

Emigration and Radical Right Populism*

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Abstract

An extensive literature links the rise of populist radical right (PRR) parties to immigration. We argue that another demographic trend is also significant: Emigration. The departure of citizens due to internal and international emigration is a major phenomenon affecting elections via two complementary mechanisms. Emigration alters the composition of electorates, but also changes the preferences of the left behind. Empirically, we establish a positive correlation between PRR vote shares and net-migration loss at the subnational level across Europe. A more fine-grained panel analysis of precincts in Sweden demonstrates that the departure of citizens raises PRR vote shares in places of emigration and that the Social Democrats are the principal losers from emigration. Elite interviews and newspaper analyses explore how emigration produces material and psychological grievances on which populists capitalize and that established parties do not effectively address. Emigration and the frustrations it generates emerge as important sources of populist success.

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Recent years have seen a much-discussed rise in populist radical right (PRR) parties. Rejecting open borders and globalization and often disregarding fundamental tenets of liberal democracy, these parties have particular appeal among voters who oppose immigration and the cultural and economic dislocations it can bring (Halikiopoulou and Vlandas, 2019; Ivarsson, 2008; Lancaster, 2020). Immigration is clearly salient in radical right campaigns and election coverage (Akkerman, 2015; Dancygier and Margalit, 2020; Gessler and Hunger, 2022; Goodman, 2021). However, when it comes to the effects of local immigration on local PRR vote shares, results are mixed (Andersson and Dehdari, 2021; Cools, Finseraas and Rogeberg, 2021; Golder, 2016).

Persistent focus on immigration has obscured another significant aspect of demographic change: domestic and international emigration. The permanent departure of locals due to emigration is a major demographic phenomenon with lasting impacts on the places left behind. One of these impacts is electoral. Emigration locales provide fertile ground for PRR parties and pose a significant challenge for traditional parties to retain their core voters.

Two mechanisms link internal and international emigration to PRR success – compositional and preference-based. Emigrants are disproportionately young and motivated adults who seek educational and economic opportunities in cosmopolitan surroundings. The population that remains is less educated and more rooted in place (Anelli and Peri, 2017; Lueders, 2022; Maxwell, 2020), attributes linked to PRR voting (De Vries, 2018; Fitzgerald, 2018). As a result, when regions experience substantial out-migration, this *compositional* change can promote PRR success without altering voting behavior. Additionally, emigration can change voter *preferences* and thereby influence voting behavior. The departure of individuals of prime working age who would have supported the local economy, formed families, and contributed to a vibrant communal life makes emigration locales less livable. Emigration can thus adversely affect public and private services, leading to school and business closures and straining the viability of public transport and healthcare systems. Many that remain lack the

skills sought after in urban centers and therefore can't easily move themselves. Additionally, those who remain may suffer psychologically, feeling that emigration devalues the status of their hometowns and communities. This decrease in quality of life gives rise to grievances on which populist parties capitalize, especially if they can convince voters that they have not only been deserted by their fellow citizens, but also by incumbent parties.

We assess the impact of emigration on the vote shares of PRR parties and evaluate both of these mechanisms. We first chart broad outlines, demonstrating a cross-sectional correlation between net-migration loss and PRR vote shares at the subnational level across Europe. To better understand what underlies this dynamic, we turn to Sweden, where fine-grained panel data on local population change are available, allowing us to estimate the effects of local departures on the vote shares of the radical right Sweden Democrats (SD) at the municipality and precinct level over two decades (2002-2018). To gain insights into mechanisms, we study a random sample of newspaper articles during the same period ($N = 560$) and analyze citizen satisfaction with public services. Interviews with party elites ($N = 12$) illuminate party responses to emigration and the challenges the Social Democrats face in light of the Sweden Democrats' entry into the electoral arena.

These analyses yield three findings. First, the departure of native Swedes to other Swedish municipalities is an important factor driving SD success. When measuring the number of departures relative to the total population at baseline, our estimates from a panel regression with two-way fixed effects suggest that the departure of 100 people from a municipality increases SD vote shares by about half a percentage point. This effect is substantively large, considering that the Sweden Democrats receive on average 8.3% in a precinct. The effects significantly outpace the impacts of immigration on SD vote shares.

Importantly, emigration effects do not simply reflect economic ones. We demonstrate that the estimated emigration effects are robust to the inclusion of variables measuring local economic decline, and a formal sensitivity analysis reveals that they are also not sensitive to unobserved confounding.

Second, while the compositional mechanism plays some role, the preference-based mechanism is also explanatory. For example, though we observe that the departure of voter types who are unlikely to be supporters of the SD does boost support for the party, precincts whose populations hold steady but are located within municipalities that experience emigration – and associated quality-of-life declines – see a rise in SD vote shares. Indeed, emigration has especially pronounced impacts on SD vote shares where we would expect it to be particularly damaging to public and private infrastructure. Newspaper articles, surveys of citizen satisfaction with public services, and elite interviews further reinforce that emigration produces grievances that populists can exploit and that traditional parties find difficult to counter.

Third, our analyses point to the challenges these demographic changes pose to established party systems (Berman and Snegovaya, 2019). We find that the Social Democrats are the principal losers to radical right populists in emigration locales. Once the incumbent party in much of Sweden, the Social Democrats have failed to respond to the problems of emigration. Newspaper data and elite interviews in turn illustrate the SD’s ability to capitalize on this strategic failure.

These findings make several contributions. We advance scholarship on the political effects of emigration. This work has largely focused on international emigration and its effects on political and economic outcomes in autocratic or recently democratized countries (Adida and Girod, 2011; Hirschman, 1993; Horz and Marbach, 2020; Karadja and Prawitz, 2019; Kelemen, 2020; Miller and Peters, 2020; Sellars, 2019). Shifting scope to post-industrial democracies, we show that emigration in the form of internal migration is an important phenomenon in high-income settings and that it can portend political change here as well, undermining liberal democracy where it had long been attained.

In addition, we advance research linking demographic change to populist success. This research has focused on the disruptions caused by immigration, but aside from a few contributions (Anelli and Peri, 2017; Lim, 2023; Patana, 2022) it has neglected the consequences of emigration. Whereas immigration can bolster PRR parties through congestion effects

and overburdened public services (Cremaschi et al., 2022; Dancygier, 2010; Hooijer, 2021), we show that opposite forces can do the same. The emptying out of regions can produce frustrations with significant political consequences.

Our research also speaks to the socio-political dimensions of regional inequalities (de Lange, van der Brug and Hartevelde, 2023; Rodden, 2019). Structural transformations have long pushed people out of peripheral regions and into urban centers. The rise of the knowledge economy has led to pressures within cities, and it has also widened regional disparities (Diamond, 2016; Moretti, 2012). Economic shocks arising from globalization intensify these disparities, generating insecurities on which populists thrive (Ballard-Rosa et al., 2021; Colantone and Stanig, 2018; Dehdari, 2021). Our paper similarly illuminates political consequences arising from this polarization, but also shows how these can unfold in the absence of shocks to local employment or incomes.

Our argument complements recent studies that highlight the grievances of residents living in declining peripheries as a source of PRR success (Patana, 2022; Rickardsson, 2021). However, different from this work – which documents a one-election, cross-sectional correlation between PRR vote shares and population decline – our panel analyses can better isolate the effect of emigration on PRR support by comparing changes in precinct-level vote shares with changes in emigration rates covering five general election cycles. Focusing on over-time variation within precincts allows us to separate emigration from other cross-sectional confounders tied to, for example, population density and economic geography. Moreover, by measuring emigration rates directly (vs. total population change), we can distinguish emigration from other components of demographic change that may contribute to the correlation between population decline and PRR support.

Finally, we expand the scope of analysis by paying attention not only to the electoral winners but also to the electoral losers of emigration, tying the success of PRR parties in emigration locales to strategic dilemmas that established parties have faced. Our work suggests that while center-left parties may benefit from urban growth strategies that promote

internal migration to cities, these policies generate losses in the periphery. Out-migration thus emerges as a key process in the reconfiguration of political competition in advanced democracies (Gingrich, 2017; Häusermann, 2020).

Emigration, Depopulation and PRR Parties

Emigration is a widespread phenomenon that can threaten the sustainability of entire regions. Approximately two-thirds of Europe’s 1,216 counties (NUTS 3 regions) are projected to have lower populations in 2050 than in 2019.¹ In the US, more than half of all counties were smaller in 2020 than in 2010, while four-fifths of all metropolitan areas grew during this period.² Internal migration plays an outsize role in these uneven population shifts. While most international emigration stems from low-income countries, internal out-migration frequently affects low-income regions in high-income countries. Transitions to post-industrial, service- and innovation-based economies have produced agglomerations in urban centers and hollowed out peripheral regions once dominated by manufacturing and heavy industry (Rickard, 2020).

Both types of emigration deprive sending regions of residents with educational and economic aspirations. Moreover, those who willingly uproot themselves are, by definition, less attached to their places of birth than those who stay behind. They may welcome interactions with strangers abroad or in ethnically-mixed cities in their native countries and feel at home in cosmopolitan environments (Lim, 2023; Lueders, 2022). These attributes – educational attainment, economic success, cosmopolitanism – should make emigrants unlikely supporters of radical right parties. These parties’ central appeal lies in their xenophobia and nationalism, and this nativism is less pronounced among educated and economically secure voters (Sobolewska and Ford, 2020). By implication, those who remain are more likely to feel close

¹See <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20210430-2>.

²See <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/08/more-than-half-of-united-states-counties-were-smaller-in-2020-than-in-2010.html>.

ties to their locality and to be circumspect of outsiders, sentiments that pave the way for PRR voting. Finally, if emigration is disproportionately female, this will also benefit PRR parties, whose support base skews male (Fitzgerald, 2018; Maxwell, 2020).³

Given these systematic differences, emigration can alter the *composition* of electorates such that relative support for PRR parties rises in emigration locales. This change in electoral support occurs without voters changing their preferences or parties changing their messages. It simply arises due to compositional shifts. Others have identified emigration’s compositional effects on politics, but have focused on different outcomes. For example, emigration of disloyal citizens is considered a “safety valve” for autocrats seeking regime stability (Kapur, 2014; Miller and Peters, 2020). Within the EU, it can facilitate the drift towards authoritarianism (Kelemen, 2020). Emigration can also change the quality of democracy. Lueders (2022) shows that the local rootedness of non-migrants leads to the localization of politics in places experiencing out-migration and to the nationalization of politics in places receiving unmoored migrants.

Additionally, emigration can change voter *preferences*.⁴ If economically active citizens leave en masse, the tax base will shrink and with it the availability of public services and private businesses. Even when national transfers compensate, reduced demand strains the viability of goods and services, and can impact nearly all areas of public life ranging from essential services to cultural offerings: the number of schools and hospitals shrinks, theaters

³Note that Cantoni and Pons (2022) show that turnout and partisanship may change post-move in the US and attribute much of this change to state-level electoral contexts and voting laws, which are less relevant in Sweden/Europe. Maxwell’s (2020) analysis of Swiss voters finds limited evidence of contextual effects.

⁴See also Lim (2023) who argues that the left behind worry about the sustainability of their local communities’ values and traditions. Lim’s analysis covers larger geographic regions (NUTS 2 and NUTS 3), making it more challenging to identify the effects of emigration and to distinguish between mechanisms.

and libraries close, restaurants and shops shut down, rail and bus lines are discontinued, and civic associations suffer (Kröhnert, van Olst and Klingolz, 2004).

Emigration can thus make places less livable. This deterioration affects citizens directly, and it can further prompt reactions such as disappointment and feelings of inadequacy. Faced with the fact that many of their neighbors choose to leave for seemingly more attractive destinations, communities may experience a collective loss of status and self-esteem. Emigration effectively degrades their hometowns. Moreover, if departures lead to the closure of gathering spots, residents are deprived of spaces that could otherwise maintain community spirit.⁵ Prior work has attributed individual-level status loss and social marginalization to radical right voting (Gidron and Hall, 2020). We theorize that emigration can also trigger these feelings at the community level.⁶ In short, emigration can have psychological repercussions which are compounded by material ones.

This argument suggests scope conditions to economic theories of rural-to-urban migration and recent work on historical international migration (Boustan and Tabellini, 2018; Karadja and Prawitz, 2019). In these models, when workers leave rural areas, the bargaining power of those left behind strengthens. Emigration then fosters unionization, strikes and welfare expenditures (Karadja and Prawitz, 2019). In contrast, we report a quality of life decline following emigration. The key to this difference is the urban skills-premium of the knowledge economy. Historically, low-skill workers emigrated, boosting the bargaining power of the remaining low-skill workers. Today, deindustrialized knowledge economies lead to the departure of high-skill workers who receive higher wages in cities. Meanwhile, the “earnings escalator” afforded to less-educated workers who once migrated to vibrant urban areas has disappeared (Autor, 2020), leaving them with few exit options and reduced bargaining power.

⁵This part of our argument lines up with Bolet’s (2021) study linking PRR voting to pub closures.

⁶See also Ansell et al. (2022) who argue that living in areas that are shut out of housing booms can trigger feelings of status loss and lead to far-right voting.

As emigration no longer increases the leverage of the left-behind, its political impact has changed. While economic and political elites may find it easier to neglect the left behind, political outsiders can appeal to this constituency by blaming incumbents for the deteriorating quality of life. In this way, emigration-based PRR voting may be understood as a protest vote against the political establishment. But unlike generalized dissatisfaction with elite politics, voters who are exposed to the consequences of emigration voice their discontent about specific failures in their localities for which they hold incumbents to account. Populist parties can further fuel this discontent (cf. [Hooghe and Dassonneville, 2018](#); [Rooduijn, Van Der Brug and De Lange, 2016](#)) by reminding voters that established parties have abandoned them, along with their neighbors. In spreading this message, they play up their populist (more so than their radical right) credentials. As the only true and legitimate representative of “the people”, populist parties maintain they are best equipped to understand the concerns of ordinary citizens ([Canovan, 1999](#)). When established parties have indeed disregarded the concerns of citizens dealing with the repercussions of emigration, such appeals may become credible to those left behind. Further, when pointing out the political elite’s shortcomings in areas of out-migration, PRR parties need not stoke resentment against cities. The challenges surrounding emigration, including the political elite’s shortcomings in meeting them, then open up new territories for PRR parties whose core message nationally and in cities centers around the ills of immigration.

Note that our focus on emigration-induced quality-of-life concerns complements but also differs from accounts linking regional economic transformations – import competition and deindustrialization, for example ([Baccini and Weymouth, 2021](#); [Colantone and Stanig, 2018](#)) – to populism or that connect immigrant-native competition over public services to radical right voting ([Cavaille and Ferwerda, 2023](#); [Cremaschi et al., 2022](#); [Dancygier, 2010](#)). We examine the effects of local departures on PRR parties net of unemployment, income inequality, and immigration and investigate how compositional changes in electorates and grievances these shifts unleash contribute to the success of these parties.

Cross-national Evidence

Dynamics of demographic change vary widely across regions. Figure 1 displays the rate of total population change between 2001-2011 across 112,028 municipalities in 32 European countries.⁷ In some parts of Europe the population is growing at levels above 2% annually, while others witness declines of a similar magnitude. This total population change is due to births, deaths, immigration and emigration. Where the population declines by 2% or more annually, it is likely that emigration is a significant driver.

Are PRR parties more successful in places with more emigration? To answer this question we correlate local vote shares with net-migration rates relying on cross-national data assembled by [Dijkstra, Poelman and Rodríguez-Pose \(2020\)](#). Their data include constituency-level radical right party vote shares for national elections in the mid 2010s across 28 European countries. In their data, a party is classified as radical right when it scores 8 or above on a 0-10 left-right scale in the CHES expert survey ([Jolly et al., 2022](#)). The net-migration data come from Eurostat and are measured at the county rather than the constituency level.⁸

Figure 2 displays a scatter plot of radical right vote shares and the average annual net-migration rate in the previous decade. Observations to the left of zero on the x-axis represent places where on average more people move away than arrive; observations to the right are places registering more people arriving than leaving. On average, as the net loss increases vote shares for radical right parties rise. We also observe a weak positive correlation between net-migration gains and radical right parties, suggesting that these parties benefit from different types of demographic change. As the sample includes observations from places

⁷The population counts come from census tabulations compiled by [Gløersen and Lürer \(2013\)](#). We informally refer to the geographic units as municipalities noting that names for local administrative units (LAU) differ across countries.

⁸By county we mean the lowest administrative subdivision for statistical purposes (NUTS 3 level).

without radical right party candidates (for which the vote share is 0), the observed correlation combines a demand- and supply-side effect of net migration on radical right party support.⁹

These patterns suggest the relevance of emigration for PRR support, but the analysis faces limitations. First, many countries do not publish data on the components of sub-national population change. By focusing on regions with low net-migration, we may exclude places where immigration is large enough to offset emigration-induced losses. Second, the level of aggregation may be too high; voters might notice how population change affects their municipality, but could have little sense about changes elsewhere in their county. Third, aggregate measures prevent us from saying anything about who is leaving. Fourth, relying on cross-national data limits our ability to isolate the effect of emigration on PRR vote shares from confounders. To remedy these inferential challenges, we turn to the Swedish case.

⁹Tables [SM.2-SM.3](#) on pages 2-3 in the Supplemental Materials (SM) report corroborating regressions adjusting for potential confounders including economic trends.

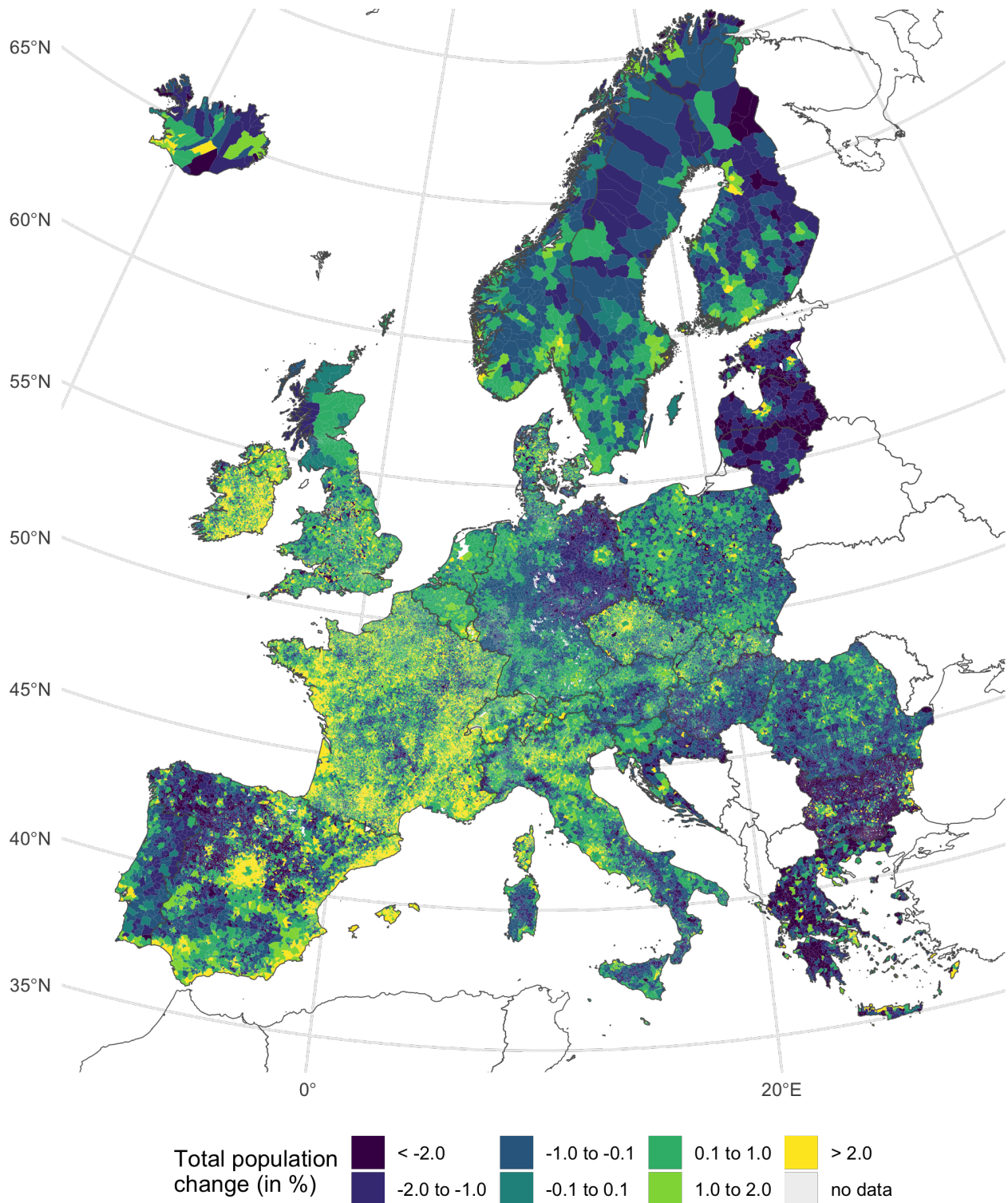


Figure 1: Population change in Europe, 2001–2011

Notes: Annualized change in the total population size between 2001–2011 (standardized by the average population size between two years) across 112,028 municipalities in 32 countries in Europe

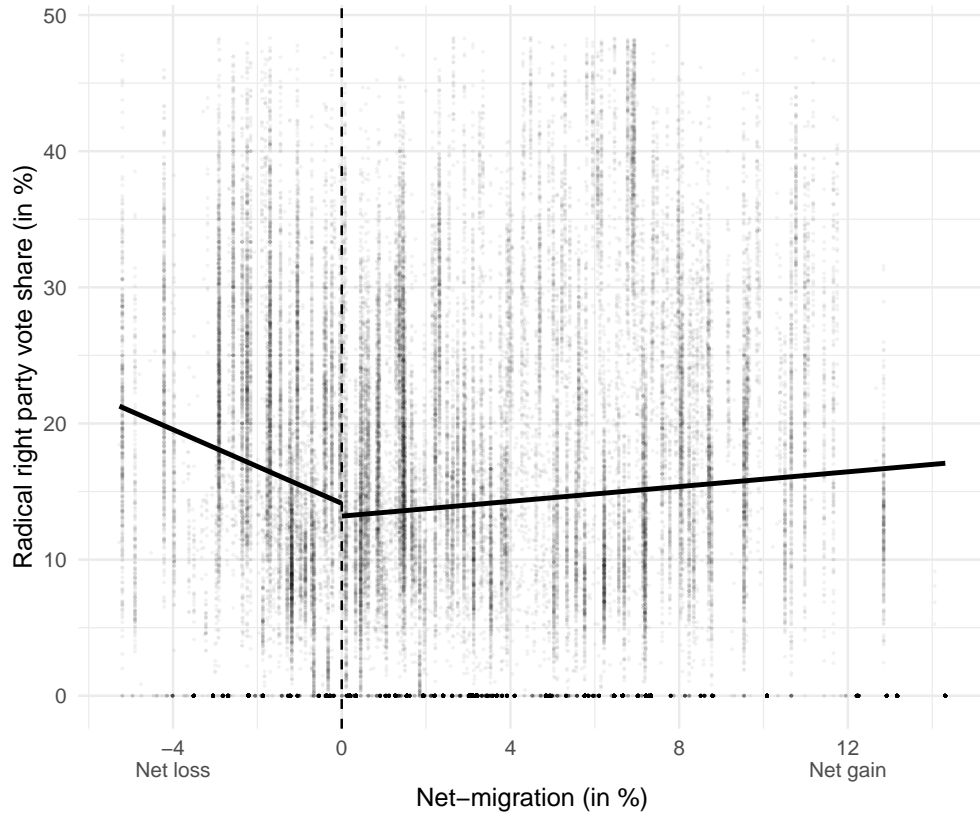


Figure 2: Relationship between net-migration rate and the vote share of radical right parties

Notes: Scatter plot and fitted linear regressions of the county-average annual net-migration rate between 2000-2016 and the vote share of radical right parties in elections during the mid 2010s. To increase readability we clip values larger (smaller) than the 99% (1%) percentile.

Emigration and Voting in Sweden

We situate our study in Sweden for reasons of data quality and representativeness. First, we can exploit administrative registry data provided by Statistics Sweden. The *Total Population Register* includes all legal residents and allows us to consistently track individuals' place of residence across years. Using yearly information on the municipality of residence, we create moving status indicators for all legal residents, based on residence information between consecutive general elections (covering 2002–2018). We combine these data with general election outcomes across Swedish precincts.

Second, key trends in Sweden resemble those in other advanced democracies. Sweden is a popular destination for immigrants from outside and inside the EU. In 2020, almost 20 percent of the population was foreign-born, up from 11 percent in 2000. As Figure 1 illustrates, this rise coincides with substantial demographic change across municipalities. The data underlying Figure 1 indicate that 51% of all Swedish municipalities experienced some population decline. Sweden is thus a typical case in Europe where, on average, about half of the municipalities in a given country experience population decline (see Table SM.1, page 1). 36% of Swedish municipalities register small population declines (between -1 to -0.1% annually), while 8% are shrinking by more than 1 but less than 2%. However, different from countries experiencing substantial population drops, there are no municipalities that shrink by more than 2% annually. These population changes are tied to economic developments. Similar to many other Western countries, Sweden was hit hard by the Great Recession. The unemployment rate rose from 6.1% in 2007, to 8.6% in 2010. Numerous manufacturing plants closed or downsized, many of them located in mid-sized industrial towns (Lindgren and Vernby, 2016).

The Sweden Democrats entered the Swedish Parliament in 2010 against this backdrop of rising immigration and economic restructuring, running on an anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim, and anti-establishment platform. Formed in 1988, the party initially had links to racist and neo-Nazi movements. Over the last two decades it worked to moderate its profile to resemble

other European nativist and populist parties.¹⁰ Whether these shifts represent a real change is disputed (Erlingsson, Vernby and Öhrvall, 2014), but they did help the party raise its vote share from less than 2% in 2002 to more than 17% in 2018. In the 2022 election, the SD won 20.5% of the vote and were informally included in the governing coalition. Although the breakthrough of a PRR party thus occurred comparatively late, these developments resemble those in several other European countries (Rydgren and Van der Meiden, 2019; Leander, 2022).

Data

Our main dependent variable is the precinct-level vote share for the Sweden Democrats. Sweden’s roughly 5,800 election precincts are the smallest geographical units (averaging around 1,200 eligible voters) with published aggregated election results. Approximately 80% of all precinct boundaries remain unchanged between elections. To construct a full precinct-level panel, we follow previous work (Dehdari, 2021) and harmonize precinct boundaries with the geography of 2018 using population-grid weights (see SM section B.1, page 4, for details).

To construct our main independent variable, the emigration rate on the municipality level, we use registry data from Statistics Sweden for the entire resident population.¹¹ By comparing the municipality of residence between two elections for each individual, we compute the number of residents in a municipality that moved to another municipality or left the country between two successive elections allowing us to calculate the per 100 capita

¹⁰According to an expert survey (Meijers and Zaslove, 2020), on four variables associated with populism – Manichean world view, native population as indivisible, support for immigration and ideology of nativism – the SD is about two standard deviations more populist than the average European party.

¹¹Sweden has 290 municipalities featuring an average population of close to 33,000 during our study period.

emigration rate. We then calculate a complementary immigration-rate measure by counting the number of individuals moving into a municipality (from abroad or internally).

We also create emigration rates for sub-groups (Swedish and foreign-born persons, citizens and non-citizens, high and low-income earners); a series of municipality-level covariates (unemployment rate, median income and the Gini coefficient, gender ratios, and age composition); and precinct-level emigration rates. We detail the construction of these variables in the SM (see section B.1 and Table SM.4, pages 4-5.) Tables SM.5 and SM.6 (pages 6-7), respectively, present municipality-level and precinct-level descriptive statistics for all variables pooled across all five elections. We find that, on average, municipality-level per capita arrivals have slightly exceeded departures (14.26 vs. 12.90). The mean share received by the Sweden Democrats (SD) is 8.13% with a range of 0 to 50%. Only the Social Democrats (S) and the Conservative Party (M) attained higher mean vote shares.

Results

Baseline Specification

Our analyses leverage over-time variation in emigration rates and party vote shares. Our main OLS specification mimics a difference-in-differences specification comparing changes in precinct-level vote shares with changes in emigration rates. Focusing on over-time variation within precincts allows us to isolate the emigration effect from other cross-sectional confounders connected to economic geography and population. Some areas have persistently high out- and in-migration for structural reasons that, unlike the SD vote share, do not change much over time. One such example are university towns, where students and employees circulate in and out. The rooted local population is unlikely to consider these flows as signs of decline.

Let y_{it} be the vote share (in %) of the Sweden Democrats in precinct i in election t . Our main specification with precinct (α_i) and year (α_t) fixed effects takes the following form:

$$y_{it} = \alpha_i + \alpha_t + \delta D_{m[i]t} + \varepsilon_{it}. \quad (1)$$

Different from a standard difference-in-differences design, our main variable of interest is continuous ($D_{m[i]t}$) and measures the number of departures from municipality m between the election in $t - 1$ and t per 100 capita in $t - 1$. The coefficient δ estimates the effect of 100 additional departures on the votes for the SD. We cluster standard errors at the municipality level ($N_m = 290$).

To address the main concern that both other municipality-level trends co-varying with emigration rates and the trend in SD support confound our estimates, we estimate versions of our baseline specification that include additional time-varying covariates (\mathbf{X}_{it}). The first set captures economic trends in a municipality (the unemployment rate, median income and the Gini coefficient) and the second set measures other sources of demographic change including shifts in gender ratios, immigration rates and age composition. We present models with and without these controls as some of these measures might introduce post-treatment bias. In addition, we conduct a formal sensitivity analysis.

Main Results

Table 1 reports estimates from the baseline specification. The departure of 100 people from the municipality (one percent of the population) increases the SD vote share by about half a percentage point. The SD receive on average 8.3% in a precinct during the elections in our sample (standard deviation = 7.6; see Table SM.6, page 7). The estimated effect is substantively large, corresponding to an increase of about 5% at the sample mean. The estimates are largely insensitive to adding the previously mentioned controls.

To be sure, the inclusion of time-varying controls may not be enough to adjust for all time-varying confounding. In the appendix we therefore present additional specifications (Tables SM.9 and SM.10, page 12) in which we allow for differential time trends in groups of

Table 1: Departures per 100 capita since the last election and the Sweden Democrats' vote share (%), 2002–2018.

	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD
Depart.	−0.09 (0.07)	0.41* (0.20)	0.38** (0.14)	0.42** (0.12)	0.44** (0.12)
Unemployment			0.47** (0.11)	0.22* (0.10)	0.21* (0.10)
Gini			−0.97** (0.21)	−0.80** (0.17)	−0.79** (0.17)
Income			−0.17** (0.02)	−0.13** (0.02)	−0.13** (0.02)
Arriv.					0.04 (0.07)
Prec. FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Demogr.)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Num. obs.	29713	29713	29713	29713	29713
R ²	0.00	0.88	0.91	0.92	0.92

Notes: OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The Sweden Democrats' vote share is measured at the precinct level. Departures and covariates are measured at the municipality level. Demographic controls include the share of inhabitants in 10-year age brackets (5-14, 14-24, 25-34, ..., 95+) and the share of men. Full results are available in Table [SM.8](#), page 11.
[†] $p < .1$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

municipalities with similar levels of departures or similar levels of unemployment in 2002 (the baseline year). We also present a specification in which we include an interaction between a linear time trend and municipality fixed effects (Table SM.11, page 13) and include the lag of the dependent variable as an independent variable (Table SM.21, page 20). Our results are robust across these alternative specifications.

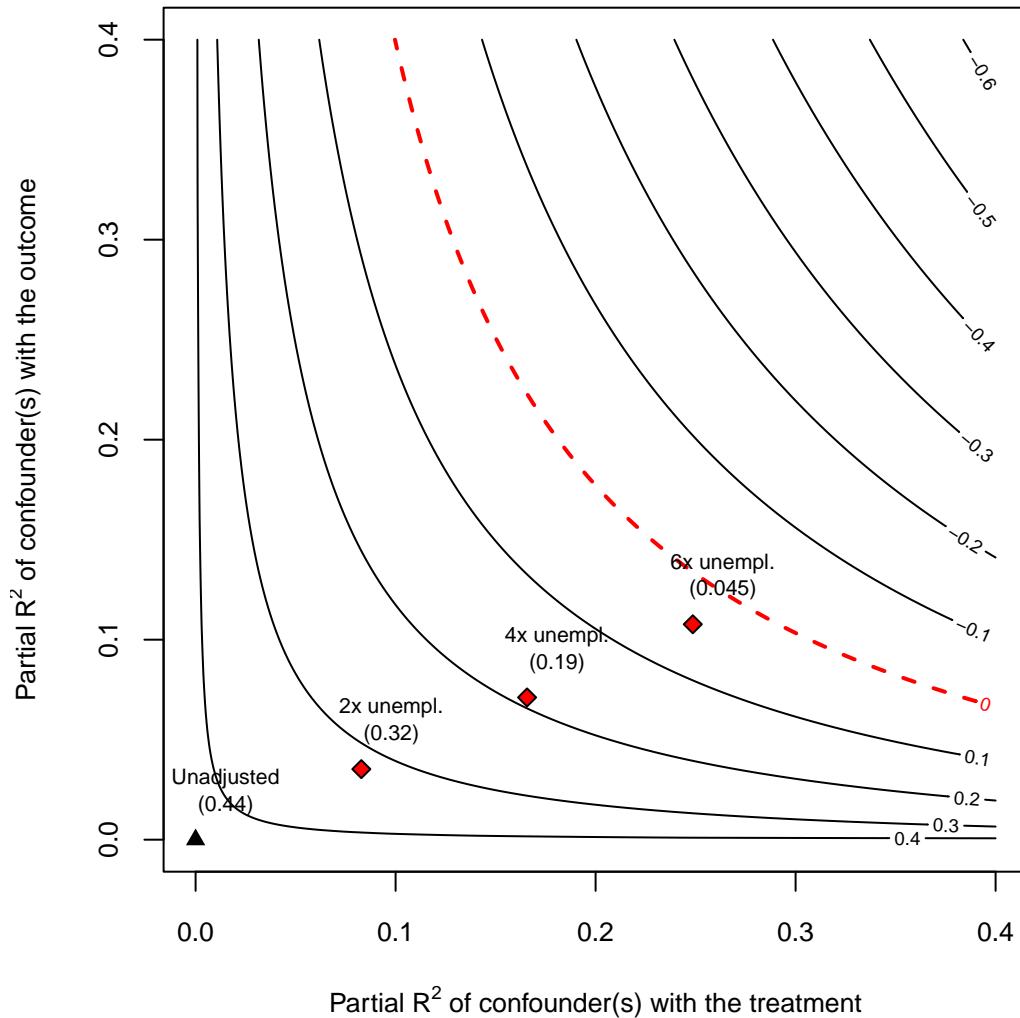


Figure 3: Sensitivity analysis to unobserved confounders

Notes: Sensitivity analysis to unobserved confounders following Cinelli and Hazlett (2020). Each contour line shows the departure effect we would have obtained in a regression that includes an unobserved confounder with a hypothetical strength. The strength of a confounder is a function of the residual variation of the departure variable (x-axis) and the residual variation of vote share for the Sweden Democrats (y-axis) explained by the hypothetical confounder. The adjusted estimates (in red) are based on adding a confounder that is 2, 4, or 6 times as strong as the unemployment variable.

Furthermore, a formal sensitivity analysis following [Cinelli and Hazlett \(2020\)](#) reveals that an unobserved confounder would have to be unusually potent. Only an unobserved confounder that explains more than 18.9% of the residual variance of both the treatment and the outcome in our regression would be strong enough to bring the point estimate to 0 ($RV = 18.9\%$). About half of residual variation would be sufficient to bring the estimate to a range where it is no longer statistically different from 0 ($RV_{\alpha=0.05} = 9\%$). Benchmarking against the observed confounders, this means that the unobserved confounder would have to be six times stronger than the observed unemployment covariate (see [Figure 3](#)).

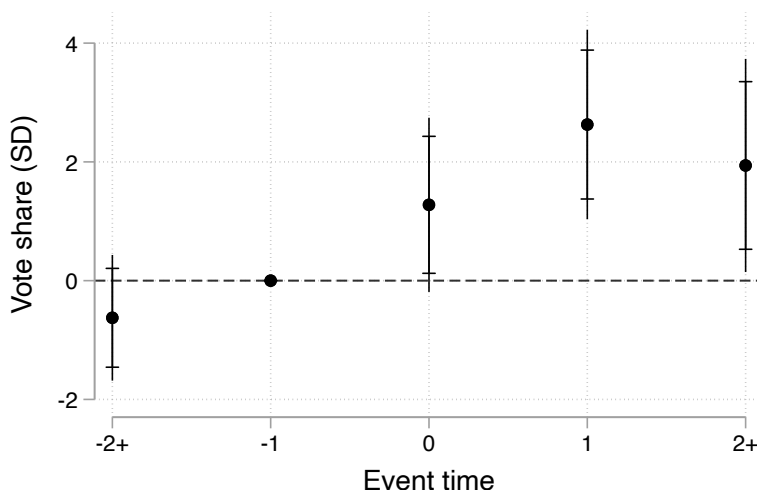


Figure 4: The cumulative effect of the number of departures per 100 capita on the Sweden Democrats’ vote share (%)

Notes: Event-study plot following the suggestions by [Freyaldenhoven et al. \(2021\)](#). Estimates display the cumulative effect of a one-unit change in the number of departures per 100 capita on the vote share for the Sweden Democrats (measured in %) in the contemporaneous election (0), the elections thereafter (1-2) as well as the elections preceding the one-unit change (-2+) all relative to the effect in election before the one-unit change (-1).

In [Figure 4](#) we show the estimates for a corresponding time-to-event specification for the baseline specification in [Table 1](#), col. 2 (see [Figure SM.1](#), page 10, for the estimates from the remaining specifications). While our main independent variable is continuous and varies smoothly, the specification is similar to that of an event-study specification in a difference-in-differences design (DiD) with staggered adoption ([Freyaldenhoven et al., 2021](#)). The

specification serves two purposes. First, we wish to rule out that the vote share for the Sweden Democrats in an election is affected by future departures. Second, we want to evaluate if departures have only a contemporaneous effect on vote shares or if there is a persistent effect on subsequent elections. The results show that there is no evidence that future departures affect current election vote shares and that there is no evidence that the effect is reverting back to zero quickly.¹²

If the SD benefit from emigration, who loses? In Tables [SM.12](#) and [SM.13](#) (pages 13-14), we break down the results by the two main left-right electoral blocs during the period under study. Our analyses demonstrate that the gains by the SD come at the expense of parties on the left.¹³ When we disaggregate by party in [Table 2](#), it becomes clear that the SD gains in places of emigration mainly come at the expense of the Social Democrats. Note that municipality-level departures do not affect precinct-level turnout (see [Table SM.14](#), page 14).

¹²Notice that the estimates in this time-to-event specification are larger than in the baseline specification as they are based on the variation in the middle of the panel (2010/2014) where the effect magnitude happens to be larger.

¹³Analyses show that the positive Green Party effect is solely driven by university towns, capturing a different dynamic.

Table 2: Departures per 100 capita since the last election and the vote share (%) for parties other than the SD, 2002–2018

Panel A							
	MP	V	S	L	C	KD	M
Depart.	0.21** (0.06)	0.04 (0.11)	-0.73** (0.11)	-0.20 [†] (0.12)	0.02 (0.13)	-0.00 (0.07)	0.30* (0.13)
Prec. FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Econ.)	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Cov. (Demogr.)	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Num. obs.	29710	29713	29713	29711	29713	29713	29713
R ²	0.87	0.86	0.93	0.88	0.88	0.87	0.93
Panel B							
	MP	V	S	L	C	KD	M
Depart.	0.19** (0.06)	-0.10* (0.04)	-0.70** (0.12)	-0.13 (0.10)	-0.04 (0.09)	-0.07 (0.06)	0.52** (0.14)
Arriv.	0.10 [†] (0.05)	-0.17** (0.06)	-0.05 (0.10)	-0.08 (0.06)	-0.02 (0.04)	0.12** (0.04)	-0.17* (0.06)
Prec. FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Econ.)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Demogr.)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Num. obs.	29710	29713	29713	29711	29713	29713	29713
R ²	0.88	0.88	0.94	0.90	0.91	0.89	0.94

Notes: OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. Parties' vote shares are measured at the precinct level. Departures and covariates are measured at the municipality level. Panel A does not include covariates. See Table 1 for covariates included in Panel B. MP = Green Party; V = Left Party; S = Social Democratic Party; L = Liberal Party; C = Centre Party; KD = Christian Democrats; M = Moderate Party. [†] $p < .1$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Probing Mechanisms

Why do the SD win votes in places experiencing substantial emigration? We first turn to a series of regressions to test the plausibility of the compositional and the preference mechanisms, complementing our precinct-level analysis with individual-level survey data. Together, these suggest that the compositional mechanism cannot be the sole driver, and

they point in the direction of changing voter preferences in reaction to out-migration playing a significant role.

Regression Analyses Evaluating the Compositional and Preference Mechanisms

While SD gains come largely at the expense of leftist parties, we see a moderate increase for parties on the right, casting some doubt on the compositional explanation. To shed further light on the plausibility of the compositional mechanism, we examine voter preferences of movers and stayers. Ideally, we would like to match neighborhood-level departures to voter preferences among those individuals who remain, both before and after departures are realized. Unfortunately, a large enough panel survey spanning the necessary time frame is not available. We therefore use a repeated cross-sectional survey carried out twice a year from 2017 to 2020 with more than 4,500 unique respondents per year to estimate the difference in the propensity to vote for the SD between stayers and movers.

We matched each respondent’s municipality of residence at the time of the survey as well as four years prior, which means we can measure each respondent’s moving status in a manner similar to our departure measure used in the above baseline results. We regress a binary variable taking the value 1 for respondents who state they vote for the SD on a binary variable indicating whether the respondent changed municipalities in the last four years.

Table 3 presents the estimates for the SD and the seven other parties in the national parliament. The negative coefficient in col. 1 means that movers are less likely to vote for the SD than are stayers. Specifically, the share of movers voting for the SD is 2.62 percentage points lower than the share of stayers who do. For all other parties, and for the Other category (comprising blank votes, undecided voters and voters of minor or local parties) this estimate is either positive or statistically indistinguishable from zero, except for the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats.

The results for the SD are in line with the compositional mechanism: If stayers are more likely to vote for the SD than are movers, a larger share of the remaining electorate in places

Table 3: Difference in average support for each party between movers and stayers

	SD	S	MP	V	L	C	KD	M	Other
Mover	-2.62** (0.84)	-6.35** (1.02)	1.99** (0.59)	3.86** (0.81)	0.32 (0.50)	1.07 (0.72)	-1.28** (0.50)	2.31** (1.03)	0.69 (0.96)
Num. obs	18714	18714	18714	18714	18714	18714	18714	18714	18714
R ²	0.006	0.005	0.002	0.003	0.001	0.002	0.006	0.003	0.008

Notes: OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. For example, in the first column the outcome is a binary variable taking the value 1 if the respondent named the Sweden Democrats as “the party that they would vote for if the election was held today”, 0 otherwise. Mover is a binary variable taking the value 1 if the respondent changed municipality of residence in the last four years (based on register data), 0 otherwise. Respondents were surveyed in 2017-2020. SD = Sweden Democrats; MP = Green Party; V = Left Party; S = Social Democratic Party; L = Liberal Party; C = Centre Party; KD = Christian Democrats; M = Moderate Party. † $p < .1$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

of out-migration are SD voters. However, the results for two other parties, in particular for the Social Democrats, are not. If stayers are disproportionately Social Democrats, the compositional mechanism predicts that emigration benefits the Social Democrats in a given municipality. Yet Table 2 indicates that they lose votes in places of emigration. This suggests that the SD may exploit disaffection among Social Democratic voters who have no exit option, and thus a preference mechanism may exist alongside a compositional one.

We next return to the precinct-level data to gain insights into how emigration benefits radical right populists. We first examine whether income drives out-migration effects. High-income earners are less likely to support the SD (Dal Bó et al., 2023; Oskarson and Demker, 2015). All else equal, their removal from local electorates should boost SD vote shares. Table SM.15 (page 15) indicates that the departure of high-income residents, but not that of low-income ones, is associated with SD vote gains. This evidence is suggestive of a compositional effect, though we also note some ambiguity as the loss of high earners deprives localities of tax revenue and purchasing power, with knock-on effects on public and private services.

A complementary hypothesis to the compositional mechanism, but one that introduces preferences about the composition of the electorate, is that the SD wins votes when non-

Table 4: Departures per 100 capita (by citizenship status) since the last election and the Sweden Democrats’ vote share (%), 2002–2018.

	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD
Depart. (ctz.)	−0.82**	0.92**	0.61**	0.49**	0.52**
	(0.09)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.11)	(0.12)
Depart. (non-ctz.)	2.57**	−0.97	−0.46	0.16	0.16
	(0.59)	(0.65)	(0.38)	(0.30)	(0.30)
Arriv. (ctz.)					0.06
					(0.11)
Arriv. (non-ctz.)					0.05
					(0.10)
Prec. FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Econ.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Demogr.)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Num. obs.	29713	29713	29713	29713	29713
R ²	0.10	0.88	0.91	0.92	0.92

Notes: OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The Sweden Democrats’ vote share is measured at the precinct level. Departures (for both citizens and non-citizens) and covariates are measured at the municipality level. See Table 1 for additional covariates. † $p < .1$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

citizens leave. Voters may attribute leaving non-citizens (who cannot vote in national elections, and are predominantly immigrants) to the SD’s creation of an environment that is hostile to immigrants and reward the party for it. If so, we would expect departures of non-citizens to correlate with SD vote gains. However, in Table 4 we show that only the departure of citizens is associated with a significant vote increase for the SD, suggesting that voters do not reward the Sweden Democrats for driving out immigrants. A similar pattern emerges when we focus on departures of Swedish-born vs. foreign-born residents (see Table SM.16, page 15).

Next, we add a variable measuring per-capita departures from the precinct to our baseline specification, which only includes municipality-level departures. If the estimated effects were only driven by departing left-leaning voters, we would expect that municipality departures have no independent effect after controlling for precinct-level departures. That is not what

Table 5: Municipal- and precinct-level departures and arrivals per 100 capita since the last election and the Sweden Democrats’ vote share (%), 2002–2018.

	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD
Depart. (Muni.)	0.01 (0.07)	0.32 (0.20)	0.30* (0.13)	0.35** (0.11)	0.37** (0.12)
Depart. (Prec.)	-0.09** (0.01)	0.08** (0.01)	0.08** (0.02)	0.07** (0.02)	0.07** (0.02)
Arriv. (Muni.)					0.04 (0.07)
Arriv. (Prec.)					0.00 (0.00)
Prec. FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Econ.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Demogr.)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Num. obs.	29712	29712	29712	29712	29712
R ²	0.01	0.88	0.91	0.92	0.92

Notes: OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. The Sweden Democrats’ vote share is measured at the precinct level. Municipal- and precinct-level departures and arrivals are included. Covariates are measured at the municipality level. See Table 1 for additional covariates. † $p < .1$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

we observe. Even in precincts with the same levels of departures, municipality departures matter and have an independent effect (see Table 5). After adding all available controls (col. 5), municipality departures have an effect that is almost as large as the effect we detected in our baseline specification reported in Table 1.

In the SM we probe these results further by interacting the per-capita departures (from the municipality) with the per-capita departures from the precinct. We use a binning specification (Hainmueller, Mummolo and Yiqing, 2019) which is more efficient compared to running three regressions on subsets of the data for precincts with few, some and many departures. We find that even in precincts with very few departures, there is a sizeable effect of municipality-level departures that exceeds the baseline estimates (see Table SM.17, page 16). We would not observe these results if compositional changes were the sole factor driving the emigration effect.

Finally, if post-emigration service deterioration prompts voters to change their preferences in favor of the SD, the effects of departures should be more pronounced in areas with low population density or declining populations, where it is particularly difficult to sustain services and amenities (cf. Erlingsson, Öhrvall and Wallman Lundåsen, 2023). As expected, effects are concentrated in municipalities with low to medium population density (see Table SM.18, page 17), and are also much more pronounced in municipalities that previously lost population (see Table SM.19, page 18). Both of these results are consistent with a service-based preference mechanism.

Overall these results corroborate that the compositional explanation is insufficient. In places with high out-migration, the SD gains votes beyond what would be expected from a compositional effect. Furthermore, they gain in places with low – but not high – population density where the breakdown of services is especially likely. These results suggest that the preference mechanism is a critical complement to the compositional one.

Exploring the Preference Mechanism in Surveys and Newspaper Coverage

We next turn to direct measures of preferences to assess whether emigration indeed influences how residents perceive public services. We draw on annual surveys (2006–2018) by Statistics Sweden, covering over 90% of municipalities. Each municipality participated, on average, 5 times, with 800–1,600 respondents per survey. Respondents rate the quality of local services in 13 areas on a 10-point scale (see section B.1 in the SM for details, pages 5, 8-9), with scores published at the municipality level. We average these scores to create a Quality Index, which we regress on departures.¹⁴

Table 6 mirrors our Table 1 baseline specification (though using municipality-level fixed effects). It shows a robust negative relationship between departures and residents’ satisfaction with local services, substantiating the preference mechanism.

¹⁴To increase comparability with our main results, municipalities are weighted by their number of precincts. Results without weights are substantively similar.

Table 6: Departures per 100 capita during the previous year and the perceived quality of local public goods and services, 2006–2018

	Quality Index				
Depart. $_{t-1}$	-0.22 (0.20)	-0.40** (0.15)	-0.52** (0.15)	-0.57** (0.17)	-0.57** (0.17)
Unemployment			0.12 (0.08)	0.11 (0.10)	0.11 (0.10)
Gini			0.63** (0.14)	0.28 (0.18)	0.28 (0.18)
Income			0.03* (0.01)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
Arriv. $_{t-1}$				0.08 (0.13)	0.08 (0.13)
Muni FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Demogr.)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Num. obs	1278	1278	1278	1278	1278
R^2	0.01	0.20	0.23	0.26	0.26

Notes: OLS estimates with standard errors in parentheses. All variables are measured at the municipality level. See Table 1 for additional covariates. $^{\dagger}p < .1$; $*p < .05$; $**p < .01$

These results confirm that citizen satisfaction with local services decreases with out-migration. Another important question is whether the connections between emigration, quality of life declines, and party politics that we posit are in fact saliently discussed and thus plausibly important elements shaping electoral behavior. We searched local, regional and national newspaper articles (from 2000–2020) to provide concrete narratives on developments associated with local out-migration. We used the website *Retriever* for full-text searches in almost all Swedish newspapers and found 4,970 newspaper articles focusing on local out-migration in a political context.¹⁵ Figure SM.2 (page 21) shows the distribution of articles over time; on average, we identified about 20 articles per month (median: 16).

We next drew a random sample of these articles ($N = 100$) and checked if they discussed local out-migration (or depopulation) in a political context in Sweden. 62 articles did so,

¹⁵The search string consisted of party names and the terms emigration and depopulation; see Figure SM.2 (page 21) for details.

and next the Swedish members of our team read those articles carefully. Among the 62, 44 mentioned specific changes associated with out-migration, which we classified into 11 categories (see Table 7). We then drew a second random sample ($N = 700$) which we coded based on this scheme.

Table 7 reports the results from an analysis pooling the samples. In total 366 articles discussed local out-migration (or depopulation) in a political context in Sweden. The first column shows the proportion of articles among those mentioning certain types of local-level changes linked to out-migration (articles may mention multiple changes, so proportions do not add up to 1). On average, articles mention 2.4 (median: 2) categories. The other two columns report overall percentages of each category.

A substantial share of articles (59%) notes a decline in the quality of public services. Specific examples include the closure of schools, fewer options for public transportation, the departure of physicians and the closing of hospitals and a lack of high-speed internet. Job availability is also an important concern. With respect to housing, articles frequently refer to the need to relax zoning restrictions, such that homes can be built on lakefronts and other scenic locations, to attract middle-class families that may otherwise opt for locating in urban settings. The quality and affordability of existing housing is another theme. The arrival of immigrants was not a central topic.

Articles also frequently link out-migration’s negative repercussions to the growth in support for the SD. After the 2018 election, one journalist wrote that “Voting for the SD can partly be seen as a protest against the deterioration of public goods and services—schools and health care—in the wake of emigration” (Pettersson, 2018). After the 2014 election another remarked that “None of the established parties manage to channel the powerlessness and discontent in the parts of the country” that experience the quality-of-life declines produced by emigration (Akinder, 2014). In short, outside observers and locals have clearly identified what we have termed the preference-based mechanism as underpinning the relationship between out-migration and radical right voting.

Table 7: Topics in newspaper coverage about out-migration, 2000–2020

	Proportion of articles	Percent of statements
Quality of public services	0.59	
<i>Schools/childcare</i>	0.31	16%
<i>Transportation</i>	0.18	9%
<i>Health care</i>	0.15	7%
<i>Internet speed</i>	0.07	4%
<i>Other</i>	0.24	12%
Availability of proper housing	0.17	9%
Lack of jobs	0.48	24%
Shops and stores closing	0.17	
<i>Essential</i>	0.11	6%
<i>Non-essential</i>	0.09	5%
Arrival of immigrants	0.09	5%
High gas prices or carbon tax	0.07	3%
		<hr/> 100%

Notes: Proportion of articles and the share of statements describing changes associated with out-migration at the local level in Sweden. $N = 366$ articles.

Party Strategy

Our analyses indicate that emigration-based grievances boost the radical right SD at the expense of the Social Democrats. In this final section we probe whether party actors recognize these links and consider them, as we have, partly the result of party strategies that arise in deindustrialized democracies. We focused on interviewing officials from the SD and Social Democrats as these two parties are the main electoral winners and losers, respectively, from out-migration.¹⁶ We aimed to interview at least one person from each party in each of the following positions (current or former): National party official with responsibility for rural affairs, local politician in depopulating regions, and party official with responsibility for election analysis.¹⁷ Interviews ($N = 12$) were semi-structured and contained nine thematic questions (see Table SM.23, page 24). We also asked interviewees for recommendations of

¹⁶Using 2010–2019 CHES data, we find that the SD is more likely than all other major parties – except the agrarian Center Party – to support rural issues.

¹⁷For more details on interview methodology, see SM section D, page 22.

party officials with relevant perspectives, and we continued this snowball process until we reached data saturation.

The interviews highlight the role of party strategy in helping generate the material and psychological preference mechanisms. Several point to decades of political neglect of rural areas which out-migration compounds due in part to Sweden's proportional electoral system that does not work in favor of sparsely populated areas. A Social Democratic former mayor notes: "When the population declines in the Northern parts of Sweden, and people move to Stockholm or other big cities, so do the parliamentary seats." According to a party official working in rural affairs "The route to power does not lie in sparsely populated areas. The harsh reality is that about a million people live north of Gävle, so even if all of them vote for you, you will not have a majority in parliament." The electoral system, in combination with the Social Democratic development strategy built on structural adjustment and urbanization, has not benefited rural areas. The same party official says that "From the 1970s and onwards, the focus has been on jobs and growth, and to accomplish this rural areas have been bled of their resources . . . also when it comes to human capital." The Social Democratic officials whom we interviewed recognized that their growth strategies directly contributed to the emptying out of the periphery and that they have further sapped the political clout of those who remain.

Interviewees agree that emigration is noticeable, not least because of its impact on the local economy, public finances and the provision of goods and services. In the words of the SD party secretary: "People notice it [emigration] . . . Local services deteriorate . . . the local store closes . . . the small school is shut down." A Social Democrat describes the adverse processes that out-migration sets in motion in similar terms. Once depopulation triggers cutbacks and fiscal strain "there is this negative spiral where [affected localities] have difficulties attracting skilled workers."

Interviewees also emphasize psychological effects. An SD local politician noted that emigration "is not good for self-esteem." The Social Democrats' former Minister of rural

affairs quotes a Social Democratic mayor whose municipality shrank from 15,000 to 6,000 inhabitants, as saying that emigration leads to “collective depression.” A Social Democratic mayor in a depopulating municipality in mid-Sweden spoke of the psychological pressures of not meeting standards of success set by the outside: “We like it here. But then someone comes from the outside and says that you’re a failure if you live here . . . so we are struggling against the public perception of what constitutes a successful individual. We constantly have to work on the psychology of the municipality’s inhabitants.” Another Social Democrat downplays emigration’s material impact and instead speaks of “a feeling of bitterness, everything revolves around Malmö, Gothenburg and Stockholm.” In short, elites recognize that emigration leads to a collectively experienced status loss.

Voter behaviour and party strategies have responded to these developments. A former Social Democratic minister explains that “People have for a long time felt abandoned and this has caused my party [and] other established parties to lose. Above all, it is the right-wing populists, such as the Sweden Democrats, who have captured these voters.” When discussing the poor rural road conditions, he quips “Every time someone hits a pothole, the Sweden Democrats gain five votes.” The party secretary of the SD similarly comments: “The Social Democrats have been a very large party in many parts of the country . . . and if those who live [in depopulating regions] feel that things are deteriorating . . . of course the Social Democrats lose votes.” A Social Democrat responsible for the 2014 post-election analysis offers this insight: “It was clear that the Social Democrats, together with some other parties, had not been prioritizing smaller and more rural localities, and that the Sweden Democrats had consciously been visiting these places, and this produced results.”

Our interviews thus underscore that the SD capitalized on the incumbent party’s failure to address the concerns of voters contending with out-migration. But they also indicate that the Social Democrats recognize that their abandonment provided an opening for right-wing populists that the party is now trying to close. The previously mentioned minister of rural affairs speaks of a growing awareness of these issues during the latest Social Democratic

government, which came to power in 2014, mentioning large-scale subsidies to grocery stores and gas stations and the expansion of high-speed internet access. However, he also acknowledges that “it takes time to regain the confidence of voters. It can’t be done during one or two terms of office. The political price you pay for disappointing people is very high.”

Overall the interviews reveal that elites believe the preference mechanism – both material and psychological – underlies the relationship between out-migration and vote gains by PRR candidates and that they are devising strategies accordingly .

Conclusion

This paper advances our understanding of PRR success on several fronts by merging two political and demographic currents in contemporary democracies: populism and emigration.

First, while a large body of research links the rise of radical right populists to immigration, we shift focus to emigration. We argue that large-scale departures of citizens to other domestic municipalities or internationally are an important source of PRR gains. To substantiate our argument we analyze cross-national data as well as longitudinal, precinct-level within-country elections results, along with individual-level surveys and newspaper articles.

Second, we formulate two mechanisms that constitute the emigration effect, contrasting changes in the *composition* of electorates with changes in electorate *preferences*. Our longitudinal data enable us to explore these mechanisms with a fine-toothed comb and to isolate the emigration effect from other confounders. While we find that the compositional mechanism affects PRR success to some degree, our evidence also indicates that changed preferences are a powerful driver of populist voting. Future research should further refine the measurement of these mechanisms. Relatedly, a useful next step would be to examine what type of emigration-induced service cuts have particularly large effects. Vote choices are informed by perceived realities, and media coverage and elite assessments helped us establish

the connections that individuals draw – if any – between out-migration and PRR voting. Yet some of these perceptions will fit objective reality better than others (Herrera, 2005).

Third, beyond PRR fortunes, we examine effects on the party system as a whole. Our results indicate that the once hegemonic Social Democrats are the losers of the shift towards populist voting in places exposed to out-migration. We then interrogate newspaper coverage and the perspectives of leading party officials to understand why this is so. While more suggestive, these sources reveal the material and psychological sources of PRR voting: the urban growth strategy pursued for many decades by mainstream parties has contributed to an emptying out of the periphery. Today’s deindustrialized knowledge economy leaves many of those who remain with few exit options. Emigration decreases the political leverage of voters in towns affected by out-migration who feel a loss of public services, a subsequent sense of political abandonment as well as an experience of “collective depression.” They are therefore attractive targets for the SD, a party that bears no responsibility for this livability crisis.

One implication of our account is that the local protest route for PRR success suggests an uncertain future for these parties. The forces driving out-migration are not easily reversed. As SD politicians move into ruling coalitions in municipalities facing further decline, their appeal may well weaken (Cohen, 2020).

Another emerging theme is the PRR’s ideological flexibility. In courting disaffected voters in the periphery, the SD – and more generally parties that style themselves as radical right populists nationwide, running on nativism and nationalism – are adjusting to local conditions, emphasizing issues that are not particularly right-wing. This suggests a normalization away from radical right positioning that is distinct from the normalization that occurs via the legitimization of far-right positions by mainstream actors (Wodak, 2020). It also illustrates the ideologically “thin” nature of today’s populists (Mudde, 2004), who opportunistically layer their populism onto a host of disparate grievances and different aspects of demographic change.

Finally, our study exposes dilemmas faced by mainstream parties. These parties, including Sweden’s Social Democrats, have tried to counter the far-right threat by moving to the right on immigration (Meguid, 2008; Spoon and Klüver, 2020). Immigration restrictions have the advantage of being relatively easy to implement, but the disadvantage of being ideologically compromising (Chou et al., 2021). Focusing on the structural causes of emigration in the periphery presents fewer ideological costs, but achieving policy success is challenging. Nonetheless, a return to their roots as proponents of public goods providers beyond urban centers may have greater electoral returns for center-left parties than a repositioning as anti-immigration hawks.

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Supplemental Materials

“Emigration and Radical Right Populism”

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A Cross-national Analysis

Country	Proportion of municipalities with total population change			
	< 0.0	-1.0 to -0.1	-2.0 to -1.0	<-2.0
Belgium	0.06	0.02	0.00	0.00
Switzerland	0.17	0.12	0.02	0.01
Ireland	0.22	0.12	0.06	0.02
France	0.23	0.15	0.04	0.01
Netherlands	0.25	0.16	0.00	0.00
United Kingdom	0.25	0.16	0.03	0.02
Slovenia	0.28	0.22	0.00	0.00
Czechia	0.29	0.20	0.04	0.01
Italy	0.41	0.25	0.09	0.02
Slovakia	0.44	0.28	0.08	0.02
Austria	0.45	0.34	0.05	0.00
Denmark	0.46	0.29	0.09	0.04
Norway	0.47	0.32	0.09	0.01
Sweden	0.51	0.36	0.08	0.00
Spain	0.52	0.19	0.17	0.14
Poland	0.52	0.35	0.08	0.03
Germany	0.63	0.37	0.18	0.03
Finland	0.64	0.32	0.27	0.03
Portugal	0.64	0.36	0.23	0.01
Greece	0.68	0.16	0.19	0.31
Romania	0.71	0.44	0.18	0.03
Croatia	0.77	0.38	0.28	0.08
Hungary	0.80	0.43	0.23	0.11
Latvia	0.86	0.09	0.34	0.42
Bulgaria	0.87	0.12	0.18	0.56
Estonia	0.87	0.15	0.39	0.32
Lithuania	0.93	0.07	0.62	0.25

Table SM.1: Proportion of municipalities with any (col. 1), with small (col. 2), medium (col. 3) and with large population declines (col. 4) between 2001-2011. Rates are based on annualized total population change between 2001-2011 as displayed in Figure 1.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Net mig.	-1.09*** (0.08)	-0.82*** (0.05)	-0.69*** (0.05)	-1.26*** (0.06)	-1.30*** (0.06)
Net mig. > 0	-0.23 (0.20)	-1.74*** (0.15)	-1.19*** (0.14)	-0.97*** (0.14)	-0.97*** (0.14)
Net mig. x (Net mig. > 0)	1.11*** (0.08)	0.90*** (0.06)	0.83*** (0.05)	1.06*** (0.06)	1.11*** (0.06)
Covariates					
Pop. dens.			-0.93*** (0.06)	-0.44*** (0.04)	-0.47*** (0.04)
Rural			-0.06 (0.05)	0.15** (0.05)	0.20*** (0.05)
Dist. capital			-0.97*** (0.07)	0.19* (0.09)	0.21* (0.09)
65+			-0.80*** (0.04)	-1.05*** (0.05)	-1.06*** (0.05)
Tertiary edu.			-0.82*** (0.05)	-3.06*** (0.06)	-3.03*** (0.06)
GDP growth p.c.				-1.34*** (0.08)	-1.21*** (0.08)
GDP p.c.				-0.38*** (0.10)	-0.40*** (0.10)
Empl. rate				4.34*** (0.08)	4.28*** (0.08)
Empl. growth				1.16*** (0.07)	1.11*** (0.07)
Indust. empl.				-0.23*** (0.03)	-0.20*** (0.03)
Unclass. vote					2.97*** (0.15)
Country FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Num. obs.	53076	53076	53005	52998	52998
R ²	0.01	0.57	0.58	0.64	0.65

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table SM.2: OLS estimates of county-average annual net migration between 2000-2016 on the vote share of radical right parties in elections during the mid 2010s. Covariates are all mean-variance standardized. Heteroscedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. Included elections: Austria 2017, Belgium 2014, Bulgaria 2017, Croatia 2016, Cyprus 2016, Czechia 2017, Denmark 2015, Estonia 2015, Finland 2015, France 2017, Germany 2017, Greece 2015, Hungary 2014, Ireland 2016, Italy 2018, Latvia 2014, Lithuania 2016, Luxembourg 2013, Malta 2017, Netherlands 2017, Poland 2015, Portugal 2015, Romania 2016, Slovakia 2016, Slovenia 2014, Spain 2016, Sweden 2014, United Kingdom 2015.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Net mig.	-1.09*** (0.08)	-0.21*** (0.05)	-0.13* (0.05)	-0.13* (0.06)	-0.17** (0.06)
Covariates					
Pop. dens.			-0.64*** (0.06)	-0.39*** (0.06)	-0.41*** (0.06)
Rural			0.20** (0.07)	0.28*** (0.07)	0.31*** (0.07)
Dist. capital			-0.35 (0.18)	-0.49** (0.19)	-0.49* (0.19)
65+			-0.61*** (0.07)	-0.56*** (0.08)	-0.59*** (0.08)
Tertiary edu.			-3.13*** (0.10)	-2.80*** (0.12)	-2.93*** (0.12)
GDP growth p.c.				0.11 (0.12)	0.15 (0.12)
GDP p.c.				-0.94*** (0.10)	-0.93*** (0.10)
Empl. rate				-0.24 (0.16)	-0.21 (0.16)
Empl. growth				0.27** (0.09)	0.31*** (0.09)
Indust. empl.				-0.03 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.05)
Unclass. vote					1.80*** (0.27)
Country FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Num. obs.	15139	15139	15105	15105	15105
R ²	0.02	0.59	0.62	0.63	0.63

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table SM.3: OLS estimates of county-average annual net migration between 2000-2016 on the vote share of radical right parties in elections during the mid 2010s. The estimation sample includes only observations for which net-migration is negative. Covariates are all mean-variance standardized. Heteroscedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses. Included elections: Austria 2017, Belgium 2014, Bulgaria 2017, Croatia 2016, Cyprus 2016, Czechia 2017, Denmark 2015, Estonia 2015, Finland 2015, France 2017, Germany 2017, Greece 2015, Hungary 2014, Ireland 2016, Italy 2018, Latvia 2014, Lithuania 2016, Luxembourg 2013, Malta 2017, Netherlands 2017, Poland 2015, Portugal 2015, Romania 2016, Slovakia 2016, Slovenia 2014, Spain 2016, Sweden 2014, United Kingdom 2015.

B Analysis of Swedish Data

B.1 Details on Data

Note that in the analyses using Swedish data, we employ individual-level microdata provided by Statistics Sweden. These are restricted access data, and we are not allowed to share the data with any third party. However, we will provide the code to replicate all of the results in the paper and SM, along with a README-file that describes how the data can be accessed and how the code can be used to replicate the results.

Harmonizing precinct boundaries Precinct shapes and sizes vary between elections. A precinct might be split into two, or two precincts might merge into one. This makes it difficult to construct a panel spanning five elections. Although a majority of precincts remain unchanged between two elections, a significant number of the 2002 precincts changed or were removed by 2018 (approximately 80% remain unchanged between two elections). To obtain comparable geographical units over time we allot precinct-level vote counts for each election to the geographic boundaries of precincts in 2018 using population-grid weights. For instance, if the precinct A_{2002} , with 100 votes for the Social Democrats in 2002, geographically corresponds to precincts A_{2018} and B_{2018} such that 90% of the population is in A_{2018} (according to the population weights), we would distribute 90 votes to the Social Democrats to A_{2018} , and 10 votes for the same party to B_{2018} . This procedure enables us to obtain election outcomes for all parties and all elections between 2002 and 2018 (according to the 2018 precinct map). Four precincts are excluded as they are missing in the shapefiles provided by the Election authority (Valmyndigheten) for the 2018 election.

Precinct-level emigration rates While we do not know residents' home addresses, we do know the 250×250 -meter grid-cell (or, in rural areas, the 1000×1000 -meter cell) in which the address that each registered individual is located. We use this information for each election year to place residents in precincts (according to the 2018 precinct boundaries). Note that the matching procedure also distributes the total population in each square to 2018 versions of precincts in order to create precinct-level shares (or departure/arrival per 100 capita).

Sub-group specific emigration rates To obtain sub-group specific emigration rates, we match data from the population register with other registries containing demographic and socioeconomic information. We create measures of emigration rates for Swedish and foreign-born persons, citizens and non-citizens as well as high and low-income earners. In calculating group income levels, we follow Dal Bó et al. (2023) and use 3.5 times the annual price base amount (as set by the government) as a cutoff. It ranges from SEK 37,900 to 45,500 during our study period. While Sweden lacks legally mandated minimum wages, according to Dal Bó et al. (2023), 3.5 times the annual price base amount is equivalent to the de facto wage floor for most of the Swedish labor market. Individuals are defined as low educated if their highest attained education level is a high school diploma, and high educated if they have any degree higher than a high school degree. With respect to country

Variable	Description	Source
Vote shares	Share of votes by party in an election (in percent)	Swedish election authority
Turnout	Number of (valid) votes divided by total number of eligible voters, times 100	Swedish election authority
Departures	Number of departures between two elections, divided by the population in the previous election year, times 100	Register data, Statistics Sweden
Arrivals	Number of arrivals between two elections, divided by the population in the previous election year, times 100	Register data, Statistics Sweden
Unemployment (municipality)	Share of working-age population (16-74) not regularly employed (in percent), i.e., non-employment	Statistics Sweden
Unemployment (precinct)	Share of adults registered as unemployed for at least one day in a given year (in percent)	Register data, Statistics Sweden
Median income	Median yearly income in SEK 1k	Register data, Statistics Sweden
Gini	Gini coefficient based on 26 income brackets (in percent)	Statistics Sweden
Age brackets	Share of share of inhabitants in 10-year age brackets (5-14, 14-24, 25-34, ..., 95+) (in percent)	Register data, Statistics Sweden
Share men	Share of male adults (in percent)	Register data, Statistics Sweden

Table SM.4: Description of variables used in municipality-level and precinct-level analysis.

of birth, we do not know the specific country of origin for most foreign-born emigrants but rather the region (e.g., North Africa, Eastern Europe).

Survey data on Quality of Services To analyze the relationship between emigration and views about the quality of local public goods and services, we compiled data from Statistics Sweden’s survey *Medborgarundersökningen (What Do You think of Your Municipality?)*. Each year Statistics Sweden surveys between 800 and 1,600 residents (ages 18–84) across Swedish municipalities. The survey asks respondents a large number of questions regarding the quality of local public goods and services. Participation is voluntary, but most

	Mean	Median	SD	Min	Max
Depart.	12.90	12.55	3.57	5.82	29.90
Arriv.	14.26	13.64	4.63	4.35	37.99
Depart. (Sw.-born)	10.15	10.17	2.53	5.17	22.16
Depart. (frgn.-born)	2.75	2.30	1.58	0.18	10.68
Depart. (ctz.)	11.27	11.20	2.88	5.49	24.84
Depart. (non-ctz.)	1.63	1.32	1.03	0.05	7.00
Arriv. (Sw.-born)	10.00	9.98	3.07	3.47	25.48
Arriv. (frgn.-born)	4.25	3.60	2.46	0.47	15.18
Arriv. (ctz.)	10.62	10.51	3.36	3.51	28.39
Arriv. (non-ctz.)	3.63	3.06	2.06	0.35	11.94
Depart. (ctz., high edu.)	4.21	3.61	2.26	0.92	13.85
Depart. (ctz., low edu.)	7.06	6.66	1.80	3.92	13.69
Depart. (non-ctz., high edu.)	0.58	0.41	0.50	0.00	4.09
Depart. (non-ctz., low edu.)	1.05	0.85	0.62	0.00	4.86
Depart. (ctz., high inc.)	4.82	4.31	1.98	1.43	15.84
Depart. (ctz., low inc.)	6.45	6.07	1.50	3.25	13.45
Depart. (non-ctz., high inc.)	0.36	0.24	0.32	0.00	2.97
Depart. (non-ctz., low inc.)	1.27	1.08	0.77	0.00	5.08
Unemployment*	41.88	42.09	4.17	29.01	60.39
Median income	225.62	218.70	40.69	146.20	361.30
Gini	37.94	37.04	3.92	29.94	55.97
Age 0-5	5.73	5.73	0.80	3.14	8.90
Age 5-14	11.54	11.24	1.59	6.99	17.56
Age 15-24	12.29	12.07	1.55	8.56	18.27
Age 25-34	13.15	12.40	3.52	5.86	23.47
Age 35-44	13.41	13.40	1.61	7.02	18.01
Age 45-54	13.09	12.99	0.82	10.51	16.41
Age 55-64	12.30	12.19	1.59	8.82	18.41
Age 65-74	9.74	9.39	2.27	5.31	18.83
Age 75-84	6.19	6.23	1.44	2.52	12.34
Age 85-94	2.39	2.41	0.59	0.66	5.42
Age 95+	0.18	0.18	0.06	0.02	0.47
Share men	49.82	49.78	0.76	47.67	53.53

Table SM.5: Descriptive statistics of municipality-level variables (Sweden), pooled across 5 election years (2002-2018). *Our measure of unemployment on the municipality level is the share of the adult population (16+) who are not employed. See also Table SM.4.

	Mean	Median	SD	Min	Max
Vote: SD	8.13	5.45	7.58	0.00	49.56
Vote: Right	43.40	42.55	14.70	3.82	98.73
Vote: Left	45.52	45.29	13.94	0.64	94.50
Vote: MP	5.65	4.87	3.27	0.00	30.53
Vote: V	6.82	5.90	4.05	0.10	45.62
Vote: S	33.04	32.58	12.39	0.38	87.51
Vote: L	7.64	6.62	4.74	0.00	41.14
Vote: C	7.06	5.69	5.21	0.00	43.46
Vote: KD	6.34	5.72	3.53	0.00	50.29
Vote: M	22.37	20.52	10.79	0.01	72.59
Turnout	81.39	82.35	6.53	38.59	96.19
Depart.	12.77	11.79	6.35	0.00	100.00
Arriv.	15.56	12.55	123.29	0.00	20 400.00
Unemployment	7.03	6.12	4.03	0.00	100.00
Median income	1517.17	1432.04	565.20	0.00	13 738.79
Age 0-14	17.19	17.44	5.49	0.00	44.21
Age 15-24	11.03	10.67	3.47	0.00	85.71
Age 25-34	11.99	10.06	6.07	0.00	100.00
Age 35-44	12.20	12.10	2.66	0.00	37.90
Age 45-54	11.97	11.94	2.36	0.00	66.67
Age 55-64	11.07	10.94	2.94	0.00	66.46
Age 65-74	8.53	8.39	3.19	0.00	75.00
Age 75-84	5.80	5.36	3.12	0.00	100.00
Age 85-94	2.28	1.92	1.74	0.00	47.37
Age 95+	0.16	0.10	0.22	0.00	10.53
Share men	49.66	49.87	2.53	24.32	100.00

Table SM.6: Descriptive statistics of precinct-level variables (Sweden), pooled across 5 election years (2002-2018).

municipalities take part.¹ In our analysis, we include the years 2006–2018.² During this time, 264 out of 290 municipalities participated, with an average participation of about 5 times per municipality. However, Statistics Sweden does not publish individual-level data.³ Instead, our analyses rely on data that has been aggregated to the municipality level.

The surveys ask citizens to rate, on a scale from 1 to 10, the quality of their municipality’s public goods and services in the following areas: (1) Culture, (2) Elderly Care, (3) Emergency Services, (4) Environment, (5) Elementary School, (6) High School, (7) Pre-School, (8) Water and Sewage, (9) Roads, (10) Sidewalks, (11) Ease of contacting municipal employees, (12) Support for vulnerable individuals and (13) Waste handling. These scores are standardized so that their theoretical minimum is 0 and their theoretical maximum is 100. We take the average of the municipality-level scores for these 13 areas to create an index of overall citizen satisfaction with the quality of local public goods and services (*Quality Index*). The index is reliable by conventional standards (coefficient alpha=0.87) and provides us with an overall assessment of the perceived quality of local public goods and services.⁴

Table SM.7 presents the relationship between departures and the perceived quality of local public goods and services. In this analysis, we have fewer cross-sectional units to rely on than in the main analysis, and we therefore use annual data and include departures with a one year lag. Most importantly, the results show that departures have a negative and statistically significant relationship with the *Quality Index*. This effect is substantively meaningful: a one standard deviation increase in departures (sd=1.35) is associated with a drop by one fifth of a standard deviation (sd=3.6) in the *Quality Index*.

To ensure that these are not driven by emigration’s relationship with a single index component, we also regressed each component on departures. Results in Table SM.7 show a negative relationship between emigration and ten out of the thirteen index components (none of the positive relationships are statistically significant).

¹See Erlingsson, Gissur Ó, Richard Öhrvall, Susanne Wallman Lundåsen and Arvid Zerne. 2021. *Centrum Mot Periferi? Om Missnöje Och Framtidstro I Sveriges Olika Landsdelar*. Linköping University Electronic Press.

²Older iterations of *Medborgarundersökningen* (2006–2015) are available from the Quality of Government Institute at <https://www.gu.se/en/quality-government/qog-data/data-downloads/politics-institutions-and-services-in-swedish-municipalities>, and these are complemented with data from 2016–2018 from Statistics Sweden’s database *Statistikdatabasen* at <https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/en/ssd/>.

³It is thus impossible to obtain the exact number of individual surveys used to construct the estimates we use here. A rough estimate based on the average number of times a municipality has participated suggests that it is well over one million.

⁴See Dahlström, Carl and Marina Nistotskaya, and Maria Tyrberg. 2018. “Outsourcing, bureaucratic personnel quality and citizen satisfaction with public services.” *Public Administration*, 96(1): 218–233.

	Quality Index	Index Components					
		Culture	Elderly Care	Emergency Service	Environment	Elementary School	High School
Depart. _{<i>t-1</i>}	-0.57** (0.19)	-0.45 (0.35)	0.03 (0.39)	0.12 (0.23)	-0.46 (0.39)	-1.44*** (0.37)	-1.02** (0.36)
Muni FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Demogr.)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Num. obs	1278	1277	1278	1278	1277	1278	1278
<i>R</i> ²	0.26	0.43	0.19	0.36	0.38	0.17	0.12

	Index Components (cont'd)						
	Pre-School	Water & Sanitation	Roads	Sidewalks	Availability	Vulnerable Groups	Water & Waste Disposal
Depart. _{<i>t-1</i>}	-0.37 (0.38)	-0.91*** (0.25)	-1.34*** (0.36)	0.23 (0.47)	-0.46 (0.31)	-0.62 (0.33)	-0.66 (0.39)
Muni FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Demogr.)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Num. obs	1278	1277	1277	1277	1277	1278	1278
<i>R</i> ²	0.13	0.39	0.41	0.27	0.47	0.20	0.51

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table SM.7: OLS estimates of the number of departures per 100 capita from the municipality during the previous year on the Perceived Quality of Local Public Goods and Services, 2006-2018

B.2 Additional Tables and Figures

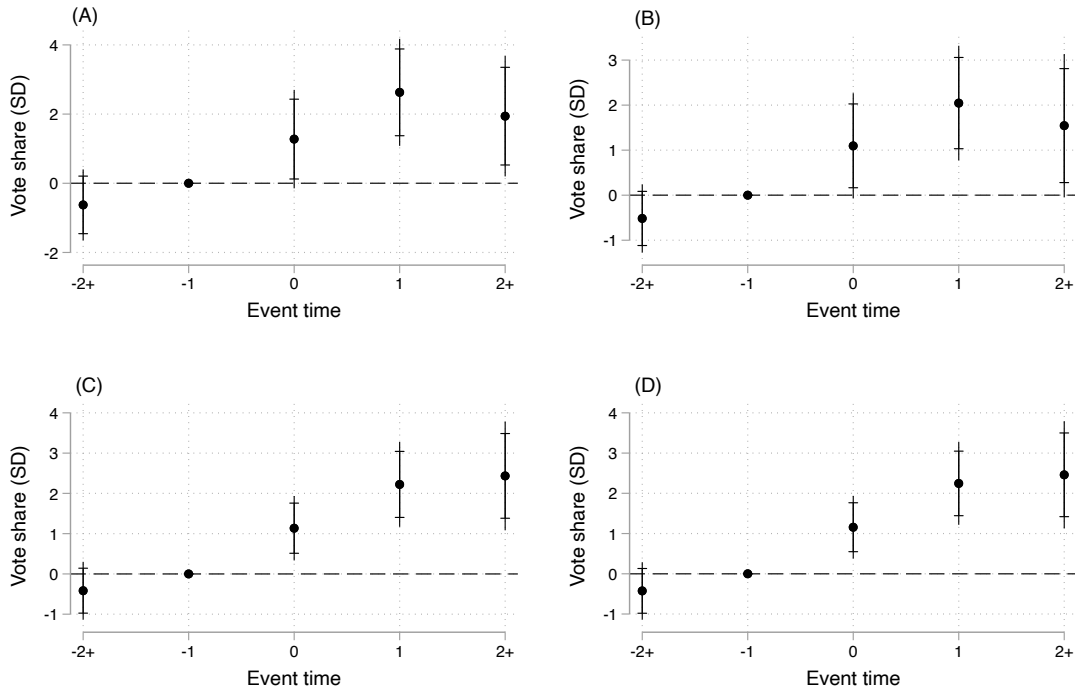


Figure SM.1: Event-study plot for the models reported in Table 1 (col. 3-6) following the suggestions by Freyaldenhoven et al. (2021). Estimates display the cumulative effect of a one-unit change in the number of departures per 100 capita on the vote share for the Sweden Democrats (measured in %) in a precinct in the contemporaneous election (0), the elections thereafter (1-2) as well as the elections preceding the one-unit change (-2+) all relative to the effects in election before the one-unit change (-1). Panel A are estimates based on a specification that only includes precinct and year fixed effects but no covariates. The specification for Panel B includes economic controls, the specification for panel C includes demographic controls and the specification in panel D includes the number of arrivals per capita as a control.

	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD
Depart.	-0.09 (0.07)	0.41* (0.20)	0.38** (0.14)	0.42*** (0.12)	0.44*** (0.12)
Unemployment			0.47*** (0.11)	0.22* (0.10)	0.21* (0.10)
Gini			-0.97*** (0.21)	-0.80*** (0.17)	-0.79*** (0.17)
Income			-0.17*** (0.02)	-0.13*** (0.02)	-0.13*** (0.02)
Age 5-14				-1.72*** (0.38)	-1.69*** (0.40)
Age 15-24				-1.11** (0.40)	-1.09** (0.41)
Age 25-34				-1.64*** (0.44)	-1.63*** (0.45)
Age 35-44				-2.99*** (0.46)	-2.90*** (0.49)
Age 45-54				-1.33*** (0.30)	-1.26*** (0.31)
Age 55-64				-1.96*** (0.29)	-1.90*** (0.33)
Age 65-74				-1.27*** (0.29)	-1.22*** (0.31)
Age 75-84				-1.76*** (0.39)	-1.72*** (0.41)
Age 85-94				-1.39* (0.55)	-1.33* (0.55)
Age 95+				-2.17 (2.00)	-2.24 (2.00)
Men				-0.10 (0.48)	-0.15 (0.50)
Arriv.					0.04 (0.07)
Prec. FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Econ.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Demogr.)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Num. obs.	29713	29713	29713	29713	29713
R ²	0.00	0.88	0.91	0.92	0.92

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table SM.8: OLS estimates of the number of departures per 100 capita from the municipality since the last election on the Sweden Democrats' vote share (measured in %) in a precinct. Covariates are measured at the municipality level. Economic covariates include the unemployment rate (in %), median income (in SEK 1k) and the Gini coefficient (in %). Demographic controls include the share of inhabitants in 10-year age brackets (5-14, 14-24, 25-34, ..., 95+) and the share of men (all in %).

	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD
Depart.	-0.09 (0.07)	0.41 (0.23)	0.66** (0.21)	0.56*** (0.11)	0.54*** (0.12)
Arriv.					-0.03 (0.07)
Prec. FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE x Depart. Bins	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Econ.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Demogr.)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Num. obs.	29713	29647	29647	29647	29647
R ²	0.00	0.85	0.86	0.92	0.92

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table SM.9: OLS estimates of the number of departures per 100 capita from the municipality since the last election on the Sweden Democrats' vote share (measured in %) in a precinct allowing for differential time trends across five bins of municipalities with similar levels of departures in 2002 within each bin. All five bins have the same range. Covariates are measured at the municipality level.

	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD
Depart.	-0.09 (0.07)	0.36* (0.17)	0.44** (0.15)	0.45*** (0.12)	0.46*** (0.13)
Arriv.					0.03 (0.07)
Prec. FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE x Unempl. Bins	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Econ.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Demogr.)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Num. obs.	29713	29695	29695	29695	29695
R ²	0.00	0.89	0.91	0.92	0.92

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table SM.10: OLS estimates of the number of departures per 100 capita from the municipality since the last election on the Sweden Democrats' vote share (measured in %) in a precinct allowing for differential time trends across five bins of municipalities with similar levels of unemployment in 2002 within each bin. All five bins have the same range. Covariates are measured at the municipality level.

	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD
Depart.	-0.09 (0.07)	0.29*** (0.06)	0.23*** (0.06)	0.17** (0.06)	0.16* (0.06)
Arriv.					-0.01 (0.05)
Prec. FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Muni FE x Time	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Econ.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Demogr.)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Num. obs.	29713	29713	29713	29713	29713
R ²	0.00	0.94	0.94	0.95	0.95

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table SM.11: OLS estimates of the number of departures per 100 capita from the municipality since the last election on the Sweden Democrats' vote share (measured in %) in a precinct allowing for a linear time trend in each municipality. Covariates are measured at the municipality level.

	Left	Left	Left	Left	Left
Depart.	-0.85*** (0.17)	-0.48* (0.19)	-0.43** (0.14)	-0.57*** (0.13)	-0.61*** (0.12)
Arriv.					-0.11 (0.11)
Prec. FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Econ.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Demogr.)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Num. obs.	29710	29710	29710	29710	29710
R ²	0.05	0.93	0.94	0.94	0.94

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table SM.12: OLS estimates of the number of departures per 100 capita from the municipality since the last election on the vote share for the *left bloc* (which includes the Green Party, the Left Party, and the Social Democratic Party) in a precinct (measured in %). Covariates are measured at the municipality level.

	Right	Right	Right	Right	Right
Depart.	0.90*** (0.17)	0.11 (0.11)	0.04 (0.12)	0.34* (0.13)	0.29* (0.13)
Arriv.					-0.15* (0.07)
Prec. FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Econ.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Demogr.)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Num. obs.	29711	29711	29711	29711	29711
R ²	0.05	0.95	0.95	0.95	0.95

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table SM.13: OLS estimates of the number of departures per 100 capita from the municipality since the last election on the vote share for *right bloc* (which includes the Liberals, the Centre Party, the Christian Democrats, and the Moderate Party) in a precinct (measured in %). Covariates are measured at the municipality level.

	Turnout	Turnout	Turnout	Turnout	Turnout
Depart.	-0.02 (0.06)	-0.09 (0.08)	-0.02 (0.06)	0.03 (0.06)	-0.00 (0.05)
Arriv.					-0.10* (0.05)
Prec. FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Econ.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Demogr.)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Num. obs.	29713	29713	29713	29713	29713
R ²	0.00	0.89	0.89	0.90	0.90

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table SM.14: OLS estimates of the number of departures per 100 capita from the municipality since the last election on turnout in a precinct (measured in %). Covariates are measured at the municipality level.

	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD
Depart. (high inc.)	0.15 (0.28)	0.04 (0.29)	0.49* (0.20)	0.67*** (0.17)	0.74*** (0.18)
Depart. (low inc.)	-0.39 (0.24)	0.68* (0.32)	0.28 (0.28)	0.20 (0.21)	0.19 (0.21)
Arriv.					0.08 (0.06)
Prec. FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Econ.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Demogr.)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Num. obs.	29713	29713	29713	29713	29713
R ²	0.01	0.88	0.91	0.92	0.92

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table SM.15: OLS estimates of the number of departures per 100 capita from the municipality since the last election on the Sweden Democrats' vote share (measured in %) in a precinct. Covariates are measured at the municipality level.

	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD
Depart. (Sw.-born)	-0.82*** (0.10)	1.25*** (0.18)	0.76*** (0.15)	0.58*** (0.12)	0.61*** (0.13)
Depart. (frgn.-born)	1.29*** (0.36)	-0.92 (0.52)	-0.42 (0.28)	0.07 (0.24)	0.07 (0.24)
Arriv. (Sw.-born)					0.08 (0.12)
Arriv. (frgn.-born)					0.05 (0.09)
Prec. FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Econ.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Demogr.)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Num. obs.	29713	29713	29713	29713	29713
R ²	0.08	0.89	0.91	0.92	0.92

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table SM.16: OLS estimates of the number of departures per 100 capita by individuals born in Sweden (Sw.-born) and foreign-born (frgn.-born) from the municipality since the last election on the vote share for the Sweden Democrats (measured in %) in a precinct. Covariates are measured at the municipality level.

	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD
α_1 (Muni. depart. x Prec.: Few depart.)	0.11 (0.15)	0.85*** (0.16)	0.60*** (0.13)	0.51*** (0.11)	0.53*** (0.11)
α_2 (Muni. depart. x Prec.: Some depart.)	-0.05 (0.17)	0.32 (0.21)	0.28* (0.13)	0.32** (0.11)	0.34** (0.11)
α_3 (Muni. depart. x Prec.: Many depart.)	-0.06 (0.06)	-0.06 (0.26)	0.12 (0.14)	0.22 (0.12)	0.24 (0.13)
μ_1	-2.53* (1.14)	-13.57*** (2.94)	-7.74*** (1.52)	-5.15*** (1.16)	-5.15*** (1.16)
μ_2		-6.03*** (1.19)	-2.99** (0.91)	-1.91* (0.77)	-1.91* (0.77)
μ_3	-1.12 (2.38)				
η_1	0.89* (0.39)	1.55*** (0.39)	1.21*** (0.24)	1.02*** (0.21)	1.03*** (0.21)
η_2	1.18* (0.52)	1.61** (0.50)	0.69*** (0.20)	0.38* (0.19)	0.38* (0.19)
η_3	-0.26*** (0.06)	0.42** (0.16)	0.22 (0.22)	0.14 (0.17)	0.14 (0.17)
β_1	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.11*** (0.03)	-0.08*** (0.02)	-0.07*** (0.02)	-0.07*** (0.02)
β_2	-0.10* (0.04)	-0.11** (0.04)	-0.04* (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)
β_3	0.01* (0.00)	-0.02* (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Arriv. (Muni.)					0.05 (0.06)
Arriv. (Prec.)					0.00 (0.00)
Prec. FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Econ.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Demogr.)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Num. obs.	29712	29712	29712	29712	29712
R ²	0.02	0.88	0.91	0.92	0.92

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table SM.17: OLS binning estimates of the number of departures per 100 capita from the municipality since the last election on the vote share for the Sweden Democrats (measured in %) in a precinct. The municipality departures are interacted with tercile-indicators for precincts with few, some and many departures (α_j). These indicators are median-centered within terciles such that the coefficients estimate the effect of municipality departures at the median within each tercile. The coefficient labels follow the notation of equation 4 in Hainmueller, Mummolo and Yiqing (2019).

	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD
α_1 (Muni. depart. x Prec.: Muni.: Low)	1.02*** (0.15)	1.37*** (0.19)	1.00*** (0.17)	0.65*** (0.14)	0.66*** (0.14)
α_2 (Muni. depart. x Prec.: Muni.: Medium)	-0.11 (0.18)	0.93*** (0.24)	0.70** (0.23)	0.66*** (0.19)	0.70*** (0.19)
α_3 (Muni. depart. x Prec.: Muni.: High)	-0.17 (0.13)	-0.19 (0.23)	-0.29 (0.23)	-0.04 (0.20)	0.00 (0.21)
μ_1	-11.78*** (2.76)		-29.32** (10.68)	-16.57 (8.62)	-16.37 (8.59)
μ_2	-0.27 (3.05)	19.06* (7.90)	-8.73 (5.86)	-4.76 (4.70)	-4.51 (4.70)
μ_3		22.47 (11.46)			
η_1	0.07 (0.12)	0.31 (0.27)	0.40 (0.23)	0.28 (0.22)	0.28 (0.22)
η_2	0.02 (0.07)	0.15 (0.08)	0.21** (0.08)	0.14* (0.07)	0.15* (0.07)
η_3	-0.00** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)
β_1	-0.00 (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
β_2	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.01** (0.00)	-0.01** (0.00)
β_3	0.00** (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Arriv. (Muni.)					0.09 (0.07)
Arriv. (Prec.)					-0.00 (0.00)
Prec. FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Econ.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Demogr.)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Num. obs.	29713	29713	29712	29712	29712
R ²	0.06	0.91	0.91	0.92	0.92

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table SM.18: OLS binning estimates of the number of departures per 100 capita from the municipality since the last election on the vote share for the Sweden Democrats (measured in %) in a precinct. The municipality departures are interacted with tercile-indicators for municipality with high, medium and low population density (α_j). These indicators are median-centered within terciles such that the coefficients estimate the effect of municipality departures at the median within each tercile. The coefficient labels follow the notation of equation 4 in [Hainmueller, Mummolo and Yiqing \(2019\)](#).

	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD
Depart.	1.16*** (0.18)	1.89*** (0.30)	1.04*** (0.20)	0.78*** (0.16)	0.78*** (0.16)
Depart. x Growing	-1.32*** (0.18)	-2.35*** (0.49)	-1.05*** (0.30)	-0.55* (0.24)	-0.55* (0.24)
Growing	12.46*** (1.83)				
Arriv.					0.02 (0.06)
Prec. FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Econ.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Demogr.)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Num. obs.	29585	29585	29585	29585	29585
R ²	0.06	0.89	0.91	0.92	0.92

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table SM.19: OLS estimates of the number of departures per 100 capita from the municipality since the last election on the vote share for the Sweden Democrats (measured in %) in a precinct. The municipality departures are interacted with a binary indicator coding if the municipality population was growing between 1991 and 2001. Covariates are measured at the municipality level.

B.3 Additional Analysis

The inclusion of very small precincts might skew the results as even a handful of departures can result in large per capita departures. There are 327 precincts with fewer than 500 inhabitants at any time during our study period. When we drop these precincts, the baseline point estimates are virtually unchanged (see Table SM.20).

	SD	SD	SD	SD	SD
Depart.	-0.08 (0.07)	0.40 (0.20)	0.38** (0.14)	0.42*** (0.12)	0.43*** (0.12)
Arriv.					0.04 (0.07)
Prec. FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Econ.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov. (Demogr.)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Num. obs.	28127	28127	28127	28127	28127
R ²	0.00	0.88	0.91	0.92	0.92

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table SM.20: OLS estimates of the number of departures per 100 capita from the municipality since the last election on the Sweden Democrats' vote share (measured in %) in a precinct. The samples excludes 327 precincts with fewer than 500 inhabitants. Covariates are measured at the municipality level.

	OLS		Arellano-Bond	
	SD	SD	SD	SD
Depart.	0.46*** (0.11)	0.36*** (0.09)	0.38*** (0.04)	0.36*** (0.05)
lag(SD)	0.88*** (0.02)	0.76*** (0.02)	0.95*** (0.04)	0.96*** (0.03)
Prec. FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cov.	No	Yes	No	Yes
Num. obs.	23617	23617	17619	17619
R^2	0.93	0.94		

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table SM.21: OLS and Arellano-Bond estimates of the number of departures per 100 capita from the municipality since the last election on the Sweden Democrats' vote share (measured in %) in a precinct. Covariates include the unemployment rate (in %), median income (in SEK 1k), the Gini coefficient (in %), inhabitants in 10-year age brackets (5-14, 14-24, 25-34, ..., 95+), the share of men (all in %), and arrivals per capita. Standard errors are clustered by municipality (OLS) or precinct (Arellano-Bond).

C Newspaper Analysis

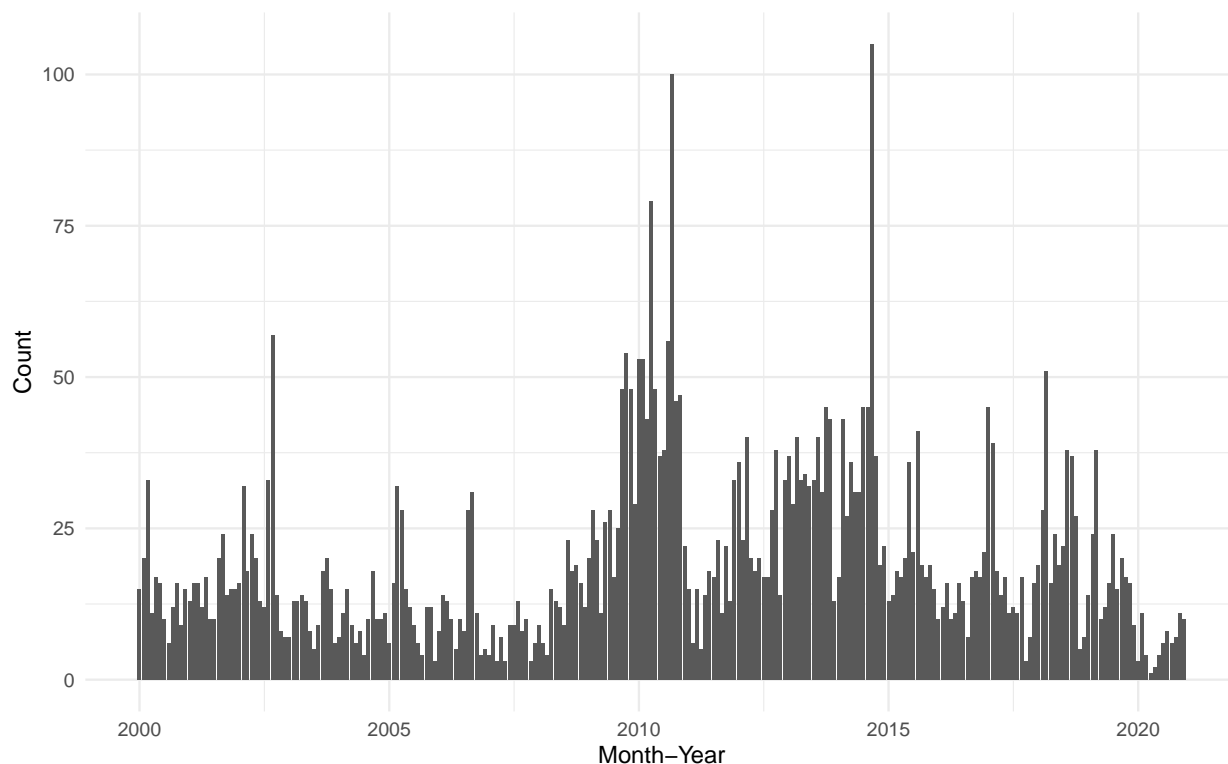


Figure SM.2: Number of hits in local, regional and national newspapers between January 2000 and December 2020. Note: This count excludes magazines, TV and radio transcripts, press releases, international newspapers and news agencies. We used the following search string: (utflyttning* OR avfolkning*) AND (Sverigedemokrater* OR Socialdemokrater* OR Centerparti* OR Miljöparti* OR Vänsterparti* OR Folkparti* OR Liberalerna* OR Moderater* OR Kristdemokrater*). The terms before the AND condition are emigration and depopulation. The following terms are word stems corresponding to the parties in the national parliament.

D Interviews

The interview study was approved by the institutional review boards of Princeton University (#13754) and Stanford University (#61017). It involved no deception. We recruited participants via email. When participants agreed to be interviewed we asked for them to confirm their consent by email. We informed participants that their participation was voluntary and that the interview could be stopped any time. We also informed them that their names could be kept confidential upon request.

We began by identifying one person from each party (the Social Democrats and the Sweden Democrats), for each of the following roles: National level party official with responsibility for rural affairs, local politician in depopulating region, and party official with responsibility for election analysis. At the end of each conversation, we asked each interviewee whether they would like to recommend another party official who they thought could offer useful perspectives. The design thus incorporated an element of snowball sampling, and we continued this process until we reached saturation as defined by Grady:

In interviews, when the researcher begins to hear the same comments again and again, data saturation is being reached. It is then time to stop collecting information and to start analysing what has been collected.⁵

The logic behind our selection criteria was that the types party officials selected for this study possess expert knowledge of how emigration impacts local communities, including their electorates. The sample of officials included in the interview study is described in Table SM.22. All of our interviewees were current or recent holders of their position (\leq three years) apart from the interviewee that participated in the Social Democratic 2014 post-election analysis group that finished their work six years ago (in 2015). The interviews were semi-structured and were organized around nine thematic questions. These themes are shown in Table SM.23.

⁵Grady, Michael. 1998 *Qualitative and Action Research: A Practitioner Handbook*. Phi Delta Kappa International, p. 6.

Table SM.22: Semi-Structured Interviews with Party Officials

Number	Date	Party	Position in Party	Role in Sample	Length	Recording
1	4-Oct-21	Social Democrats	Former Political advisor for two Ministers of Rural Affairs	National level party official with responsibility for rural affairs	51 mins	Audio
2	21-Oct-21	Sweden Democrats	Party Secretary	Official Responsible for election analysis	37 mins	Audio
3	21-Oct-21	Sweden Democrats	Parliamentarian and party spokesperson (forestry)	National level party official with responsibility for rural affairs	40 mins	Audio
4	25-Oct-21	Social Democrats	Post-election analyst	Official Responsible for election analysis	41 mins	Audio
5	1-Nov-21	Social Democrats	Mayor	Local politician in depopulating region	34 mins	Audio
6	4-Nov-21	Social Democrats	Post-election analyst	Official Responsible for election analysis	49 mins	Audio
7	12-Nov-21	Social Democrats	Former Minister of Rural Affairs	National level party official with responsibility for rural affairs	31 mins	Audio
8	3-Dec-21	Sweden Democrats	Local politician	Local politician in depopulating region	47 mins	Audio
9	9-Dec-21	Sweden Democrats	Local politician	Local politician in depopulating region	25 mins	Audio
10	31-Mar-22	Social Democrats	Mayor	Local politician in depopulating region	38 mins	Audio
11	8-Apr-22	Social Democrats	Local politician	Local politician in depopulating region	38 mins	Audio
12	31-May-22	Sweden Democrats	Local politician	Local politician in depopulating region	24 mins	Audio

Table SM.23: Thematic Questions Used in Semi-Structured Interviews with Party Officials

#	Question:
1	There has been a great deal of in-migration and out-migration from Sweden's cities in the past twenty years. How has this changed the strategies and coalitions of your party for municipal elections?
2	Has your party done any studies on population change and its implications for vote shares by party? Could you tell me what you learned or send me any documents that might have been prepared on this?
3	When a municipality loses population because many of its residents leave, how do local citizens react? Do you think the local population notices local population loss?
4	How is your party affected if members of highly skilled residents leave? What about when immigrant populations leave for different cities?
5	Immigration and emigration probably change the cultural composition of Sweden's municipalities. How does that affect the votes for the Social Democrats and for the Sweden Democrats?
6	When a municipality loses population because many of its residents leave, how does this impact the remaining population? Does it change in any way their political values or commitments?
7	Looking at the last two decades, we have found that the Sweden Democrats receive higher vote shares in municipalities that lose population due to out-migration. Why do you think that is?
8	Looking at the last two decades, we have found that the Social Democrats receive lower vote shares in municipalities that lose population due to out-migration. Why do you think that is?
9	Are there some public goods and services (schools, public transport, doctors, post offices, grocery stores) that are particularly affected when a municipality loses population?
