



## Nothing to Fear but Fear Itself? Swedish Case Study

- New research from FORES (Sweden), as part of a Demos (UK) cross-European project, reveals a strong link between Swedish citizens' views on immigration and party affiliation, and exclusionary, ethnic conceptions of national identity.
- Sweden Democrat (nationalist party) voters are more than twice as likely to hold ethnic conceptions of national identity compared with supporters of other parties, and those who hold these views are also more likely to also express anti-immigrant attitudes.
- The study, which mapped political rhetoric in Sweden, showed other leaders are also now adopting nationalist language previously the domain of the Sweden Democrats.

New research conducted by FORES (Sweden) for a cross-European project on fear and populism in Europe led by Demos (UK), shows Swedish political discourse is increasingly influenced by exclusionary ideas of national identity.

New analysis of Swedish media shows a stark increase in conversations about "Swedish values". Mentions of "integration", "immigration" and "Swedish culture" also saw a large increase in 2015 and 2016, during the height of the European migration crisis.

The research also studied recent speeches of political leaders, and found that exclusionary notions of national identity (emphasising the cultural nature of identity) are becoming increasingly prevalent - not just in those of Jimmie Åkesson, leader of the nationalist Sweden Democrats, but also in the speeches of Anna Kinberg-Batra, leader of the Moderate party, and Ebba Busch-Thor, leader of the Christian Democrats.

While Åkesson's rhetoric was the most explicitly anti-immigration, the leaders of the Moderate and Christian Democrats parties were increasingly positioning immigration as a threat to Swedish cultural values, such as gender equality and work ethic.

This research was complemented by new polling of Swedish citizens, which shows that Sweden Democrats supporters are more than twice as likely to be attached to the ethnic dimension of national identity. However, the survey also found that Swedes of all political affiliations display a very strong sense of *civic* national identity.

With its strong tradition of social liberalism, Sweden has long been seen as the exception to the trend of growing support for populist anti-immigration parties in Europe. This changed with the 2010 elections, when the Sweden Democrats (SD) gained enough electoral support to enter the Swedish Parliament.

More recently, the European migration crisis in 2015–16 has seen the Government take a restrictive turn on its traditionally generous asylum policy, as national debates about identity and culture reached a fever pitch. This Swedish case study looked in detail at this changing political discourse, focusing on the role of national identity in shaping attitudes and narratives about immigration in Sweden.

**Speaking about the findings, Clara Sandelind, Fellow at the University of Sheffield and author of this case study, said:**

"Talking about identity may not trigger negative attitudes to immigration, but what matters is how politicians talk about identity. Exclusionary ethnic and cultural national identities are often masquerading as more inclusive civic identities, as politicians link civic values to the majority culture."

#### **Media Contact**

Alex Porter, Demos

[alex.porter@demos.co.uk](mailto:alex.porter@demos.co.uk)

Ph. +44 20 7367 4200

Mob. +44 7969 326 069

Agnes Bondelid, Fores (Sweden)

[agnes.bondelid@fores.se](mailto:agnes.bondelid@fores.se)

#### **Notes to Editors**

Demos is Britain's leading cross-party think tank: an independent, educational charity, which produces original and innovative research. Visit: [demos.co.uk](http://demos.co.uk)

Fores – Forum for Reforms, Entrepreneurship and Sustainability – is a leading Swedish think tank, foundation and non-profit NGO. For more information, please visit: <http://fores.se/about-fores/> or contact [agnes.bondelid@fores.se](mailto:agnes.bondelid@fores.se).

This project was supported by the Open Societies Foundation.

The full research, methodology and an executive summary are available to download [here](#).

This study was part of a major pan-European research project from the UK-based think tank, Demos, which sought to capture how an emerging culture and politics of fear is gripping the European Union as a whole, and its unique manifestations within member states. The project addressed five levels of impacts: party politics, public policy, social cohesion and integration, media rhetoric, citizens and identity.

Demos undertook extensive pan-European research, as well as conducting specific analysis on the United Kingdom's vote to leave the European Union, and commissioned exclusive new academic research within five other member states to provide a snapshot of the 'flash-points of fear' on the ground in Germany, France, Spain, Poland and Sweden. The project was supported by two high-level workshops in Brussels, bringing together thought leaders from across the European Union, to map local level impacts and devise solutions at EU, national and grassroots levels.