3.5:** Money Granted to Red over Time (NOK)




Source: Parliamentary groups' accounting reports 2007-2022

Compared to the average voter, Red's supporters are younger, more urban, have lower incomes, and have a higher level of education (Institutt for Samfunnsforskning, 2024a). The higher support among young voters has been a stable feature of the party since its founding, as well as its predecessor RV (Kvale, 2021). In the 2021 election, social equality and the environment were the two issues that Red voters overwhelmingly described as 'most important' (Bergh, Hesstvedt and Karlsen, 2022). Social (in-) equality and taxation is also the area where Red had the clearest media presence in the run-up to the election, making up a third of all news stories mentioning Red (ibid.: p. 17). In terms of the level of trust in democratic actors and institutions, Red voters are generally less trusting than mainstream voters, but more trusting than FrP voters (Ivarsflaten and Bjånesøy, 2024). Together with the

[33] For a full account of party spending, see the accounting reports at partifinansiering.no.

agrarian Center Party, Red is also the party whose voters have the clearest anti-EU profile. In fact, Red voters go further than those of the Center party. In a 2019 survey, Red was the only party in which a majority of voters expressed the opinion that the European Economic Agreement is bad for Norway (Sverdrup, Svendsen and Weltzien, 2019), and the only party where a majority said they would vote against it in a referendum (Svendsen, 2021).

*Relationship to the mainstream*

Red is an unpopular choice for national governing party among voters. When asked in 2017 "which parties do you not want in government?", 42 percent of respondents mentioned Red. Only two parties, MDG (43 percent) and FrP (47 percent), got higher scores (Bergh, 2019). When asked "Which parties do you want in government", Red was the least popular answer, with only 9 % of voters mentioning them. By comparison, the Progress Party is more divisive for voters, with 47 percent mentioning them as a party they do not want in government and 32 percent mentioning them among the parties they do want to govern.

A challenge for Red in terms of growth and systemic integration is the development of the party organization at the local and grassroots levels. Red is a growing party and has increased its geographic coverage over time. In 2015, it ran for election in 78 municipalities (Kommunal Rapport, 2015a). In 2019, this had increased to 138 (NTB, 2019b). In 2023, it ran in 171 municipalities (Dale, 2023). On the other hand, in a 2024 op-ed written by three prominent local politicians for the party, the authors emphasize that Red is highly centralized around the parliamentary group at the national level and that it is lacking in organizational resources around the country (Aarlott, Fjermeros and Denstad, 2024).

Not surprisingly, Red has had a rather confrontational style in Parliament. In his first parliamentary period, Moxnes proposed two votes of no confidence against cabinet members (the only such proposals of that government period). The first was against the Progress Party Minister of Justice, Public Security and Immigration, Sylvi Listhaug after she published a controversial Facebook post accusing the Labor party of being "more concerned with the rights of terrorists than the security of the nation". This was widely criticized, especially in light of the 22nd of July terror attacks, where the Labor Party was targeted. This vote of no confidence had broad support among the opposition parties and ended with her resignation. The second vote was against Minister of Labor Anniken Hauglie (H) after it became clear that a lot of people had been falsely prosecuted for defrauding the welfare system. Red received no support for this proposal and ended up being the only party to vote for it.

The center-left parties have repeatedly stated that they will not enter a government coalition where Red is a member. The leader of the Labor Party, Jonas Gahr Støre, said in a radio debate that such national collaboration is out of the question, arguing that Red is revolutionary and has undemocratic roots (Myklebust, 2018). The Center Party has made similar statements (Vermnes, 2018). Moxnes on his part, has said in an interview that Red should grow bigger and gain more parliamentary experience before considering joining any government coalition. He cites fears of becoming a doormat of the Labor Party. In the interview, he also stated that policy is more important than office for Red (Sørenes, 2019).

*Development at the local level*

For several years, Red has been influential at the sub-national level, gaining large vote shares and local government positions in several cities. They seem to have gained local strongholds in the northern counties of Troms and Nordland, as well as in Oslo. Overall, they have fared better in the cities than in rural, less populous areas.

Red has had the post of mayor or deputy mayor in seven municipalities since its inception, with varying degrees of success. These municipalities range in size from Sømna (population 1 970) to Tromsø (population 76 975). Table 3.3 gives an overview of Red's executive experience at the local level since it was founded. Red's first mayor was Knut Henning Thygesen in Risør in 2007. However, this was a result of a direct election. Red did not rely on the support of any other parties to secure the post. The 2015 election became somewhat of a breakthrough for the party. It secured prominent positions within four local coalitions: the southern coastal town of Kragerø, and the cities of Gjøvik, Bodø, and Tromsø. The latter three are populous municipalities by Norwegian standards (all in the top decile). Red has also functioned as a parliamentary support party for a left-wing government in Oslo. AP is Red's most frequent coalition partner. In the seven cases where Red had the deputy mayor post, AP had the Mayor post in 5, SP in one (Alstahaug), and a local list in one (Sømna).

**Table 3.3:** Development of Red's Local Government Participation

| Government period | N mayors | N deputy mayors | Red vote share |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2007-11** | 1 | 0 | 1.9% |
| **2011-15** | 0 | 1 | 1.5% |
| **2015-19** | 0 | 4 | 2.0% |
| **2019-23** | 0 | 1 | 3.8% |
| **2023-27** | 1 | 1 | 3.5% |

Source: the Employer's organization of Norwegian municipalities (KS), various news sources (NTB, 2007; Lien, 2011; Birkelund, 2019; Wien, 2019)

*Summary*

In summation, Red is a self-proclaimed communist party with roots in the old Norwegian communist movement. As a party it is, however, clearly distinguishable from its predecessors. Over time, Red has become more moderate and more oriented towards practical politics. While initially marginal, Red has grown electorally and in terms of membership, finally passing the electoral threshold of 4 percent in 2021. Its voters tend to be younger, more urban and more highly educated than the average voter. Red's relationship to the mainstream at the national level has been characterized by mutual rejection (when it comes to coalition formation). However, at the local level they have joined coalitions in several municipalities, the most prominent of which being in the northern cities of Tromsø and Bodø, and as a parliamentary support party in Oslo.

***The Sweden Democrats***

*Origins and early development*

The far-right in Sweden has had a trajectory that is quite different from those of its Scandinavian neighbors. Where the Norwegian and Danish Progress Parties had big breakthroughs in the earthquake elections of 1973, Sweden saw no such early far-right growth. Sweden was long considered an exceptional case in European politics because no far-right party was represented in the Riksdag (Rydgren and van der Meiden, 2019). According to Valen et al. (1990, p. 113), this difference can be explained by the fact that Norway and Denmark both had center-right coalition governments during the 1960s that increased taxes, while Sweden did not. In the two former cases, an opportunity arose for an anti-tax protest party to wedge itself between right-wing voters and mainstream-right parties. In Sweden, where no such coalition had ruled in that period, there was no successful establishment of a

far-right party (Rydgren, 2008b), because discontent with the levels of tax could be channeled into support for mainstream right-wing parties.

Sweden had no far-right representation in parliament until 2010, apart from the single term of 1991-1994 when the anti-immigrant tax-populist party New Democracy (ND) gained 6,7 percent of the vote and 25 out of 349 MPs (Rydgren, 2008b). A weak party organization and external forces such as a deep economic recession contributed to the quick demise of this party. Furthermore, it did not adopt a protectionist, welfare chauvinist stance, which had proved to be successful elsewhere. According to Jens Rydgren "this rendered the party even more out of step with the times from the perspective of vote maximization" (2008, p. 139).

The Sweden Democrats, founded in 1988, was long a marginal force in Swedish politics. The party has roots in the neo-fascist movement, and in the early days of the party, its membership overlapped with several anti-democratic extreme right groups. David Art writes that "until 1994, half of the party members had criminal records and a third were directly connected with neo-Nazi organizations" (Art, 2011, p. 89). This meant that until recently the party was generally stigmatized among most voters and viewed as an unacceptable alternative. Much effort has since gone into the work of making the party more legitimate.

*Ideology*

SD fits the ideological model of a populist radical right party well (Mudde, 2007). It exhibits nationalism, authoritarianism, and populism. Since SD's inception, nationalism has constituted the core ideological principle of the party (Jungar, 2016). Since 2011, the party has also specified social conservatism as a fundamental principle in its manifestos. The first sentence in its 2011 program of principles reads:

> "The Sweden Democrats is a social-conservative party with a nationalist outlook and considers value-conservatism and the maintenance of a welfare model based on solidarity as the most important tools for building a good society" (Sverigedemokraterna, 2011).

Since its inception, the Sweden Democrats have also maintained strict law and order positions. SD's election manifestos have consistently emphasized the "crime problem", often relating it to immigration, and advocated stricter measures to tackle it. In SD's most recent election manifesto (Sverigedemokraterna, 2022), the first five chapters all relate to law and order: Crime and punishment, gang-related crime, victims of crime, the police, and terrorism. In terms of populism, the SD has consistently described the political elites as ignorant and

irresponsible, in particular in terms of how they have dealt with SD's core issues of crime and immigration. Recent manifestos also argue for an increased use of direct democracy in Sweden, with the argument that elites are not acting according to the will of the Swedish people.

While defined in terms of its positions on sociocultural issues, the party is best classified as centrist (in the Swedish context) on the socioeconomic dimension. It is a staunch supporter of the welfare state, although clearly welfare chauvinist, and advocates wealth redistribution and regulation of the market (Jungar, 2016).

*Support, Members, and Voters*

Since the 2002 election, when it received 1,4 percent of the votes, SD has seen tremendous electoral growth. It doubled its vote share from 2002 to 2006, receiving 2,9 percent. In 2010, it obtained 5,7 percent and was represented in parliament for the first time. In 2014 the party got 12,9 percent of the votes, ending Sweden's status as an exceptional case where no large far-right party had emerged (Rydgren and van der Meiden, 2019). In 2018, SD received 17,5 percent, making it difficult for any coalition to form without them. In 2022, they received 20,5 percent of the vote, making it the largest party on the right. Since 2022, SD has also functioned as a parliamentary support party for the center-right government. In just a decade, the party has gone from a marginal and marginalized player in Swedish politics to the second-largest party. Rydgren and van der Meiden (2019) explain this growth as resulting from four factors:

> "(1) the decline of class politics in Sweden; (2) the growing salience of sociocultural politics, and in particular the politicization of the immigration issue; (3) the increased convergence caused by a double move toward the center by the Social Democratic party and Conservative party, leaving voters confused about policy alternatives; and (4) the process by which the Sweden Democrats have tried to distance itself from its neo-fascist past and erect a more respectable façade."

Not surprisingly, given this remarkable growth, there have been some significant changes to the voter base of the Sweden Democrats over the past decade (Öhberg, 2020). The most striking change is the growth in support among all demographics. It is still a party that appeals more to men, workers, and people in rural areas. Their age profile has been reversed, however. It has gone from being a party for younger voters to one that attracts more middle-aged and elderly supporters. Moreover, it has become more popular among white-collar workers in the private sector. Compared to a decade ago, the SD electorate comprises people

with a significantly higher degree of political interest. SD's voters also identify as strong supporters of the party to a higher extent. In terms of its voters' position on the core issue of immigration, not much has changed. In 2019, they were still on average as opposed to accepting more refugees as they were in 2009 (ibid.). Finally, the voters of the Moderates and Christian Democrats have become much more sympathetic towards SD, opening a space for coalition building between the parties going forward.

The SD has been the subject of a strict cordon sanitaire, where mainstream parties have refused to form coalitions with them, collaborate over policy, or even vote for any of SD's policy proposals, regardless of the content, at the national, regional, or local levels. David Art (2011) describes how the taboo against association with the party has prevented ambitious potential members from joining, prevented the party from finding venues for meetings (as no one would rent to them, fearing vandalism), caused party activists to lose their jobs and even resulted in physical violence against SD members. The threat of job loss, verbal abuse, or physical violence against SD members meant that there was a certain 'social selection' among active members. In Art's words, the people who choose to join under these conditions are 'those who have little to lose' (p. 95). In practice, this meant that the party attracted members of lower socio-economic status and retirees. Moreover, as Loxbo and Bolin (2016) show, the socioeconomic status of candidates is positively related to SD's electoral performance at the local level. This cordon sanitaire has therefore arguably presented a real barrier to electoral growth in the early phases of party development.

If we look at the party's elected representatives at the local level, we can see that SD's representatives are much less educated and have significantly lower incomes than local representatives across all parties[34]. While the education gap has remained more or less constant over the past two decades, the difference in terms of income has lessened somewhat over time. In the period 2006-2010, 42 percent of SD representatives were in the bottom 40 percent of the population in terms of income. In 2022, only 29 percent were in that income bracket. This is still a significantly larger share than among representatives overall, where 19 percent were in the low-income groups (both in 2006 and 2022). The gender imbalance is also much larger among SD representatives compared to politicians from all parties. This has also lessened somewhat over time. In 2006-2010, 80 percent of local representatives from SD were men. In 2022, the share was 72 percent. By comparison, the share of men across all parties has remained steady at 57 percent since 2006. Overall, SD is a demographically

[34] The numbers cited in this section are all from the statistics database of Sweden's Central Bureau of Statistics (SCB).

unusual party but has become slightly more similar to the other parties over time. An interpretation is that as the taboo against association with the party has become weaker, the party has been able to recruit outside its traditional membership base.

*Relationship to the mainstream*

The mainstream parties have adopted various strategies for dealing with the electoral challenge of SD over time. Rydgren and van der Meiden (Rydgren and van der Meiden, 2019) describe the response of the mainstream parties until the 2010 parliamentary breakthrough as "dismissive". After that, they pursued a more adversarial strategy. This is evident in the televised party leader debates since October 2012, where SD has been accused of "inhumane" comments and rhetoric, "driving up ice-cold sentiments and poison in Swedish society", being racists, xenophobic and right-wing extremists (see for example 'Agenda partiledardebatt', 2012). Finally, they changed to a more accommodative approach, adopting a stricter stance on immigration and law and order, and, in the case of L, M, and KD including SD in a national alliance.

In the Norwegian case, we could see a clear convergence among all the parties on the socioeconomic dimension. A similar trend can be observed in Sweden (figure 3.6). Again based on Comparative Manifestos data (Volkens *et al.*, 2019), graphs can be constructed, showing how Swedish parties develop on the socioeconomic and sociocultural dimensions over time.

**Figure 3.6:** Socioeconomic Positions, Swedish parties


Note: Negative values indicate a left-wing position, and positive values indicate a right-wing position.
*Source*: Comparative Manifesto Project

As in Norway, Swedish parties converge on the socioeconomic dimension over time. The development of the sociocultural dimension stands out, however. As the Sweden Democrats enter parliament, we see evidence of the supreme consensus among the other parties in Swedish politics regarding all matters sociocultural. There is a big gap between SD and the rest. Over time, however, we can see the two largest parties (Social Democrats and Moderates) doing a hard turn to the right, perhaps to prevent voter flight to SD. This is also reflected in the rhetoric and collaboration practices of the Moderate leadership. There is a clear contrast between the approach of Fredrik Reinfeldt (2003-2015), who expressly rejected SD and emphasized progressive immigration policies, and his successors, Anna Kinberg Batra (2015-2017) and Ulf Kristersson (2017-present), who coopted parts of SD's immigration policies, and gradually opened up to SD's inclusion in right-wing collaborations (Jupskås, 2021)[35].

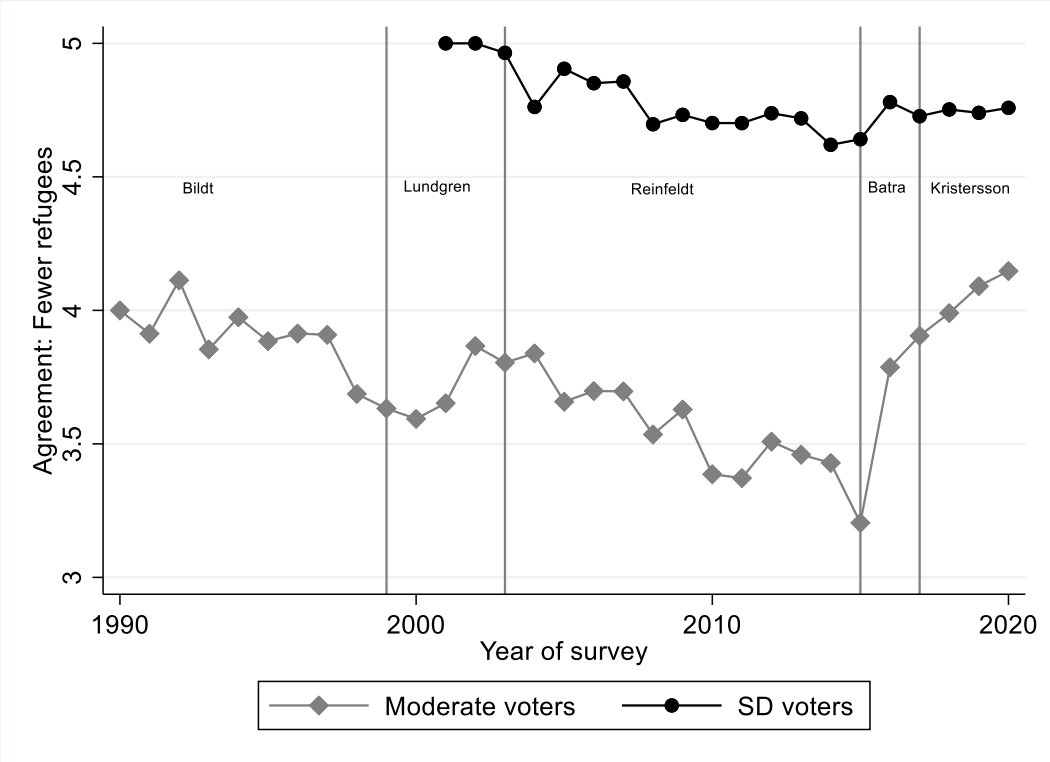
[35] By way of illustration, Fredrik Reinfeldt gave a campaign speech in 2014, urging Swedes to "open their hearts to the vulnerable people around the world" (Karlsson and Eriksson, 2014). By contrast, Ulf Kristersson stated in a 2021 radio interview that "immigration has become a burden to Sweden" and that a failed integration policy was at the root of Sweden's challenges with crime (Sveriges Radio, 2021).

**Figure 3.7:** Sociocultural Positions, Swedish Parties


*Note*: Negative values indicate a culturally conservative position, and positive values indicate a liberal position.
*Source*: Comparative Manifesto Project

The ideological composition of the voters for SD and the Moderates also reflects these developments. Since 2015, likely helped along by the refugee crisis and several leadership changes, each new leader representing a tougher stance on immigration, the voters for the Moderate Party have become steadily more restrictive on the immigration issue. Figure 3.8 shows the average position on the refugee question among SD and M voters over time. We see that the largest movement among M voters in terms of their positions on the refugee question happened between 2015 and 2016, coinciding with the Syrian refugee crisis as well as a change in leadership from Frederik Reinfeldt, who was fairly liberal on this question to Anna Kinberg-Batra who represented a stricter position. Since 2016, the voters have moved steadily towards a more restrictive attitude.

**Figure 3.8:** SD and M Voters' Average Level of Agreement: "Sweden Should Accept Fewer Refugees", over Time (Separated by Leader of the Moderates).




*Source:* The SOM-study (SOM Institute, University Of Gothenburg, 2019)

As long as it remained in place, the cordon sanitaire was an impediment both to collaboration with other parties and to party building and professionalization. As mentioned, however, SD has grown exponentially in parliament over the past decade. This has meant a large increase in the party's budgets, for instance in terms of campaign spending (Grusell and Nord, 2020). Along with increased representation and funding, the party has professionalized, and "put in place instruments for the control, socialization, and education of both party representatives and activists" (Jungar, 2016, p. 215). Furthermore, and similarly to the FrP, the SD has since conducted purges of members that are considered too radical, including the dissolution of the party's youth organization in 2015 (Widfeldt, 2017, p. 139). Ann-Cathrine Jungar describes the strategy adopted since the leadership change in 2005 as a desired transformation "from what many considered a 'pariah party' into an 'electable' contender by moving toward ideological moderation and enforcing greater party discipline" (2016, p. 210). In practice, this has involved a more centralized party structure and strict guidelines for party members regarding "acceptable" speech and behavior. This has not been well received by ideological

hardliners within the party, however. The SD's recent history has been marked by internal conflicts, expulsion of members and party splits (see Jungar, 2016).

After the 2022 election SD became a support party for a right-wing government, including the Moderates, Christian Democrats and Liberals. This is a big step toward legitimation and integration for SD. Despite being the largest party on the right, however, the Sweden Democrats were not offered any cabinet positions, let alone the premiership. To be sure, this was in some ways an ideal development for SD, which got the chance to push many of its favorite policies through, without bearing the responsibility of a cabinet portfolio. In effect, it is free to criticize those policies not covered by the government agreement, and in that way limit the vote loss that may follow from government responsibility. Despite the collaboration between SD and the mainstream, one could argue that these negotiations reveal the enduring influence of the cordon sanitaire in Sweden (Axelsen, 2023). The mainstream right parties could arguably have limited SD's policy influence in exchange for cabinet positions, but they chose to exclude it for normative reasons. The Liberals stated before the election that they refused to join a government that included SD. The leader of the party asserted that:

> "I will not become a Sweden Democrat just because we agree on the issue of nuclear power" (Åberg, 2022).

Seemingly, the statement was made to maintain the perceived boundary between his party and the SD.

*Development at the local level*

At the municipal level, collaboration between SD and the mainstream happened for the first time after the 2018 election. Seven municipal governments in the Skåne and Blekinge regions included SD: Svalöv, Staffanstorp, Hörby (where they governed alone), Bromölla, Bjuv, Surahammar and Sölvesborg. Their local coalition partners were the Moderates, the Christian Democrats, the Liberals, the Center Party (only in Surahammar) and a local list in Sölvesborg. In all instances, the Moderates were part of the coalitions together with SD, apart from in Hörby, where the SD ruled in a single-party minority government[36]. At the time these collaborations were initiated, both M and KD had central guidelines prohibiting coalitions with SD. This led to some tension between these local branches and the central leaderships of

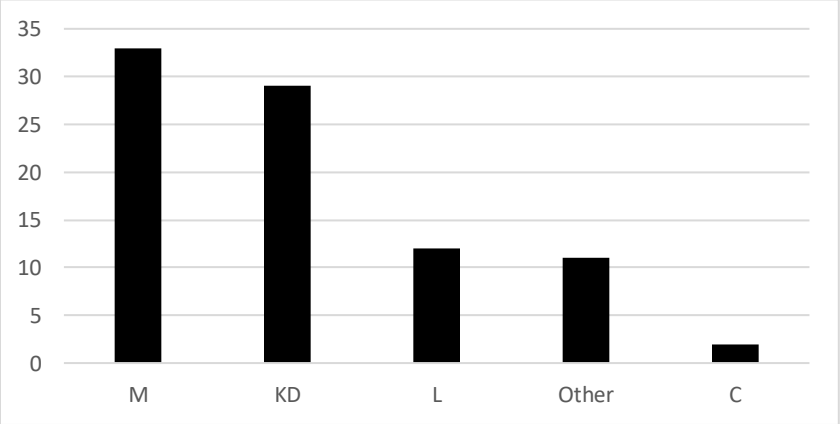
[36] Here, the Moderates helped to elect SD into power through a 'technical collaboration' (Rydhagen, Kjelldén and Dyrssen, 2018)

the parties. For example, in reference to the coalition in Staffanstorp, deputy party secretary for the Moderates, Anders Edholm stated:

> "This goes against the party guidelines. We are not to collaborate with SD at the local, regional or national level" (Nord and Carlsson, 2018).

Overall, the ascendancy of the Sweden Democrats has created certain dilemmas for the mainstream parties when it comes to local coalition building. Where SD has grown to prominence, within-bloc coalitions became impossible, and mainstream parties were forced to choose between staying out of government, crossing the bloc lines, forming minority governments, or collaborating with SD. Karl Loxbo (2010) showed that the polarizing impact of SD led to an abundance of minority governments, rather than grand coalitions. After the 2022 election, the number of local coalitions with the SD grew massively. At the time of writing, it is part of 38 local governments. Figure 3.9 shows the distribution of their local coalition partners. Strikingly, only their national partners have initiated extensive local collaborations with SD. This is unusual for a country where local collaborations often include parties from opposite sides of the political spectrum. By comparison, the Left Party collaborated with M in seven municipalities in the previous government period. Had the norm against collaboration with the Sweden Democrats been abandoned completely, we would expect a wider selection of local coalition partners.

**Figure 3.9:** Frequency of SD's Local Coalition Partners, 2022-2026




*Source:* SKR

*Summary*

In sum, SD is the party among my cases that has been most consistently ostracized. This is partly due to the origins of the party, which most scholars describe as neo-fascist. Since entering parliament, the party has experienced tremendous (near exponential) electoral growth. It has also actively attempted to distance itself from its extreme roots, excluded

members that are considered too radical, and generally enforced greater party discipline. Moreover, there has been considerable movement on the part of the Swedish mainstream parties, which have coopted parts of SDs rhetoric and taken more right-wing positions on sociocultural issues. Most recently, this has resulted in a collaboration agreement at the national level between SD and three mainstream right parties. At the local level SD entered coalition governments in several municipalities just after the 2018 elections. Since the 2022 election SD's number of local coalitions has increased vastly, but is, with two exceptions, still limited to its three national collaboration partners. Its most common collaboration partner is the Moderates.

### ***The Left Party***

*Origins*

Among the parties under study here, the Left Party is by far the oldest. It was founded in 1917 under the name Sweden's Social Democratic Left Party. It was established in a split from the Social Democratic party as a revolutionary branch of the workers' movement. In 1921 the name was changed to Sweden's Communist Party (SKP) and it entered the Communist International. During the 1950s and early 1960s, it distanced itself from Moscow, with "a final rupture in 1964" (Koß, 2010). Between 1967 and 1990 it functioned under the name The Left Party Communists. Since 1990 it has been called the Left Party. The final name change happened as a reaction to the collapse of international communism when it renounced the communist label and decided to redefine itself as a "non-communist radical left" party (March, 2008, p. 129). In Blomgren's (2023: p. 518) assessment, the party has transformed from a traditional communist party to a democratic socialist party.

Already from the 1960's, the party was attempting to negotiate a common electoral platform with S, but as Koß (2010: p. 106) points out "the party's ongoing relative closeness in ideological terms to Soviet Communism rendered SKP an unacceptable partner for the Social Democrats." Informal cooperation occurred from the middle of the century, however, and the Left Party consistently supported Social Democratic governments. V has been described as a 'captive party' throughout most of its history (Bale and Bergman, 2006). It has provided support for the Social Democrats without receiving much in return, because any alternative government would, from V's perspective, be much worse. In the words of Bale and Bergman (2006: p. 430), since they "could not countenance letting the right into government, they could be relied upon not to pull the plug on a Labour or Labour-led

administration." In short, most of V's history has been marked by a distinct lack of bargaining power in relation to the Social Democratic Party.

*Ideology*

In its long history, V has undergone several periods of change in terms of ideology and affiliation. Most interesting in the context of this thesis, however, are the changes to the party profile that have taken place since the fall of international communism. According to David Arter (2002), these include a renewal of the party's ideology, away from Marxism-Leninism and toward a "new left" ideology. At present, the party holds a red-green profile emphasizing environmental protection as well as economic equality. In its current manifesto, V describes itself as a "socialist and feminist party with ecological foundations" (Vänsterpartiet, 2018).

The ideological changes of the party relate closely to a reorientation of the party toward government participation. Since the 1990s, V has sought to build a better relationship with the Social Democrats in order to pursue participation in future governing coalitions. In 1990, the word "communist" was removed from the party name. In light of the developments in Central and Eastern Europe, it was argued that the label was a "massive barrier to prospective voters" (Arter, 2002, p. 16). In 1992, 38 leading members of the party issued a statement demanding that the party "remove commitment to a planned economy, promote individual freedom and shift the program in a generally left socialist direction" (Arter, 2002, p. 9).

In the Swedish National Broadcaster's (SVT) voting advice application for 2022, the Left Party listed three issues as the "most important" at the national level: opposition to privatization and market logic in education, reduction of CO2 emissions, and nationalization of the energy industry.

*Support, Members, and Voters*

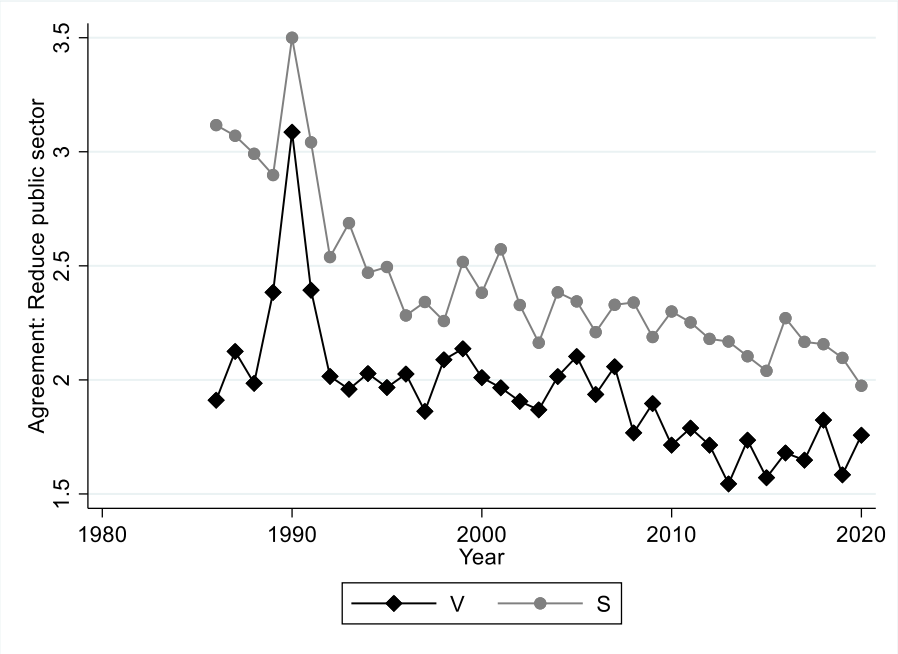
The Left Party has for most of its history been one of the smaller parties in Swedish politics. According to Arter (2002), V stayed afloat electorally for a long time due to the so-called "comrade vote", or tactical support from Social Democrats, following the introduction of a 4 percent national electoral threshold in 1968. The average vote share for V was 5,6 percent in the 1980s, 7,6 percent in the 1990s, 7,2 percent in the 2000s, and 6,4 percent in the 2010s. V's highest vote share after the Second World War was in 1998 when it received 12 percent. The electoral peak in the mid- to late 1990s has several reasons. First, as pointed out by Arter

(2002), the party exhibited clear and unanimous opposition to Swedish membership in the EU (only the Greens shared this stance), which resulted in a "single issue bonus" in the 1994 general elections. A second reason is the turn to the right by the ruling Social Democrats. V managed to wedge itself between the Social Democrats and its voters by criticizing cuts to the welfare state (Arter, 2002, p. 25). Finally, Schyman's charisma and broader voter appeal is emphasized in the literature (see for example Arter, 2002; Koß, 2010) This resulted in V becoming the third largest party in parliament and put them in an advantageous position for legislative deal-making with the Social Democrats and Greens. From 1998 to 2006 V functioned as an active support party (institutionalised through support party contracts) in parliament for the ruling Social Democrats.

Summarizing the attitudes of the members, they are in favour of diversity and multiculturalism, a big government presence in the economy, strong environmental protection, LGBTQ rights, less severe punishments for crime, and redistribution of wealth (See the summary by Kölln & Polk, 2015). There are two issues that especially unite the members of V: redistribution of wealth and environmental protection. Compared with members of other (especially larger mainstream) parties, the V members are less prone to emphasise government participation as a key goal of the party, and they are more likely to report that party representatives are interested in what they think – i.e. perceived efficacy within the party is higher among V members (Kölln and Polk, 2015b). The strong intra-party democracy is one of the factors that made the break with the party's communist roots such a protracted process.

The party is overrepresented among urban and female voters (SVT, 2021). They also have a higher share of sympathizers among younger voters, and those with a longer tertiary education, compared to those who only have a secondary or primary education (SCB, 2018). Figure 3.10 shows the development of Left Party voters on the question of the size of the public sector. It shows that on the socioeconomic dimension, the difference between the voters of the two parties has remained fairly steady since the mid-90s.

**Figure 3.10**: Agreement with Reducing the Public Sector, V and S Voters




*Source:* The SOM-study (SOM Institute, University Of Gothenburg, 2019)

*Relationship to the mainstream*

As indicated earlier, V has experienced several shifts in party goals and ideology. An important period of moderation was the 1990s, when the party distanced itself from its communist legacy. A key figure in the move toward moderation and governing ambitions was the party leader from 1993 to 2003, Gudrun Schyman. She distinguished herself from previous leaders with her charisma, media savvy, and mass appeal (March, 2008, p. 137). She advocated participation in a governing coalition with the Social Democrats, as well as a broadening of V's ideological platform and a conscious break with its communist roots (Koß, 2010, p.107). In general, the party gained a new and softer image in that period. She explicitly advocated a break with the "communist tradition" and rejected the communist label. In a famous speech at the party conference in Växjö in 2000, she declared:

> "We have once and for all broken with the communist tradition. We reject Lenin's theory of the party and the state. We reject the communist theories of armed revolution, the leading role of the party, one-party rule, and planned economy" (Cited in Nilsson, 2017)

The modernization of the party was not met with unanimous approval. David Arter describes the process as "protracted and divisive" (2002, p. 9). By way of example, the aforementioned 38 party members who issued a statement in favour of moderation were met with scepticism by other leading members of V who believed it to be an attempt to split the party (ibid, p. 10). Traditionalists within the party have been most unhappy with the extent and pace of change to the party profile since the fall of communism. With its roots in the old communist movement, V's history is characterized by a "permanent struggle between 'reformers' and 'traditionalists'" (Koß, 2010). Schyman was ultimately succeeded by a traditionalist, Lars Ohly, who refused to denounce communism and facilitated a turn toward the left for the party as a whole.

V has been in more or less formalized collaborations (though never as cabinet members) with two other parties at the national level: the Social Democrats and the Greens. Koss makes the point that despite (or perhaps due to) the similarities between the Greens and V, they have had a complicated relationship. As he points out: "Not only is V quite 'green'; the Greens are, despite their bloc-transcending image, really a party of the left" (2010, p. 114). Their relationship is characterized by a lack of mutual trust and communication (ibid).

Being on the far left, V has traditionally been in a difficult negotiating position when dealing with the Social Democrats. In fact, according to several scholars, the party has "been held captive, supporting Social Democratic Party (SAP) minority governments for fear of a centre-right alternative" (Keith, 2011: p. 108; Bale and Bergman, 2006). This situation made it difficult for V to make it plausible that its parliamentary support was conditional on its policy demands being met. Certain changes in Swedish politics have boosted the influence and coalition potential of the party over the last two decades, however. As Keith explains:

> New budget procedures made it harder for minority governments to remain in power after being defeated in parliament in votes on the budget, prompting SAP [Social Democrats] to formalise relations and to negotiate 'contracts' for Vänsterpartiet's support between 1998–2006 […]. After a right-wing coalition came to power in 2006, SAP became more enthusiastic about bringing V into government and made a pre-electoral coalition agreement with them in 2009 (2011, 108).

The historical reluctance of the Social Democrats to invite the Left Party into any kind of coalition at the national level proved to be justified in the 2010 election. According to Aylott

and Bolin, the Social Democrats' "[a]ssociation with the Left Party had alienated middle-class, urban voters, and the Social Democrats' electoral support in 2010 fell to its lowest since 1914" (2015, p. 731). This sentiment is echoed by Anders Widfeldt who writes that

> The formerly communist Left Party was still considered by many as too radical and irresponsible, and its inclusion in a prospective coalition was seen as damaging to the other two red–green parties (Widfeldt, 2011, p. 1148)

In 2014, despite V's wishes to join, the party was excluded from a red-green coalition of S and MP (Blomgren, 2023). In recent years, the Left Party has taken on a new, and more assertive oppositional role in relation to the Social Democrats, even engaging in legislative deal-making with center-right parties against the Social Democrats on occasion (ibid.: p. 535).

*Development at the local level*

At the local level, the Left Party has consistently had a high level of participation in government. Between 1994 and 2018, 2028 governments were formed at the local level in Sweden. V was a part of 598 of these. The most common form of government participation for V is as a junior coalition partner to the Social Democrats. The table below shows the number of governments V participated in per government period as well as their overall vote share at the local level.

**Table 3.4:** Local Government Participation and Vote Share, Left Party

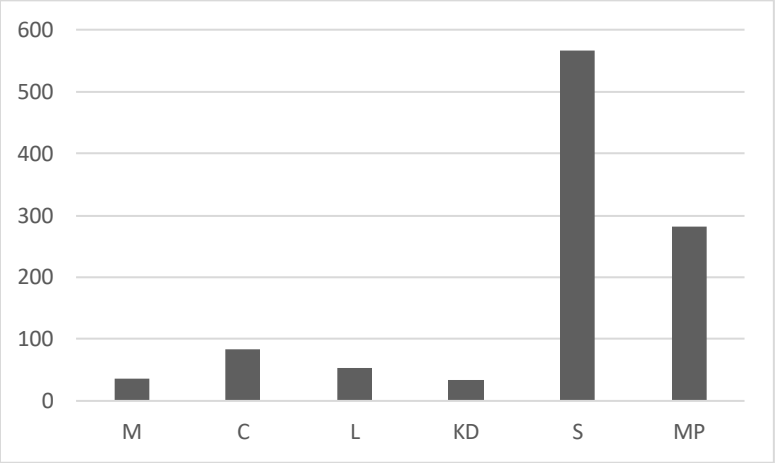
| Government period | V-governments | V vote share |
|---|---|---|
| 1994-1998 | 79 | 6.0% |
| 1998-2002 | 112 | 10.2% |
| 2002-2006 | 97 | 8.2% |
| 2006-2010 | 69 | 6.0% |
| 2010-2014 | 83 | 5.6% |
| 2014-2018 | 103 | 6.4% |
| 2018-2022 | 61 | 7.7% |
| 2022-2026 | 60 | 6.8% |

*Sources: SCB, SKR (2021)*

Regarding local coalition partners, we see a clear pattern (Figure 3.11). V has mainly entered left-wing coalitions at the local level. S is V's most frequent coalition partner by far, followed by the Greens (MP). The Social Democrats have been V's coalition partner in 95 percent of

all V's local governments, and the Greens in 47 percent. Policy distance and national alliances seem to be key factors determining V's coalition membership also at the local level. However, as the Sweden Democrats have grown electorally, V has increasingly been included in cross-bloc coalitions. Before 2014, while SD was still a marginal force in municipal councils across Sweden, only 13 percent of V's local coalitions included parties from the center-right. From 2014 to 2022, after SD had made large electoral inroads, nearly half of V's local coalitions were cross-bloc alliances.

**Figure 3.11:** Frequency of V's Local Coalition Partners, 1994-2022




*Source*: SKR

*Summary*

In sum, the Left Party is a left-wing challenger with roots in the Swedish communist movement. Unlike Red, the Left Party has been in continual existence since 1917, when it split away from the Social Democrats. Since the fall of international communism, the party has changed its ideological profile towards that of a new left party. Presently, it has a red-green profile, emphasizing social equality and environmentalism. These are also the issues its members care most about. Women, urbanites, and highly educated people are overrepresented among their voters. In pursuit of greater insider status within the Swedish party system, the party has in recent decades moderated its ideological profile in several ways, including a rejection of the communist label. These changes have been met with internal resistance. Electorally, the party reached a peak in 1998 when it received 12% of the vote at the national level. The Social Democrats have historically been reluctant to invite the Left Party into government at the national level. In 1998, however, V did gain the position of active support party for S. At the time of writing, V has yet to be formally included in a

national governing coalition. There has been a consistently high level of coalition formation between V and S at the local level for a long time, however.

**Conclusion**

Overall, we are dealing with a rather diverse group of challengers. Two are on the right and two are on the left. Two (V and FrP) have relatively long experiences in parliament and have engaged in alliance formation at the national level and two have a shorter history as parliamentary parties and have no (R), or a very short (SD), history of national alliance formation. SD has experienced strict exclusion at the local level, while the other three have been included at this level all along. The parties also diverge in their origins. SD, and to a lesser extent R and V have struggled with a perceived 'extreme legacy' that has impeded their ability to integrate into the party system. The Progress Party, with roots in the anti-tax movement, has had an easier time building alliances at the national level.

On the other hand, they share some key features. Beyond the defining features of challenger parties elaborated in the theory section, they have all at one point been excluded at the national level due to their perceived policy distance from the mainstream, radical roots, or image as unreliable or irresponsible government partners. Moreover, they have undergone periods of moderation, motivated by the goal of obtaining a more serious image and engaging in executive or policy collaborations with other parties. They have all faced internal resistance to these changes by 'policy purifiers' or traditionalists within the parties. At the local level, all four parties have joined coalition governments. In all cases, this has been before national-level inclusion. For FrP and V these local coalitions were ideologically narrow in the beginning, and included a wider range of parties later on. For SD and Red, they are still ideologically narrow.

# Chapter 4: The Determinants of Local Coalition-Formation with a Challenger in Norway

The first empirical question addressed by this thesis concerns the determinants of coalition formation for challengers at the local level. There are good reasons to examine these in a study of systemic integration. First, we do not know the extent to which policy proximity matters to government participation at the local level. If it does matter, then it constitutes an important incentive to moderate and integrate for office-oriented branches of the challenger party. Moreover, I argued in Chapter 1 that central parties may take lessons from the local level and use successful subnational examples to showcase their abilities to govern, cooperate, and take responsibility. This mechanism is significantly weakened if ideology plays a minimal role at the local level. A similar argument can be made about the extent to which we can draw lessons from this study that apply beyond the local level. If similar factors matter at the local level, then it is a fair equivalent of the national political system, and we can more confidently use the findings in this thesis to hypothesize about similar events at the national level.

Before moving on to the question of the impact of government participation, I will therefore examine the determinants of such participation. This has been done at the national level by several authors. Building on these, and especially on the model by Sarah de Lange (2008), I will determine whether challenger politicians at the local level enter coalitions on similar grounds as politicians at the national level.

The section on the Progress Party will first outline the theoretical model and hypotheses for the logistic regression. Thereafter it presents the data, and explains how the variables were operationalized before presenting the results. It also discusses some cases that were not well covered by the model, and explains how inclusion or inclusion occurred in these instances.

The section on Red considers the role of the size- and ideology variables in each case of government participation. It also looks at certain factors beyond the model, and considers some puzzling outliers. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the findings inform the theory presented in Chapter 1.

## The Progress Party

Sarah de Lange has argued forcefully that "the government participation of radical right-wing populist parties is structured by the same factors that structure the government participation of other kinds of parties, mainstream and non-mainstream" (2008: p. 224) A main conclusion from de Lange's thesis is that radical right parties are invited into coalitions as junior members based on their parliamentary strength and their ideological proximity to the prime minister's party. In other words, the senior coalition member invites the challenger to participate in coalitions for reasons of office-seeking and policy-seeking. She did not find support for hypotheses related to the size of the prime minister's party, the growth of the radical right party or the electoral losses of the prime minister's party.

In this chapter, I run a similar logistic regression analysis on data covering coalition formation following the 2019 local elections in Norway. I include a similar set of variables as de Lange. I find that the local level is similar to the national level in terms of the determinants of coalition-formation. Just as de Lange did, I find significant effects of policy proximity to the senior government party (but only on socio-economic and not socio-cultural issues) as well as for the share of seats obtained by the challenger. I do not find significant effects of the size of the party of the mayor or of changes in the share of the challenger party; again, similarly to de Lange. I also examine some cases that are not well accounted for by the statistical model to identify alternative causal paths to inclusion and exclusion from government.

### *Hypotheses*

A common assumption in the literature is that challengers emphasize votes and (pure) policy above office. This is in part related to the trade-off between office on the one hand and policy and votes on the other, which is often claimed to be greater for challengers (Adams et al., 2006; de Lange, 2008: p. 87; Heinisch, 2003). The idea is that to a greater extent than conventional parties, challengers are punished by voters for government participation (Krause, 2019) or for policy adjustments made in coalitions and they therefore avoid participating in government. Despite the punishment such parties receive for participating in government, they nevertheless join governments on similar grounds as other parties. They are office-seeking and invited to join based on policy affinity and electoral success. This was

suggested by Sarah de Lange (2008: p. 224), who made the following conclusion in her thesis:

> the government participation of radical right-wing populist parties is a relatively ordinary phenomenon. Radical right-wing populist parties are not less likely to participate in government coalitions than other kinds of parties, especially when the frequency of government participation of radical right-wing populist parties is compared to that of other non-mainstream parties.

If we assume that challengers are as office-oriented as any other party, we must examine the reasons why mainstream parties might invite them into government. Mainstream parties can be expected to invite challengers to join government when the challenger's electoral strength makes them an attractive coalition partner, for example in order to achieve a successful vote of investiture or secure budget votes. Following this line of argument, we can predict that challengers are invited into government when they are large enough to be useful and the mainstream party is small enough to require their votes in the municipal council.

> H1: The challenger is more likely to participate in local government as a junior partner, the higher their share of seats in municipal council.

> H2: The challenger is more likely to participate in local government as a junior partner, the smaller the share of seats in municipal council won by the mayor's party.

Next, we can hypothesize that a certain degree of policy proximity is a precondition for coalition-formation. As de Lange points out, this has certainly been a general finding in the literature on coalition building (de Lange, 2008: p. 97). If the senior member ('the formateur') of the coalition wants to maximize its control over the policy output, it should and does choose coalition partners that have policy positions close to its own (Warwick, 1996; Mattila and Raunio, 2004; Isaksson, 2005; Dumont and Bäck, 2006). This has at least been the case in Western Europe (Döring and Hellström, 2013). The literature also finds, however, that *anti-system parties* are unlikely to participate in government even if they are close to the senior member of the coalition on the left-right scale (Warwick, 1996; Mattila and Raunio, 2004; Isaksson, 2005; S. L. de Lange, 2008). We should not simply assume that parties on the far left and far right are anti-system parties, however. This may change over time, and vary between levels of government, and across municipalities. As the data below

concerns a party that has already participated in government at the national level, we may expect a low level of 'anti-systemness' among its local branches.

> H3: challenger is more likely to participate in local government as a junior partner, the smaller the policy distance from the mayor party on socioeconomic and sociocultural issues.

The effect of policy distance may, however, be smaller at the local level. As I elaborated in the theory section of this thesis, the local level has been found to be more pragmatic and less ideological compared to the national level (Carlson, Burrell and Dolan, 1989). Many of the large ideological questions that separate the parties at the national level can more easily be overcome or avoided at the local level. Accordingly, other more idiosyncratic reasons for collaboration, such as personal chemistry between the politicians, may play a larger role at this level of government.

Finally, we may hypothesize that the mayor's party will attempt to minimize vote-loss through choice of coalition partner. In other words, a mainstream party may include a challenger in government because the challenger's continued opposition status would leave the challenger in a good position to keep collecting votes at the mainstream's expense. In order to manage the *electoral* challenge of the challenger, the mainstream party may attempt to 'neutralize' them by inviting them into power and tying their electoral fortunes to their own (see Dumont & Bäck, 2006).

> H4: challenger is more likely to participate in local government as a junior partner the larger their electoral gains experienced by the challenger since the previous election.

This chapter uses a nested logistic regression analysis to test the hypotheses related to the local government participation of the Progress Party as a junior coalition member. As cases in this analysis, I include all Norwegian municipalities in 2019, except where the Progress Party was not represented in the municipal council (either because they did not run or because they did not receive enough votes) or where the party of the mayor received more than 50 % of the seats, and hence did not need to seek coalitions with other parties. In other words, the inclusion criterium is that a coalition between FrP and another party is theoretically possible. For purposes of comparison, I have largely replicated de Lange's (2008) large N analysis, and I include most of her independent variables in the present study.

*Data and operationalizations*

The data comes primarily from two sources. The data on election results (share of seats, party of mayor and deputy mayor) comes from a dataset by Fiva, Halse and Natvik (2020) on local governments in Norway. The data on party ideology comes from a voting advice application, structured as a survey of local candidates conducted by a Norwegian newspaper in 2019. In the lead-up to the 2019 election, the Norwegian national newspaper VG published a so-called "valgomat"[37] on their website. This is a common practice among Norwegian newspapers in the period prior to elections. The readers answer a survey about their political opinions and based on their responses are matched to the political party that is closest to their views. In the 2019 VG valgomat, however, the same survey was answered by 7298 local politicians from all parties represented in parliament, as well as those represented in the municipal councils. Their responses were also published on the newspaper's website, so that readers could compare their responses directly to each candidate in their municipality. The survey covered a range of policy areas, including taxes, education, state vs market, environmental protection, immigration, (de-) centralization and infrastructure spending, as well as local questions which varied depending on which municipality one belonged to. The questions were developed in collaboration with academic researchers and local newspapers and with input from the political parties themselves. The questions are not the same for all municipalities. They vary based on size, geography, type of organization and political situation (for example whether the municipality has a property tax or not).

Ideology is operationalized based on a factor analysis run on all the shared questions posed to all politicians in the dataset. I found two clear factors: One socioeconomic factor, which loaded especially strongly on questions concerning privatization of public services (state vs market), and a new politics, sociocultural factor which loaded strongly on questions concerning immigration and multiculturalism, as well as environmental protection. Although questions of immigration on the one hand and environmentalism on the other are theoretically distinct, they seem to go together empirically in Norway's case. This is echoed in prior research on Norwegian voters, which has found that the strongest correlation between political dimensions is that green voters also tend to be pro-immigration, and non-greens tend to be anti-immigration (Aardal, 2011, p. 83). This strong correlation is fairly unique to

[37] This is a compound word consisting of "valg", meaning election, and automat, meaning machine or automaton.

Norway, however. As we shall see later, a factor analysis of a survey of Swedish politicians (KOLFU) does not reveal such a green/immigration dimension. In other countries, environmental issues have been found to relate most strongly to the traditional economic left-right dimension (Kriesi *et al.*, 2006). In Norway, we find parties in favor of environmental protection on the socioeconomic right (e.g. Venstre) as well as the left (e.g. SV). These parties also share a liberal view on the immigration issue. The Norwegian case fits neatly into the GAL-TAN model proposed by Hooghe, Marks and Wilson (2002). These two factors, aggregated to the party-branch level (unweighted average by party), will serve as the basis for the dependent variables in the analysis below.

**Table 4.1:** Factor Analysis, 2019 Norwegian VAA. Varimax Rotation.

| Variable | 1<br>EV=6,72 | 2<br>EV=2,17 |
|---|---|---|
| No to increased privatization of healthcare | 0.86 | |
| Public actors are better able to run elder care than private actors | 0.84 | |
| Elderly should be able to choose private homecare | -0.81 | |
| Public actors should handle tasks like cleaning and waste management | 0.78 | |
| Small ERs and maternity wards should be moved to better-staffed, large, central hospitals | -0.61 | |
| It is wrong to ban for-profit healthcare actors | -0.58 | |
| Municipality should set aside enough money for school meals | 0.57 | |
| Driving a car has become too expensive, especially if it runs on gasoline or diesel | | -0.77 |
| A positive thing that Norway has become a multicultural society | | 0.75 |
| Municipality should refuse to accept, house, and integrate more asylum seekers than at present | | -0.75 |
| It is good that we use road tolls to finance public transport | | 0.73 |
| Current immigration policy is too strict | 0.43 | 0.72 |
| Cars purchased by municipality should be zero-emission | | 0.69 |

*Note: Factor loadings below 0.4 not reported.*
*Source: VG (2019)*

In the analysis, there were four factors with eigenvalues larger than 1. Factors 1 and 2 stand out by loading strongly on sets of questions that go together according to topic. As table 4.1 shows, factor 1 loads most strongly on topics related to the traditional socioeconomic left-right axis. It seems to cover the respondents' views on issues related to state versus market. Factor 2 covers "new politics", including immigration and green issues. Here, I have displayed only those questions that loaded strongly on factor 1 or factor 2. In sum, ideology is operationalized as two factor variables: a traditional economic left-right axis and a new

politics axis ranging from liberal and green to restrictive and non-green. The distance between parties was calculated as the square root of the squared difference between the score of the mayor's party and the Progress Party.

The dependent variable is a dichotomous variable showing whether FrP gained the deputy mayor following the election. While most municipalities install an executive council (formannskap) which is proportional to the share of seats in the municipal council, the positions of mayor and deputy mayor are elected by a simple majority vote in the municipal council. It is here that the parties engage in coalitions at the local level in Norway. This has been used to operationalize government participation at the local level in Norway elsewhere in the literature as well (Bjørklund and Saglie, 2004; Art, 2011, pp. 162-163). In this sense, the position of deputy mayor is equivalent to junior coalition membership at the local level in Norway. This variable takes on the value 1 if FrP gained the deputy mayor post after the election and 0 otherwise. In the end, there are 16 municipalities (7,08%) where the Progress Party gains the deputy mayor with a mayor from a mainstream party, following the 2019 elections. There are 210 (92,92%) municipalities where they do not.

My independent variables follow from the hypotheses above:

1. Seat share FrP: This measures the share of seats gained by the Progress Party as a percentage of the total number of seats. I also include a squared seat share to account for a possible quadratic relationship between the variables.
2. Seat share mayor party: This measures the percentage of council seats won by the party of the mayor.
3. Policy distance sociocultural: Measured based on a factor analysis on a survey of about 7300 local candidates prior to the 2019 Norwegian local elections. An average score was made for each party in each municipality, and the absolute distance between FrP and the mayor party was calculated.
4. Policy distance socioeconomic: same as above, but for the socioeconomic factor.
5. FrP size change: change in the share of seats on the municipal council compared to the previous election, measured in percentage points.

I also control for population size, since coalition-formation can be expected to function differently in large compared to small municipalities. The differences between the national

and local levels identified above can be assumed to be especially pronounced in very small municipalities.

*Results*

I begin by running a few preliminary tests to assess the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. First, I report the mean values on each of the independent variables within each value on the dependent variable. Each difference has a directionality which corresponds to the theoretical expectations. In the municipalities where FrP has the deputy mayor, they have more seats on the municipal council, the mayor's party has fewer seats, the socioeconomic and sociocultural distances between FrP and the mayor party are smaller, and FrP has grown more/lost less electorally since the last election. Two of these differences are statistically significant: the seat share of FrP and the socioeconomic distance. The mean seat share of the FrP in government is strikingly similar to the one found by de Lange (2008, p. 130) at the national level. She found that "(r)adical right-wing populist parties that have participated in government coalitions control about 15 per cent of the parliamentary seats".

**Table 4.2:** Comparison of Means, FrP in Government and Opposition

| | Mean for FrP in opposition | Mean for FrP in government | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| FrP seat share | 9.33 | 15.47 | 6.14*** |
| Mayor party seat share | 30.29 | 28.84 | -1.46 |
| Sociocultural distance | 1.65 | 1.40 | -0.25 |
| Socioeconomic distance | 1.53 | 1.12 | -0.40* |
| FrP size change | -0.70 | 1.16 | 1.85 |
| Population | 25235.99 | 14029.31 | -11206.68 |

* Significant at the .05 level. *** Significant at the .001 level. Significance level determined by a T-test

These preliminary tests provide tentative support for the first and third hypotheses. Like de Lange, I find that local branches of the Progress Party are more likely to participate in local government as junior coalition partners when they have a larger share of seats in the municipal council and when the policy distance between them and the party of the mayor is smaller. The policy proximity effect does not seem to extend to sociocultural issues, however.

Next, I ran a nested logistic regression, with each model adding information about a unique party objective. Model 0 includes only the constant, and functions as a baseline model. Model 1 takes into account the office-seeking objectives of the mayor party. Model 2 accounts for policy seeking, and model 3 taps into the vote-seeking (loss aversion) of mayor parties. Improvements in the pseudo-R2 and log likelihood from one model to the next indicates improvements in goodness-of-fit.

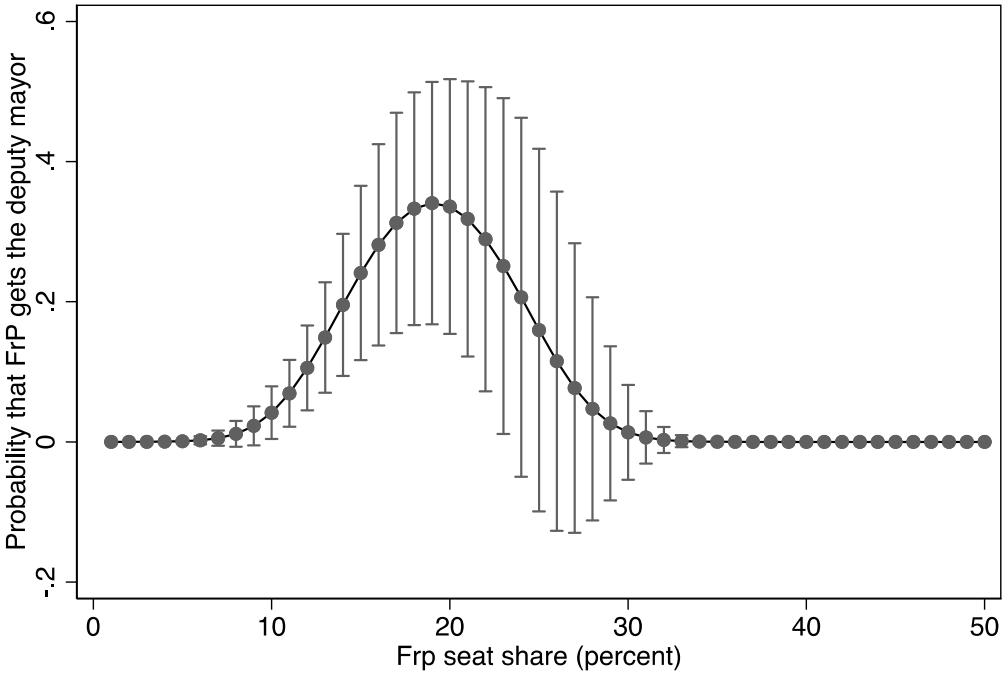
**Table 4.3:** Logistic Regression: FrP Joining Coalition as Junior Member

| | **Model 0** | **Model 1** | **Model 2** | **Model 3** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constant | -3.05*** | -10.77*** | -9.49*** | -10.08** |
| | | | | |
| FrP seat share | | 1.10*** | 1.26*** | 1.31*** |
| FrP seat share$^2$ | | -0.03*** | -0.03** | -0.03** |
| Mayor party share | | -0.02 | -0.00 | -0.00 |
| sociocultural distance | | | -1.00 | -1.00 |
| socioeconomic distance | | | -1.10** | -1.07* |
| FrP size change | | | | 0.09 |
| Population | | | | 0.00 |
| | | | | |
| Pseudo R2 | 0 | 0.26 | 0.36 | 0.37 |
| N | 374 | 348 | 252 | 251 |
| Log Likelihood | -57.79 | -42.55*** | -38.27* | -37.65 |

Note: *Significant at the .05 level, ** Significant at the .01 level, *** Significant at the .001 level. Log-odds reported as coefficients. For the Log Likelihood values, asterisks indicate level of significance for likelihood ratio-test, comparing each model to the previous.

The results at the local level in Norway are strikingly similar to those identified at the national level by de Lange (2008). The variables that consistently and significantly affect coalition-formation with the radical right are the electoral strength of the challenger and the ideological proximity to the mayor's party. Unlike de Lange I found a quadratic relationship between seat share and the likelihood of government participation. Including the square of FrP's seat share as a variable significantly improved the goodness-of-fit.

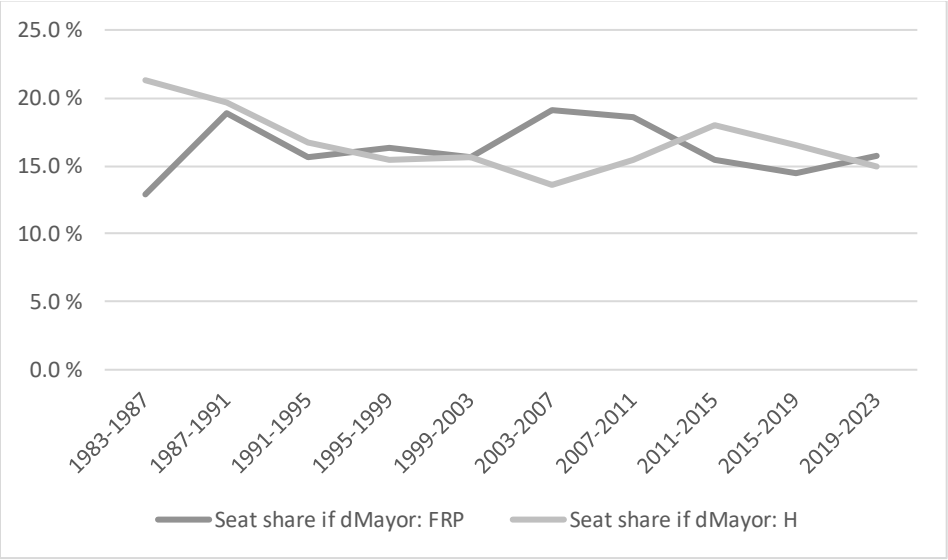
**Figure 4.1:** Quadratic effect of Progress Party seat share




As is clear from the graph above, the likelihood of government participation as a junior partner increases with the seat share, until it reaches a peak at around 19 percent of the seats in the council. With this level of representation, around one in three local branches gain the deputy mayor post. At higher shares, it becomes increasingly unreasonable for the Progress Party to take the post as deputy mayor, and the likelihood drops sharply. Instead, it is left negotiating about whether to take the position of mayor or function as a powerful opposition party. Therefore, having 30 percent of the seats is associated with the same likelihood of gaining the deputy mayor as having 7 percent of the seats. I should note too that the average share of seats in the municipal council obtained by the deputy mayor party is overall (factoring in every election since 1983) not significantly different when the junior incumbent is FrP and H. This indicates that when it comes to coalition formation the Progress Party is assessed based on the same standards as the nearest mainstream party. If FrP was treated as a pariah, we should expect the vote-share required for them to receive the deputy mayor post to

be higher on average compared to the threshold for the closest mainstream party. There is not much evidence to indicate that they have at any point been systematically excluded from government at the local level in Norway.

**Figure 4.2:** Average Seat Share if Party has Deputy Mayor. FRP vs. H




Source: Fiva, Halse and Natvik, 2020

Socioeconomic distance is also associated with the dependent variable. The municipalities with the smallest average differences between the Progress Party and the mayor's party have values around 0, while the largest differences equal about 3 on the scale from left to right. An increased difference of 1 decreases the odds of government inclusion by a factor of 0,344. This is a substantially large decrease in the odds. Given the large variety of parties engaged in local coalitions with the Progress Party (the Labor Party (AP), Center Party (SP), Christian Democrats (KRF) and Conservatives (H)), the effect of ideological proximity is somewhat puzzling. We may take it to mean that while ideological positions still matter at the local level, there is a great deal of ideological variation within parties according to which municipality we look at. Note, however, that across the models, it is the distance between the parties in terms of socioeconomic positions, not sociocultural positions, that consistently correlates with coalition building. Questions regarding issues such as immigration and the environment, do not seem to impact decisions regarding local coalitions to the same degree as questions of taxes and privatization. This may indicate that, at least on the Norwegian right, systemic integration in terms of moderation on this challenger's core issues is not an

important precondition for local coalition building. Moreover, this effect is not as strongly significant as the one identified at the national level by de Lange. Her variable of policy proximity was consistently significant at the 0.001-level. This may indicate that ideological proximity is a more essential prerequisite for coalition formation at the national level, compared to the local level.

By necessity, each model is an improvement on the previous in terms of pseudo-$R^2$ and log likelihood. However, the only substantially large and statistically significant improvements occur between model 0 and model 1 (when taking office-seeking objectives into account) and between model 1 and model 2 (when taking policy proximity into account). This indicates that the final hypothesis, which stated that mayors will be more likely to include the challenger if the challenger experiences electoral growth, should be rejected. The idea that mainstream parties will want to use inclusion in government to manage electoral threats from the fringes does not find empirical support in this case.

In sum, only two of the hypothesized factors seem to matter: electoral/legislative strength of the challenger and policy proximity on the socioeconomic dimension. This rather precisely echoes the findings made in 2008 at the national level (de Lange, 2008). Mayor parties invite the Progress Party to participate in local government as junior partners, firstly in order to secure enough votes of investiture (office seeking motives) and secondly to further their policy agenda (policy-seeking). This is evidenced by the significant effects of policy proximity and seat share in the logistic regression analysis (a quadratic effect in the case of seat shares). I do not find support for the notion that mainstream parties invite the Progress Party into coalitions in order to prevent voter flight to the margins, i.e. by tying their electoral fortunes together as governing parties. The growth of the Progress Party since last election has no significant effect on the probability of the FrP gaining the post of deputy mayor.

*Outliers*

If we look more closely at the cases, we see that among the cases where FrP got the deputy mayor position in 2019, the instance with the lowest legislative weight was as high as 9,5 percent of the seats. In other words, there seems to be no path to the deputy mayor post where the Progress Party does not contribute significantly to the coalition's legislative weight. It is not a sufficient condition, however. There are several instances where the Progress Party was

close to the ideal seat share but was excluded from government. Many, but not all, of these can be explained if we consider the ideological difference between FrP and the mayor party.

The most puzzling among the negative cases is the municipality of Austevoll south of Bergen. Here, the Progress Party gained 23,8 percent of the seats (close to the ideal seat share), and had small policy differences with the Conservatives, who got the mayor post. In fact, on the socioeconomic dimension, identified above as the most influential, the two parties are nearly identical. A coalition between the Conservatives and the Progress Party would have had a majority in the municipal council. Nevertheless, the Conservatives entered a coalition with the Labor Party instead. This case can be explained if we consider the political history of the municipality. From 2003 to 2015, the Progress Party held the mayor post in the municipality. They ruled together with the Center Party, which had the deputy mayor post throughout the period. Between 2007 and 2015, the Progress Party was dominant, with 43 (2007) and 47 (2011) percent of the vote. The Conservatives and Labor were the two largest opposition parties and worked together on a number of issues. In 2015, the Progress Party experienced a serious drop in votes (26,4 percentage points). At the same time, AP and H grew significantly and together they outnumbered the FrP/SP constellation. After that election, the two parties entered government together. The 2015 coalition was repeated after the 2019 election. When the Conservatives and Labor first entered a coalition, they gave the following statement:

> Since 2003, the Conservative Party (Høyre) has been in opposition in the municipal council in Austevoll. Throughout these 12 years, the Conservatives have found common ground with the Labour Party (Ap) on a number of issues. In the municipal election in Austevoll in 2015, the Conservatives received 37.8 percent of the vote and the Labour Party received 24.2 percent. With 62 percent of the votes in Austevoll, the election result is a clear mandate from the voters to implement a political shift. Therefore, the Labour Party and the Conservatives have entered into a technical electoral cooperation. The Labour Party and the Conservatives have also found a basis to establish a political platform for the next four years. This political platform will be influential for investments in the municipal budgets and in matters brought before the municipal council (Austevoll Høgre, 2016)

Here, we see an alternative causal path to exclusion from government, which preempts policy proximity and vote share. If the party has been electorally dominant, collaborated with a

small party in government, and forced its largest electoral rivals into opposition for several periods, then a large electoral decline for the challenger may facilitate the exclusion of the party from government via cross-bloc collaboration.

On the other hand, if we examine the positive cases where there is a large degree of policy disagreement, and a more modest vote-share for the Progress Party, we can outline an alternative causal path to power beyond the model. Based on news accounts, it seems that a good personal chemistry between local party leaders can outweigh ideological differences to some extent. This is perhaps to be expected in small municipalities, such as Fitjar (population: 3 200), where the Progress Party gained the deputy mayor post despite fairly large policy differences with the mayor party (KrF) and a seat share of 10,8 percent. Leading up to the 2019 election, the leaders of the respective local branches gave an interview in the local paper, where the KrF politician expressed this:

> We know where we disagree, but we have a good chemistry. That's very important in a collaboration, as we've just seen an example of from a neighboring municipality (Hovstad, 2019)

This effect is not limited to very small municipalities, however. In Sandnes (population: 78 400) AP and FrP collaborated in coalition for several government periods in succession despite significant policy disagreement. In an interview after the 2019 election, FrP's branch leader emphasized personal chemistry as an important reason why the parties could collaborate (Fossmo, 2019).

*Conclusions*

How do these findings inform the model indicated in the theory chapter? Overall, the variables determining government participation at the local level seem to be the same as at the national level. The Progress Party gets to participate in local government if it has the sufficient legislative weight, and if its policy positions are not too distant from those of the mayor's party. I do find some support, however, for the notion that ideological proximity is somewhat less important at the local, compared to the national level. The effect of policy proximity is not significant in the case of sociocultural positions, and in terms of socioeconomic positions it is only significant at the 0.05 level. The notion of a lower threshold for government participation at the local level is in sum only partly supported by

the evidence. We may at least reject the notion that the local level is a wholly non-ideological space, where positions do not matter. We should conclude that we find variation at the local level in terms of electoral support for the various parties and in terms of the policy positions of the challenger relative to the mainstream. It is largely this variation that facilitates the varying outcomes in terms of government participation.

I should add too that the policy proximity effect means that more moderate local politicians have a higher chance of entering positions of power as part of a government coalition. Should such a position improve a politician's likelihood of a national political career, it may be an important first step in a spill-over effect from local to national mainstreaming.

Finally, the cases that are not well described by the statistical model indicate alternative causal paths to inclusion and exclusion. As we shall see with Red below, collaboration in opposition can bring unlikely coalition partners together against a dominant party (as was the case with AP and H against FrP in Austevoll). This set of circumstances can lead to exclusion despite an ideal vote-share and high policy proximity. Moreover, personal chemistry can compensate for a lack of ideological proximity between potential partners, as illustrated by the cases of Fitjar and Sandnes.

**Red**

Given the relatively few instances of Red's participation in local government, it makes little sense to study these cases statistically. Instead, this section is devoted to exploring the determinants of coalition formation through comparisons of each of the six instances where Red had the position of deputy mayor. I will look at what the cases have in common, where they differ from each other and from most party branches, and which potential causes for government participation are emphasized by the parties themselves.

Since its founding in 2007, Red has had two mayors and six deputy mayors. The first mayor was elected in Risør in 2007, when the municipality ran a trial with direct mayoral elections. As there was no coalition formation with Red in that case, it is not directly relevant to the discussion in this chapter. The second mayor was in Kragerø from October 2023. This case is described more closely in Chapter 5 and Chapter 8. Red has held the position of deputy

mayor in Risør (2011-2015), Kragerø, Tromsø, Bodø, Gjøvik (2015-2019) and Alstahaug (2019-2023).

*Policy proximity*

First, and most obviously, a degree of agreement on key policies has been emphasized by the parties as a crucial reason to join the government. None of the governments Red has joined have included parties that are traditionally on the right. In five cases, the Labor Party had the post of mayor and in one case it was the Center Party. In Tromsø, Red joined the other left-wing parties in creating joint 'alternative budgets' while still in opposition, signaling a degree of policy proximity prior to the formation of the coalition (Woie, 2019). A similar collaboration in opposition occurred in Kragerø, prior to Red's government participation. In Gjøvik, Red emphasized Labor's willingness to shift to the left as a key reason why they would join the government (Rambøl and Sørenes, 2015). In Alstahaug, Red united with the Center Party on the (de-)centralization issue, and specifically the issue of preserving the local hospital, where Red's candidate Hanne Benedicte Wiig had engaged in extensive activism. In all cases, the coalitions agreed on a joint policy platform that formed the basis of the collaboration. A sufficient level of agreement on salient issues is generally necessary to avoid the kind of conflict that can break up a government.

Apart from Alstahaug, where the centralization issue was most salient, Red has emphasized socioeconomic issues such as opposition to privatization, workers' rights, welfare, and public services in negotiations (Stensrud and Moe, 2015; Scheistrøen, 2019b; Tymi, 2019; Woie, 2019; Tymi, Tangen and Dankertsen, 2023). In Bodø and Tromsø, opposition to the parliamentarian city council model was also an important demand (Tymi, 2019; Woie, 2019).

*Electoral strength*

With one exception, electoral strength has been key to Red's government participation. From 2011-2015, Risør was the only municipality where Red participated in government. It was also the municipality where they received the highest vote share that year (12.3%). In 2015, there were four deputy mayors from Red. Kragerø was the municipality where Red received the highest vote share in the country (16.4%), Tromsø ranks second on that list (14.4%) and Bodø is number four (10.4%). In 2019, Red gained the post of deputy mayor in only one municipality, Alstahaug, which again was the most electorally successful branch of Red that year. In several cases, Red's electoral strength is related to the popularity of a single

politician. Charlotte Therkelsen, deputy mayor in Kragerø was the politician (of any party) in Telemark County who received the most personal votes in 2015[38]. Jens Ingvald Olsen of Tromsø Red was the candidate in the city who received the most personal votes by far in 2015. Hanne Benedicte Wiig (R) was the politician in Alstahaug who got the most personal votes from voters of other parties in 2019 (Steinholt, 2019), as did Finn Olav Rolijordet (R) in Gjøvik (Moshagen, 2015). Leading up to the 2011 election in Risør, Red's mayoral candidate was the most popular among voters, 36% of whom said they would like him to be the mayor after the election (Lode, 2011).

The outlier when it comes to electoral strength is the municipality of Gjøvik, where Red received only 3.9 percent of the vote in 2015 but gained the deputy mayor post. Finn Olav Rolijordet, Red's deputy mayor in Gjøvik, explained Red's willingness to join the local government despite their relatively low electoral strength as a result of Labor's weak bargaining position after the election. Just before the election, the Center Party had switched allegiance from the Labor Party to the Conservatives (H). The Greens were in position of king-maker, first favoring a center-right government, before landing on a left-wing government. This rather special strategic landscape left Red in a strong position, as Rolijordet explains:

> It has to do with special conditions, and the role of the Green Party. After the election, they first made a collaboration agreement with the right wing, which they then broke. That led to a regime change in Gjøvik, which lasted for one day, before the Greens made sure the left could stay in power. This rather special situation where Labor became quite vulnerable, opened an opportunity for a radicalization to the left. The results of the political negotiations are not yet clear, they will be presented at a press conference on Wednesday. But it will involve a clear shift to the left. That is why Red has decided to join (cited in Rambøl and Sørenes, 2015).

Another factor was likely the general popularity of Red's local leader in Gjøvik, who as mentioned received more personal votes from voters of other parties than any other local candidate. Red has generally been cautious of joining coalitions when they don't have a large proportion of the votes, citing fears of becoming a doormat to the larger governing parties.

[38] These are votes given to individual candidates in addition to the party list votes. They do not need to be for a person from the party list you are voting for.

This was mentioned by city council representative for Red in Bodø Andreas Tymi in his evaluation of the collaboration in Bodø, printed in the party journal, Gnist. According to him, "it was crucial for us not to fall into the SV trap[39] and have to spend the next years as a doormat to the Labor Party" (Tymi, 2019). Charlotte Therkelsen, deputy mayor in Kragerø municipality summarized the same perspective during a party strategy conference on the 30th of October 2022.

> It is important that we don't take a position of power until we can no longer avoid it. I mean, when such a large number of people have made their opinion clear, as was the case when we became the second largest party in Kragerø municipality, it would look incredibly stupid, and it would be incredibly unfair to the people who voted for us, not to seize that opportunity. Previously, however, we have received 7, 8, 9 or even 12 percent without seeking power (*Rødt Hjemmefra // Live fra Vendepunkt*, 2022).

This concern with vote-seeking before office- or policy-seeking was explained by Akkerman et al. (2016, p. 14) as a result of the limited number of coalition partners for radical compared to centrist parties. To strengthen its bargaining position, the party prefers to grow electorally strong before negotiating with mainstream. Its commitment to a policy agenda that is far from the median position in any potential coalition government means that they are likely to experience outsized electoral punishment, unless they have a significant degree of influence over the government's agenda. As opposed to a small centrist party, they cannot plausibly threaten to leave the coalition and seek a majority with a different constellation of parties. Put simply, because they are on the fringes, they are unlikely to realize their favorite policies unless they are a necessary partner to the dominant coalition party. Therkelsen summarized this succinctly when she stated that:

> we were the second largest party in the municipality and the Labor Party were completely dependent on us, and that makes it much easier to deal with them (*Rødt Hjemmefra // Live fra Vendepunkt*, 2022)

[39] This is a reference to the experiences of the Socialist Left Party (SV) in national government, and their electoral punishment after being a loyal government member overshadowed by a dominant coalition partner. After eight years in government the party barely made it into parliament. In polls leading up to the election in 2013, SV was under the electoral threshold of 4%. In fact, they managed 4.1 percent on election day.

*Electoral growth*

These first two factors are the same as those identified for the Progress Party in the quantitative analysis above. Moreover, in four of the six cases – Tromsø, Bodø, Kragerø and Alstahaug – Red had experienced tremendous electoral growth since the previous election, essentially changing from small parties (6-7 percent) to medium sized parties (10-18 percent). As de Lange (2008) notes, this may also improve a party's chances of joining, both for normative and strategic reasons. Parties may want to invite a party that has grown significantly into government because they feel a duty to reflect the new wishes of the electorate. In a sense, this party now has a more legitimate claim to participate than a party of equal size that has shrunk since the last election. The party that has grown may similarly experience a sense of duty to their voters to participate in government, a sentiment that was expressed by Therkelsen in the quote above. On the strategic side, a party may decide to invite a challenger into government in order to manage their electoral growth. Given the common trade-off between office and votes (i.e., the electoral punishment for incumbents), a mayor party may decide to limit the growth potential of a successful challenger by including it in government (de Lange, 2008, p. 99). Any party, but perhaps especially a radical party, must relinquish large parts of its election manifesto in compromises with government partners. Such compromises are likely to be unpopular among the core voters of the party.

On the other hand, it is difficult to distinguish the effect of electoral growth from electoral size in these cases. After all, growth is associated with legislative weight. The fact that exceptional electoral growth is associated with government participation does not mean that the growth itself caused the inclusion in government. Given the findings on the Progress Party above, it seems likely that it is Red's potential contribution to a coalition's legislative weight, and its bargaining power in relation to the mainstream that matter, rather than a wish to manage Red's future growth or a perceived duty to reflect the wishes of the voters.

*Factors beyond the model*

In several of the municipalities, a strong collaboration in opposition, prior to the government formation seems to have been an important prerequisite as well. Bendik Hugstmyr Woie, leader of Red Tromsø wrote an evaluation of the collaboration just prior to the 2019 election in the party magazine. Here, he emphasized precisely this factor, stating that in '(t)he last two years before the municipal election in 2015 we proposed a joint alternative budget together with the other four opposition parties' (Woie, 2019). He explains that it was opposition to the

right-wing government, as well as a collaboration between the political left and the unions that kept the left together in opposition. This made it feasible for the left-wing parties to govern together, despite a history of policy disagreements. Similarly, the Kragerø collaboration occurred after 8 years of right-wing governments. A politician from the Kragerø Labor Party told me that Red and AP had:

> A very long collaboration in opposition. We got to know each other through this work and had dealt with difficult issues and common projects already prior to the point where we decided (…) that we wanted to collaborate to take over the governance of the municipality.[40]

Such collaborations in opposition had the dual advantage of reducing uncertainty around a potential coalition partner with no previous government experience and fostering a good relationship and sense of a shared political project between the parties.

A puzzling negative case in 2019 is the city of Trondheim. Here, a red-green coalition of AP, SV, MdG and Red would have had a majority in the city council. Red had also expressed the wish to join the alliance before the election (Baumberger, 2018). Instead of Red, SP (which had the same number of council members as Red) was included in the local coalition. A year before the election, Rita Ottervik, AP's leader in Trondheim stated that while she was open to negotiating with Red over policy, she would not include it in a coalition (ibid.). The key reason mentioned in the interview was that Red proposes unbalanced budgets and would not contribute to a responsible economic governance of the city. This suggests that a reputation as a responsible governor is a key factor in coalition building, beyond legislative weight and ideological proximity. An implication of this insight is that a period in government as a responsible coalition member can increase a party's coalition potential through the reputation mechanism.

*Dilemmas and mitigation strategies*

A dilemma for a party like Red is how to deal with strong policy disagreements within the coalition. A key concern for a radical party entering coalition is being perceived as a sell-out; a party that abandoned its principles in pursuit of power (see for example Dunphy & Bale, 2011). Members of several of the Red branches in local power have emphasized specific

[40] Interview with local Labor politician, Kragerø

strategies to deal with this problem. In Kragerø, the deputy mayor said the following about her negotiations with the other coalition parties just after the 2015 election:

> We have talked through a lot of policies while constructing the collaboration agreement, and on some points, we have agreed to disagree. It is not a breach of the coalition agreement to vote differently on certain single issues. I think that is a good starting point. We do not have to start off by accepting a lot of big concessions. We need to retain our integrity as well (Hagen, 2015).

Similarly, Red in Bodø were adamant that a government collaboration would have to involve a certain degree of freedom for Red to vote against the government. In his assessment of Red Bodø's experiences in coalition, Andreas Tymi writes that:

> When we received large policy concessions in negotiations, assurances about good cooperation routines and room for an independent and detached position of this type, even in budgetary matters – and being aware that we were one of Red's party branches with the longest parliamentary experience – we elected to take a chance on a close collaboration of this kind (Tymi, 2019).

This was also the case in Gjøvik, where deputy mayor Finn Olav Rolijordet emphasized his attempts to 'preserve the oppositional role we had previously' (Birkelund, 2019). In an interview just after the 2015 election, he explained that on some issues, the parties have "agreed to disagree" (Stensrud and Moe, 2015)

*Conclusion*

In sum, Red's willingness and opportunity to join local governments as a junior partner has been structured by a number of factors. First, a level of agreement on key policy issues underpinned each of the coalitions. Secondly, apart from the special case of Gjøvik, each case of government participation for Red has happened in a municipality where Red has been unusually popular. Even in Gjøvik, the deputy mayor had a high level of personal popularity, receiving a large number of personal votes from voters of other parties. On the one hand, electoral strength increases their attractiveness as a coalition partner because the party of the mayor depends on their votes to gain a majority in the municipal council. On the other, it strengthens Red's bargaining position, mitigating the risks of being a 'doormat' to a more

dominant coalition partner. In many of the cases, the popularity of the party is driven by the popularity of a single, well-liked local politician. Bargaining power stemming from popularity seems to be a key condition for participation.

A third common factor for many of the cases was the fact that the municipality had been under right-wing governments for a period leading up to the collaboration. In fact, three of the cases (Tromsø, Bodø, and Kragerø) had deputy mayors from the Progress Party in the previous period. In Risør, there had been a right-wing majority in the municipal council. Alstahaug stands out in this regard. Here, Red and SP formed a united front on the centralization issue, where they believed the previous Labor government had failed. This meant that the future coalition parties had collaborated in opposition against the ruling majority.

Finally, a key condition for joining the government in several cases was that the party could put procedures in place to preserve their ideological integrity and avoid a trade-off between responsibility and ideological commitment that was too severe. In Kragerø, Bodø and Gjøvik this meant negotiating a space to disagree with their coalition partners on certain key issues.

**Conclusions**

How well do the findings in this chapter fit the causal model presented in Chapter 1? Put simply, two main factors determine coalition membership: Size and ideology. The data indicates that mainstream parties invite challenger parties to join coalitions for reasons of policy-seeking and office-seeking. These conclusions echo the previous findings from the national level referenced in the theory chapter. Below a certain threshold, more seats in the municipal council increases the chances that the challenger will join a local coalition. In FrP's case, this threshold was determined to be around 19 percent. In Red's case, all but one instance of local coalition membership occurred where the party had unusually strong election results. Gjøvik is the exception here. This case suggests that a path to power without a large vote-share exists, when the mayor party is in a weak bargaining position with few alternative coalition partners, and the leader of the challenger party enjoys significant personal popularity among voters of the other parties, increasing the legitimacy of the appointment. In such a circumstance, the challenger gains enough policy influence to accept coalition membership.

Secondly, large policy distances between the challenger and the formateur party generally decrease the likelihood of coalition membership. In the case of the Progress Party, we saw that policy distance on the socioeconomic dimension is negatively associated with coalition membership. On the other hand, a closer examination of individual cases showed that personal chemistry between local coalition partners can sometimes compensate for large policy distances. In Red's case, influencing public policy was a key motivation to join local governments. There also seems to be a real concern that participation in a coalition will water down Red's policies. For that reason, Red has generally avoided coalition commitments unless it has a large degree of bargaining power in relation to a bigger coalition partner. In all cases, this has entailed a situation where the coalition is completely dependent on Red's votes in the municipal council to pass policy. In certain cases, Red has also negotiated a space to disagree with the mayor party on specified issues, in order to mitigate the loss of integrity or policy purity they foresee as a result of compromises in government.

Electoral growth (as distinct from legislative weight) does not seem to have an important impact on the coalition formation of the Norwegian challenger parties. This indicates that mainstream parties are not in the habit of inviting challengers into coalition in order to manage its electoral losses.

In sum, the same variables matter at the local level in Norway as at the national level. Parties seem to value both size and policy proximity when choosing coalition partners. We may discard the notion that local parties disregard ideology and look only at seat shares when building local coalitions. In other words, office-oriented challenger parties are incentivized to moderate and bridge the policy gap with potential partners.

# Chapter 5:

## The Determinants of Local Coalition-Formation with a Challenger in Sweden

In this chapter, I use data similar to the kind I employed for FrP and the same theoretical model to examine coalition formation with challengers in Sweden. The data for this chapter comes from three sources. The election results and government participation data were taken from the membership and employers' association website for Swedish municipalities and regions (Sveriges Kommuner och Regioner, 2022). The data on election results were taken from the Swedish Election Authority's website (Valmyndigheten). The data on ideology comes from a voting advice application structured as a newspaper survey of local party branches made by the Swedish National Broadcaster, SVT. Like the Norwegian Valgomat, the Swedish survey was posted online so that voters could answer the survey and be matched to the closest local political party. In any given municipality, all the parties represented locally from 2014-2018 (2018 survey) and 2018-2022 (2022 survey) were asked to respond.

For measuring policy distance in Sweden, I thus rely on data that is very similar to those from Norway: a newspaper survey covering the views of political party branches in each municipality in the country. The key difference is that each branch sent its official response to the VAA in Sweden, while in Norway, individual candidates (several per party in each municipality) responded to the questionnaire. For the purposes of this study, there is little practical difference, as the party branch is the unit of analysis. In the case of Norway, I aggregated the responses to the party branch level, while for Sweden, I could use the responses directly.

In total, 2209 local party branches replied to the 2018-survey (an average of 7,6 parties per municipality). 15 of the questions in the survey were given to all the respondents. The measurement of ideology (described below) is based on the responses to these 15 questions and makes up an independent variable in the study of the Left Party. For the 2022-survey, 2130 local branches gave their response, for an average of 7,4 parties per municipality. This survey is the basis for the section on the determinants of coalition formation for the Sweden Democrats after 2022.

I have kept all the hypotheses from the previous chapter. In other words, I expect the challenger party to be more likely to join the government as a junior coalition partner when it has a higher share of seats in the municipal council (H1), when the largest party in the coalition has a smaller share of the seats (H2), when the policy distance between the challenger and the largest government party is smaller (H3) and when the challenger has grown electorally since the last election (H4). Again, these hypotheses are tested using a nested logistic regression analysis.

The section on the Left Party has the same basic structure as the section on the Progress Party. It outlines the variables, data and operationalization, before presenting the results of the logistic regression analysis. Thereafter it considers some informative cases that were not well explained by the model, before summarizing the main findings.

The section on SD is divided into two parts. The first part covers the 2018-2022 period when government participation was could not be explained mainly by size and ideology variables. It outlines the ways in which the cordon sanitaire prevented coalition formation with SD, and what characterized the handful of cases where it was included. The second part covers the post-2022 period and uses the same structure as the sections on V and FrP. Again, variables, data and operationalization are accounted for, before the results of a logistic regression analysis are presented. The chapter concludes with a systematic comparison of the four parties.

**The Left Party**

First, I examine the coalition formation of the Left Party, which has a significant degree of local government participation. I have excluded two municipalities from the analysis, where the Left Party was the largest party in government. I excluded these cases because the logic of coalition formation is very different for the Left Party when they are the dominant coalition partner. I also excluded several instances where a single party had a majority in the municipal council and did not need to form a coalition. Upon examination, there are no instances of a coalition being formed in a municipality where a single party is in the majority. Finally, I excluded all the municipalities where the Left Party was not represented or where it did not respond to the survey.

*Variables and operationalization*

In the Swedish system, distinguishing local government parties is more straightforward than in Norway. Formally, Sweden also operates with executive committees, where all parties should be represented (assembly government). In practice, however, there is always a ruling majority (or a minority tolerated by the majority), which is explicit and organized (Gilljam and Karlsson, 2015 p. 561). Each party is, therefore, self-consciously part of either the government or the opposition, and there is good data on local coalition membership. Thus, junior coalition membership is operationalized as being part of a coalition with at least one member with more seats than V in the municipal council.

As in the last analysis, ideology is operationalized based on a factor analysis run on the shared questions in the VAA. The factor analysis shows results that are very similar to the Norwegian analysis. Two main factors are apparent. One factor loads on socioeconomic issues, especially the role of private actors versus public actors. The other loads most strongly on immigration issues, law and order, environmental questions, and traditional values (e.g., gender equality). These factor variables were stored and used to calculate the socioeconomic and sociocultural differences between the Left Party and the largest party in the governing coalition. The variables are operationalized as follows:

1. Seat Share V: This measures the share of seats gained by the Left Party as a percentage of the total seats. I also include a squared seat share to account for a potential quadratic relationship between the variables.
2. Seat share formateur party: This measures the percentage of council seats won by the largest party in the coalition that ended up in power after the 2018 election.
3. Policy distance sociocultural: Measured based on a factor analysis on a survey of 2209 local party branches before the 2018 Swedish local elections.
4. Policy distance socioeconomic: same as above, but for the socioeconomic factor.
5. V size change: change in the share of seats on the municipal council compared to the previous election, measured in percentage points.

**Table 5.1:** Factor Analysis, 2018 Swedish VAA. Varimax Rotation

| Variable | 1<br>EV=6.30 | 2<br>EV=1.96 |
|---|---|---|
| Six-hour workday in elder care, with the same salaries | -0.78 | |
| Elder care and care homes should to a greater extent be run by private actors | 0.77 | |
| Municipality should not engage in activities where they are in competition with private actors | 0.76 | |
| Allow more construction in currently protected coastal areas | 0.76 | |
| Municipality should subsidize the building and provision of cheap rental housing | -0.71 | |
| A gender quota should be introduced in municipal company boards, so at least 40% of each gender is represented | -0.67 | -0.53 |
| Obligatory Swedish language classes for recently arrived immigrants | 0.60 | 0.44 |
| Our municipality should accept fewer refugees | | 0.83 |
| Begging should be prohibited in our municipality | | 0.83 |
| Obligatory gender-conscious pedagogy in municipal pre-schools | | -0.75 |
| Financial support for stay-at-home parents | | 0.64 |
| We should prioritize environmental protection above other issues | | -0.62 |
| We should hold more local referenda | | 0.52 |
| Introduce a cell phone ban in schools | | 0.43 |

*Note*: Factor loadings below 0.4 not reported. One question not shown here because it did not load above 0.4 on either of the factors identified.
*Source*: SVT-Valkompassen 2018

*Results*

As with FrP, I begin by comparing the means of each independent variable in municipalities according to government status. All variables except the seat share of the Left Party are significantly different when the Left Party ends up in power and when they end up in opposition. The difference between the seat share of the dominant coalition party when V is in government and in opposition is in the opposite direction of what was hypothesized, i.e., higher when V is in government.

**Table 5.2**: Comparison of Means, V in Government and Opposition

| | Mean if V in opposition | Mean if V in government | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| V seat share | 6.33 | 7.13 | 0.79 |
| Formateur party seat share | 29.07 | 36.21 | 7.13*** |
| Sociocultural distance | 0.73 | 0.51 | -0.23** |
| Socioeconomic distance | 1.76 | 1.09 | -0.68*** |
| V size change | 0.22 | 1.38 | 1.15* |
| Population | 43653.75 | 17475.53 | -26178.23* |

* Significant at the .05 level. ** Significant at the .01 level. *** Significant at the .001 level. Significance level determined by a T-test.

In other words, hypotheses 3 and 4 find tentative support. Hypotheses 1 and 2 find no support in the data so far. There is a highly significant positive association between the dominant coalition party's seat share and V's junior coalition membership. This indicates the need to amend the theorized expression of office-seeking motives in the case of the Swedish Left Party.

**Table 5.3:** Logistic Regression – V Joining Coalition as Junior Member

| | Model 0 | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Constant | -1.25*** | -6.86*** | -3.95** | -3.05* |
| | | | | |
| V seat share | | 0.19 | 0.10 | 0.15 |
| V seat share$^2$ | | -0.01 | -0.01 | -0.01 |
| Major party share | | 0.14*** | 0.12*** | 0.11*** |
| sociocultural distance | | | -0.99* | -1.08* |
| socioeconomic distance | | | -0.95** | -0.99** |
| V size change | | | | 0.14* |
| Population | | | | -0.00** |
| | | | | |
| Pseudo $R^2$ | 0 | 0.17 | 0.24 | 0.31 |
| N | 238 | 238 | 238 | 238 |
| Log Likelihood | -126.21 | -104.96*** | -96.17*** | -86.94*** |

*Note:* * Significant at the .05 level, ** Significant at the .01 level, *** Significant at the .001 level. Log-odds reported as coefficients. For the Log Likelihood values, asterisks indicate level of significance for likelihood ratio-test, comparing each model to the previous.

The nested logistic model confirms the impression from the preliminary test. Vote share matters for V as well, but in a different way: the vote share of the largest party in the coalition determines whether V is invited into a coalition. A higher vote share for the dominant government party is associated with a higher likelihood that V joins the government. This coefficient is strongly significant across models. It also represents the largest improvement in pseudo-R2 and Log Likelihood. An interpretation is that a party like the Social Democrats is more likely to invite V into government when it does not have to form a broad coalition with other large parties closer to the center. The effect remains, even if we look only at those instances where S is the largest government party. It is still highly significant and of a similar magnitude. In 55 out of 60 cases of Left Party government participation in 2018, the Social Democrats also participated. In 53 out of these 55 instances, S is the dominant coalition party. We may conclude that when the Social Democrats are strong enough to dictate the terms of the coalition-formation process, the Left Party is more likely to be invited into government. When the vote shares are distributed more evenly across several parties, the Social Democrats are more likely to exclude the Left Party to facilitate collaboration with more centrist partners. In short, the Social Democrats exclude the Left Party when including them would hinder the formation of a viable government with S at the center. Office-seeking thus seems to be an important motivation for coalition formation in the Swedish case as well.

Both socioeconomic and sociocultural distance matter to coalition formation in the case of the Left Party. Socioeconomic distance is, however, more closely related to the outcome than sociocultural distance. In other words, V is more likely to be invited into government if its policy positions align more closely with those of the dominant government party. The significant effect of sociocultural policy distance may reflect the impact the Sweden Democrats had on coalition formation practices in Sweden in 2018. The Sweden Democrats reached a high vote share across Swedish municipalities in that election. This prompted more cross-bloc coalitions (40 percent of all governments) than previously. The traditional coalition blocs are primarily based on socioeconomic policy positions. On this dimension, the right-wing parties are very similar. The new cross-bloc coalitions have been formed to exclude the Sweden Democrats, which in turn is (partly) motivated by sociocultural positions. In other words, socio-culturally liberal parties are willing to concede more socioeconomic policies and include V in government to keep SD out of power.

In contrast to FrP, size change is a significant coefficient. Two reasons may explain this effect. First, as De Lange (2008) notes, “there is the normative argument that focuses on

the electoral responsiveness of coalition outcomes" (p. 105). In other words, dominant parties invite V into coalitions to respect the voters' wishes. A significant shift of voters to the Left Party may impress upon the leaders of the mainstream party a responsibility to reflect these changed preferences of the electorate when forming a government. Another more strategic reason is that the mainstream party invites the challenger into government to neutralize the vote gains associated with the challenger's pure oppositional strategy. While far-right parties commonly make electoral inroads at the expense of both center-left and center-right parties, the far-left is generally only in direct competition with the mainstream left. This may explain why electoral growth is significantly associated with government participation in the case of the Left Party but not the Progress Party. When the Progress Party grows, several mainstream parties lose votes. By contrast, the mainstream left experiences a more acute electoral challenge from the far left and more readily resorts to managing the threat by inviting them into government. Each set of variables introduced entails a statistically significant (0.001-level) improvement in Log Likelihood. In other words, variables related to office-seeking, policy-seeking, and vote-seeking all seem to play a part in the local government participation of the Left Party in 2018. Once more, the first set of variables, those associated with office-seeking, represent the largest improvements in goodness-of-fit.

*Outliers*

Looking more closely at the cases that are not well described by this model can once again aid us in theory development. Firstly, there are a handful of puzzling negative cases. There are, for instance, some municipalities where V is ideologically close to an electorally large branch of the Social Democrats, but V is excluded anyway. V and S would have had a majority in the council together in a handful of these cases. One such example is the municipality of Pajala in northern Sweden. S gained 38 percent of the council seats here, and V gained 23. The two parties also gave very similar answers in the VAA that year. Rather than including V in government, S made a somewhat fragile coalition with the Christian Democrats (KD) and the Healthcare Party[41] (Nyberg, 2018). If we consider the recent political history of the municipality, this outcome becomes less surprising. In the previous three government periods (2006-2016), S and V had collaborated in government. In 2016, V left the coalition following a series of conflicts within the Social Democratic Party, which, according to V's group leader, made S very difficult to work with (Nyberg, 2016). V then

[41] A party without national representation, but with electoral success in certain regions and municipalities.

collaborated with the members who had left S in the period leading up to the election. This alienated V from S, and they did not form a coalition after the election in 2018.

Another surprising case of exclusion from government can be found in the municipality of Örnsköldsvik. Again, S was the dominant party and could have formed a majority coalition with V. The two parties also gave very similar answers to the VAA. In the previous government period, the parties had been coalition partners. Nevertheless, S chose to negotiate a deal with the center-right parties, whereby S would be voted in as a single-party minority government. According to V's first candidate in the municipality, this occurred because S wanted to secure all the paid political positions in the municipality for itself (Wålstedth, 2018). In the election, S lost a few seats in the municipal council, while V gained seats. This gave V a better claim than previously over representation in key government posts. A plausible explanation here is that an office-oriented S branch is willing to sacrifice some policy in exchange for maximizing the spoils of office.

There are a handful of puzzling positive cases as well. For instance, in Sollefteå municipality, the Center Party and Left Party entered a coalition together with a local party. There were large ideological differences between C and V, especially in terms of socioeconomic policy. V had previously collaborated with the Social Democrats. V's local leader explained the decision to change coalitions in the following way:

> Our party is too small compared to the Social Democrats, and we therefore had difficulties getting our issues on the agenda. Now, we are three parties in a more equal distribution. We are the parties with the largest increase in mandates (Aguilar, 2021).

He emphasized pragmatism and personal chemistry as important factors that compensate for ideological differences. We can recognize this concern with avoiding becoming a doormat to a larger mainstream partner from Red's coalition practices in Norway. Rather than choosing smaller partners beyond the traditional left, Red has generally chosen to stay in opposition.

*Conclusions*

Overall, some similarities between the determinants of coalition formation for FrP and V may be established. The impact of ideological proximity is similar in the two cases. In both instances, socioeconomic distance is significant. In the case of the Left Party, sociocultural distance is also significantly associated with the outcome, but the association is weaker than socioeconomic policy distance. The comparative overview of Red's government participation showed that policy proximity was also an important precondition in this case. For all three parties, we may reject the notion that coalition formation is non-ideological at the local level

in Scandinavia. Policy distance, especially socioeconomic positions, matters to coalition building at the sub-national level.

Office-seeking motives seem to be important in all instances but in different ways. In the case of FrP, an ideal range of seat shares for the challenger to participate in government is revealed. It may be concluded, therefore, that the mayor party invites the challenger into government when it relies on its votes in the municipal council (e.g., for investiture or the passing of budgets). Moreover, as Red's cases illustrated clearly, a degree of bargaining power stemming from a high seat share in the council also helped to alleviate concerns for the challenger party of being dominated by a large partner. In the case of the Left Party, it is the vote share of the largest party in the coalition that is significantly related to government participation for the challenger. Higher vote shares for the formateur party are associated with an increased chance of government participation for the Left Party. S seems only to invite V into a coalition when S is large enough to dictate the terms of coalition formation (i.e., when centrist coalition partners cannot veto the decision).

An important difference between FrP and V is that V's seat share change is significantly associated with coalition formation. This indicates that mainstream parties in Sweden (S in particular) manage the electoral challenge from the left by inviting the challenger into government, thus tying their electoral fortunes together and neutralizing the electoral growth that may have been achieved through a purely oppositional strategy. Such an effect was not found in Norway. In sum, the analysis so far supports the conclusion that politics at the local level is a fair equivalent of the political system overall. Local coalition formation for challengers in Scandinavia is subject to pressures and incentives similar to those at the national level.

**The Sweden Democrats**

The SD has only participated in local governments as full partners since 2018. As I explained previously, this is due to a cordon sanitaire, which prevented coalition formation and other forms of collaboration at all levels of government. Despite this short history of coalition building, SD's history of local government participation should be divided into two distinct periods: before and after the 2022 nationwide loosening of the cordon sanitaire. As I have argued elsewhere (Axelsen, 2023), excluding the Sweden Democrats goes beyond a mere strategic preference. It has a social norm structure, shared and maintained within a reference network of 'legitimate democratic actors.' Therefore, in the pre-2022 period, we see many instances of mainstream parties excluding SD from coalitions despite significant political

costs. Moreover, the handful of mainstream right party branches that violated the cordon sanitaire after the 2018 election experienced strong adverse reactions, and many engaged in a public negotiation over their continued membership in the legitimate mainstream.

In the period leading up to the 2022 election, however, the norm eroded, leading to national coalition talks between the Sweden Democrats and three of the mainstream right parties in Sweden (L, KD, and M). After the election, SD became a support party for a national government consisting of these three parties. An explosion of local coalitions between SD and the mainstream right accompanied this development. However, local coalitions have occurred almost exclusively with these national collaboration partners.

In this section, I will first discuss the features that typify the local coalition formation process before 2022, when the cordon sanitaire was still strong and present among Swedish party branches. The period is characterized by costly adherence to the norm of exclusion and sanctions against those who violate it. In addition, those who collaborate with SD engage in a negotiation with the rest of the mainstream to defend their continued membership in this group of "legitimate parties" despite their departure from the norm. Next, I run a logistic regression analysis like the one executed on the Left Party and the Norwegian Progress Party to determine whether SD's coalition formation has become more like those of other challenger parties. The analysis shows that sociocultural policy distance, the size of the mayor party, and SD's electoral growth are all negatively associated with SD coalition membership.

**Pre-2022: Pariah party**

Before 2022, coalition formation with the Sweden Democrats was exceedingly rare, even at the local level. The first coalitions that included the party were formed in the government period from 2018-2022. Despite the high vote share for the party in the period (it received more than 10 percent of the vote in three-quarters of all municipalities), it joined just seven local coalition governments: Sölvesborg, Bjuv, Bromölla, Hörby, Staffanstorp, Svalöv, and Surahammar. As I document elsewhere (Axelsen, 2023), local branches of the Swedish mainstream-right parties adhered to the cordon sanitaire in a costly manner. There were 35 municipalities where SD could have formed a majority with either the Christian Democrats (KD), the Moderates (M), or both. In 18 municipalities, no other right-wing majority was possible (Axelsen, 2023). In these cases, the mainstream right had to choose between a coalition with SD, staying out of government, an undesirable grand coalition, and a potentially ineffective minority government. Choosing one of the latter three options involves

a costly adherence to the norm if M and KD could pursue their favorite policies more effectively in a majority government with SD. Evidence suggests that Swedish parties prefer majority governments over minority governments, within-block coalitions over cross-bloc coalitions, and participating in government over staying in opposition, all else equal. In each case, these preferences are driven by the opportunity to pursue policy more effectively and enjoy the spoils of office. However, up until the most recent election, Swedish parties preferred excluding SD, even if that meant forming a grand coalition or a minority government or even staying out of government altogether.

*Negative reactions*

The handful of local mainstream party branches that violated the cordon sanitaire received strongly negative reactions from political opponents, journalists, and even co-partisans. Firstly, the collaborations received negative attention from political opponents locally and nationally. For example, Johanna Beijer of the Sölvesborg Social Democrats said the following after SD entered a local coalition in the municipality:

> I am deeply disappointed in the other parties that choose to collaborate with SD because it means leaving your fundamental values behind. This is an unacceptable notion to me. To be so interested in ruling that one would not stand up for the solidarity and human rights we work for in Sölvesborg (Olander and Södergren, 2018).

Beijer's reaction goes beyond what we may expect from an opposition party criticizing the government. Violating the cordon sanitaire is viewed as tantamount to 'leaving your basic values behind.' It is seen as a challenge against the complex of democratic norms on which the political system rests, including the willingness to stand up for human rights.

At the national level, central politicians from other parties expressed their displeasure on social media, in the press, and even on the floor of parliament. In November 2018, Ardalan Shekarabi (S), the then minister for civil service affairs, Tweeted that:

> M chooses SD rather than the Alliance or a grand coalition in Staffanstorp, Skåne. Conservative, rather than liberal values. The fringes rather than the center. This development is not good for Sweden (Svensson, 2019b).

Similarly, Fredrik Malm, MP for the Liberals, tweeted that:

> The Moderates have rejected an Alliance majority in Staffanstorp and rule with SD instead. The first reform is banning Jews from eating kosher food in schools. Bold (Svensson, 2019b).

In reaction to the Hörby collaboration, the Minister for Democracy Alice Bah Kunke of the Green Party wrote the following on her Facebook page:

> The fact that Sweden Democrats do not respect human rights is not exactly news, but the result of the election is now that the Moderates grant power to politicians like Stefan Borg [SD], who expresses rotten values that should have no place in Sweden (Rydhagen, Kjelldén and Dyrssen, 2018)

In these comments, little distinction is made between "the Moderates" as a whole and the given local branch of that party. In other words, sanctions in the form of public adverse reactions are directed at the party centrally, and violations are described as a move away from mainstream liberal values for the entire party. The SD-ruled municipalities were also the subject of debates in the Swedish parliament. Rhetorically, the municipalities were used to suggest that mainstream-right parties were becoming more like the Sweden Democrats. In the parliamentary session on December 17th, 2018, Rasmus Ling of the Green Party made the following speech:

> The Moderates said before the election that they did not want to collaborate with the Sweden Democrats at any level of government, but in two municipalities, Bromölla and Sölvesborg, they have nevertheless voted that party into power and given them the post of mayor, the most powerful position in a municipality. In Staffanstorp in Skåne, the Moderates took power together with the Sweden Democrats, not because it was necessary but because they wanted to. They could easily have built a majority with one or more Alliance parties but considered themselves closer to the Sweden Democrats politically. This says a lot about how the political landscape has changed very quickly (Sveriges Riksdag, 2018, p. 42)

The way these local collaborations are used rhetorically suggests a strong stigmatization effect. Being associated with the Sweden Democrats is considered deeply damaging when the speech is made, even if we are dealing with just a handful of small municipalities, and the

Moderates centrally were still distancing themselves from these local branches and condemning the coalitions. A similar argument was made even more pointedly by the leader of the Left Party, Jonas Sjöstedt, who addressed his speech directly to M-leader Ulf Kristersson:

> Mister Speaker and Ulf Kristersson! Racism is one of Sweden's big social issues. Racist organizations and parties commonly single out people of the Muslim faith as scapegoats and targets of their attacks. I am concerned that the Moderates are heading in the same direction. This is especially evident in the municipalities where they rule together with the Sweden Democrats. In Bromölla, they have suggested a ban on praying during work hours. This is clearly targeting Muslims, although no one says it explicitly. In Sölvesborg it is manifested as a refusal to purchase books in the native language of the students. In Staffanstorp, it is manifested as a refusal to serve food that has been butchered in such a way that Muslims can eat it. In Staffanstorp and Skurup it is manifested as a ban on veils in schools. It is probably illegal to implement such policies. This is a type of policy designed to signal that Muslims are the problem. The question to you, Ulf Kristersson, is: Are these Moderate policies? (Sveriges Riksdag, 2019, p. 23)

This speech was followed by Kristersson's reply, in which he agreed that these were not Moderate policies. Sjöstedt ended this interaction with an appeal for Kristersson to speak to his municipal politicians when they "play along with the pitiful racist game that the Sweden Democrats are conducting and when they make local decisions that only have a single purpose, which is to stigmatize and single out Swedes of Muslim faith" (ibid., p. 24). Again, the local violations of the cordon sanitaire are taken as signals that the Moderate Party as a whole is moving away from the mainstream. In Sweden, the identity as a legitimate democratic party was at the time partly contingent on saying no to SD. Sjöstedt's criticisms should also be read as a way to counter the most common defense of these local coalitions: that the local level is a non-ideological space where everyone can collaborate. He spends considerable time on the concrete ways in which local governments that include SD have made life more difficult for Muslims.

A more costly reaction to these local collaborations came from the Center Party. They chose to switch allegiances at the national level in coalition formation from the right wing to the left wing, explicitly naming the local SD coalitions as a factor in the decision. In a radio

interview for a program entitled G*overnment Formation 2018 – on Betrayal, Coffee and the Death of the Alliance,* party leader Annie Lööf pointed to Staffanstorp and other local coalitions as one of the reasons she no longer had trust in the Moderates as a coalition partner:

> The fact that the Moderates at the local level, as they did in Staffanstorp, where the center-right alliance was in the majority, collaborate with the Sweden Democrats instead … It has been very difficult for my members to justify this on behalf of the Centre Party. That was a factor in all this (Svensson, 2019b).

The Liberals also supported a national government led by the Social Democrats until the 2022 election, when they returned to a right-wing coalition receiving parliamentary support from SD. When L first left the right-wing Alliance, the leader of the Liberals, Jan Björklund, mentioned the overtures between SD and certain Alliance members as the "nail in the coffin" for the long-standing coalition (Bäckman and Horvatovic, 2019).

Local norm-breakers also received adverse reactions from their own co-partisans during this period. The message from the central leadership of the Moderates was consistently negative. Party leader Ulf Kristersson was asked to comment on local collaborations with SD several times. To the newspaper Sydsvenskan (Lönnaeus, 2018), he said that he was critical towards co-partisans around the country who negotiate with SD:

> This is not our way of operating. One should stick to the party's policy.

To Aftonbladet (P. Karlsson, 2018), he directly appealed to local Moderate politicians nationwide to practice strict exclusion of SD.

> My message is that we should act at the local level as we act at the national level. We always seek support for our policies and have no problems with anyone supporting them. We will always, in all cases, prioritize the Alliance. We will not negotiate, compromise, or build local governments with SD.

These messages were also consistently reiterated by deputy party secretary Anders Edholm, who has responded to media inquiries about the coalitions by stating that such collaboration 'violates the guidelines' (Rydhagen, Kjelldén and Dyrssen, 2018) and that M 'should not collaborate with SD at the local, regional or national level' (Aftonbladet, 2018a). Party secretary Gunnar Strömmer expressed similar opinions in response to the collaboration in

Svalöv, stating that ‘our policy is clear – M will not let SD into local governments’ (Karlsson, 2019).

The Liberals, arguably more committed to the cordon sanitaire than M and KD at the time, had even stronger internal reactions to perceived norm violations. When the Liberals in Munkedal municipality made a joint budget proposal with M and SD, the Liberal Youth Party called for the local branch to be excluded from the party (Rezai, Scilaris and Näslund, 2019). After Liberal council members from the same municipality voted to instate a Sweden Democrat as leader of the municipal legislative council, Pär Gustafsson, the leader of the Liberals in West Sweden, warned them that they would be expelled if they did not begin to oppose SD (Dikalow, 2020). Similarly, in response to the fact that L supported an SD government in Svalöv, L’s party secretary Maria Arnholm said that there was “no excuse” for helping SD to power and that what the Liberals had done in Svalöv was “wrong” and “deeply regrettable” (Lindholm, 2022).

*The path to power pre-2018*

What typified the municipalities where SD joined coalitions in the 2018-2022 period? SD’s government participation depended on whether mainstream parties were willing to violate a strict social norm. This outcome seems to be more likely when SD has a very high degree of bargaining power due to its electoral strength. Table 5.4 shows SD’s vote share in each of the municipalities where it joined the government (2018-2022):

**Table 5.4:** Seat Share for SD where they Participated in Government, 2018-2022.

| Municipality | Vote share SD |
|---|---|
| Bjuv | 35% |
| Hörby | 34% |
| Svalöv | 31% |
| Sölvesborg | 29% |
| Bromölla | 29% |
| Surahammar | 23% |
| Staffanstorp | 12% |
| Country average | 14% |

*Source*: Swedish election authorities

In every case, apart from Staffanstorp, SD had a vote share far above the national average. When as many as a third of the seats in the municipal council were occupied by the SD, it became harder to exclude them, both for normative and strategic reasons. For the closest mainstream parties, maintaining the cordon sanitaire in those cases means not only forgoing the opportunity to pursue policy and office more effectively but also declaring that one in three voters should have no influence over local politics. Nevertheless, most instances where SD was very popular did not result in government participation, even when there were no other opportunities to pursue a within-bloc majority coalition. In that sense, electoral strength should be considered an important but insufficient condition.

A key motivation for mainstream right branches that collaborated with SD in that period seems to be policy maximization. Local party leaders in Sölvesborg (Abrahamsson, 2018), Bjuv (Sköldqvist, 2020), and Hörby (Aftonbladet, 2018a) emphasized to the press that collaboration with SD was the best way to achieve their policy goals. However, as I showed above, violating the cordon sanitaire also meant dealing with accusations of accommodating extremism, anti-democratic positions, or xenophobia. In the press, the mainstream right branches dealt with these accusations by contesting the norm's application to their case or arguing in terms of alternative democratic norms, seemingly in conflict with the cordon sanitaire.

*Identity negotiation among violators*

As I have shown elsewhere (Axelsen, 2023), the mainstream branches that did not adhere to the cordon sanitaire engaged in identity negotiation when confronted about their norm violation. Rather than arguing that the norm was invalid, most local violators justified their divergence from the cordon sanitaire by reference to other democratic norms or by contesting the application of the norm to their situation. This latter kind of justification is called applicatory norm contestation in the literature on international norms (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2018).

An example of someone arguing in terms of competing democratic norms can be found in Hörby. Lars Göran Ritmer, group leader of the Hörby Moderates, said the following in response to criticisms of the local coalition:

> During this past government period, we have been in opposition together with SD and noticed that we have similar views on many issues. The Moderates in Hörby think that we should respect the election results and protect democracy (Mikulic, 2018)

Note the emphasis on 'protecting democracy' and 'respecting the election results.' The clear implication is that the norm against letting the Sweden Democrats into positions of power conflicted with other, even more central, democratic norms. These norms also define membership in the group of legitimate democratic actors. A politician who does not respect the election results also excludes herself from the legitimate mainstream. In this way, the norm violation is framed as pro-social rather than anti-social (see Axelsen, 2023 for a full elaboration). For an example of applicatory contestation of the norm, consider the following statement by Jeppe Jonsson, a county-level representative, on the collaboration in Sölvesborg:

> Not all questions are ideological; this is about ordinary practical matters in a municipality. There, you can collaborate with all parties. We have collaborated with many parties throughout the years, and the most important thing for us in this context is to ensure progress for the ideas and proposals of the Moderates (Ridderstolpe, 2018)

Jonsson does not deny the validity of the cordon sanitaire overall but instead challenges the application of the norm to the local level, which he describes as non-ideological. He also refers to the duty of politicians to deliver the policies they have promoted during the campaign. The implication, again, is that it would be bad for democracy if politicians neglected their obligation to pursue campaign issues to exclude a pariah.

*An outlier*

The municipality of Staffanstorp stands out from the other cases of collaboration in several ways. As Rasmus Ling of the Green Party noted in the quote above, the Moderates did not need SD to form a within-bloc majority coalition in Staffanstorp. The Moderates received 44 % of the seats (making it the country's third most successful Moderate branch) and could have built a majority with just the Liberals, for instance. M *preferred* to collaborate with SD.

The way the Moderates in Staffanstorp contested the cordon sanitaire is also unusual. Rather than justify their decision by reference to alternative democratic norms or by arguing that the norm did not apply to them, they seemed to reject the norm outright. This is evident from statements made by the local Moderate party leader and mayor, Christian Sonesson, just

after the coalition was formed. Before the election, Christian Sonesson stated he was open to collaborating with SD. After the election, when he had left the Alliance collaboration behind, he said that 'the party has a policy. I have ignored it' (Perlenberg, 2019a). His reasons for forming the coalition were not characterized by applicatory contestation or competing democratic norms. Instead, he emphasizes that the two parties have many similarities, which they have noticed in municipal council votes over the past four years (Carlsson, 2018). This amounts to what the literature on international norms dubs a validity contestation (Deitelhoff and Zimmermann, 2018). The Staffanstorp Moderates are not contesting the application of the norm to their case but rather the validity of the rule in general.

The Staffanstorp case shows that the importance of electoral strength is diminished as soon as the norm does not have a decisive influence over key players. SD joined a coalition with only 12% of the votes in a municipality where the Moderates could pursue other within-bloc coalitions. The case suggests that as soon as the norm is considered invalid by the formateur, policy proximity and a sufficient contribution to the coalition's legislative weight are sufficient to cause inclusion in government.

**Post-2022: a challenger like any other?**

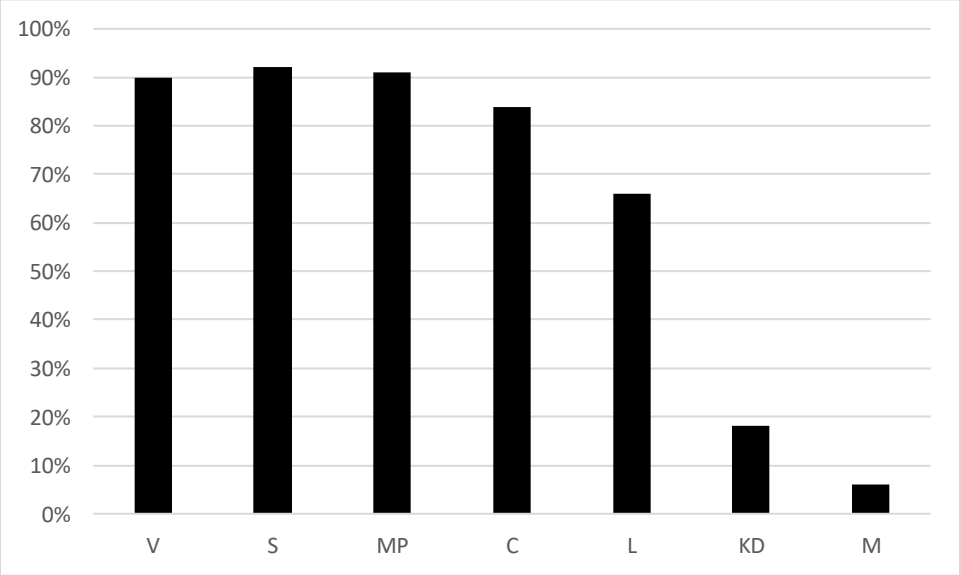
In the run-up to the 2022 election, we see the cordon sanitaire seriously challenged for the first time. After the election, SD became a support party for a right-wing government at the national level. The number of local coalitions with SD also increased immensely following that election. However, the coalitions follow very distinct patterns. In some parties, the norm against collaborating with the Sweden Democrats is still in force—the anti-pacts against SD are evidence of this. In the newspaper survey leading up to the 2022 election, each party branch was asked whether there were any parties they would <u>not</u> collaborate with after the election. This gave the parties an opportunity to signal to voters that they were (not) willing to break the norm against collaboration[42]. As is apparent from figure 5.1, the parties on the

[42] The variable was coded in such a way that only branches that explicitly mention SD, or that make clear references to it (e.g. "We will not collaborate with any party on the far right/ the fringes of the party system") are coded as having an anti-pact (1). Those who do not mention SD, or who explicitly say they are open to talks with all parties are given the value 0. Those who do not answer the question are coded as missing. This does not mean that every branch with the value 0 are willing to collaborate with SD. For example, among the 10% of branches of the Left Party coded as 0, many simply answered: "yes" or "we will not collaborate with a party

left (MP, S and V) still maintain a strict cordon sanitaire, with around 90% of branches expressing that SD is not a party they will collaborate with. On the right wing, C (84%) and L (66%) also signal that they will exclude SD in most municipalities. In KD (18%) and M (6%), however, branches have mostly abandoned the norm.

Clearly, a further factor distinguishing SD from the other cases in this thesis is a trickle-down effect, whereby local coalition decisions are impacted strongly by the central party line. This has been treated extensively elsewhere (Backlund, 2020). It is plainly not the case that all these local branches independently maintained a cordon sanitaire against SD and then independently abandoned it in 2022. Rather, the central parties' decision to include SD at the national level also meant abandoning any policy against local collaboration. Moreover, as I showed above, the cordon sanitaire was maintained through (the threat of) informal negative sanctions against those who violated it. This was a multi-level structure where the central party was an important enforcer. For FrP, V, and R, there has been no such norm of exclusion at the local level, and the mainstream counterparts have happily approved of local collaborations even while keeping the challenger at arm's length nationally.

**Figure 5.1:** Explicit Anti-Pacts Against SD, by Party 2022




Source: Valkompassen 2022

whose values are too far from our own". The estimated number of anti-pacts against SD is, therefore, conservative, especially on the left, where branches may assume that voters know that they would not collaborate with SD.

Given the weakened cordon sanitaire, I expect that coalition formation for the Sweden Democrats after the 2022 election will be more like that of other parties. It is reasonable to assume that their chances of making it into government are, to a greater extent than previously, governed by policy- and office-seeking motivations on the part of the mainstream right. I will, therefore, test the same set of hypotheses for the SD as I did for V and FrP. I hypothesize that the likelihood of government inclusion is related to SD's vote share (H1), to the mayor party's vote share (H2), to the degree of policy proximity between SD and the major coalition party (H3), and the degree of electoral growth for SD (H4).

**Data and Operationalization**

The data on Swedish parties' policy positions in the 2022 election comes from the 2022 Election Compass (SVT, 2022b). This rendered a dataset with local branches as the unit of analysis (n=1989) and answers to policy questions as the key variables. As previously, I ran a factor analysis (table 5.5) on all the questions posed to the branches in every Swedish municipality. Again, two dimensions are revealed: one socioeconomic and one sociocultural. Based on the factor scores for factors 1 and 2, I calculated the policy distance between SD and the mayor party in the same way as in the previous analyses.

**Table 5.5**: Factor Analysis, 2022 VAA. Varimax Rotation.

| Variable | 1<br>EV=4,13 | 2<br>EV=1,04 |
|---|---|---|
| Private elder care | -0.80 | |
| Private schools | -0.78 | |
| Six-hour workday | 0.77 | |
| Public housing | 0.73 | |
| Fewer refugees | | -0.86 |
| Those who work in elder care should have to learn Swedish. | | -0.72 |
| Culture spending | | 0.69 |
| Electric car chargers | | 0.45 |
| Municipal tax | 0.43 | 0.46 |

Source: SVT Valkompassen (2022)

*Results*

First, as with FrP and V, t-tests were run to examine the difference in the means for the municipalities where SD became a junior coalition party versus the ones where it remained in opposition. As the table below shows, the two variables that are significantly different

between the two groups are the seat share of the mayor party and the distance between SD and the dominant government party in terms of sociocultural positions. We can also note that the differences in SD's vote share and socioeconomic policy distance, while not significant, are all in the expected direction.

**Table 5.6:** Comparison of Means, SD in Government and Opposition.

| | Mean for SD in opposition | Mean for SD in government | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| SD vote share | 16.3% | 18.3% | -2.0% |
| Mayor party vote share | 30.0% | 22.2% | 7.7%*** |
| Sociocultural distance | 0.29 | 0.14 | 0.16*** |
| Socioeconomic distance | 0.25 | 0.21 | 0.05 |
| SD size change | 2.4% | 1.6% | 0.8% |
| Population | 36587.00 | 27387.00 | 9199.00 |

* Significant at the .05 level, **Significant at the .01 level, *** Significant at the 0.001 level

Once more, I ran a nested logistic regression model to test the hypotheses (table 5.7). Each model adds information related to a specific party objective: office-seeking (model 1), policy-seeking (model 2), and vote-seeking (model 3). Just like in V's case, the coefficient for the vote share of the mayor party is significant on the 0.001 level across models. The introduction of the vote-share variables also involves an increase in the pseudo $R^2$ from 0 to 0.13, and the Wald test score and likelihood ratio test show a statistically significant improvement of model fit by including the variables. This means that we can be confident that the vote share of the dominant coalition party matters to SD's inclusion in a coalition. Unlike in V's case, the effect is now in the expected direction. Smaller mayor parties are significantly more likely to invite SD into coalition. In other words, coalition formation with SD is more likely when the mayor party needs more votes to get a majority in the council.

**Table 5.7**: Logistic Regression – SD Joining Coalition as Junior Member

| VARIABLES | Model 0 | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
| Constant | -2.15***<br>(0.21) | -1.25<br>(2.23) | 0.17<br>(2.53) | 0.71<br>(2.40) |
| | | | | |
| Vote SD | | 18.90<br>(20.06) | 15.84<br>(21.14) | 17.63<br>(21.87) |
| Vote $SD^2$ | | -35.23<br>(47.39) | -24.50<br>(50.55) | -22.83<br>(53.74) |
| Vote mayor party | | -11.67***<br>(3.12) | -11.99**<br>(3.46) | -12.10**<br>(3.54) |
| Sociocultural distance | | | -5.27**<br>(1.61) | -5.10**<br>(1.67) |
| Socioeconomic distance | | | -0.59<br>(1.50) | -1.54<br>(1.61) |
| Change in vote share SD | | | | -28.13*<br>(11.27) |
| Population | | | | -4.13e-06<br>(6.72e-06) |
| | | | | |
| Pseudo R2 | 0.00 | 0.13 | 0.22 | 0.26 |
| Log Likelihood | -83.23 | -72.60*** | -64.87*** | -61.33* |
| Wald test score | | 0.00 | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| | | | | |
| N | 248 | 248 | 248 | 248 |

*Note:* * Significant at the .05 level, **Significant at the .01 level. *** Significant at the .001 level.
In each case, the Wald test score is a test of the new independent variables included in the model (for the final model, this does not include population). Significance levels of log-likelihood are determined by a series of likelihood ratio tests (comparing each model to the previous) performed on a restricted sample with no missing cases on any of the variables in the full model.

Sociocultural policy distance from the major coalition party has a statistically significant (0.01-level) effect on coalition membership. According to the Wald- and likelihood ratio tests, the policy variables are associated with similar improvements in goodness of fit as the vote share variables. The larger the sociocultural policy distance between SD and the dominant coalition party, the lower the probability that SD is invited to join the government. It is not surprising that this policy dimension should have the greatest impact on SD's chances to join a government, given that the sociocultural policy stances of the party were an important rationale for its exclusion in the first place. Swedish parties have historically excluded SD, partly because they disagreed with its stance on issues like immigration and law and order. When coalition formation becomes feasible, it is more likely to occur when SD and the dominant coalition party have no strong disagreement on these issues. Phrased differently, the cordon sanitaire is lifted first by those party branches closer to the SD on the sociocultural dimension.

Finally, we can note that the effect of the change in SD's vote share is statistically significant ($p<0.05$). It is negative, indicating that the more SD has grown since the previous election, the lower the chances of inclusion in a coalition as a junior member. This is the opposite of what was hypothesized (H4). A possible explanation is that those municipalities where SD had the largest unrealized growth potential in 2018 are those where the norm against association with the party was strongest. In other words, sizeable electoral growth from 2018 to 2022 and the continued exclusion of SD may both be associated with the persistence of the exclusion norm. Moreover, in the municipalities where the SD was well represented in the 2018-22 period, they were more likely to build personal and collaborative relationships with other parties, setting the stage for coalitions in the subsequent period. However, SD does not have unlimited growth potential, meaning that branches that are very successful in 2018 are also less likely to grow than branches that underperformed in 2018.

Another explanation is that in the municipalities with the largest vote increase for SD, the party does not have the local party organization to keep up with the growth. This seems to be the case in Dorotea municipality, for instance. SD's share grew from four percent in 2018 to 22 percent in 2022. According to news reports after the election, half of SD's seats stood empty in the council after the election (Helte and Halth, 2022). This would tend to undermine SD's attractiveness and bargaining position.

*Factors beyond the model*

In terms of vote shares, there are two puzzling cases of SD membership where electorally large M-branches were in a position to form right-wing coalitions without SD. These were Staffanstorp and Bjurholm. Above, Staffanstorp was described as an unusual case already in the previous government period. This will also be explored in the next chapter. In 2018, small policy distances and a local disregard for the cordon sanitaire generated an early opportunity for SD to participate. This relationship was carried forward to the 2022-26 period. Also, in Bjurholm, Sweden's smallest municipality by population, the cordon sanitaire seems to have eroded quite early. In the 2018 election compass, neither L, KD, nor M had explicit anti-pacts against SD in Bjurholm. When C left the center-right alliance after disagreements over policy during the 2022 coalition negotiations (SVT, 2022a), there were few barriers to including SD.

The cordon sanitaire remained strong in some municipalities, even in the 2022 election. There were five municipalities where all parties had explicit anti-pacts against SD, as reported in the election compass: Finspång, Hallsberg, Härryda, Huddinge and Jönköping.

Moreover, there were 24 municipalities where more than half the municipal council members came from parties with an anti-pact against SD. There are no instances of SD joining a coalition in any of these places. Upon inspection, the prevalence of local anti-pacts does not seem to be related to policy distances on either dimension. Due to these pockets of persistent exclusion, we can still observe many instances of cross-bloc coalitions. Some 'unholy alliances' (e.g., between S and M) seem merely to be continuations of incidentally stable alliances that were formed when the cordon sanitaire was still nationwide and covered all Swedish parties. This was, for instance, the case in Eslöv (Sveriges Radio, 2014; Johansson and Carlsson, 2022). Here, the Moderates originally began collaborating with S to keep SD out of power. In 2022, the reasoning for retaining the coalition had changed. M was now carrying on the collaboration with S because the collaboration had worked well so far, and M wanted a stable majority to deal with the economic challenges faced by the municipality.

*Conclusion*

SD stands out. Unlike the other three parties examined here, SD has recently gone through a period where policy proximity and vote shares could not account for coalition membership. Before 2022, SD was excluded from coalitions, even at the local level, with few exceptions. To be sure, the presence of a cordon sanitaire in Sweden can partly be explained by large policy distances between SD and the mainstream. Moreover, the handful of coalitions that occurred after the 2018 election can partly be explained by the office and policy motivations of the mainstream right. However, little can be understood if we do not consider the norm of exclusion. Most branches of the mainstream right did not include SD in this period, even if exclusion was costly in terms of office or policy. Where coalitions did occur, the mainstream partners had to deal with public condemnation and publicly defend their identity as legitimate democratic actors.

After this norm eroded significantly leading up to the 2022 election, SD's coalition membership can be explained by the same variables as the other cases studied here. The mayor party's office- and policy motivations are both significantly related to the outcome: SD is more likely to be part of a coalition if the mayor party is smaller and if the parties do not diverge too much on the sociocultural dimension. However, the cordon sanitaire still persists in certain municipalities, limiting SD's coalition potential. Moreover, V, S, MP, and, with a couple of exceptions, C, are still maintaining nationwide anti-pacts against SD.

**The four cases compared**

How well does each of the four cases conform to the theoretical model presented in Chapter 1? For each of the four cases studied here, the data shows that coalition formation at the local level is determined by (broadly) the same key factors identified by De Lange (2008) at the national level. These are electoral strength and policy proximity. The consistent effects of policy proximity across the cases indicate a selection effect, where challengers closer to the mainstream are more likely to be invited into coalition. The issues parties need to agree on in order to form coalitions vary, however. In the case of the Progress Party, only proximity on the socioeconomic dimension is significantly associated with the outcome. In the Left Party's case, both dimensions matter, but the effect of socioeconomic proximity is strongest. SD relies on agreement over sociocultural issues only (post 2022). Red has chiefly put forward socioeconomic demands in policy negotiations. In all cases, we can reject the notion that policy is unimportant at the local level. Local party branches enter coalitions to implement policies they care about.

Next, size matters in all cases, but in different ways. For FrP, we see the same effect as De Lange (2008) found at the national level: Only the size of the challenger party affects the likelihood of coalition membership. For the Left Party, the size of the dominant coalition party was positively associated with the outcome. Where the formateur is larger, V is more likely to participate. The Swedish Social Democrats seem to form two distinct types of coalitions. In the first type, S is large and dominant and invites smaller left-wing parties along to achieve a council majority. In the second type, S is weaker and relies on medium-sized centrist (or sometimes right-wing) parties to gain a majority, usually resulting in a cross-bloc coalition. These centrist parties prefer to keep V out of government. The difference between FrP and V in this regard could reflect broad party strategies, and the fact that it is more unusual for V to be a large party. In the period of study, FrP received more than ten percent of the seats in a quarter of cases. V received ten percent or more only in eight percent of cases. On the other hand, FrP achieved no seats in about a third of cases, while for V only a handful of municipalities (4 percent) saw no representation of the party. In other words, if V wants to pursue an office-seeking strategy across Sweden, it must broadly accept the role of a small coalition party supporting an electorally dominant S mayor. FrP has better opportunities to cherry-pick collaborations where it has a larger share of seats without becoming irrelevant as a local government party.

For now, Red seems to have a high electoral threshold to join a government. It tends to avoid coalitions where it would be completely dominated by a larger coalition partner. This indicates that in balancing party goals, Red is strongly policy-oriented, while V is more office-oriented and accepts a more junior role when it participates. Finally, after 2022, SD is more likely to be invited into government when the mayor party is smaller. We should ask ourselves about the theoretical difference between the positive effect of challenger party size (as with FrP) and the negative effect of mayor party size (as with SD). De Lange (2008, p. 104) refers to the latter as a logical addition to the former. Formateurs are more likely to include a challenger if they rely on the challenger's votes to form a government. They are more likely to rely on a challenger's votes if the challenger is big or the formateur party is small. In 2022, SD was large almost everywhere. Only fourteen percent of SD branches gained less than ten percent of the vote. The decisive variation was, therefore, in terms of the size of the mayor's party.

In the Swedish cases, I also find weakly significant effects of electoral growth, but in opposite directions. For V, growth is associated with a higher chance of joining the government, while for SD, the effect is negative. I propose that this puzzling effect in SD's case may be related to the norm against association with the party. Where SD experienced early electoral growth (i.e., before 2018), there had already been a longer period where SD could improve its reputation and build personal relationships. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, SD's bad reputation has been a key obstacle to its inclusion in alliances, also at the local level.

**Table 5.8:** Comparative Summary of Key Insights

| | Key explanatory factors | Factors outside the model identified |
|---|---|---|
| Progress Party | Size, (socioeconomic) policy proximity | Traditional rivals teaming up against a challenger, personal chemistry between politicians |
| Red | Size, policy proximity | Alliance building while in opposition, reputation for (ir-) responsibility |
| Left Party | Size of mayor party (+), policy proximity, electoral growth (+) | Balance of power within coalition, balance of goals for mayor party, alienation between previous coalition partners |
| SD | Size of mayor party (-), (sociocultural) policy proximity, electoral growth (-) | Norm contestation during cordon sanitaire, persistence of past alliances |

The chapter has also examined factors outside the model that seem to play a role in coalition formation. Cases that do not conform to the statistical model have been particularly informative in this regard. Some of these factors are relatively simple to operationalize and use in statistical analysis. Quantitatively oriented students of coalition formation could, for instance, include variables such as co-existence in opposition in the previous government period, the persistence of past alliances that formed under different conditions, and whether the challenger has been a dominant government party and pushed unlikely coalition partners together in opposition (i.e., long-term exclusion of two medium-sized rivals). On the other hand, factors like personal chemistry, the reputation of the challenger among other local parties, and norm contestation practices (in the case of a cordon sanitaire) are more difficult to measure and may require qualitative analysis.

# Chapter 6: Case studies, the Road to Power

In the previous chapters, associations between coalition membership and size- and ideology variables were established. This chapter examines the associations in greater detail to establish *how* these variables matter. The effects of policy distance have been similar across cases: larger distances are associated with lower probabilities of coalition membership[43]. Due to the variations in policy proximity across the four cases, the analysis below can inform the theory both by demonstrating how policy proximity impacts the challenger party's willingness to participate and attractiveness as a coalition partner and by showing how coalitions can be formed even when larger policy distances exist. The cases of Staffanstorp and Grimstad are ideal for establishing whether and why ideological proximity matters to potential coalition partners. On the other hand, the cases of Kragerø and Mörbylånga are ideal for examining how coalitions can occur even when there are larger ideological differences between the parties. Each case-study contains a section on the role of vote-shares, of policy proximity, and of additional factors that impacted the outcome.

When it comes to vote shares, the previous chapters revealed varied effects. In the case of FrP, we saw a positive effect of the challenger party's seat share. Similarly, they revealed that Red tends to participate when it has an unusually high vote share. In SD's case, they showed that the vote share of the mayor's party is negatively associated with the outcome, while V is more likely to participate when the formateur has a high share of the seats. As the chapter will show, Red in Kragerø conforms to the general pattern, with a high share of the council seats. The other cases are, to varying extents, exceptions when it comes to the vote-share variables. SD participated in Staffanstorp even though M had a very large share of the seats and could have formed other ideologically compact coalitions. V participated in Mörbylånga despite the modest size of the Social Democrats, who depended on a center-right party to form a government. FrP joined a government in Grimstad despite falling short of the electoral success that typifies FrP in local government. In this way, the cases inform the theory both by examining the causal relationship between the dependent and independent variables and by specifying the conditions under which the outcome can occur in the absence of these variables. The variation among the cases in terms of the independent variables also means that the chapter can examine the interactions between these factors. To

[43] Though there is variation when it comes to which dimension matters most.

what extent can a strong bargaining position compensate for large ideological differences? Does ideological proximity weigh up for a sub-optimal distribution of seats? The chapter will also examine additional factors that muffle or amplify the effects of ideology and vote shares or influence government participation through other causal paths.

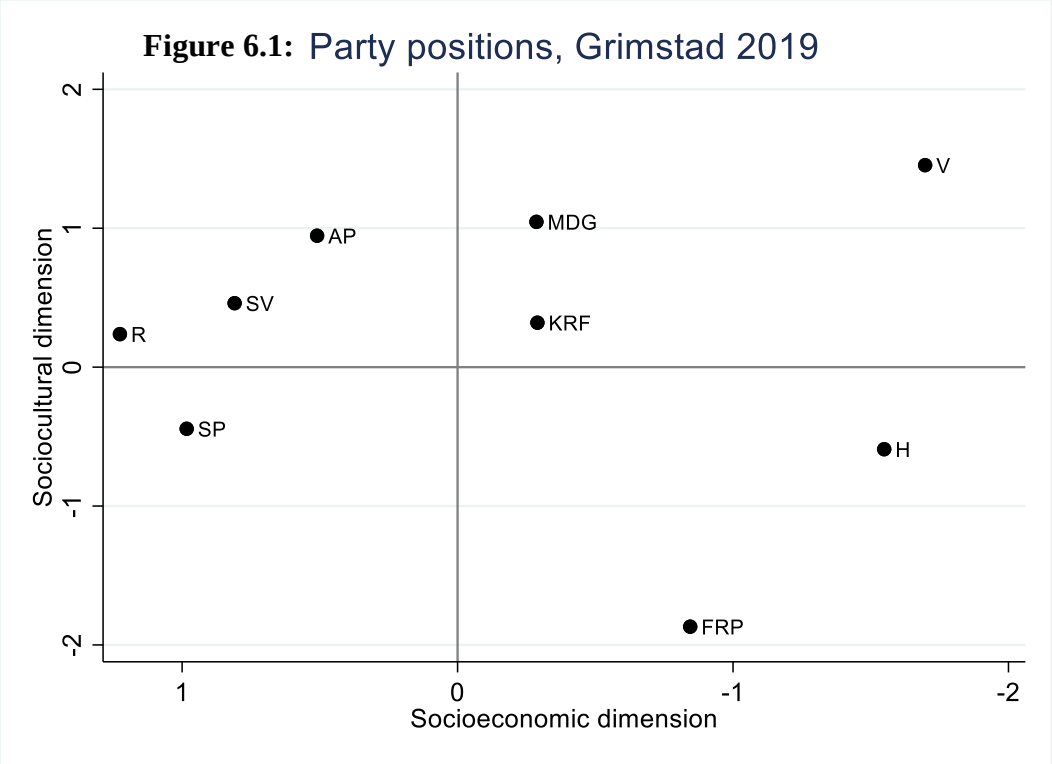
## FrP in Grimstad

### *Vote shares*

In the municipality of Grimstad, the Progress Party became the 4th largest party, with 10,1% of the vote in the 2019 election. This vote share is on the low side of the ideal range, as identified in Chapter 4. The mayor party (H) received the most votes (21,1%), but only barely. When imputing the values (vote share, policy distance, etc.) for Grimstad, the statistical model used in Chapter 4 gave a probability of about 17% that the Progress Party would end up with the deputy mayor. The relatively low vote share (only slightly above the average for FrP in opposition) was the main contributing factor to this low probability. If the Progress Party had received a vote share of 19% (keeping other variables constant), their predicted probability of gaining the deputy mayor would have increased to more than 50%. These vote shares meant that FrP and H had to include more parties in the coalition and entered a collaboration with the Christian Democrats (KrF) and Center Party (SP). Given the ideological spread within this coalition, FrP's ideological positioning in relation to the mainstream was a crucial precondition. In particular, FrP's policy emphasis on socioeconomic rather than sociocultural issues made the party a more attractive coalition partner.

### *Policy proximity*

Grimstad FrP was positioned closer to the mayor's party compared to the average in municipalities where FrP has the deputy mayor. This was the case on the sociocultural dimension and, even more strikingly, on the socioeconomic dimension in Grimstad. Figure 6.1 shows the policy positions of the political parties in Grimstad just prior to the 2019 election, based on the same operationalization as in Chapter 4.




*Source*: VG Valgomat, 2019

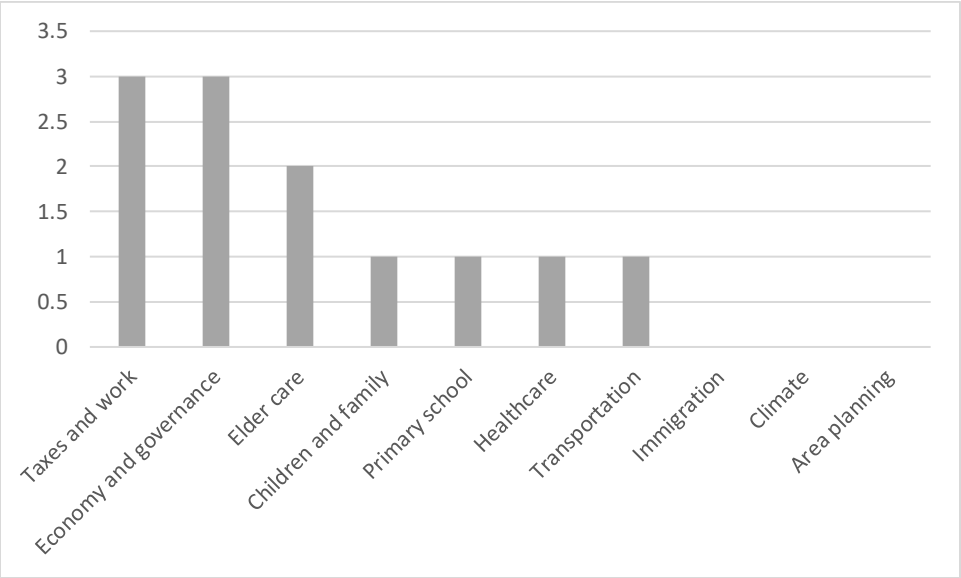
Based on the graph, FrP and H seem to be natural coalition partners, being the only two parties that are simultaneously to the right of center on the socioeconomic dimension and on the sociocultural scale.

In interviews, local politicians from both FrP and H highlighted socioeconomic issues as those that were most emphasized during negotiations to form a coalition. For the Progress Party, key issues included economic governance and property taxes. The latter issue was identified by several informants as the only point of contention between FrP and the other coalition partners. As one politician from the Grimstad Conservatives told me, "The Progress Party were 'harder' on that issue."[44] In the newspaper survey cited in Chapter 4, the local politicians were asked to pick their core issues from a predefined list of policy areas. All three Progress Party candidates from Grimstad who answered the survey mentioned "taxes and work" and "economy and governance" among their core issues. None mentioned immigration (Figure 6.2). Similarly, in their personal appeals to voters, published at the

[44] Interview with local politician, Grimstad Høyre

beginning of each candidate's response, the most frequent topic (if you divide them into quasi-sentences and tag them by topic) is references to the competence of FrP or their politicians to govern. Beyond this, we find appeals for administrative efficiency, avoiding oversized public budgets, support for free-market policies, and mentions of the importance of personal freedom, especially from bureaucratic control. None mention any issues related to immigration or law and order. These issues do not appear in FrP's local manifestos from 2015 and 2019 either. Thus, while the Progress Party politicians may have indicated strongly restrictive positions on the immigration-related items in the survey, these issues do not appear to have been very salient within the party branch.

**Figure 6.2:** Key Issues Mentioned by FrP Candidates, Grimstad 2019




Source: Valgomaten, VG, 2019

*Additional factors*

Beyond the high policy proximity and emphasis on socioeconomic issues, the collaboration was facilitated by pre-governmental alliances. As one local politician from FrP Grimstad pointed out, the relationship between the coalition partners was carefully developed long before they gained the position of deputy mayor:

> We have had periods where no one wanted to collaborate with the Progress Party, and then we have periods, like now, where they do want to collaborate with FrP. It is a long-term project. We spent four years establishing credibility and trust among the other parties. (…) We had joint motions with Høyre and with KrF [while in opposition]. We took the initiative to do that in order to establish a closer dialogue, with a collaboration after the election in mind – so that they could see that we were a serious actor.[45]

Moreover, as one Progress Party politician informed me, "half of the Conservative group in the municipal council are former FrP members"[46]. This resulted in similar local priorities between the two parties.

It seems to be the case, in other words, that an important precondition for the Progress Party to join the local government in Grimstad was to find common ground with the center-right in terms of policy positions but also crucially in terms of salience. The Progress Party broadly agrees with the conservatives on socioeconomic issues and has highlighted these in their appeals to voters. Moreover, inter-party collaboration in opposition and the careful cultivation of alliances leading up to the 2019 election played a key role. This was a deliberate strategy on the part of FrP, driven by office-seeking motivations.

**Red in Kragerø**

*Vote shares*

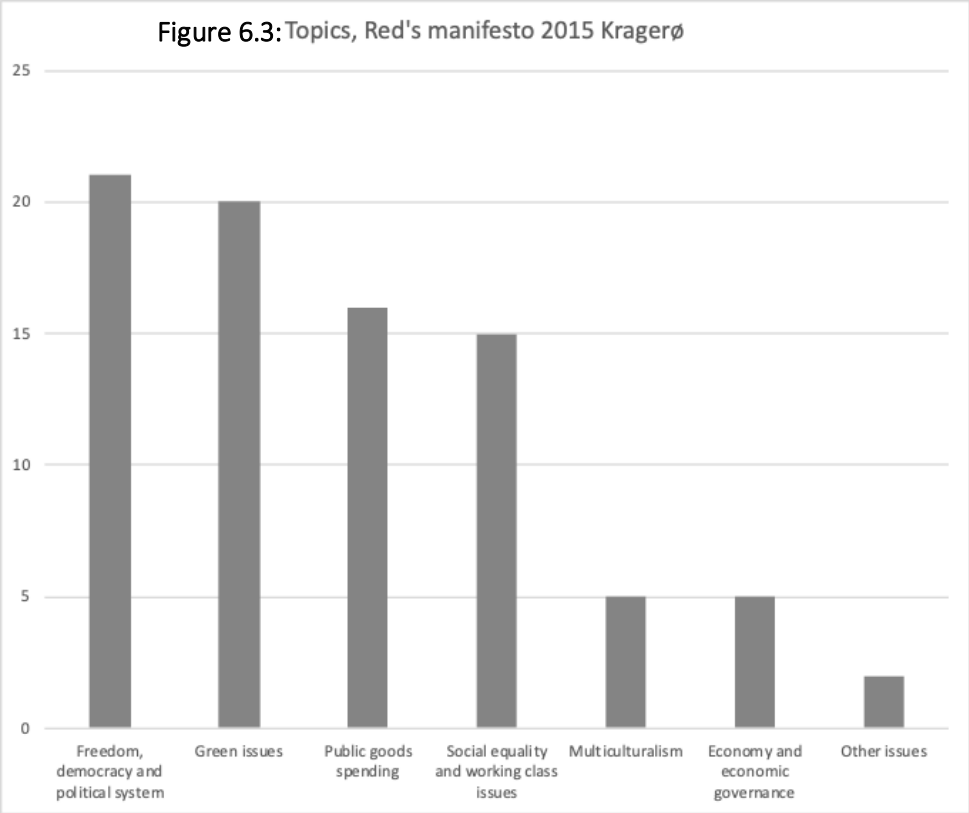
In terms of vote shares, Red in Kragerø conforms to the theoretical expectations. In 2015, Kragerø had the most electorally successful branch of Red, gaining 16,4 percent of the vote. This made them the second largest party in the town, after the Labor Party (36,9 percent), which gained the mayor. Such a strong electoral position seems to have been a key condition for Red's government participation in Kragerø. In the preceding election, Red had received 8,5 percent of the seats and remained in opposition. In the 2019 election, Red also entered opposition after receiving 11,4 percent of the seats. As noted in the previous chapter, Red's local party leader was also very popular, receiving more personal votes than any other politician in the county of Telemark.

[45] Interview with politician from FrP Grimstad.
[46] Interview with politician from FrP Grimstad.

A high vote share for Red mattered in several respects. Firstly, it made Red an attractive coalition partner, as it could contribute significant legislative weight to a potential coalition. In turn, this gave Red significant bargaining power in relation to the Labor Party, which could not build a viable coalition without it. This bargaining power meant that Red could assuage the fear of becoming a doormat to the Labor Party. This has been a perennial concern and barrier to participation for Red nationally (Sørenes, 2019) and locally (e.g., Tymi, 2019; Kristiansen, 2023). Thirdly, as was emphasized by Red Kragerø's deputy mayor at a party strategy event in 2022 (*Rødt Hjemmefra // Live fra Vendepunkt*, 2022), the high level of support within the local community contributed to a sense of duty to govern. Red had been entrusted with a mandate to rule.

*Policy proximity*

Red in Kragerø was quite distinct from the mainstream in terms of its policy emphasis. In Figure 6.3, I have divided Red's 2015 manifesto into quasi-sentences and coded each of these according to content, following the coding manual of the Comparative Manifesto Project (Volkens *et al.*, 2020). For Figure 6.3, I have combined the topics mentioned in the manifesto into broader categories. As the graph shows, the most prevalent topics in the Manifesto were freedom, democracy, and the political system. The party program heavily emphasizes issues like governmental transparency, citizen engagement, and the fight against corruption. Other prevalent topics included green issues (environmental protection and sustainability), public goods spending (welfare, education, and culture/leisure), social equality, and working-class issues.




*Source*: Local election manifesto, Red Kragerø 2015

However, there were key points of agreement that formed the basis of the shared policy platform. In interviews, politicians from Red and from AP emphasized social inequality and conditions for working-class people as important points that the two parties could agree on. Several informants identified the Kragerø Labor Party branch as more left-wing than the average municipal branch, making policy agreements more feasible. Moreover, in the coalition negotiations, the position of mayor was a priority for the Labor Party. This made the collaboration more attractive for Red from a policy-seeking perspective. As one Red politician told me:

> "They gave us very much, both in terms of positions and policy, quite early on in the negotiations in order to realize that demand."

Moreover, as already indicated, Red's high vote share meant it stood a greater chance of making its mark on the policy platform. For this reason, a highly policy-oriented branch of Red may enter a coalition with a more office-oriented branch of AP if Red's seat share is high enough, even when there are significant policy distances. *Additional factors*

Several additional factors played a role in Red Kragerø's road to power. Firstly, as noted in Chapter 4, the parties on the left had initiated a policy collaboration while in opposition against the previous right-wing government. Leading up to the election, this cooperation was coordinated by the local trade unions, who desired a united, left-wing government in the coming period (LO-Aktuelt, 2015). This helped to remove the barriers of mistrust that might have existed between the parties and helped to foster a sense of a shared political project.

In all my interviews in Kragerø, the politicians emphasized that an important precondition for the collaboration was an agreement where the partners were permitted to disagree on a series of issues. As one politician from the Labor party told me:

> We managed to pick out these issues where there was disagreement and decided beforehand on how to deal with them when they came up. We gave each other permission to have different opinions, even when we were together in position. When these issues would come up, we were to be allowed to build a different majority. The coalition did not collapse. This was all agreed beforehand.

An exception to this rule was the municipal budget. According to the Labor Party informant, all parties in the coalition accepted that when it came to the budget, the parties would simply have to come to an agreement.

Another important precondition for the collaboration seems to have been the entrance of a younger and more pragmatic wing within Red Kragerø. One Labor politician explained to me that a change in Red's local leadership to someone more pragmatic and with a greater desire to govern was an important step in the lead-up to coalition formation[47]. Within Red, the misgivings against entering the coalition were strongest within the old guard. This was emphasized by several informants. As one Red member explained:

> Some of the older members were a little more critical [to entering the coalition].(…) However, after a while, I felt like there was broad support and enthusiasm about the fact that we got the deputy mayor post and got to make a clear mark on policies right away. (…) [The arguments against joining the government were] that it would dilute our policies, and the fact that we are known for being outsiders and 'guard dogs' who speak our minds and don't sell out our principles. This is the way the old guard has

[47] Interview with local politician, Kragerø Labor

> always operated: pounding their fists and fighting. Suddenly having to diverge from your own program and making compromises is scarier for those who are not used to it.[48]

In sum, several preconditions beyond policy proximity and electoral success were in place before the coalition could occur. These include a policy collaboration in opposition, an agreement to disagree - preventing unacceptable concessions, and a leading group of younger, more pragmatic members.

**SD in Staffanstorp**

In the case of Staffanstorp, an important contextual variable is the level of hostility the party faced as it entered local politics. Staffanstorp was the first municipality where SD was part of a local government just after the 2018 election. Being the object of a national cordon sanitaire, the SD experienced some challenges upon entering local politics that were not found in the other cases. My interviews in Staffanstorp revealed that the SD initially faced very high levels of hostility, but that this eased over time. One politician explained that:

> When we entered the scene, all the other parties had an impression from the media: "There are a bunch of strange, dangerous, unpleasant people entering Staffanstorp's political scene this period." They were very wary and cautious. But we gave them no reason to develop this image any further. Slowly but surely, most of the parties realized – and they could even state this in the media – that we were not thugs with iron pipes. [49]

Similarly, another SD politician told me that:

> When we entered 8 years ago there was not really any party apart from the Moderates that wanted to talk to us. They did not want to shake hands or say hello or anything. We were not to exist on this council. But this has changed now. [50]

This background meant that a coalition between the SD and the Moderates had to achieve a majority in the council by itself. Coalition options were very limited for SD. As we shall see, three factors played a key role in SD's coalition formation in Staffanstorp. Firstly, the exceptionally high vote-shares of the Moderates meant that a two-party majority coalition

[48] Interview with local politician, Kragerø Red

[49] Interview with local politician, Staffanstorp SD – The mention of "iron pipes" refers to an episode in 2010, when three SD politicians (two MPs among them) had filmed themselves verbally abusing people on the street and arming themselves with metal pipes when the situation escalated (Baas and Holmén, 2012).

[50] Interview with local politician, Staffanstorp SD

could be formed. Secondly, the Moderates' unusual positions and emphasis on the sociocultural dimension meant that SD was an attractive coalition partner. Finally, the local leadership of the Moderates was willing to violate the norm of non-collaboration despite negative reactions from the central party and other actors in the Swedish political system.

*Vote shares*

In the 2018 election, SD received about 12 percent of the seats in Staffanstorp, while the Moderates received 44 percent. SD's opportunities for coalition membership would have been severely limited if either party received a significantly lower vote share. All the other right-wing parties, L, KD, and C, had explicit anti-pacts against SD in Staffanstorp (SVT, 2018). A broader coalition that included SD was, therefore, not feasible. However, given M's legislative weight, other right-wing coalitions were possible. For instance, M and L would have been in the majority, as would a coalition of M, C, and KD. M preferred SD over these alternatives. To account for this fact, we must consider the branches' relative policy positions, as well as the relationships between the local parties.

*Policy proximity*

In interviews, politicians from both parties emphasized that the collaboration between the two parties was very comfortable and convenient, due to the similarity of the parties' local policy platforms. One local SD politician told me that:

> In Staffanstorp, we have had it very easy, in the sense that the Moderates here are basically identical to us in almost every question. (…). There have not been any big problems or conflicts. [51]

Another SD representative said, similarly, that:

> The Moderates in Staffanstorp are really more "SD" than the SD are. Their ideas are more 'extreme' than ours. (…) We often say that the Moderates have copied our election manifesto. So, when we were asked if we wanted to join the coalition, it was really simple.[52]

This policy proximity can be found in the "election compass" from 2018 as well. Both parties tagged the same three questions as "important":

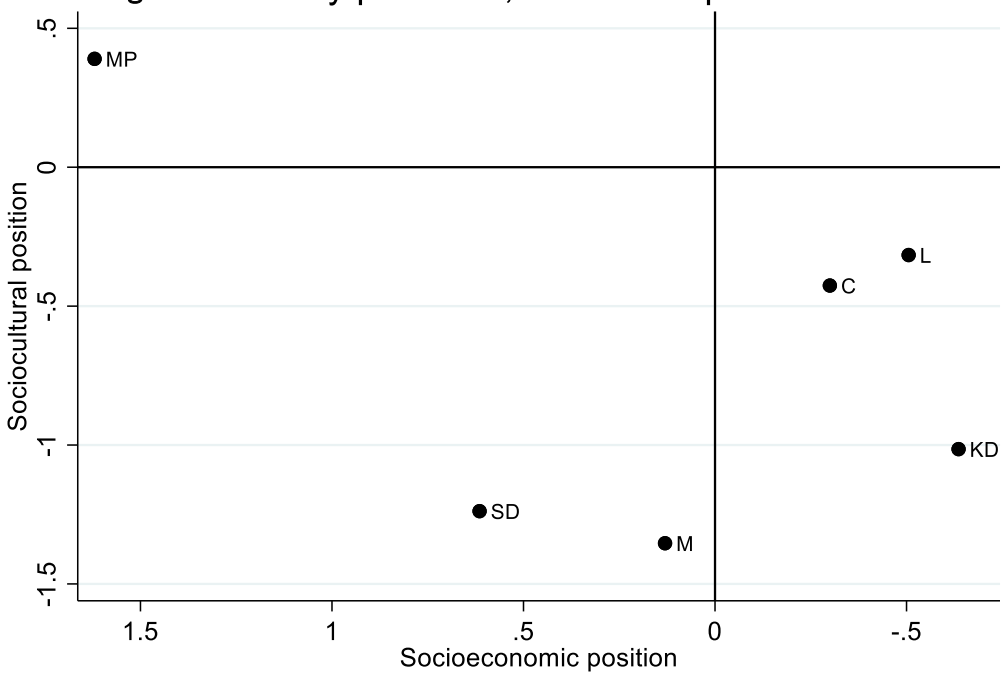
[51] Interview with local politician, Staffanstorp SD
[52] Interview with local politician, Staffanstorp SD

A) Our municipality should accept fewer refugees.
B) Obligatory Swedish classes should be introduced to newly arrived immigrants as a condition for welfare benefits.
C) Begging should be banned in out municipality.

Both parties stated that they think these are "Very good proposals." In their communication with local voters, then, both parties emphasize immigration and law and order, on which they share identical stances. In terms of policy positions, not taking saliency into account, figure 6.4 also shows rather clearly why the Moderates might prefer a coalition with SD over one with the other center-right parties in the municipality.

The figure clearly shows the greater policy proximity between SD and M, compared to M and any other party. We can also see why an informant claimed that M is "more SD than SD is", as M's sociocultural position is as illiberal as SD's position. Combined with the identical saliency discussed above, we may conclude that these were natural allies in the municipality if the goal is to maximize policy. Compared to the average in Swedish municipalities that year, the two parties are much closer in Staffanstorp, and it is mainly the Staffanstorp Moderate party that stands apart from the national average.

Figure 6.4: Party positions, Staffanstorp 2018




Source: Valkompassen, SVT, 2018

This ideological positioning also resulted in a large number of split tickets among voters in the municipality. In Staffanstorp, the Moderates received 42,9 percent of the votes in the municipal election and 28 percent in the parliamentary election. The Sweden Democrats received 11,1 percent in the municipal election and 23,1 percent in the national election. Most of the ticket splitters who chose the Moderates locally voted SD at the national level (Lärka, 2018). According to local M leader Christian Sonesson, this voter behavior signals a "rejection of the [Moderate] party's national policies" (ibid) on the part of the voters.

From the perspective of the Moderate party, SD was the 'comfortable choice', due to its level of agreement with the Moderates on local questions and SD's tendency to assent to M's proposals in the municipal council.

*Additional factors*

In the absence of a cordon sanitaire, the exceptional policy proximity, in combination with a favorable distribution of seats in the council, might have been sufficient to secure SD a place in the local government. In Sweden in 2018, however, local parties were incentivized to exclude SD from coalitions, especially if other within-bloc alliances were possible. One M politician explained to me that beyond this policy proximity, M was induced to include SD due to a failed collaboration in the previous period with the other center-right parties:

> There were discussions. But we saw no path to continued collaboration with the Liberals and the Center Party… KD was also part of it, but they only had one representative… So [joining forces with SD] was a comfortable path to retaining the majority.[53]

While some in the Moderate party were concerned about the distance between the parties in terms of 'basic values', it was argued that this distance was really at the national level, and that locally, they should consider only agreement on local issues and the level of personal chemistry between representatives from the two branches.

A key condition for inclusion was the attitude of the local M leadership to the national norm of exclusion. The Staffanstorp Moderates were the only party branch in that period to

[53] Interview with local politician, Staffanstorp M

explicitly and publicly reject the cordon sanitaire as invalid. This was highlighted in Chapter 5. In other municipalities where SD coalitions occurred, the Moderates argued that the cordon did not apply in their case (e.g., because the local level is not an arena for ideological struggle) or that other democratic norms (e.g., parties keeping their campaign promises) would be better served by including them. In Staffanstorp, M blatantly ignored the central party line. In the words of Christian Sonesson, leader of the Staffanstorp Moderates:

> "The [Moderate] party has a policy. I have ignored it" (Perlenberg, 2019a)

Within SD, there were no discussions about the advisability of entering government. Or, as one politician told me, if there were any concerns about losing the kind of visibility that a party can have in opposition, this was massively and immediately outweighed by the opportunity to govern[54].

In sum, the Staffanstorp coalition can be explained by a combination of unusual factors. Policy proximity or shared policy salience was an important condition. Secondly, given SD's limited coalition potential, M's exceptionally high vote share was necessary to form a viable coalition between the two parties. Additionally, SD seems to have been helped into power by the breakdown of a previous alliance between the mainstream right parties. Given the national cordon sanitaire against the SD among all mainstream parties in that period, another important factor was a local M-leadership that was willing to diverge from the party line.

**V in Mörbylånga**

*Vote shares*

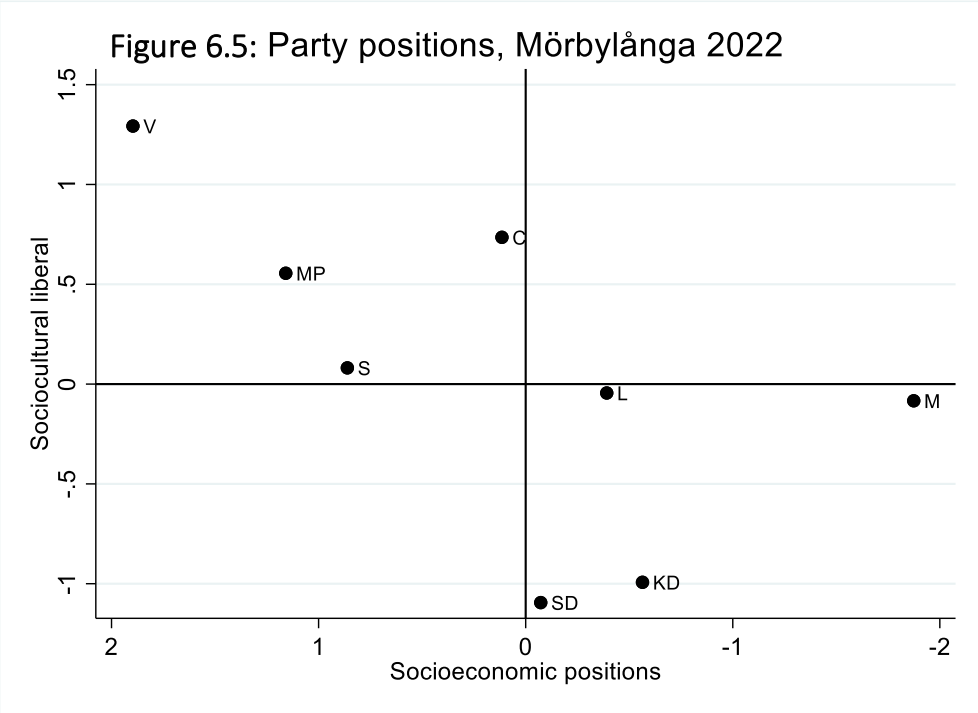
Among my local case studies, the Mörbylånga Left Party is the one with the least legislative strength (4,4 percent of the seats), which is slightly below the national average. However, V's legislative weight was sufficient to give the government a majority in the municipal council, both in 2018 and 2022. S's seat share in the council was on the low side (28 percent), slightly below the average share of the formateur party when V is excluded from the government. V, therefore, had to appeal to a broader coalition, which included a party beyond S. In 2018, a coalition between C and S would have received 48 percent of the seats, while including V gave the government a majority in the council (53 percent). Part of what made V an attractive

[54] Interview with local politician, Staffanstorp SD

coalition partner is that it had a low vote share compared to the larger coalition partners. V could provide just enough votes in the council to provide the coalition with majority status without making the coalition oversized. A puzzling fact in this case is that the traditional center-right Alliance (C+L+KD+M) would have gained a narrow majority in the council. We must, therefore, explain not only what made V a willing and attractive coalition partner for S but also why C preferred two left-wing coalition partners over its traditional right-wing alliance.

*Policy proximity*

Part of the explanation for V's inclusion in Mörbylånga concerns policy positions. V was not included simply because it had more moderate policy positions than in other municipalities. V is, if anything, further away from the center, both in terms of socioeconomic and sociocultural positions, compared to the national average, while S Mörbylånga is more or less on the national average. C, however, stands out by being much further to the left than it is nationally. In Figure 6.5, party positions in Mörbylånga are displayed, based on the parties' answers to the election compass. The degree of policy proximity within the coalition clearly stems from C's unusual positioning on socioeconomic issues to the left of center. This was an important precondition for government formation between the parties.




Source: Valkompassen, SVT, 2018

In Red's case, we saw that the challenger's high degree of bargaining power made it more willing to enter an alliance with a relatively distant coalition partner. In V's case, the opposite effect seems to occur, whereby low bargaining power increases V's coalition potential. How do we explain the difference? Red in Kragerø was highly policy-oriented, weary of being overshadowed by a larger partner and losing its support and ideological integrity. V in Mörbylånga was also policy-oriented but in a different way. As Bale and Bergman (2006) explain, the Left Party has often ended up in a *captive* position because they "could not countenance letting the right into government" (p. 428). This meant that the Left Party could not plausibly threaten to pull its support for an S-led government should its demands not be met[55]. In effect, the Left Party in Mörbylånga from 2018-2022 was in an analogous situation to the one it had long endured at the national level. V was willing to accept a limited role in government and less direct impact on policy because the perceived benefits of a broad shift from a right-wing to a left-wing government were so high. The different conceptualizations of policy maximization found in the two parties seem to reflect different, broad strategies. In 2014, V published guidelines for achieving political influence at the local level, where the key message was that V should seek executive power (Vänsterpartiet, 2014a). The document describes this as the best way to effect political change. By contrast, where Red has been relatively small but necessary for a left-wing majority, it has often preferred the "Oslo model," where it stays in opposition but negotiates with a left-wing minority government on a case-by-case basis (Sandvik and Olssøn, 2019). In other words, while Red was concerned with avoiding a situation where its policies would be too 'watered down' through compromise in government, V has generally been more willing to settle for a step in the right direction.

The Center Party, on the other hand, arguably had a very large degree of bargaining power. It had long-standing working relationships on the right and could plausibly threaten to leave the collaboration if it did not get enough influence within the left-wing coalition. This

[55] While the Social Democrats do have a lot of power in such a situation, it must nevertheless be careful not to overplay its hand. In the municipality of Gothenburg in 2018, the Left Party actually pulled their support for the S-led government because S wanted V to vote for their budget proposal without any negotiation (Andersson, 2019). This resulted in the formation of a right-wing minority government instead.

situation directly influenced the negotiations leading up to the 2018 government formation. As one Left Party politician explained:

> When we were divvying up positions, the Social Democrats neglected us. The sense was that "well, you are not very big, so you should not count on any ordinary committee seats." We had to settle with being alternates on the committees. That was the state of play after the 2018 election. Before the 2022 election, the collaboration was a bit better because they had seen that we could be relied upon and trusted.[56]

*Additional factors*

In 2018, neither S nor V had ever been in power in Mörbylånga. Unlike FrP and Red, the Left Party did not have an organized collaboration with the formateur party while in opposition. As one Left Party politician told me:

> We did not campaign together, and each party acted alone. Only after getting into government did we start collaborating.[57]

Nevertheless, it seems that the fact that neither S nor V had ever been in power provided a key motivation to make the coalition work. This situation further muffled the effects of policy disagreements between V and the rest. As a local politician for the Social Democrats told me:

> Neither S nor V had ever been in the ruling majority in Mörbylånga. Never. So, when we got the opportunity to build a coalition with the Center Party, both the Social Democrats and the Left Party were very open to compromise about everything.[58]

Another influential factor was a certain level of dissatisfaction among the Center Party representatives with how M had led the previous coalition government, perceiving the party as too dominant (Isefjord, 2018). This was part of the reason why C decided to change coalition partners. This lowered C's exit opportunities somewhat and made the left-wing coalition more attractive.

In sum, V's case is initially puzzling because it was not particularly close to the Social Democrats and because S needed the support of a center-right party to make a viable

[56] Interview with local politician V Mörbylånga
[57] Interview with local politician V Mörbylånga
[58] Interview with local politician S Mörbylånga

coalition. On the one hand, V was attractive as a coalition partner because of its low bargaining power and its lack of plausible alternative coalitions. This situation was arguably not ideal for V, and it meant accepting a low degree of direct influence. V was willing to join the coalition and accept large concessions because any alternative was considered worse from a policy perspective. The chance to install a left-wing government for the first time in the history of the municipality was another important justification.

**Conclusions**

This section will summarize the key factors in each case, before outlining some theoretical insights. In Grimstad, due to FrP's moderate legislative weight, government participation required collaboration with a relatively wide coalition of parties. FrP's ideological positions and emphasis, close to the mainstream, and its practice of fostering alliances in opposition made this coalition possible. In Kragerø, Red was relatively distinct from AP in terms of policy emphasis. However, a combination of pre-governmental alliance building, pragmatic leadership, Red's electoral size, agreements to disagree on contentious issues, and an office-oriented coalition partner made Red a willing and attractive coalition partner. SD was included in Staffanstorp, despite a national cordon sanitaire, due to the presence of an electorally large formateur party that was very close to SD in terms of policy positions and emphasis. M in Staffanstorp had limited coalition options due to failed collaborations in the past. It also had a leadership that resisted the national norm of exclusion. Finally, despite fairly substantial policy differences, Mörbylånga V collaborated with S and C. Here, V's low bargaining power and the absence of policy purity goals in the branch made it an attractive and willing coalition partner. The coalition was further aided by the fact that C had previously had poor experiences in a coalition on the right, which increased the likelihood of a V+S+C coalition.

The cases of Staffanstorp and Grimstad show why parties become more attractive coalition partners when the they are ideologically close to potential allies. In Staffanstorp, SD was described as the 'comfortable choice' for M, due to the similarities between the parties' positions, and SD's habit of assenting to M's proposals in the council. FrP in Grimstad made itself an attractive coalition partner by emphasizing issues of agreement with H. The number and size of concessions and compromises are smaller when the parties have more similar positions. Policy-seeking parties will, therefore, prefer ideologically compact coalitions.

The case of Kragerø shows how a large vote share can increase the challenger party's coalition potential, both because the formateur is likely to depend on its votes and because it

lowers the risk of being overshadowed by a dominant coalition partner. The former mechanism concerns the formateur's reason for including the challenger, while the latter concerns the challenger's motivation to participate. Both were necessary for a coalition to form.

Next, the analyses show the interaction between relative vote shares and ideology. The case of Kragerø showed how the effect of policy distance can be muffled by a larger vote share. Firstly, Red had significant bargaining power and was willing to join the coalition despite disagreement because negotiations were more likely to go Red's way. On the other hand, the Labor Party, being more office-oriented than Red, accepted this state of affairs as long as Red could help AP secure the mayor post. FrP's case shows how parties can compensate for less ideal vote shares through policy proximity. By adopting and emphasizing fairly mainstream positions, the Progress Party was an acceptable coalition partner to a wider range of parties, and a broad coalition could be formed. Finally, V's case shows how a low degree of bargaining power can also compensate for policy disagreements because it makes V a more attractive coalition partner. Having an electorally weak coalition partner is attractive for the formateur because disagreements will favor the dominant party. This requires that the challenger does not seek policy purity but believes that a left-wing coalition is preferable to any alternative, regardless of its own level of direct influence.

Finally, the cases demonstrate that several factors beyond the size and ideology variables matter to coalition formation. The cases of FrP and Red both show how collaboration in opposition, before government participation, can increase a challenger's coalition potential. In both cases, the challenger engaged in pre-governmental collaborations, fostering important collaborative relationships with other parties and a sense of a shared political project. This affects the reputational barriers to participation. Challengers are sometimes dismissed from coalitions because other parties view them as irresponsible, dogmatic, and unwilling to compromise. A successful collaboration in opposition can dispel such notions. It can also improve the personal chemistry between potential partners. I noted in previous chapters that this can compensate for ideological differences by making politicians more willing to compromise.

The Swedish cases show how the failure of previous coalitions can increase a challenger's coalition potential. If certain coalitions are precluded due to bad experiences, other coalitions become more likely. This occurred in Mörbylånga, where C was unhappy with M's conduct in the previous government period and joined the left-wing coalition. Likewise, in Staffanstorp, M had a falling out with C and L, making SD more attractive.

The case of Kragerø also shows that the impact of policy distance can be muffled through mitigation strategies already during initial negotiations. Here, Red and AP had an agreement to disagree on certain issues where the parties' policy horizons did not overlap. This removed a barrier to Red's participation in government. Red would not have to vote for or publicly defend certain policies it fundamentally disagreed with.

Red's case also shows that the position and strength of pragmatists versus ideologues within a branch matters. If the pragmatists are dominant, the branch will favor compromise and influence over policy purity. A pragmatic branch will thus have a lower threshold for participation in government.

# Chapter 7: Moderation in government in Norway?

A key question in this study is whether inclusion in local government leads challenger parties to moderate ideologically. The next three chapters are devoted to this question. The data on this varies from case to case, and I will present slightly different data for the various parties. For the Progress Party, I use the same kind of data that was used for measuring ideology in Chapter 4 but updated with data from 2023. I look at ideological development in party branches that have been in government and compare it to municipalities where they have been in opposition. Using media accounts and government statistics, I also discuss FrP's policy impact on government and mechanisms of moderation in power. The analysis of Red's experience in government relies on a comparative case study.

The case studies in Chapter 9 will give a full account of the mechanisms at work in this process in four municipalities. Chapters 7 and 8 mainly aim to establish whether a moderation effect is present and give an overview of the mechanisms that seem to matter most *across cases*. The analysis shows that the Progress Party moderated significantly on the question of refugees where it was in power between 2019 and 2023. Moreover, this moderation was larger than in the municipalities where it stayed in opposition. Beyond FrP's policy pledges in the VAA, I consider whether the party has been constrained from pursuing its preferred policies in power. I show that FrP has been constrained on salient issues. I consider the role of the various moderating mechanisms outlined in the theory chapter. The responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff (adherence to national rules), pothole mechanism (local role constraints involved in providing basic services), and compromise mechanism have all affected FrP's ability to pursue its preferred policies.

Secondly, I show that the policy proximity between Red and the mainstream is greater in municipalities where Red participated in government compared to most-similar municipalities where it stayed in opposition (though never on more than one ideological dimension). Red frequently had to deviate from its preferred policies due to the pressures involved in governing. Key barriers to Red's far-left policies include tight budgetary frameworks, policy commitments inherited from previous governments, and demands from coalition partners. I show that governments that include Red are characterized by a certain degree of tension between Red's desire for independence and public responsiveness on the one hand and the coalition partners' desire for cohesiveness and responsible government on the other. I also show that Red is highly aware of these pressures and employs mitigating

measures to avoid tradeoffs that could result in a devastating loss of party identity or a severe lack of policy influence.

**FrP**

*Hypotheses*

To study the ideological impact of local incumbency on the Progress Party, I used the same dataset as in the analysis of the determinants of local government participation, updated with data from 2023. Using these data, I can see the degree to which individual party branches changed their stances on the questions included in both newspaper surveys. In other words, I can see whether being in power has had a moderating impact on the Progress Party compared to remaining in opposition. There may be uniform developments within the Progress Party, which apply equally to included and excluded branches. A comparison must, therefore, be made between the branches of the Progress Party that entered government and those that remained in opposition. This forms the basis of the first hypothesis:

> H1: The Progress Party branches that have been in power have moderated their positions more than the branches that have not been in government.

Secondly, we need to consider the kinds of issues on which the Progress Party might moderate its stances in government. On the one hand, we might expect the Progress Party to dig its heels in on core issues. Van Spanje and Van Der Brug (2007) find that radical right parties included in political collaborations moderate over time on a general left-right dimension. On the other hand, the ostracized parties remained radical over time. Contrary to this, Akkerman and Rooduijn (2015) found that radical right parties do not adjust their anti-immigration stances after being included in alliances or government coalitions. This discrepancy can be interpreted as evidence that radical right parties included in government moderate broadly but dig their heels in on core issues. I therefore hypothesize that:

> H2: The Progress Party will not moderate its views on immigration but rather on issues that are less central to the character of the party.

Thirdly, and conversely, we may expect the Progress Party to moderate its views on sociocultural issues because agreement on these issues was not a prerequisite for coalition formation, as opposed to socioeconomic issues. The average policy gap should be larger on this dimension, and we can expect movement on the part of FrP to bridge it.

H3: The Progress Party will moderate most strongly on sociocultural issues when in power.

Fifteen questions were present in both VAA surveys. In some instances, there were slight changes to the phrasing of the question, or the questions were reversed. A clear example is the question refugee question. In 2019, the statement was "The municipality should decline to receive, house, and integrate more asylum seekers than we do today." In 2023, the statement was, "The municipality should receive more refugees, also from countries besides Ukraine." While these questions essentially measure the same attitudes, the phrasing may affect how a candidate will answer. For example, the directionality of the question may impact the likelihood of expressing anti-refugee sentiments due to the acquiescence-response bias (Krosnick, 1999). Due to the characteristics of the respondents in this survey, however, this bias should be less pronounced than in surveys of the general population. These respondents are, on average, more educated and have more crystalized political views than the general public. In short, politicians know what they think about political issues, and are therefore less likely to employ the yea-saying heuristic. Moreover, to the extent that such biases are present, they should not differ between politicians in and out of government. For example, while the mention of Ukraine in 2023 may have primed the notion of humanitarian responsibility among the respondents, there is no reason to think this priming effect is greater or smaller when a party is in local government.

*Preliminary tests*

Table 7.1 shows the average change in opinion from 2019 to 2023 on the questions that were present in both years for Progress Party branches in power and opposition, respectively. It also shows the difference in terms of the degree of change between the two groups. This is a preliminary test to see whether the degree of change is significantly different when the FrP is in government and when it is in opposition.

**Table 7.1:** Change in Opinion. FrP Branches in Opposition versus Government

| | In opposition | In government | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| No more refugees | -0.29 | -1.00 | 0.71*** |
| Government should pay for installment of high-speed internet in remote areas | -0.06 | -1.06 | 1.01* |
| Eldercare should still be locally financed | 0.06 | 0.70 | -0.64* |
| Elders should be able to choose private care | 0.08 | -0.18 | 0.26* |
| No private nursing homes/elder care | 0.17 | -0.34 | 0.51 |
| More municipalities should merge | -0.01 | 0.56 | -0.57 |
| No homework in schools | 0.03 | -0.42 | 0.44 |
| No new construction projects in agricultural areas | 0.44 | 0.05 | 0.39 |
| More money for road maintenance | 0.47 | 0.12 | 0.32 |
| We should not introduce a property tax | 0.13 | 0.00 | 0.13 |
| Prioritize green cars for public procurement | -0.54 | -0.42 | -0.13 |
| Pro-windmills | -0.31 | -0.20 | -0.11 |
| Mandate 'meat-free days' in public cafeterias | -0.13 | -0.06 | -0.08 |
| Turn down large road projects that increase traffic | -0.08 | -0.13 | 0.05 |
| Get rid of property tax | -0.05 | -0.10 | 0.04 |

Note: Positive numbers indicate increased agreement with the statement from 2019-2023, while negative numbers indicate less agreement. The significance level of the difference is measured using a series of T-tests.
*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05.
Source: VG's voting advice application (2019; 2023)

For each question with a statistically significant difference between government and opposition, a greater change has occurred within the branches participating in government. The clearest difference between FrP in government and opposition is on the core question of refugees. Both in government and in opposition, FrP has softened its position on the refugee question since 2019. However, it has softened significantly more in those municipalities where it has held the position of mayor or deputy mayor. This is not in line with previous findings from the national level. Several studies have shown that government participation has little effect on core issues for radical right parties (e.g., Akkerman and Rooduijn, 2015; Capaul and Ewert, 2021). In fact, in the 18 valid[59] cases of government participation on the part of FrP, there were twelve cases of moderation, five cases with no change, and only one case of a more restrictive position. On average, the candidates who have been in government moderate by 1 unit on the scale from completely disagree to completely agree. This is tantamount to answering "somewhat agree", rather than "completely agree" when confronted with the proposal that the municipality should not receive more refugees. It is a meaningful degree of change, equivalent to about 1.2 standard deviations among FrP branches.

[59] Two cases were excluded due to missing data in the 2023 survey.

Among the other questions on which FrP has changed significantly more in government than in opposition, we find two questions on geriatric care. This issue has been a central focus for the party since the early 1980s. In other words, these are not secondary issues of lesser importance to the Progress Party. One of these questions concerns the public versus private sector, where the Progress Party generally favors opening up to private actors. The second question concerns local versus national provision of geriatric care, where FrP generally favors national provision. In each case, then, the change in government is away from the typical Progress Party position, i.e., away from privatization and national financing of services. Also on salient socioeconomic questions, there is movement on the part of FrP branches in government toward a more centrist position. This movement is significantly smaller when the party is in opposition.

*Regression model*

I ran a series of regressions, varying the dependent variable each time. The idea is to see whether the associations between government participation and moderation identified in Table 7.1 hold when we control for potential municipality- and branch-level confounders. For instance, FrP's electoral success may affect both its chances of government participation and its willingness to budge on its favorite policies. I ran regression models using each of the questions in Table 7.1 as dependent variables. Again, these variables measure the degree to which each party branch has changed its position on the given question from 2019 to 2023. They have a theoretical range from -4 (changing from "completely agree" to "completely disagree") to 4 (changing from "completely disagree" to "completely agree"). The main independent variable in each model was the government participation of FrP in the period in question (2019-2023). Additionally, I included the following set of control variables:

**County**: The county variable should allow me to hold many (unknown) confounders constant. Large geographic distance often reflects divergence in aspects of culture and way of life (Nielsen, 2016, p. 580). This is a dummy variable, taking on a different value for each county.

**Population size**: This variable is likely related to ideology as well. Politicians in larger cities should be more like national politicians in terms of ideology than politicians in small municipalities. This is because metropolitan politics is a better approximation of national politics. If the population size is related both to the Progress Party's chances of government participation and to aspects of the candidates' ideological orientation (rigidity, affective polarization toward other partisans, etc.), then this is a confounder and should be

controlled for. It is operationalized as the number of inhabitants in the municipality in 2019, as given in the dataset by Fiva, Halse, and Natvik (2020).

**Seat share FrP:** As we saw in Chapter 4, FrP's seat share is related to its chances of joining a local government. It is potentially also related to relevant ideological factors such as rigidity and the weighting of party goals (i.e., vote versus policy and office). It affects the bargaining power of FrP within the coalition and, thus, how much policy it is expected to concede in negotiations with partners. This is operationalized in the same way as in Chapter 4.

**Seat share Mayor's party:** Theoretically, this variable could be related to coalition formation and relative bargaining power within the coalition (and thus the degree to which FrP would be expected to change). It is operationalized in the same way as in Chapter 4.

**Sociocultural distance from the mayor's party (2019):** The policy distance between FrP and the mayor's party at the beginning of the government period is likely related to the chances of joining the government and the policy gap they need to bridge in government. The opposite is also possible, that a smaller policy gap in 2019 increases the chances that the parties are willing to compromise and thus increases the degree of moderation. In any case, this variable should be controlled for. Measured in the same way as Chapter 4.

**Socioeconomic distance from the mayor's party (2019):** Included with the same rationale as sociocultural distance. Measured in the same way as Chapter 4.

I excluded the cases where the Progress Party was in government between 2015 and 2019. This means that the analysis below compares those who entered government in 2019 after at least one period in opposition and those who remain in opposition. I do this to exclude the cases where the relevant moderation might have occurred in the period before the one under study.

**Table 7.2**: Change in Opinions. FrP branches, 2019-2023. OLS-regression.

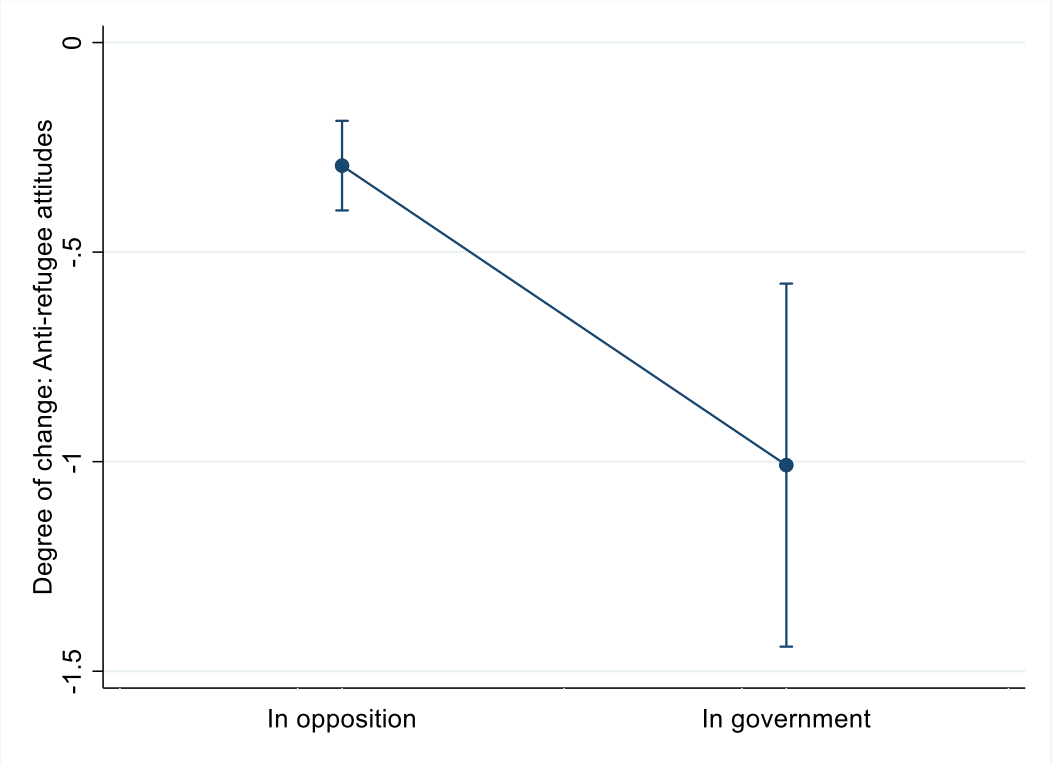
| VARIABLES | No more refugees | Internet development | Elder care locally financed | Private choice in elder care |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
| Constant | 0.04 | 1.74 | -1.66 | 0.26 |
| | (1.45) | (1.08) | (2.00) | (1.02) |
| FrP in power | -0.76** | -1.20* | 0.38 | -0.14 |
| | (0.25) | (0.57) | (0.34) | (0.17) |
| FrP seat share | -0.74 | 0.37 | 0.93 | -0.93 |
| | (1.13) | (2.82) | (1.56) | (0.80) |
| Mayor seat share | -0.11<br>(0.55) | -0.71<br>(1.23) | 1.19<br>(0.75) | 0.24<br>(0.39) |
| Distance sociocultural issues | -0.18<br>(0.10) | -0.50*<br>(0.23) | 0.10<br>(0.14) | -0.06<br>(0.07) |
| Distance socioeconomic issues | 0.08<br>(0.09) | -0.07<br>(0.23) | 0.11<br>(0.13) | -0.14*<br>(0.07) |
| County dummy | C.F. | C.F. | C.F | C.F. |
| Population | -0.00<br>(0.00) | 0.00<br>(0.00) | 0.00<br>(0.00) | 0.00<br>(0.00) |
| | | | | |
| R2 | 0.21 | 0.18 | 0.07 | 0.15 |
| N | 196 | 89 | 197 | 197 |

*Note*:* Significant at the .05 level, **Significant at the .01 level. C.F. = Controlled for. Standard errors in parentheses

Table 7.2 shows the regression results. To save space, only the models with dependent variables that produced significant differences in the preliminary test have been included[60]. Only two models showed a significant association between government participation and the dependent variable. As we see in the table, the association between government participation and moderation holds only for the refugee question and for the issue of internet provision to remote areas. We can say with some confidence that all else being equal, the Progress Party tends to moderate its stance on the refugee question more when in government than in opposition. We can read the coefficient for 'FrP in power' in the following way: being in local government is associated with a movement toward openness to refugees. This movement is 0.76 units larger than when the branch is in opposition, all else equal. This is displayed graphically in figure 7.1. We can see from the graph that FrP politicians change significantly more in power than in opposition.

[60] None of the other questions were significantly associated with government participation in the regression model either.

**Figure 7.1**: Change to Refugee Attitudes in Government versus Opposition, FrP




In some ways, this is a surprising result. I hypothesized that the Progress Party was likely to dig in its heels on the core question of refugees and concede on socioeconomic issues (H2). A possible explanation is that immigration is not a core issue at the local level. In national elections, immigration has been the issue that matters most to FrP's voters. In the 2017 parliamentary election for example, it was the most important issue for 62 percent of FrP voters, making it by far the most common 'most important issue' in that group (Bergh and Aardal, 2019, p. 31). This has been true in other parliamentary elections as well (see for example Aardal, 2011, p. 136). To be sure, Norwegian municipal councils can decide how many refugees they want to receive, and the Progress Party is likely to be restrictive in this regard. At the local level, immigration has nevertheless been less decisive for the Progress Party vote. For instance, in the 2019 local election, it was only the fourth most important issue to Progress Party voters, after toll booths, transportation, and property tax (Saglie, Segaard and Christensen, 2021). In the 2015 local election, immigration was the most important issue, but by a much smaller margin than at the national level (Saglie and Christensen, 2017, p. 34). It was about as important as property tax and geriatric care. This

makes it easier for the Progress Party to moderate in local government on the immigration issue without receiving a large electoral punishment.

Finally, there is a significant difference between FrP in government and opposition on the question of public installation of high-speed internet in remote areas. While this is not a key issue for the party, it illustrates the way a party needs to change its profile when in government. Plainly, an opposition party is not constrained by tight public budgets and can more freely support spending on popular causes leading up to the election. After a period in government, it can either reduce its support of the policy or risk having to explain why it has not yet enacted it. Moreover, any party entering government after a time in opposition arguably has less information regarding what kind of spending is realistic. It is, therefore, reasonable that the Progress Party would adjust this opinion in a more miserly direction after governing.

*Mechanisms of constraint and moderation*

To assess the level of mainstreaming the Progress Party undergoes in government, we should consider the constraints placed upon it in office. We know from Chapter 4 that proximity to the mainstream on the socioeconomic dimension matters to government inclusion. This incentivizes office-oriented Progress Party branches to adjust their positions closer to the mainstream in anticipation of government participation. After entering government, FrP faces further barriers to pursuing its favorite policies. This section considers the degree to which the Progress Party has been prevented from implementing its program in local government and outlines the key barriers. It does this by examining two salient policy areas for the Progress Party: refugee settlement and local tax.

*The pothole mechanism*

Firstly, municipal finances and budgetary restraints limit the opportunities to implement ambitious policies. In the case of the Progress Party, which does not promote particularly expensive social policies, this mainly affects tax cuts. The party is pressured to keep tax levels high enough to pay for basic services for citizens. This falls under the *pothole mechanism* described in the theory chapter. For instance, a portion of the income tax is set by the municipality and can, by law, be adjusted by the municipal council. However, no example

of a municipality collecting less than the legal maximum exists[61]. This includes all municipalities led by the Progress Party. Property tax is also decided at the local level. Here, there is variation across municipalities. However, the data does not indicate that the Progress Party is more likely to abolish the property tax or to refrain from introducing it than any other governing party. Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (SSB) shows that in 2024, 81 % of municipalities where FrP was in charge (had either the mayor, deputy mayor, or both) collected property tax on private homes and vacation properties. Among other municipalities, the share was 77 percent. The difference was not statistically significant. On the other hand, property tax on commercial property occurred in 90 percent of the municipalities led by FrP, compared to 96 percent of other municipalities. Overall, the Progress Party is about as likely as any other governing party to levy property taxes. One important reason why the Progress Party does not abolish the property tax when it governs is the need to finance basic services. For instance, in 2015, the FrP mayor in Hadsel municipality explained to the press that removing the tax would involve cuts in basic services and was, therefore, unrealistic in the short term (Sørgård, 2015). At the time, party leader Siv Jensen was the Minister of Finance and had argued publicly that the budgetary framework for Norwegian municipalities was robust enough to eliminate the property tax. The FrP mayor argued that while the long-term goal was to get rid of the tax, it was necessary to maintain the local welfare services for the time being. Another aspect of these taxes is that they are difficult to eliminate once they have been introduced. In a 2008 interview FrP's group leader in the municipal affairs and administration committee in parliament, Per Willy Amundsen, he explained the prevalence of FrP-led municipalities with property tax as "a legacy of past regimes. The property tax was handed to these mayors when they took over" (Skiphamn, 2008).

*The compromise mechanism*

Compromises between coalition parties or between the government and opposition constitute another barrier. A 2005 analysis of taxes in FRP-led municipalities showed a general rise in tax levels and fees after they entered government, despite the party's emphasis on tax reduction. Torbjørn Andersen (FrP), who was a member of the municipal committee in parliament at the time, explained this as resulting from necessary compromises:

[61] Recently, there have been examples of municipalities lowering the local wealth tax to attract wealthy residents, however.

> "If FrP has gone along with tax-increases, it is because we do not have a majority by ourselves and have to rule together with other parties. We do not have a majority by ourselves in any municipality" (Dagens Perspektiv, 2005).

Similar explanations have been given by FrP politicians in power in various municipalities (e.g., Dahl, 2017; Fremstad and Gangnes, 2019)

During the Syrian refugee crisis, newspapers could reveal that FrP-led municipalities were not more negative to receiving refugees than other municipalities. This was despite admonishments from FrP leader Siv Jensen that municipalities should refuse to receive asylum seekers in order to block the refugee agreement. At the beginning of the 2015 election campaign, she stated that:

> The more municipalities that refuse to house Syrian refugees, the higher the chances are that the agreement to accept 8000 Syrian refugees to Norway cannot be implemented (Strand and Gillesvik, 2016).

In fact, however, the municipalities where FrP participated in government accepted 87,88 percent of the requests made by the directorate of integration and diversity, which was slightly above average for Norwegian municipalities. Also during the 2019-2023 government period, FrP-led municipalities accepted a share of refugees that was equivalent to the national average (IMDI, 2023). Even when in local government, FrP has, in the main, been outvoted by the other parties on this issue.

Having to implement policies that go against their prior views is a mechanism that works to moderate a party's stances. In these cases, a party may prefer to soften its stance or lower the salience of the issue rather than explain the dissonance between its manifesto and the government's actions to voters. This mechanism is related to electoral strategy, where the Progress Party moderates to avoid the electoral punishment that follows from breaking an election pledge, which they have now learned is unrealistic.

The question of refugees is the single issue on which Progress Party politicians were furthest from the average among all politicians in 2019. It stands to reason, therefore, that this position would be more difficult to maintain in government than on issues where they are more aligned with the mainstream. In other words, they are more likely to be outvoted on this issue than any other issue. After a period in government, it is on this issue more than any other that FrP has experienced difficulties implementing its preferred policy because it is less likely that other parties have made similar pledges on the issue (Thomson *et al.*, 2017).

The municipality of Ulstein is a good example of this. The Progress Party received 24,6 percent of the votes and the mayor post in 2019. They did this through a constitutive coalition with the Conservatives (H) and the Christian People's Party (KRF). Every year, the municipal council votes on how many refugees to accept in the coming year after the Directorate of Integration and Diversity makes its request, and the municipal director makes a recommendation based on the municipality's capacity. In every year but one, the Progress Party argued that the municipality should receive fewer refugees than requested. The arguments made by FrP in the municipal council emphasize the social costs involved and the difficulties of integrating refugees (Karlsen, 2020; Bjerknes, 2021, 2023). KRF argued to receive the full amount in each of these instances, and FrP lost the vote. Similar situations occurred in other FrP-led municipalities as well. In Grimstad (Grimstad Kommunestyre, 2020b), Etne (Haraldsen, 2020), Nærøysund (Nærøysund FrP, 2020), and Flekkefjord (Flekkefjord Bystyre, 2020), FrP lost votes regarding the reception of refugees from the Moria refugee camp in Greece in 2020.

*National laws*

In 2022, just after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Ulstein FrP agreed that the municipality should receive the requested number of refugees. In his speech to the council, however, the FrP mayor made a distinction between these refugees and other refugees:

> The Ukrainians are a large and homogenous group with a culture that makes them easy to integrate into Norwegian society (Myrene, 2022).

This attitude is reflective of FrP's stance on the refugee issue nationally. In a statement on the Progress Party website, FrP's spokesperson on immigration issues, Erlend Wiborg, said that Ukrainian refugees should be prioritized for entrance to Norway due to their geographic and cultural proximity. He made it clear that this generosity should not extend to other refugees and that:

> We also have to make sure that others do not exploit the generous attitude European countries have adopted toward Ukrainian refugees. FrP, therefore, wants to send Norwegian personnel to the neighboring countries to identify Ukrainian refugees to avoid others exploiting the crisis to sneak into Norway and Schengen (FrP, 2022).

In some FrP-led municipalities, this attitude resulted in proposals by the Progress Party to accept more refugees only on the condition that they come from Ukraine. This happened, for instance, in Etne (Ravn, 2022) and Kvitsøy (Berentsen, 2022), where FrP had the deputy mayor. In the spring of 2024, such proposals became the subject of national debate after the

municipality of Drammen outside Oslo (where FrP had the deputy mayor post) made a resolution to accept only Ukrainian refugees. Members of the opposition reported the municipality to the police, alleging that the resolution was illegal. This prompted the County Governor to undertake a so-called 'legality check' of the resolution. The conclusion was that the decision violated the Constitution and national anti-discrimination laws and was, therefore, invalid (Brekke and Kaalstad, 2024). In the aftermath of this, the National Ombudsman for Equality and Anti-Discrimination sent out letters to municipalities with similar resolutions to examine their legality as well (Bakken, 2024).

This constraint only works to limit a party insofar as it has ambitions that violate national rules. In fact, it is rarely a constraint in this direct sense. However, the anticipation of an unfavorable decision in a potential legality check can prevent the party from proposing a resolution in the first place. As such, this constraint falls under the responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff described in the theory chapter. Being in power sometimes means discarding policies because veto-players stand in the way.

*Normative pressure*

Another consideration that may push FrP politicians in government towards a less restrictive stance on refugees while in power is normative pressure. When in government, FrP is expected to represent the entire municipality and may well experience a larger normative pressure to accept people fleeing war. Moreover, the party is more likely to view itself as responsible for the fate of these people when it is in a position of power, making it more difficult to dismiss refugees. An apparent example of this occurred in the municipality of Flekkefjord after large fires had broken out in Moria refugee camp in Greece. In September 2020, the FrP mayor proposed to the municipal council that the town should accept more refugees, considering the dire living conditions in the camp. The FrP mayor made the following appeal:

> The images from the camp leave no doubt that many people are living under extremely difficult conditions. If no help is given and no measures are taken, we may risk that the situation develops into a major humanitarian crisis (NTB, 2020)

*Summary*

The Progress Party has clearly experienced barriers to policymaking in government. Overall, it has not made a great policy impact in government either on the issue of local taxes or when it comes to the reception of refugees. The data shows that the Progress Party has moderated its election pledges in power, specifically on the refugee question. The compromise

mechanism seems to play an important role in this issue area. This is the question where the Progress Party stands furthest apart from other local politicians, and where ambitious campaign pledges are most likely to amount to naught. The chapter also shows that other factors have constrained FrP on this question, including national laws and normative pressure. On the issue of taxation, the cases indicate that budgetary pressures, as well as the compromise mechanism, were important barriers.

**Red**

The majority of cases of Red's full government inclusion at the local level (as of the time of writing) occurred between 2015 and 2019. The only deputy mayor from Red between 2019 and 2023 is in the northern municipality of Alstahaug. The account below is qualitative, as the number of cases is smaller and, because most cases occurred prior to 2019, I cannot quantify the change in ideology for Red as I did for FrP given the data available. Nonetheless, this account begins with a comparison of Red's ideological proximity to the mainstream (operationalized using the 2019 newspaper survey) just after the government period in 2015-2019. I examine the cases where Red was in power compared to most-similar municipalities it was in opposition. In each instance of collaboration in that period, Red ruled together with the Labor Party. I therefore compare the average scores for the candidates of these two parties. For each of the four incumbency municipalities, I have selected a non-incumbency municipality of a similar population size and in the same county. Once I had a list of municipalities in the same county and population category as the target municipality, I picked a match that was closest in terms of Red's vote share in 2015. As Table 7.3 shows, these municipalities match much better on the vote share in 2019. It is difficult to generate a good match based on the vote share in 2015 because the municipalities where Red received a high share of the vote in 2015 (as it did in three of the cases of government participation) are very rare indeed. Moreover, due to the scarcity of large cities in Norway, the two cases with the largest populations (Tromsø and Bodø) are not as well matched on this variable as the other two (Gjøvik and Kragerø).

**Table 7.3:** Matching Criteria, Red in Government 2015

| Municipality | In government 2015-19 | County | Population | Red vote-share 2015 | Red vote-share 2019 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kragerø | Yes | Vestfold og Telemark | 10,416 | 16.4% | 12.5% |
| Notodden | No | Vestfold og Telemark | 12,994 | 5.5% | 8.5% |
| Gjøvik | Yes | Innlandet | 30,395 | 3.9% | 6.1% |
| Lillehammer | No | Innlandet | 28,493 | 2.9% | 6.7% |
| Tromsø | Yes | Troms og Finnmark | 77,095 | 14.4% | 5.2% |
| Harstad | No | Troms og Finnmark | 24,748 | 3.4% | 4.0% |
| Bodø | Yes | Nordland | 52,560 | 10.4% | 8.0% |
| Rana | No | Nordland | 26,083 | 3.2% | 6.8% |

*Source*: Fiva, Halse and Natvik, 2020

*Ideological moderation*

I used the factor scores generated for the analysis in Chapter 4 to place each of these cases in a two-dimensional policy space and compare those who participated in government to those who remained in opposition. The results are displayed in Table 7.4. Of course, because the data is only for 2019, some of the differences between Red in government and opposition may have occurred before government participation (i.e., before 2015). In fact, this is rather likely, given the observations I made on the determinants of coalition formation in Chapters 4 and 5. It does allow us to reject the notion that there are no differences between Red in government and Red in opposition. In combination with the comparative case study below, table 7.4 tells us something about the impact of government participation on Red's ideological profile in relation to the mainstream.

**Table 7.4**: Policy Positions on Two Dimensions. Red versus AP, where Red was in Power (Bold) Compared to Matched Municipalities where it was in Opposition. 2019.

| | ***Socioeconomic*** | | | ***Sociocultural*** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Municipality*** | *AP* | *Red* | *Difference* | *AP* | *Red* | *Difference* |
| **Kragerø** | **0.64** | **0.78** | **0.14** | **0.50** | **1.01** | **0.51** |
| Notodden | 0.15 | 1.22 | 1.08 | -0.48 | 0.34 | 0.82 |
| **Bodø** | **0.35** | **1.43** | **1.09** | **0.41** | **0.63** | **0.23** |
| Rana | -0.04 | 0.85 | 0.89 | 0.08 | 0.83 | 0.75 |
| **Gjøvik** | **0.25** | **1.52** | **1.27** | **0.31** | **0.31** | **0.00** |
| Lillehammer | -0.01 | 1.01 | 1.02 | 0.25 | 0.74 | 0.49 |
| **Tromsø** | **-0.64** | **1.20** | **1.84** | **0.77** | **0.80** | **0.04** |
| Harstad | 0.65 | 1.18 | 0.53 | 0.03 | 0.83 | 0.80 |
| Country average | 0.38 | 1.14 | 0.76 | 0.05 | 0.40 | 0.35 |

*Source*: Valgomat, VG, 2019

In terms of ideological positioning, there are some key differences between the municipalities where Red entered coalitions and those where it remained out of government. Firstly, note that Red and AP are quite close on just one of the two dimensions in the municipalities where Red was in power. In Kragerø, the proximity is on the socioeconomic dimension. Red in Kragerø is on the centrist end of the party on this dimension, and Kragerø AP is further to the left than other AP party branches. In fact, the two local branches are closer to each other on this dimension than to their own respective parties' averages. In Gjøvik, Bodø, and Tromsø on the other hand, the proximity is on the sociocultural dimension. AP and Red are closer to each other on sociocultural issues in each of these municipalities than they are to their respective parties' averages. There is no case where AP and Red are close on both dimensions.

In the matched municipalities where Red has not been in power, on the other hand, there is a large ideological distance on both dimensions. Among the cases where Red participated in government, Bodø stands out. In Bodø, there is a large distance between AP and Red on the socioeconomic dimension, and a moderate distance on the sociocultural dimension (though smaller than any policy distance among the opposition cases). As I explain below, it makes sense that the Bodø case stands out. Here, the tension between Red's desire for independence and AP's desire for internal cohesion within the coalition ultimately resulted in a public conflict and Red's exit from the coalition in 2018.

***Mechanisms of constraint and moderation***

*The pothole mechanism*

Various obstacles to Red's radical political project have moderated its political activities in local power. One of these is tight municipal budgets, which limit Red in terms of spending on expensive social policies. This was, for instance, the case in Tromsø. In his assessment of the period in power, Red's top candidate from the municipality wrote in 2019 that:

> Dealing with challenging municipal finances is perhaps the biggest challenge for a revolutionary socialist project. The budgetary framework handed down from the central government is far too tight, while the tasks grow in number. A long-standing and central issue for Red has been to mobilize the local inhabitants against the tight budgetary frameworks set by the central government (Woie, 2019).

While the party is in opposition, it can formulate policies based on 'dream budgets'. When in power, it needs to secure funding for real policies. The framework handed down by the national government and the demands of coalition partners put real limitations on what can be achieved. This is a larger problem for the left, where policy priorities include expensive social policies. Red's deputy mayor in Kragerø explained in an interview that the budget can be a barrier to realizing Red's favorite policies:

> Even when Red governs a municipality, what we get from the central government and parliament is out of our control, and budgets are tight. Therefore, it is important at all times to be open with the public about what your demands are (Baltzersen, 2020).

Similarly, in connection with the local government's budget proposal for 2019, Red's deputy mayor in Gjøvik made the following statement to the municipal council:

> This is the 4th budget that we in Rødt have helped shape. It has undoubtedly been the year with the greatest challenges. The budgetary framework is arguably the weakest in many years due to the right-wing [national] government's underfunding of municipal tasks and new reforms. The lousiest government in a long time (Rolijordet, 2019)

He goes on to explain that the combination of this tight framework and certain highly prioritized policy programs meant that there were not enough funds left over for desired policies, such as keeping child benefits for recipients of social aid.

Another concrete example of this is Red's stance on property tax in Tromsø. Red had for a long time opposed this particular tax, because they felt that it was not progressive enough, impacting low-income people negatively. As they entered local government, however, they were part of a decision to double the property tax. Red's local leader in

Tromsø, and leader of the local government's finance committee, gave the following explanation:

> The municipality needs to be financed. In order to abandon the property tax, the municipality needs increased allocations from the central government, which we have not received. Increasing the property tax is a choice we had to make, even if it is not something we prefer. This is an unwanted and forced situation (Aronsen, 2015)

This is an example of Red depoliticizing policy. In Peter Mair's (2009) phrase, the party branches "become busy with the administration of things" (p. 16). We can note that depoliticizing the issue of property tax as a purely necessary administrative measure obliged Red to justify the policy. It is not obvious to Red's supporters why it would enact such a policy. Not being in line with the party's manifesto, the increased property tax was also exceedingly difficult to justify for Red as a party. Acting "responsibly" in service of a budget surplus conflicts with other party goals, such as responsiveness to the voters and policy maximization.

This spending barrier to left-wing social policies at the local level is also acknowledged by Red at the national level. In its alternative national budget for 2019, Red wanted to set aside 8 billion kroner extra for municipalities to spend freely for precisely that reason (Rødt, 2018). Red is also to an extent limited by the budgetary commitments of previous governments. For example, in Tromsø, Red agreed to support the construction of a new public bath, in part because "the H-led city council [2011-2015] had already spent 70 million kroner on the planning of it" (Woie, 2019). This is a general limitation for governments. They act within the constraints set by the commitments of previous governments. Even radical parties must maintain and fund a whole host of inherited policy programs (Mair, 2009, p. 14).

*The compromise mechanism*

Secondly, the demands of coalition partners have limited Red's opportunities to pursue pure "Red policies." This can happen either by outright concessions, i.e., agreeing to policies they do not really support, or by letting certain issues drop off the political agenda. A concrete example of the former is Red Bodø's attempts to adjust the property taxes in a more progressive direction. In Red's 2019 summary of the government period in Bodø, a municipal councilor describes it in the following way:

> For the next year, we continued to pursue several changes to make the property tax more equitable and to give relief to ordinary homeowners. In the final budget

> negotiations in the fall of 2018, this was a major focus for us, but we did not get approval for it, as AP again threatened to keep us at the venue until we gave in and to dissolve the coalition if we did not concede. We reluctantly agreed to a reassessment of the property tax next spring, where changes could be discussed (Tymi, 2019).

In other words, policy adjustments have occurred due to demands by coalition partners. It seems that to the extent that Red affected the policy programs of these local governments, it happened largely through the coalition agreements that had been developed at the beginning of the government period. Red's deputy mayor in Gjøvik emphasized this when interviewed about the coalition:

> There has been no lack of disagreements between us. Red has discussed the hospital issue with a different approach than Labor. We have disagreed on the ownership and future of the Eidsiva energy company. We are four different parties, and the differences are necessarily present, even if we do have a coalition agreement. We have managed good common solutions. That has been the strength of this coalition. We have been loyal to the coalition agreement we all entered. We are ready for a renewed collaboration.

Similarly, at the party's strategy conference in 2022, Red's deputy mayor in Kragerø emphasized the significance of being 'very concrete' when making a collaboration agreement for the coalition's success (*Rødt*, 2022). The importance of clear collaboration agreements was perhaps most evident in the case of Bodø. One council representative blames the breakdown of the coalition in part on the lack of clear language in the agreement:

> We cannot guarantee that we shall enter a similar collaboration in the future. What is clear, however, is that we need much clearer language in the coalition agreement – nothing can be based on trust and oral agreements about interpretation. Moreover, we need much clearer language regarding processes, where openness regarding who makes and supports proposals in internal meetings is a matter of course. There has to be room to change proposals, including budget proposals after hearings, debate, new proposals and external input (Tymi, 2019).

Implicit in these reflections is a recognition that in the absence of concrete and unambiguous agreements, Red risks ending up dominated by larger and more experienced coalition parties. There is pressure from coalition partners to moderate and concede issues. This was a conclusion of Dunphy and Bale's (2011) study of radical left parties in coalition government. A key concern for these parties is to "negotiate a detailed and concrete government

programme that can be referred to, as opposed to a vague and open-ended agreement that can be more easily manipulated by the larger parties" (p. 501).

In Kragerø and Gjøvik, a fair balance seems to have been struck between responsiveness and commitment to a radical agenda on the one hand and responsibility and devotion to a cohesive coalition on the other. In Gjøvik, all the coalition parties described the working relationship as good and each party stated its openness to continued collaboration at the end of the government period (Gulbrandsen, 2019; Sønstelie, 2019). In Kragerø, the collaboration was similarly described as 'good' (Fivelstad, 2019), however due to a combination of disagreements between AP and the rest on trade and industrial policy and a set of poor poll results, there was a lack of commitment to continued collaboration leading up to the 2019 election.

*Dilemmas and mitigation strategies*

As I touched upon in Chapter 4, a key concern for Red in power has been that formal coalitions should not undermine the 'soul' of the party. Preserving a degree of party identity, policy purity, integrity, or enthusiasm around Red's political project is generally perceived as somewhat antithetical to a harmonious coalition. This dilemma was summarized in the report for the 2017 national party conference:

> [Governing] brings with it both problems and opportunities. Before the election, we promised voters that we would use our positions to fight those policies of the national government that increase disparities. How are we to do this in a situation where the parliamentary majority has put a stranglehold on the municipal budgets? How do we retain our independent and system-critical role while at the same time securing a majority for the budget? Red is on the one hand supposed to criticize an unfair system, while simultaneously becoming more closely tied to the system (Rødt, 2017)

As we saw in Chapter 4, Red is acutely aware of the tradeoff between governing on the one hand and keeping a pure commitment to policy goals and a high level of responsiveness to its voters on the other. This was succinctly described by the leader of Red in Vefsn municipality, where Red decided not to enter government despite large electoral support, and AP's dependence on Red's votes in the council. In the party newspaper, he described the internal discussions surrounding the decision:

> Some thought we should take the post of deputy mayor, reasoning that many had voted for us expecting that we would have more political influence and take on

> responsibility. Others believed we should not tie ourselves to a policy platform because it would prevent us from pursuing our policies (Lindset, 2019).

The Vefsn leader goes on to describe the political disagreements between Red and Labor that became apparent during the government period and concludes that Red was "right to avoid a binding collaboration" and that such a coalition would have collapsed already in December the same year.

The clearest example of this challenge in government is the Bodø coalition, which broke down one year before the 2019 election. In a summary of Red's experience in government, a city council representative from Red in Bodø gave the following account:

> The experiences thus far tell us that it is impossible to achieve this kind of openness and collaboration with AP without constant struggle – even when it is written into a coalition agreement. AP uses every possible method to discipline coalition parties into a closed and seemingly harmonious collaboration on their terms. There are probably local variations, but overall we should avoid these situations where power turns into impotence. Keeping things out of the attention of the media and the public is always a barrier to our political project and strategy. No degree of policy influence can excuse such a way of operating over time (Tymi, 2019).

This conclusion followed a long account of how the initially successful collaboration had soured, largely due to the tension between AP's desire for agreement and cohesion within the government and Red's desire for independence. In this representative's view, AP had used "dirty tricks" to bend the coalition partners to its will and broken the coalition agreement repeatedly. In a press release to the media, signed by all the other left-wing parties (MDG, SV, SP, and AP), they lay out the reasons for excluding Red from the coalition. Again, the tension between cohesion and independence is described as a key challenge, though the narrative of whom is to blame is reversed:

> What we view as the most challenging aspect of Red as a party is that they try to take responsibility while at the same time absolving themselves of it. This is to put tactics above policy. Moreover, there is no doubt that it has been challenging to collaborate with a party that on several occasions has attacked municipal employees verbally, and that creates uncertainty around decisions they themselves have helped to craft. This way of doing politics makes a formal, organized, and substantial collaboration across parties very challenging (Anda, 2018).

Red's experience in Bodø became a clear example of the 'one-foot-in one-foot-out' approach that has been observed on the far right (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005) and the far left

(Dunphy and Bale, 2011) at the national level. For instance, Red increasingly criticized the policies of the local government in social and traditional media (Sneve, 2018). The event that triggered the expulsion of Red from the coalition was that a council member from Red criticized the allocation of funds to an art project, accusing administrators of borderline corrupt practices. In Bodø, Red clearly weighted the risks of losing their identity and distinctness more heavily than the risk of being accused of 'irresponsibility.'

This tension exists, though to a lesser extent, in the other cases of Red's government participation as well. In a 2019 interview, Red's deputy mayor in Gjøvik municipality emphasized his efforts to "preserve much of our role as an opposition party" (Birkelund, 2019) and listed a series of issues where Red had diverged from AP during the government period. In a 2018 interview, the top candidate for Red in Tromsø explained that the key difference between Red and the Socialist Left party (SV) is that "SV has been power-seeking and not quite reliable on certain issues. They have made compromises nationally that Red would never have agreed to" (Lande and Johansen, 2018). When asked about his own party's local coalition, and the compromises involved, he emphasized the importance of having certain non-negotiable principles that you would not abandon even in a majority coalition. Such lines in the sand have been observed elsewhere to be important to the success of far-left parties in coalition governments (Dunphy and Bale, 2011). Similarly, just after entering government, Red's deputy mayor in Kragerø expressed the importance of "keeping our integrity" and maintaining the opportunity to disagree with Labor on certain issues (Hagen, 2015). In general, Red identifies as a 'guard dog' that keeps the powerful in check. Being tied too closely to a coalition, without the opportunity to dissent is generally viewed as a threat to this identity and should be avoided. This is sometimes done through clauses in coalition agreements that specifically permit dissent on certain issues.

However, there is variation in Red's ideological rigidity in government. In Bodø, Red's attempts to distinguish itself from the coalition resulted in conflict and the end of collaboration between the parties. In Tromsø, on the other hand, Red's leadership has reported that they have received feedback from members who feel that "Red has not done a good enough job at showcasing our own core issues" and that "often, we have very much stood united on policies with SV and Labor" (Woie, 2019). This seems to be reflected in subsequent election results. In the 2019 election, Red Tromsø experienced a large electoral punishment, dropping from 14,4% of the votes in 2015 to 5,2% in 2019. In Bodø, the drop was much smaller (2.5 percentage points) despite the breakdown of the coalition.

*Summary*

In sum, Red has experienced a variety of pressures to moderate while in government. The data shows that in opposition, Red is distant from the mainstream on both policy dimensions. However, after a period in government, Red is close to the mainstream on either the socioeconomic or sociocultural dimension. The chapter has described the mechanisms of moderation that matter most across cases. Firstly, in line with the 'pothole theory of democracy,' the practice of governing seems to have a moderating impact. Dealing with budgets, policy programs inherited from previous governments, and national frameworks means that Red has had to concede important policies. Being a radical party that emphasizes responsiveness to voters and anti-establishment stances, Red has had a larger challenge than most mainstream parties in squaring its behavior in government with its manifesto. Moreover, Red has had to bridge the policy distance with the mainstream to participate in and sustain coalitions. Being on the far left of any coalition, compromises have tended to be quite far from Red's preferred positions.

On the other hand, Red has been highly aware of these barriers to policy maximization in government. In particular, the party seems to have taken lessons from other left-wing parties in government, such as the Socialist Left Party. It has, therefore, attempted to maximize policy impact through detailed and concrete coalition agreements. Red's willingness to compromise is limited by the goal of maintaining the integrity of its socialist project. The party, therefore, tends to insist on a degree of independence.

## Conclusion

How does this chapter inform the theory? Firstly, it establishes that the Norwegian challenger parties are partly moderated by their experience in government. In FrP's case, we saw significant and substantially large moderation on the question of refugees. In Red's case, we saw that the local parties were close to the mainstream on one dimension after a period in government. Matched branches that remained in opposition were ideologically distant from the mainstream on both dimensions. Secondly, it establishes that the parties were clearly prevented from implementing some of their preferred policies in government. On average, the Progress Party does not seem to have a large policy impact in local government on prioritized issues such as property tax, or ideologically significant issues like refugee reception. Similarly, in many cases Red had to abandon desired and prioritized social policies due to the constraints it faced in office.

The chapter also outlines certain mechanisms of moderation that seem to have had a particularly strong impact across cases. Firstly, both Red and FrP have been limited by the demands of coalition partners (the compromise mechanism). Secondly, both parties have had to abandon desired policies due to budget constraints (pothole mechanism). In Red's case, it had to make tough decisions to abandon expensive social policies, while FrP failed to deliver tax cuts when the alternative was a failure to deliver basic services to citizens. In FrP's case, there is evidence of normative and legal pressures to moderate on the refugee issue. Red's and FrP's cases also demonstrate the impact of policy legacies from previous governments.

Across Red's cases, we can observe the application of certain strategies (agree to disagree/ one-foot-in, one-foot-out) to mitigate the potentially detrimental impact of governing on party identity, policy purity, and popularity. Red also generally strives to retain a degree of independence within its local coalitions to manage the tension between responsibility and coalitional cohesion on the one hand and responsiveness to voters and commitment to a far-left agenda on the other. The party's success in coalition depends largely on how they manage this dilemma. In Bodø, the emphasis on independence and responsiveness led the party to retain a fairly large share of the votes but also to be banished from the coalition a year before the 2019 election. In Tromsø, the emphasis on intra-coalitional harmony entailed a good working relationship with its alliance partners but also a large electoral punishment. In Kragerø and Gjøvik, Red seems to have balanced responsiveness and responsibility, retaining a large share of the vote (a significant increase in the case of Gjøvik), and maintaining a good working relationship with the other coalition parties throughout.

## Chapter 8: Moderation in local government in Sweden?

This chapter investigates the degree to which the two Swedish cases have mainstreamed in government. In Chapter 7, we saw that incumbency is related to a degree of moderation for the two Norwegian cases. Again, this chapter aims to establish whether each of the Swedish parties moderated their positions in power, determine the degree to which they were constrained in their pursuit of policy goals, and give an overview of mechanisms of moderation that mattered most across the cases.

The analysis of the Left Party relies largely on large surveys of Swedish local politicians (KOLFU, 2008; 2012). The evidence shows systematic and significant differences between Left Party politicians in government and opposition. On average, incumbent Left Party politicians have more centrist views across dimensions. Additionally, they emphasize issues associated with prudent economic governance, such as tourism and economic development, more than their colleagues in opposition. They exhibit higher satisfaction with democracy and less support for alternative forms of political participation, such as protests. They also consult with various groups outside the party, including members of other parties and civil servants, to a significantly higher degree when developing policies.

SD stands out from the other cases because of the high threshold for entering governments in 2018. This means that SD generally had a very high degree of electoral support or very small differences with its partners in terms of positions when it participated in coalitions. I show that SD had a large impact on the policy agenda in the municipalities it governed, implementing policies related to law and order, immigration, and traditional values. On the other hand, I show that SD has been limited by regulations and policies from the national level, and in some cases a tempestuous relationship with the local administration. Moreover, SD has emphasized the importance of acting responsibly to prove itself as a viable government party and a reliable coalition partner. These efforts are aimed, not solely at voters and parties in the respective municipalities, but also at other municipalities and at the national level. While SD has been less incentivized to moderate its policy stances, it has faced very real limitations in terms of what can be achieved in government. In some cases, this seems to have changed the way SD engages in politics.

## The Left Party

As established in Chapter 5, the Left Party most commonly participates in government coalitions as a junior partner to the Social Democrats. V is a frequent government member. It has been a part of 29.4 percent of all local governments since 1994. However, coalitions have become broader ideologically over time. In 1994-1998, 94 percent of V's coalitions were pure left-wing collaborations (including only S and/or MP). After the Sweden Democrats entered municipal councils with substantial vote shares in 2014, the number of cross-bloc coalitions grew massively. In 2014-2018, 67 percent of V's local coalitions were pure, left-wing coalitions. In 2018-2022, they were less common than cross-bloc coalitions, making up only 42 percent of all V's local governments. While the motivation to join grand coalitions in this period (2014-2022) may have been to keep SD out of power, rather than to maximize V's policy influence, we may expect these ideologically broad coalitions to amplify the compromise mechanism for V. In the periods covered by the surveys in this chapter, the pure left coalitions were still by far the most common for V, however. In any case, V operates in coalition governments with more centrist, pro-system partners, and we may expect government participation to be associated with more moderate views on the part of V's politicians due to the compromise mechanism. Moreover, other effects such as the pothole mechanism and the responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff should operate independently of the composition of the coalition.

### *Data and design*

To establish a potential 'taming' effect, I look at the 2008 and 2012 surveys of local politicians in Sweden (KOLFU). I compare the Left Party politicians in local government to those in opposition to determine whether incumbency is associated with more moderate views among V's local politicians. Conducted for the first time in 2008, the KOLFU survey aims to examine attitudes about democracy and politics among Swedish politicians at the municipal and county levels. The 2008 survey received responses from 9,890 local representatives out of a universe of about 13,500 subnational representatives. In other words, the whole universe of relevant cases was asked to take part in the survey, and about 73% ended up answering the questionnaire.

The data used to examine V differs from the data used to examine FrP in some key respects. The experiences of the Left Party in government are examined by means of surveys

of local politicians in 2008 and 2012. Unlike the data used for FrP, it is not panel data, and hence cannot be used to measure changes in individual units over time. Therefore, it is difficult to disentangle the changes that occur in government from differences that determine government participation in the first place. We cannot know whether the observed differences between Left Party politicians in and out of government are best explained as a result of or as a precondition for power. The associations uncovered in this chapter can be interpreted in two ways, both with similar implications. Either Left Party branches change as a result of participating in local government, or they are invited into government based on their degree of moderation on a wide range of political opinions. If the latter is true, it means that, to the extent that they are office seeking, they are heavily incentivized to moderate in anticipation of government participation. In favor of the moderation in government-hypothesis, I present some evidence on the mechanisms theorized to mediate the effect of government participation on ideological moderation.

Another limitation of the data is that I cannot take into account the previous incumbency status of any of the respondents. There is a variable showing whether the politician is in opposition or in the governing coalition. There is no variable showing the municipality of the respondent, nor one showing previous government experience. Certain Left Party respondents may recently have entered opposition after a long period in government. These politicians, coded as non-incumbents in the dataset, may nevertheless exhibit a more moderate profile as a result of their previous experiences in government. This would tend to skew the results toward a type II error, accepting a false null hypothesis. While an exact estimate of the incumbency effect may therefore be unattainable with the given data, I may nevertheless draw certain conclusions regarding tendencies and directionality.

A clear advantage of these Swedish surveys is that they cover a much wider set of questions than the newspaper surveys employed in previous chapters. The questions in the survey cover respondents' views on salient political issues, as well as assessments of how well democracy functions at different levels of government, the legitimacy of various forms of political participation, their political activities, and their social backgrounds. Beyond examining the degree of policy moderation associated with government participation, I can, therefore, study differences in terms of politicians' views on the political system, democracy, representation, and activism.

*Policy positions*

In this section, I will look at how the incumbency status of the Swedish Left Party has impacted its stances on the socioeconomic dimension as well as on the question of refugees. A factor analysis (see table 8.1) of the ideology questions in the survey reveals two dimensions among Swedish politicians: One related to socioeconomic positions and one related to immigration stances. Below, I show the impact of the current government status on the socioeconomic dimension and the refugee questions, respectively.

I begin by running a PCF-analysis on the questions that cover policy positions on national and local questions. The analysis revealed two theoretically meaningful dimensions. The first factor, with the highest eigenvalue, is the one that covers the socioeconomic dimension. The questions that loaded strongly on this factor all had to do with the size of the public sector, public spending and the role of the government versus private actors in the realm of welfare service provision. The second dimension, as mentioned, loaded strongly only on the two refugee questions[62]. For ease of interpretation, I therefore chose to operationalize the second dimension as the average of the two refugee questions.

**Table 8.1:** PCF-Analysis on Ideological Questions, 2008 KOLFU-Survey. Varimax Rotation.

| Variable | Socioeconomic dimension EV= 8,2 | Sociocultural dimension EV=1,33 |
|---|---|---|
| Allowing more private contractors to perform municipal activities | 0.87 | |
| Childcare allowance for age 1-3 | 0.82 | |
| More customer choice in municipal activities | 0.84 | |
| More charter schools | 0.87 | |
| Limit the opportunity to sell municipal-owned housing companies | -0.75 | |
| Prevent companies with a profit motive from running hospitals | -0.80 | |
| Diminish the public sector | 0.78 | |
| Get rid of the regional level of government | 0.44 | |
| Accept more refugees in municipality | | 0.82 |
| Accept fewer refugees in Sweden | | -0.85 |
| Intensify the work for equality between genders | | 0.42 |

*Note:* Exploratory principal components factor analysis. Factor loadings below 0.4 not reported. These two factors were also present in the 2012 KOLFU-survey.

*Source*: 2008 KOLFU-survey

[62] There were no questions on immigration besides these two concerning the number of refugees to accept. We might assume that if there were any such questions in the questionnaire, they would load on the same factor.

Table 8.2 shows the results of two separate OLS regression analyses of the Left Party's local representatives. The first regression model uses the average positions of each respondent on the two refugee questions (with one question reversed so that higher scores indicate a more pro-immigration attitude) as the dependent variable. The independent variable is the current incumbency status of the politician. The variable is operationalized based on the question "do you belong to the government or the opposition in your municipality". As control variables, I have included municipality size, gender, age and education. The first model shows a strongly significant effect of incumbency. As higher scores indicate a more pro-refugee (or less anti-refugee) position, and the Left Party is generally more in favor of accepting refugees than other parties, we can conclude from the coefficient (b=-0.27, p<0.001) that incumbency status is associated with a move towards the center on the part of the Left Party.

**Table 8.2**: Politicians' Policy Positions. OLS-Regression. Left Party Only.

| | **Refugee questions** | **Socioeconomic position** |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| In governing coalition | -0.27***<br>(-3.61) | -0.12**<br>(-2.87) |
| Population (Ref: < 10000) | | |
| 10000-20000 | -0.10<br>(-0.95) | 0.01<br>(0.08) |
| 20000-40000 | 0.04<br>(0.36) | 0.06<br>(1.00) |
| 40000-80000 | 0.14<br>(1.09) | 0.13<br>(1.82) |
| 80000- | 0.09<br>(0.73) | 0.21**<br>(2.82) |
| Female | 0.06<br>(0.83) | -0.04<br>(-0.93) |
| Age: (12 categories) | C.F. | C.F. |
| Education: (Ref: primary) | | |
| Secondary | 0.31*<br>(2.27) | -0.00<br>(-0.00) |
| Tertiary | 0.32*<br>(2.45) | 0.06<br>(0.77) |
| PhD | 0.69**<br>(2.99) | -0.06<br>(-0.45) |
| _constant | 4.23***<br>(16.37) | 0.93***<br>(6.43) |
| N | 500 | 454 |

*Source:* KOLFU-survey 2008
*Note*: t-statistics in parentheses. * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. C.F.= controlled for. Age coefficients not reported to preserve space. Only politicians from the Left Party are included in the analysis.

Model 1 – The dependent variable is the politicians' average score on the two refugee questions. Higher scores indicate a more pro-immigration position.

Model 2 – the dependent variable is respondents' scores on the socioeconomic variable. Higher scores indicate a more left-wing position.

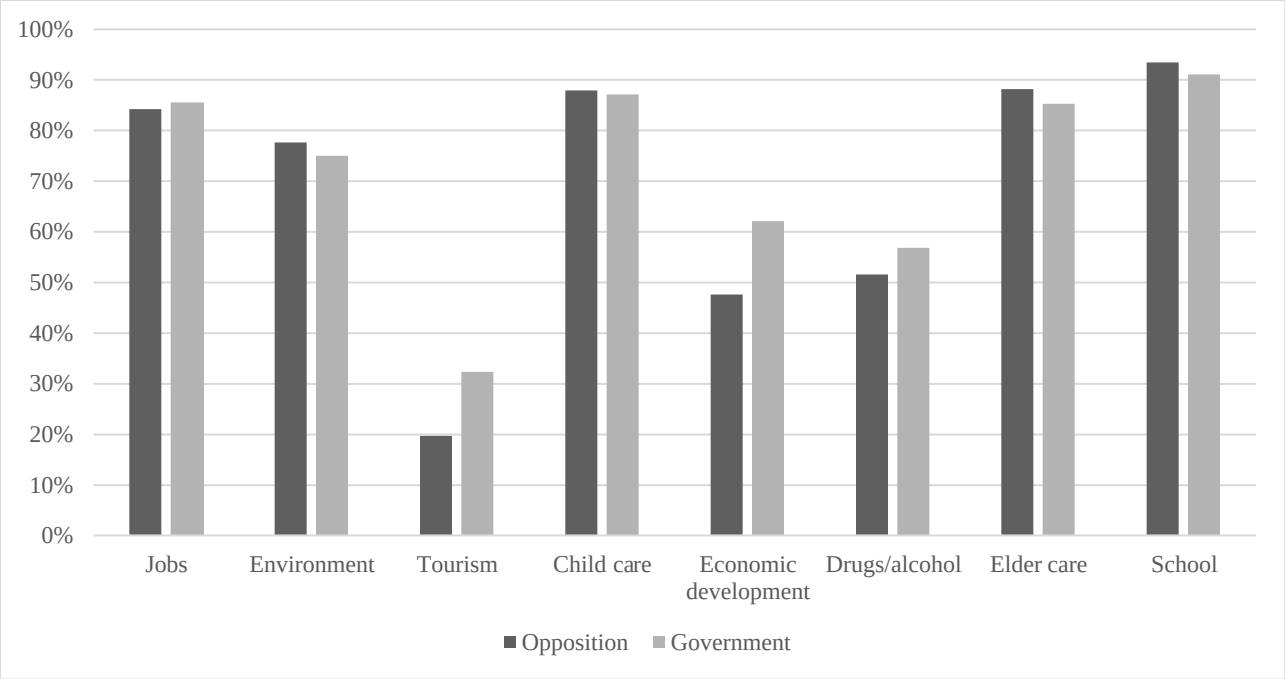
In the second regression model, I have kept the independent and control variables but introduced the socioeconomic dimension from the factor analysis as a dependent variable. Again, the analysis shows an association between governing and moderate views. In short, incumbent politicians of the Left Party are significantly less left-wing than their co-partisans in opposition ($b=-0.12$, $p<0.01$).[63] This aligns with the theoretical expectations: Included challengers are closer to the mainstream. This is true across policy areas, including socioeconomic and refugee questions. Ideological moderation is an important part of the mainstreaming of challenger parties and is substantially associated with local government participation in the case of the Left Party.

*Policy priorities*

Looking at the policy priorities of Left Party politicians (figure 8.1), we can see that those in government prioritize tourism (12 pp difference) and economic development (14 pp difference) significantly more than those in opposition. These issues are associated with the prudent economic governance of a municipality but are not necessarily core issues for the Left Party in general. In other words, being held responsible for the local economic situation while in power is likely to increase V's emphasis on tourism and economic development. Another likely reason for this difference in emphasis is coordination with coalition partners. Goldring et al. (2020) found that coalition partners tend to coordinate their strategies in terms of issue emphasis. This may, for instance, be institutionalized through coalition agreements at the beginning of the government period. To the extent that the Left Party's coalition partners are more oriented towards responsible economic governance (as when it governs with the more office-oriented Social Democrats), it makes sense that the Left Party would emphasize tourism and economic development more when in government. Such a broadening of the agenda leaves less time and resources for the party's core issues.

[63] Further analysis showed that that incumbent V-politicians are also significantly less green than their counterparts in opposition ($b=0.21$, $p<0.05$).

**Figure 8.1**: Policy Priorities of Left Party Politicians According to Government Status




*Note:* The graph shows the share of respondents who want to prioritize the issue over other issues
Source: 2012 KOLFU-survey

*Views on representation*

Previous studies (Gilljam and Karlsson, 2015) indicate that politicians in office are more pro-establishment than politicians in opposition. Opposition members tend to favor a broad participatory democracy, while incumbents favor representative democracy. When it comes to the role of citizens in politics, we see significant differences between Left Party politicians in power and in opposition. This is evident from several questions, including their degree of support for referenda, their concern with citizen dialogue at various stages of the decision-making process and their sympathy for hypothetical citizens engaged in protest events such as demonstrations, occupation of school buildings and illegal strikes.

Firstly, in both questions regarding referenda at the local level[64], Left Party incumbents were significantly less in favor than their co-partisans in opposition. This is not unexpected. As a branch grows influential through the institutions of representative democracy, direct democracy becomes a less attractive policy tool. The party branch's opportunity structures change once they get into power. They may now pursue their favorite policies by other means. This also implies a shift in the understanding of the proper role of citizens in politics.

The effect can be observed when respondents are asked about the importance of citizen dialogue at various stages of the political decision-making process. In table 8.3, we see that opposition politicians believe dialogue is more important at all stages of the political process than do government politicians. Note, too, that these differences are larger and more statistically significant when the average scores are lower. In other words, the incumbency effect is more substantial when there is less general agreement that citizen involvement is appropriate. In general, citizen dialogue is welcomed by incumbents and opposition alike when the purpose is factfinding and evaluation. It is considered less appropriate when decisions are formulated, made, and carried out. Further analysis showed a similar effect among Social Democrats. It seems to be a general truth that opposition politicians are more geared toward direct citizen involvement.

**Table 8.3:** The Importance of Citizen Dialogue, Government Versus Opposition. Left Party Only

| Stage of the political process | Opposition | Government | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| When initiatives and ideas are raised early in the process | 8.35 | 8.11 | -0.25 |
| When public inquiries are made, prior to policy decisions | 8.26 | 8.13 | -0.13 |
| When proposals are formulated | 7.34 | 6.84 | -0.50* |
| When proposals are discussed in decision-making bodies | 8.10 | 7.88 | -0.22 |
| When decisions are made | 7.40 | 6.41 | -0.99** |
| When the administration carries out decisions | 6.84 | 6.17 | -0.67* |
| When decisions after a while are evaluated | 8.69 | 8.45 | -0.24 |

*Note:* The original question was, "How important do you think it is to have a dialogue with citizens in the following stage of the political decision-making process?". This is measured on a scale from 0 ("Not at all important") to 10 ("Very important"). Significance levels were determined with a series of T-tests.
*Source:* KOLFU-survey 2008

[64] The statements respondents were asked to agree or disagree with were: 1. "We should hold more referenda at the municipal level" and 2. "We should force municipalities to hold a referendum if demanded by at least 10% of the population"

**Table 8.4:** Level of Sympathy for Protest Events. Government Versus Opposition. Left Party Only.

| Action Type | Opposition | Government | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| Petition among citizens | 8.71 | 8.14 | -0.57** |
| Demonstration without police permission | 6.68 | 5.85 | -0.83** |
| Parents not sending kids to school | 4.56 | 3.95 | -0.61* |
| Occupation of school building | 4.99 | 3.99 | -1.00** |
| Illegal teacher strike | 4.78 | 3.31 | -1.48*** |
| Parents seeking out politicians at their home | 3.90 | 3.27 | -0.63* |
| Parents who, contrary to regulation, speak up at council meeting | 4.56 | 4.26 | -0.31 |
| Parents attacking politicians in local press, without response | 4.92 | 4.26 | -0.67* |

*Note:* The original question was, "Imagine a situation where there is a proposal to shut down a school. How great would your level of understanding be for the following types of protests?" This is measured on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means no understanding at all and 10 means a great deal of understanding. Significance levels were determined with a series of T-tests.
*Source:* KOLFU-survey, 2008

Table 8.4 shows that the level of sympathy for protesters is higher for politicians in opposition, compared to members of a ruling party branch. The directionality of the effect is the same for all questions, and the effect is significant in all instances but one. We may safely conclude that to the Left Party, local government participation is associated with less acceptance of unconventional forms of political participation. Such an incumbency effect is not unique to V, however. Social Democrats exhibit similar differences between incumbents and non-incumbents. However, the average level of sympathy is much lower for Social Democrats compared to Left Party politicians both in and out of government. This may, in part, be a function of inclusion in power at all levels of government over many decades. Finding themselves more commonly in power at all levels of government, the Social Democrats will have been exposed to the effects of incumbency much more frequently than the Left Party. Over time, we can expect government participation to increase the level of adherence to representative democracy among Left Party politicians.

In sum, all parties are subject to an incumbency effect when it comes to opinions about citizen involvement in politics. Support for referenda, citizen dialogue, and protest activities is higher among opposition politicians than among incumbents. Although the differences between government and opposition politicians are sometimes fairly small, I find

no instances of a reverse effect. In other words, it is never the case that incumbent politicians are, on average, more in favor of direct citizen involvement than opposition politicians.

*Democratic satisfaction*

As several scholars have pointed out (Haugsgjerd, 2019; Kriesi and Schulte-Cloos, 2020; Norris, 2005: p. 161), the degree of democratic satisfaction or satisfaction with government among supporters of challenger parties depends to a large extent on their degree of inclusion in the political system, and especially inclusion in government. Supporters of more included or accepted challengers are generally happier with the state of democracy. We should establish, however: (a) Whether this goes for politicians as well as for voters, (b) whether it is true for politicians at the *local level*, and (c) whether this effect is unique to challengers or a general effect of being included/excluded from power.

The first question speaks to the supply side of the politics of resentment thesis. I am asking whether disaffection with democracy drops among included politicians. Should this be the case, we should inquire whether incumbency also translates into more favorable assessments of "the establishment" in general. The level of political cynicism and pessimism about the political system are taken as indicators of mainstreaming. In other words, does government participation moderate the anti-system attitudes of challenger politicians?

All three questions are addressed in Table 8.5. First, Left Party politicians are significantly more satisfied with democracy at the European, national, and municipal levels of government when they are included in local government. Among Social Democrats, there are significant differences only at the municipal level of government. We may draw a tentative conclusion, therefore, that government inclusion leads to a generalized increase in democratic satisfaction for the left-wing challenger but not for the mainstream left party[65]. The mainstream politicians only improve their assessments of *local* democracy as a result of local incumbency.

[65] In fact, no party besides the Left Party exhibits this effect.

**Table 8.5:** Satisfaction with Democracy at Four Levels of Government. Government Versus Opposition. V and S.

| | Left Party | | | Social Democrats | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Level of government | Opposition | Government | Difference | Opposition | Government | Difference |
| EU | 3.64 | 3.51 | -0.13* | 2.77 | 2.77 | 0.00 |
| Sweden | 2.40 | 2.22 | -0.18** | 2.01 | 2.03 | 0.02 |
| Regional | 2.50 | 2.40 | -0.10 | 2.22 | 2.22 | 0.00 |
| Municipal | 2.47 | 1.91 | -0.56*** | 2.17 | 1.69 | -0.48*** |

*Note*: Satisfaction with democracy is measured on a scale from 1 to 4, where 1 indicates "very satisfied" and 4 is "very dissatisfied." "Difference" is calculated by subtracting the opposition's mean score from the government participators' mean. Significance levels were determined with a series of T-tests.
*Source*: 2008 KOLFU-survey

We may conclude that there is an incumbency effect on generalized democratic satisfaction that is quite unique to the Left Party. Note, however, that among every party in the survey, there is an incumbency effect on democratic satisfaction at the municipal level. Quite obviously, ruling a municipality makes you more satisfied with how democracy works in your municipality.

As with incumbents generally, the incumbent Left Party politicians are generally happier with the state of democracy at the municipal level. In contrast to other parties, however, the incumbent local challengers are also more satisfied with democracy at the national and European levels. In other words, general pessimism about the state of the political system, identified above as a key element of the challenger profile, seems to lessen in conjunction with government participation. This finding complements those studies showing increased democratic satisfaction among *voters* for challengers once they make it into office (Harteveld et al. 2020; Haugsgjerd 2019). It also fits in well with the findings of Kriesi and Schulte-Cloos (2020). They show that political discontent, measured as dissatisfaction with democracy and the government, only heightens the success of radical challengers if these parties are in opposition. In other words, being in government decouples the challenger from the protest vote.

*Anti-establishment views*

A key aspect of the challenger party profile outlined in the theory chapter is the use of anti-establishment rhetoric. Exclusion from government, in combination with a fierce ideological

opposition to the regime one operates in, may prompt a party to engage in delegitimizing messages against the established elites (Capoccia, 2002, p. 16). It stands to reason, therefore, that government participation should undermine this aspect of the challenger profile. In short, we may expect fewer anti-establishment stances among the challengers that are included in government.

The question of the knowledgeability of various actors about local political issues may shed light on this hypothesis. At the very center of anti-establishment politics is the claim "that the power elite are unable or unwilling to represent ordinary citizens" (Barr, 2009: p. 31). Therefore, the idea that established actors are ignorant about the issues affecting people in the municipality should be held more strongly by those who are more anti-establishment.

Not surprisingly, incumbent Left Party politicians view the executive committee and the mayor as more knowledgeable than V's opposition politicians. This is tantamount to declaring "our side" as more knowledgeable than the political rivals. Interestingly, however, this incumbency effect extends to assessments of other municipal politicians, bureaucrats, and local businesses. It seems that incumbency comes with a generalized improved opinion about the knowledgeability of local power holders. The local establishment is, in other words, less derided by challengers when they are in power.

**Table 8.6:** Assessment of Knowledgeability of Various Actors about Local Political Issues. Government versus Opposition. Left Party Only.

| Actor | Opposition | Government | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| Municipal executive committee | 6.52 | 7.38 | 0.87*** |
| Mayor | 6.34 | 8.26 | 1.92*** |
| Other municipal politicians | 5.29 | 5.74 | 0.44** |
| Bureaucrats | 6.67 | 7.18 | 0.51** |
| Citizens | 4.52 | 4.70 | 0.18 |
| National government | 5.54 | 5.62 | 0.09 |
| Local businesses | 4.50 | 4.96 | 0.46* |
| Journalists observing local politics | 5.37 | 5.38 | 0.01 |
| You yourself | 6.88 | 7.35 | 0.47** |

*Note:* Original question was "In your opinion, how knowledgeable are the following actors about political issues in your municipality". This is measured on a scale from 0 ("Not at all knowledgeable") to 10 ("Very knowledgeable"). Significance levels were determined with a series of T-tests.
*Source:* KOLFU-survey 2008

In the 2012 KOLFU survey, there is an additional question that would tend to cover anti-establishment attitudes. This question measures the respondent's perceptions of the prevalence of various corrupt practices or impropriety in their municipality (Table 8.7). The differences are all statistically significant and in the expected direction. Again, it is unsurprising that we would find differences between the government and the opposition on this question. Agreement to these questions means admitting to a lack of proper government oversight or control, which a participant in government would clearly be less motivated to do. It is likely, however, that government participation over time would lead to a generally lowered corruption perception.

**Table 8.7:** Perception of Corrupt Practices. Government versus Opposition. Left Party Only.

| Practice | Opposition | Government | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| Politician attempted to influence the outcome of a public inquiry | 4.64 | 3.43 | -1.21*** |
| A former politician was hired in a leadership position in municipal administration or in a municipal company | 3.08 | 2.34 | -0.73** |
| A civil servant was hired despite not being the most qualified | 4.28 | 3.11 | -1.18*** |
| A businessperson has offered a gift or service to a public servant in connection with a procurement | 2.15 | 1.56 | -0.59** |
| A public employee has taken additional payment to perform a service that was part of their job description | 1.64 | 1.34 | -0.30* |

Note: Original question was "In your opinion, to what extent has the following taken place in your municipality during the current government period? This is measured on a scale from 1 ("Not at all") to 7 ("It was very prevalent"). Significance levels were determined by means of a series of T-tests.
*Source*: KOLFU-survey, 2012

*Mechanisms of moderation*

A theorized mechanism that would push challenger parties closer to the mainstream while in government is obligations to a new set of principals (Mair, 2009). A party, regardless of its government participation, is expected to act on behalf of the voters. This, in addition to the views of the party members should shape the policy emphasis of the party. When in power, however, it is also expected to act as an agent of "a host of different and sometimes contradictory principals constituted by the many veto and semiveto players who now surround government in its dispersed multi-level institutional setting" (ibid., p. 12). Acting as a prudent and responsible government member, requires parties to listen to and respect the views of these veto players. Additionally, in a setting where coalition governments are the

norm, coalition partners function as important veto players for government parties. If this is the case, we should expect Left Party politicians in government to be more concerned with the opinions of the administration and of other parties when making policy decisions.

Table 8.8 shows that this is indeed the case. Members of the governing majority are on average more prone to seek consult with this set of actors than are members of the opposition. This difference is statistically significant in the case of politicians from other parties and civil servants (both politically appointed and not). In the cases where the policy preferences of Left Party voters and members conflict with those of politicians from other parties and bureaucrats, incumbent politicians would be less responsive to the former group. This is a strong explanation for the policy gap between V-politicians in government and opposition. Meeting the "everyday responsibilities of office" (Mair, 2009, p. 14) means acting within constraints set by actors besides voters and party members. At the local level, the role of civil servants is to implement the policies decided by the local government but also to inform politicians of the constraints they must operate under based on laws and regulations decided at the national level, as well as budgetary constraints. Technocratic demands are much stronger, and ideological representation is correspondingly weaker (Caramani, 2017).

**Table 8.8:** Seeking Advice from Various Actors when Developing Proposals. Left Party Only.

| Actor | Opposition | Government | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| Politicians from your own party | 4.53 | 4.62 | -0.10 |
| Politicians from other parties | 2.31 | 2.64 | -0.33** |
| Politically appointed civil servants | 2.15 | 2.46 | -0.31** |
| Other civil servants | 2.34 | 2.63 | -0.29** |
| Local businesspeople | 2.05 | 2.15 | -0.11 |
| Citizens | 3.55 | 3.58 | -0.04 |
| Close friends and family | 3.05 | 3.24 | -0.19 |

*Source:* KOLFU-survey 2012

*Note:* Original question was "When developing political proposals, to what extent do you consult with the following groups". This is measured on a scale from 1 ("To a very small extent") to 5 ("To a very large extent"). Only Left Party respondents included. Significance levels were determined by means of a series of T-tests.

The table indicates that the compromise mechanism and the responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff are key mechanisms in the case of the Left Party. This squares well with V's own

accounts of the challenges of government. In the "operational plan" published by the Left Party in Stockholm County in 2015, we find the following description:

> To be involved in governing a municipality entails both opportunities and challenges. Above all, it means that we can participate in implementing reforms and contribute to societal changes toward a more solidarity-driven and just society. We can demonstrate that the Left Party makes a difference. However, our participation can also create expectations that are difficult to meet, partly because we must compromise with other parties and partly because the economic frameworks, largely determined by factors beyond our control, do not align with the actual local needs or our ambitions (Vänsterpartiet Storstockholm, 2015: p.6)

As with Red in Norway, budgetary frameworks are a special challenge for V as a left-wing challenger party. They campaign on expensive social policies that are difficult to fund. Also like Red, V has therefore tended to propose large increases in discretionary funds for municipalities in its national shadow budgets (Rudbäck, 2020).

*Summary*

Comparing Left Party politicians in local government to those in opposition revealed systematic differences. Overall, Left Party politicians in government are closer to the mainstream, both ideologically and when it comes to their assessments of the political system. Overwhelmingly, the evidence shows that V politicians in power are less pessimistic about the state of democracy, less concerned with citizen dialogue, less understanding of protest actions and exhibit less anti-establishment sentiment than their co-partisans in opposition. In short: there is evidence of a broad mainstreaming effect in the case of the Left Party.

A systematic difference between the Left Party in government and opposition is the practice of seeking advice from actors outside the party. To a significantly greater extent Left Party politicians in government seek advice from members of other parties and civil servants of various descriptions when formulating policy. This indicates the presence of a compromise mechanism and responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff for Left Party politicians in power.

## The Sweden Democrats

### *Policy positions*

Between 2018 and 2022 SD participated in a handful of local governments. Many of the observations made so far hold for SD in government as well. As we shall see, SD has had to deal with similar obstacles to policy maximization as was observed for the other party cases. A key difference between this case and the others is that SD has generally had a larger vote share when participating in local government. Apart from the unusual case of Staffanstorp, SD had between 29 and 35 percent of the seats in the municipalities it governed. This means that SD has generally had a stronger bargaining power in policy negotiations than my other party cases.

This has entailed fewer incentives to change its policy profile compared to the other parties studied in this thesis. For instance, in the election compasses cited in Chapter 5, SD did not change its position at all on the refugee question between 2018 and 2022 in any of the municipalities where it participated in government. In Bjuv, Bromölla and Sölvesborg, SD did moderate its stance on local referendums from full to partial agreement, however. This meant that in 2022, none of the SD branches that had been in government completely agreed with the statement that "there should be more local referendums in my municipality". This is not unique to the branches in government, however. The data shows that 43 percent of SD branches surveyed in both elections became less positive to local referendums (8 percent moderated by two units on the agreement scale). By comparison, only 11 percent of branches moderated their views on the refugee question, and never by more than one unit on the scale from 'very bad proposal' to 'very good proposal.'

### *Impact on policy agendas*

Even though many of SD's principal issues are mainly decided at the national level, we see a clear shift in the policy agenda in SD-led municipalities to feature policies related to SD's core positions. Such policies include law-and-order policies like bans against begging (in Staffanstorp (SVT, 2019), Bromölla (Nordell, 2019), and Sölvesborg (Alm, 2021)), the installation of surveillance cameras (Bromölla and Staffanstorp (Mattsson, 2018)) and funding of security guards to support the police and patrol the streets (in Sölvesborg (Rostedt, 2021), Hörby, Bromölla (Mattsson, 2018) and Staffanstorp (Carlsson and Hansson, 2019)).

They also include policies related to traditional values, such as refraining from raising the pride flag on municipal flagpoles during pride celebrations (in Svalöv, Sölvesborg (Birgersson, 2020), and Hörby (Berg, 2020) and a host of anti-immigration and assimilation

oriented policies including removal of books in the library that are written in immigrants' mother tongue (Sölvesborg (Elmstedt, 2019)), cut spending on mother tongue tuition (Hörby, Bromölla, and Sölvesborg (Orange, 2018; Clausen, 2020)) bans on kosher and halal meats in public cafeterias (Staffanstorp (Andersson, 2018)), bans against hijabs in school (in Staffanstorp – though this was struck down by the courts (Hansson, 2020)), and a "multicultural accounting report" to calculate the costs of immigration (Bromölla (Mattsson, 2018)). Svalöv is a bit of an exception in this regard, explicitly avoiding 'symbolic issues' and focusing instead on practical local issues. In an interview just before the 2022 election, Teddy Nilsson, the local leader of SD in Svalöv gave the following statement in an interview with a local newspaper:

> We are so much more than our immigration policy, but we are not very experienced at communicating it. Our welfare policies are close to that of the old Social Democrats, and our economic policies are closer to the center right. So we are able to speak to both sides (Malmberg, 2022).

### ***Mechanisms of moderation and constraint***

#### *National rules and regulations*

Despite SD's outsized bargaining power, some of the barriers to policy maximization observed in my other party cases is present for SD as well. Firstly, SD-led municipalities are limited by policies, rules, and regulations that are decided at the national level. This was emphasized by Johanna Beijer, a representative from the Social Democrats in Sölvesborg at the beginning of SD's period in government:

> I'm not sure it is possible to fully realize many of SD's policies in a municipality. There are laws and regulations that have to be taken into account. Even they [SD] have to follow those ('Reportage från tre SD-styrda kommuner i Skåne', 2019)

For instance, in contrast to Norway, Swedish municipalities can no longer decide how many refugees to receive in a given year. This is decided by the National Migration Agency, following a change in the law in 2016 in response to the refugee crisis. This was pointed out by Teddy Nilsson, SD's leader in Svalöv, when asked about opportunities to influence immigration issues locally:

> I operate in a municipality, so I have to deal with the consequences of a national policy and adjust myself accordingly. But it is possible to get things done. We have

> the lowest unemployment among immigrants in nine years. We make demands of them. They have to participate in activities. This has clearly ensured that they get gainful employment (Malmberg, 2022).

In this institutional context, anti-immigration policies are sometimes creative. In Staffanstorp where the SD and M were in the majority and in full agreement on this issue, refugees were housed in trailers on camping sites. Critics described the move as a measure to deter refugees from the municipality (Pelling, 2022). This policy was also adopted by SD in Sölvesborg, who included it in the 220-point plan for the municipality, presented at the beginning of the government period (Alfredsson and Ogenblad, 2019). Moreover, the Sölvesborg government's 220-point policy plan included an item to "counter the allocation law". There is a national-level awareness of this constraint for SD's preferred local policies. The allocation law was criticized by SD members on the floor of parliament no less than 23 times from 2016 to the time of writing. Among SD's most common arguments against the policy was the notion that the law violates the local right to self-governance. Incidentally, as we saw in the case of FrP, Staffanstorp has been much more open to the idea of accepting Ukrainian refugees, using similar arguments about cultural and geographic proximity (Klintö, 2022). The same can be observed in Sölvesborg, where local SD leader and mayor Louise Erixon argued to accept Ukrainian refugees because "they are in our absolute vicinity" (Åsgård, 2022).

Constitutional and civil rights became a further barrier to certain SD-policies. As indicated, Staffanstorp was prevented from introducing a ban against hijabs and other religious veils in primary schools by a court ruling in 2020. The court argued that such a ban would violate basic religious liberties (Hansson, 2020). In Bromölla, a ban on prayer during working hours was overturned by the highest administrative court (Office of International Religious Freedom, 2021). Similarly, an open question at the time of writing is whether the bans against begging in Bromölla, Sölvesborg and Staffanstorp were in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights, and will be struck down by the European Court of Justice in the future. This seems more likely following the court's 2021 decision in a similar case in Switzerland, where a woman was fined for begging in Geneva with reference to a local ordinance that banned the practice. The ECJ overturned the ruling. Since 2021, there have been public debates about the meaning of this ruling for the local Swedish bans on begging (See for example Westeson, 2021). Hörby was reported to the School Inspection Board for violating the Swedish School Law, when limiting access to mother tongue classes for minorities (Falkirk, 2019), and in Sölvesborg the local government received stern

criticism along with an order to remedy their lack of mother tongue education for national minorities after a 2019 inspection (Sällberg, 2019). In other words, despite the large degree of influence SD has over the policy agenda in these municipalities, they are limited by rules and regulations from the national or European levels.

These barriers to SD's policy maximization differ from the compromise mechanism, which was much more prominent in the other three cases, in at least one important respect. When SD is prevented from implementing a certain policy because it violates some national policy or regulation, it is still completely free to voice its disagreement with these rules. This is in contrast to junior coalition partners who, when conceding a policy to a larger coalition partner, are often pressured to refrain from criticizing the decision publicly. This was emphasized in the section about Red in Chapter 6. Red had to strike a balance between communicating disagreements with government decisions to voters and maintaining a healthy working relationship with the Labor Party.

*The administration*

A more pronounced challenge in SD's case compared to the other cases is the relationship with the administration. The cases of Sölvesborg and Hörby illustrate this most clearly. Louise Erixon, SD's mayor in Sölvesborg, emphasized this heavily in a 2021 interview. As she states:

> In politics, there are a lot of ambitions, but if you do not have civil service workers who want to implement your policies, you are left sitting there with nothing but a desire to change things. The key word is humility; to have a humble attitude and being able to pick your battles. That is the message we want to convey (Rohwedder, 2021).

In fact, after SD lost its position in Sölvesborg's governing majority following the 2022 election, Erixon got a new position in SD, where she would serve as a link between the central party and branches that aimed for local government participation. One of the things she has taught to aspiring government members across the country is how to maintain a good relationship with the administration (Olsson, 2023). Hörby also serves as an example in this regard, but for another reason. Hörby was the municipality where SD received the strongest support in the country in 2018 (35%). With the support of the Moderates, they took over the governance of the municipality after the election. In one year, 25 members of the administration resigned (Perlenberg, 2020). In newspaper accounts, this mass exodus was attributed to a bad working environment, a culture of silence, and an excessively top-down approach to governance (Rohwedder, 2021). One member of the administration explained

that she left her position partly because the policies she was asked to implement became incompatible with what she perceived as her professional duty to the municipality's inhabitants. She gives the example of recently arrived immigrants in her interview with a local newspaper:

> We have a duty to ensure that newly arrived immigrants become good citizens, we are supposed to arrange housing and a certain level of financial assistance. But when limitations are placed on us, this duty becomes difficult to carry out (Möller, 2020).

After the replacement of these civil servants, the leader of the opposition in Hörby, Anders Larsson of the Center Party, described the new administration in the following way:

> Now, they have employees that are docile. There is no spontaneity in the council meetings, and none of the civil servants dare to speak their minds. They might come and share their views in the break, however. It is totally top-down (Rohwedder, 2021).

Similarly, Renaldo Tirone, the leader of the Hörby Social Democrats described SD's leadership style as "ruling by fear" (Orange, 2022). On their part, SD argued that this mass departure was a good thing if it meant less resistance to structural reforms or policy plans (Orange, 2022). Despite the explicit focus on a good relationship with the administration, there was friction between the political leadership and civil servants in Sölvesborg as well. A case in point is the local administrator in charge of culture and libraries, Sofia Lenninger. She was asked to leave her job after nine months because the way she acted as a civil servant ran counter to the wishes of the political leadership (Lindgren, 2020). One example, which she describes as the moment she "went down", was when she approved funds for a theater performance in Arabic at a local preschool. She was told that she had acted against the political views of the municipality. The press was generally interested in the story, and she stated in an interview that she probably had a different view of democracy than the majority coalition. In October 2019, she was "bought out" and left her job. All told, there seems to be friction between SD-led governments and the administration. This was a key observation in a 2022 report by DIK, a union for those employed in the cultural sector with about 20,000 members (Palm, 2022). The report, based on a survey answered by 3428 publicly employed members, and titled "We know how things turned out in Sölvesborg" observes:

> The Sweden Democrats stand out. Their entrance into power led to changes (p. 17)

The title of the report references a survey response, where the SD-led municipality is held forth as a frightening example of politicians overstepping in relation to municipal employees. The changes described by members include unwritten rules of behavior. As one survey respondent explained:

> You're not allowed to bring in artists who are considered critical of the Sweden Democrats, not display rainbow signs, not show pictures from author talks because the author wears a veil, etc. (p. 17)

*Reputation building*

Among these local SD-branches, there has been a conscious effort to prove to voters and politicians that they are a responsible government party. In a 2019 interview, Loise Erixon of SD Sölvesborg emphasized the task of proving "that we can collaborate" (Mårtenson, 2019). She stated further that:

> I know it can work, and we just have to prove it. That you can negotiate with us. That we can behave and handle the role (ibid.)

This was similarly emphasized by Cecilia Bladh in Zito of the Hörby SD, when she was interviewed about her first period in power.

> There will always be people who don't like us, we can never change that. But I hope they understand that we don't bite, we are not neo-Nazis, we are not fascists, and we are not racists. We are a party that has reality-based political views. We've done very well in all our four municipalities, and I hope that can give the Moderates the courage to start cooperating with us at a national level (Orange, 2022).

As Paxton (Paxton, 2023) points out, having a reputation as a 'normal' party is a key element of systemic integration. As a party that has struggled with a reputation as extreme, radical, illegitimate, or inexperienced, this chance to prove it can function as a government party motivates SD to act responsibly, or at least be perceived to do so. The party avoids presenting itself as radical, and instead emphasizes its role as a 'normal-responsible actor'. This strategy has the dual purpose of attracting skeptical voters and opening coalition options that were previously shut off to the party. As the quote from Hörby shows, this may not be aimed exclusively at the parties within the municipality, but also at other municipalities or even the national level. SD-leader Jimmie Åkesson also spoke about the significance of local coalitions in his attempts to foster a good relationship between SD and M at the national level:

> It cements an image that it is possible: if it can be done in a municipality, then it should at least be possible to engage in conversations at the national level. I hope that the Moderates, above all in Stockholm, look to Sölvesborg and other municipalities where this actually works, and learn from it (*Jimmie Åkesson om Sölvesborg*, 2019).

This phenomenon was described in the theory chapter as a mechanism that would tend to moderate the rhetoric and behavior of challengers. A barrier to vote maximization for a party like the Sweden Democrats is the perception among voters that it is too inexperienced and radical to function in government. Each instance of government participation is an opportunity to convince and recruit skeptical voters, but only if the party acts more or less responsibly in office. It may further prove SD's merits as a reliable coalition partner to mainstream parties in their own municipality, other municipalities, and even the national level.

***Consequences of governing***

When it comes to voter appeal, SD has, with two exceptions, managed to increase its vote share in government. In Svalöv, Sölvesborg, Hörby, Bjuv and Surahammar, SD's share increased by between 4 and 9 percentage points (the national average for the party was a decrease of 1 percentage point in the local elections). By comparison, Red experienced vote drops of between 2 and 9 percentage points in all but one case of government participation, in the 2015-2019 period. A significant difference between these sets of cases is, of course, the fact that SD was the dominant coalition partner in all these instances and had a much larger degree of influence over the government's policy agenda. Red was, in all cases, a junior partner to the Labor party and was consequently held accountable for policies it had much less control over. In Staffanstorp, where SD was a junior partner to the Moderates, SD's vote share decreased by 0.86 percentage points. Finally, Bromölla stands out with a decrease of 2.55 percentage points. Here, SD governed alone in a minority government, helped to power by the Moderates. This, in combination with inexperience in government and an uncooperative opposition, meant that it frequently lost votes in the municipal council and had to enact policies formulated by the opposition. In addition, the SD-led government amassed a sizable budgetary deficit during its time in power. After one and a half years, SD gave up on governing and left the reins to an S-led minority government. Jenny Önnevik, the leader of the Social Democrats in Bromölla, related in a newspaper interview that she noticed a distinct change in behavior and attitude among SD politicians after their period in government:

> There has been a big change. The fact that they had 1,5 years in office seems to have taught them that their simplified view of politics is not correct. They now seem to realize that issues are complex. I think their time in government made them realize this (Persson, 2021).

This description aligns well with the 'pothole theory' described in Chapter 1. When radical parties become 'busy with the administration of things' (Mair, 2009), they can devote less energy to the pursuit of radical policies. This difference is perhaps starkest for a party without experience in government.

**Summary**

Due to its generally higher degree of bargaining power as the largest party in its coalitions between 2018 and 2022, the Sweden Democrats have to a larger extent been able to minimize the demands of coalition partners as an obstacle to policy maximization. This has meant a significant shift in the policy output of the municipalities it has governed. In this chapter, I have shown that SD-led municipalities have implemented a host of policies related to its core issues of traditional values, law and order, and nationalism.

On the other hand, it has been limited by rules and regulations handed down from the national level, and the practical demands of governing. This has, in certain instances, resulted in creative policies, for instance, pursuing anti-immigration policies within the current legal framework by accepting their allotted number of refugees but housing them in caravans on camping sites. Another challenge for SD in power has been its relationship with the local administration. In Hörby, this played out most dramatically with a mass exodus of civil servants, with whom the SD-led government could not collaborate productively. Moreover, there appears to be a high degree of awareness among SD-politicians in government of their opportunity to improve their reputation among voters and other parties by behaving responsibly in office.

All in all, we see a less pronounced change in this handful of party branches, compared to the other party cases in this study. A key reason for this is SD's high seat share in the municipalities it has helped to govern between 2018 and 2022. SD has simply had fewer incentives to adjust its policy agenda than the other challenger parties. Even in the relative absence of the compromise mechanism, however, SD has experienced barriers to policy maximization through national policies, inexperience in power, varying ability to collaborate with the administration, and the desire to prove itself as a viable government party.

**The four parties compared**

Some similarities and differences between the four parties can now be outlined. Firstly, the degree of moderated policy positions varies across cases. At one end, we find the Swedish

Left Party, which consistently has more centrist views across dimensions, and more pro-system attitudes when in government, compared to in opposition. On the other end of the spectrum, we find the Sweden Democrats, which has not moderated its positions significantly in government. The two Norwegian cases are somewhere in between, with significant, but narrow moderation. The Progress Party changed its positions significantly on the refugee question while in government. Red was consistently close to the mainstream only on a single policy dimension after governing, compared to large policy distances on both dimensions in matched municipalities where it had remained in opposition.

How can we explain this pattern? Firstly, the Sweden Democrats stands out by having such a large threshold for inclusion in 2018 that in the municipalities where it did govern, it was either with a radical branch of the mainstream right (as in Staffanstorp), or SD was electorally dominant (as in the other cases). This meant that the compromise mechanism was largely absent for SD in that period. In the current government period (2022-2026), the threshold for participation has been much lower (see Chapter 5), and we can therefore expect the party to be more strongly constrained through compromise. Red also had a relatively high threshold for participation, though this was to a greater extent self-imposed. Generally, Red has been careful not to enter coalitions when its seat share is too low, citing fears of becoming a doormat to a larger alliance partner. Additionally, Red muffled the compromise mechanism through mitigation strategies such as one-foot-in, one-foot-out (Bodø being a clear example), and agreements to disagree (as in Gjøvik and Kragerø). It also emphasized the importance of concrete and detailed coalition agreements to avoid being dominated by a stronger partner. As we saw in Chapters 4 and 5, the Progress Party's seat share was positively associated with coalition membership, while for V it was the mayor party's seat share that mattered. The Progress Party in local government has 15,5 percent of the seats on average, while the Left Party has 7,1 percent. This can explain the difference in degree of moderation between the parties. Compared to the other parties, V has much less bargaining power within its coalitions. It therefore has to make more concessions. The Progress Party has an easier time building a voting majority in the council around its positions, apart from on the refugee issue, where it is too far apart from the majority opinion.

Other mechanisms have mattered as well when it comes to constraints on policy implementation. The two left wing parties demonstrate that more expensive policy goals are often ruled out due to budgetary constraints, and the need to fund basic services for citizens. This constraint played a role for the Progress Party as well, but in that case, it put limitations on tax cuts. In the case of the two right-wing challengers, but most significantly in SD's case,

national laws have also limited their policy pursuit. For FrP, we saw that resolutions in the council to choose refugees based on country of origin were hamstringed by legality checks. In SD's case, we saw several policies struck down by the courts for violating national laws. It seems that the compromise mechanism has the strongest effect on the policy positions of the challenger parties. While other mechanisms may limit their free pursuit of policy, the compromise mechanism comes with added pressure to refrain from criticizing the policy outcome. In other words, it matters not only whether the party was constrained, but also how it was constrained.

**Table 8.9:** Comparative Summary of Key Insights

| | **Moderated policy positions?** | **Key moderating mechanisms** | **Mitigating circumstances and strategies** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Progress Party** | Narrow, but significant | Compromise, pothole, responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff | Relatively high bargaining power |
| **Red** | Narrow, but significant | Compromise, pothole, responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff | One-foot-in, one-foot-out, agree to disagree, relatively high bargaining power |
| **Left Party** | Broad and significant | Compromise, responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff | |
| **Sweden Democrats** | Insubstantial | Responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff (national rules and local administration), reputation building | High bargaining power, Radical partner |

Chapters 7 and 8 have established some broad trends in terms of policy constraint, moderation and key mechanisms at play. In Chapter 9 we will see the mechanisms in action, establish how they relate to mainstreaming for individual branches, and establish the scope conditions that muffle or amplify those mechanisms.

# Chapter 9: Case studies of the challengers' experiences in government

This chapter is about softened or frustrated ambitions. It investigates four municipalities where each of the respective challenger parties has participated as a junior government party. Using the theoretical model from Chapter 1 as a framework, it looks at the various barriers that have hindered the policy projects and softened the behavior of each challenger in turn. Important obstacles include demands from coalition partners, national laws and policies, tight municipal budgets, role constraints, and reputation building. The significance of each of these constraints has varied from case to case. The importance of the compromise mechanism is determined by the degree of policy proximity within the coalition and the bargaining power of the challenger in relation to the other government parties. National laws and policies constrain those policies that diverge most from the national mainstream and, therefore, depend on the degree to which the challenger has made radical campaign pledges leading into the coalition formation. Tight municipal budgets are a much larger constraint for the left-wing parties due to their emphasis on expensive social policy programs. Role constraints and reputation building have mattered in all cases. However, some manage the dilemma of responsiveness versus responsibility through 'role-playing,' distinguishing between prudent government members and dedicated representatives of the party, between pragmatists and ideologues. The degree to which each government has pursued and implemented the challenger's preferred policies has, therefore, varied between cases, but we do not see unconstrained policy maximization in any municipality. The chapter uses data from interviews, newspapers, and municipal council protocols to describe the various challenges the parties have faced when trying to realize their political project in local government.

The goal in this chapter is to 'see the mechanisms in action'; to describe whether and how each of the mechanisms relate to mainstreaming for the individual branches, and to establish the scope conditions that muffle or amplify each mechanism. The theoretical purpose of this exercise is to investigate the claim that there is a causal connection between government inclusion and mainstreaming. If the associations established in the previous two chapters are somehow spurious, we should not expect to observe the mechanisms in the case studies below. Moreover, the chapter seeks to establish the sources of variation in the degree of mainstreaming across cases. It does this by examining the absence or presence of moderating mechanisms, amplifying or muffling scope conditions, and mitigation strategies.

## FRP in Grimstad

*The Responsiveness-Responsibility Tradeoff*

From the offset, FrP Grimstad saw limitations imposed on its policy space by emphasizing prudent economic governance. For example, the first item in the coalition's policy platform, presented in October 2019, was "The majority coalition is committed to pursuing a modest and responsible set of economic policies" (Berg and Ellingsen, 2019). This primary goal was, to an extent, in conflict with FrP's pledge to lower the local property tax. For this reason, FrP's deputy mayor highlighted to the local press that cuts to the property tax are "a goal, not a promise" and that "we are entering a challenging economic situation, and the most important thing is to create financial flexibility before addressing the property tax" (ibid.).

Overall, the policy plan clearly prioritizes prudence and responsibility in economic matters, mentioning bureaucratic efficiency, improving healthcare and childcare services, and enhancing infrastructure. This focus on responsible governance resulted in an uncontroversial budget proposal in December 2019. In fact, local newspapers related that the government achieved a historic degree of support around this proposal, securing backing from various political parties, including the Greens (MdG) and the Liberals (V), who were not part of the coalition (Karlsen, 2019).

On the other hand, FrP Grimstad's focus on responsibility over responsiveness produced a level of tension within the branch. In the local party's annual meeting in 2020, the branch leadership was instructed by members to prioritize reducing property taxes. In response to this request from the members, FrP's deputy mayor responded that while she agreed with the wish and was glad that the members kept the leadership on their toes, the tax reduction must be done responsibly:

> Even though we would have liked to remove the entire property tax overnight, it must be done in a fiscally responsible way. That means it must be done gradually. We have already started and will continue with this work going forward (Andreassen, 2020).

This emphasis on responsible fiscal governance was maintained throughout the four years in power. One interviewee told me in the summer of 2022 that there was a certain level of disappointment among FrP's supporters over the fact that the property tax had persisted throughout the period.[66] When the Liberals proposed a reduction in property tax in the middle of the year 2022, FrP welcomed the proposal but pointed out that this would be difficult to do

[66] Interview with FrP politician, Grimstad

outside the annual budget negotiations due to legal restrictions and that any change would need to be economically sustainable (Haugen, 2022b).

*Role playing: Opportunities and pitfalls*

This sense of responsible governance extended to a specific understanding of how one ought to act in government as well. Nevertheless, the party has engaged in a certain division of roles, where some members are expected to represent the government (responsibly), while others should represent the party. As one FrP politician explained:

> When you are in government you have a different role. And since we have gained significant political influence, we don't go out alone, but we are a team. We don't go out on our own and say: "This is something we just had to agree to" (…) [The role of the government members] is to be part of the political leadership in a given constellation [of parties], while others in the party may promote "FrP-issues."[67]

In some council votes, also on immigration issues, we see that FrP splits its vote, with some voting with the majority and some against. One interviewee from the Progress Party described this kind of split as a tactical division of roles, again between responsible government members and responsive council members[68]. Jupskås (2016) noted that FrP had a similar strategy when participating in national government. It is a variant of the 'one-foot-in, one-foot-out' strategy, which has been argued to alleviate the dilemma faced by government parties that have built their voter base largely by criticizing the failure of the parties in charge to represent the interests and desires of ordinary people.

This strategy was described in the theory chapter as 'role-playing' (Albertazzi, 2009), where the roles of responsible government members and the more responsive party representatives are played by different people in the branch. Despite this tacit agreement within the party, the difference in emphasis between responsible pragmatists and more responsive ideologues generated tensions within the branch. The apotheosis of this was the 2021 internal party debates regarding the label "national conservatism." At the 2021 annual meeting of FrP's county branch in Agder (to which Grimstad belongs), a discussion unfolded regarding the following proposal made by the Lindesnes branch:

[67] Interview with FrP politician, Grimstad

Interview with FrP politician, Grimstad

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> FrP is and will continue to be a liberalist people's party that wants to preserve the constitution and the freedom of the individual and that furthers our economy through the free market.
>
> Fish, lumber, industry, oil, and shipping – our glory and power have created the nation through trade and production. This has been our nation's strength through decades of prosperity and adversity. This would not be possible if not for the fact that Norwegian conservative values have formed the basis of the decisions that have been made through the years. Our prosperity is based on these values. These basic values are unfortunately in decline in our beloved Norway. Liberalism and national conservatism can go hand in hand and make the nation stronger in an increasingly globalized world.
>
> Lindesnes FrP believes it is important that the nation's conservative values are more clearly expressed in the party's ideological foundations and principles. Being clear about putting the nation's interests first will be a strength in the future (Karlsen, 2021b).

In the Grimstad branch, opinions were split over this resolution. FrP's deputy mayor was against the motion, arguing to the local press that the phrase is associated with "protectionism, nationalism, racial discrimination, and ethnic discrimination" and that it is "as far right as can be" (ibid.). She also stated that the phrase is associated with actors the FrP does not like to be compared to, such as the Sweden Democrats. On the other hand, three of Grimstad's delegates to the meeting voted in favor of the motion despite the ostensible prior agreement that the branch would vote "no" (Ballestad, 2021). One of these politicians justified the vote by saying that he understands national conservatism as the desire to "preserve what belongs to the nation, retaining political control in Parliament, not surrendering sovereignty to all kinds of international organizations such as the UN all the time" (Karlsen, 2021b). He also denied that the term has anything to do with racism or xenophobia.

Following this rather public disagreement about the principles and direction of the party, Grimstad FrP held a special meeting of the branch's executive committee to discuss it. This meeting resulted in a vote where a clear majority of participants opposed adding "national conservativism" to FrP's mission statement (Karlsen, 2021c). The tensions related to this public disagreement came to a head at a branch meeting in May of 2021, where a physical fight broke out (Karlsen, 2021a). In the aftermath of this meeting, two councilmen (both of whom voted for the "national conservatism" resolution) resigned from the party,

both citing the way certain party colleagues had labeled them in the press as the reason for their departure (Berg, 2021).

Such internal divisions have been observed elsewhere in the literature (e.g. Downs, Manning and Engstrom, 2009; Dunphy and Bale, 2011) to be a potential consequence of government participation for radical parties. In fact, Akkerman and De Lange (2012), describe such a failure to coordinate factions within the party (pragmatists versus ideologues), as a chief determinant of performance in government for radical parties. It has been described as the cause of party splits and electoral punishment (ibid.). In this case, it seems to have suppressed the vote somewhat for FrP. FrP Grimstad did increase its vote share by 0.8 percentage points. This is not a large increase given the nationwide right-wing turn of the 2023 election. If we look at the 240 municipalities where FrP ran for election both in 2019 and 2023, FrP increased its vote share by more than 0.8 percentage points in 197 of them. This puts FrP Grimstad in the bottom 18 percent of branches in terms of electoral improvement. The internal conflict, where half the municipal council group departed during the government period, likely prevented FrP from fully capitalizing on the national "blue wave".

*The compromise mechanism*

Despite the party leadership's focus on prudent governance, Grimstad FrP differed from the mainstream in certain policy areas. A clear point of divergence between the Progress Party and the majority of the municipal council was immigration issues, specifically the annual discussion about how many refugees Grimstad should accept in the coming year. In December 2019, the Directorate of Immigration and Diversity (IMDi) requested that Grimstad receive 25 refugees over the coming year. One FrP representative proposed instead that:

- Grimstad municipal council has decided not to house any of the refugees requested by IMDi
- The municipal director is requested to investigate the long-term prospects for previously received refugees, including in the areas of integration, low income in families, childhood poverty, exclusion from the labor market, moving to other municipalities, as well as economic consequences (Grimstad Kommunestyre, 2019).

The council decided, against two votes from FrP, to accept the 25 refugees. The second bullet point in the alternative proposal received only four votes, all from the Progress Party. Similarly, in December 2020, every party except FrP voted to receive the 23 refugees

requested by IMDi, but this time, FrP did not produce an alternative proposal. In a more broadly divisive vote in June of 2020, a council member from Red gained support from all the opposition parties and the Christian Democrats (and thus a majority) for the following proposal:

> Grimstad municipal council supports the petition "Evacuate the children from Moria. NOW!" Grimstad municipality has the competency and capacity to house more refugees than what the national government has planned for, also when it comes to unaccompanied minors, and asks the government to give a positive response to the request from Greece to receive unaccompanied minors from the refugee camps (Grimstad Kommunestyre, 2020a)

In the debates leading up to this vote, the proponents argued in terms of urgent humanitarian and moral responsibility that children are "suffering right now" (V), "living in terrible conditions" (AP), and that we have a "moral responsibility to bring them home" (MDG) (Haugen, 2020). The Progress Party representatives, on the other hand, argued that this falls outside the responsibilities of a municipality and that it seemed arbitrary to prioritize this particular refugee camp. One FrP council member gave the following reply to a Green Party representative who had argued in favor of the motion:

> The term morality has been brought up, and one feels immoral. We agree on the issue: there are very many who need help. I myself rented out a house to people from Burma (sic.) who had lived in a refugee camp for 17 years. Why are you saying that we should receive those from the Moria camp? And why not 1000 or 10.000 more since we have the money for it? One should be careful with the term "morality" (ibid.).

An almost identical outcome occurred in the vote over a KrF council member's December 2021 proposal:

> Grimstad municipality asks the government to bring home the Norwegian women and their children from the camps in Syria. The children must be given the opportunity to have a safe childhood and a good education in Norway. The women must be held accountable for their actions as members of ISIS in the Norwegian court system (Grimstad Kommunestyre, 2021).

This proposal was supported by a united opposition (AP, R, SV, MDG and V), as well as KrF and one representative from Høyre.

In the annual votes over the number of refugees to receive, FrP has tended to be singularly restrictive. In more divisive votes, where it is proposed that Grimstad involves itself in the national immigration debate, FrP tends to be part of a larger minority, together

with Høyre and the Center Party. They have lost these votes due to the stance of the Christian People's Party (KrF). Given the composition of the municipal council, it has been hard for FrP to deliver restrictive policies in this area.

An exception to FrP's restrictive stance on asylum policies was, as in other FrP branches, the Ukrainian refugee crisis (see Chapter 7). In a March 2022 vote, the following proposal gained unanimous approval in the council:

> Grimstad municipality reports to the Directorate of Immigration and Diversity that the municipality has the capacity to house 150 refugees in total in 2022. Family reunification will be accepted in addition to this. Should the need arise, Grimstad can accept its relative share of the total number of refugees received by Norway.

Despite the unanimous support for this proposal, the accompanying debate revealed the division between FrP and the other parties on the issue of refugees. A representative of the Green Party made the following statement to the council:

> It is slightly sad to think that before Christmas, some representatives were standing here and arguing to receive fewer refugees. Refugees are refugees regardless of their skin color and background (Haugen, 2022a).

FrP's deputy mayor replied that:

> It is slightly sad when you see the situation that we are in to bring up policies regarding refugees from non-western countries. FrP's policy has been to help refugees in the areas near their home countries, and we are nearby [to the Ukraine] (ibid.).

In three of the five regular votes to receive the number of refugees requested by IMDi, FrP was alone in opposing the motion. One exception was, as mentioned, just after the beginning of the war in Ukraine, when a unanimous council voted to receive 150 refugees. The other exception was just a few weeks before the invasion when three representatives (two independent and one from the Center Party) voted against accepting IMDi's requested number of refugees. However, the two independents were former members of FrP who had left the party after the "national conservatism" disagreement. On the spectrum from ideologues to pragmatists, one of the interviewees described the council members that left the party as "very ideological."[69] The Progress Party's elite-level realignment can help explain the shift in voting behavior, even before the Ukraine situation.

Similarly, FrP has been outvoted on seven environmental proposals during its four years in government. These include a general declaration that "the administration should

[69] Interview with politician, FrP Grimstad

strengthen the efforts to create a municipality that emphasizes sustainability and green solutions" (Grimstad Kommunestyre, 2020a) bicycle parking at schools (ibid.), a request that the county should prioritize environmental issues (ibid.), nature preservation (Grimstad Kommunestyre, 2021), money for a bicycle and walking path (Grimstad Kommunestyre, 2022a), installing sun-cell panels above parking spaces (Grimstad Kommunestyre, 2022b), and windmills (Grimstad Kommunestyre, 2023). In all these cases, the Progress Party was in the minority, opposing environmental policies. During a discussion over whether Grimstad should declare a climate crisis, one FrP politician stated that there is no evidence for such a crisis:

> The term crisis is one we should avoid. There is no concrete evidence that there is a climate crisis in Grimstad. Declaring this is to exploit the term (Kalvehagen, 2020)

I should reiterate that neither immigration nor resistance to environmental policies were at all salient in FrP Grimstad's campaign material. For instance, the most recent reference to immigration politics I could find in FrP Grimstad's campaign material was in 2011, when the branch published a recurring ad in the local newspaper: "Five good reasons to vote FrP." One of the reasons listed was:

> We want a stricter immigration and asylum policy and to lead an integration policy that places stricter demands on those who gain residency in Norway (Grimstad FrP, 2011).

When it comes to the immigration question, one interviewee from FrP emphasized that even if they can vote over the number of refugees they receive locally, the question really becomes ideologically relevant at the national level:

> It is at the national level that they need to set the guidelines. They [the refugees] will just be placed in another municipality if we don't take them.[70]

Besides these ideological divergences from the majority, the voting record in the Grimstad municipal council shows that FrP tends to be more restrictive than other parties regarding public spending on culture and certain welfare services. In six out of the seven times FrP was outvoted on issues of cultural spending during the 2019-2023 period, it was because they did not agree with increasing public expenditure[71]. Similarly, when FrP was outvoted on matters of public spending on education, healthcare, or social security, it was most often in the

[70] Interview with politician, FrP Grimstad

[71] Excluding five instances where it was unclear whether voting yes would involve any significant public monetary investment. For example, FrP was in a minority that did not vote for a proposal to "stick to a report on cultural heritage guidelines when restoring the pier." Here, it is somewhat unclear whether sticking to this report would increase the costs of restoration.

restrictive minority. Across 45 municipal council meetings during the government period, FrP was outvoted 128 times[72] (excluding procedural votes, such as proposals to postpone an issue until the next meeting), or about three times every session on average.

The issues where FrP was on the losing side were most commonly related to public spending, either on culture, public services, or in the form of public investments and procurement of property, where FrP was usually more restrictive than the council majority. This indicates a clear difference between the left and the right in power. We can recall from Chapter 6 that a major barrier for Red in office was restrictive budgets because left-wing social policies are expensive. This is not a barrier to the same extent for FrP, because its party program calls for smaller government and less spending. When asked about tight budgetary frameworks handed down from the national government as a potential hindrance for FrP policies, one interviewee stated that:

> They have not been so tight. It has not been my experience that they have been tight. Many would like to tell you about tight budgetary frameworks, both the administration and others who can't get anything done. But we have had a surfeit in eight of the last ten years. (…). So, the budgetary frameworks are good.[73]

As we have seen in this chapter, however, FrP is limited in this regard because most other parties favor more public spending than they do.

*Summary*

In the choice between responsiveness and responsibility, responsibility has been dominant in FrP Grimstad's approach to government. This is clear from the party's rhetoric before and during government, and in the issue-emphasis of its policy output. This approach is not without risks. One Progress Party interviewee expressed concern about the degree of integration into the party system that had occurred while in power. When asked in 2022 how the relationship with other parties had changed during the period, the politician responded that:

> It has improved. Whether that is positive or negative, who knows? Did we become too similar to the others? Did it become unclear to the voters who wants what? There is a balance to be struck there. We might well have gone too far in being pragmatic. We may get a punishment from the voters due to that, who knows? But when you are in position, you are there to get things done, and then you must be pragmatic. There is

[72] I counted FrP as losing a vote if at least one FrP representative was in the voting minority.
[73] Interview with politician from FrP, Grimstad.

no way around it. You can't just scream and yell and not get anything done. That doesn't work.[74]

We do see that the Progress Party has grappled with this power dilemma and has attempted to alleviate the disadvantages of emphasizing pragmatism and responsibility in government by engaging in a division of roles. Some politicians have been tasked with representing the government and municipality, while others represented the party. This is reflected in tactical splits of FRP's votes in the municipal council, where the pragmatists voted one way, and the ideologues voted the other. However, this bifurcation of the branch has generated intra-party tensions. These were most dramatically played out after a public disagreement over the direction and ideological foundations of the party, which ended with the departure of the ideologues in the middle of the government period.

**Red in Kragerø**

Being in power in Kragerø allowed Red to pursue policy. An example the party has often pointed to is that the municipality, based on Red's proposal, spent 1.2 million kroner per year to ensure that families that receive financial assistance should not lose their child benefits[75]. The party also points to the introduction of a program to counter social dumping, putting services under the auspices of the municipality that were previously subject to tender (de-privatization), and strengthening local democracy (Scheistrøen, 2019a).

This latter policy area was highly prioritized at the beginning of the government period. In a 2015 interview (Kommunal Rapport, 2015b), Red's deputy mayor reflected on how she would preserve the ombudsman role and ensure citizen involvement in politics while in government. There, she highlighted a series of proposals, including the production of a "citizens' handbook to political influence," a 'listening bench' in a public area, where the mayor and deputy mayor would regularly sit down and talk to citizens about local politics, and open days at their offices in city hall. Elsewhere, she also emphasized broad public hearings on important issues, where more citizens would have the chance to be involved (Hagen, 2015). Trade unions were also given the right to speak and make proposals in committees (Fragell, 2016). Red's bargaining power was strengthened by what an SV interviewee dubbed 'a coalition within the coalition' between Red, SV, and the Greens,

[74] Interview with FrP politician, Grimstad.

[75] Child benefits is a sum of money paid to all parents regardless of their income. Financial assistance is a means-tested welfare benefit and ordinarily, child benefits would be deducted from the sum as a source of income.

which were closer to each other in terms of policy priorities than to AP. To be sure, there was broad agreement within the coalition on many of these policies. The influence that came with being in position had more to do with priorities and agenda-setting than convincing coalition partners to change their minds about issues.

*Pothole Mechanism*

Despite Red's substantial agenda-setting power within the coalition, there were also obstacles to its political project in local government. Firstly, there were practical limitations regarding the budget and capacities of the municipal administration. At the beginning of the government period, local newspapers noted that there was tension between the left-wing government and the municipal administration regarding budgetary matters. In November 2015, municipal director Inger Lysa presented her first municipal budget proposal for the new municipal council. To create a budget surplus, this proposal contained several cuts, for example in primary schools and health care. In reaction to this proposition, Red's deputy mayor stated that:

> This budget proposal will give us serious challenges (Fivelstad, 2015b)

When the government presented its own budget proposal in December of that year, it included a sizable reduction in the surplus, mainly due to plans for the municipality to purchase the local hospital. When she presented the majority's budget proposal, Red's deputy mayor stated:

> In 2016, there is only one important priority. There will be a massive budgetary footprint in 2016 in the form of a giant investment in Kragerø Hospital. (…). We cannot afford to buy a hospital, but nor can we afford not to (Fivelstad, 2015c).

Here, she also referenced the expectations of the voters. This prompted the municipal director to state that while she respects that it is the role of politicians to prioritize, she wants to implore the political leadership not to reduce the small surplus that she had included in her budget proposal. Several interviewees emphasized that daily meetings with the administration mitigated whatever tensions there might have been. As the Labor party interviewee phrased it:

> We had some rounds related to the municipal director, where Red was very critical of the administrative governance of the municipality. But again, since we were in government, the mayor and deputy mayor had daily meetings with the administration, so that was all settled behind closed doors. (…) But had Red not been in office, they would probably have been "at war" with the administration. This has to do with the

> fact that many responsibilities are delegated, and not everything is dealt with politically.[76]

The hospital purchase also demonstrated the difficulties of maintaining policy purity for a radical government party. Due to the cost of the hospital, the government cut its investment in affordable housing for the homeless and disadvantaged in half. This prompted sharp criticism from a representative of the Progress Party during a budget debate in the executive council:

> You take from the weakest of the weak. I am shocked by this, especially when we know the extent of the need (Fivelstad, 2015).

In the council meeting, the deputy mayor admitted that these cuts had been "very painful" but that "purchasing Kragerø Hospital is the priority, and this is the price for buying the hospital" (ibid.). This kind of prioritizing aligns well with the 'pothole theory of democracy' (Berman, 2008). Once politicians face real limitations in terms of budget size and competing policy projects, they must abandon some of their favorite policies. In the words of Downs et al. (2009):

> Those with some measure of governing responsibility will have to narrow and prioritise the agenda in order to focus on those policy priorities that have a realistic chance of being achieved (p. 158).

As I argued in previous chapters, the budgetary boundaries on policy are particularly acute for left-wing parties in government. This is because their preferred policies are generally expensive, which means that budgets are quickly depleted, and heavy prioritization is necessary. As mentioned in Chapter 7, Red has acknowledged this spending barrier in national discussions, with claims that "the parliamentary majority has put a stranglehold on the municipal budgets" and proposals for massive increases in "free funds" for municipalities (Rødt, 2017, 2018). As one interviewee from Red phrased it:

> We would of course have liked more money to implement social policies. Times were tough and we had to cut spending every year even if we did not want to. Just like every municipality in Norway.[77]

*Responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff*

A similar challenge was revealed during the discussions in February 2016 concerning the housing of refugees (Fivelstad, 2016). In addition to a number of adult refugees, the

[76] Interview with politician, AP Kragerø
[77] Interview with politician, Red Kragerø

municipality was asked by central authorities to receive five unaccompanied minors under the age of 15. According to the local administration, however, this would not be possible as it would require the establishment of a special child protection service to take care of them. The position of the government was that the municipality should accept unaccompanied minors, but only from 2017, after they had established the facilities required to care for them. This delay received criticism from a representative of the Liberal Party (V) who said that children should not spend time in refugee centers, and that if they vote to accept them right away, the facilities could be established later in the year. The deputy mayor responded that "Red wants nothing more than to accept lone refugees under the age of 15. It is hard to say no to this, but the administration tells us that they do not have the capacity to undertake such a task" (ibid.).

A further barrier to Red's to pursuit of policies in local government was the decisions made by the national government. During Red's period in local power, there was a right-wing government at the national level, which included the Conservatives and FrP, with support from the Liberals (which joined the government as a full member in 2017) and the Christian People's Party. A clear example of this becoming a barrier was the 2017 council discussions over how many refugees to accept in the coming year. In the budget for 2018, Kragerø municipality was prepared to accept 20 refugees. However, the national government only asked them to receive 10. This was part of a country-wide downscaling of the reception of refugees in smaller municipalities. According to the deputy mayor, the national government deprived people of "the act of solidarity that is helping human beings seeking refuge" (Fivelstad, 2017). In the end, the municipal council had to settle with the following resolution:

> The municipal council approves the request by the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi) to house 10 refugees in 2018. In the municipal director's budget proposal, money was set aside for the housing of 20 refugees. The municipality has the capacity and desire to house significantly more refugees than IMDI has requested, so if the situation changes in the coming year, more places are available (ibid.)

As was the case for the Progress Party, government participation brought with it expectations about how to act responsibly. In an interview with Red's party newspaper in 2020, the deputy mayor summarized her experience with budgetary work in local government:

> There is a feeling of shock when you get into position after many years in opposition. Suddenly, you do not have the freedom to be the person who criticizes and rants about everything. You are held responsible for many things that you do not fully support

> yourself. However, I do think this is an important part of becoming a clear and real alternative. This is important practice for us (Baltzersen, 2020).

Moreover, several informants agreed that pressure had been applied to Red within the coalition to avoid rhetoric that was considered "too radical."[78] This understanding of prudent behavior in government exists in a tension with fears that the party would lose its identity should it become too like the others.

*The compromise mechanism*

The compromise mechanism, mostly in relation to the Labor Party, further limited Red's political project. Both in my interviews and in the local newspaper, trade and industrial policy was mentioned as a particular point of disagreement between Red and Labor. In the summer of 2019, just before the election, Labor's Mayor had expressed to the local newspaper that he could not promise a continued collaboration with the left-wing parties after the election, largely due to disagreements in this policy area. Labor's position was that the government should induce enterprise and stimulate the local economy:

> Now, we have to prioritize trade and industrial policy. Only more jobs and increased tax revenue can lay the foundations for the services the municipality will provide (Fivelstad, 2019).

This became a challenge, especially towards the end of the government period. While the beginning of the period was characterized by broad agreement within the coalition on issues like the procurement of the hospital, de-privatizing cleaning jobs, and various social policies, the end of the period saw strong disagreements, for instance, on zoning and construction issues, especially on the seafront.

In November 2018, for example, when the executive council voted on whether to enter a rental agreement for the new administration offices with a major real estate developer (Fredensborg), a Red representative asked:

> Does Fredensborg have enough integrity to be our partner in this? (Fivelstad, 2018)

She cited instances in Oslo, where the company had allegedly skirted the rules. Several politicians, including the mayor, expressed strong disagreement with this statement. In the end, two representatives voted against the motion, both from Red.

*Mitigation strategies*

[78] Interviews with politicians, Red, AP Kragerø

In Kragerø, as elsewhere, there was a high awareness among Red's politicians of the potential pitfalls of government participation. Firstly, there was some concern that conforming to the government role would entail a loss of identity and make the party less distinct from the mainstream. According to one Red politician, this resulted in a division of roles between those who were supposed to represent the radical issues or grassroots to a greater extent and those who were supposed to be responsible government members. We recognize this strategy from the Progress Party's efforts in Grimstad. In Kragerø, this division of roles and broad representation in government helped Red mitigate the situation where daily governance tasks might have prevented dedication to the radical left project. As one interviewee phrased it:

> we had such a good level of representation in the political system: we had leaders of municipal committees, we had three members of the executive council, and we had six members of the municipal council. Our structure – people in all these committees – made it so that the political job got done anyway, even if [the deputy mayor] got busy with boring administrative tasks. The political tempo in the organization was still there.[79]

The impact of the compromise mechanism was mitigated by two factors. Firstly, many of the strongest disagreements were discussed and resolved before the parties entered government. This was arguably the point in time when Red had the largest bargaining power. Being the second largest party in the city and rather less office-oriented than the Labor Party, Red had a strong exit opportunity prior to government formation. The costs of exit, in terms of reputation, both in the eyes of voters and in the view of other parties, as well as a loss of influence, increased substantially once the government was formed. This meant that many of Red's preferred policies were contained within the initial coalition agreement, which contained 37 policy items. This is further evidenced by the fact that the strongest disagreements occurred on issues not covered by the coalition agreement and only after the policy items in the agreement were implemented. As one Red interviewee phrased it:

> Once we had completed the policy items in the plan, we sat there and did not have a proper direction for the last years in government (…). I feel that a main conclusion of our local branch was that we should have sat down again, together with the unions, and made a new policy plan for the municipality.[80]

It is doubtful, however, that Red would have gained the same level of influence over a policy platform negotiated in the middle of the government period. The standing of the initial

[79] Interview with politician, Red Kragerø
[80] Interview with politician, Red Kragerø

coalition agreement was strengthened further by the fact that the local trade unions had been heavily involved in orchestrating it while the parties were still in opposition (LO-Aktuelt, 2015). Having a highly regarded third party invested in the agreement increased the cost of diverging from it.

A second mitigating factor relating to Red's ability to 'retain its integrity' in government concerns how the coalition parties dealt with unbridgeable policy gaps. As indicated in previous chapters, the coalition parties in Kragerø sometimes decided to 'agree to disagree.' A Labor Party politician explained that part of the coalition's success was due to how they handled disagreements. As he explained:

> We did not put difficult issues aside. Of course, we were not fortune tellers, so we could not clarify everything in advance. But when difficult issues arose, we had joint meetings among all the coalition parties. There, things could get heated. But we took these cases seriously and came to an agreement on most issues. Where we couldn't agree, we agreed on how to handle the disagreement in public. Our priority, as the largest party, was that we could build a majority around the issue in the council and that Red accepted this as long as they could express their disagreement.

This is mirrored in a statement by Red's deputy mayor in the party newspaper just after entering government:

> We have talked through a lot of policies while constructing the collaboration agreement, and on some points, we have agreed to disagree. It is not a breach of the coalition agreement to vote differently on certain single issues. I think that is a good starting point. We do not have to start off by accepting a lot of big concessions. We need to retain our integrity as well (Hagen, 2015).

These two factors, a policy platform constructed at the peak of Red's bargaining power and the opportunity for Red to vote differently on issues of strong disagreement, were instrumental in avoiding the trap of being overshadowed by a larger coalition partner and, therefore, losing voters. The former factor helped to maximize Red's policy impact, and the latter limited the loss of reputation from large concessions in a coalition.

*Lasting changes?*

At least from the Labor Party's perspective, Red's government experiences produced lasting changes in Red's reputation, positions, and behavior. A Labor interviewee informed me that after the period in government:

> Red is still confrontational [as an opposition party], but not in the same way as before their years in government (…). I think it has to do with the years in government because they can better understand the difficulties involved in governing in a coalition. I interpret this as a greater understanding of the fact that things are not always so straightforward and that those who govern have to make their own compromises. (…). Previously, Red would propose 'demonstrative budgets.' They proposed budgets with a deficit. That was something they could not do while in government, and nor do they do it now.[81]

Red's position within the party system has remained strong since 2019. In the election of 2023, Red's top candidate (the former deputy mayor) was the main mayoral candidate of the left, supported by the Socialist Left Party, Labor, and the Greens. In the coalition negotiations after the election, the Labor Party even turned down a coalition offer from the centrist parties and an offer of the Mayor position, stating that they "support [Red's mayoral candidate] Therkelsen" (Nilssen, 2023a). In the end, a defector from the Conservative Party ensured a majority for the left-wing coalition, which installed Therkelsen as the mayor of Kragerø.

*Summary*

Most of the mechanisms theorized to induce moderation in government are present in the case of Red in Kragerø. Red's policy preferences were tempered by practical constraints (budgets, administrative capacities, etc.), policies handed down from the national level, expectations of responsible behavior in government, a motivation to improve one's reputation as a viable government party, and by the demands of coalition partners. The latter mechanism was something Red was conscious of and managed to mitigate through a detailed coalition agreement negotiated at the point in time when Red had the highest bargaining power and a negotiated space for Red to disagree with Labor on certain issues where they could not come to an agreement.

As we saw in the case of FrP in Grimstad, Red in Kragerø had to grapple with the dilemma between coalition cohesion and responsibility in government on the one hand and radical commitment and responsiveness to voters on the other. Besides 'agreeing to disagree,' Red also engaged in 'role-playing,' where the deputy mayor emphasized responsibility and cohesion while other politicians represented the grassroots. However, unlike FrP in Grimstad,

[81] Interview with politician, AP Kragerø

Red did not see any strong internal conflict between pragmatists and ideologues within the branch.

## SD in Staffanstorp

*(Absence of) The compromise mechanism*

One might expect that the alliance between SD, at 11 percent of the vote, and the much more experienced Moderates, at 43 percent, might result in large policy concessions on the part of SD. However, as was emphasized in the chapter on SD's road to power in Staffanstorp, M and SD had very similar local policy programs. In a radio program, Richard Olsson, SD's local leader in Staffanstorp explained that:

> The campaign material from the Moderates was very close to our positions. More or less everything that was in our election manifesto has been implemented during this government period ('Kommuntopparna som trotsade partilinjen och bjöd in SD i värmen', 2022).

When asked whether SD had to go along with many policies that they opposed, he replied that this had not happened and that "the Moderates and Sweden Democrats in Staffanstorp have basically the same positions" (ibid.). Elsewhere, Olsson estimated that the share of issues that the parties agreed on was 90-95 percent (Eriksson and Olofsson, 2018). Similarly, Christian Sonesson, M's mayor in Staffanstorp, repeatedly stated that SD and M are "very close" politically (Ridderstolpe, 2018; Nilsson, 2020). In a radio interview in 2019, he expanded on this statement:

> I justify that based on the contents of our policy programs, based on how they [SD] have voted in the council, and based on my conversations with the Sweden Democrats, where I have found that it is very easy for us to agree on economic policy, migration policy … there have been very few conflict areas ('Moderaten Christian Sonesson, Staffanstorp väljer SD', 2019).

As the two parties announced the coalition to the press, Sonesson and Olsson issued the following statement explaining how the two parties had found common ground:

> In the past four years, the similarities between these two parties have become clear in votes in the municipal council. Therefore, a joint political action program has been

developed, which will form the basis for the political direction of the upcoming government period (Carlsson, 2018)

Sonesson later claimed that the job of putting together a shared policy plan had been easy (Svensson, 2019b). This was echoed by the former chairman of SD in Staffanstorp, Jonny Rolf, who said that the two parties have "a common view on most issues" (Aftonbladet, 2018b), as well as in my interviews (see the section on SD in Staffanstorp in Chapter 6). In my conversations with local politicians, two separate informants stated that the interview would probably be "a bit boring" since there had been so little disagreement and conflict within the coalition[82]. The parties also emphasized the same issues and had very similar positions in their answers to the 2018 election compass, referenced in previous chapters.

This degree of policy proximity meant that SD did not need much bargaining power to secure approval for its preferred policies in negotiations with M. However, as Bonnie Meguid (2005) points out, accommodating an inexperienced niche party by copying its policy positions may undermine the challenger's electoral potential. Voters who are concerned with "SD issues" like immigration/integration and law and order now have a choice between two parties. According to Meguid, the more established party will often have an advantage in this competition due to its greater legislative experience, proven governmental effectiveness, voter access, and material resources. Given such a situation, voters who perceive the two parties as equal in terms of their program will prefer the stronger, more experienced party over the challenger. This seems to be what happened in Staffanstorp. 23.1 percent of the voters in the municipality voted for SD in the parliamentary elections, while only 11.1 percent voted for SD in the local elections. Most of these ticket splitters voted for M locally (Lärka, 2018).

Due to the level of agreement and the fact that the coalition had a majority in the council, we see *an almost complete absence of the compromise mechanism*. In short, the government vigorously pursued SD's preferred policies. The Staffanstorp Moderates, particularly the mayor, were strongly outspoken on refugee policy and law and order. The policy program published by the two parties at the beginning of the government period is a testament to this. This document attracted national media attention due to several symbolic and concrete policies consistent with a far-right profile. These include an intention to prohibit separate bath times for men and women in municipal swimming pools and to ban "ritually slaughtered meat" (e.g., halal or kosher) and begging. It also contained plans to introduce an

[82] Interviews with two politicians, SD Staffanstorp

“integration requirement” for recently arrived immigrants, to abolish or reform the “allocation law,” which requires Swedish municipalities to accept the refugees allotted to them by the central government, to increase police presence, and install surveillance cameras in vulnerable areas (Andersson, 2018; Nilsson, 2020). Beyond a focus on immigration and law and order, the program contains classic right-wing issues, such as low taxation, individual economic responsibility, and measures to ensure the self-sufficiency of those who receive public economic assistance.

This emphasis on SD’s core issues was maintained throughout the government period, also on the part of the Moderates. Already prior to the 2018 election, Christian Sonesson got a lot of media attention due to controversial policy positions. For instance, he was criticized for engaging in right-wing “symbolic politics” when he called for a ban on Islamic prayer calls, despite there being no mosques in Staffanstorp (Magnusson, 2018), and for housing refugees in trailers on camping grounds (Strömberg, 2018). He was also criticized by the national leader of the Green Party (MP), who was at that time Minister of Education for describing gender pedagogy in schools as "the left's fluffy project" (Hangasmaa, 2018). In 2019, the Staffanstorp government got attention for its proposal to deny assistance and subsistence support to returning foreign fighters from ISIS. This proposal was criticized as populist symbolic politics, given that Staffanstorp had no known cases of ISIS foreign fighters and that the proposal was likely in conflict with national laws, making it invalid (Perlenberg, 2019b). In the same year, the M-SD government included a ban on “religious veils” (e.g., hijabs) in primary schools and preschools in their integration plan for the municipality (Adelgren, 2019).

In 2022, Sonesson was widely criticized for his decision to outright refuse the four refugees allotted to Staffanstorp by the central migration authorities. In that instance, he told the press that these four refugees are not welcome no matter what laws are passed (Persson, 2022). This also squares with Sonesson’s repeated calls over several years for a complete halt to refugees coming to Sweden (Norström, 2019). As discussed in previous chapters, the Ukraine war seems to be an exception to the anti-refugee position. In fact, Sonesson wrote an opinion piece in a national newspaper, together with SD’s mayor in Sölvesborg, about why Ukrainian refugees are not like other refugees (Sonesson and Erixon, 2022). Their core argument is that Ukraine is in Sweden’s immediate vicinity and that integration into Swedish society is easier for these refugees than for those who come from outside Europe.

*Responsiveness-responsibility: external moderators*

Despite the degree of ideological agreement and the local coalition's vigorous pursuit of SD policies, there were clear barriers to their local political project. The first challenge concerns the attitudes and demands of municipal employees and the administration. For instance, when the government introduced municipal security guards to support the police, a key item in the coalition's plan to increase the sense of safety in the municipality, the police refused. They stated that the need for these additional guards is not supported by the crime statistics. Sonesson responded to this in a radio interview in 2019:

> We don't share the view of the local police that there is no need for security guards. (…). There are too few police officers in Staffanstorp. (…). We have said that we will make resources available. (…) As a member of the police force, I would be grateful and accept these resources without hesitation. Instead, we see the police trying to argue about this and making descriptions that the citizens of Staffanstorp don't recognize. Why? ('Moderaten Christian Sonesson, Staffanstorp väljer SD', 2019)

Similarly, the Academics Union, which includes many members of the local administration, reacted strongly to the local government's decision to stop receiving quota refugees (those resettled by the UNHCR) in 2022. According to the chief lawyer for the union, this refusal was tantamount to encouraging civil servants to defy the law. In an interview with the union's member's magazine, he stated:

> If our members are expected to implement decisions that violate the law, an uncertainty will arise. An unpleasant conflict, where employers say one thing and the law says another. This can affect the health of the civil servants and cause stress, as they do not know how to act. In the longer term, we also believe that Staffanstorp can have difficulties attracting well educated and competent employees. If you have problems providing competent staff, it will affect the organization negatively (S. Karlsson, 2022b).

This resulted in negotiations between the union and the municipal government (S. Karlsson, 2022a), where the union proclaimed that the local government should have told employees not to implement the decision. Similar discussions with the union occurred in 2019 when the local government decided that the social welfare officers of the municipality should refuse economic support to returning ISIS terrorists. According to the union's attorney:

> This raised a lot of questions. How was a social worker supposed to know who was a returning ISIS terrorist? It is not the job of the welfare service to investigate such questions. Furthermore, you cannot simply single out individuals and refuse them

> municipal service on such grounds. That is also a kind of encouragement to defy the law (S. Karlsson, 2022b).

These disagreements are similar to (though less pronounced than) the one described in Chapter 7 in Hörby. Civil Servants experience conflict between what they are asked to do and what they consider their professional duty. Related to this, a further barrier to these policies is national laws, policies, and civil rights. For example, the main objection to Staffanstorp's refusal of refugees was that it violated the 2016 allocation law, which states that municipalities cannot refuse refugees allotted to them by the national migration authorities. Two SD interviewees mentioned national policies in general and this law specifically as a barrier to SD's political project at the local level. As one informant phrased it:

> The problem is that they make laws in parliament that affect the local level. Local self-governance is gone in certain areas. Above all, this allocation issue: How many [refugees] we can safely receive. They don't really look at the municipality's capacity regarding housing and so on. (…) That is probably the most frustrating part for us. That they have taken away the local self-governance.[83]

Another interviewee similarly emphasized that it was parliament and not local parties that prevented SD from realizing their preferred policies in government:

> There was the migration policy: in 2015 [sic], they limited municipalities' right to govern themselves in this area. So, that was a clear limitation. The limitations did not come from the collaboration partners but rather from the national government. We basically wanted to terminate the agreement with the Migration Administration, but that was deemed illegal.[84]

Staffanstorp's decision to defy the law generated controversy within the Moderate Party. M's mayor in nearby Vellinge described the decision as "pathetic," and the party's national spokesperson in matters of migration and social security stated that despite the Moderates' call for a halt to refugees, "the existing rules should be followed" (Lindbäck, 2022). Staffanstorp was also brought up several times in the Swedish Parliament as an example of a municipality that does not do its fair share when it comes to refugee policy[85].

Similarly, it was argued that by law, the municipality could not simply refuse welfare services to inhabitants, even if they were suspected ISIS terrorists. Moderate politicians from

[83] Interview with politician, SD Staffanstorp
[84] Interview with politician, SD Staffanstorp
[85] Specifically, it was mentioned by Emma Hult of the Green Party, twice by Rikard Larsson of the Social Democrats, and once by Morgan Johansson of the Social Democrats.

other municipalities, and even the national leadership, stated sympathy for Sonesson and the Staffanstorp government's position but said that until the law is changed, municipal politicians should follow the rules (Larsson, 2019). Ulf Kristersson, the national leader of the Moderates, stated that:

> The law applies to everyone; there is no specific legislation just for Staffanstorp (Ibid.)

The municipal ban on begging was also hindered by uncertainty surrounding the ban's legality. In fact, Staffanstorp refrained from enacting it until a court had decided on its lawfulness in another municipality. The lower Administrative Courts stopped a similar ban in Vellinge municipality in 2017, and the municipality pursued a protracted appeals process. When the highest Administrative Court upheld Vellinge's right to ban begging in 2019, Staffanstorp was the first municipality in Sweden to emulate it by passing an identical ban (Carlson, 2019).

The clearest example of national laws as a policy barrier was probably the attempt to ban religious headscarves (hijabs) in schools. According to Sweden's highest Administrative Court, municipalities have no legal basis to ban headscarves or similar garments in local preschools and primary schools (Fridh, 2022). The court stated that clothing expressing religious affiliation is protected by the constitution's paragraph on freedom of religion as well as the European Convention. This court decision nullified the municipality's ban.

*Reputation building*

SD's reputation as an "extreme" or "unacceptable" party was a major barrier to full integration into the party system. Given SD's exceptionally negative image among other parties as it entered the political scene in Staffanstorp, reputation building could be achieved by participating in normal political activities. This was elaborated in the chapter on Staffanstorp SD's road to power. SD's reputation seems to have changed largely due to the dissonance between their initial image and how they acted in local politics. As one interviewee explained:

> [Our relationship with other parties] has changed. Now, we are accepted by the other parties in the municipality. I mean, we are regular people. We act based on common sense.[86]

[86] Interview with politician, SD staffanstorp

The first task in reputation building was convincing the other parties that SD consisted of "ordinary people" and that they were not these "thugs with iron pipes," as one interviewee phrased it[87]. Beyond this, intentional effort was put into improving the party's reputation through training programs. In early 2019, an article by the activist group Expo revealed that the local chairman of Staffanstorp SD, Jonny Rolf, had been in contact with the Soldiers of Odin (Leman and Vergara, 2018). This is a vigilante group with chapters in the Nordic countries, which described itself as "a patriotic street patrol organization, which opposes harmful immigration, Islamization, EU and globalization" (Bjørgo and Mareš, 2019, p. 24). This disclosure led to an internal investigation within Staffanstorp SD. Richard Olsson, the deputy chairman at the time, later stated to the media that:

> We take the criticism seriously. The board has had internal discussions with Jonny Rolf and received credible explanations for these comments and memberships that are several years old (cited in Dalsbro, 2019).

In a newspaper interview, Olsson also emphasized that the party's representatives receive continuous training, including guidance on how to behave on social media:

> Our candidates should be role models on the internet, and there is systematic training to ensure this. Prior to the 2018 election, the Sweden Democrats trained its candidates according to the communication plan, which includes a significant portion on online conduct. Jonny Rolf underwent this training last summer (cited in Dalsbro, 2019).

The internal investigation and the social media training signals that the party wants to curate a professional image. Newspaper accounts show that SD quite frequently excludes local members for criminal or scandalous behavior, infighting, strategic differences, and especially for racism or extremism. Over the last decade, SD has had a self-declared zero tolerance for racism and extremism, and according to the party, cleaning up the ranks is a "high priority" (Heimersson, 2021). A prominent example occurred in 2023 when twelve local SD politicians in Klippan municipality were excluded from the party after two former nazis were voted into positions of responsibility by the branch (Gravlund, 2023).

There are signs that SD has achieved a certain level of acceptance in Staffanstorp, beyond the Moderates. In a 2019 interview, Pierre Sjöström, leader of the Staffanstorp Social Democrats, explained that the notion of a socially excluded SD in Staffanstorp was greatly exaggerated:

[87] Interview with politician, SD Staffanstorp

> We both talk and visit each other. We behave like people. They are happy to give the impression that they are treated like pariahs, but that's not the case. We talk to them. But we don't see that we get anything in return. They don't support us in any way, especially now that they have joined a coalition with the Moderates (Svensson, 2019b).

A second aspect of this reputation was SD's status as inexperienced or untested in local government. This aspect is obviously somewhat impacted by a period in government. However, SD's junior status in relation to the Moderates meant that SD had less opportunity to take credit for perceived instances of good governance. Moreover, Sonesson and the Staffanstorp Moderates' willingness to work against national rules and policies they disagreed with meant that the government was not chiefly perceived as "prudent" or "responsible" by the media or opposition. However, as Richard Olsson, SD's leader in Staffanstorp, said towards the end of the government period, governments like these may well have an impact on the possibilities of building coalitions with SD elsewhere:

> I think there were many that did not know exactly where we stood at the local level. And now they clearly know, to a greater extent, that a collaboration can work ('Stor skillnad på synen att bilda majoritet med SD i skånska kommuner', 2022).

Finally, SD has a reputation with its coalition partner. At the beginning of the government period, SD was perceived as the most viable option for the Moderates, despite what such a coalition would mean in terms of criticism and nationwide attention. Beyond the policy proximity between the parties, a chief reason for this was the perception that SD would be an easy coalition partner that would not turn against the government, push for difficult compromises, or air out the coalition's dirty laundry (disagreements, internal discussions etc.) in public. In the words of one interviewee from the Moderates "SD was a comfortable choice" due to its compliant behavior in the municipal council[88]. SD has done little to damage or change this reputation. The 2022 election had very similar results to the one in 2018, and the two parties decided to continue their collaboration. In his announcement of the 2022-2026 government, Sonesson wrote:

> The relationship between the Moderates and the Sweden Democrats is the best. Our collaboration is based on trust and shared political views (Lennartsson, 2022)

*Summary*

[88] Interview with politician, M Staffanstorp

The policy proximity between SD and M in Staffanstorp has meant a virtual absence of the compromise mechanism, which has been a central barrier to policy maximization for the other cases in this chapter. SD's local political project has been constrained in other ways, however. One key barrier was national policies and laws. This put real limitations on the local government's attempt to ban hijabs in schools, refuse refugees allocated by the central migration authorities, and deny welfare services to returning ISIS foreign fighters. This particular constraint was sometimes manifested as resistance by administrators to implement policies that lacked or had dubious legal status. Additionally, SD has placed constraints on the behavior of its politicians in pursuit of a more professional image and reputation.

**V in Mörbylånga**

*The compromise mechanism: Low bargaining power*

The first point to make regarding V's experience in government is that they were in an exceptionally weak bargaining position. There are many reasons for this. Firstly, they had significantly fewer seats in the municipal council than their coalition partners. After the 2018 election, V had 2 seats (4.44%), while C had 9 seats (20%), and S had 13 seats (28.9%). V's votes were necessary to build a majority, but as the interviews revealed, the distribution of positions of authority and direct policy influence just after the election were very much determined by this imbalance. The Left Party functioned as a support party for the government for the first few years and gradually grew more integrated into the coalition. The second reason is that the Left Party, as the party furthest to the left, had no real alternatives in terms of coalition partners beyond C and S and a very strong preference for left-wing governments over right-wing governments. Whatever ambivalence V might have had about the other government parties was, therefore, far outweighed by their distaste for right-wing governments. Although the Social Democrats and Center Party relied on V for a majority, V could nevertheless be counted on to keep the government in power because any viable alternative government was considered much worse. They were, in short, what Bale and Bergman (2006) describe as a "captive party." A Social Democratic politician summed up V's dilemma thus:

> In most cases, they have had to consider the following: "What is the alternative if we do not agree to this? That the Moderates should be in charge? Well, we don't want that."

> And then they voted for the budget proposal even if there were parts of it that they did not like very much.[89]

The attitudes of other parties to V as a potential coalition party deepened its captive position. In the 2018 election compass, the Moderates, the Liberals, and the Christian Democrats all mentioned the Left Party as a party they would not like to govern with after the election. The Sweden Democrats did not mention the Left Party, but V mentioned SD. S and C were, therefore, the only two local mainstream parties that had not excluded V on principle prior to the election (SVT, 2018).

On the other hand, V was (increasingly) included throughout the government period and given a measure of policy influence. We may ask why S and C would do this if they were in the privileged position of relying on a captive party with no plausible alternatives in terms of collaboration. As Bale and Bergman (2006) point out, relying on the support of a party that is not fully a member of the opposition means imperiling the government's policy agenda, as well as higher transaction costs due to the need to continuously "negotiate support on an issue-by-issue basis" (p. 439). V's bargaining chip was long-term, reliable support for the government's policies. In exchange for this, they received a measure of insider status (participation in joint group meetings) and some policy influence, especially in the budget negotiations. As explained in Chapter 6, the fact that Mörbylånga had never had a left-wing government further amplified the compromise effect. An interviewee from S noted V's lack of policy demands during the government formation process and attributed it to the desire for a change in government:

> The Left Party did not have any issues that they demanded. The person who was group leader for the Left Party at that time was just happy that the Social Democrats got into power, and that we brought the Center Party in from the other side. C did not have to join the coalition. They had a [possible] coalition with their old "friends". There really were no issues that the Left Party demanded initially[90].

This quote also shows the relative strength of C's bargaining position as compared to V's. Besides having a larger share of the council seats, the Center Party had very plausible alternative coalition opportunities on the right. In short, C was the pivotal party in the coalition. It could choose between more than one coalition and hence had a large degree of bargaining power. C could, therefore, make large demands in terms of positions in the government as well as policy, while V could not. Getting the Moderates out of power and

[89] Interview with politician, S Mörbylånga
[90] Interview with politician, S Mörbylånga

installing a more left-wing government was considered such an improvement on the current situation that there were no discussions within V over whether to support it. As one V-member phrased it:

> There were no opposing views within the party about how to approach the government question. The goal in 2018 was to remove the Moderates from government. There have been no disagreements about this within the party.[91]

Finally, C was reportedly skeptical about V's participation in the coalition. The interviewee from S told me that the Center Party was initially "very clear that they did not want the Left Party as a formal member of the government.[92]" However, this had more to do with fundamental ideological questions that mostly play out at the national level. A V-member attributed this skepticism partly to a "fear of communism," especially among the older C-members[93]. This, in combination with the asymmetric distribution of bargaining power between the two parties, meant that V was, to an extent, marginalized within the coalition.

There were several facets to this. Firstly, their lack of positions within the government has been a barrier to them, not least in terms of timely access to information. An S-politician explained that:

> They are not in charge of any committees. That means that they are not part of our majority meetings where we discuss long-term and strategic issues. They are part of the joint group meetings. Otherwise, they will receive information when they ask for it. We do not have a good platform where they get information in real-time. That means that sometimes when they come with opinions or demands, the rest of us give them the full context, and they reconsider their request.

*Responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff: internal moderators*

This lack of influence played out in interaction with a fairly strict set of expectations regarding V's behavior and role as a responsible government member, and resulted in the Left Party lacking visibility among voters. Despite V's initially loose attachment to the government, they were expected to refrain from certain activities that had characterized their time in opposition. An S-politician explained that they had "a fair few conversations" about what it entails to be part of a governing majority:

[91] Interview with politician, V Mörbylånga
[92] Interview with politician, S Mörbylånga
[93] Interview with politician, V Mörbylånga

> Even if we were all very happy from the beginning, they wanted, after a while, to make individual proposals for the municipal council and make their own formal proposals in budgetary matters and so on. Then, we had to have some conversations where we made it clear that this was not a way we could do things.

A V politician described the Left Party's behavior in opposition as "very active."[94] We can note that V made 15 independent proposals to the council in the 2014-2018 government period (V Mörbylånga, 2021). If we look at the election year 2018 (until the change in government in November), the council protocols show that V had six proposals addressed by the council that year, while the Social Democrats had eight. V must be described as comparatively active, considering that S was the largest opposition party and 7.5 times bigger than V. After joining the coalition it was no longer considered appropriate for V to make independent proposals. Disagreements were exclusively to be aired in meetings between the coalition parties, which became a challenge for a party that was used to anchoring its political influence and voter appeal in public attention surrounding their local proposals. As the same V politician phrased it:

> I think the other parties considered us rather difficult [prior to government participation]. Now, we have probably been less visible to the voters. Now, everything happens in the group meetings, within the government. That is where we debate things. Unfortunately, too little goes on in public. I think that is a dilemma.[95]

A local Social Democrat shared this impression, stating that:

> I would not say that they [V] are very prominent in the local media, or that even most people really know who they are. [96]

V's falling in line is further evidenced by the voting record in the municipal council. Between September 2020 and September 2023 (the years for which the protocols are openly available online), V's representatives voted in line with the government in every vote in the municipal council. However, I should note that before the government formation, V voted in line with S in most cases. In the council protocols between 2016 and 2018, I found only three instances where the two parties voted differently. C, on the other hand, voted differently from S and V in most instances.

All this may explain why V in Mörbylånga, unlike SD in Staffanstorp, became more positive to referendums between 2018 and 2022 (the only changed response among the five

[94] Interview with politician, V Mörbylånga
[95] Interview with politician, V Mörbylånga
[96] Interview with politician, S Mörbylånga

questions repeated between surveys). In 2018, V replied in the election compass that more local referendums were "a fairly bad proposal," while in 2022, they replied that it was "a fairly good proposal," commenting that "(w)e believe that a strong democracy is of the utmost importance, and when it comes to significant issues that require broad consensus, referendums are a good way to achieve this" (SVT, 2022b). As argued by Gilljam and Karlsson (2015) the mechanism driving the government-opposition gap in support for direct democracy is likely self-interest. Those who have a lot of influence within the institutions of representative democracy are less in favor of direct democracy simply because political activity outside those institutions is not in their interest. V in Mörbylånga did not experience this effect due to their undersized influence in government. In fact, referendums seemed more attractive as a political tool after a period as a "captive" party. Regarding policy positions, we see little change for Mörbylånga V over time. The 2018 local election manifesto was nearly identical to the one in 2022[97].

*(Absence of) mitigation strategies*

From a policy-, office-, or vote-seeking perspective, it may seem irrational for V to accept this limited role. On matters where V disagreed with the rest of the government, they had little influence. Furthermore, it was included in a very limited way when it came to the distribution of positions. It was also much less visible to the voters after gaining office, lacking the means to distinguish themselves properly from the other government parties. Why not simply pull out of this coalition? A common justification when V has left local coalitions with the Social Democrats is lack of participation and influence. In a previous chapter, I described how V did not want to continue collaborating with S in Gothenburg after S requested that V vote for their budget without any negotiation (Andersson, 2019). Similarly, lack of influence and participation was mentioned to the media as reasons when V left S-led governments in Surahammar in 2011 (Johansson, 2011), Malmö in 2015 (Lennartsson, 2015), Uppvidinge in 2020 (Nyström, 2020), and Gällivare in 2022 (K. Karlsson, 2022).

However, despite the seemingly low degree of policy influence, we can argue that V in Mörbylånga has prioritized policy over office and votes by joining the coalition. This is not mainly in the sense of direct and continuous policy influence but rather in terms of deciding the overall direction of the municipality by supporting a left-wing over a right-wing

[97] Four concrete policy proposals were removed, including digital literacy classes for the elderly, building a world heritage museum, moving a leisure center, and banning pesticides that are negatively impacting the local bee population. In return, two proposals were added: free school meals and investments in solar power.

government. This motivation was seemingly amplified by the fact that a left-wing coalition had never previously ruled the municipality. Moreover, we may argue that V in Mörbylånga has behaved in an office-seeking manner in the longer term by building bridges for future coalition formation. As already stated, a key obstacle to V's formal inclusion in government was their poor reputation among the members of the Center Party. However, V's time as a passive, minor government party seems to have, at least in part, removed this particular barrier. As one V politician stated:

> I think we have strengthened our position for the future. We have shown that we are prepared to take responsibility for the budget and for the large questions. I think that the collaboration continues to work well.

We could also ask why V in Mörbylånga did not, like Red in Kragerø, employ any strategies to mitigate the costs of governing, in terms of visibility, policy purity, and responsiveness to voters. A plausible answer is that V simply lacked the kind of organizational strength and broad representation in government that facilitated such tactics in Red's case. It did not have the bargaining power to demand an 'agreement to disagree,' nor enough people in various committees to pursue a role-playing strategy. Moreover, V in Mörbylånga did not have the same consciousness around the pitfalls of governing as Red had in Kragerø when forming their coalition.

*Summary*

Of all the case studies in this chapter, V in Mörbylånga has had the least opportunity to pursue policy. This is due to its weak bargaining position in relation to S and C. V was smaller electorally, highly motivated to support the first left-led government in the municipality, strongly opposed to the notion of a right-wing government, and without viable alternative coalition partners. Moreover, there have been fairly strict limitations on V's opportunity to act independently outside the government. This has resulted in decreased visibility to voters, a low degree of direct policy influence, and low representation in terms of seats on committees. In Sheri Berman's (2008) phrase, this is an instance of political context trumping radical nature. The way the incentives and opportunity structure were set up in this case meant that the Left Party was, more than any of the other cases examined here, 'tamed' in government.

### A reassessment of the mechanisms

This chapter has investigated how the various mechanisms described in the theory chapter relate to mainstreaming in four municipalities. We see variation between the four cases both in terms of the degree of moderation and which mechanisms have been important. The cases also show the scope conditions that amplify or muffle the effects of each mechanism. Moreover, the chapter has looked at mitigation strategies employed by the parties to avoid the pitfalls of government participation. Table 9.1 summarizes the key mechanisms, mitigation strategies, and muffling and amplifying scope conditions of each case.

**Table 9.1:** Key Findings

| | FrP | R | SD | V |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Key moderating mechanisms | Anticipatory moderation.<br><br>Compromise.<br><br>Responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff (external pressure).<br><br>Local reputation-building. | Anticipatory moderation.<br><br>Compromise.<br><br>Responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff (internal and external pressure).<br><br>Pothole mechanism.<br><br>Local and national reputation-building. | Responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff (external pressure).<br><br>Local reputation building. | Compromise.<br><br>Responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff (internal pressure). |
| Mitigation strategies | Role-playing | Role-playing.<br><br>Agree to disagree | | |
| Amplifying scope conditions | Pragmatic leadership | Pragmatic leadership.<br><br>Expensive policy preferences | Policy preferences violate national rules | Low bargaining power |
| Muffling scope conditions | | High bargaining power | Radical and powerful coalition partner | |

Firstly, as we saw in Chapter 6, the anticipatory bridging of the policy gap was important in the two Norwegian cases and happened partly through alliance-building while the parties were still in opposition. An important precondition for such pre-governmental alliance building was pragmatic leadership on the part of the challenger party, with clear goals of joining a coalition given the right conditions. In Red's case, the pre-governmental alliance was further supported by trade unions working as an external facilitator. In Staffanstorp, the

policy gap was bridged, not through the strategic efforts of SD, but by the Moderates who coopted SD's policy program. In other words, moderation was not a condition for SD's inclusion in government in Staffanstorp. In Mörbylånga, pre-governmental moderation was unnecessary, given the party's low bargaining power. S and C did not fear that including V would involve unacceptable policy concessions.

The reputation-building mechanism is evident in SD's case. The party's lack of credibility as a legitimate political actor in Sweden has prompted it to pursue a more professional image through training programs and oversight of members' behavior. However, due to SD's status as a junior partner to a strong branch of the Moderates, the Staffanstorp coalition was not an ideal opportunity to showcase its competence as a governing party beyond the municipality's borders. As we shall see in Chapter 10, other local SD governments figured more prominently as 'display windows' for SD. Toeing the line in relation to its coalition partner did, however, seem to be impactful for SD's future participation in Staffanstorp. Red, which also has a very limited number of experiences in local government, viewed the Kragerø coalition as important in the effort to become 'a clear and real alternative.' Red made strong efforts to build a good reputation among the other parties in Kragerø, as evidenced by the party's status as formateur for a broad coalition in 2023. Moreover, being Red's most electorally successful branch in 2015, Kragerø took on greater national importance for the party, as we shall see in the next chapter. For FrP in Grimstad and V in Mörbylånga, the reputation-building mechanism was less important in this broad sense. The two parties have plenty of other, more prominent local coalitions that serve to inform the parties' (nationwide) image as potential governors. Both parties did take pains, however, to act as reliable and responsible partners in local government to secure their coalition potential in the municipality going forward.

The compromise mechanism was an important constraint for FrP, R, and V, but not for SD. In FrP's case, we see that the pragmatism of the branch's leadership amplified the impact of this mechanism, prompting the party to de-emphasize those issues where it was in the minority in the council. In Red's case, the mechanism's effect was somewhat muffled by the fact that the party managed to negotiate a detailed policy platform at the peak of its bargaining power and create a 'coalition within the coalition' with SV and the Greens. V's case further demonstrates the significance of bargaining power within the coalition. The party's weak position meant that it had to defer to the other coalition members across issue areas and had a very limited influence over the government's policy agenda. In Staffanstorp, the compromise mechanism was pre-empted by the exceptional policy proximity between SD

and M. M had coopted SD's policy program (both in terms of positions and emphasis), which meant that SD did not have to concede any major issues.

External constraints, such as budgetary frameworks and national rules and policies, was another important limitation. For SD, due to the lack of constraints within the coalition, national rules and regulations were perhaps the most important limitations on its pursuit of policy. There was, in most cases, a voting majority behind SD's preferred positions in the municipal council. Courts and civil servants, therefore, became central barriers for some of the government's more controversial policies. This falls under the responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff. In Kragerø, Red was significantly hindered by tight budgetary frameworks and national policies that did not align with its local policy ambitions. In Grimstad, FrP was similarly impeded by budgetary concerns when it came to tax policy. The budgetary constraint relates to several of the mechanisms described in the theory chapter. Firstly, the municipalities are required by law to provide certain services to citizens. While the level of investment may vary, basic funding must be secured across a range of policies. Some funds from the central government are also earmarked for specific purposes and may not be transferred according to the preferences of the local government. The local government is subject to national control, should it fail to meet the requirements of basic service provision or if it operates with a deficit. In this sense, the budget constraint falls under the responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff. Local governments are forced to meet certain requirements by national veto players. Secondly, the budget falls under the pothole mechanism, requiring the challenger to abandon "dream budgets" and secure funding for actual services. Expensive new policy projects tend to lose out in competition with established government policies. As the case of FrP in Grimstad demonstrates, responsible economic governance can also be an important aspect of local reputation building. In Mörbylånga, these mechanisms were largely pre-empted by the compromise mechanism. V had such a limited impact on the government's policy program that neither national rules nor budgetary constraints were relevant. This illustrates a point made in the theory chapter about the relationship between the mechanisms. They are sequential. In this case, the severe compromise mechanism made subsequent mechanisms redundant.

As the two left-wing cases demonstrate, internal pressure within the coalition can also amplify the responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff. Both these parties reported experiencing pressure from coalition partners to conform to the government role, by toning down their rhetoric and avoiding public disagreements with the coalition (with pre-agreed exceptions on certain issues in Red's case).

To varying degrees, the parties employed strategies to mitigate the perceived negative consequences of governing in a coalition. Red and FrP engaged in 'role-playing' to balance the duties and expectations of government participation with commitment to the party and its core issues. This is a version of the 'one foot in, one foot out' strategy that has been observed among challenger parties at the national level. It eases the pressure to choose between a radical and pragmatic/realist approach to government. SD and V have had more trouble standing out from their coalition partners in the eyes of the public and claiming credit for government policies. In SD's case, the need to pursue such strategies was much smaller due to the radical profile of the Moderates: The government already pursued SD's favorite policies with vigor. In V's case, the absence of mitigation strategies likely resulted from a lack of organizational strength and weak representation across government institutions. Organizational strength and broad representation in government were key to Red Kragerø's role-playing strategy. Moreover, compared to V, Red has been much more circumspect about the possibility of being dominated by a stronger party in government. Red in Kragerø also negotiated a space to disagree publicly with the Labor Party on certain issues where no agreement was possible. This served as a face-saving measure for Red, allowing it to refrain from publicly supporting policies it disagreed with.

In sum, the theorized mechanisms of moderation are amplified and muffled by further factors. Anticipatory moderation can be triggered by pragmatic leadership and pre-governmental alliances. It can be undermined if the potential coalition partners have coopted the challenger's policies. The reputation-building mechanism can be amplified by a large degree of national attention and by a challenger's nationwide goal of government participation. An individual party branch can be undermined if the challenger has extensive experience in local government elsewhere. The importance of the compromise mechanism depends largely on the challenger's bargaining power within the coalition, and the ideological proximity of the coalition partners. Finally, the challenger is likely to be more moderated by budgetary frameworks and national regulations if it has made unrealistic policy pledges, in terms of the cost of the policy or divergence from national laws, before entering government. The negative impact of the mechanisms can also be managed through mitigation strategies such as role-playing or agreements to disagree. Mitigation strategies are, in turn, facilitated by organizational strength and the conscious efforts and goals of the party.

# Chapter 10: A trickle-up effect

The previous chapters have shown that local government participation involves constraints on the policy pursuits of challenger parties. In chapters 4, 5, and 6, I showed evidence indicating that parties at the local level value policy proximity when forming local coalitions. In chapters 7, 8, and 9, I gave evidence showing that radical parties are constrained in government in terms of their ability to pursue their preferred policies and that government participation is associated with a degree of moderation. The data on the Left Party in Chapter 8 also showed that participation in governing coalitions has been associated with more pro-system views for individual politicians. The key question in this chapter is how these experiences affect the parties' systemic integration and mainstreaming at the national level.

In the theory chapter, I proposed two key mechanisms by which local government participation might trickle up and induce systemic integration at the national level. The first is what we might call the multilevel learning mechanism. Here, the key question is whether parties value and use information from local collaborations when evaluating the possibilities for similar alliances nationally. Associated with this mechanism is the notion of local 'showcases' or 'display windows.' Parties with no track record from national government can use successful local coalitions strategically to show voters and potential partners that collaboration can work and that they can act responsibly in government. Naturally, once a national alliance is formed, the value of such information from the local level decreases. This is most obvious in the case of the Progress Party. After 2013, when they joined a national government for the first time, voters and other parties had direct evidence of their ability to govern the country in a coalition. Since then, the informational value of local coalitions is much lower.

However, local coalitions may provide different information, such as how well coalitions work between FrP and parties they have not yet collaborated with nationally (e.g., the Center Party). FrP's local strongholds may also be used to showcase to voters what kind of governance would be provided if FrP had a stronger national bargaining position (i.e., more electoral support). Overall, however, this learning effect should be stronger for parties with little or no experience from national alliances.

The other mechanism is the movement of politicians with local government experience to the national level. I have already shown that participation in local government is associated with tempered policy ambitions and pro-system attitudes. If a significant portion of the parliamentary group is made up of such politicians, and their mainstreaming is not totally countermanded by the more conflictual, ideological nature of national politics, we may speak of a spill-over effect from the local to the national level.

Unlike the multilevel learning mechanism, this effect is not dependent on the level of national inclusion. It is, of course, more likely to occur when the party is included nationally because nationally included parties are also more likely to make local alliances. This is especially true if, as in the case of the Sweden Democrats, the party has been the subject of a cordon sanitaire. However, there is no reason to believe that the effect is any weaker after the party has formed national alliances. If anything, it might be stronger if there are perceived opportunities to employ pragmatic, pro-system attitudes in national coalitions. The first key question related to this mechanism is how common local government experience is among national politicians. This will depend, firstly, on how frequently the party has participated in local governments. Secondly, it depends on the degree to which local government experience is an advantage for aspiring national politicians.

SD and Red have very few cases of local government participation prior to the current government period. In these cases, the chapter investigates the extent to which local government experience valued within the party. Is it likely to improve a politician's career opportunities at the national level? What does the journey from local government to national politics look like for an individual politician? These questions help us gauge whether the mechanism will play a role in the party's development going forward.

Secondly, we should ascertain whether and how these locally rooted MPs differ from their colleagues in terms of behavior, opinions, and/or reputation. Are MPs with local government experience less active in opposition than their colleagues? Do they deal with different policy areas? Do they communicate with voters in a different way?

## The Progress Party

### *Multilevel learning*

Let us first consider the multilevel learning effect for the Progress Party. Before 2013, FrP's only executive experience was at the sub-national level. To determine the degree to which these local coalitions were influential for FrP's national strategy, we might first ascertain the degree of contact and bottom-up influence between levels of government in that period. An

unusually high degree of contact between local branches and the central party organization can indicate active learning between levels of government. In 2008, a survey was conducted among leaders of local party branches in Norway (Institute for Social Research, 2022). They were either leaders of the party groups in the municipal council, municipal party branch leaders, or both. Between 87 and 102 such respondents were recruited from each party represented in parliament at the time. 682 respondents were recruited in total. To get a sense of the degree and frequency of communication between the local and national levels of government, I look at four questions posed to these respondents about their contacts with various branches of the national party organization. The politicians were asked how often they have been in direct contact with the following party divisions over the past year: the parliamentary group (Members of Parliament), the secretariat of the parliamentary group, the central party committees, and employees at the national party offices. I recoded these variables into a cumulative variable showing the overall level of national contact. It was coded as follows:

1: No contact – respondent answered "never" to all questions
2: Occasional contact – respondent answered "a few times" to at least one question
3: Monthly contact – respondent answered "monthly" to at least one question
4: Weekly contact – respondent answered "weekly" to at least one question
5: Daily contact - respondent answered "daily" to at least one question

Overall, about one-third (36,37 percent) of local branch leaders report having contact with the national party monthly, weekly, or daily. As we shall see, however, the degree of contact varies substantially according to party affiliation.

As the table shows, occasional contact with the national level is by far the most common overall. Daily contact with the national party is highly unusual. The Progress Party stands out by having much more frequent communication between the local and national levels of government than other parties. They are the only party for which monthly contact is the most common. Moreover, the share of local leaders in weekly contact with the national level is about twice as large in the Progress Party (22,77 percent) compared to the Conservatives (H) – the party with the second highest share (11,9 percent). This indicates a high degree of interest in political affairs at the municipal level on the part of the Progress Party. Previous studies have described the party organization of the Progress Party in this period as unusually

top-down in a Norwegian context (Allern and Saglie, 2012), with the central party engaging in local issues such as municipal manifestos and candidate selection processes (Jupskås, 2015).

**Table 10.1:** Local/National contact, Norwegian parties, 2008

| | No contact | Occasional | Monthly | Weekly | Daily |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **AP** | 5.9 | 60.4 | 23.7 | 9.9 | 0.0 |
| **FRP** | 1.0 | 36.6 | 38.6 | 22.7 | 1.0 |
| **H** | 8.3 | 42.9 | 36.9 | 11.9 | 0.0 |
| **KRF** | 7.5 | 66.7 | 21.5 | 3.2 | 1.1 |
| **SP** | 9.2 | 65.3 | 24.5 | 1.0 | 0.0 |
| **SV** | 5.5 | 61.5 | 30.8 | 1.1 | 1.1 |
| **V** | 9.0 | 65.0 | 19.0 | 6.0 | 1.0 |

*Note*: Numbers indicate the percentage of party branch leaders who reported contact with at least one of the following: Members of parliament, secretariat of the parliamentary group, central committee, and employees at the national party offices. More frequent contact took precedence, so having daily contact with only one segment of the national party organization entailed the category "Daily." Those coded as "No contact" reported no communication with the national level.
*Source*: Parties between National and Local Politics dataset (2008)

As Fred Paxton (2023) points out, local governments may be used strategically by central parties in at least two ways:

> (A)s a showcase for its moderation and capacity to govern, or a laboratory to test its ideologically radical policy aims (p. 185)

It is not always the case, of course, that the central party directs the local branch to test out certain policies, or to act responsibly. The local branch may act on its own accord in this regard. The previous chapters in this thesis indicate that local branches contain ideologically motivated politicians who are independently motivated to implement the core policies of the parties and that the constraints they face in government, including demands of coalition partners, national rules and policies, and budgetary constraints, as well as a desire to improve their local reputation, are what limits their pursuit of policy and constrains their oppositional behavior. Nevertheless, the local governments have strategic value for the central party as showcases, both of policy achievement and custodial performance and the ability to participate in a coalition. In the case of the Progress Party, their participation in the Oslo

government from 2003 is an example of the latter kind of showcasing. In a 2003 news article (Herbjørnsrud, 2003), then-deputy leader of the Oslo branch, Christian Tybring-Gjedde (now an MP), explains that the government participation is part of a national-level strategy to integrate FrP in the party system:

> It is good for FrP that we make it into the city government. That will strengthen our chances of national government power after the 2005 election. If all goes well in the next two years between H and FrP, and the election results in two years are good, it will be natural for FrP to participate in a right-wing government (ibid.).

The article reports that then-party leader Carl I. Hagen was highly invested in the local coalition and received constant updates on the state of negotiations. Beyond helping to govern the most populous city in Norway, the coalition was a chance to prove to the mainstream right parties that a national coalition could work. As one newspaper reported:

> The central leaderships of the Conservatives, Christian People's Party, Liberals, and Progress Party have all looked to Oslo to find arguments for a coalition government. They are saying that when the four parties manage to govern the capital together, they should be able to govern the country together (Strand, 2013).

This added an extra sense of significance to the success of this local government, also for the other parties involved.

The municipality that is most commonly referred to as "FrP's display window" is Os, a medium-sized municipality near Bergen where FrP's Terje Søviknes was the mayor between 1999 and 2016, as well as from 2018 to 2019. The municipality has been a showcase in both the senses described above. Leading up to the election in 2019, the union magazine Fri Fagbevegelse asked each of the parliamentary parties to name one municipality they considered a "local showcase" (Madssen, 2019). FrP named Os municipality. It named the same municipality when asked the same in 2007 by the online newspaper Nettavisen (Almendingen and Waagbø, 2007). Firstly, the local branch has self-consciously used the government to showcase "good FrP policies" (Lindebotten, 2001), including privatization of public services, cuts in the public sector, infrastructure investment, and sales of publicly owned stocks. Next, Os, and other municipalities like it have been used to dismiss claims that FrP is not a serious party. Leading into the parliamentary election in 2009, FrP's general secretary, Geir Mo, mentioned this as an important challenge in the upcoming campaign. He mentioned Os along with two other FrP-led municipalities as "excellent display windows showing what FrP stands for" (Spang, 2009).

Several other municipalities have been dubbed "local showcases" over the years. These include Tønsberg, Nordreisa, Austevoll, Drammen, Fredrikstad, Ullensaker, Stranda, Tromsø, and Bergen. A common trait for these showcases is that they stand out from FrP at the national level, either because of FrP's unusually high level of representation, because FrP is in government (pre-2013), because FrP has formed alliances that are untested at the national level, or because FrP gets to implement its preferred (and untested) policies. For example, Oslo became a showcase for the party because it was governed in a coalition that FrP wanted to emulate at the national level (H+FrP with budgetary support from V and KrF). It was considered a good test case because governing Norway's largest city most approximated governing the country. It also became a trial for FrP's preferred policies, especially in the area of geriatric care. Since FrP's entrance in national government in 2013, this kind of showcasing – using local governments as proof of FrP's seriousness and capacity to govern – became less important. Since then, municipalities like Os have been used more exclusively to showcase FrP's policies.

*Movement of politicians between levels*

Next, we will consider the prevalence and lasting impact of local government experience among members of parliament for the Progress Party. First, based on coded biographies from the website of the Norwegian Parliament, supplemented with other sources (newspapers, party websites, etc.) I made a dataset on the local political experience of Progress Party MPs over time. Here, I have constructed variables showing whether each MP since 1989 has a background in local politics and whether the Progress Party was in local government while he or she was active at the local level. There have been 111 unique MPs from the Progress Party since 1989. Out of these, only two had no discernable experience as elected representatives at the municipal level prior to entering parliament. Out of these 109 MPs with local political experience, 44 had experience from local *government*. That is to say, FrP had either the mayor or the deputy mayor in their municipality while they were active in the municipal or executive council. About 40 percent of Progress Party MPs thus have experience governing together with other parties at the local level before representing the party in parliament. Politicians with local government experience were also well represented in the national government when the Progress Party participated between 2013 and 2020. Eight of the eighteen FrP politicians who became ministers in that period had experience from local government, several as mayors or deputy mayors.

We may first conclude that local political experience is almost a prerequisite for entering parliament for FrP. This is how one begins a national political career in the Progress Party. Secondly, we can note that experience in local government coalitions is common for Progress Party MPs. We may ask, however, whether this is because local government experience is an advantage for aspiring parliamentarians. Cirone et al. (2021) found evidence of a seniority progression effect in candidate selection for Norwegian parties. They show that being mayor improves a politician's chances of running for parliament, winning a parliamentary seat, and staying in parliament for a long time. Political parties follow rules for candidate selection to valuable list positions that prioritize prior experience, including local executive experience. The "mayoral boost" is larger for candidates with executive experience from large municipalities, but it is clearly present in small municipalities as well. The Progress Party had 32 unique mayors between 2003 and 2023. Of those, 20 had no national political career. Four of the mayors became MPs, five became deputy MPs (one serving full time in parliament for a long period), 2 state secretaries for the 2013-2020 government (one of whom became MP in 2017), and one minister and deputy party leader. Similarly, among the nine FrP politicians who have been part of the city government in Oslo since 1990, three have become MPs (Limi, Listhaug and Myhre), two became government ministers (Kallmyr and Listhaug), one became FrP's deputy leader (Limi), and one became party leader (Sylvi Listhaug). Arguably, Oslo is such an important city in Norway that talented politicians with roles in the central party do not consider it a step down to participate in local politics here, at least not as part of the executive.

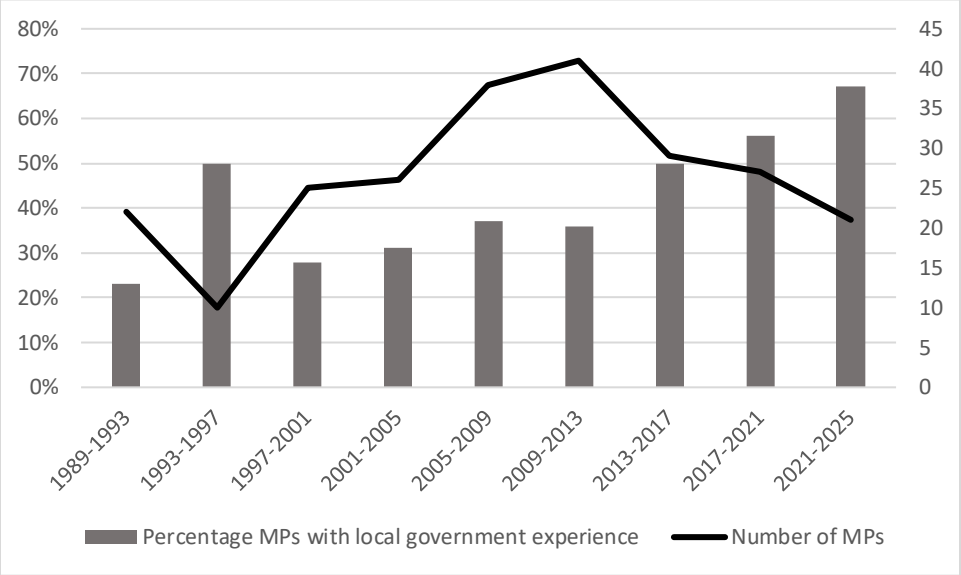
We may surmise, then, that experience from local government is not only common, but advantageous for aspiring national politicians in Norway. As Heidar and Karlsen (2018) note, local political experience is an important selection criterion for national political candidates. Such candidates, signified by their executive or campaign experience and media profiles, are considered more able to mobilize votes for the constituency party (p. 72). This is partly a result of the system of nominations of parliamentary candidates, where local branches send delegates to nomination meetings, where the final list of candidates is decided. This means that local branches have a large degree of influence over the nomination process. The system is decentralized and dominated by a small group of party activists (Narud, 2008). This system results in a high share of candidates with local political experience. Aars and Offerdal (2012) found significant differences between large and small municipalities in Norway when it came to progressive ambitions within the party. In small municipalities (<10,000 inhabitants) 4.9 percent wanted to continue with a career at a higher level of

government. In large municipalities, the percentage was 9.8. We should note that previous studies have observed an unusually high level of national involvement in nomination processes within the Progress Party compared to other Norwegian parties (see, for example, Jupskås, 2015). However, this has not resulted in a lack of candidates with a local political background from being nominated. For instance, data from the 2013 Norwegian Parliamentary Candidate Survey (CCS, 2020) shows that 92 percent of Progress Party candidates had previously been elected to municipal councils. This was significantly higher than the average among all Norwegian parties, at 71 percent. Beyond eligibility, ties to the local community are emphasized by the nomination committees when they consider the fitness of a potential candidate. This was evident, for instance, during the internal conflict in the Oppland County branch over the 2021 party list. In that election, former party leader Carl I. Hagen was nominated as the top candidate for the county. This became controversial because Hagen had no real ties to the county (apart from his wife, who is from Oppland). After the nomination, there were news reports of Progress Party members withdrawing from lists and committees in Oppland because they did not agree with the decision (Vollan, 2020). A municipal branch leader in Oppland stated to the press that:

> I don't think Hagen is what Oppland Frp needs on its list leading up to the parliamentary election. We don't need a celebrity. (…) The atmosphere within the party is tense and divided. We need someone who understands the strengths and weaknesses of the district, and, most importantly, has the right motivation (ibid.).

We can see from figure 10.1 that, apart from the unusual spike in the 1993-97 parliamentary period, there has been a steady increase in the share of Progress Party parliamentarians with a background from local government. This is not surprising given that for each subsequent government period there is an increase in the overall number of Progress Party members with such a background. Their share of the selection pool for party lists increases cumulatively. In short, local government experience is common for FrP parliamentarians. In fact, it seems to be an advantage for aspiring national politicians. Given the prevalence of such experiences among legislators at the national level, any durable changes that consistently occur because of these experiences are highly significant. If politicians grow more moderate, pro-system, or well-regarded in local government, it will impact the national profile of the party over time.

**Figure 10.1**: Share of FrP MPs with Experience from Local Governing Coalitions and Number of FrP MPs over Time




*Note*: X-axis shows parliamentary period, left Y-axis shows share of FrP MPs (corresponding to the bars), right Y axis shows number of FrP MPs (corresponding to the line)

*Source*: Parliamentary website (supplemented with various sources)

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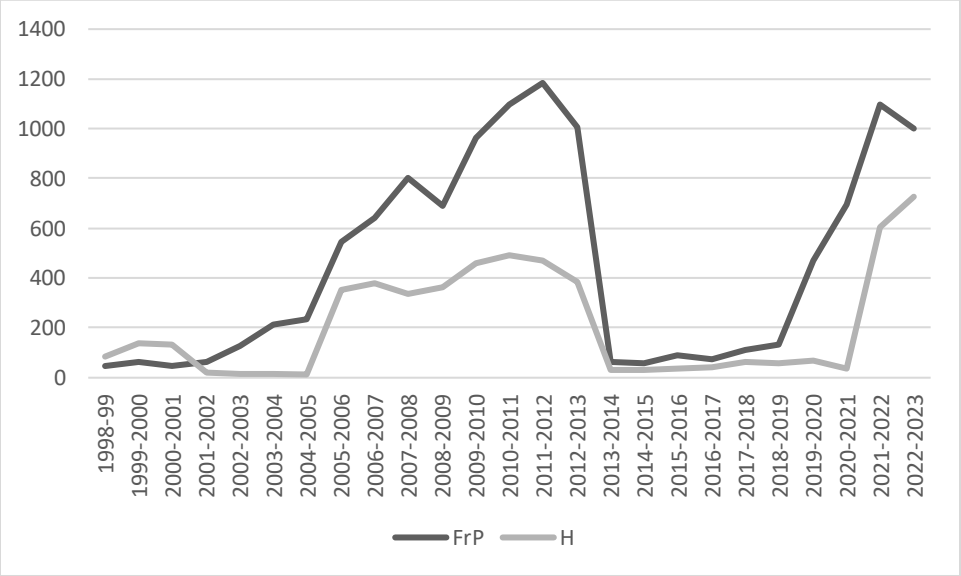
In previous chapters, I have given evidence showing that challenger parties with government responsibility adjust their goals and behavior. As I showed in Chapters 4 and 5, mainstreaming is in part a prerequisite to join a coalition government, especially as a junior partner. Moreover, due to compromises, practical constraints, and the desire to appear responsible in office, parties will often abandon unrealistic, radical policy goals and oppositional behaviors that characterized their previous political activity. Now, we must ask ourselves whether these experiences translate to mainstreaming at the national level. Are MPs with experience from local government less oppositional or disruptive than their co-partisans without such experiences? And do they differ in their issue emphasis while in parliament?

To answer these questions, we first need to consider what counts as "oppositional" or "disruptive" behavior by a parliamentarian for FrP. One possible indicator is written and oral questions to the government. This is an activity that is nearly exclusive to the opposition. When it comes to oral questions, for instance during the weekly parliamentary "question hour", the Progress Party asks about as many questions as one might expect from a party of its size when it is in opposition. When it comes to written questions, however, FrP has been

much more active than other opposition parties. Jupskås (2016) refers to it as a form of "bullying the executive," due to the sheer volume of questions[98]. In the 2011-2012 parliamentary session, the peak of this oppositional activity, the Progress Party submitted 1184 questions to the government, while the Conservatives (at that time an opposition party of similar size) submitted 470.

**Figure 10.2**: FrP and H: Number of Written Questions in Parliament




*Note:* The X-axis shows the parliamentary session, and Y axis shows the number of questions
*Source*: website of the Norwegian parliament (stortinget.no)

As can be seen from the graph, this is an activity FrP has engaged in vigorously while in opposition, and hardly at all in government (2013-2020). The Progress Party and the Conservatives (H) were both in opposition against a center-left government between 2005 and 2013. As we can see from the graph, however, the Progress Party consistently sends far more questions to the government. In the 2022-2023 session, seven of the ten most prolific question writers were from the Progress Party (the list also contains two politicians from Red and one from the Liberals). When Erlend Wiborg (FrP), one of the most prolific question writers in parliament in 2022-23, was asked about his activities he replied:

> The reason I ask many questions is that I am concerned with having facts I can use in political matters. Especially within my primary area of responsibility, which is

[98] There are indications that the Progress Party views its activities in a similar way. When Bård Hoksrud became the parliamentarian who had asked the most "question hour" questions to the government during the 2022-23 parliamentary session, the Facebook page for Vestfold and Telemark FrP declared him "minister bully of the year". See: https://beta.some.arkivverket.no/post/957706

> immigration and integration, I believe that much of the debate is based on emotions and a desire to appear 'good,' and that it is far too lacking in factual basis. Therefore, I want to have as many facts as possible because I believe it improves politics. However, I also use written questions to bring attention to issues and force the government to take a stance on matters, not just hide behind the bureaucracy (Skovdahl, 2023).

In short, written questions to the government is an oppositional activity, used to put pressure on the government. It is also used far more by the Progress Party than by other opposition parties. We might ask, then, whether FrP MPs with local government experience are less prolific question writers than their colleagues without such experience. The data does not indicate this. Looking at the first two parliamentary sessions after the Progress Party left government (the only two full sessions post-government at the time of writing), the average number of questions per MP was quite similar in the two groups. The MPs with local government experience asked 50 questions per parliamentary session on average. The number for those without such experience was 44. If anything, then, the MPs with a local government background ask more questions than their colleagues without such a background.

However, if we look at the topics of these questions, some differences begin to appear. A cursory overview can be gained by looking at which minister is addressed in each question (Table 10.2). The emphasis among MPs without local government experience is clearly on issues addressed to the Justice Minister. This is the ministry that deals with both law and order and immigration[99]. It makes up about a third of all questions asked by that group from 2021-23, but only nine percent for MPs with local government experience. For MPs with a local government background, transportation and healthcare are the most popular categories. Both of these ministries touch on core municipal tasks. Not surprisingly this group also emphasizes municipal affairs more heavily than their colleagues in parliament. This is largely due to the activities of Helge André Njåstad, former mayor of Austevoll municipality. During the period in question, he was the deputy leader of the parliamentary Committee for Municipalities and Administration and posed 65 written questions to the Minister for Municipal Affairs (out of 92 questions from FrP to that minister). Overall we see that core, ideological questions of immigration and law and order are more heavily emphasized by MPs

[99] Further inspection revealed that most of FrP's immigration and law and order related questions were indeed addressed to this minister. Both the directorates of integration and diversity (IMDi), and of immigration (UDI) are subordinate to this ministry.

without a background in local government. Issues related to core municipal tasks are more emphasized by locally rooted politicians.

**Table 10.2:** Written Questions to the Government according to the Minister Addressed and the Local Government Experience of the MP, 2021-2023

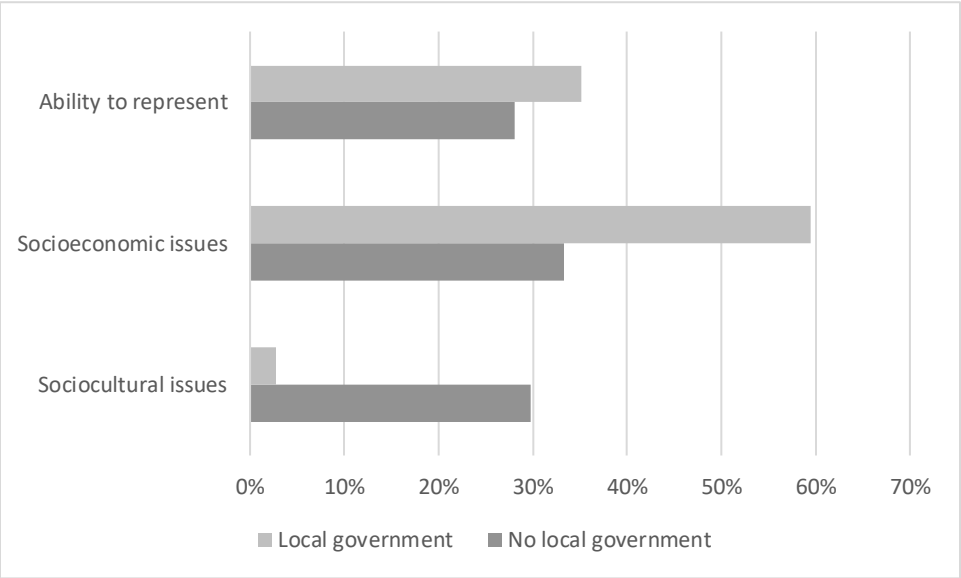
| Minister addressed | No local government | Local government |
|---|---|---|
| Justice | 34% | 9% |
| Oil and Energy | 14% | 3% |
| Transportation | 8% | 21% |
| Industry | 7% | 2% |
| Finance | 7% | 11% |
| Labor and Inclusion | 6% | 3% |
| Defense | 6% | 1% |
| Environment | 3% | 2% |
| Foreign Affairs | 3% | 2% |
| Fisheries | 3% | 2% |
| Health | 3% | 21% |
| Municipal Affairs | 2% | 7% |
| Agriculture | 1% | 2% |
| Culture and Equality | 1% | 5% |
| Prime Minister | 1% | 2% |
| Children and Family | 1% | 4% |
| Research and Higher Education | 1% | 2% |
| Development | 1% | 0% |
| Education | 0% | 3% |

*Note*: The table shows the percentage of questions posed by FrP MPs with and without local government experience respectively that are addressed to each government minister.
Source: Website of the Nowegian Parliament (stortinget.no)

This pattern is also found in how they appealed to voters as candidates. In the newspaper survey before the 2021 election (VG, 2021), each candidate filled out a section called “Why should we vote for you?”. For each of the Progress Party candidates that made it into parliament, I divided their responses into quasi-sentences, each containing exactly one

"message." This is the coding unit. If a natural sentence contains more than one message, it is divided into several quasi-sentences, each containing one message. A quasi-sentence never contains more than one natural sentence, however. Each of these quasi-sentences was categorized according to the policy position conveyed in the message. I used the manifesto project coding scheme (Volkens *et al.*, 2020). I then subdivided the sentences into three main categories: Socioeconomic issues[100], ability to represent[101], and sociocultural issues[102]. The results are displayed in Figure 10.3.

**Figure 10.3:** Issue Focus in Personal Appeals to Voters, FrP MPs




*Note:* Graph shows the share of quasi-sentences devoted to each policy dimension, as well as the candidate's personal ability to represent the constituents.
*Source:* VG Valgomat (2021), "Why should we vote for you?"

As the graph clearly shows, MPs with a background in local government are much less prone to emphasize sociocultural issues. Among the MPs without local government experience, sociocultural issues are the topic of 30 percent of the quasi-sentences in their appeals. Most prominent among these issues were law and order, immigration, and national independence.

[100] Looking only at the categories contained in the data, economic issues include the categories 411 (technology and infrastructure), 401 (free market), 410 (economic growth), 504 (welfare expansion), 502 (culture), 303 (governmental and administrative efficiency), and 201.1 (freedom). In the data, the latter category exclusively covers references to reduce bureaucratic limitations on individuals or businesses.
[101] This is covered by the Manifesto Project categories 305.1 (party competence) and 305.2 (personal competence). It includes any general reference to the positive qualities of the politician or the party, to follow through on policy, work hard, represent the interests of the constituents etc.
[102] This covers the CMP categories 109 (internationalism: negative), 601 (national way of life: positive), 104 (military: positive), 605.1 (Law and order: positive), 601.2 (immigration: negative), 608.1 (multiculturalism: negative)

This dimension makes up only three percent of the total for candidates with a local government background.

It is not the case that all MPs with a local government background are moderate, while all MPs without such a background are radical. On average, however, there do seem to be differences in terms of the policy emphasis in the two groups. The latter group engages more with far-right core issues such as immigration and law and order in appeals to voters. Moreover, this translates to parliamentary activity, partly due to the distribution of MPs to parliamentary committees. Five FrP MPs have a background as mayor or deputy mayor of a municipality. Of these, two are members of the committee for municipal affairs and administration, two are members of the transportation committee and one is a member of the finance committee. By contrast, the justice committee has two members from FrP, neither of whom has a local government background (although both have been members of local legislative councils).

In sum, the local government participation of the Progress Party has had a national-level impact in several respects. Firstly, through the movement of politicians from one level of government to another. A large and increasing share of FrP's parliamentarians has a background in local government. While these politicians are no less active than their parliament colleagues, they seem more constituency oriented. They gravitate to parliamentary committees that deal with issues impacting the local level and are less ideological in their communication with voters. Moreover, there has been a high degree of contact between the national and the local level within the Progress Party. Indeed, branch leaders reported a significantly higher level of national-local contact within the Progress Party than in other parties. Before FrP's inclusion in the national government, the local coalitions also had a high strategic value for the Progress Party. FrP's local governments were used as showcases to demonstrate its governing capacity and ability to collaborate, both to voters and to potential coalition partners at the national level. In these ways, local government participation has impacted FrPs systemic integration and mainstreaming at the national level over time.

**Red**

Compared to the Progress Party, Red has a much shorter history as a party, much fewer examples of local government participation, and much fewer MPs. Since its founding, Red has had the mayor or deputy mayor in six municipalities. In parliament, Red has had nine representatives, all of whom are currently serving. It makes less sense, therefore, to look at

the background of Red's MPs and compare those with and without local government experience. This section will instead look at the impact of local governments on discussions of national alliance formation and parliamentary cooperation between Red and the mainstream. I show that local governments have been used by local actors within Red and the mainstream left to inform discussions regarding national inclusion. Moreover, I show that Red has taken lessons from the local level about best practices and potential pitfalls when the central party considers national parliamentary cooperation. This is evidenced by the inclusion of these experiences in reports and conferences about the party's national strategy. Finally, I show that while Red emphasizes ideological purity and an oppositional spirit, local government experience is still valued and rewarded within the party.

*Multilevel learning: Showcasing to potential partners*

Firstly, the local coalitions are used by relevant actors to argue in favor of national-level collaboration. The Labor Party leadership has generally rejected a collaboration with Red at the national level on principle but has been open to such collaborations at the local level. The discrepancy has been interrogated in the press. A clear example was cited in the introduction of this thesis. The Labor party leader was confronted on the radio program Politisk Kvarter about the dissonance between his attitude toward Red at the national and local levels (2018). This radio debate was part of a broader public discussion about how the mainstream should relate to Red as a party. In response to Labor's national rejection of Red, local politicians from Red and the Labor Party have pointed to their own experiences of subnational government collaboration to push for national inclusion. For example, in May of 2019, a top parliamentary candidate from Red Tromsø pointed to the success of their local coalition in his municipality and expressed puzzlement at the ambiguous view AP's leadership had of Red:

> It is slightly bizarre that they question our understanding of democracy. Why should such an opposition to a collaboration with Red stop in parliament and be accepted locally? I don't think this stance resonates with most Labor-people either when they see how many good policies we can pass together (Cosson-Eide and Lindholm, 2019)

For another example, the former Red mayor (2007-2011) and deputy mayor (2011-2015) in Risør wrote an opinion piece in August of 2017, where he called for national cooperation between the two parties and pointed to local collaborations as evidence that such a national alliance could be successful:

> It garnered attention that Støre was so bombastic in his rejection of a collaboration with Red last week. Red and AP have walked under the same red banner in many May 1st parades across the country and have a close collaboration in many municipalities, with good results. In Bodø, Tromsø, and Kragerø, Red has the deputy mayor under AP. In Oslo, the two parties have a good collaborative relationship. The experiences with collaboration between the two parties in Risør, where Red has had the mayor and deputy mayor, have also been good (Thygesen, 2017).

The top parliamentary candidate from Red in Telemark county wrote a similar piece, where he pointed to all the accomplishments of the coalition in his home municipality of Kragerø, as well as other subnational coalitions between the two parties, as an argument in favor of national collaboration (Lund, 2017). Local Labor Party politicians made similar arguments. Most prominently, in a 2019 interview, Oslo's executive city council leader Raymond Johansen emphasized that the Oslo collaboration works "very well indeed" and that the Labor party should not be "shutting any doors" nationally. He further stated that:

> Governing a city is different to governing a country. We do not have to deal with foreign policy or the issue of oil and gas extraction in a city. At the same time, I think that AP is in a position where it is important to have friends. Seeking collaboration with those on the same side as us will be important. My view is that these parties [Red and MDG] are on our side, even if we disagree about much (Haakonsen and Sandvik, 2019).

Actors beyond local politicians have also used successful subnational alliances as an argument for national collaboration. For example, the leader of the youth wing of the Labor Party pointed to local alliances when arguing that AP should be open to collaboration with Red and the Greens (NTB, 2019a). As Bjørklund (2011, p. 315) observed in the case of the Progress Party, such bottom-up pressure to increase collaboration from local mainstream politicians with experience from coalitions with a challenger can contribute to the gradual recognition of the party as a viable negotiating partner.

However, key actors in the Labor Party have generally been dismissive of the urgings of local representatives. The main argument is that being in government at the local level is very different from governing at the national level. While Labor voters have been split almost evenly on the issue of national inclusion of Red (Søndeland, 2017), the Labor leader has repeatedly stated that a formalized collaboration with Red is out of the question. In fact, due

to the revolutionary stances in Red's program of principles, Støre has stated that he feels a closer political kinship with the leader of the Conservatives than with Red's leader (Politisk Kvarter, 'Rødt + AP=?', 2018). This has been echoed by other top politicians in the Labor Party (Haakonsen and Sandvik, 2019). At the national level, Red has generally also rejected the notion of joining a coalition government as a full member. When this question arose in 2019, Moxnes clarified that Red would not join a left-wing government because he feared that "Red would become a doormat to the Labor Party" (Sørenes, 2019). However, as opposed to Labor's objections, Red's apprehension is founded on a strategic rather than a principled objection. Moxnes highlights the need to grow "much bigger and stronger before considering that [joining government]" (ibid.). This is reflected in the respective parties' level of interest in local coalitions. Red has ambitions of forming national-level alliances, given a sufficient measure of bargaining power. The party, therefore, takes a keen interest in local experiences with collaboration. AP rejects a formal collaboration with Red on principle. Therefore, these local alliances are less interesting. As a Labor politician who had been part of the coalition in Kragerø explained:

> We had no contact with the party at the county or national level about the process of joining forces with Red. There was more of a sense of wonder within the party that this whole thing worked out okay. There was hardly any interest from the national party. I think they looked at this coalition more as a curiosity.[103]

There was a certain degree of interest within the party in the coalition's success and its popularity among voters. According to the same Labor politician, this topic was discussed several times per year at the large party gatherings. The framing, however, was not that Red and AP were equal contributors to the alliance:

> The predominant interpretation was that we in AP had been good at getting Red to go along with our policies. Even if that was not the whole truth, and we had given concessions, and this was a collaborative effort, there was an unwillingness to acknowledge the fact that Red had contributed (…).[104]

*Multilevel learning: Promises and pitfalls of governing*

At the time of writing, Red lacks national-level executive and coalitional experience. They do, however, have ambitions to gain policy influence at the national level through

[103] Interview with politician, AP Kragerø
[104] Interview with politician, AP Kragerø

collaboration with other parties. In this process, Red has actively collected insights about such collaborations from the experiences of similar parties abroad, as well as their own experiences at the local level. The culmination of these efforts was a 2021 internal party report entitled *Parliamentary Collaboration for the Radical Left* (Rødt, 2021b), written by a working group that consisted of Moxnes, the then-party leader, as well as various local politicians who had participated in multi-party collaborations in municipalities. Their instructions were to:

> Survey positive and negative experiences with parliamentary collaboration from the radical left in countries such as Denmark, Sweden, Spain, Portugal etc., and combine these with Red's own experiences locally and in parliament (Ibid.)

The report contains subchapters on experiences from four municipalities: Bodø, Gjøvik, Oslo (where they have functioned as a parliamentary support party), and Alstahaug. The report concludes that collaboration in parliament, outside government, is the most fruitful way forward. However, it demonstrates the value of local executive and coalitional experience in a party that has no such experience at the national level, and where the large majority of local branches have pursued a purely oppositional strategy. There is a small group of politicians within the party with experience and knowledge about how to build fruitful relationships with other parties, which factors increase one's bargaining power in policy negotiations, when to stay in opposition, and how detailed one should be when creating a multi-party policy platform. Red has taken an active interest in these experiences when developing its national strategy. This was apparent also in the case of Kragerø. As one interviewee from Red phrased it:

> There has been a lot of interest. Red in Kragerø has always been very electorally successful, compared to other municipalities. After the election when we ended up in government, there was a large degree of interest within the organization. They wanted to track the collaboration.[105]

This entailed regular discussions with the central party, especially about Red's policy influence in position and how well the coalition partners managed to work together. Beyond the aforementioned report, Red's strategy conference in October 2022 is indicative of these efforts. The topic of the conference was 'Red's path to influence – on strategy and collaboration in elected bodies.' The panel at the conference included politicians who had

[105] Interview with politician, Red Kragerø

been involved in local alliances of various types, from fully integrated coalitions (Kragerø, Tromsø) to support party agreements (Oslo). The key question was what level of participation would give Red the highest degree of political influence. The multi-level learning mechanism discussed in the theory chapter, while largely absent for the Labor Party, is clearly present for Red. When developing its national strategy, it has actively sought insights from local coalitions. The reason it is not present for the Labor Party seems to be Labor's rejection of Red on normative grounds at the national level.

*Movement of politicians between levels*

A second mechanism through which local integration may spill over to the national level is the movement of politicians between levels of government. Local politicians who hold or move on to central positions in the party generally seem to increase the visibility of the political situation in their home municipality. This was emphasized by several interviewees and seems to hold true for Labor as well as Red. Moreover, as previous chapters have shown, politicians from local challenger parties are included in government based on their pragmatism, cooperative abilities, and ideological proximity to potential partners. They are also likely to adjust their political ambitions and behavior according to what works while in power. Therefore, if it is true that success in local politics improves a politician's career opportunities in the central party, instances of Red's local government participation may influence national-level strategies both for Red and its coalition partners. If a larger share of national decision-makers are politicians with experience from local coalitions that include Red, it should improve Red's chances of integrating into the national party system. This happens directly because these politicians are more open to national collaborative efforts and indirectly through their influence over the discourse and agenda of the national party. Red's former deputy mayor in Kragerø, is a good example of this kind of trickle-up effect. Since becoming deputy mayor in 2017, she has gained increasingly central positions within the party. In April of 2017, while still in local government, she was elected to the central party board. In an interview with the local newspaper, she explained that her experience as deputy mayor was an important factor when she was elected at the annual party conference (Løkkebø, 2017). She was re-elected for this position in 2019. At the annual conference that year, deputy party leader Marie Sneve Martinussen (now leader) emphasized the deputy mayor's local-level success as a key quality:

> Many believe that Bjørnar Moxnes [party leader] is Red's most popular politician, but really it is Charlotte (Brubakken, 2019a).

In June of the same year, she got a position as a political advisor to the parliamentary group. In a statement to Kragerø's local newspaper, the leader of Red's parliamentary secretariat said that:

> Charlotte has solid political experience. When Red is going to draw up its alternative budget proposal for next year, Charlotte's experience from municipal and county councils in opposition and government will come to good use. It is parliament that decides the budgetary framework for the municipalities and municipal finances are a big priority for Red. Charlotte knows the party well, and she has interesting ideas about how we can improve going forward. Moreover, it cannot hurt to have the head of Red's most successful party branch helping us (Brubakken, 2019b).

In March of 2023, she was unanimously elected as Red's second deputy leader by the party's selection committee. In an interview with the local newspaper, she stated that she thinks her long involvement in local politics was a particularly important reason why she was chosen for the post (Nilssen, 2023b). In July of the same year, she became Red's only deputy leader after Bjørnar Moxnes stepped down due to a scandal. At each step, her success and experience in local government were emphasized as reasons for promotion. However, while local governing experience seems to have been a clear advantage in this case, an opposite tendency can also be observed within the party. As another Red politician explained:

> In one way, I think [participation in local government] increases a politician's career prospects. At the same time, Red is a party that values a good 'opposition politician' as much as a good 'government politician'. (…) Some will probably view [members with a background from governing coalitions] as more on the right end of the spectrum within Red. Because one has been in that kind of collaboration and has that kind of experience, one can be labeled as more aligned with AP.[106]

In other words, because of Red's orientation towards policy purity, and especially insofar as the party wants to pursue an oppositional strategy, local experience from government coalitions can function as a hindrance if it is judged that the experience has made you too pragmatic or moderate. Despite these persistent attitudes, several key politicians in Red's local governments have held central positions in the party at various times. A former member

[106] Interview with politician, Red Kragerø

of the Kragerø coalition is now a member of parliament for Red. Red's former deputy mayor in Gjøvik was at one point Red's treasurer. Red's deputy mayor in Bodø was a member of Red's central board. Red's branch leader in Tromsø (a key member of the coalition) became a paid advisor to the parliamentary group. Red's former deputy mayor in Alstahaug became the deputy MP for Nordland county in 2021[107]. Moreover, when asked in 2019 by the union magazine Fri Fagbevegelse (Scheistrøen, 2019b), which municipality was Red's "local showcase," they did not pick one where Red pursued an oppositional strategy. Rather, they picked Kragerø, where Red had the deputy mayor.

In sum, Red has actively promoted and utilized its experiences in local government. These have been used to inform national strategies and to showcase Red's abilities as a governing party. Those who have led Red in local coalitions have been included in the central party organization and allowed to influence Red's profile as a party.

**Sweden Democrats**

Similarly to Red, SD has a very limited history of local government participation. Between 2018 and 2022, SD was part of a small number of local coalition governments. Like with Red, I will examine how these local coalitions have informed national discussions over SD's integration in this section. I show that SD has used these local coalitions strategically as showcases. These local governments were valuable for SD at the national level as 'display windows' to demonstrate that collaboration can work and that SD can act responsibly. This framing was reproduced by other actors as well. I show that there was intense interest in these governments from the media and political opponents, who used these coalitions as evidence of what including SD at the national level would look like. While opportunities to advance to positions in the central party have been limited for politicians who have led SD in local coalitions, the partial dissolution of the cordon sanitaire post-2022 is likely to increase the selection pool of local politicians with executive experience dramatically going forward.

*Multilevel learning: Showcasing*

Just as we saw in the case of Red, and the Progress Party in the early 2000s, the handful of local coalitions between the Sweden Democrats and the mainstream (before 2022) garnered national attention. Firstly, the SD centrally focused on the strategic value of the local

[107] In fact, the only person to have led Red in a local coalition without having some sort of subsequent position in the central party seems to be Red's former mayor in Risør.

coalitions. As the first local coalitions with SD began emerging in the aftermath of the 2018 election, prominent national politicians from SD made statements about them to the media. For instance, when an SD-led coalition with M and KD was formed in Svalöv in 2019, SD's national parliamentary group leader commented that:

> It is very pleasing. Svalöv has experienced a long period of shaky and weak governance, but now it is getting a stable majority government that is good for the municipality's residents. We have a significant consensus on budget issues and individual policy matters. It is good because it now allows us to show that we are capable (…). Every time something like this happens, and we can demonstrate that we take responsibility, we lower the thresholds for the Moderates and the Christian Democrats. We can show that this is good and can benefit everyone involved (Vickhoff and Svensson, 2019).

SD leader Jimmie Åkesson reportedly stated that "the road to power is via the municipalities" (Moe, 2019), and expressed the following view when asked about local coalitions in a 2019 interview:

> They are, of course, very important. Partly, they are important because we can get many of our policies through. This is what we want and why we exist at all as a party. But it is also important that we will be able to show Ulf Kristersson [Moderate leader] and Ebba Busch Thor [KD leader] that a collaboration with us can work (Svensson, 2019b).

Also among the local SD politicians who participated in municipal governments, there was an awareness of the potential spill-over effect a successful SD coalition could have at the national level. In an interview with the newspaper Expressen, Louise Erixon, the Mayor of Sölvesborg related that:

> I think that our coalition partners here… I think they want to test out a collaboration with SD at the local level before they engage in one at the national level. And then it is up to us to show that you can compromise and negotiate with us, and to have a good dialogue. And that we can concede issues even if we consider them important, just like others have to do in a coalition. And my ambition is to showcase that and hopefully see the same development in parliament and the national government (Svensson, 2019a)

These local collaborations have, in short, been something SD wants to showcase. Moreover, SD's central leadership has expressed the intention to use insights from the local level to develop a national collaboration strategy. In an interview in October 2020, Åkesson explained that he would use insights from the municipality of Svalöv, where SD had negotiated a written collaboration agreement with the other coalition parties, which committed each party to certain policies and clarified everyone's positions before entering government. When asked if he would take on the Svalöv model in SD's national negotiations, Åkesson stated:

> Yes, of course I will. Now, both the Moderates and Christian Democrats have communicated that – even if they do not want to see us join a government – they are open to budget negotiations with us. And then, experiences of how we have succeeded at the municipal level are important to me (Forssblad, 2020).

SD having no experience of national alliances, these local coalitions were considered important evidence of SD's governing abilities and qualities as a coalition partner, or lack thereof. This is not only true for the Sweden Democrats themselves. Parties on the left have often pointed to these local governments. Failures in government at the local level have been used as evidence of SD's unfitness for national power, and policy achievements have been used to warn against what would happen if SD gained national influence. For instance, when the Sölvesborg coalition broke down after the 2022 election, and the Moderates built a coalition with S and C instead[108], the Social Democrats' party secretary Tobias Baudin was quick to comment in the press that this is a sign of "The Sweden Democrats' inability to take responsibility and lead when it matters." He went on:

> This shows how hard it is to govern with the Sweden Democrats. It does not bode well for Kristersson's government that his "display window" is now collapsing (Dickson, 2022).

The parties on the left have also used what SD considers policy achievements to reinforce the cordon sanitaire at the national level. As mentioned in a previous chapter, V-leader Jonas Sjöstedt confronted Ulf Kristersson in parliament in 2020 with the various policies implemented in municipalities where M and SD rule together. The Prime Minister from the Social Democrats, Stefan Löfven, made a similar statement in Parliament, calling out Hörby

[108] This story was accompanied by press headlines such as "Birgit Birgersson Brorsson – the trade union Social Democrat who busted SD's display window" (Frisk, 2023) and "SD loses power in Åkesson's home municipality" (Yousuf, 2022).

(where M voted for the local SD government), and the democratic decline he believed the local government had been responsible for (Riksdagen, 2020). Several journalistic books also used these local experiences as indicators of how SD would act in a potential future government. The author Amanda Broberg published a book called *SD-Land* in 2022, where she examined the SD-led municipalities to answer the question of what would happen if SD came to power. In 2021, the journalist Mats Wingborg published *Blåbrunt Sverige* (Blue-brown[109] Sweden), exploring the municipalities where SD governs, and the overarching question: How will you be affected if the right wins the election?

The case of Surahammar was used strategically by the Moderates in the run-up to the 2022 election. A story by the newspaper Aftonbladet reports on a campaign tour by Ulf Kristersson in 2022, where he stopped by the municipality of Surahammar (Rohwedder, 2022). Surahammar began the government period of 2018-2022 with a center-left government consisting of S, V, and C. In 2021, however, C was thrown out of the coalition and decided to form a right-wing government together with M, KD, L, and SD. This became the first-ever coalition where the Center Party collaborated with SD anywhere in Sweden and the first time in over 100 years that the Social Democrats had not been in power in Surahammar (Mattsson, 2021). The newspaper report describes Kristersson's visit as "the most important stop on this journey" (Rohwedder, 2022). It was the only example in Sweden of the entire center-right Alliance working with the Sweden democrats. As the journalist explains:

> The stop in Surahammar is for the benefit of the journalists that have come along. The Moderates have already been here, and now they want to show off the Center Party members of Surahammar, and their collaboration with SD, like trophies (ibid.).

Kristersson visited the municipality several times during the campaign to "show it off in the media" (Bygdén, 2022). Kristersson brought up the municipality to the press on other occasions as well. In the national broadcast's program "Utfrågningen," where party leaders are questioned by journalists, Kristersson mentioned the Surahammar coalition unprompted while he and the journalists were discussing the various coalitions M had been part of at the local level. This enthusiasm for showcasing local coalitions with SD seems to have manifested only after the Moderates opened up to such a coalition at the national level. For example, Christian Sonesson of the Staffanstorp Moderates related to the press in October

[109] Blue is the color associated with the traditional mainstream right in Sweden, while brown is a color associated with fascism.

2021 that no one from the party leadership had gotten in touch with him, and asked him to share his experiences of working with SD:

> Other municipal politicians have contacted me, but no, I have not received any such questions from the party leadership about it. And I do not think I will either. That would surprise me (Thomsen and Sandberg, 2021)

Within the Center Party, the Surahammar coalition generated predictable outrage. While the local C-leader stated to the press that the collaboration works well, as they "do not get into national politics, but focus on municipal issues" (Eriksson, 2022), Annie Lööf, leader of the Center Party publicly condemned the coalition and said to the press that:

> We have talked to [the Surahammar branch] both before and after the decision and said that this is not something we can stand behind (ibid.)

*Movement of politicians between levels*

Naturally, the opportunities to advance to the national level have been rather more limited for SD politicians with local government experience, given the short history of SD's inclusion locally. If we look at the leaders of the seven municipalities where SD was in government between 2018 and 2022, four have remained at the local level (two continuing as mayors), and two left office – one mid-term and one a few months into her second term as mayor – neither of whom seem to have held any prominent positions since. Louise Erixon of Sölvesborg was ousted from the local coalition after the 2023 election when M began collaborating with S and C. Since then, she has taken on the position of mentor to SD politicians who want to govern locally. In this position, she serves as a link between the central party organization and the local representatives (Olsson, 2023). This is a key difference between SD and Red, where local politicians with executive experience have already begun to take positions in the central party organization. An important reason for this difference is that SD has been represented in parliament for over a decade and has filled central positions in the party with politicians who have parliamentary experience. However, SD clearly recruits candidates with local experience when putting together electoral lists for parliament. Of the 73 current SD MPs, only 11 have no discernible local-level experience. Most MPs have long experience in municipal councils. Moreover, at the time of writing, SD is part of 38 governing coalitions at the municipal level and two at the regional level. There are, therefore, good reasons to expect SD's parliamentary group in the future to comprise many more politicians with subnational executive experience.

In sum, SD's coalitions at the local level have been the subject of intense national interest. They have been used strategically, both by SD and others to impact national discussions about SD's role in the party system. Specifically, SD has valued the local coalitions as showcases, promoting the notion that including SD in national alliances is a feasible way forward. On the other hand, failures of governance and zealous pursuit of SD-policies has been used by political opponents to warn against the same inclusion of SD. While leaders of SD in local coalitions have not yet advanced to central positions in the party, the partial dissolution of the cordon sanitaire has increased the number of such politicians dramatically. These members will likely play a role in the central party going forward.

**The Left Party**

*Multilevel learning: Showcasing*

Since the late 1990s, the Left Party has been partially included at the national level. While they have never achieved full inclusion as a government member, they have participated in budgetary collaboration in parliament and provided support for S-led governments. Their mode of operating has sometimes been dubbed "contract parliamentarianism" (Bale and Bergman, 2006), as it relies on written contracts between the government and the Left Party. This state of semi-inclusion seems conducive to the coalitional learning mechanism described in the other cases. The Left Party uses these local experiences in several ways. Firstly, as we have seen in the other cases in this chapter, certain municipalities are used as 'display windows' to show off Left Party policies and to prove its ability to govern. However, the degree to which this is true varies according to shifts in the party culture and leadership. Jörgen Hermansson (2010) describes, for example, how the Left Party, under the leadership of Lars Ohly (2004-2012), refrained from showcasing V-led local governments. The clearest example is the municipality of Fagersta. Here, the Left Party achieved a single-party majority for several government periods in a row under the local leadership of Stig Henriksson. However, as Hermansson points out, rather than celebrating the success of the local stronghold, the party leadership expressed concern and even embarrassment about the branch:

> The message was clear: the Left Party does not seek power for its own sake! If things go as well as in Fagersta, they cannot have been implementing proper left-wing policies. Real left-wing politics happens in opposition, in the minority, it strikes from below. The Left Party cannot be the steward of power in a fundamentally unjust society (p. 223)

We can recognize this ambiguity about fellow partisans with government experience from the case of Red. In both instances, a certain value is placed on the role of the pure oppositional politician, uncorrupted by power and pragmatism. There is perhaps something to this line of thinking. Sometimes, local branches of radical parties have large electoral success or manage to enter coalitions because they diverge from the party line. As David Karlsson notes in his study of Swedish municipalities where parties massively exceed the national vote share:

> The Left Party members in Fagersta differ from their party colleagues in the rest of the country by standing considerably further to the right. Furthermore, in both refugee and environmental policies, the Fagersta Left Party diverges from the party at the national level. The municipality ranks at the top when it comes to how satisfied the council members themselves are with both democracy and the services in the municipalities. The mayor (Henriksson) is perceived as much more knowledgeable and to some extent more influential than the mayors in other municipalities (Karlsson, 2011, p. 29)

On the other hand, when Jonas Sjöstedt, a more pragmatic and office-seeking figure than his predecessor, took over the leadership of the Left Party, there was a shift in rhetoric regarding these local governments. Staying with the example of Fagersta, Sjöstedt praised it as an important showcase during the 2014 election campaign. In one newspaper interview, he stated that:

> I think Fagersta is important to us; we have achieved a majority there in election after election. The municipality has received awards for having one of the best-managed economies. They excel in education, integration, and many other areas. To me, this is so important; the Left Party can govern. When we are in power, there is order and fiscal discipline, and we use taxpayers' money responsibly. We deliver on what we are supposed to do. That is the kind of left I want to see. A Left Party that has ideas but is also proficient at governing (Marmorstein and Karlsson, 2013)

Sjöstedt's strategic use of local coalitions went beyond the case of Fagersta. According to one newspaper account (Dagens Nyheter, 2014), Sjöstedt's campaign strategy in 2014 involved showcasing their achievements in local governments across Sweden. According to the article, this was partly a reaction to voters' low opinion of the Left Party's abilities to lead the country and be responsible for the economy. This message was also circulated to activists in the form of study materials campaigners should learn before the 2014 campaign. The chapter "Our Strengths and Weaknesses" contains a long list of local achievements that the activists

are encouraged to bring up in conversations with voters. For example, the section concludes that:

> In Fagersta, which is the municipality where we are the strongest and have our own majority, the economy is one of the most well-managed. We can govern, we can manage money, and we implement our policies in practice all the time (Vänsterpartiet, 2014b).

Clearly, Sjöstedt and the central leadership used the local governments to display V's ability to act responsibly in government. Moreover, local coalitions were used as proof that V could collaborate and compromise with other parties in an alliance. In 2013, Sjöstedt wrote an opinion piece together with the local leader of the Malmö Left Party about V's local achievements, stating that "In Malmö, we have shown that the Left Party can govern" (Sjöstedt and Skrak, 2013). During that same campaign, Sjöstedt wrote another opinion piece together with a prominent party colleague entitled "We want to govern" (Sjöstedt and Andersson, 2013), where they argued that the Social Democrats and the Greens should choose a collaboration with V over collaboration with the Center Party and Liberals. Here, they point to local coalitions as proof of V's ability to cooperate in government. They write:

> In today's political situation, Stefan Löfven is the best alternative for prime minister. In collaboration with him, a policy of solidarity is possible. But it requires that he has the right companions. There are many areas where we do not have exactly the same positions as the Social Democrats and the Green Party. But the foundations for compromises and cooperation exist. We already govern a significant portion of Sweden's municipalities and counties together.

In an interview in April 2014, Sjöstedt noted that V's central leadership is frequently in touch with the local branches that are in power:

> We are in contact several times per week with the municipalities we govern or help to govern (Persson, 2014).

This may help explain local politicians' perception of national influence in the party. The 2012 KOLFU survey shows the degree of shared rule (local politicians' influence over national decision-making) according to party affiliation in Sweden. The local politicians were asked the following question:

> How do you assess your opportunities to influence your party's campaign pledges to the voters in national parliamentary elections?

The respondents could answer on a five-point scale ranging from "very good" to "very bad." In Table 10.3, I report the balance of opinion on this question within each Swedish

parliamentary party. A clear pattern emerges, where politicians from the less nationally integrated parties (Left Party, Greens, and SD) believe they have more influence over national policy pledges. The Sweden Democrats stands out as the only party where more local respondents assessed their opportunities to influence national campaign promises as "quite good" or "very good" than "quite bad" or "very bad". The Left Party politicians also report a far higher level of shared rule than more dominant or established parties like the Social Democrats[110].

**Table 10.3**: Balance of opinion: Degree of Influence over National Policy Pledges. Swedish Parties.

| | V | S | MP | C | KD | L/FP | M | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Balance of opinion | -8.7 | -22.4 | -8.2 | -19.9 | -13.8 | -26.6 | -29.7 | 2.83 |

*Note:* the balance of opinion was calculated as the difference between the percentage of respondents who answer "very good" or "quite good" and those who say "quite bad" or "very bad"

Source: KOLFU-survey 2012

V's central leadership seems to have an interest in potential lessons from local politics. In a report by the Left Party's 'Future Commission' in 2019, the authors delve into the experiences in five different municipalities where V has governed. The chapter aimed to draw lessons on how to "do politics." One of the recommendations from the chapter is that the party leadership should "further map out what the various branches around the countries are doing" (Gabrielsson, 2011, p. 30).

*Movement of politicians between levels*

Like in the Progress Party, MPs in the Left Party often have pre-parliamentary careers at the local level. Again, based on the biographies on the parliament website, supplemented with other sources (party websites, newspaper stories) in cases of missing information, I made a dataset of the local-level pre-parliamentary careers of Left Party MPs over time. From 2006 to the present, the average share of MPs with local *government* experience, operationalized as being an elected representative in a municipality while V was part of a governing majority, is

[110] Note that this is not a simple function of party size. Even small mainstream parties report a low degree of national influence. For example, the Liberal Party, at 7,5 percent in the previous parliamentary election reported a lower degree of national influence than the Social Democrats at 30,7 percent of the vote.

45 percent (min=36 percent, max=52 percent). In the Swedish case, there is, however, a larger share of politicians with no detectable municipal politics experience. Many of the MPs without a background in local politics enter parliament after holding key positions in the central party administration, leadership roles at the regional level, or in the youth party. A difference between the Left Party and the Progress Party is that the Progress Party MPs have almost always begun their careers at the local level. This also squares well with numbers from the Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS), showing that a full 26 percent of Left Party candidates for parliament have no experience from municipal legislative or executive councils. The comparable number for the Progress Party was about 11 percent. However, that still leaves a sizable majority of V candidates with a local politics background. The nomination process in Sweden is very similar to that in Norway. They, too, have subnational nomination committees, which coordinate the activities of a nomination meeting of local party delegates. This conference makes a final decision on the party's list for the national election (Narud, 2008). In Aars and Offerdal's (2012) study of local councilors, they find that 8,9 percent of representatives at the municipal level in Sweden have immediate ambitions of a career at a higher level of government.

In the Comparative Candidates Survey, Left Party candidates with no local politics background stand out from the rest in terms of their emphasis during campaigns. These differences are summarized in table 10.4. Note first that those with local experiences report a higher emphasis on all items, compared to those with no such experience. This could be an indication that politicians with a local background run more active campaigns in general than those without such a background. The data also clearly indicates that locally rooted politicians are more responsive to a specific constituency. They are more concerned with advocating the policy demands of constituents, being open to voters, and engaging in extensive communication with them. This aligns well with previous findings by Binderkrantz et al. (2020).

**Table 10.4:** Emphasis during Campaigns. Left Party Politicians, according to Experience from Local Politics.

| | Local experience | No local experience | Difference |
|---|---|---|---|
| Advocating the policy demands of the voters in the constituency | 3.19 | 2.39 | 0.79*** |
| Particular items on the party platform | 3.50 | 2.85 | 0.65** |
| Openness to voters in the constituency and communicating with them extensively | 3.76 | 3.15 | 0.61** |
| Own personal characteristics and circumstances | 2.70 | 2.34 | 0.36† |
| Taking care of the socio-economic well-being of the constituency | 3.45 | 3.11 | 0.34† |
| Providing services and practical help to people in the constituency | 1.94 | 1.71 | 0.23 |
| Issues specific to own personal campaign | 1.41 | 1.36 | 0.05 |

*Note:* Significance levels were determined by a series of t-tests. Scale is from 1 (Very little emphasis) to 5 (very much emphasis). † p<0.1, ** p<0.01, ***p<0.001.
Source: CCS 2014 round, Sweden.

In the current parliament, there are 24 MPs from the Left Party. Out of these, 14 (58 percent) have experience from local government. In terms of the level of activity in parliament, there is very little difference between the two groups. In the 2022/23 parliamentary session, each group asked about the same number of questions to the government on average. They also made a similar number of statements in debates and signed a similar number of policy proposals. In total, the average member with a local government background had 48.4 registered activities in parliament, while the members with no such background had an average of 50.4 activities[111].

In terms of top positions in the parliamentary group, the MPs with a local government background seem to do well. The current party leader, the parliamentary group leader, and the deputy group leader all have backgrounds in local coalition governments. The party leader, Nooshi Dadgostar, had a pre-parliamentary career that included a period in the Botkyrka municipal council while V was in a coalition with MP and S. The group leader, Samuel Gonzales Westling was the deputy mayor in Hofors municipality before entering parliament. The deputy group leader, Vasiliki Tsouplaki, had been active in the municipal council in Västerås, including in several executive committees while V was in local power.

[111] This is according to data on the Left Party from the website of the Swedish Parliament (Sveriges Riksdag, 2024)

As in the case of the Progress Party, we might consider which parliamentary committees are dominated by which group. In his account of Swedish parliamentarians with strong local ties, David Karlsson explains that they stand out from the rest by "flocking to certain committees" (D. Karlsson, 2018). Education, business, and transportation are among the committees with particularly large shares of municipally rooted politicians. As he explains, education is the single most important policy area at the local level, while the latter two committees deal with issues that relate to core municipal tasks, such as economic development and local infrastructure.

The Left Party currently has exactly one regular member of each parliamentary committee. In all three of the aforementioned committees, the V members have a background in local government. Karlsson notes that four other committees also contain high shares of party locals: Environment and Agriculture, the Civil Committee (dealing with issues like housing and consumer rights), Culture, and Defense. The fact that politicians who care about municipal issues flock to the defense committee might seem strange. However, as Karlsson points out, this committee deals with areas like rescue services that are relevant at the local level. Three out of four of these committees are inhabited by a V member with local experience. In the Environment and Agriculture Committee, we find Kajsa Fredholm, a fairly prototypical party functionary with no local government career, but a background of internal party positions, including in the party leadership. Looking at her profile, she emphasizes the national and global question of climate change more than local agriculture issues (Sveriges Radio, 2022). These allocations conform well to Karlsson's previous findings. On the other hand, the EU and Foreign Affairs Committees are inhabited by V-members with local government backgrounds. These are both internationally oriented committees and touch very little upon municipal issues. Overall, however, MPs with local government backgrounds in the Left Party are allocated to committees in such a way that they can devote their time and energy to issues that are relevant at the local level. This is all in line with the argument of Karlsson, who notes that:

> As an individual explanatory variable for the degree of focus on local and regional issues, experience with subnational assignments is more important than party (p. 167).

This makes sense, considering that politicians with such a background are socialized in a context where they are judged by voters less on their partisanship and ideology and more on their performance as managers of municipal affairs and personal ties to the community. Those who have only operated in local opposition or who have been entirely socialized within the national party organization care about different issues.

*Summary*

In sum, like the other three parties, the Left Party has extensively showcased some of its local governments. In the 2014 election, this showcasing was a key part of V's campaign strategy. As in the other cases, the purpose of displaying these instances of local government was to demonstrate V's capacity to govern, collaborate, and be responsible in lieu of direct evidence of this from the national level. Local politicians in the Left Party also report a higher degree of influence over the policy agenda of the national party compared to more established mainstream parties. Like the Progress Party, a large share of V's parliamentarians had a local government background. Also like the Progress Party, this background does not seem to impact the level of activity in parliament. It does, however, seem to impact the kinds of issues parliamentarians engage with. The Left Party conforms to the pattern observed in parliament more generally, that locally rooted politicians join committees that deal with issues related to the local level. Local government participation appears to impact national processes of integration into the party system through the strategic use of local experiences to improve V's reputation among voters and potential partners, and through the movement of politicians between levels of government.

**The four parties compared**

In conclusion, local government participation has impacted the integration process into the national party system for the parties under study in several ways. Firstly, before inclusion in national government, local coalitions serve an important function as showcases in all four cases. The parties have all engaged in the practice of pronouncing certain municipalities 'local display windows.' The central parties instrumentalize the local governments to showcase governing capabilities to voters and potential partners in place of direct evidence from the national level. The case of FrP shows that once inclusion in national government is achieved, the value of local governments, as showcases, goes down. V's case demonstrates that the national goals and orientation of the party leadership matter immensely. V-led local governments were only used as showcases after a new, office-oriented leadership took over. Before that, the most successful local branches of the party were viewed with some skepticism by the central party, which was policy-oriented and pursued an oppositional strategy.

In the case of Red, and to an extent SD, the local government experiences have been used to inform their own national coalition strategies. Both parties point, for example, to experiences in local coalitions to demonstrate the importance of written and detailed coalition

agreements to avoid empty promises on the part of alliance partners. This kind of internal strategic learning is particularly useful for the less-integrated parties. They have no experience dealing with alliances and policy negotiation in parliament and must, therefore, rely on lessons from abroad or from the subnational level to gauge the promises and pitfalls of national coalition building. There is little evidence of this kind of active, strategic multilevel learning on the part of FrP and V.

SD stands out from the other cases due to the unusually high level of national interest in its local governments. This has likely amplified the learning mechanism. The national parties and the public have been aware of the goings-on in these municipalities to a greater extent than in the other cases, including the governments' popularity, the quality of collaboration, the degree of responsible governance, and the policy impact of the parties involved. The governments have also been instrumentalized by a wide variety of actors to encourage or discourage similar arrangements at the national level. In the cases of FrP, R, and V, we do not see political rivals actively using local governments to argue against national inclusion.

In the two cases with extensive local government participation, V and FrP, a large share of parliamentarians has local executive experience. This is related to the way parliamentary candidates are selected. The system is similar in the two countries and rewards local executive experience. Red has a much shorter history in parliament. It has had 8 MPs, all of whom are currently serving. It also has a much less extensive history of local coalitions. The chapter showed, however, that many leading politicians in Red's local governments have gone on to hold important positions in the central party. In SD's case, we have seen little such movement. This is because the party was electorally successful years before it participated in local government. In other words, it had to establish paths to parliament that did not include local executive experience. However, given the large increase in local coalitions that include SD after the 2022 election, we may expect this mechanism to play a greater role going forward.

The data on V and FrP indicates some lasting impact of local government experience on the behavior of national politicians. While these experiences generally do not impact the level of (oppositional) activity in parliament, they do seem to impact the types of issues MPs engage with. Locally rooted politicians are more constituency-oriented than their party colleagues and gravitate to committees that deal with local issues. In FrP's case, we saw that politicians without a local government background emphasized sociocultural issues, such as

immigration and law and order, to a greater extent, both in parliamentary activities and in communication with voters.

# Chapter 11: Conclusion

This thesis has examined mainstreaming processes in four Scandinavian challenger parties. It has studied whether local government participation, which commonly occurs well before national alliances are formed, matters to the development of these parties. The key questions of this thesis are as follows: is local government participation associated with mainstreaming for challenger parties on the far left and far right? And to what extent does local government participation affect systemic integration and mainstreaming processes at the national level? This chapter will reexamine the causal model theorized in Chapter 1 and consider how this model might be refined considering the analyses in previous chapters. How does local executive power fit into the inclusion-moderation thesis, which generally posits that participation in ordinary political processes, such as elections, party building, and coalition formation, has a moderating impact on radical challenger parties?

I have argued that participation in local government is to some extent transformative for radical challenger parties. Politicians in coalition governments face a number of constraints, which limit their free pursuit of policy. That means they have to implement and defend policies that do not fit their previous policy program. Moreover, they are likely to abandon campaign pledges once they have proved unrealistic. They are also selected into government on the basis of their policy affinity with potential coalition partners. These factors in combination mean that local government participation is associated with a measure of moderation for radical challenger parties. However, the effects are not uniform across cases. The thesis has investigated the scope conditions that amplify or undermine each mechanism, in order to explain the variation.

The causal model presented in Chapter 1 has proved to be broadly correct but in need of refinement. In particular, the mechanisms that were thought to mediate government participation and moderation work in interaction with other factors. The section below takes account of these refinements.

## The causal model, a reassessment

*The determinants of participation*

In the theory section, I argued that it is plausible that local government participation is associated with mainstreaming for challenger parties. Several mechanisms were theorized to mediate this relationship. Firstly, as Luther (2011), argues, parties adapt their ideologies when they become more office-oriented, in order to join coalition governments. It was argued

that, even at the local level, parties use ideological proximity as a criterion to choose coalition partners. On the other hand, it was not unreasonable to expect the local level to be much more oriented towards practical issues than ideological disagreements. For example, Oliver, Ha, and Callen (2012) argue that in the U.S. context, local governments are "managerial democracies" and that local elections are "based on the custodial performance of civic-oriented leaders and on their personal connections to voters with similarly deep community ties". If this is true for the cases studied here, we should expect ideology to be a much less important criterion locally than nationally when parties collaborate to form government. I argued in the methods chapter, however, that local politics in the Nordic countries in general, and Norway and Sweden in particular, have a strongly nationalized frame, and is likely to mirror the national level. Moreover, the local level in these countries controls large areas of public policy and administers a large share of the total government budget. Ideological differences were therefore expected to be relevant at this level as well. The empirical analysis confirmed this expectation.

The first empirical question addressed by this thesis was whether challenger parties are included in local governments based on similar factors as in national politics. If policy proximity is important, office-oriented challenger parties have an incentive to adapt their positions to those of their preferred coalition partners. In chapters 4, 5 and 6, I showed that policy proximity or similar policy emphasis within the coalition are important requirements for government participation also at the local level. The logistic regressions all revealed significant effects of policy proximity, on either the socioeconomic dimension (Progress Party), the sociocultural dimension (SD) or both (Left Party). The case studies of Red's handful of local governments similarly showed policy proximity to be an important prerequisite to join local coalitions. Firstly, this is in line with models of the policy-seeking party, positing that parties in general join governments to impact public policy (Axelrod, 1970; de Swaan, 1973). It makes an empirical contribution in this regard by testing this model on new data. As such, it is part of the growing literature that applies coalition theory at the local level, moving beyond the data that gave rise to these theories in the first place (e.g., Bäck, 2003; Skjæveland, Serritzlew and Blom-Hansen, 2007; Loxbo, 2010; Backlund, 2020). In line with previous national level studies (De Lange, 2008; Fagerholm, 2021), this thesis confirms that challengers are invited into government partly for reasons of policy seeking. It goes beyond this by showing that the effect occurs at the local level: municipal, office-oriented challengers are incentivized to moderate in anticipation of government participation. As the case of SD in Staffanstorp showed, policy proximity is sometimes caused by the

radicalization of a mainstream party. In such cases, the challenger increases its attractiveness as a coalition partner, because formateurs generally prefer ideologically compact coalitions. Proximity also increases the challenger's willingness to participate, as it will have to abandon fewer policies.

Moreover, as the case studies revealed, the effect of policy proximity is sometimes moderated by the quality of inter-party and inter-personal relationships in the municipality. In several cases, we saw that cultivating a collaborative relationship prior to government participation aided the efforts to form an alliance. Such pre-governmental collaboration helped to reveal the common ground between the parties and improved the working relationship between the parties. This effect was also revealed in a different way by Austevoll, FrP's puzzling case of exclusion from government. Here, the Conservatives' and Labor's period in opposition together led the two traditional rivals to find common ground and oust the previously dominant FrP from power. Other scholars have noted that a period in opposition together can increase the coalition potential between parties (Kekkonen and Ylä-Anttila, 2021). Few have included this in models of coalition formation, however. A hypothesis for future studies of coalition formation is that parties that have been in opposition together form 'affective blocs' (ibid.) that are in turn more likely to build coalitions. Some of this effect will be mediated through policy proximity (finding common ground against the government), and some of it through personal chemistry (building 'rapport' through shared activities in opposition). Mirroring this effect, the puzzling instances of exclusion in SD's case (e.g., the municipality of Eslöv) also showed that coalitions originally formed by 'necessity' (i.e., to exclude SD), can over time grow into organic alliances through improved personal chemistry and increasingly similar policy programs.

On the other hand, several cases (V in Mörbylånga and SD in Staffanstorp being clear examples) also showed that a failed collaboration can be conducive to the formation of new and untested coalitions. When alienation occurs between established (mainstream) coalition partners it limits the number of alternatives for the formateur and thereby increases the challenger's chances to make it into government. On the other hand, as Red's experiences in Bodø and V's puzzling case of exclusion in Pajala show, alienation sometimes occurs between challenger and mainstream parties in government and can be a severe barrier to further participation. This is a general feature of coalition formation (Tavits, 2008). Coalitions are less likely between partners with a failed collaboration in the (recent) past.

The thesis found little evidence of logrolling as a basis for government formation for challengers that emphasize sociocultural issues. In fact, it found that *similar* policy priorities

were often conducive to coalition building. The Progress Party in Grimstad is a case in point. Here, the emphasis on socioeconomic issues formed the basis for inclusion in a broad right-wing coalition, and the formulation of budget proposals so uncontroversial that several opposition parties voted for them. Similarly, in Staffanstorp, M's emphasis on sociocultural issues made SD a convenient coalition partner. As I noted in the theory chapter, there are good reasons to choose a coalition partner with similar policy priorities. Governments have limited resources and policies in one issue area may affect policies in another. On the other hand, a different sort of quid-pro-quo was revealed as conducive to coalition formation. The case of Red in Kragerø showed that fewer policy concessions were necessary on the part of the challenger party when the formateur party was highly office oriented. In other words, tangential party goals (office versus policy), rather than policy priorities seemed to reduce the need to bridge the policy gap.

*Compromise*

Next, I posited that disagreements over policy within the coalition result in policy concessions on the part of the challenger (the compromise mechanism). This was clear for instance in the case of the Progress Party, where I showed that when the party was in power, it generally softened its stance on the refugee issue in the subsequent election. I concluded that an important reason for this was FrP's difficulties in building a voting majority around restricting refugees' access to the municipality. These difficulties were apparent also in the Grimstad case study, where the Progress Party was consistently in the voting minority on refugee issues. The Left Party was shown to be more centrist in government across policy dimensions. However, there was significant variation in the data. In some cases, the challenger party retained a radical profile while in others it moderated significantly. Previous studies that seek to explain how challenger parties avoid moderation in office have generally emphasized mitigation strategies, such as one-foot-in, one-foot-out (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2005, 2010; Albertazzi, 2009) and logrolling over policy (Akkerman and De Lange, 2012). While the thesis has shown that such strategies (role-playing and agreements to disagree in particular) play a role, the key sources of variation were to be found in amplifying and muffling scope conditions.

The case studies revealed clearly that the impact of the compromise mechanism will depend on the challenger's bargaining power, as well as the degree of policy proximity within the coalition. Bargaining power is in part a function of the challenger's electoral strength relative to its alliance partners. Another source of bargaining power, which is

generally in low supply for these parties, is plausible alternative coalitions. Centrist parties are for instance in a stronger bargaining position than parties on the far left or far right because they are *pivotal*. They can cultivate several alternatives and thereby increase the perceived likelihood that they will walk away from an unappealing agreement. Far right and far-left parties on the other hand will generally not have several options when forming coalitions. They will therefore have to make larger concessions, all else equal. This is clearly illustrated by the case of the Left Party in Mörbylånga. Here, the relatively weak electoral support and the lack of alternative coalitions resulted in a low degree of influence within the coalition. On the other hand, Red, which is more purity oriented than V in its policy goals can more plausibly threaten to withdraw from negotiations and enter opposition.

As Red's case illustrates, bargaining power is also a matter of timing. In Kragerø, the evidence indicates that Red had the highest degree of influence during the initial coalition bargaining. This meant that Red had a large impact on the 2015 coalition agreement, and it was in its interest to make this document as comprehensive and detailed as possible. In the case of SD in Staffanstorp, we saw quite clearly how the compromise mechanism was preempted by the exceptionally high degree of policy proximity between M and SD. Because M pursued SD's preferred policies without any pressure from SD, SD was not forced to concede any issues to its partner.

In sum, then, the compromise mechanism should be studied in interaction with two key variables: Relative bargaining power and policy proximity. In cases of weak bargaining power and large policy distances, the compromise mechanism is strongest. This squares well with findings from the national level, which show that having some, but not many, government responsibilities (i.e. being a junior or support party) is most strongly associated with moderation in government (Capaul and Ewert, 2021). A dilemma from the perspective of preserving the mainstream consensus is that often a challenger party will not participate in government until it considers itself large enough to retain its integrity, popularity and ideological purity in power. On the other hand, many mainstream parties will avoid collaborating with challenger parties until the challenger has grown 'too big to ignore.' This is especially true for challenger parties that are considered more radical, as illustrated by the cases of Red and SD, compared to FrP and V. This state of affairs is not conducive to a strong compromise mechanism.

*Responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff*

Beyond the compromise mechanism, I posited that challengers in government operate under new practical constraints. Following Mair (2009), I postulated that the challenger's responsiveness and commitment to the radical ideological project will be diminished as a result of governing responsibility (the responsiveness-responsibility tradeoff). The role of governing party entails a commitment to act responsibly. This involves several obligations that are often incompatible with policy purity and responsiveness, including prudent fiscal governance, adherence to national rules and regulations, and the administration of policy programs inherited from previous governments.

The differences between Red and the Progress Party indicate that financial constraints are particularly challenging to left-wing parties in government. Because left-wing social policies are generally expensive, tight municipal budgets mean that far-left parties in government must prioritize heavily. This is reflected for instance in Red's intention to increase 'free funds' for municipalities, outlined in Red's alternative budget at the national level. The Progress Party, on the other hand, is generally in favor of limiting public spending and is therefore less challenged by fiscal constraints.

SD's experiences in local government show that a challenger party that is less constrained by compromise nevertheless faces limitations of national rules and policies. The very fact that SD's had the chance to pursue policies that diverged significantly from the national norm meant that more than other local incumbents, they have been constrained by court rulings and the demands of national agencies. SD's experiences also demonstrate that acting irresponsibly, by breaching national rules and policies, can have further negative effects on the pursuit of policy by damaging the relationship with the local administration. This can become a barrier to the efficacy of the local government, which relies on the administration to implement its policies.

The party leadership embracing the role of responsible governor can sometimes result in high internal tension between pragmatists and ideologues within a party. This was demonstrated very clearly in FrP's case in Grimstad. The first years in government were characterized by the existence of a dominant, moderate and pragmatic wing, alongside a more ideological wing. There was a high degree of tension between the two camps, and the identity of the branch going forward seemed to be at stake. After a rather public conflict, the ideological wing split off and operated as independents in the council. The literature on radical parties in office shows that this is not an unprecedented development. For instance, FPÖ's experience in national government in Austria is largely analogous. Here, the FPÖ politicians who were part of the government grew progressively moderate, resulting in growing internal tensions

and an eventual party split, where the moderate wing left the party and founded BZÖ (Heinisch and Hauser, 2016).

*Pothole-mechanism*

Beyond this, managing a municipality involves pressures to resolve practical, everyday issues for constituents (the pothole mechanism). As Sheri Berman (2008) argues: "Parties that are busy filling potholes, fixing cracked sidewalks, and upgrading faulty sewage systems tend to have little time left over for ideology, political rigidity, and radicalism" (p. 6). Given that the local level is especially geared towards precisely this kind of civic management, this mechanism was thought to be present and impactful for municipal challenger parties. The impact of this mechanism seems to depend on the challenger's organizational strength and representation. Parties that are well-represented and have a sizeable local branch are more able to engage in role-playing, where some politicians represent the party's core issues, while others get on with necessary administrative tasks. For example, in Kragerø, while daily administrative tasks largely occupied the deputy mayor, other representatives could devote themselves to 'Red issues', because the party was so well represented. This strategy was also present in Grimstad, where the key government politicians conformed to the role and got 'busy with the administration of things', while other members were responsive to the base. In Mörbylånga, on the other hand, the Left Party seemed to lack the organizational resources to engage in this kind of roleplay. Again, the radical positioning and style of the Moderates completely preempted this mechanism in Staffanstorp. SD's more radical positions were well maintained by the government throughout the period, without much effort on SD's part.

*Reputation building*

To varying degrees, the parties carry a reputational burden. In particular, the parties with very limited government experience at all levels are often perceived by voters and other parties as irresponsible or unfit to govern. Participating in local government in a responsible way (i.e., as a trustworthy partner, or a party that is willing to concede and compromise) is seen as a chance to remedy this image problem (reputation-building mechanism). This entails an incentive to tone down independence and ideological purity, and instead engage in pragmatic policy development, prudent leadership, and cooperative problem-solving. This perception has been particularly strong for the Sweden Democrats, a historically isolated party with a serious image problem. The politicians that have led SD in local coalitions have emphasized the opportunity to prove that SD is a serious party that can govern and compromise with its

partners. This mechanism is related to the national practice of showcasing local examples of responsible governance, making it visible and impactful beyond the municipality.

As the case-studies show, the parties also have a local reputation. In all four cases, the parties cultivated a reputation as a reliable and attractive coalition partner to ensure future coalition opportunities. The literature indicates that past government experience is an important predictor of coalition membership (Warwick, 1996). Warwick (ibid.) suggests that this effect is in part reputation-based, i.e., that tried and tested coalition partners are considered 'safer' choices than untested ones and that being in government gives a party the opportunity to prove itself 'safe'. However, the reputation building effort involved in challenger party branch's first experience in local government is often more fundamental than this. Rather than proving itself a safe choice in the upcoming election, it must prove itself to be the kind of party that is capable of governing at all. On the other hand, as this thesis has demonstrated, challenger parties face dilemmas in government, related to party cohesion, identity, and integrity, that are not easy to reconcile with this reputation building effort.

*Winner's boost in pro-system views*

I theorized that challenger parties that participate in power are less likely to express anti-establishment and anti-system views. The explanation for this is twofold. First, as the party's insider status and elite position increase, critiques of political insiders and elites lose their credibility and strategic value. Second, politicians are likely to express more support for political institutions if they benefit from the way things are organized. In short, the status quo is supported by the winners. The evidence on the Left Party strongly indicates such an effect. Consistently, politicians that take part in governing coalitions are more pro-system and more satisfied with the state of democracy than their co-partisans in opposition. The data on the handful of SD branches that have completed a period in power suggests, likewise, that these branches become less supportive of direct democracy. This is in line with previous findings from the literature (Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006; Esaiasson, Gilljam and Karlsson, 2013; Gilljam and Karlsson, 2015). The thesis goes beyond previous studies by showing that the winner's boost is at least as strong for challenger parties in power.

This effect is not uniform, however. Red's experiences in Bodø show, for instance, that challenger parties sometimes continue to criticize their coalition partners after entering office and take on a role as the 'opposition within government.' This oppositional activity was not well received by the coalition partners who excluded Red from the coalition. The winner's boost seems to have been short lived in that case due to the tension between Red's

desire for independence and AP's desire for coalitional cohesion. Moreover, the Mörbylånga case showed that disaffection and support for direct democracy can sometimes increase in government if the challenger is overly constrained within the coalition.

*The trickle-up effect*

Finally, I theorized that the immediate effects of local government participation may trickle up and affect the level of systemic integration and mainstreaming for the challenger party on the national level. I theorized two mechanisms through which such a spill-over effect may occur: the movement of politicians between levels of government and multi-level showcasing and learning. To examine the former mechanism, I examined the prevalence of local government experiences among parliamentarians, and the opportunities to proceed from the local to the national level for successful subnational representatives. The data on the two parties with extensive histories of local inclusion (V and FrP) shows that local government experience is very common among MPs. For Red, the data shows that local government experience is highly valued within the party, and that a large share of the politicians that have led Red in local coalitions have subsequently held high positions in the central party.

I also examined the differences between two groups of national politicians: those with experience from local government and those without (i.e. those who have only been in local opposition and those who have only had a career in the central party). The evidence shows that the two groups are rather similar when it comes to level of oppositional activity in parliament. On the other hand, politicians with local executive experience flock to parliamentary committees that deal with local issues. Therefore, the issue focus is somewhat different for the two groups of politicians. Moreover, the case of the Progress Party shows that this is reflected in the way these politicians appeal to voters. For those with local government experience, there is much less emphasis on sociocultural issues like immigration or law and order, than among those who have only been in local opposition or among party functionaries. Politicians in the former group emphasize socioeconomic issues and their ability to represent the constituency, to a higher extent. Beyond establishing a spill-over effect from local to national mainstreaming, this finding informs the literature on pre-parliamentary careers. It establishes that a local government background is very common among MPs from challenger parties in Norway and Sweden. It also suggests that this background affects politicians' behavior in parliament. This aligns well with previous findings from the literature (Binderkrantz *et al.*, 2020).

For each of the four parties I also examined the practice of strategic showcasing of local governments. This practice has a special significance prior to full national inclusion. The challenger parties themselves, and sometimes their coalition partners use such local collaborations as evidence that a national alliance could work in lieu of direct national-level evidence. We saw extensive use of this practice in all four parties. Prior to 2013, when the Progress Party participated in national government for the first time, local governments were actively used as showcases of FrP's abilities to govern, cooperate and take responsibility (in addition to showcasing FrP-policies). Red, having no experience with alliance formation at the national level, uses local coalitions as showcases to voters and other parties in a similar way to FrP pre-2013. Moreover, Red has made efforts to take lessons from these local alliances when planning out a national strategy for collaboration on the left. The Sweden Democrats have also promoted and used their local government coalitions in national reputation-building endeavors. Local coalitions have been described as opportunities to show that SD can function well in government, and SD's national leadership has expressed that the party will use local coalitions as models when attempting to join national government. The Left Party demonstrates that the learning/showcasing effect depends on the party culture and the goals of the leadership. Under the management of Lars Ohly, the Left Party seemed to actively ignore obvious candidates for local showcases. Ohly had an oppositional strategy and expressed doubt as to the radical commitment of the most successful branches where V gained local power. After Jonas Sjöstedt took over as leader, by contrast, local showcases became a key part of V's national campaign strategy, with the aim of improving the perception that V could govern and be responsible for the economy. The strength of the learning mechanism seems to depend partly on the parties themselves. Some parties place a higher value the information from local governments. Red, for example, has included these experiences to an unusually high degree in national discussions on the strategic direction of the party. On the other hand, national awareness of the success of local coalitions was unusually high in the case of SD. SD-led governments were historically unique and happened against the wishes of the mainstream parties' central leadership. Therefore, there was a high degree of media interest in the popularity, policies, and quality of collaboration in these governments.

*Summary*

A more refined causal model can now be outlined. Each mechanism is moderated by further factors. Degree of compromise is determined by relative bargaining power and policy

proximity. The impact of national rules and policies are determined by the incompatibility between the challenger's local policy program and the dominant positions at the national level. The impact of budgetary constraints depends on the cost of challenger's preferred policies. The pothole mechanism is moderated by the challenger's level of representation and organizational strength. The reputation building motivation is amplified by the degree of stigmatization the party experiences. The worse the reputation of the party, the stronger the incentive to appear responsible and normal. When it comes to the trickle-up effect, the learning mechanism and degree of strategic showcasing depend on the challenger's (lack of) national government experience, the prevalence of local government participation, and the success of each local coalition.

Future studies of government inclusion and programmatic/behavioral moderation should take these features into account: How strong is the challenger's bargaining position (electoral strength and viable alternatives) in relation to the rest of the coalition? To what extent do the challenger's policy positions diverge from those of its alliance partners? To what extent would the challenger's campaign pledges violate rules or policies decided at higher levels of government? Is the party represented in many executive committees and does it have a strong party organization? Answering these questions will help to account for variations in degree of moderation in power.

**Implications**

What do the findings in this thesis mean for future studies of challenger parties on the far left and far right? First, they imply the need to account for local-level processes when studying how these parties change over time. Like other forms of democratic participation, such as electoral competition, parliamentary representation and national coalition building, local government formation is transformative to a party. It offers real opportunities to pursue policy, but only in a constrained way. Parties have to make themselves attractive to potential coalition partners, make compromises within an alliance, conform to the dictates of responsibility in government, and provide practical solutions to the problems of local citizens. The degree to which the parties are constrained depends on further factors enumerated above. In short, challenger parties are restrained in local government. These effects may spill over to the national level by providing information to national strategists, and through the movement of politicians from the local to the national level.

This thesis has examined two similar political systems. Norway and Sweden are both unitary states with a high degree of decentralization, and a high level of local public

spending. There is a high presence of national parties in local politics, and a high turnout in local elections. As I explained in Chapter 1, these country cases were chosen in part because local politics are likely to mirror national patterns and dynamics. In other words, it is uncertain how well the findings here will travel to other countries, especially to places like the U.S., where local elections and government are less party political, and more exclusively oriented towards practical "urban governance" (Paxton, 2023, p. 220). While there are reasons to suppose that the findings translate best to similar political contexts (e.g., Denmark or Finland), Paxton's (2023) study shows that radical parties matter in local politics in countries like Austria, Switzerland, France, and Italy, and that these local experiences are significant in the development and strategies of the parties.

Secondly, future studies may test the relevance of the insights of this thesis at the national level. There is no reason to suppose that many of the findings from the local level do not, mutatis mutandis, also apply at the national level. The causal model, including the mechanisms and interaction variables enumerated above could help to account for variations in the level of moderation for challenger parties in national government. Certain adjustments to the model would be necessary, however. For instance, national rules and policies, do of course not limit national governments in their policy pursuits as they do at the local level. However, constitutional and international (e.g., EU) rules and policies do.

Certain variables have not been examined in this thesis, even though there are theoretical reasons to believe that they matter, due to the lack of appropriate data. For instance, existing surveys in the two countries are not easily disaggregated to the local level because of privacy restrictions. A topic for future studies is changes to the electorate of radical challengers following local government participation. Government participation may, for example, lead to a realignment, where the party repels radical voters and attracts more moderate ones. It could also moderate and increase democratic satisfaction and pro-system attitudes among its existing voters. This would mediate a moderate shift in rhetoric and ideology for these parties. Similar realignments and attitude shifts can be theorized among members and activists (Art, 2011). Panel data of members and voters at the municipal level could be used to examine these effects.

This thesis also has implications for the larger question of how mainstream parties ought to relate to radical challengers. Mainstream parties that ponder this question must assess whether a strict cordon sanitaire that covers the local level is a prudent response to challenges from the far right or far left. Popular contributions to the literature (notably Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018)) advocate strict gatekeeping against such actors, both within

parties and between parties. On the other hand, this response must be weighed against other, more accommodative, responses. The cooperation approach is typically motivated by strategic concerns, including the formation of desirable governments where the mainstream party in question can have a dominant position, or the chance to oust a rival from a dominant position in the political system. Parties that choose to include challengers in government, often rely on the presence of 'taming effects,' however (Heinze, 2018). They include these parties, hoping that they will be constrained in terms of rhetoric, behavior, and policy pursuit. This thesis has shown that, also at the local level, parties join government hoping to influence policy. Being in government gives them new opportunities to do exactly that, but only in a constrained way. Mainstream parties that consider a government coalition with a radical challenger must consider the scope conditions for the inclusion-moderation effect in their case. How much bargaining power does the challenger have in policy negotiations? How distant are the challenger's positions from the mainstream? Does the challenger have the organizational strength to pursue a one-foot-in, one-foot-out strategy (e.g., through role playing)? To what extent can we rely on courts and other veto players to prevent the implementation of the most radical policies? The answers to these questions determine the degree to which radical challengers are constrained in government.

From the perspective of preserving the mainstream, there are 'safe' and 'unsafe' ways of including a challenger party in government. Moderating and constraining mechanisms can be maximized by making moderation a requirement of entry in the coalition, encouraging anticipatory moderation through pre-governmental alliances, by only including challenger parties with a low degree of bargaining power, a weak party organization, and a pragmatic leadership. The least 'safe' instances of coalition membership for challengers are when moderating mechanisms are undermined, for instance by a highly office oriented formateur collaborating with a highly policy (purity) oriented challenger with a great deal of bargaining power and organizational strength.

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# Appendix

Interview guide

Outline

A. Introduction
B. Joining government
C. Balancing policy influence and wishes of the voters against responsibility in office
D. Communication and movement within the party

A. Introduction

- Thank you
- Short description of the project
- Confidential treatment of data
- Introduction to the interview, and how to answer the questions (skipping questions, and adding information beyond what I asked about)

B. Joining government

1. As [challenger party] was entering the governing coalition in [municipality], what were its policy priorities?
2. And what were the main priorities of [mainstream partner in local coalition]?
3. Were there any issues where [challenger] had large disagreements with [mainstream partner]? What were these issues?
4. To what extent did the members/politicians of [challenger party] view themselves as political outsiders prior to joining the government? And to what extent did were they viewed as outsiders by members of the other parties? (follow-up: did this change when they became part of the governing coalition?)
5. Were there strong internal discussions within your local branch about how wise it would be to form such a coalition? (follow-up: What were the arguments of those who argued against it?)
6. In politics, we often speak of a left/right axis. Think back to the moment just before you formed this government. On a scale from 0-10 where 0 is furthest to the left and 10 is furthest to the right, where would you place the following actors:

| | Furthest left 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | Furthest right 10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| [challenger] in [municipality] | | | | | | | | | | | |
| [challenger] in the average municipality | | | | | | | | | | | |
| [challenger] at the national level | | | | | | | | | | | |
| [mainstream partner] in [municipality] | | | | | | | | | | | |
| [Mainstream partner] in the average municipality | | | | | | | | | | | |
| [Mainstream partner] at the national level | | | | | | | | | | | |

*Other responses:*

**C. Balancing policy influence and wishes of the voters against responsibility in office**

7. Politicians often have to balance different and conflicting considerations when that make strategic decisions. I will now give you a series of statements regarding the balance between such considerations. I would like you to indicate your level of agreement with each statement. The alternatives are “Completely disagree”, “somewhat disagree”, “Neither nor”, “somewhat agree”, and “completely agree.”

| | Completely disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neither nor | Somewhat agree | Completely agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The branch feared losing voters as a result of this collaboration. | | | | | |
| The branch feared that the compromises they would have to make in coalition would mean to concede important issues. | | | | | |
| In those cases where the party had to concede important issues, they made it clear to voters that the decision was made against the party's wishes. | | | | | |
| Being in government gave [challenger] a good opportunity to improve its reputation among skeptical voters | | | | | |
| [challenger's] time in government has meant that more ambitious and career-oriented people have wanted to join the party | | | | | |

8. Within most parties, there is a degree of tension between "pragmatists" and "ideologues". Pragmatists want to join government, even if that means adjusting policy goals in compromises with alliance partners. Ideologues also want to enter government, but not if it means adjusting policy goals as a consequence of compromise. Think of the average member of [challenger party] in [municipality]. Where would you place them: clearly among the pragmatists, closer to the pragmatists, in-between the pragmatists and ideologues, closer to the ideologues or clearly among the ideologues? And what about the average member of [mainstream partner] in [municipality]?

| | [challenger] | [mainstream] |
|---|---|---|
| a. Clearly among the pragmatists | | |
| c. Closer to the pragmatists | | |
| d. In-between | | |
| e. Closer to the ideologues | | |
| g. Clearly among the ideologues | | |

9. I will now give you a list of political issues. To what degree was [challenger] in [municipality] forced to concede [give up their preferred positions], for instance to

preserve a good working relationship with coalition partners, or in exchange for concessions from the other parties during the government period?

| | Large concessions | Small concessions | None |
|---|---|---|---|
| A) Local democracy and political transparency | | | |
| B) Climate and environment | | | |
| C) Social inequality | | | |
| D) Education | | | |
| E) Immigration/ integration | | | |
| F) Programs for children/youths | | | |
| G) Elder care | | | |
| H) Economic governance of the municipality (including the privatization issue and municipal hires) | | | |
| I) Local business policies | | | |
| J) Healthcare | | | |

10. And what about [mainstream partner]? What concessions did they have to make? [Same list of policy areas as above]

Follow up regarding specific issues if the answer was "large concessions"

11. Think about the various barriers to [challenger's] political project locally. What has stood in the way when [challenger] has tried to realize its manifesto in government? (Prompts: Tight budgets, demands by coalition partners, daily management tasks taking up time, energy and money, limits placed by the administration)
12. To what extent do you agree with the following statements: completely agree, somewhat agree, neither nor, somewhat disagree, or completely disagree?

| | Completely disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neither/nor | Somewhat agree | Completely agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| To preserve a good collaborative environment between the governing parties, issues where the parties strongly disagreed were set aside, even if one of the parties thought it was important | | | | | |
| Within the coalition, pressure was applied to [challenger] to avoid rhetoric that was considered "too radical" | | | | | |

13. Has the period in government changed [challenger's] relationship with the other parties in [municipality], for instance when it comes to the politicians'/party's reputation, collaborative relationships or the possibility of joining future coalitions?
14. Overall, would you say that [challenger] moderated its votes in the municipal council while in government (so as to act more in line with its coalition partners than it would otherwise)?
15. What about [mainstream partner] did it moderate its votes in the municipal council while in government (so as to act more in line with [challenger] than it would otherwise)?

**D. Communication and movement within the party**

16. Overall, what level of interest has the central party shown in the collaboration between [challenger] and [mainstream partner] in you municipality? (Follow-up: Were you asked to provide information about how successful the coalition was? How often would you have such conversations? Was it your experience that the interest in your local branch from the central party increased as soon as [challenger] joined the coalition?)
17. How often would you or your local co-partisans discuss the following issues with people from the central party during the government period (either in official meetings or more informal conversations/e-mails and the like)?

| | Never | On rare occasions | Regularly |
|---|---|---|---|
| Popularity of the coalition among voters | | | |
| How well the parties worked together? | | | |
| Degree of policy influence for your party in the municipality | | | |

18. If the answer was regularly: about how often? Monthly, weekly, or what?
19. Would you say that the degree of communication and access between the local branch here in [municipality] is larger than average for a local branch, about average, or smaller than average?
20. To what extent to you think that joining a local government increases a politician's chances of having a career at the national level within your party, compared to remaining in opposition? (e.g. as an MP, advisor to the parliamentary group or similar)?
21. To what extent do you think that national parties gather and use information from local coalitions when they consider an untested coalition at the national level? In other words, can successful local coalitions inspire similar coalitions nationally? And can failed local coalitions deter national politicians from attempting similar cooperations?
22. Below, I have listed a series of possible preconditions for local coalitions affecting national decisions about alliances between parties. On a scale from 1 (completely unimportant) to 5 (very important) how crucial are the following factors for a successful "spill-over" effect?

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| That local collaborations occur in large and important municipalities | | | | | |
| That collaborations occur in many municipalities across the country | | | | | |
| That the collaborations are popular among local voters | | | | | |
| That the parties in coalition collaborate well | | | | | |
| That the coalitions are effective and manage to implement the policies they want to | | | | | |
| The degree of contact between the local branch and the central party | | | | | |

Is there anything you would like to add about the topics we have discussed? Is there anything important I should know about that was not well covered by the questions?