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The stigmatisation effect of the radical right on voters' assessment of political proposals

Niklas Bolin^a , Stefan Dahlberg^{a,b}  and Sofie Blombäck^a 

^aDepartment of Humanities and Social Sciences, Mid Sweden University, Sundsvall and Östersund, Sweden; ^bDepartment of Comparative Politics, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway


ABSTRACT

Despite the continued electoral progress of the radical right, there are reasons to believe that its full electoral potential has yet to be revealed. Previous research suggests that it suffers from a stigmatisation effect and that many voters will find its proposals less compelling compared to if they were presented by a mainstream party even for policy issues they agree upon. This study employs a unique survey design, with two experiments conducted seven years apart, on a panel of Swedish voters. The aim is to evaluate whether proposals are assessed differently dependent on who the sender is and whether the effect diminishes as the cordon sanitaire of the party weakens. The results show that proposals are less liked if the sender is the radical right. This effect persists even after a weakening of the ostracisation of the radical right as well as for different types of political issues.

KEYWORDS Radical right parties; stigmatisation; reputational shield; party cues; ostracisation

The radical right continues to make electoral progress in many European countries and the party family can now be considered as one of the larger ones. Despite this, and the fact that many radical right parties have been represented in parliament for decades, there are reasons to believe that neither other parties nor voters view them as just another party. Previous research suggests that radical right parties might suffer from a stigmatisation effect among voters (e.g. Hartevelt *et al.* 2017), in other words, that it is less socially acceptable to support them compared with other parties. This is believed to be especially true for radical right parties that lack a reputational shield (Ivarsflaten 2006). Similarly, there is research indicating that voters are hesitant when it comes to supporting

CONTACT Niklas Bolin  niklas.bolin@miun.se

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proposals from stigmatised actors (Blinder *et al.* 2013). That is, voters do not fully separate the policy content of political propositions from the parties that make them, which should make voters less likely to support proposals from stigmatised actors such as radical right parties.

In this paper, we take a novel approach and combine the literature on mainstream parties' reactions to the radical right with the literature on the stigmatisation of the radical right at a voter level. Empirically, we use two survey experiments to test the existence and potential limitation of the stigmatisation effect of the radical right. The experiments were carried out seven years apart on Swedish voters, which gives us a unique possibility to test the strength and duration of the stigma effect. Both experiments focussed on cues from the Sweden Democrats, a party that fits the criteria for a radical right party without a reputational shield, *i.e.* having its roots in fascist movements rather than liberal ideals. Respondents were asked to evaluate fictitious policy proposals, with either the radical right party, a mainstream party or no party as the cue giver. The first experiment was carried out in 2011, shortly after the Sweden Democrats' electoral breakthrough at the national level. A second set of experiments were carried out in 2018, making it possible to test whether the stigmatisation effect remained as the electoral support for the party increased and the cordon sanitaire imposed by the other parties weakened. By doing this, we were able to test the effect of mainstream parties' changed stances towards a radical right party on voters' assessment of political proposals. We further varied the contents of the proposals into a valence issue and in doing so effectively tested whether the stigma effect could be found beyond the original formulation of the hypothesis. In 2011 the policy proposal was a contentious issue, a ban on Muslim head scarves in schools. In 2018 we used one contentious issue, targeting begging on the streets, and one universally popular proposal, aimed at pensioners. The results show that there is a stigmatisation effect of a cue from a radical right party, and that this effect largely remains over time, even after controlling for party sympathy and socio-economic background. Moreover, we find a stigmatisation effect even when it comes to a universally popular valence proposal benefiting the elderly. This points to the fact that party stigma matters regardless of the content of the proposal.

In the next section, we present our theoretical background and our hypotheses. We then move on to a case description where we argue for Sweden as an appropriate case to test our claims before we present the research design and data. In the penultimate section of the paper, we present our empirical findings. In the final section, we summarise our findings and discuss their implications for our understanding of party cues in general and the stigma of the radical right in particular.

Theory and hypotheses

Voters do not make up their minds about political proposals independently of those who put them forth. There is a large amount of literature on elite cues focussing both on individual politicians and political parties, as well as other types of actors such as interest groups and religious leaders (e.g. Nicholson 2011; Zaller 1992). If voters only cared about getting the policy outcome that they desired, they would simply vote for the party that offered such policies. Yet there is ample evidence showing that voters tend to prefer proposals made by a party that they already like, indicating that parties also guide voters' position taking.

The common explanation for this phenomenon is that voters use party cues as a heuristic short-cut. Since voters do not in fact have fixed preferences for all possible issues, and since making an informed decision about every issue on the agenda is costly, it is rational for voters to use cues from political actors that they know and trust as an indication of a proposal's merits. Conversely, if the proposal is made by a party the voter does not like, the voter can be expected to oppose the proposal (Lau and Redlawsk 2006; Popkin 1991).

Research on elite cues has highlighted the fact that this process is not universal. Voters do not simply accept what parties tell them, even if a cue comes from a party the voter likes. In Zaller's (1992: 266) words '[t]he effect of any persuasive communication depends on the other ideas already present in a person's mind and on the opposing ideas to which the individual may be concurrently exposed'. While much of Zaller's work deals with the significance of contradictory information from other political actors, in this research we focus on two other types of pre-existing information. We argue that both the nature of the cue-giver and the content of the proposal can also moderate the extent to which parties can influence their voters.

While it is reasonable to expect voters to prefer proposals from their own party over proposals from another party, it does not follow that voters in multiparty systems are equally resistant to cues from all other parties. Electoral decisions are seldom made in isolation and although party cues are an important source of information, voters are also affected by their social environment, in that certain opinions, beliefs and attitudes are more 'correct' than others (Festinger 1957). The social context has been found to be particularly important for explaining voting for radical right parties, in that the social stigma constitutes a strong signal. A social stigma is generally defined as 'an attribute that is deeply discrediting' (Goffman 1963: 12; Harteveld *et al.* 2017). From a voter perspective, 'a party experiences stigma if it is regarded as unacceptable in the social context in which this voter lives' (Harteveld *et al.* 2019: 298). The stigma is often constructed at the polity level and the radical right parties are

a well-documented example, with many of them being treated as pariahs or political outcasts (van der Brug *et al.* 2000; Van Spanje and Van Der Brug 2007). This implies that in general it is less socially acceptable to support proposals from these parties.

For many voters the presence of a social stigma functions as a social norm meaning that one simply does not vote for this party (Harteveld *et al.* 2017). This norm is an extension of another strong social norm, that is that one does not discriminate against people on the basis of ethnicity, sexuality or religion; a norm that the radical right, implicitly or explicitly, is challenging (Ivarsflaten *et al.* 2010). It has been suggested that such norms can constitute an indirect influence even in cases where there are no direct social consequences for breaking the norm, such as within a voting booth. This is because voters generate and update their political opinions continuously and the stigmatisation of a party can thus prevent voters from considering proposals from such a party although they might agree with the issue at hand (Harteveld *et al.* 2019).

Research has been devoted to how the established parties have tried to respond to the radical right parties, especially their immigration policies (Abou-Chadi 2016; Bale *et al.* 2010; Han 2015; Meguid 2005), indicating that the established parties at least sometimes view the radical right parties as too radical at the same time as studies on voters have shown that they are less likely to vote for a party that is seen as extreme (Harteveld *et al.* 2017). It should be noted here that a party that is stigmatised is not necessarily the same as it being ostracised or a pariah. While most parties that are ostracised are also stigmatised, Moffitt (2021) points out that actors such as established parties or even the pariah party itself could have strategic reasons rather than ideological reasons for the ostracisation. This is in line with research that shows that the difference between the ostracised and the non-ostracised radical right is not solely the degree of extremism (Akkerman and Rooduijn 2015; van Spanje 2010). In other words, the fact that other parties break a cordon sanitaire is not a conclusive sign that a party is no longer stigmatised as far as voters are concerned (van Spanje and Azrout 2020). At the same time, not all voters are put off by the stigmatisation of a party, illustrated by the fact that ostracised parties sometimes do well in elections (van Spanje and Weber 2019). For example, Harteveld *et al.* (2017) and Harteveld & Ivarsflaten (2018) have focussed on the fact that female voters are less likely to vote for radical right parties, due to their stigmatisation, while Friberg-Fernros *et al.* (2017) and van Spanje & Azrout (2020) have shown that voters are less inclined to vote for a party if it is described as racist or xenophobic. Similarly, in a study on negative partisanship, Meléndez & Rovira Kaltwasser (2021) find that a substantial share of voters has strong negative feelings towards radical right parties.

We expected the same mechanism to influence voters' evaluations of policy proposals from stigmatised cue givers, such as a radical right party. Our first hypothesis was thus:

H1: Stigmatisation Hypothesis: A proposal will be less liked if the cue comes from a radical right party.

Being stigmatised is not necessarily a binary state for a party. A common trajectory for radical right parties, even those without a reputational shield, has been a gradual decrease in ostracism as well as the adoption of some of the parties' policies by other parties (Minkenberg 2013). In addition, radical right support can be normalised both by parliamentary representation (Valentim 2021) and by how media legitimise its political views and language (Ekström *et al.* 2020). This may lessen the stigmatisation effect over time, as the cue giver becomes more mainstream. However, it has been suggested that the stigma surrounding a party is not only a function of ostracism by mainstream parties but also that the stigmatisation can develop into an internalised norm among voters, independent of the actions of other parties (Harteveld *et al.* 2019). Moreover, in a 2006 study, Ivarsflaten introduced the idea of a reputational shield as an important explanation for why some parties are successful in appealing to voters with anti-immigration policies while others fail. Ivarsflaten's proposition is that parties with historical legacies that enable them to defend themselves against allegations of racism and xenophobia – a reputational shield – have greater chances of attracting voters than parties with a racist or extremist history do. Based on this proposal we argue that a social stigma might be enduring even if the ostracisation of a party weakens if its history is too closely associated with fascism, since a party cannot change its roots. Our second hypothesis was thus:

H2: Enduring Stigmatisation Hypothesis: A proposal will be less liked if the cue comes from a radical right party, even if the ostracisation of the party weakens, due to the lack of a reputational shield.

The logic behind the need for a reputational shield is that voters do not want to appear prejudiced, not even to themselves, and one simply does not discriminate against other people may it be ethnicity or religion. Since racism always will be connected to discrimination, a party's past will not easily be overridden if it is founded in fascist movements.

The cue-giver is obviously not the only thing that voters consider when evaluating a proposal and while we expected a proposal from a controversial party to be less popular than a proposal from another party, we also wanted to control for the content of the proposal.

This is further actualised when the proposal under consideration can be perceived as prejudiced or racist (Blinder *et al.* 2013). Many policies

can be interpreted as either prejudiced or not prejudiced. For example, restrictive immigration policies can be advocated either as a tool for preserving the ethnical homogeneity of a country or as necessary for protecting the welfare system (Hinnfors *et al.* 2012). If the party cue comes from a party that is not seen as prejudiced, this provides a cover for the voter. If the non-prejudiced party made the proposal, then the voter is able to consider the proposal to be likewise unprejudiced. If the cue comes from a party without a reputational shield, it becomes more difficult for the voter to consciously, or sub-consciously, argue that the proposal is not prejudiced. This anti-prejudice mechanism leads us to expect that the most likely case for finding a stigmatising effect is when voters are asked to evaluate a potentially prejudiced issue.

Research into the effect of stigmatisation has tended to focus either on the electoral consequences for the party, or on the cue effect on issues that can be perceived as prejudiced (Blinder *et al.* 2013). Less is known about the effect, if any, on less contentious issues but numerous studies have shown that the policy content limits the effect of party cues in general (Bäck *et al.* 2021; Chong and Mullinix 2019; Peterson 2019). For example, if a policy targets a universally popular group, the effect of elite cues tends to diminish (Nicholson 2011), as is the case if the voters are already strongly opposed to the issue (Bäck *et al.* 2021). An issue that is not potentially prejudiced would thus be a viable test of the limit of the stigmatisation effect. In other words, by focussing on a popular valence issue we disconnect the anti-prejudice norm connected to specific proposals that have a social stigma associated with a party, thereby allowing us to assess whether the effect of a lack of reputational shield could be identified even beyond contentious issues originally associated with the theory. We thus chose to focus on an economic issue that would be likely to be popular with most voters. This was a hard test for our main hypothesis since it required the stigma to be strong enough to overcome the appeal of the policy content. Such effects have previously only been tested with extreme groups such as the Ku Klux Klan (Nicholson 2011). Our third hypothesis was thus:

H3: Content Hypothesis; A proposal will be less liked if the cue comes from a radical right party, even if the proposal cannot be seen as potentially prejudiced.

Case description

We departed from the proposition that radical right parties suffer from a stigmatisation effect that spills over onto voters' assessments of political proposals. Moreover, we expected such an effect to persist even as the mainstream parties alleviate their ostracism of the radical right party. To

assess this proposition, we argue that the Swedish party system is a compelling case since it demonstrates the emergence of a radical right party that was initially completely ostracised, but to which the hostility of some of the other parties and voters has recently decreased.

For a long time, Sweden was seen as a deviant case in terms of radical right electoral success (Rydgren 2002). While such parties occupied seats in a range of western European countries at the turn of the century, it was not until 2010 that the Sweden Democrats managed to pass the electoral threshold of the Swedish parliament.¹ While the party is commonly placed within the group of radical right parties, its origin and history are clearly more compromising than most other parties in this group. Unlike many other radical right parties, the Sweden Democrats has roots within outright racist movements (Larsson and Ekman 2001) and as such is a suitable case for assessing the specific stigmatisation effect of pariah parties, that is, parties that are ostracised from any form of political cooperation with the established parties (van Spanje and de Graaf 2018: 5). Due to its compromising past, the Sweden Democrats lacks a reputational shield that can guard against other actors' attempts to undermine the credibility of its policy proposals (Ivarsflaten 2006). This has had a great impact on how it has been treated by other parties. So although the Sweden Democrats has de-radicalised over the years (Widfeldt 2015: 196), it has been highly stigmatised for a long time (Art 2011; Loxbo and Bolin 2016).

During most of its first two parliamentary terms, the Sweden Democrats, was completely isolated in parliament by parties of both the centre-left and the centre-right blocs as well as in public debate (Aylott and Bolin 2015). Following its parliamentary entrance in 2010, the centre-right government in cooperation with parts of the opposition liberalised immigration policy, in order to 'prevent xenophobic forces from influencing migration policy' in the words of the then Prime Minister (Bolin *et al.* 2014: 329). The ostracism reached its peak with the 2014 December Agreement, which followed the election of a 'hung parliament'. According to this deal, the smaller party bloc would allow the larger one to form a government and get its budget through parliament. This effectively constructed a cartel that explicitly excluded the Sweden Democrats from all influence. The parliamentary arena became 'truncated, with seven parties acting as if the eighth was not there' (Aylott and Bolin 2019: 1505).

However, the December Agreement, collapsed due to internal dissent within some of the centre-right parties. The 2015 refugee crisis further contributed to the weakening of the ostracism of the Sweden Democrats. After years of allowing the Sweden Democrats to monopolise scepticism about immigration, some of the other parties now tightened their position

(Aylott and Bolin 2019), meaning that one of the main arguments for upholding the cordon sanitaire weakened. With the December Agreement buried, it was also increasingly evident that the centre-right parties would need the parliamentary seats of the Sweden Democrats to be able to form a government in the foreseeable future. In early 2017, when the leader of the largest centre-right party publicly announced that her party would be willing to topple the government with the help of the Sweden Democrats, this was widely seen as the first real step towards an acceptance of the radical right. While it has been claimed that the Sweden Democrats was still excluded by a cordon sanitaire up until the 2018 election (Heinze 2018), it is evident that a gradual relaxation had taken place among some of the centre-right parties (Backlund 2020: 196–201). The shift could also be noted elsewhere. The Sweden Democrats' leadership marketed the idea of a future conservative bloc together with the Moderates and the Christian Democrats (Aylott and Bolin 2019) in order to present the image of a party increasingly being treated as a coalitionable party by others. The gradual opening up to the Sweden Democrats was also evident at the voter level. Although still the most disliked party, voter ratings of the Sweden Democrats have improved among centre-right voters over recent years (Reiljan and Ryan 2021). Finally, Swedish media has increasingly normalised and legitimised the political views and language of the Sweden Democrats (Ekström *et al.* 2020).

Research design and data

In order to explore the importance of party cues on voters' assessment of political proposals we employed an experimental survey design conducted among Swedish respondents. We took advantage of the fact that we had two similar experiments carried out several years apart, spanning a critical time period of the Sweden Democrats' history. It should be noted that the two experiments were not originally designed to be used in the same study, so there are some differences in the exact set-up of the experiments. As we will show, however, they are similar enough to allow us to make comparisons over time. The fact that minor differences exist is actually a strength in this respect. Replications are important in experimental studies, but in order to ensure robustness it is also important that the causal mechanisms can be tested and identified with different survey related tools. The empirical findings from an experimental set-up should be independent of rating scales and question wording (Feest 2019; Zwaan *et al.* 2018).

The first experiment, conducted in 2011, started with a vignette referring to a newspaper article about an opinion poll, problematising the use of head scarves in public. The actual stimuli involved a fictitious

political proposal addressing a prohibition of the use of head scarves in public schools, with the sender information altered. The control group only received the text and the proposal without any further information (see Online Appendix A1 for a detailed description of the survey vignettes). The second group received the same information but with a fictitious male or female politician from the Liberal Party as the sender. The third group was either addressed by a male or a female representative from the Sweden Democrats.² The respondents were then asked about their opinion in terms of agreement with the proposal on a seven-point scale.

In an attempt to increase the validity of the experiment, the Liberal Party was chosen as being representative of established mainstream parties due to the fact that the party put forth a proposal about language tests for citizenship during the election campaigns of 2002 and 2006 (Oscarsson and Holmberg 2008). At a time when the Sweden Democrats was highly stigmatised, this made the Liberal Party the only plausible counterpart, from a respondent perspective, in a domain where the Sweden Democrats was the issue owner.

The respondents were divided in their attitudes towards the proposal but with a slight plurality favouring the prohibition of head scarves in public schools (see Figure 1).

The second set of experiments were carried out in 2018. This time respondents were asked about their opinions on two different political proposals (see Online Appendix A2). The first proposal dealt with the introduction of a ban on begging. Historically this has not been an important issue in Swedish politics. However, in recent years there has been an influx of what is commonly referred to as vulnerable EU/EEA citizens. Among these primarily ethnic Roma people from Bulgaria and Romania begging is an important source of income (Tyrberg and Dahlström 2018). Begging is not prohibited in Sweden but has gained more prominence in public debate in recent years, peaking around the time of the second experiment in 2018. As the issue has risen in salience, some parties have also become more open to imposing some degree of restriction. The debate has almost exclusively dealt with vulnerable EU/EEA citizens and is therefore a good example of what sometimes is referred to as a crim-migration issue, an issue where criminal policy and immigration law converge (Stumpf 2006). As such, it fits the profile of the Sweden Democrats well. Until the 2014 election, the party was alone in demanding the introduction of a ban on begging. However, during the 2014–2018 election term some parties, at least partly, changed their stances from being staunchly against a ban to becoming open to imposing some sort of restriction. Besides the Sweden Democrats, the Moderates also included a pledge for an introduction of a ban in its 2018 election manifesto. The

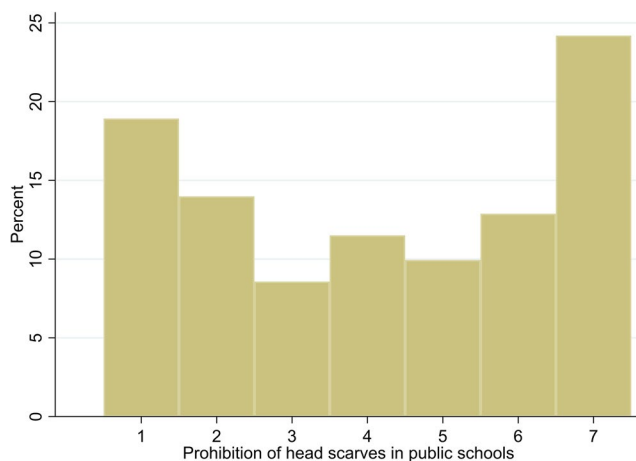


Figure 1. Prohibition of head scarves in public schools, distribution of respondents.

Note: The respondents were asked about their opinion in terms of agreement with the proposal on a seven-point scale (where 1 = to no extent at all and 7 = to a large extent).

Social Democrats did not campaign on a ban, but argued for other reforms that were widely seen as the party taking a restrictive turn.³ Most other parties opposed a ban. Public opinion was also divided. In a survey conducted in 2015, 49 per cent of the respondents supported the introduction of a ban on begging whereas 30 per cent were against it (Zelano 2016). Our survey responses showed a similar pattern (see Figure 2).

The second political proposal dealt with a tax reduction for pensioners, which can be considered a valence issue in Swedish public debate (c.f. Stokes 1963). In contrast to the issue of introducing a ban on begging, this issue is less contentious insofar as it deals with a group, pensioners, which is a universally popular group. Similar to the issue of a ban on begging, the question of a reduction in pensioners' taxes has become more prevalent in public debate during the last decade. It originates in the tax cuts that the centre-right government introduced in five different steps from 2006 to 2014. While the tax cuts were opposed by the centre-left, they did not reverse them once back in power (Aylott and Bolin 2015: 732). However, as the cuts only covered income from work and not from pensions, many regarded it as effectively a raised tax on the incomes of pensioners, and hence referred to it as the pensioners' tax. Parties to the right also subsequently adopted this terminology and sought to even out the tax rates. In our survey, more than 80 per cent of the respondents supported a tax cut for pensioners whereas only about 6 per cent did not support it (see Figure 3).

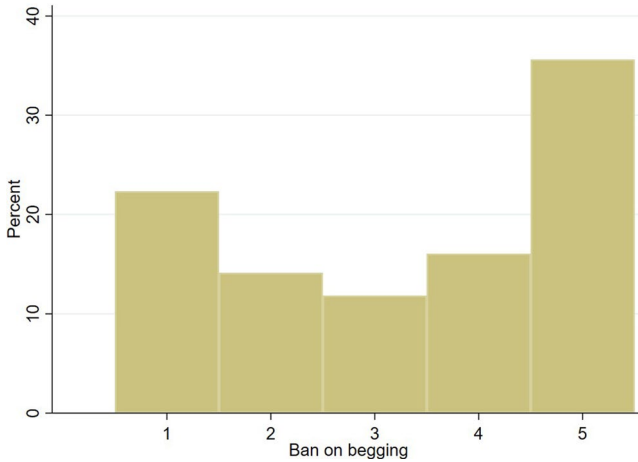


Figure 2. Ban on begging, distribution of respondents.

Note: The respondents were asked about their opinion in terms of agreement with the proposal on a five-point scale (1 = very bad idea; 2 = somewhat bad idea; 3 = neither good nor bad idea; 4 = somewhat good idea; 5 = very good idea).

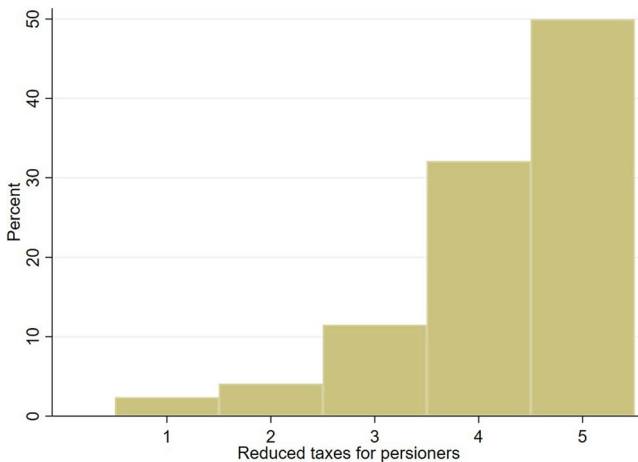


Figure 3. Tax cut for pensioners, distribution of respondents.

Note: The respondents were asked about their opinion in terms of agreement with the proposal on a five-point scale (1 = very bad idea; 2 = somewhat bad idea; 3 = neither good nor bad idea; 4 = somewhat good idea; 5 = very good idea).

The two political proposals were presented to the respondents as two different vignettes formulated as excerpts from news articles. To investigate the degree to which party cues influence whether a person agrees with a political proposition, the respondents were randomly assigned to receive the message from one of four different senders. The control group was presented with the proposal without any reference to a specific

political party whereas the three other groups were presented with the exact same proposal but with the sender being the Social Democrats, the Moderates or the Sweden Democrats. At the time the survey was conducted, these parties were the three biggest parties in Sweden, together holding about two thirds of the parliamentary seats. The respondents were asked to score their opinion of the propositions on a five-point scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good).

Both experiments were carried out within the Swedish Citizen Panel (Medborgarpanelen), an online panel survey run by the Laboratory of Opinion Research (LORE), at the University of Gothenburg.

The first experiment was launched in the 3rd round of the Swedish citizen panel (see Online Appendix A3 for descriptive statistics). The survey was conducted from 17-31 October 2011 and consisted of six experiments. 3684 out of 5025 respondents (73.3 percent) participated (Dahlberg *et al.* 2012). The survey was based on an opt-in sample and consisted of a group of 9995 standing respondents in total (for more information about the panel and recruitment see Dahlberg *et al.* 2010).⁴

The second survey was conducted as a part of round 29 of the Swedish Citizen Panel and was carried out between 22 March and 16 April, 2018 (see Online Appendix A4 for descriptive statistics). The survey included about 2500 out of about 4300 respondents (58 per cent) roughly equally divided across each of the four experimental groups (608-651 respondents in each group) (Martinsson *et al.* 2018).⁵

Results

Our first survey experiment was, as mentioned, carried out in 2011 when the Sweden Democrats was completely ostracised by all the other parties. The respondents were asked to evaluate a proposal to introduce a prohibition on head scarves in public schools.

As shown in the methodology section, there is a u-shape formed distribution with most respondents scoring the proposal close to the ends of the seven-point scale, although the average score of 4.15 indicates that a ban on head scarves is a rather well-liked proposition. The average score for each group is presented in Table 1. In line with our first Stigmatisation hypothesis, we found that receiving the cue from the Sweden Democrats is associated with a small but significantly lower average score. The average score for respondents that received their cue from the Sweden Democrats was slightly below 4 whereas respondents who were presented with the head scarves ban proposal from a Liberal politician scored about 4.3 on average. The score for the Sweden Democrats group is also significantly lower than for the control group. There is no significant difference between the Liberal cue and the control group.

Table 1. Attitudes towards a prohibition of head scarves in public schools.

Treatment	Mean	Std. Dev.	N
Control group/no sender	4.23 ^a	2.27	760
Liberals	4.29 ^b	2.26	1461
Sweden Democrats	3.97 ^{ab}	2.25	1420
Total	4.15	2.26	3641

Note: Means that share a common superscript letter are significantly different from each other at the 95 per cent statistical confidence level. Since the original 2011 experiment was designed to also capture a gender dimension, the party groups above are of twice the size compared to the control group. As a test of robustness, we have replicated the analysis on half the samples for the party stimulus groups based on randomisation in order to mimic the size of the control group. The results from these analyses are similar to those displayed.

Our second set of experiments were carried out in 2018 to test the two remaining hypotheses. In the two experiments conducted, we divided our respondents into four groups based on the sender of the party cue in order to capture whether different party cues influence the respondents' assessments.

In our first 2018 experiment, the respondents were asked about their attitude towards the introduction of a ban on begging. The distribution of responses is similar to that of the 2011 survey experiment on a ban on head scarves, with most responses being at the ends of the five-point scale but on average this was a well-liked proposition. The average score of all respondents is 3.29.

Table 2 presents the average score for each group for the proposal to introduce a ban on begging. With an average score of 3.17 we found that the respondents who received their party cue from the Sweden Democrats scored the ban on begging proposal the lowest. Moreover, their score was significantly lower than that of the respondents in the control group as well as those who received their cue from the Social Democrats. The average score for those who received the Sweden Democrats treatment was lower than for those who had their cue from the Moderates. However, the difference failed to reach statistical significance. There are no statistically significant differences between any of the other groups.

Generally, we can thus conclude that our data also provides some support to our second Enduring Stigmatisation Hypothesis. Despite the strong electoral progress of the Sweden Democrats and indications of an

Table 2. Attitudes towards an introduction of a ban on begging.

Treatment	Mean	Std. Dev.	N
Control group/no party	3.34 ^a	1.61	606
Social Democrats	3.38 ^b	1.57	617
Moderates	3.26	1.56	610
Sweden Democrats	3.17 ^{a,b}	1.63	649
Total	3.29	1.59	2,482

Note: Means that share a common superscript letter are significantly different from each other at the 95 per cent statistical confidence level.

initial relaxation of the *cordon sanitaire*, the radical right party was still associated with a stigmatisation effect when respondents were asked about their attitudes to a political proposal. If sympathisers of the Sweden Democrats are excluded from the analysis, the difference between the control groups and the Sweden Democrats as senders is even larger for two of the proposals (diff 0.06 for prohibition of head scarfs in 2011; -0.03 for a ban on begging and 0.08 for the proposal on reduced taxes for pensioners in 2018 (see Online Appendix 5)). The fact that we found larger differences between the control groups and the stimulus groups in two out of three proposals could be an indication of affective polarisation, which is when respondents react stronger to proposals from the outgroup party (e.g. Iyengar *et al.* 2019; Wagner 2021). The results are mixed, however, and there is no discernible substantial increase or decrease over time in this respect. The non-significant difference between the group that received its cue from Sweden Democrats and the group that was presented with the proposal from the Moderates, however, indicates the possible presence of a moderating effect. In other words, even though the lacking of a reputational shield seemed to have a persistent effect, we are unable to rule out that the effect wanes over time and is dependent on other parties' treatment of the radical right party.

In our third Content Hypothesis, we suggested that the effect of the enduring stigma due to the lack of reputational shield might also have an impact beyond less contentious issues than those traditionally associated with radical right parties. To test this claim, we used the second survey experiment conducted in 2018 when respondents were asked to score their attitude to a proposal for reduced taxes for pensioners. As described in the method section, the proposal is almost universally liked. On a five-point scale, the average score was 4.23.

In Table 3, we present the average score for each treatment group. In line with the two survey experiments described previously, the group that was given its cue by the Sweden Democrats scores the political proposal lower on average than the other groups do. In fact, unlike proposal for a ban on begging, the score was significantly lower than that given by both of the other treatment groups and the control group.

Table 3. Attitudes towards reduced taxes for pensioners.

Treatment	Mean	Std. Dev.	N
Control group/no party	4.36 ^{a,b}	0.92	606
Social Democrats	4.27 ^c	0.94	617
Moderates	4.24 ^{a,d}	0.92	611
Sweden Democrats	4.07 ^{b,c,d}	1.06	650
Total	4.23	0.97	2,484

Note: Means that share a common superscript letter are significantly different from each other at the 95 per cent statistical confidence level or higher.

In other words, we found a clear stigmatisation effect even in a non-contentious issue that is almost universally liked. We can thus conclude that our third Content Hypothesis is also supported.

As a further test of robustness, we also conducted a multivariate analyses at the individual level, where we in addition to the most favoured party also included a standard set of control variables (such as sex, age, education, left-right self-placement, political interest and party sympathy). As displayed in Online Appendix A6 our results are robust even when controlling for these additional factors.

Concluding remarks

Previous research suggests that radical right parties suffer from a stigmatisation effect in that voters are reluctant to vote for them since supporting such a party is regarded as less socially acceptable. Similarly, it has been suggested that the stigma effect might be enduring, although the ostracisation of the party weakens, due to the lack of a reputational shield. This would make political proposals from the radical right less appealing to voters, compared with a situation where the exact same proposal is presented by one of the mainstream parties. Hitherto, however, these propositions have not been extensively studied. To address this, we conducted survey experiments at two different points in time, with a panel of Swedish voters, randomising the sender in order to measure whether political proposals are less favoured when they are presented by the radical right Sweden Democrats instead of one of the mainstream parties.

The data supports all three of our hypotheses. Firstly, we found that there is a general stigmatisation effect, with political proposals being rated significantly lower if the sender is the radical right Sweden Democrats compared to if the respondent was cued by another party. Secondly, the effect largely endured despite the Sweden Democrats' electoral growth and a partial weakening of the cordon sanitaire. Thirdly, we also found that the stigmatisation effect was not restricted to traditional radical right issues. On the contrary, our analysis suggests that the stigma effect for a radical right party spills over to other less contentious issues. From this perspective, it appears that a party cue can trump the policy content. It is not the policy proposals per se that are problematic. A morally controversial proposal can become legitimised if promoted by a mainstream party, while an objectively neutral valence issue can be maligned by endorsement from a radical right party.

From a radical right perspective, our findings may be both good and bad news. The more positive interpretation holds that the Sweden Democrats, despite its almost unparalleled electoral progress, still has

not reached its full potential. Our results show a continued stigmatisation effect that manifests in some voters being sceptical to even the most uncontroversial proposals made by the party. These voters are also likely to abstain from voting for the party, even though its political views align with those of the voters (Harteveld *et al.* 2019). This is, of course, also the bad news. Even though the proposed ban on begging was not evaluated significantly lower when it came from the Sweden Democrats compared with the Moderates, and the effect sizes are difficult to evaluate, there seems to be a quite resilient and long-lasting stigma. This finding is interesting and raises the question of whether radical right parties with an extremist legacy can ever escape from their past.

Indeed, one important task for future research is to survey the resilient effect of a lack of reputational shield and the limitations of stigmatisation. In other words, when and why do a stigmatisation effect wane? One way to further delve into this question would be to examine the Swedish case further. The initial moderation of the ostracism of the Sweden Democrats discerned in 2017 has accelerated since the 2018 election. After a record-long government formation process (Teorell *et al.* 2020), the former centre-right bloc split definitely over the issue of how to deal with the Sweden Democrats. Two parties were still keen to uphold a cordon sanitaire, and accordingly opted for supporting a left-of-centre government, whereas the two others were willing to gain power with the support of the Sweden Democrats (Aylott and Bolin 2019). By the end of 2019, these two had taken the abolishment of the cordon sanitaire a step further and had publicly announced that they were prepared to enter policy negotiations with the Sweden Democrats (Backlund 2020). An additional relaxation of the cordon sanitaire took place in early 2021 when the Liberals declared that they would no longer support the centre-left government and instead intended to work for a future centre-right government supported by the Sweden Democrats. If the stigma indeed can be mitigated by other parties moderating an existing isolation, we would be able to identify such an effect if the setting of this study were to be replicated in the current Swedish situation. Another venue for further research is to go comparative in order to disentangle the impact of a reputational shield on the enduring stigma effect. Weakening ostracisation should reasonably have a stronger impact on the stigma of radical right parties with a reputational shield. In the Swedish case we, on the contrary, found that the stigma endured even when the cordon sanitaire weakened. The current Swedish situation also raises an additional issue related to the results of this study, namely what happens with those parties that break the isolation of the radical right. Since the stigma associated with being a radical right party without a reputational shield seems to endure, even when the party is no longer

ostracised, the parties who break the cordon sanitaire might open themselves to 'stigmatisation by association'. If voters are motivated by anti-prejudice norms, does the stigmatisation spill over to parties who collaborate with radical right parties without a reputational shield and to what extent would such a spill-over effect be moderated by factors such as electoral size and ideological placement?

Previous studies on the mainstreaming of formerly ostracised parties have mostly focussed on electoral effects (e.g. van Spanje and Weber 2019). We argue that it could also affect how voters interpret cues from parties that have broken the cordon sanitaire. While we did not test this directly, we would like to draw attention to the experiment regarding the ban on begging, where there was no significant difference between a cue from the Sweden Democrats and one from the Moderates. It would be valuable for future research to explore the consequences for parties that collaborate with stigmatised parties.

Notes

1. New Democracy, a party that held parliamentary seats from 1991 to 1994, can be seen as a partial exception. However, while the party shared some of the anti-immigration attitudes of SD, it was more of a neo-liberal populist party than a radical right party and its economic right-wing agenda was, at least initially, as important as a strict immigration stance.
2. The alteration of gender implies that the first experiment, which was conducted independently of our second experiment, contains a second dimension. However, since party cues is the common denominator of the two experiments, we have solely focused on this dimension in this particular paper.
3. Former prime minister and party leader of the Social Democrats, Göran Persson, was in early 2016 arguing for a prohibition of begging (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 11 March 2016).
4. The sample is based on self-selected and not randomly selected respondents. This implies that inference to the entire population should be made with caution. In order to make generalizations of the results, the study should preferably be replicated using representative samples (for differences between the sample and the population, see Dahlberg *et al.* 2010). However, the purpose of the experiment is not merely to make descriptive inferences about absolute levels (which are often affected by the sampling bias) but rather to test hypotheses on causal effects, in that effect estimates are empirically often less sensitive to the sampling biases than are percentage levels (Martinsson *et al.* 2013).
5. The study conducted in 2018 was approved by the regional ethics board in Gothenburg, decision 2014-03-24, approval number 189-14. In 2011, when the first study was carried out, it was not necessary to seek ethical approval from the regional ethics board according to the national legislation, since it did not include sensitive information. The study was, however, reviewed in terms of scientific quality and research ethics through a

local committee at the University of Gothenburg. Informed consent was obtained from all individuals that participated in the surveys.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Data availability statement

Data were collected through the Laboratory of Opinion Research (LORE), University of Gothenburg. Derived data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Notes on contributors

Niklas Bolin is Associate Professor of Political Science at Mid Sweden University, Sundsvall, Sweden. His main research interests are parties and elections, particularly organisation, leadership, intra-party democracy, radical right parties and green parties. He is co-editor of *Managing Leader Selections in European Political Parties* (Palgrave, 2021) and has published in journals including *Party Politics*, *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, *Scandinavian Political Studies* and *West European Politics*. [niklas.bolin@miun.se]

Stefan Dahlberg is Professor in Political Science at the Department of Humanities and Social Science at the Mid Sweden University and at the Department of Comparative Politics, University of Bergen, where he is Research Director at the Digital Social Science Core Facility (DIGSSCORE). His research interests include democratic representation, political legitimacy and survey methodology. Recent publications have appeared in *Journal of Politics*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Electoral Studies* and *West European Politics*. [stefan.dahlberg@miun.se]

Sofie Blombäck is Assistant Professor of Political Science at Mid Sweden University, Sundsvall, Sweden. Her main research interests include parties and party systems, with a particular focus on European elections and new political parties. She has published in journals including *Party Politics* and *Scandinavian Political Studies*. [sofie.blomback@miun.se]

ORCID

Niklas Bolin  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2597-363X>

Stefan Dahlberg  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7483-9234>

Sofie Blombäck  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9469-7691>

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