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**RESEARCH**

# The Six Roles of the Anti-Immigration Parties in Scandinavian Immigration Press Debate 1970–2016

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This article analyzes through qualitative content analysis what role the populist radical right parties have had in Scandinavian immigration debate in the press from 1970 to 2016. The press may highlight other dimensions of these parties' relationship with the immigration issue than party programs and statements. I identify six distinct roles the parties have performed in the debate: *the radical traditionalist*, *the deviant*, *the extremist*, *the powerful (against the little guy)*, *the persecuted*, and *the policy innovator*. Showing that the populist radical right parties are not just exchanging the same set of familiar arguments with their political opponents over and over again, this analysis adds to our understanding of how these parties debate immigration and the kinds of criticism they draw, and it shows that the immigration issue can actually lead to highly unfavorable media coverage that goes beyond their policy radicalism, which I suggest could hurt their electoral prospects.

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**Keywords:** Immigration debate; Populist radical right parties; Anti-immigration parties; Immigration press debate; Scandinavian immigration

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## Introduction

Existing research shows that opposition to immigration is a defining attribute of populist radical right parties—according to Ivarsflaten (2007), it is the only common denominator of those that are electorally successful and the primary reason voters support them (Arzheimer 2018). It manifests itself in all three overarching attributes by which this party family has become known: immigrants are excluded from their notion of the people they see themselves as advocates for (populism); these parties advocate ethnocracy and therefore major changes to immigration policies (radicalism); and, relatedly, they are socio-culturally ethno-pluralists (right-wing) (Betz & Johnson 2004; Canovan 1999; Elgenius & Rydgren 2018; Minkenberg 2000; Mudde 2007; Rydgren 2007; van Spanje 2010). While party programs, propaganda, and expert surveys have been indispensable data types for this research, press coverage of the anti-immigrant parties over time represents a somewhat underexplored, but potentially rich, data source that speaks to the parties' ideological and policy positions, the kinds of response they trigger from their political opponents, and the electoral significance of the immigration

issue for them. The press is a main arena for the public deliberation over the immigration issue and for the populist radical right parties to reach the electorate and gain support for their take on immigration. While party programs and public statements let them present and explain the issue as they prefer—an overall message, the most salient aspects, the shortcomings of the opponents, and so forth—the press may present the party and its views and representatives much differently, for a number of reasons. Therefore, in this article, I analyze through qualitative content analysis what role the populist radical right parties have had in the Scandinavian immigration debate in the press from 1970 to 2016, using the SCANPUB dataset. ‘Role’ refers to the functions they have (had) in the immigration debate by virtue of the subjects they appear in the context of; what is factually written about them, including statements by others; and what statements the parties themselves make in relation to the subjects, as evident in intra- or cross-national patterns in the data. To the extent that press articles reveal roles that complement what existing research tends to highlight, namely that the populist radical right parties in the public arena are outspoken critics of immigration, press coverage can be an important supplementary source of insight into how these parties relate to the immigration issue. This is not to suggest existing research is incorrect but that press articles could link the parties to the immigration issue in other ways and thus put them in additional roles beyond that of the immigration critic—roles that could affect their electoral prospects in ways hitherto not fully appreciated, which future research must examine.

The data consist of 131 news items, columns, and editorials in six Scandinavian newspapers that quoted or mentioned either of the two Progress parties, the Danish People’s Party, New Democracy, and the Sweden Democrats. These parties are generally considered representative of Western populist radical right parties as a category (see e.g., Rydgren 2007), and they operate in media systems that share characteristics with several other European countries (Hallin & Mancini 2004). The findings can therefore be valid for other parties of this variety in similar contexts, although this must be examined in future research. I identified six distinct roles that Scandinavian populist radical right parties have in actuality performed in the press debate over immigration over the 47-year period, at some point and in all or particular countries, whether they sought the role themselves or have involuntarily been assigned it by other public actors. The roles were those of *the radical traditionalist*, *the deviant*, *the extremist*, *the powerful (against the little guy)*, *the persecuted*, and *the policy innovator*. Showing that the populist radical right parties are not just exchanging the same set of familiar arguments with their political opponents over and over again, this analysis adds to our understanding of how these parties debate immigration and the kinds of criticism they draw, and it shows that the immigration issue can lead to highly unfavorable media coverage that goes beyond their policy radicalism, which I suggest could hurt their electoral prospects.

The article is organized as follows. First, I present the issue of immigration as a policy issue and how the populist radical right relates to it. I then review past research on the Scandinavian populist radical right parties and the immigration issue, including related recent work on media coverage. Data and method are presented in the third section, followed by a contextualizing discussion of why the national context can be expected to shape press coverage of the parties. I then present and discuss the roles of the Scandinavian parties in the immigration debate over the 47-year period. Findings and implications are discussed in the conclusion.

### **The Immigration Issue and Populist Radical Right Parties**

The influx of labor migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers into Western Europe since the 1970s put the challenging issue of immigration high on the political agenda (for an overview, see Hovden & Mjelde 2019b). Immigration is a particularly complex issue with social,

cultural, economic, and moral aspects that blends into most if not all other policy domains, involving subjects and themes such as racism, foreign aid, individual rights, national culture, changing social and cultural patterns, moral values, crime, poverty, religion, the educational system, the future of the welfare state, and so forth. It involves some very difficult political dilemmas, such as, on the one hand, the desire to help people in dire need and giving people the opportunity to create a better life for themselves, and on the other hand, wanting to avoid new social problems, increased public expenditures, and social unrest. For example, the unemployment rate has long been higher among immigrants than the native-born population (OECD 2004; 2016).

While populist radical right parties are not single-issue parties and several of them emerged around entirely different issues (see e.g., Harmel, Svåsand & Mjelde 2018; Mudde 1999), they were quick to seize on grievances over immigration and embraced the idea of ethno-pluralism—the view that different ethnic groups should stay separate to preserve their culture, which was elaborated by the French *Nouvelle Droite* and is now the foremost characteristic of the party family (Rydgren 2005). Populist radical right parties use five anti-immigrant frames/arguments, according to Elgenius and Rydgren (2018; see also Rydgren 2007). First, immigrants crowd out natives in the competition for limited goods, for example taking over jobs and housing; second, they are a burden to the welfare state, due in particular to high unemployment rates, thus taxing resources that could have gone to the native population; third, they bring crime and social unrest; fourth, they bring foreign customs and values that threaten to undermine national culture and identity; fifth, they threaten liberal values. Moreover, their anti-immigration stance manifests itself in all three overarching attributes by which the party family is identified. The parties present themselves as speaking on behalf of ‘the people’ against all the elites, yet immigrants are excluded from their concept of the demos. Their radicalism is first and foremost evident in their ethnocentric vision of the ideal society and the major changes to immigration policies that they consequently favor. Finally, and relatedly, these parties’ non-egalitarian, particularistic attitude to immigrants and their place in society (i.e., their ethno-pluralism) is a critical element of what makes them socio-culturally right wing (see Betz & Johnson 2004; Canovan 1999; Elgenius & Rydgren 2018; Minkenberg 2000; Mudde 2007; Rydgren 2007; van Spanje 2010). Next, I review the existing research on the Scandinavian populist radical right parties as it relates to the immigration issue.

### **Literature on the Scandinavian Populist Radical Right Parties, the Immigration Issue, and the Media and Public Debate**

The growing literature on the Scandinavian populist radical right parties give an account of the emergence of the Progress parties in Denmark and Norway in the early 1970s as right-wing protest parties of entrepreneurial origins. It shows that they gradually incorporated the immigration issue into their policy profiles, when the character and volume of immigration to these countries changed markedly with the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, early research on the Swedish case focused on explaining the absence of a successful populist radical right party, save for the flash in the pan party New Democracy, which burst onto the political scene in 1991 and imploded within three years. The Sweden Democrats,

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<sup>1</sup> Gripsrud (2018) argues the Norwegian Progress Party’s opposition to immigration was manifest already in the 1970s, as evident for example in party founder Anders Lange’s defense of the apartheid regime in South Africa, statements made by Progress Party MP Erik Gjems-Onstad in the 1974 parliamentary debate on the immigration moratorium, and in a letter to the editor arguing against a new mosque in Oslo by party leader Carl I. Hagen in *Aftenposten* in 1979.

founded in 1988 and entering parliament in 2010, has received abundant attention in recent years, however. The studies discuss the electoral significance of the immigration issue to these parties and opposition to immigration as an attribute that defines them as a party type. For instance, the 1987 election is commonly regarded as the first in which immigration was politicized in Norway, and the moderation process within the Sweden Democrats in the 2000s allowed the party to grow its appeal (Andersen & Björklund 2000; Bergmann 2017; Dahlström & Esaiasson 2011; Erlingsson, Vernby & Öhrvall 2014; Harmel, Svåsand & Mjelde 2018; Hellström 2016; Ivarsflaten 2007; Ivarsflaten & Gudbrandsen 2012; Jungar & Jupskås 2014; Rydgren 2002, 2010; Rydgren & van der Meiden 2018; Widfeldt 2000, 2018). A small number of single-case studies deal with the nature and dimensions of these parties' anti-immigration stance in depth, such as Elgenius and Rydgren (2018) and Jupskås (2015). As mentioned, Elgenius and Rydgren, building in part on Rydgren's earlier work (Rydgren 2007), find that the Sweden Democrats' message features nostalgic, etho-nationalistic frames and Jupskås finds that five anti-immigration 'narratives' have been used by the Norwegian Progress Party. Another set of related studies has analyzed other Scandinavian parties' strategic responses to the populist radical right's successful mobilization on the immigration issue, focusing on the structure of party competition in Denmark and Sweden (Green-Pedersen & Krogstrup 2008; Green-Pedersen & Odmalm 2008; Widfeldt 2015) or the response of the social democrats (Bale et al. 2010) to explain the early politicization of the immigration issue in Denmark and the absence thereof in Sweden. Finally, several studies have looked at what role the media have played in the growth of the Scandinavian populist radical right parties and, in turn, how the parties have shaped press coverage. Two main findings are first, that the media have facilitated their electoral breakthrough, giving them visibility by covering the issues these parties raise. Second, the media bestow legitimacy by covering them as serious actors, particularly when the media engage in populism themselves (Mjelde & Hovden 2019; Bächler & Hopmann 2017; Ellinas 2010; Green-Pedersen & Krogstrup 2008; Hellström & Belevander 2018; Jupskås et al. 2017; Mazzoleni 2008; Mudde 2007; Strömbäck, Jungar & Dahlberg 2017), even though one study concludes that Swedish editorials were clearly more critical in their tone towards the parties than Danish and Norwegian ones (Hellström, Hagelund & Meret 2016). Moreover, (Hovden & Mjelde 2019b) show the Scandinavian populist radical right parties have been leading actors in the politicization of the immigration debate in the press in all three countries from 1970 to 2016, and (Mjelde & Hovden 2019), using the same data, also find that press articles are more likely to contain populism when the populist radical-right parties are either speaking or spoken about in the articles.

### **Data and Method**

The press articles were drawn from 4406 news, feature, and debate items about immigration to and migration within Scandinavia and Europe collected by the SCANPUB project for a quantitative content analysis of Scandinavian immigration debate from 1970 to 2016. The sample consisted of the broadsheets *Aftenposten* (NO), *Dagens Nyheter* (SE), and *Jyllandsposten* (DK) and the tabloids *VG* (NO), *Aftonbladet* (SE), and *Ekstrabladet* (DK). As political leanings appeared most evident in the Danish press, a limited sample of *Politiken* was added to balance the Danish sample. Articles that explicitly or implicitly dealt with post-1960 immigration in the context of 26 different topics, such as the welfare state and labor market policies, integration, admission policy, media representation, multiculturalism, crime, religion, and social customs, were selected, relying on constructed week-sampling of 24 days each year throughout the 47-year period, which resulted in a database covering 5640 newspaper weekdays (only every 5th year for *Politiken*). Trained student assistants in each country

selected and coded the items from November 2016 to February 2018.<sup>2</sup> The secondary sample, analyzed here, included all news items, columns, and editorials that the assistants coded as explicitly quoting or mentioning either of the two Progress parties, the Danish People's Party, New Democracy, and the Sweden Democrats, in total 131 (out of the original 4406).<sup>3</sup>

Whereas Hovden and Mjelde (2019b) have analyzed the full sample quantitatively, I analyze the role of these parties in the Scandinavian immigration debate—the secondary sample—through qualitative content analysis in a general and evaluative sense of the method by systematically examining the data for the purpose of categorizing the contents and registering data that were relevant to the research question. Thus, the analysis was inductive: I sought to derive concepts or themes—what I in the end characterized as roles—through interpretation of the newspaper articles (see Grønmo 2004; Kuckartz 2014; Thomas 2006). I first read all articles two times and determined what the subject of the piece was; what was factually written about the parties, including statements by others; and what (if any) statements they themselves made about the matter. When there was an intra- or cross-national pattern in terms of the subject matter, how the populist radical right parties discussed it, or in how other actors responded to them, in turn, I considered that to be a role that the populist radical right effectively performed and characterized it accordingly and selected the most instructive item(s) to exemplify. The roles were thus inferred from the empirical material for the group as a whole, even though not every role was evident in each country. If, for instance, several stories cover some type of a connection between neo-Nazi groups and a populist radical right party, the party itself may be said to perform the function of the extremist in the immigration debate, relative to other (mainstream) parties in the debate, to the extent that it condones extremists or acquiesces in extremist ideology, even if its party program is not extremist in any way. The connection may involve only one or a few party representatives, but the association between the party and extremists is then made in the public debate, fairly or unfairly. Moreover, the articles do not deal to the same extent or throughout the period with the same roles. Accordingly, some of the roles are exemplified with multiple examples; in the case of the *policy innovator*, I only found one example. In this specific case, the article concerns policy innovation in the sole municipality in Norway with a Progress Party mayor after the 1999 election, who was considered a rising star in the party. Such policy innovation has contributed to the municipality being dubbed 'the showcase' for the Progress Party's policies, a label that has stuck in the Norwegian public sphere ever since (see e.g., Gilbrant 2019; Westhrin 1999). The article thus exemplifies this role. The purpose is *not* to quantify but to present and discuss each distinct role that I identified through the use of instructive examples, which I do after the next section, which suggests how the national context can be expected to impact the debate in each country.

### **The National Context: Similarities and Differences**

The Scandinavian immigration debate in the press has taken place in political and media contexts both similar and dissimilar. Existing literature generally treats the five populist radical right parties studied here as both a distinct party family within the Scandinavian political system (e.g., Jungar & Jupskås 2014) and as a subset of the European populist radical right (e.g.,

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<sup>2</sup> For an extended account of the sampling, see the SCANPUB representative analysis methodology report (Hovden & Mjelde 2019a).

<sup>3</sup> Letters to the editor were excluded due to the large increase in the number of such articles in the period in combination with the many particularities of this genre, including both its form (e.g., often being very short, which means that the items will have fewer subjects and sources), who writes them ('ordinary people' as opposed to bona fide journalists, experts, and elites), their looser connection to the daily news agenda, etc.

Rydgren 2018). The three countries' media systems all belong to the so-called 'democratic-corporatist model', characterized by high newspaper circulation, a (now) politically neutral commercial press, strong media/journalistic professionalization, and both institutionalized self-regulation and strong state intervention, including protection of freedom of the press (Hallin & Mancini 2004). Populist radical right parties tend to be newsmakers, because immigration is a divisive issue that has been increasingly covered in Scandinavia (Hovden & Mjelde 2019b), and the parties have been led by charismatic leaders that use provocative rhetoric (Esser, Stępińska & Hopmann, 2017; Mazzoleni 2008; Strömback, Jungar & Dahlgren 2017). Moreover, Hellström, Hagelund and Meret (2016) find newspaper editorials in all the countries tend to portray the parties in a more negative tone when immigration is the subject. Taken together, these features suggest the parties are comparable in terms of the positions they take and with regard to the media environment in which they operate. One can thus expect them to play at least some of the same roles in the immigration debate. On the other hand, the parties' histories differ, as do the political and national media contexts in some ways.

First, the Norwegian Progress Party is arguably more of a mainstream party. It is more ideologically moderate, at least compared to the Danish People's Party and the Sweden Democrats (Jungar & Jupskås 2014; Mudde 2007), was institutionalized as a party organization by the early 1990s (Harmel, Svåsand & Mjelde 2018), and has been in parliament continuously since 1981 and was the junior partner in the coalition government from 2013 to 2020. Second, Denmark has had a harsher and more critical public discourse towards immigrants (Hovden & Mjelde 2019b; Hovden, Mjelde & Gripsrud 2018), likely in part related to the presence of comparatively stronger free (advertisement-based) papers and classic tabloid newspapers, unlike their Norwegian and Swedish counterparts, and the earlier politicization of the immigration issue there (Green-Pedersen & Krogstrup 2008). Third, the Sweden Democrats is a special party due to its neo-Nazi origins. This has led to the other parties forming a cordon sanitaire against it and most likely also newspaper editorials being more negative toward it (Green-Pedersen & Krogstrup 2008; Hellström, Hagelund & Meret 2016). Moreover, Swedish immigration discourse has been characterized by more immigration-friendly views (Hovden & Mjelde 2019b; Hovden, Mjelde & Gripsrud 2018). In fact, what Brochmann and Hagelund (2012) refer to as a 'kindness continuum' within the region—Sweden having the most liberal immigration policies, Denmark the most restrictive, with Norway somewhere in between—applies also to the tone of their immigration discourses, according to Hovden and Mjelde (2019b). These intra-Scandinavian differences could shape how the parties are covered in each of the countries.

### **The Roles of the Scandinavian Populist Radical Right Parties in the Press Debate, 1970–2016**

I identified six distinct roles that Scandinavian populist radical right parties have in actuality performed in the press debate over immigration over the 47-year period, at some point and in all or particular countries, whether they sought the role themselves or have involuntarily been assigned it by other public actors.

#### ***The Radical Traditionalist***

Unsurprisingly, the most typical role of the populist radical right parties in the debate has been the one for which they have become known: the defender of the national culture of the native-born population against the threats immigrants (allegedly) represent, who therefore calls for far more restrictive immigration policies. Multiple example stories across the three countries show this. In an interview with *Aftenposten*, the prominent Progress Party MP John Alvheim calls for the deportation from Norway of all asylum seekers in Norway who

have been granted humanitarian protection. He is responding to the release of a report that shows that every fifth citizen will by 2050 be a person from the third world or a descendant thereof, if the current immigration policies remain in place. Alvheim intends to introduce a bill in parliament and says that 'Norwegians risk becoming a minority in their own country', and he is particularly worried about the potential influence of Islam in Norway (Ramberg 1991). VG has a story in which a survey shows two in three Norwegians want to ban foreign flags in the national holiday parade. Progress Party leader Siv Jensen says foreign flags have no place in the parade, and she thinks many Norwegians will be upset by the desire of some to bring foreign flags (Maso, Bugge, Emelianow & Johansen 2008). In Sweden, the Sweden Democrats' ethnopluralist ideology is the subject of a commentary in *Dagens Nyheter*, which contains a radical written formulation of it by the party itself: 'Sweden is the Swedes' country. By this, the Sweden Democrats are not saying that we think we Swedes are better than others, we are only saying that Sweden is the only place on earth where we ... can develop our own character and identity' (Kempe 2009). In an interview on the day of his release from prison after serving time for tax evasion, Progress Party leader Mogens Glistrup offers the slogan-like statement 'Denmark free of income tax and refugees' (Ritterband 1985). A report in *Politiken* details widespread anti-Islam sentiments in a Facebook support group for former leader Pia Kjærsgaard, quoting several Danish People's Party members making anti-Islam and anti-immigrant statements, with the group's leader—a party member—proposing that 'no immigrant 10 generations out should be eligible for city council or the Danish parliament'. Neither Kjærsgaard or the current vice chair, Søren Espersen, want to comment on the controversial statements, with the latter noting 'It is the way it is' (Vangkilde 2015).

### ***The Deviant***

Several articles suggest the apparent paradox in these parties calling out all that is wrong with immigrants when their representatives suffer from their own personal shortcomings. These stories portray the parties' representatives and members as deviant, outlandish, or wacky. A piece in *Extra Bladet*, bordering on ridicule, with the thematic subtitle 'Hullabaloo at Kjærsgaard'—a play on the name of party leader Pia Kjærsgaard—states that a candidate for the Danish People's Party left his Muslim wife to further his own political career, although he denies this accusation. Based on this case, the article offers the generalization 'Muslim wife [is] an obstacle when seeking election to parliament for the Danish People's Party' (Olesen 2000). *Jyllandsposten* reports from the Danish Progress Party's infamous 1995 'party conference from hell'<sup>4</sup>—a nickname reflecting the party was about to implode from internal strife and weak institutionalization. In the story, the delegates' eccentricity and opposition to immigration are discussed in the same section, the implication being that these are two defining characteristics that make the party stand out. The journalists comment on the delegates' memorable outfits, and one delegate offers that with respect to the general electorate, 'The weirdos are with us'. Several delegates have reportedly told them that many party members feel they are wrongly seen as racists (Beck & Steinmetz 1995). An unflattering story in *Aftonbladet* discusses welfare dependency among Sweden Democrats. Under the headline 'Get welfare – in the millions', the story points out that the party 'thinks that immigration costs too much. But they themselves live off welfare', emphasizing that one in five elected Sweden Democrats is reliant on welfare. Three figures show that Sweden Democrat-politicians earn less than the national average, more often owe money to the debt collection service, and have a higher payment delinquency rate than representatives of other parties (Buskas & Kärrman 2007).

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<sup>4</sup> This was a nickname used on the conference by the public (see Harmel, Svåsand and Mjelde 2018: 120).

### ***The Extremist***

Extremism/racism among the parties themselves and ties to extremist groups are reported in a number of articles. A VG article reports that the Progress Party, as the only Norwegian party, does not ban members of the anti-immigrant association the People's Movement Against Immigration (FMI), whose leader was arrested just months before (and later convicted) for planning to bomb a refugee center, from joining the party. Whereas representatives from all the other Norwegian parties reject FMI members—with some making clear in no uncertain terms that FMI members are banned from their parties—Progress Party leader Carl I. Hagen says there is nothing in his party's statutes barring FMI representatives from joining his party. Hagen goes on to distance himself from the FMI in a rather vague way, noting that he has mixed feelings about its leader encouraging its members to vote for the Progress Party (Talsnes 1989). An item in *Dagens Nyheter* titled 'The Sweden Democrats' rhetoric resembles nazism's' has a professor making that comparison after the party described the country's growing Muslim population as the largest threat against Sweden since the Second World War (Kihlström 2009). There are multiple stories about scandalous behavior by prominent members of the Sweden Democrats, with one inebriated Sweden Democrat leader, Erik Almqvist, caught on camera making racist statements (Samuelsen 2012). Another, Kent Ekeröth—incidentally the one doing the recording in the previous example—is in hot water for raising funds for Avpixlat, an alternative radical right wing media website accused of spreading hatred against immigrants (Sköld, Wiman & Sandberg 2012). *Aftenposten* reports that prominent Danish People's Party politician Mogens Camre has been convicted of sending out a tweet in which he says that Muslims should get the same treatment that Hitler got, and that the Danish People's Party has stated that the verdict will not have any consequences for Camre's future in the party (Færås 2015).

### ***The Powerful (Against the Little Guy)***

Both the Norwegian and Danish parties appear in stories in which they wield the levers of governmental or partisan political power against (vulnerable) immigrants. After the Norwegian Progress Party entered government in 2013, several stories feature party representatives now in official roles, often as ministers, defending government practices with adverse effects on individual immigrants. An article in VG reports that a Syrian family with an ill five-year old daughter in a refugee center close to the Russian border, where the family made a crossing into Norway, has been taken into custody by the Norwegian police. They are facing a possible forced return to Russia, with uncertain consequences for their human rights, which their Norwegian lawyer claims the government policy framework violates. The minister of immigration and integration, the Progress Party's Sylvi Listhaug, responds that she has no concern about returning them to Russia, arguing that the government considers it a safe third country and cites the parliamentary consensus behind the applicable government policy (Haugsbø & Mikkelsen 2016). *Aftenposten* also has a story about the Norwegian government sending an observer to Eritrea and efforts to reach an agreement with the Eritrean government to provide for the return of asylum seekers from the country, which according to the UN is a large-scale violator of human rights that commits crimes against humanity. An Eritrean woman running a radio program described as somewhat of a hotline for Eritreans on the run is strongly critical of the Norwegian government. The Progress Party's vice minister of justice, Jøran Kallmyr, defends the government's work, despite being aware that the returning refugees are forced by the Eritrean government to sign an 'admission of guilt' letter (Stokke & Aale 2016). In Denmark, an article in *Jyllandsposten* features the story of a stateless Palestinian who nearly obtained citizenship under a 1961 UN convention when his case began to languish within the bureaucracy, which his lawyer blames on the alleged intervention by the Danish People's

Party to prevent him and other stateless persons from obtaining Danish citizenship. The party rejects the accusation but immediately introduces legislation to withdraw Denmark from the UN convention that provides for citizenship for stateless persons (Skytt 2011).

### ***The Persecuted***

Representatives of the populist radical right have themselves played the role of the victim who is persecuted by the public because of their political beliefs, and not without basis. A story in *Jyllandsposten* covers the court battles of Danish People's Party leader Pia Kjærsgaard, where she has twice sued and won defamation cases against a political opponent and a newspaper editor, respectively. Both accused her of being a racist, the latter in the aftermath of an episode in Copenhagen in which she was attacked by 150 teenagers throwing rocks at her when she was about to meet a journalist to talk about immigration (Grønvald 2000). In a comment, Kjærsgaard states: 'I hope my political opponents now, after a second clear verdict, will hold back before they barge ahead and make defamatory and vulgar statements against me personally and the Danish People's Party', adding that she has had to pay a steep personal price because people such as the one she sued make her out to be 'the icon of evil'. An article in *Ekstra Bladet* describes the case of a Sweden Democrat candidate for the Swedish parliament seeking asylum in Denmark after allegedly receiving death threats. He first won a wrongful termination court case against the Swedish Migration Agency, where he once worked, that involved criticism he had made against the government's asylum policies. Now he claims he is being silenced by the media as a candidate for the Sweden Democrats and that his car and home have been vandalized, adding that he fears he will suffer the same fate as Pim Fortuyn (Michaelsen 2002).

### ***The Policy Innovator***

The Scandinavian populist radical right has occasionally introduced significant policy proposals in the area of immigration that eventually became governmental policy, in spite of condemnation and ostracization from other parties. A VG article in 2000 with the headline 'Puts price tag on refugees' features an interview with the country's then only Progress Party mayor, Terje Soviknes, whose administration was the first in the country to produce an accounting of the financial costs for his municipality of taking in refugees. The mayor states that he believes other mayors wish to do the same but do not dare (Landsend 2000). Notably, this proposal was a local variant of national Progress Party policy. In 1995, the Norwegian Progress Party MP Øystein Hedstrøm introduced a parliamentary resolution that called for a governmental study of the effects of immigration on the Norwegian society, written with input from anti-immigration activists, reportedly including the leader of the racist party White Electoral Alliance, Jack Erik Kjuus—and notably followed up in part by both left- and right-wing governments in the form of two official reports about the consequences of mass immigration (Gripsrud 2018).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Populist radical right parties are defined in large part by their sweeping opposition to immigration, which can be summarized by a set of distinct frames/arguments (cf. Elgenius & Rydgren 2018; Rydgren 2007). This analysis of the Scandinavian populist radical right parties role in immigration debate in the press since the very beginning of non-Western immigration to the region, which found that they have effectively taken on six different roles here, both supports and adds to this understanding of the parties. There are plenty of examples in the material of the parties making anti-immigrant statements that echo the familiar arguments discussed by past research and that is expressed in party programs—what I here termed the

role of the radical traditionalist. At times, they have occupied a much more marginal position in the debate, having been cast in or taken the role of the extremist. The other roles identified here reveal new facets to the parties' position in the immigration debate, which plausibly could impact how they are perceived by the public beyond the issue of immigration.

First, the harsh attacks on immigrants invite journalistic scrutiny of the personal character of the parties' own representatives, which has led to an unflattering highlighting of their own flaws and peculiarities, making them appear deviant relative to the average citizen out there. Second, and in stark contrast to the conventional understanding of these parties as self-proclaimed champions of the man and woman in the street, their assumption of powerful government positions has placed them in the role of the powerful political establishment, representing and defending the system against vulnerable individual immigrants. While the populist radical right parties exclude (non-Western) immigrants from their concept of the people, the case of the Norwegian Progress Party clearly shows that entering government can entail political accountability and the use of power that fly in the face of their image as the voice of the downtrodden. Third, in a sort of weird role-reversal, the parties have at times invoked the plight of the persecuted, effectively placing themselves in the kind of place that many immigrants find themselves as victims of political oppression. Thus, when they embrace the role of the victim, their political fight against immigration renders them weak and vulnerable. This could, on the other hand, also reinforce their populist image as (yet) another example of injustice suffered at the hands of powerful political forces trying to suppress the beliefs of average people—in this case popular resentment against immigration. Fourth, the parties have also been reformers introducing new political ideas that were later widely embraced. Thus, in contrast to the perception that the parties are backwards-looking and stand for retrograde policies, they have also contributed innovative, impactful ideas in the area of immigration that bring public policy forward, as measured by their adoption by mainstream parties.

These findings imply, first, immigration is an issue that could exacerbate the liability that the immigration issue potentially is for populist radical right parties. While their stance on immigration undoubtedly attracts a significant number of voters, it alienates other voters and could even lead other parties to reject any cooperation with them, as in the case of the Sweden Democrats. If they, on top of this, are also seen as extreme, deviant, or cruel, it is at least thinkable that anti-immigration appeals may in fact hurt these parties electorally to the extent that they draw attention to behavior by party representatives that some voters may not condone, even if the voters are generally sympathetic to the parties' views on immigration. For example, the immigration issue could undermine their populist image if it makes the parties into the face of an inhumane political system. Second, the immigration issue could, on the other hand, help them sand down their rough image to the extent that it puts them in the role of the 'underdog' and thus creates public sympathy for them or allows them to be seen in a positive light as disruptors who contribute bold, innovative ideas that benefit society. Future studies must test these propositions while taking the national context into consideration.

While the six roles identified above speak to the party family as a whole at a general, abstract level, not every party was found to have had every role in the Scandinavian debate. For example, the Norwegian Progress Party is the only one that has been in executive office, which has had the effect of making it a part of the political establishment that implements policies that sometimes have dramatic effects on individual immigrants, as shown above. The Danish People's Party has also been in this role, but government participation most clearly contributes to it when it entails ministerial influence over immigration policy implementation. The

Sweden Democrats will also much more easily glide into the role of the extremist, given its neo-Nazi roots and the predominance of immigration-friendly views in the Swedish discourse.

Finally, a more socially stratified public discourse in Denmark has likely contributed to derisive depictions of populist radical right parties and their members. Which roles a particular party plays will therefore to some degree be contingent upon the specific circumstances that shape its country's immigration debate. Future research should also attempt to quantify to what extent the parties have played the roles this article has only identified but not counted in the sense of frequencies for the population—which could be the debate in all national and regional newspapers in the countries—as that will likely matter for how the various roles impact the parties' standing with voters. Furthermore, future work should also examine what roles other parties of this family have played in the press debate over immigration in their countries to test the generalizability of the findings from the Scandinavian context and possibly to identify additional roles.

### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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