Linköping University
The Institute for Analytical Sociology

# Right-wing populism and social distance towards Muslims in Sweden – Results from a nation-wide vignette study

Tim Müller
Peter Hedström
Sarah Valdez
Karl Wennberg

Linköping University

Department of Social and Welfare Studies

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*Tim Müller, Peter Hedström, Sarah Valdez, and Karl Wennberg*
*University of Linköping, Institute for Analytical Sociology*

## Abstract

New right-wing extremist parties all over Europe have been described as adopting a master frame that combines **xenophobia** and **anti-political establishment populism** (Rydgren 2004). In Sweden the *Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna, SD)* have emerged as the dominating new right-wing extremist party that was able to more than double their share of votes from the 2010 to the 2014 parliamentary elections (2010: 5.7%, 2014: 12.9%). We conducted a **vignette study** in a representative sample of the Swedish population shortly before and after the 2014 national elections, which helps us to analyse the **social distance between the majority population and the Muslim minority**. We are explicitly taking into account the prevalence of **right-wing populist attitudes** in the population and their **support for SD** in the 2010 and 2014 elections. Our results show that; (1) anti-minority attitudes (held by 36% of the population) but not anti-establishment attitudes (held by 37% of the population) predict increased social distance to Muslims and even towards persons that are only presented as having a foreign name, (2) SD voters hold drastically more negative views about Muslims than does any other voter group, (3) the vote for SD is purely driven by anti-minority sentiments, not anti-establishmentarism. **In conclusion, while SD might present its cause in the language of anti-establishment populism and their voters might legitimise their voting choice by this principle, SD voters' intentions are fundamentally rooted in xenophobia.**

## General aims of the vignette study

The latest election successes of right-wing populist parties all over Europe, and more specifically the Sweden Democrats in Sweden, raises questions about the attitudes that the general population holds towards minorities with a foreign background and particularly those with a Muslim background. Muslim immigrants in most European countries have emerged as the "universal out-group", which is often portrayed as most culturally distant and acts as the most salient group in debates on issues of immigration and integration.[2]

A number of theories have been suggested to explain why people increasingly cast their vote for right-wing populist parties. Traditional approaches in the field of right-wing populism research (Betz 1994; Kitschelt 1995) have tried to explain the appeal of new radical right parties with rapid economic and cultural change, which puts those groups in society that do not have the necessary economic or cultural capital to adapt to the change in a subjectively perceived disadvantaged position. Moreover, those groups, which cannot compete in a globalised economy (e.g. blue collar workers, lower ranking white collar workers), can be mobilised by racist political entrepreneurs (Rydgren 2002). A large number of national and international studies has shown that voters are not so much motivated by the desire to express protest against the established parties or the way democracy works in their country (van der Brug, Fennema and Tillie 2000; Arzheimer 2007; Eger and Valdez, forthcoming). The evidence rather shows that they vote for right-wing populist parties because they perceive immigration as a cultural and sometimes economic threat, and latent xenophobia is manifested through voting for right-wing extremist parties.

Our study was designed to capture levels of latent xenophobia and anti-minority attitudes in the Swedish population and especially among voters of the Sweden Democrats (SD). For this purpose,

[1] All results in this report as well as their interpretations solely reflect the authors' views. We would like to emphasise that the polling company Novus Group International AB was only responsible for the data collection and survey administration and was not involved in the data analysis or writing of this report.

[2] The creation of a socially and culturally distant out-group in order to increase social coherence and an elevation of one's in-group is a traditional concept derived from social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979).

we chose to measure attitudes towards minorities in a so-called "vignette design" (Atzmüller and Steiner 2010), which allows us to minimise social desirability bias and provide more evidence on the drivers of anti-minority attitudes and how these translate into votes for SD. Our vignette design has been developed in cooperation with researchers from Humboldt University Berlin and will be used for an international comparison between Germany and Sweden in the future (Foroutan et al. 2014, Beigang et al 2014). We measure the social distance towards Muslims and persons with a foreign sounding name on three indicators of personal interaction (accepting a person as a next door neighbour, as a nurse, or as a potential family member) with a target vignette and test how well the party voted for in the last elections, general anti-minority attitudes, anti-establishment attitudes, and other socio-demographic characteristics predict negative responses towards the presented vignettes.

**Our results confirm that voters of the Sweden Democrats hold drastically more negative views towards Muslims and persons with a foreign name than voters of other Swedish parties. These views are strongly driven by general anti-minority sentiments – not anti-establishment sentiments. The same holds when looking at people's decisions to vote for SD. Voters are not choosing SD to express a general dissatisfaction with the established parties, but their choice is driven by general anti-minority sentiments. Despite generally high levels of acceptance of Muslims and foreigners, we also find that ca. 35% of respondents in our sample agree somewhat or strongly with the view that minorities' rights are given too much weight at the expense of the general population, which indicates that the voting potential of SD might be stronger than previously expected.**

**Features and advantages of the vignette design**

Our research design allows us to tackle a number of questions, which have previously garnered little attention. In particular, we are able to measure latent xenophobic attitudes and assess the effect of specific attributes of minority groups which are evaluated negatively (Does it matter if they have a foreign name? High or low education? Muslim or Christian?). The particular characteristrics of our design are described below.

*What is a vignette design and why do we use it?*

A so-called "vignette design", or factorial survey design, can be compared to an experiment conducted in a lab and allows the researchers to fully control the assignment of experimental conditions to the participants (Atzmüller and Steiner 2010). The "experimental treatment" in this case is the presentation of a person description that systematically varies in certain characteristics (i.e. a person described as a Christian vs. a person described as a Muslim), but to which respondents are assigned randomly. **More concretely, respondents in an opinion survey are asked to rate a very specific person description on an attitude scale, without also knowing which other possible person descriptions have been presented to other respondents.** Because respondents cannot select which description they receive, and they are only evaluating one description at a time, they cannot as easily adjust their responses into a direction which they might think of as "socially desirable".

Moreover, because person descriptions are varied systematically in only a limited set of characteristics, **we can estimate how strongly respondents' evaluations are affected by one attribute of a person as opposed to another attribute on which respondents might base their evaluation** (i.e.; Are persons evaluated negatively because of their religious faith or because they have a low socio-economic status? If presented vignettes have the same socio-economic status but only differ with regard to religious faith, then differences in evaluation must be due to the factor "faith", not socio-economic status.).

**The research design allows us to assess how far different sub-groups of the population are affected by a certain cue that is presented to them. Through this, we can directly measure how different groups of voters evaluate the same vignette.** This is something that is not possible in traditional lab based studies, which mostly rely on student volunteers. Because we are analysing

a large representative sample of the Swedish population, we can generalise our findings to the general population with a sufficient level of confidence.[3]

*Which personal attributes of a vignette increase social distance?*

Our design systematically varied the person descriptions, which people were asked to rate on the following dimensions:

- Christian vs. Muslim
- Male vs. female
- Swedish sounding name vs. foreign sounding name
- Religiosity vs. no indication of being religious
- Volunteering for secular cause vs. volunteering for religious cause
- Lower education vs. higher education

Generally we expected that Muslim vignettes would receive less approval on all dimensions. (Muslims are seen as the universal out-group.) However, this could be due to negative attributes that are part of the stereotype, but unrelated to the cultural content ascribed to that stereotype. For instance, respondents could hold more negative attitudes towards Muslims because Muslims are perceived as "foreign" (and foreigners are generally evaluated more negatively), or more religious (and religiosity is seen with suspicion), or as having a lower socio-economic status (indicated by a lower education level). In all cases, the vignette that contains a positive attribute (e.g. high education) should be evaluated better than the one with a negative attribute.

While we have to conduct more detailed research, **our first results show that the only vignette characteristic that matters in the evaluation across the general population is the description of a person as "Muslim".** Only being perceived as foreigner, having high or low education, or high or low religiosity do not matter. "Muslim" vignettes that are described as volunteering for a secular cause are perceived as more favourable than those volunteering for a Mosque. However, "Christian" vignettes that volunteer for a church do not suffer from more negative evaluations.

*Explaining the relationship between socio-demographic characteristics, and latent and manifest xenophobia*

Due to the "globalisation disadvantage" hypothesis described above, wherein workers who fare less well in the globalised economy are susceptible to the appeals of xenophobic political entrepreneurs, **we would expect that lower social classes, the less educated, and older people should hold a perception of greater social distance towards Muslims and be more likely to vote for SD.** Our vignette design lets us test the perception of Muslims in these different social groups.

*Anti-minority and anti-establishment populist attitudes and their effect on latent and manifest xenophobia*

In addition to traditional explanations of right-wing extremist voting (see above), it has been claimed that voting for right wing populist parties can be seen as a form of protest against the established parties or a perceived corruption of the political system as a whole. However, evidence from an increasing number of studies indicates that support of anti-immigration parties is not merely a form of protest voting but rather reflects a xenophobic potential in the electorate which perceives immigration as a cultural and/or economic threat (van der Brug, Fennema and Tillie 2000; Arzheimer 2007; Eger and Valdez, forthcoming).

[3] Technically, we did not draw a fully random sample of the population, but relied on a panel of respondents, which regularly participates in opinion surveys. However, the sample of these respondents is matching the overall socio-demographic characteristics of the general population closely. For more information on potential bias that this might introduce to our data, please see the section on methods and survey administration.

However, this evidence has not received much attention in the public debate after the recent parliamentary elections. Commentators and politicians have emphasised that the surge of support for SD cannot be explained by anti-immigrant attitudes, but rather is due to dissatisfaction with the established parties. "To summarise SD's voters as racists is not credible anymore" was claimed by Gudrun Schyman and Kenneth Hermele in SvD on 24/9. Maciej Zaremba (DN 18/9) warned about stamping the Sweden Democrats as racists and said that SD's success could be explained mainly by people who "voted for SD in frustration over [issues that are important to them] but that the establishment seems to ignore". Sanna Rayman expressed similar views in SvD on 9/11 and claimed that the SD nowadays grows "far beyond the small group of xenophobes."

Our research design lets us directly test these claims. **We tested whether respondents' agreement with statements reflecting either anti-establishment sentiments or anti-minority attitudes would influence their evaluations of the presented vignettes, and which of the statements would predict voting for SD.** Furthermore we tested whether SD's electoral success would be seen as a signal of legitimisation that would lead to an increased expression of anti-Muslim attitudes after the elections.

## Vignette design and measurement of social distance

We presented each respondent with a person vignette (fully randomised across respondents) that varied along 6 dimensions (see Table 1). We aimed to create vignettes that would describe young persons, which could belong to the Christian or Muslim faith. In total 64 different attribute combinations were possible, of which each of our respondents was presented only one.

***Table 1:*** *Operationalisation of vignette attributes.*

| Vignette attribute | Operationalisation |
|---|---|
| Religious faith | Christian vs. Muslim |
| Foreign name (female and male versions) | Vignette was presented with a common Swedish name or a foreign sounding name that could belong to a Christian or Muslim person.<br>Swedish: Lisa or Stefan<br>Foreign: Amirah or Ibrahim |
| Religiosity | The vignette was either described as "religious" or such a description was omitted. |
| Volunteering in free time, secular vs. religious cause | The person description indicated that the person was either volunteering for a secular cause (working in a home for the elderly) or for a religious cause (in a church if Christian or in a mosque if Muslim) |
| Educational degree | Each vignette could either have educational credentials that would allow a university education (higher education) or following a vocational track (lower education) |

*Vignette wording in English:*

| |
|---|
| Please imagine that this person is living in your neighbourhood. Afterwards I will ask you a few questions about this person.<br>[Lisa/Amirah/Stefan/Ibrahim] is [devout/“ „] [Christian/Muslim]. He/She attends [vocational/university oriented school] and in his/her free time he/she does voluntary work in a [church/mosque/home for the elderly]. |

*Vignette wording in Swedish:*

| |
|---|
| Vänligen föreställ dig att denna person bor i ditt grannskap.<br>[Lisa/Amirah/Stefan/Ibrahim] är [troende/” ”] [Kristen/Muslim]. Han/hon går en [studieförberedande (teoretiskt inriktad) gymnasial utbildnin/ yrkesförberedande (praktiskt inriktad) gymnasial utbildning] och på sin fritid engagerar han/hon sig i kyrkans församling/ moskéns församling/ ett hem för äldre]. |

After being presented with the vignette, we assessed respondents' social distance towards the vignette. All questions were presented in a randomised order, so that effects of the question ordering would be avoided. Respondents were asked to rate how positive or negative they would find it if this person would

- be their **next door neighbour**,
- act as a **nurse for their elderly parents**,
- **marry into the respondent's family**.

Each dimension represents a different level of personal contact (neighbour/low, nurse/medium, marriage/high). It was therefore expectable that respondents would generally be less positive on the marriage question than on the next door neighbour question.[4]

*Question wording in English:*

| |
|---|
| How would you find it if...<br><br>…someone like [Lisa/Amirah/Stefan/Ibrahim] would become your next door neighbour?<br><br>… someone like [Lisa/Amirah/Stefan/Ibrahim] would care for your parents as a nurse?<br><br>… someone like [Lisa/Amirah/Stefan/Ibrahim] would marry into your family?<br><br>Response categories: (1) very positive (2) rather positive (3) rather negative (4) very negative. (NA) Refused. (DK) Don't know. |

*Question wording in Swedish:*

| |
|---|
| Hur skulle du ställa dig till att...<br><br>...någon som [Lisa/Amirah/Stefan/Ibrahim] blev din närmsta granne?<br><br>...någon som [Lisa/Amirah/Stefan/Ibrahim] skötte om dina föräldrar?<br><br>...någon som [Lisa/Amirah/Stefan/Ibrahim] gifte in sig i din familj?<br><br>Svarskategorier: (1) Mycket positiv (2) Ganska positiv (3) Ganska negativ (4) Mycket negativ. (VIS) Vill inte svara. (VI) Vet inte. |

[4] With regard to the marriage item used in our study, we would like to remark that responses on this variable need not necessarily reflect latent xenophobia, but could arguably also measure different value orientations of members of different religious groups. We find that many religious groups prescribe the marriage between members of the same religious faith, and Christians as well as Muslims could just express their adherence to this religious norm by preferring the in-marriage of members of the same faith.

For the analyses presented below we coded all positive answers into one positive category and all negative answers into one negative category. We left the DK and Refused categories as they were and used a statistical technique called *multinomial logistic regression* (Long 1997) to model respondents' answers on each of the possible categories (1) positive (2) negative (3) Refused (4) DK. However, for the sake of brevity, we only present the results for the positive/negative responses.

## Measurement of right-wing populist attitudes

We tried to capture the two main dimensions of right-wing populism (Rydgren 2004), **xenophobia** and **anti-political establishment populism**, by two different items:

How strongly do you agree with the following statements? [Instämmer du, eller instämmer du inte, i följande påstående?] (Responses from 1 – "Do not agree at all" [Instämmer inte alls] to 5 – "Completely agree" [Instämmer helt])

**Anti-minority attitudes:**
1. Too much weight is given to the rights of minorities at the expense of the general population.
[I samhället tas generellt för mycket hänsyn till olika minoriteter än till befolkningen som helhet.]

**Anti-establishment attitudes:**
2. The political parties in the parliament mostly represent lobby groups and elite interests, not what the people really think.
[De politiska partierna representerar i högre grad olika intresseorganisationer och lobbyister, snarare än befolkningen som helhet.]

## Socio-demographic background variables

All of our models are controlling for the following respondents' socio-demographic background characteristics:

- Sex
- Age
- Education - (1) No degree/primary education, (2) secondary education (3) university education
- Occupation - (1) Blue collar (2) White collar (3) Self-employed (4) Pensioner (5) Unemployed (6) other/student/parental leave

## Political party voted for in 2010/2014

We conducted the survey at two points in time, once before the parliamentary elections (Wave 1) and a second time after the parliamentary elections (Wave 2). However, please note that different respondents were surveyed at each of the survey waves. In each round respondents were asked about which party they voted for. In Wave 1 this question asked about the voting choice in the 2010 elections, in Wave 2 respondents were asked about their vote in the 2010 and 2014 elections.

## Methods

*Sampling and survey administration*
Our data has been collected in two waves, one before the parliamentary elections (10-22 April 2014) and one after the elections (2-14 October 2014). The survey was conducted **online** and administered by the Novus opinion survey (www.novus.se) company as part of its "Novus Sweden Online Panel", **a panel of regular survey participants** (age 18 and above) which is created through probability based recruiting methods (random telephone interviews). This method of online panel recruitment

assures that a panel's properties closely resemble the properties of fully random samples, which is important for the inferences that are made about the general population (AAPOR 2010). Novus assured us about the national representativeness and reliability of the analysed data. The sample sizes were N = 2130 in Wave 1 (Response rate: 56%) and N = 2109 in Wave 2 (Response rate: 60%). The survey was conducted as a cross-sectional survey at both time points, which means that we have a different set of respondents each time. All analyses apply the appropriate survey weights delivered by Novus. These survey weights are necessary because while we have a sample that closely matches the distribution of the general population, certain demographic groups might be underrepresented, for which the survey weights adjust. We are confident that our results are generalizable towards the general population, and opinion surveys like this are used regularly to assess issues of public opinion or for election polls. However since the survey was administered online and is recruited from regular survey participants, a selection bias might be introduced. As such it might be possible that our survey overrepresents parts of the population, which generally feel more motivated to speak out on social or political issues. On the other hand, social groups with less online access/general affinity toward online surveys might be underrepresented.

*Statistical method of analysis and results presented*

Almost all results that we present here are *predictions based on statistical models*. Because different social background variables might be associated with respondents' attitudes and lead to spurious correlations, all our models take respondents' gender, educational degree and occupation into account. As an example: Men might hold stronger anti-minority attitudes than women, and men are overrepresented among SD voters. We then might find an effect of SD voters holding stronger anti-minority attitudes. However this correlation would be spurious, as it is created through a mere overrepresentation of men. By introducing socio-demographic control variables we make sure that such an effect is actually due to the respondent's affinity towards SD, whether this person is a man or a woman.

Because our social distance measurements had a high rate of non-response on the marriage item (see Table 2), we used *multinomial logistic regression* for our analyses (Long 1997). This method allows us to model responses for each category separately. Positive responses (rather and very positive) and negative responses (rather and very negative) were treated as one category each, and refusals and "don't knows" modelled as separate responses. But for the sake of brevity, we are only presenting the results for positive/negative responses here. The reader should keep in mind that through this particular modelling method predictions of positive and negative responses do not always sum up to 100% because our models take into account that respondents could also refuse an answer. All results are either "predicted probabilities" or "marginal effects" between treatment groups (Christian vs. Muslim vignette) for positive responses. *Predicted probability* means, how large is the probability that a respondent with certain characteristics (e.g. being an SD voter) gives a positive response on a certain item, given that he is "average" on all other characteristics. *Marginal effect* in this case means, how strong is the difference in percentage points between an "average" respondent who was *not* presented with a certain vignette attribute (e.g. the vignette being Muslim) vs. an "average" respondent who *was* presented with a certain vignette attribute. The general response patterns did not differ between survey waves (see Figure 1), and so we generally analysed the pooled data using a variable to indicate survey waves. However in those cases, where we assessed the effect of voting for a certain party in 2014, we could only use Wave 2.

***Table 2:*** *Overall response to social distance items in Wave 1 and 2 (in percent)*

| | **As neighbour** | | **As nurse** | | **Marrying into family** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Wave 1* | *Wave 2* | *Wave 1* | *Wave 2* | *Wave 1* | *Wave 2* |
| Very negative | 2.4% | 2.6% | 3.1% | 2.9% | 8.6% | 7.5% |
| Rather negative | 4.7% | 4.7% | 4.4% | 4.3% | 12.3% | 12.5% |
| Rather positive | 41.0% | 43.7% | 38.2% | 41.8% | 33.6% | 36.2% |
| Very positive | 41.2% | 39.4% | 44.2% | 41.4% | 26.7% | 26.7% |
| Refused | 1.3% | 1.0% | 1.4% | 1.3% | 1.8% | 1.7% |
| DK | 9.3% | 8.6% | 8.7% | 8.6% | 17.0% | 15.4% |

*Note: Number of cases in Wave 1 N = 2130; Wave 2 N = 2109. All percentage values rounded off to the first decimal.*

## Results

### Evaluation of Muslim vs. Christian vignettes, before and after the elections

In order to test whether respondents were more likely to express negative attitudes towards Muslims after the elections and the surge in SD vote, we first examined whether responses differed between survey waves. Figure 1 shows the predicted percent of positive responses for respondents at the two different points in time, while keeping all other variables at their mean (average gender, age, education, etc.). On each bar we also indicate the "95% confidence interval" of our prediction. This means that the observed percentage in the whole Swedish population (as opposed to the sample that we are looking at here) could still vary within this interval. It therefore indicates the statistical error that we are making when generalising our predictions to the whole population. When these confidence intervals overlap, we do not find any *statistically significant* difference between the values. However, when they do not overlap, we can be fairly confident that the values also differ in the population at large.

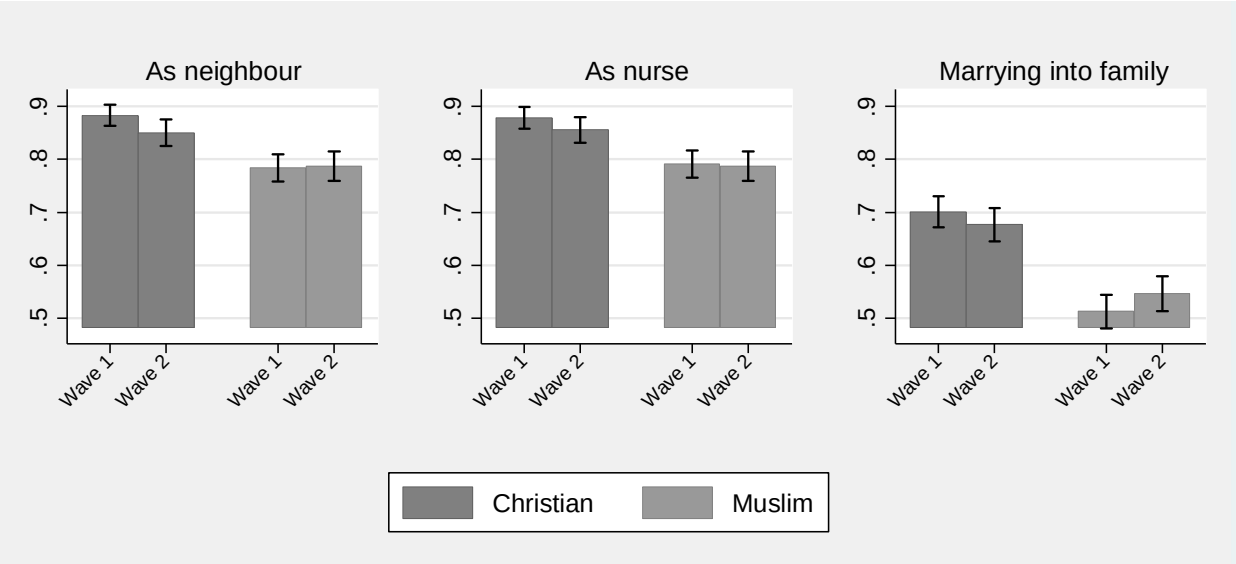


***Figure 1:*** *Social distance in different survey waves, Christian vs. Muslim vignettes*

According to Figure 1 (please note that the scale of the y-axis ranges from 0.5 to 0.9) respondents did not evaluate Muslim vignettes more negatively after the elections. The success of the SD did therefore not lead to an increased acceptance of xenophobia through a legitimisation effect (at least not in such a short time period). If respondents were presented with a Christian vignette, they replied positively towards having this person as a neighbour or a nurse in about 90% of cases. For the marriage item, positive responses were around 70%. However the general pattern is that

**respondents expressed greater social distance towards Muslim vignettes than towards Christian vignettes**. **Muslims are less accepted as neighbours, nurses for elderly parents and much less accepted to marry into someone's family**. Around 80% replied positively towards having a Muslim as a neighbour or nurse, and ca. 50% would find it positive to have a Muslim marrying into their family. (The differences between the values for the Christian vignette are statistically significant, as the confidence intervals do not overlap.) These results show that the Swedish population generally holds positive views about Muslims. There were no effects of the vignettes' foreign name, sex, education level or religiosity. **But we found that a Muslim vignette portrayed as volunteering in a Mosque was significantly less accepted than a Christian vignette portrayed as volunteering in a church (results not shown).**

**Social distance in different occupational groups**

We were also interested in finding out whether certain groups in the population that might feel economically threatened through immigration would hold more negative attitudes towards Muslims. In general we expected that unemployed and blue collar workers would be more likely to experience such an economic threat as opposed to white collar employees with more secure jobs.
Figure 2 shows the *marginal effect* of being presented with a Muslim vignette vs. a Christian vignette for the different occupation groups in our sample, while holding all other explanatory variables at their mean. It can be interpreted as the difference in percentage points of positive responses between those groups.

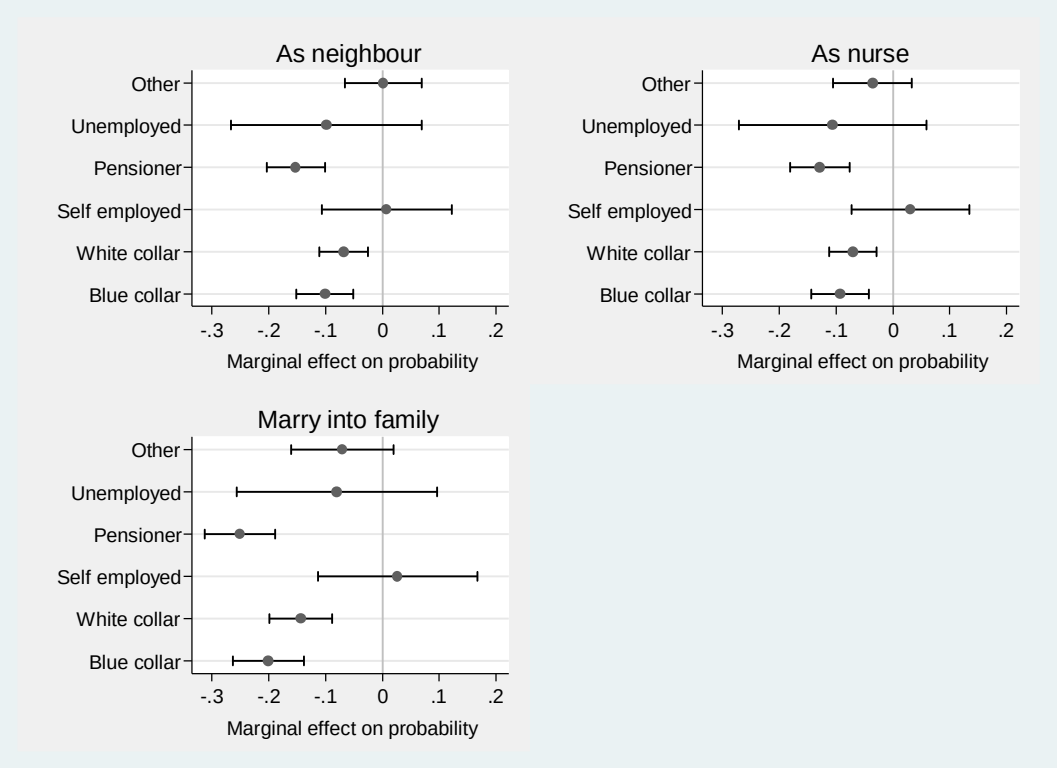


***Figure 2:*** *Marginal effects of Muslim vignette on social distance in different occupational groups.*

As the figure shows, **there is only limited evidence that those social groups which feel that they are less able to adapt to socio-cultural or economic change seem to express stronger social distance towards Muslims.** Pensioners, white collar and blue collar workers all show negative effects, when they are presented with a Muslim vignette. For the pensioners the effect in the upper left graph is ca. -0.15. This means that the share of positive responses towards a Muslim as neighbour is 15 percentage points lower in the Muslim treatment group than in the Christian treatment group. The probability for white and blue collar workers to approve of a certain personal interaction drops between 10-20% points if they are presented with a Muslim instead of a Christian vignette. But there

are no significant effects for the "other" group (mostly students and persons on parental leave), unemployed and self-employed. The confidence intervals of these predictions overlap with 0, and therefore we do not find a meaningful difference between the treatment groups here. With regard to the unemployed respondents this result is somewhat surprising, as they should feel the strongest economic threat of all groups.

**Right-wing populist attitudes – prevalence and effects**

An important part of our analysis is the assessment of right-wing populist attitudes in the population – their prevalence and effects for latent and manifest xenophobia. Table 3 shows the prevalence of right-wing populist attitudes in our population sample.[5] A score of 1 meant that a respondent did not at all agree to the question, a score of 5 indicated a respondent's complete agreement. Respondents could further differentiate their agreement with the intermediate scores of the scale. **Roughly 16% of the Swedish population completely agree that too much weight is given to minority rights, and roughly 36% agree if we count the two highest response options. 12% completely agree that the established political parties mostly represent lobby-group interests, ca. 37% if we count the two highest response options.**

***Table 3:*** *Agreement to right-wing populist attitudes in %.*

| | | Anti-minority | Anti-establishment |
|---|---|---|---|
| Do not agree at all | | 18.7% | 5.9% |
| | 2 | 16.9% | 14.4% |
| | 3 | 21.4% | 25.8% |
| | 4 | 19.6% | 24.7% |
| Agree completely | | 15.8% | 11.8% |
| DK | | 7.5% | 17.4% |
| | | 100% | 100% |

In how far these attitudes affect social distance towards Muslims can be seen in Figures 3 and 4. The graphs depict marginal effects of being presented with a Muslim vs. a Christian vignette for respondents that show different levels of agreement with the populist attitude questions. All other explanatory variables are held at their mean. **In this model we included the responses to both attitude scales as predictors. Therefore, the effects shown here hold for persons with average anti-establishment attitudes (for Figure 3) and average anti-minority attitudes (Figure 4).**[6] They can be interpreted as follows: If we look at the top left graph, we find that the effect of being shown a Muslim vignette gradually becomes more negative as a person holds stronger anti-minority attitudes. Respondents that do not agree at all with the anti-minority statement show a slightly more positive reaction to the Muslim vignette as the same group of people that received a Christian vignette (ca. 0.05). But this effect is not statistically significant.

[5] Note, however, anti-establishment attitudes are not confined to right-wing populism. All percentage values in Table 3 rounded off to the first decimal.

[6] A further hypothesis, namely that anti-establishment and anti-minority attitudes only show an effect if a respondent scores highly on *both* dimensions was tested via a statistical interaction effect. This effect was statistically not significant at the 5% level and hence cannot be confirmed.

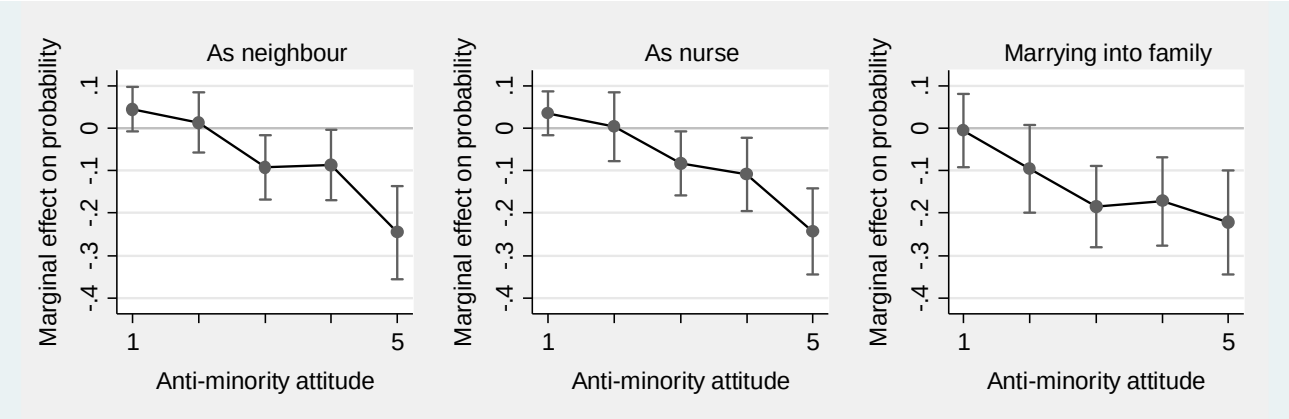


***Figure 3:*** *Marginal effect of Muslim vs. Christian effect for respondents with different agreement to anti-minority attitudes.*

In the same graph we find that respondents who fully agree with the anti-minority statement (a score of 5 on the scale) have an effect of ca. -0.25. This means that respondents with strong anti-minority attitudes have a 25% points lower probability to accept a Muslim as next door neighbour than a Christian. These effects are roughly the same for the neighbour, nurse and marriage item. **So, not surprisingly, people who think that minorities' rights are being paid too much attention will be much less likely to accept minorities in various social interactions. But one should keep in mind that overall 16% of the population fully agree with this sentiment.**

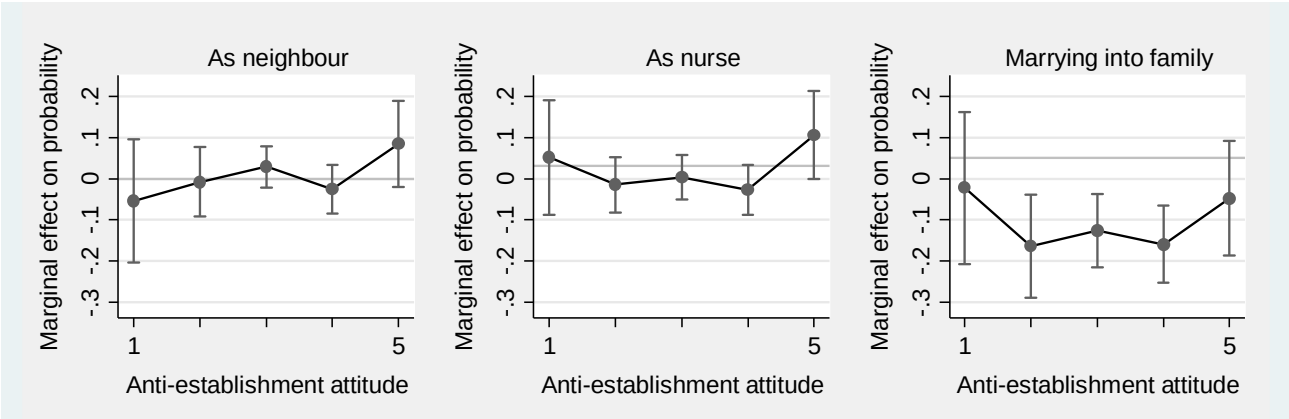


***Figure 4:*** *Marginal effect of Muslim vs. Christian effect for respondents with different agreement to anti-establishment attitudes.*

Figure 4 can be interpreted in the same manner. **But in contrast to the anti-minority effect, we do not find a negative effect of anti-establishment attitudes on the social distance towards Muslims.** The reason is that many parties that are represented in the Swedish parliament in fact express anti-establishment attitudes (e.g. Vänsterpartiet, Feministisk Initativ), without capitalising on xenophobic resentments. **These results show that populist attitudes are only related to stronger latent xenophobia if they emphasise negative attitudes towards minorities in general. Disagreement with the established parties is not per se a predictor of latent xenophobia.** But the question remains whether the Sweden Democrats can claim to be merely an anti-establishment party. Our next results will shed some light on the issue.

**Populist attitudes, voting for SD and effects on social distance**

Figure 5 shows the predicted probabilities of voting for SD given a respondent's level of agreement with anti-minority and anti-establishment attitudes. As in all other models, we are controlling for socio-demographic background variables. As before, each model contains both attitude dimensions

as predictors. This means that the effect of anti-minority attitudes on the chances of voting for SD are calculated for a person with average scores on the anti-establishment item and vice versa. The results reveal that SD voters mainly have one core message in mind when casting their vote for SD – resentments towards minorities, and *not* anti-establishment attitudes. **The chances of voting for SD increase strongly if respondents hold strong anti-minority attitudes, but there is no effect if they hold anti-establishment attitudes.** Those who agree somewhat with the anti-minority item (a score of 4) have a probability to vote for SD of roughly 12%. Those of agreeing fully with the anti-minority item have a probability of ca. 25% to vote for SD. In comparison, we do not find a statistically significant effect of anti-establishment attitudes. While the chances to vote for SD are slightly increasing with higher agreement to the anti-establishment item, all the confidence intervals in the graph are overlapping. Therefore, a person that does not hold any anti-establishment attitudes has approximately the same chances of voting for SD as a person with very strong anti-establishment attitudes, if both persons have the same average level of anti-minority attitudes.

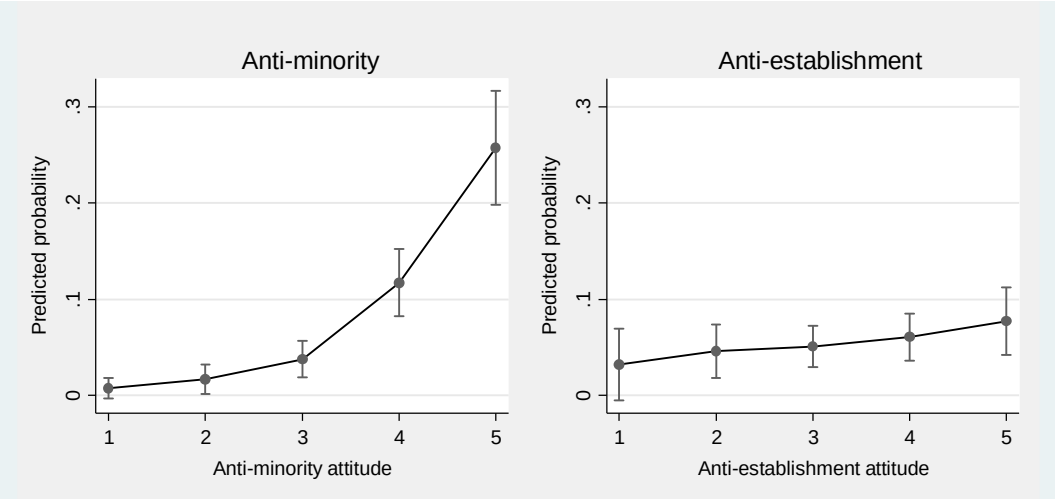


***Figure 5:*** *Effects of anti-minority and anti-establishment attitudes on vote for SD in 2014.*

Another concern of this study is how strongly SD voters differ in their social distance towards Muslims in comparison to voters of other parties. It also could be argued that people who voted for SD in 2014 are very different from SD's core electorate, which voted for them in 2010. As SD expanded their voter base considerably from 2010 to 2014 (2010: 5.7%, 2014: 12.9% of votes), we hypothesised that SD voters in 2014 might be composed of a more diverse part of the population, which might also hold less xenophobic beliefs than the core SD voters of 2010. Figures 6 and 7 let us test this hypothesis.

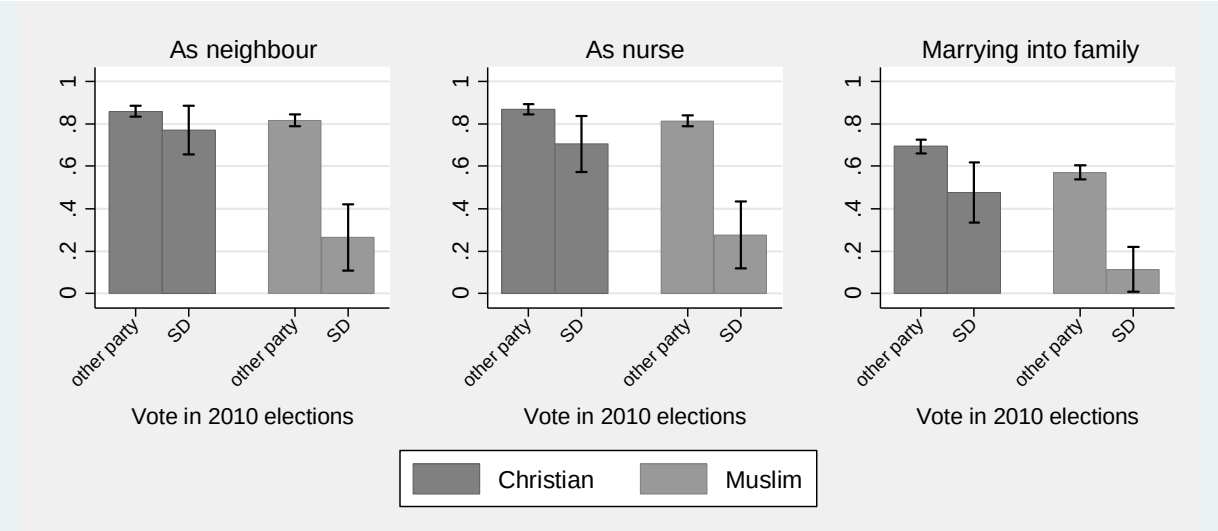


***Figure 6:*** *Social distance for voters of the SD in 2010 in comparison to voters of all other parties.*

Figures 6 and 7 show that SD voters hold very different attitudes towards Muslims than voters for other parties. SD voters in 2010 do not significantly differ in their approval of a Christian as a neighbour, nurse or family member from voters of the other parties. But if the vignette is presented as being a Muslim, only 30% of the 2010 SD voters give a positive response to the neighbour or nurse item, and only 10% for the marriage item. The social distance toward Muslims among SD voters is higher in 2010 as opposed to 2014, which would support the hypothesis of an increased variation within their electorate in the recent elections. **But for respondents who voted for SD in 2014 we find that only 40% are willing to accept a Muslim as their neighbour, 50% would approve if a Muslim would care for their elderly parents and only 20% would accept a Muslim to marry into their family. Among the other voter groups ca. to 85% accept a Muslim as neighbour or nurse, while 70% would agree to have the person as a family member.** These effects hold under control of various background characteristics.

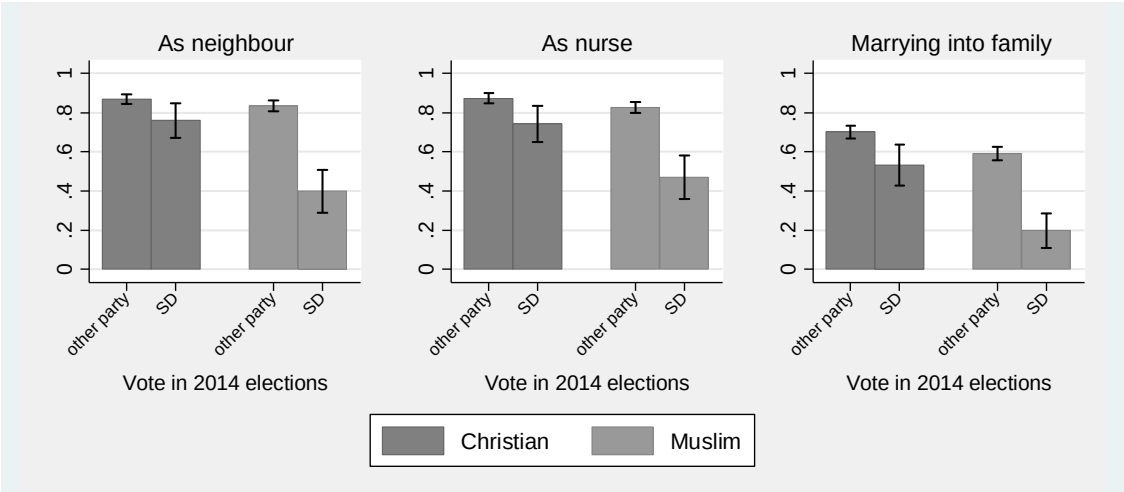


***Figure 7:*** *Social distance for voters of the SD in 2014 in comparison to voters of all other parties.*

It could be possible, however, that this response pattern only holds if SD voters are presented with a vignette that is explicitly labelled as "Muslim". **But as Figures 8 and 9 reveal, SD voters also show a negative response if the person that they are presented with only has a foreign name (Ibrahim or Amirah).** While around 80% of the voters of other parties give a positive response no matter whether the vignette had a foreign name or was Christian or Muslim (and 70% for the marriage question), only 60-65% of SD voters would react positively towards a Christian neighbour or nurse with a foreign name. About 40% would react positively if such a person would marry into their family. If a target vignette was presented as Muslim, the foreign name would not matter additionally. About 30% would show a positive reaction to such a person as neighbour or nurse among SD voters and 35 to 40% among 2014 SD voters.

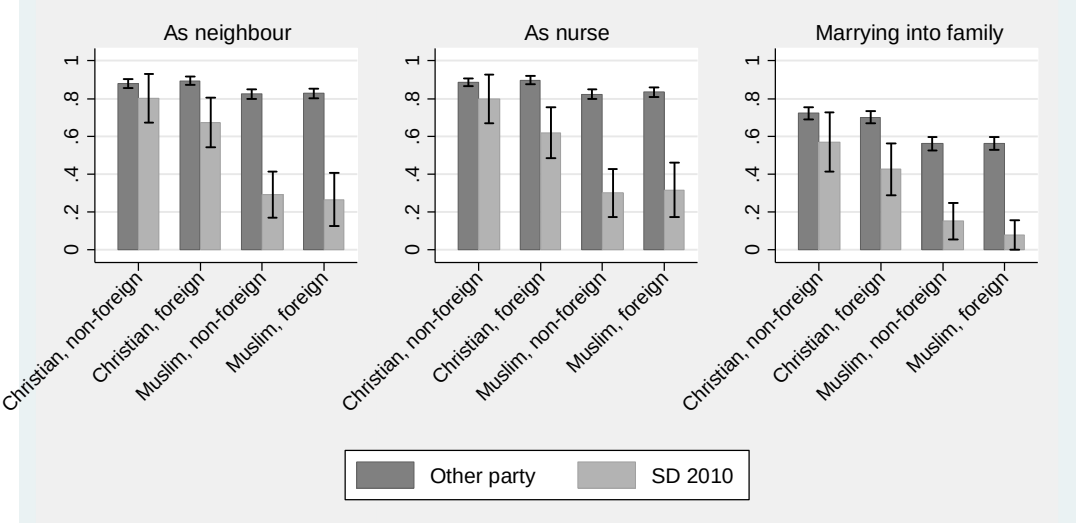


***Figure 8:*** *Social distance towards persons with foreign sounding names and Muslims for voters of SD in 2010 in comparison to voters of all other parties.*

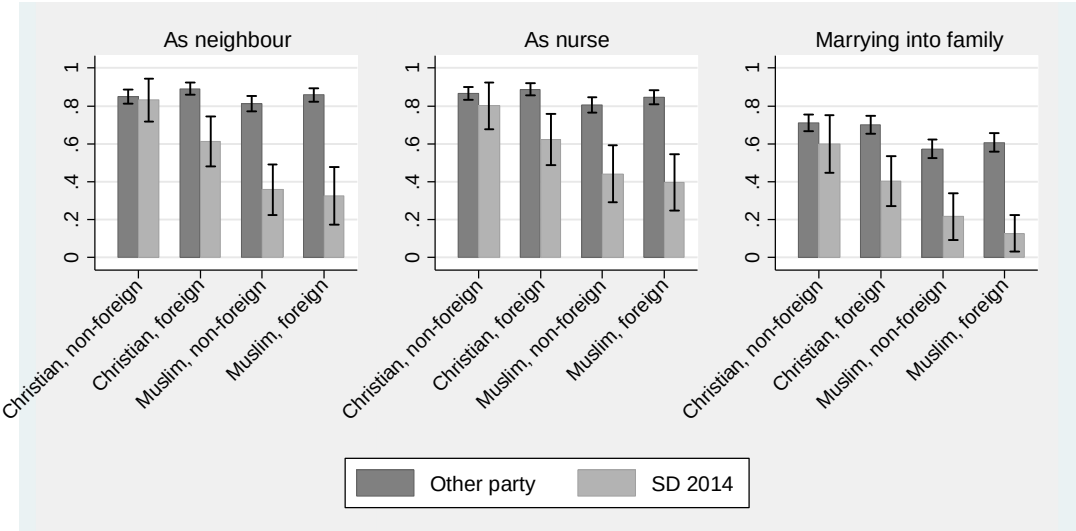


***Figure 9:*** *Social distance towards persons with foreign sounding names and Muslims for voters of SD in 2014 in comparison to voters of all other parties.*

The attitudes of SD voters become clearer even when looking at the predicted *negative responses* instead of the positive responses. Because our statistical model predicted responses for positive, negative and DK/refused categories separately, the positive and negative responses do not necessarily sum up to 100%. SD voters also chose the DK/refused options more often than voters of other parties. In Figure 10 we can see how likely it is that a SD voter in the latest election would give a negative response towards vignettes with foreign names and/or Muslim faith. **Looking at their rejection of Muslims with a foreign name, we find that SD voters have a 50% chance of rejecting this person as a neighbour (ca. 38% give a positive response, 12% choose DK or refuse to answer). The pattern is the same when asked about foreigners/Muslims as a nurse. Our model predicts a negative response for having a Muslim person with a foreign name marrying into their family with a probability of 70% (ca. 15% choose a positive response, 15% DK/refused).**

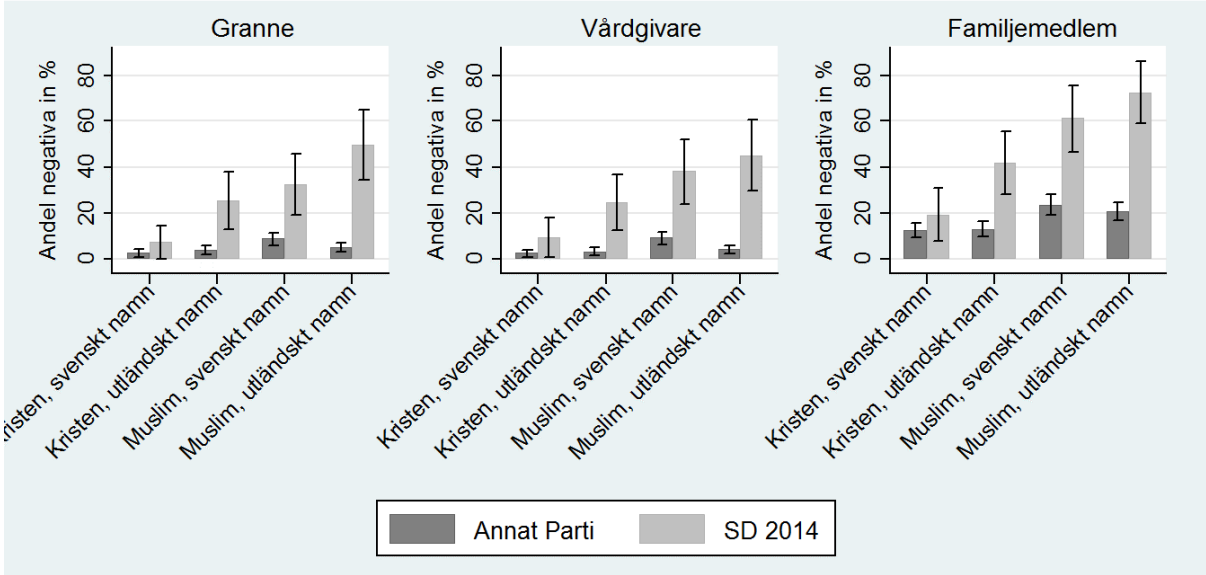


**Figure 10:** *Evaluation of vignettes with foreign names and Muslim or Christian faith among voters of other parties and SD in the 2014 election. (Negative responses in %)*

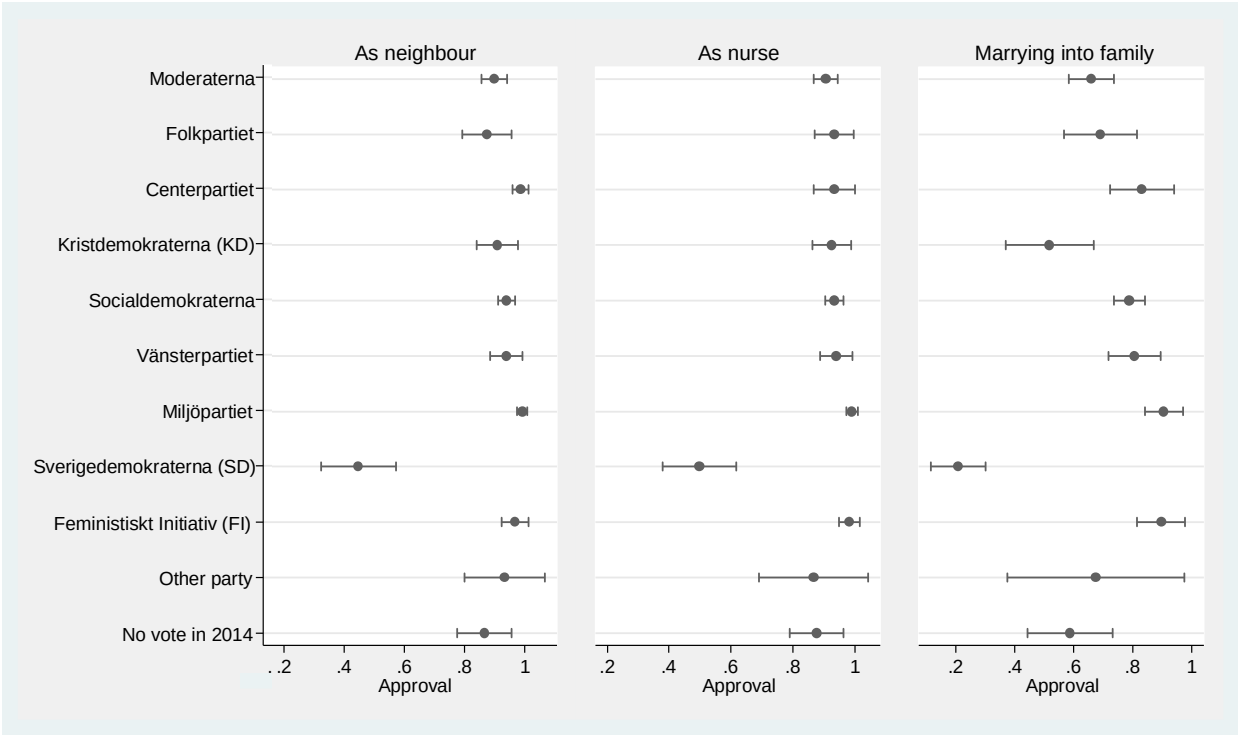


***Figure 11:*** *Social distance towards Muslims among voters for different political parties in 2014.*

Figure 11 gives a more detailed comparison of SD voters vs. voters of other parties. The graph depicts the predicted positive responses towards Muslims on the three social interaction domains. The predictions differ slightly from the previous figures because in this model we had to fix the vignette attribute "foreign name" to its average. Otherwise a model with this many categories could not have been estimated. (The predicted values mirror the percentages shown in Figure 7). **It clearly shows that the Sweden Democrats are far removed from the rest of the party spectrum. Voters of conservative and left parties do not strongly differ in their approval of Muslims, and we find generally relatively high rates of acceptance on all three dimensions.**

## Conclusion

The current study examined the prevalence of latent and manifest xenophobia in the Swedish population, whereby we used a vignette design to assess social distance towards Muslims, which have emerged as a "universal out-group" in many debates around immigration issues. We paid particular attention to the role of populist attitudes and xenophobia, and focussed on the voters of the Sweden Democrats. Our data is based on an opinion survey among a representative sample of the Swedish population collected before and after the recent parliamentary elections. The results show that while there is generally a high acceptance of Muslims within the population at large, most respondents have a preference for Christians as their neighbours, nurses for elderly parents, or family members. Furthermore, approximately 35% of respondents agree that minorities' rights are given too much weight at the expense of the general population.

There is only limited evidence that these attitudes are the result of a perceived economic threat by immigrants: immigrants taking jobs or straining the social welfare system, for example. There is no statistically significant difference in the levels of social distance towards Muslims reported by blue collar workers, white collar workers, and pensioners. Though being a member of any of these categories resulted in a decreased acceptance of Muslims, there is no difference between blue and white collar workers, even though blue collar workers may face more negative impacts from a global, mobilized workforce. And although unemployed workers may feel the greatest economic threat from immigration, being unemployed had no impact on reported social distance. It should also be noted that although small business owners generally benefit from mobile labour, self-employment did not have any effect either. Therefore, Swedish voters seem not react strongly to either perceived negative or positive economic impacts of immigration, which is consistent with findings on the 2010 election (Valdez 2014), which may be a result of compressed wage structures and class-egalitarianism.

Our results confirm that voters of the Sweden Democrats hold drastically more negative views towards Muslims and persons with a foreign name than voters of other Swedish parties. Furthermore, these views are strongly driven by general anti-minority sentiments rather than anti-establishment sentiments. It appears that voters are not choosing SD in order to express a general dissatisfaction with established parties. The choice to vote for SD is driven by anti-minority, specifically Muslim, sentiments. SD voters are more likely than supporters of other parties to agree that too much weight is placed on minority rights, and they are less likely to accept a Muslim as a neighbour, care-taker, or family member.

These findings call into question the popular portrayal of SD supporters as anti-establishment populists who are simply dissatisfied with other parties. This study indicates that they are ideologically motivated voters rather than protest voters. Furthermore, since slightly more than one-third of Swedes reported anti-immigrant attitudes in their responses to this survey, the voting potential of SD might be stronger than previously expected.

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