The Rise of the Radical Right in Sweden: Consequences for Political Selection *

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Abstract

We study changes in Sweden’s political class during the rapid rise of the Sweden Democrats, a radical right party that went from being of negligible importance in 2006 to the third largest party in 2014. We associate the growth in support for the Sweden Democrats to a series of policy reforms in 2006 that led to a significant widening of the income gap between those robustly attached to the labor market (the “core” workers) and those with precarious attachment (the “non-core,” including primarily the sick and the non-stably employed). We show that the Sweden Democrats grew by supplying politicians that closely resemble the population mix of core vs non-core, while the mainstream parties maintained a “product-line” of mostly high-earning core members of the labor force. At the same time, the Sweden Democrat candidates have less educational attainment, and less experience in politics and the public sector. Thus, the growth of the Sweden Democrats increased descriptive representation of the economically disenfranchised, but did so at the cost of lowering the average level of policy expertise in the political class. Keywords: Political Selection, Valence, Radical Right, Populism.

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1 Introduction

Several democracies, including advanced ones, have seen a strengthening of extremist political parties.\footnote{Radical-right parties currently sit in the governments of Austria, Finland, Italy, Hungary, and Poland. Australia, Israel, and Japan are also experiencing a resurgence of the radical right and even majoritarian election systems like the United States and the United Kingdom have seen the formation of new radical-right parties or party factions (Rydgren 2018).} To many, this is a concern because those parties often promote non-mainstream policies, as well as values that are inimical to the liberal democracies in which such parties arise. In addition, the rise of extremist politics may affect democracy’s performance as a leadership selection mechanism. Therefore, it is important to understand the forces behind such rise, and the way the political system adjusts to those forces, with special attention to how political representation is affected in the process.

In this paper, we investigate how a policy shock that had large economic consequences is associated with the rapid rise of an extreme right-wing party in Sweden, and how this affected political selection. We take as the starting point a policy reform in Sweden in 2006 that created an expanding income gap across different segments of the population. Using detailed administrative data, we link the impact of the reform to changing political fortunes across parties, including the rise of a previously marginalized party, the Sweden Democrats, who by 2014 had become the 3\textsuperscript{rd} largest party in national parliament.

In the main part of the paper, we study the response by both the established parties as well as the Sweden Democrats in terms of the type of politicians that were put forward in the ballots. In an idealized Downsian democracy world where platforms are credible, we might not expect any changes in political personnel. Parties would respond to changing electoral demands by offering different platforms. In an alternative, idealized citizen-candidate world where platforms are non-credible, parties would respond by putting forward candidates that resemble the new configuration of voters, in which case there would be consequences for political selection. Does the adjustment of the Swedish political system match any of these idealized scenarios, and if the latter, what are the political selection consequences?

We exploit rich data on all political candidates at the municipal level in Sweden to evaluate the extent to which political change involved changes in political selection. We study changes in political selection along two main dimensions: one is expertise, as proxied by education levels and previous public office experience, and the other is “descriptive representation – do politicians look like voters in socioeconomic terms?”

We begin by characterizing the demand shock. We show that the 2006 policy reform created a widening income gap between the core working population and various groups who were relatively left behind, comprising the “non-core” segments, such as the unemployed, the unstably employed, retirees, and those in occupations intensive in highly repetitive tasks. We compute that the difference in real disposable income between these two groups increased by as much as 20 percent from 2005 to 2012. Coinciding with the introduction of the policy reform, we also find sharp rise in the support for the Sweden Democrats. This relationship is evident not only in the time series but also holds in the cross-section at the municipal level. Specifically, we show that income inequality, as measured by the weighted ratio in real
disposable income between the core and non-core segments of the labor, is strongly correlated with the share of votes for the Sweden Democrats. This association survives a battery of robustness checks including municipal fixed effects, as well as additional explanations featuring immigration and employment contraction in occupations intensive in repetitive tasks.

In response to the demand-side shock, the political system could have responded in different ways. One possibility is that mainstream parties could have adjusted their message and/or the mix of candidates they offered to be more attractive to an increasingly aggrieved segment of the population, thereby limiting the scope for meaningful Sweden Democrat entry. Qualitative evidence suggests mainstream parties did not alter their policy stance and thus we abstract from the analysis of platforms to study the supply of politician types. Our analysis shows mainstream parties put forward politicians who are more successful in the labor market than the average citizen, let alone those in the non-core segments of the labor market. Those politicians are high earners and have histories of robust attachment to the labor market. In contrast the Sweden Democrats experienced a vertiginous rise by putting forward candidates who over-represent the vulnerable categories that suffered most from the reform. That overrepresentation remained remarkably stable even as the Sweden Democrats went from being a tiny party to being the third largest. The established parties, perhaps surprisingly, do not significantly change their mix of candidates in response to the shock nor the Sweden Democrat gains [THIS IS A VALUABLE POINT, BUT RIGHT NOW WE DO NOT HAVE DYNAMIC GRAPHS. PERHAPS AUGMENT BAR GRAPHS TO COMPARE 2006 AND 2014?]. The resulting picture is one where a policy shock that hurt a segment of the population was met with a change in the mix of politician types to weigh more heavily politicians who resemble those who were hurt. A concomitant change is that the candidates put forward by the Sweden Democrats display less policy expertise than those in the established parties, as measured by educational attainment, earnings capacity and previous public office experience.

Based on these demand and supply-side patterns, we elaborate two broad implications. First, the rise of the radical right in Sweden reflects a political system that is flexible enough to accommodate shifts in the demand for representation; as established parties do not reflect a new demand side configuration, smaller parties grow to bridge the gap in descriptive representation. This flexibility may be seen as a virtue of democratic responsiveness, but the adjustment is not without its costs. As we have argued in earlier work (Dal B, Finan, Folke, Persson and Rickne 2017), democracies may face a tradeoff when it comes to political selection. A political class that is descriptively representative of more vulnerable segments of society may be compromised along some other dimensions - such as those grouped under the term “valence” in positive political theory models. For instance, representing the economically excluded could come at the cost of reducing the stock of policy expertise in government. In this paper we find that the forces leading to the rise of the radical right illustrate such a tradeoff: adjustments in descriptive representation carried with them the entry of politicians with less expertise. Thus, forces leading to political extremism may tighten political selection tradeoffs.

Second, the facts involved in the rise of the Sweden Democrats cannot be fully rationalized
using the basic intuitions of two standard models of political representation, namely the Downsian model and the citizen-candidate model. Neither model has parties that exist separately from candidates. A pure Downsian model features parties/candidates that can make credible platform announcements, and abstracts from the selection of candidates. In such a model, parties/candidates would react to changes in voter attitudes by adjusting their platforms, without an obvious need to change personnel. In fact, the Downsian model is compatible with a neat separation in politics between “producers” (parties/politicians) and “consumers” (voters), where the adjustment of platforms by politicians resembles changes in product lines by producers. A pure citizen-candidate model (as in Osborne and Slivinski 1996, or Besley and Coate 1997) blurs that separation: citizens and politicians suffer policy consequences equally, candidates stem from the citizenry, and if the median voter were to change, the candidates who run in equilibrium would also change. This is in principle more promising of a theoretical account than the Downsian model: in the citizen-candidate model changes in electoral demands entail changes in the type of politicians who are in supply, as observed in Sweden. What is unclear in a basic citizen-candidate model is how to account for the fact that the change in politician types happens in connection to the growth of a single party. If one is to interpret candidates in the model as such, then the model is compatible with a world in which existing parties offer revised candidate mixes following a shift in the electorate. But this does not match the facts: as most of the traditional parties remained unchanged, the relatively new Sweden Democrats offered a better descriptive match between politicians and voters and enjoyed rapid growth in terms of votes and ranks. If the citizen-candidates in the model are to be seen as parties forming, then the question arises as to why new parties are needed at all. If descriptive representation is important to party credibility, why would not the existing parties adjust the types of candidates they supply in order to preempt the Sweden Democrats? Or to maintain the analogy with economics, if parties are the producers and politicians are the products, why wouldn’t the parties change the mix of politicians they offer? One possibility is that parties exist as reputational labels a la Snyder and Ting (20XX), both in terms of their ideological and expertise offering, and that this prevents them from adjusting and preempting entry. In sum, the political system in Sweden may be rationalized as citizen-candidate system in which party brands matter.

Overall our findings contribute to a nascent but growing empirical literature on the rise of radical-right parties in advanced democracies. The focus of this literature has been mainly on demand side factors. For example, several studies have documented a robust association for various countries between a regions share of immigrants and its support for radical right parties. These countries include Germany (Barone et al 2014), Italy (Otto and Steinhardt 2015), Austria (Halla, Wagner and Zweimiller 2014), Denmark (Harmon 2015, Dippel et al 2016), and Sweden (Demker 2011, Rydgren and Ruth 2011). Other studies have instead highlighted the importance of economic grievances in determining the rise of populist parties both throughout Europe and in U.S., with a particular focus on the impacts of globalization (e.g. Guiso et al. 2017, Autor et al. 2016, Dippel et al 2016; Che Y. et al 2016; Jensen et al 2016). Our study contributes to this literature by showing that consistent with the economic grievance argument, the rise of the Sweden Democrats can be in part explained by the consequences of a policy reform that worsened the economic condition of non-core
members of the labor force.

In contrast to the demand side, the evidence on the supply of politicians for the radical right is virtually non-existent, largely due to data constraints. We typically do not have information on who joins a radical right party, and as results studies have had to focused on the existence of radical right parties as a measure of supply (e.g. Guiso 2017). But because existence is often defined by vote totals, this measure naturally conflates both supply and demand. Thus, our paper presents the first large-scale study on the supply of politicians for a radical right party and its implications for political selection.

2 Setting and Data

2.1 Sweden Democrats

The Sweden Democrats were founded in 1988. The party won political representation for the first time in 1991 with two municipal council seats but only appeared in national parliament in 2006. Since then however, the party has grown to become the third largest party in 2014. As depicted in Figure 1, the Sweden Democrats went from only receiving a mere XX% of seats in 2006 to over YY% seats in 2014.

The movement grew out of an organization known as “Keep Sweden Swedish” (Bevara Sverige Svenskt, BSS) (Widfeldt 2008). Over time, the party has moderated its stance from biological racism towards ethno-nationalism. Their current argument is that social conflict ensues when people from different cultures attempt to live together (Widfeldt 2008). In the early 2010s, nationalism was formally replaced by social conservatism, putting more emphasis on traditional family values and on law and order (Rydgren 2018). Recent work on party ideologies has classified the Sweden Democrats as a typical radical-right party (Rydgren 2007, Rydgren 2018) and as part of the “populist right” (van Kessel 2015, Norris and Inglehart 2016). As with other radical-right parties, the Sweden Democrats have adopted an anti-establishment stance while appealing to a nostalgic utopia of Sweden’s past drawn from the construct of the “people’s homestead”, a 1920s Social Democratic concept, emphasizing working-class employment, the nuclear family, and a strong welfare state.

The main political priority of the Sweden Democrats is to restrict immigration (Erlingson et al. 2014). In parliament, the party votes often with the center-right bloc. However, the voting pattern on tax and labor-market issues is ambiguous. A left-leaning think-tank concludes that for the 2010-2014 election period “the Sweden Democrats are ambivalent [on tax issues]. The party wants to spend like a left-wing party, but tax like a right-wing party”, and “the party thinks that it can solve this equation by lowering immigration and international aid” (Tanksmedjan Tiden 2014). At municipal level, the Sweden Democrats have often supported center-right coalitions on tax cuts and privatization, warned of an “Islamization” of cities and neighborhoods, and demanded “multicultural financial statements” that describe the local budget in a way that highlights resources spent on natives and immigrants (Wngmar 2011). The party has also emphasized law and order, challenged multicultural education and feminist-inspired pedagogical frameworks; and it often strives to direct more
resources towards elderly care (Mulinari and Neergard 2014).

Survey data shows that Sweden Democrat voters have lower education (Sannerstedt 2014) and are over-represented among the working class (Oskarsson and Demker 2015). Exploiting data from exit polls, Erlingsson et al. (2014) find that the Sweden Democrats is the party with the largest share of blue-collar workers and unemployed amongst their voters. Exploiting individual register data and electoral data at the precinct level, Dehdari (2017) finds that receiving unemployment notices during the financial crisis significantly raised the share of SD voters, but only among low-skill native workers. This relationship was stronger in precincts with a higher proportion of foreign-born low-skill workers.

2.2 Make-Work-Pay Agenda

The Swedish election in September 2006 marked the end of Social Democratic dominance in Swedish politics. A coalition of center and right parties took power, with the Conservative Party as the leading coalition member. The coalition ran on a platform of tax cuts to “make work pay”, coupled with criticism of alleged misuse of social-entitlement programs. The hallmark of this agenda was a series of income-tax cuts. Taxes on earned income were cut in five steps, once per year in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and a fifth time in 2011 after the coalition’s re-election to a second term. For a person at Sweden’s median income, the tax cuts meant about 10% higher take-home pay.

To finance the tax cuts and incentivize work, the coalition also held back expenditures in endowment programs and social insurance. Some prominent policies included lower benefit levels in unemployment and sickness insurance. Another, more indirect, way of cutting costs was to index various social insurances to nominal prices, while real wages were rising (this had already been started by earlier Social Democratic governments). An (intended) consequence of the make-work-pay agenda was to raise the disposable-income gap between people with and without employment (Bengtsson et al. 2014).

The tax cuts for the employed made retirees relatively worse off. To compensate for this, retirees were given compensatory tax cuts amounting to 50% of the earned-income tax cuts. The incomes of retirees with middle and high-incomes were also buoyed by abolishment of the property and wealth taxes.

Whether the reform agenda increased employment or not is an open question. Employment has only risen marginally, and even if the financial crisis did not have a big impact in Sweden, it confounds the analysis. Swedish economists have argued that the universal structure of the earned-income tax credit defies robust evaluation methods (Edmark et al. 2012).

3 Data

The data used here come from three sources. First, we assemble a comprehensive list of nominated and elected politicians for all parties and all elections held during the period of 1982-2014. In Sweden, a political party must submit an ordered list of candidates, including
their personal identification codes, to the electoral agency prior to the election. This party ballot is included in the data as soon as it appears in an election, regardless of how many votes it receives. In addition to the party’s list, voters have the option of also writing in a candidate’s name on the ballot. Given their fast growth and challenges in candidate recruitment, such write-ins are common for the Sweden Democrats, as they make up about 40% of their nominees and 12% of their elected.

These data are then linked to several administrative registries from Statistics Sweden. These registry data contain annual information on various socio-economic characteristics for the entire Swedish Population above 16 years of age during the period of 1979-2012. In total, the data set contains approximately 14 million unique individuals, of which roughly 150,000 were nominated and 53,000 were elected at some point during the 1982-2014 period. For the Sweden Democrats, the data contains 3,360 nominated candidates and 1,650 elected politicians.

An important feature of the registry data is that it contains information on an individual’s various sources of income, which we use to categorize a person’s degree of inclusion in the labor market based on the Social Exclusion and Labour Market Attachment (SELMA) framework. This framework, which was originally developed by (Kindlund och Biterman 2002; Bckman and Franzen 2007), classifies an individual as a core member of the labor force if the person’s labor income exceeds 3.5 “benchmark amounts” (SEK 156,800 in today’s prices, about USD 18,700) in at least two out of three consecutive years. In addition, the person must also have zero income from early retirement; as well as extensive sick leave, unemployment, or labor income between 1 and 3.5 benchmark amounts in at most one out of the three years. XXXUNCLEAR: IS THE LAST COUPLE SENTENCES AN ADDITIONAL SET OF PROPERTIES TO BE CONSIDERED CORE? MAYBE IT SHOULD READ In addition, to be considered core, an individual cannot have received any income from early retirement, from extensive sick leave, from unemployment, and never have earned income between 1 and 3.5 benchmark amounts in more than one out of three consecutive years. ?? XXX

Individuals who are not part of the core are classified as non-core members, and they can be divided further into five subgroups based primarily on their sources of income. Students are defined as any person who receives student benefits and is enrolled in higher education. Individuals involved in military training are also included in this category. Retirees are defined based on age and age-related pension receipts. Unstable employment is defined as combinations over the three years of labor income and minor amounts from other sources, such as unemployment benefits or sick leave. Extensive sick leave is defined as having at least 90 days of registered sick leave in at least two out of the past three years. Early retirement is defined by having received early retirement benefits above a certain threshold. Finally,

2The benchmark amount is updated each year for inflation and used in various Swedish social insurance programs. An income exceeding 3.5 benchmark amounts is expected to cover nearly all full-time jobs in minimum-wage sectors. Only a handful of occupations in the hotel and restaurant services would fall below the cutoff (Social Rapport 2010).

3The model also uses information on age, year of immigration, and year of death. Details of the exact categorization are given in the Appendix, Table W2.
people are categorized as *excluded* from the labor market for having extensive unemployment (at least 180 days in two out of the past three years), being economically inactive (an income below 0.5 benchmark amounts in all three years), or being a recent immigrant.

We further extend this classification in two ways. First, we distinguish retirees by whether they receive at least some “guaranteed pension” as part of their retirement benefits. This pension program is a supplementary benefit that is determined by income level, relationship status, and length of residence in the country. We define low-income retirees as those who receive a nonzero guaranteed pension supplement. The other retirees are coded as high-income retirees.

For the purposes of our analysis, we will keep students separated from the rest of the non-core, and refer as non-core to low-income retirees and the categories reflecting a weak attachment to the labor market, namely those with unstable employment, under extensive sick leave, early retirement, and the directly excluded.

We also distinguish individuals who are in the labor market based on the Routine Task Index (RTI) of their occupation (as defined by Goose et al. (2014)). We will refer to those doing jobs with a high level of routinization as being in a “high RTI” part of the core, and those doing jobs with low levels of routinization as being in a “low RTI” part of the core. In general individuals in high RTI occupations are seen to be more vulnerable to industry shocks as their jobs are in theory more easily substitutable. We pool all individuals with an occupation code in 2002-2012 and compute the median RTI value. People with an occupation above the median is defined as high RTI, and others as low RTI.

Our third main data set is precinct-level voting data, which we downloaded from the Swedish Electoral Agency (valmyndigheten.se). These data are available for the 2002, 2006, and 2010 elections. Municipalities are split into voting precincts, and there are about 5,600 electoral precincts throughout Sweden, with each precinct containing on average about 1,200 voters. Throughout the paper we use voting data from the parliamentary elections rather than from the municipal elections [WHY?].

### 4 The evolution of the political demand side: the 2006 policy reform and the rise of the Sweden Democrats

As we discussed in Section ??, a series of fiscal reforms were introduced after the Conservative Party came into power in 2006. These reforms, which cut both taxes as well as spending on social welfare programs, led to a dramatic redistribution of real disposable income between the core and non-core segments of the labor force. This can be seen quite clearly in Figure 2, which plots average real disposable income for the core and non-core labor force from 1995 to 2012. Prior to 2006, the average income of the core moved largely in parallel with the income for the non-core. In 2006, the income gap between these two groups was approximately 10%. After 2006, we see a sharp widening of the income gap which by 2012 is almost 30%. To the right of the plot in Figure 2, we compute relative to members of the core, the difference in
income growth from 2005-2012 for the various subgroups of the non-core. Those with unstable work, who had retired early, or remained unemployed or economically inactive experienced the largest changes in income relative to the core.

In panel A of Figure 3, we overlay the share of votes for the Social Democrats during the parliamentary elections on the average incomes depicted in Figure 2. We see that the timing of the fiscal reforms, and hence the widening of the income gap between core and non-core members, exactly coincides with the sharp acceleration of electoral support for the Sweden Democrats after the 2006 elections.

Beyond these aggregate trends, we also find a similar pattern using cross-sectional variation across municipalities. In panel B of Figure 3, we plot the growth in SD vote shares between 2002 and 2014 (y-axis) against the growth in income inequality between core and non-core from 2002 to 2014, where income inequality is defined as the ratio of real disposable income of the core to the non-core multiplied by the share of non-core. We see a strong positive relationship suggesting that the municipalities with the highest growth in core/non-core income inequality also saw the largest growth in the SD vote share for the same period.

In Figure 4, we examine whether the relationship between SD vote shares and core/non-core income inequality holds at the level of the electoral precinct. This level of disaggregation allow for the use of municipal fixed effects to account for important factors that may vary across municipalities in the support for the Sweden Democrats, such as differences in party lists or platforms, etc. In panels A-C, we plot by election year, the relationship between the share of vote for Social Democrats and income inequality net of their municipal means. Consistent with the other figures, we see that the association between vote shares for the Social Democrats and income inequality at the precinct level become significantly steeper across each subsequent election. For instance, in 2006 the correlation coefficient was XX, compared to YY for the 2010 election.

Thus far, the graphical evidence suggests that the abrupt rise in support for the Social Democrats seems to coincide with the increase in income inequality between the core and non-core segments of the labor force following the fiscal reforms. There exists, however, other explanations for the rise of the Sweden Democrats that could also correlated with increases in income inequality. One alternative hypothesis has to do with the anti-immigrant backlash that has become one of the rallying cries for the leaders of the party. In addition, a series of wars during the 2000s have led to high inflows of political referees from such countries as Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Syria. If immigrants are locating in municipalities with a high share of non-core individuals, then we might observe a spurious correlation between support for the Social Democrats and income inequality. In Figure 5, we reproduce Figure 3 using the share of non-nordic immigrants. In the aggregate, the share of immigrants has been growing relative steady over time without the pronounced trend break that we observed in SD vote shares of income inequality (panel A). Also, when we examine changes over time across municipalities, we see if anything a positive correlation between immigrant growth and SD growth (panel B).

4Because the boundaries of electoral precincts change over time, we are not able to compute changes in vote share or income inequality.
An alternative explanation for the rise of the Sweden Democrats has to do with the disappearance of jobs in sectors with high routine task content. Based on data from exit polls, Erlingsson et al. (2014) find that the Sweden Democrats have the largest share of blue-collar workers and unemployed amongst their voters. In panel A of Figure 6, we do see that high RTI jobs have been losing ground over time in Sweden. But the drop in high RTI jobs between 2004 and 2012 has been relatively small (2 pc points), and in panel B, we do not see a strong correlation across municipalities between changes in support for Social Democrats and changes in the share of high RTI among the Core.

We refine the analysis further by testing whether the association between SD vote shares and core versus non-core income inequality is robust to controlling for these various confounds. Specifically, we estimate variants of the following regression model

\[ \text{vs}_{mt} = \beta I_{mt} + \delta_t + \gamma_m + X_{mt}'\alpha + \epsilon_{mt}, \]

where \( \text{vs}_{mt} \) denotes the share votes the Sweden Democrats received in municipality \( m \) during the parliamentary election in year \( t \). Our measure of income inequality, \( I_{mt} \), is again the ratio of disposable income of the core to non-core multiplied by the share of non-core in the municipality. \( \delta_t \) and \( \gamma_m \) denote time and municipal fixed effects, and \( X_{mt} \) denotes a vector of municipal controls, such as the share of immigrants or high RTI jobs among the core. The error term, \( \epsilon_{mt} \), is clustered across municipalities. Our estimation sample includes all 290 municipalities across the four election years from 2002-2014.

In Table 1, we present the results from estimating Equation 2. Column 1 reports the results of a parsimonious OLS regression that only controls for time fixed effects. The coefficient on our inequality measure is sizeable and precisely estimated. It implies that at a one standard deviation increase in income inequality is associated with a XX percentage point increase in vote shares for the Social Democrats. The inclusion of municipal fixed effects only strengthens the correlation as the coefficient increase by 68 percent. In column 3, we add to the specification estimated in column 2 controls for share of immigrants and share of high RTI jobs among the core in the municipality. The coefficient on inequality remains robust, and the coefficients on the share of immigrants or high RTI jobs is either statistically insignificant or the wrong expected sign. For instance, we find high immigrant shares are negatively correlated with support for the Social Democrats.

5 Adjustments in political supply: Sweden Democrats and evolving political representation

The last section characterizes a bifurcation of fortunes among Swedish citizens, which was associated to a change in political demands. In this section we characterize a matching bifurcation in the type of politicians that constitute the supply side of politics.

Before reviewing the evidence, it is convenient to lay out ways in which the political system could respond to a widening income gap like the one seen in Sweden after 2006. One way in which the political system could respond is by (i) having the established parties offer
adjusted platforms. This is the way in which those familiar with Downsian politics models would expect the system to respond. But if parties have difficulty to adjust their platforms, be it for a need to protect a reputation, due to credibility limitations, or ideological inflexibility, a different response would emerge. We may see (ii) more ideologically flexible politicians migrating to a newly branded party from which adjusted platforms could be offered, (iii) having a newly branded party emerge by additional politicians forming one, who are recruited from the same social backgrounds as incumbent politicians, or (iv) have a newer party rise which channels individuals of a different social extraction - one closer to the demand side that holds the grievance.

5.1 The social extraction of politicians: attachment to the labor force

5.1.1 Aggregate

To determine which of these types of adjustment occurred, we start by investigating the social extraction of politicians, by reference to the categories that were differentially affected by the 2006 reforms. We then ask whether the Sweden Democrat politicians differ from the rest. In Figure 7 we break down the labor market situation of the population (in 2014?) and also that of politicians. We classify individuals into three broad categories: those in the core labor force, those in the non-core, and students. 56% of the population is in the core, and almost 34% in the non-core. The average party in Sweden (excluding the Sweden Democrats) has over 73% of politicians hailing from the core and less than 19% from the non-core. That means there are roughly 15 percentage points of non-core people who are present in the population but not “mapped” one to one into politics. This is compatible with a picture of positive selection into politics, whereby politicians tend to be higher achieving members of society, which includes more stable and better paid jobs. The flipside is, politicians do not exactly “look” like citizens in terms of their labor market fortunes.

[Figure 7 HERE: Own background: SD politicians vs rest - simplified stacked bars - core vs non-core vs students]

Things are different with Sweden Democrat politicians. As is clear in Figure 7, among Sweden Democrats the share of politicians in the core is almost exactly the same as in the population, around 56%, and they over-represent the non-core with a share over 37%, which is much larger than for other parties and even slightly larger than the population. In other words, the SD politicians look almost the same as the population –if anything they seem to over-represent the lower achieving segments–, unlike all other parties, including the Left party.

We now offer a more detailed look at the representation of non-core groups among the Sweden Democrat politicians. We ask how likely it is that such representation is tied to the worsening fortunes of those groups. To investigate this, we regress the labor market category $L_{i,m,t}^c$ of each politician $i$ in municipality $m$ at time $t$ on a dummy for whether the politician belongs in the Sweden Democrats, as well as municipality-time effects, as expressed in the following equation:
\[ C_{i,m,t} = \beta^C S_{D_{i,m,t}} + \phi_{m,t} + \epsilon_{m,t} \]

The coefficient of interest \( \beta^C \) captures the share of Sweden Democrat politicians in category \( C \) relative to other parties. In this regression, we separate the various non-core categories, and perform the estimation with and without controls for age, education and sex. The Sweden Democrats, as can be expected from Figure 7, over-represent non-core categories relative to other parties. But in addition, we can plot the regression coefficients \( \beta^C \) against the income loss of each one of the non-core groups. This is reflected in Figure 8.

[Figure 8 HERE: SD over-representation of various non-core categories (slide 36 in presentation)]

The figure ranks non-core categories from left to right according to their loss of income relative to the core. The dots represent the regression coefficient \( \beta^C \) with and without controls. The figure suggests that, relative to other parties, SD are differentially representative of those non-core categories that have suffered the larger losses relative to core income. This suggests that the link between the Sweden Democrat politicians and the non-core population goes beyond a broad association. When looking within the non-core, the link strengthens as we focus on the more vulnerable groups. (As it can be appreciated, the results are robust to controls for key demographics.) This is yet another hint at the fact that the economic grievances stemming from the 2006 reform are a factor in the mobilization of individuals who become Sweden Democrat politicians.

The patterns in Figures 7 and 8 indicate that the political system adjusted to the shock in a specific way, namely by having a new, non-mainstream party make important vote share gains, and grow its ranks with individuals that share their labor market situation with those most affected by the shock. In this respect, the political supply of politicians changed to more closely match the profile of the demand side, namely voters, along the dimension made salient by the shock. The fact that this important change occurred indicates that purely Downsian adjustments in platform choice by established parties could not fully absorb the shock. One possibility might be that established parties, lacking personnel who sufficiently resembles the aggrieved voters, could not credibly offer a platform response.

One criticism to the patterns in Figures 7 and 8 is that they may be driven by just the rank and file. It could be the case that the leadership of the Sweden Democrat party is just as different from the population as all other politicians. We explore this possibility in Figure 9, which shows that, when broken down between party leaders and rank and file, the patterns remain.

[Figure 9 HERE: Are leaders different? (slide 39 - replicate but using non-core, and maybe RTI high, as opposed to RTI low vs high, and replace ”other parties” for rightmost column now featuring the Left party)]

5.1.2 Municipal variation

The aggregate findings reflect intuitive variation in the cross-section of Swedish municipalities. In Table 2 we explore the prevalence of Sweden Democrat politicians as a function of our measure of inequality between core and non-core.
Specifically, we estimate variants of the following regression model

$$SD^i_{mt} = \beta I_{mt} + \delta_t + \gamma_{m,t} + \mathbf{X}'_{m,t}\alpha + \epsilon_{mt}, \quad (2)$$

where $SD^i_{mt}, i = 1, 2, 3$ denotes a different measure of prevalence of Sweden Democrat politicians in the respective columns 1, 2, and 3 of the Table, in municipality $m$ during the election year $t$. Our measure of income inequality, $I_{mt}$, is again the ratio of disposable income of the core to non-core multiplied by the share of non-core in the municipality. $\delta_t$ and $\gamma_{m,t}$ denote time and municipal fixed effects, and $\mathbf{X}_{m,t}$ denotes a vector of municipal controls, such as the share of immigrants or high RTI jobs among the core. As before, the error term, $\epsilon_{mt}$, is clustered across municipalities, and the estimation sample includes all 290 municipalities across the four election years from 2002-2014.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td># of SD candidates/council size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td># non-core SD candidates/council size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td># non-core SD candidates/# SD candidates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If we only include ‘Share core with high RTI’ as a control, we don’t need cols 4-5]

In the first column of the table, the dependent variable $SD^1_{mt}$ is the absolute number of Sweden Democrat candidates in the municipality divided by the size of the corresponding municipal city council. This is meant to capture a measure of overall Sweden Democrat political supply in a municipality. In the second column, the dependent variable $SD^2_{mt}$ is the number of Sweden Democrat candidates in a municipality who belong in the non-core divided by the size of the municipal city council, and in the third column the dependent variable $SD^3_{mt}$ is the number of non-core Sweden Democrat candidates in the municipality divided by the total number of Sweden Democrat candidates in that municipality. As the definitions of these dependent variables make clear, parties do not need to field a number of candidates equal to the size of the municipal council. We take the variation in the length of the list as a proxy of the supply of candidates by the Sweden Democrats, and changes in the composition of their lists as a proxy for the composition of their supply.

Column 1 shows that there is a larger increase in the presence of Sweden Democrat candidates (relative to city council size) in municipalities that see larger increases in inequality. It could well be that although in aggregate Sweden Democrats include more non-core candidates, in municipalities where inequality grows, the extra candidates tend to be recruited from core occupations. However, Column 2 shows that is not true - in fact, the growth in Sweden Democrat candidates is driven by an increase in the number of non-core candidates (always relative to the size of the municipal city council). Lastly, one might surmise that although the number of non-core candidates among Sweden Democrats becomes larger in more unequal municipalities, it is still the case that in relative terms the Sweden Democrat party lists become less pro-non-core in terms of shares. This could be the case if core candidates grew faster than the non-core. Again this is rejected by the data, as reflected in column 3. In
sum, more unequal municipalities in the period 2002-2014 have seen more Sweden Democrat candidates, more of them hailing from the non-core, and constituting a larger share of the political supply put out by the Sweden Democrat party.

5.2 The social extraction of politicians: personal and parental income

The analysis thus far has focused on one aspect of the background of politicians, namely their position in the labor market. An additional perspective is possible in terms of the income of these individuals (measured before they access public office if they eventually do so). There are at least two incomes that could be relevant to an individual. One is the personal income generated by the individual, which may reflect her own luck and talents. The other is parental income, which likely shaped some of the well-being and opportunities enjoyed by the person while growing up. While the first measure offers a partially informative picture of the person’s own achievements, the second speaks to the person’s social origins.

In the top panel of Figure 11 we compare the income distribution of Sweden Democrat politicians against the rest of politicians. Given the x-axis measures percentiles, the corresponding distribution for the entire population would be uniform at 1%. It can be appreciated that politicians from all other parties tend to be high earners, as the distribution of their income is skewed to the right. This is true even for politicians in the Left party, and it matches the earlier finding in Figure 7 that typical politicians are more likely to come from the core labor force relative to the average Swede. It also matches findings reported in our earlier work (Dal Bó, Finan, Folke, Persson and Rickne 2017) on the high earnings of politicians. The top panel of Figure 11 also shows that the income distribution of the Sweden Democrat politicians is skewed to the left as opposed to the right, indicating they have earnings below the population average. This is not entirely surprising since the labor market participation of Sweden Democrats is less robust as evidenced by the high share of them in the non-core, but it establishes a stark contrast with the rest of the political class. While the typical politician earns substantially more than the average Swede, the typical Sweden Democrat politician earns less.

It is conceivable that these earnings differentials across politicians are driven by parental background. Perhaps typical politicians come from high-earning homes, while Sweden Democrat politicians come from disproportionately low-earning homes. The bottom panel of Figure 11 shows this is not the case. Typical politicians have a distribution of income among their parents that resembles the uniform distribution for the population (those in the non-Left have a slight uptick in the very top 5% tier, but those in the Left have a bit less mass there). The Sweden Democrats have fathers with incomes that are also close to the population, albeit with a slight skewness to the left. In other words, typical politicians do not come from money, but rather they make their own, and while the fathers of the Sweden Democrats are slightly poorer on average, Sweden Democrat politicians trail the population by much more than their fathers did. In other words, the labor market and earnings achievements of politicians –both in the positive and in the negative direction– do not appear to reflect inter-generational fortunes but within-generation shocks.
The analysis of the labor market and income performance of politicians suggests that Sweden Democrat politicians provide descriptive representation of segments of the population that saw their relative fortunes start trailing after 2006. This could reflect important advantages of democracy as it is practiced in Sweden, for example a flexibility of the system to allow for political entry of new parties, and even the entry of new types of politicians that look socially very different from the incumbent ones. At a time where a particular social sector has a grievance, observing an adjustment in descriptive representation may allow for redressing the grievances, and lend the entire democratic system legitimacy. However, the growth of the Sweden Democrat has been deemed a worrying phenomenon by those who consider far-right ideology troubling. Beyond the potential costs of allowing for far-right agendas to gain traction, it is worth asking whether the gains in descriptive representation could pose costs in terms of other dimensions of political selection.

5.3 Is there a tradeoff?

There are several individual characteristics that voters could value in politicians. In positive political theory analysis, these are usually grouped under the umbrella term “valence.” One important feature, which is typically crucial in most personnel recruitment decisions, is experience. When it comes to a political job, two forms of relevant experience could be earlier experience as a politician, or earlier experience as a public sector employee.

In Panel A of Table 3 we separate the cohort elected in each election year from 2002 to 2014, and detail for each party the percentage of elected municipal politicians who had been elected before. Those elected before we will call “experienced,” as opposed to the newly elected, whom we call “inexperienced.” Since the Sweden Democrat party is new, one might argue that a comparison in 2002 or 2006 is bound to show their politicians as inexperienced. But even when focusing attention on later years, the typical (i.e., non-Sweden Democrat) party cohort that is elected never contains less than 43% of experienced politicians, with the main parties (Social Democrats, Conservatives, and Center) typically containing well over 50, 60, and even 70% of experienced politicians. The Sweden Democrats, in contrast, see their highest share of experienced politicians at 22% in 2014.

One interpretation is that the low rates of experienced politicians among the Sweden Democrats reflect their being a new party at first, and a growing party later. But new brand and growth do not have to bring inexperience with them: the Sweden Democrat party could recruit experienced politicians who realign themselves into a new party when it becomes available and it looks like there is a social demand for it. The data in Table 3 disproves this has taken place, indicating Sweden Democrats engaged instead in de novo recruitment. While this may, as argued above, have advantages in terms or adjusting descriptive representation, it does have implications for the experience pool that is brought to bear to political office.

Panel B of Table 3 reports data on an alternative measure of experience, namely public employment, and confirms the patterns observed with previous political office. If we take
year 2014, while the typical elected party cohort contains 43% of politicians with previous municipal employment (in terms of the cross-party unweighted average), only 14% of Sweden Democrats have such experience. If we focus on total public sector employment we see that 60% of politicians in typical parties have such experience, while only 23% of Sweden Democrats do.

[Figure 12: Table 3 HERE - Public sector experience: Political + public sector Note: it would be great to state that this comparison holds when controlling for age]

An alternative, but also important, measure when it comes to political selection is educational attainment. This measure is not without its problems. For example, it may reflect parental background and opportunities and not just individual skills. While this caveat is important, two observations are worth making. One, as seen in Figure 11, Sweden Democrats are not seen to have substantially worse parental backgrounds than other politicians. Two, educational attainment could be important to the extent that education helps develop habits and skills that make individuals more productive as politicians. These observations justify analyzing variation in educational attainment across politicians.

In Figure 13 we report the rates of tertiary education attainment across parties for the elected cohorts in the 2002-2014 period. These rates vary markedly, and the relative ranking across parties is remarkably stable. The Green party has the highest rate, approaching almost 80% by 2014. Conservatives are below, but never under 60%. Social Democrats start in 2002 in the mid 30's, but surpass 40% by 2014. The Sweden Democrats have the lowest rate of tertiary education attainment, typically around the mid-20% range.

[Figure 13 HERE: Tertiary education Note: is data in figure among candidates, or elected pols?]

5.4 Why did not the Left capitalize?

Our analysis in 4 related the rise of the Sweden Democrat party to an increase in inequality between different segments of the population. We can trace that increase in inequality to a specific policy shock that sought to limit moral hazard and incentivize work. One might think that a political beneficiary of such developments could have been the Left party. This party is ideologically opposed to the policy lying at the start of the process, and as a traditional leftist party, it would typically adopt the cause of the economically disadvantaged. But the Left party reaped no discernible political benefit; instead, the far-right party did - a party which is not in clear opposition to the policy that, arguably, caused the grievances at play.

We do not intend to fully explain why political benefits accrued in what appears to be a surprising direction. What is clear is that the Left, theoretically better positioned to be the vehicle through which the aggrieved could mobilize their demands, did not become that vehicle. In light of the findings in this section, the Sweden Democrats appear to have one distinguishing mark: they offered a descriptive representation of those who were losing out. But is that feature a strong differentiating factor relative to the Left?

In figure 14 we reproduce our Figure 8 in Panel A, and in Panel B we offer a replica of it for the Left party. The figure makes clear that while the Sweden Democrats over-represent various non-core categories, the Left party does not.
In a world where party platforms are credible regardless of who announces them, the Left could conceivably compete with the Sweden Democrats in addressing the grievances of the non-core. In fact, given their historical policy positions, they could be even unbeatable at doing so. But if descriptive representation is important for becoming the successful supply response to a political demand, then the Left did not have the right type of politicians to offer a successful response.

6 Conclusion

We investigate the rise of a radical-right political party in Sweden which went from being a marginal presence in 2002 to the third most voted party in 2014. To be sure, naturally occurring shocks may temporarily shift politics toward extremes but eventually pass. Still, two factors suggest that it is valuable to study the rise of extremist parties. One factor is that even if those parties reach power due to temporary circumstances, they could have persistent effects on citizens via policy. This could occur both due to these parties’ ideological stance, and through their impact on the pool of policy expertise that is brought to bear on public affairs. Another factor is that parties espousing illiberal values are, by definition, inimical to the liberal democracies that facilitate their emergence. While healthy democratic systems ought to be flexible and permit political entry, concerns arise that some forms of entry could have destabilizing effects. Illiberal entry is concerning because it implies that democracies may on occasion fail to display the homeostatic properties that are necessary for long-term regime survival.

In this paper we situate the rapid rise of the radical-right Sweden Democrat party as reflecting an interplay between political demand and supply, with the main focus of our analysis linking the rise of the Sweden Democrats to a change in the type of politicians who are in supply. Arguably, a shift in demand occurred following a rapidly unfolding set of policies around the year 2006. These policies aimed to reduce the reach of the long-standing social safety net in place in Sweden. The ostensible objective was to make social benefits such as unemployment insurance less generous in a way that would incentivize individuals to seek a more sustained attachment in the labor market. The apparent result was a widening income gap between those stably employed and those in more vulnerable situations, such as the sick, the unstably employed, or the unemployed.

The resulting inequality appears to have had political effects. Not only does the nationwide growth of the Sweden Democrats track the opening income gap, but the cross-sectional municipal patterns of their growth are explained by the relative levels of inequality following the policy innovations in 2006. These patterns suggest that the Swedish democratic system displayed a specific political response to policy and economic developments that had likely reconfigured the expectations and demands of a substantial segment of the citizenry. The
response registered in supply side of the political system entailed a form of entry, at least in an intensive margin sense, as a previously negligible party became the third largest.

On the surface, the rise of the Sweden Democrats represents an increase in representation of radical-right ideas. But the rise of this party entails other changes in the supply of representation. The established parties that lost ground to the Sweden Democrats recruit politicians who are high earners and relatively successful in the labor market (those in the core), and under-represent the vulnerable segments that were hardest hit by the 2006 reforms (those in the non-core). Unlike the existing parties, the Sweden Democrat politicians closely resemble the distribution of labor market fortunes of the population. In fact, the Sweden Democrats over-representation of sub-populations within the non-core grows as the income gap relative to the core grows.

It may be counterintuitive that the Left party, perhaps the most pro-redistribution party, and also ideologically opposed to the reforms, did not become the vehicle through which citizen dissatisfaction was expressed. One limitation for that party to credibly take that role may be the fact that its politicians, like those of other mainstream parties, do not look like the aggrieved population.

These facts suggest that descriptive representation may be a component of credible representation, and that simply announcing different platforms, as parties do in standard Down-sian models, would not have been enough for mainstream parties to pre-empt the rise of the Sweden Democrats. The importance of politician “types” for representation suggests that a citizen-candidate model of politics may be better suited to rationalize the facts. However, that type of model does not readily explain why mainstream parties would not simply change the type of politicians that they recruit to lend credibility to their new platform announcements. Party labels and reputations seem to matter as well, separately from the credibility and incentives of individual politicians.

The rapid rise of a political party from fringe to massive phenomenon suggests that Swedish democracy is flexible and responsive. This may bode well for its legitimacy in the eyes of citizens. But the ascent of Swedish Democrats not only made the political class more similar to the population in terms of labor extraction. It also made it more similar to the population in terms of lower policy expertise. This suggests that the rise of extreme parties at times when descriptive representation is important may tighten tradeoffs inherent in political selection.
7 Figures
8 Appendix
Figures and tables

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 2. SD Parliamentary vote share and national growth income (LHS) and municipal growth in vote shares and inequality (RHS)

Notes: Each bin contains 5 observations in the right-hand graph.
Figure 4

Panels A-C

Figure 5

Figure 6

Notes: Each bin contains 5 observations in the right-hand graph.
Table 1 (in this and other tables we would like to show the highlighted columns only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vote Share OLS (1)</th>
<th>Inequality First Stage (3)</th>
<th>Vote Share Red. Form (4)</th>
<th>Vote Share 2SLS (5)</th>
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<td>-0.13*** (0.03)</td>
<td>-0.19*** (0.06)</td>
<td>2.95*** (0.87)</td>
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<tr>
<td>D2002*ShareNoncore2006</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D2010*ShareNoncore2006</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>D2014*ShareNoncore2006</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Municipality f.e.</td>
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<td></td>
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Then supplement these three columns with further time-varying controls (e.g., demographics) to show robustness

Figure 7
Figure 8

Figure 9 (slide 39 – replicate what appears below but using core vs non-core instead of RTI low vs high, and substitute “other parties” for rightmost column now featuring the Left party)

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality Characteristics</th>
<th>Aggregate</th>
<th>Non-core</th>
<th>High RTI amongst employed core</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>absolute</td>
<td>absolute</td>
<td>share</td>
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<td>Inequality (α)</td>
<td>1.15**</td>
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<td>(0.47)</td>
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<td>Share immigrants</td>
<td>3.20***</td>
<td>1.01***</td>
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<td>(0.67)</td>
<td>(0.25)</td>
<td>(1.29)</td>
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<td>Share core with high RTI</td>
<td>-0.60</td>
<td>-0.32*</td>
<td>-3.83***</td>
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<td>(0.38)</td>
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Table 3 (panels A and B could conceivable be merged into one, perhaps we could exclude the reelection row in the first panel since we do not use that info currently)

Panel A: Previous elected office

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<th>SD</th>
<th>Conserv</th>
<th>Center</th>
<th>Liberal</th>
<th>Christian Dem</th>
<th>Greens</th>
<th>Social Dem</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>15</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>62</td>
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<td>64</td>
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<td>64</td>
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<td>48</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>62</td>
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<td>60</td>
<td>72</td>
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<td>67</td>
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<td>53</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014prev elec</td>
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<td>63</td>
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<td>69</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>57</td>
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Panel B – Previous public employment

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Conserv</th>
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Figure 11

Figure 12

Panel A: reproduction of Figure 8; and Panel B is replica of it for the Left