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Sister parties no more:

Explaining the refugee policy divergence of the Swedish and Danish Social Democratic parties

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Abstract

The Social Democratic parties of Sweden and Denmark share many things, operating in countries with shared history and culture. However, one thing not shared is refugee policy. This working paper seeks to understand why the Social Democratic parties of Sweden and Denmark have developed such different refugee policies despite their many similarities. While the gradual developments of both parties in opposite policy directions can be seen to take place over time, existing literature proposes several different explanations to what has caused this divergence. As such, this research aims at filling a gap in existing literature by gathering central explanations, assessing and reviewing their relative influence on policy divergence. This is done by exploring key changes in policy using three different hypotheses, all presenting a potential causal factor and mechanism for divergence. These three factors are party politics, leadership, and refugee inflow level. They are extracted from three strands of existing literature, namely from comparative politics of asylum in Scandinavia, comparative politics of asylum in general, as well as from the literature on comparative politics of Scandinavian social democratic parties. Examining key policy changes using categorization of factors based on causal role played, this research seeks to understand how divergence has emerged as a result of the chosen three factors. The resulting argument is that all extracted factors have played a part in policy *change*, but that the party-political factor constitutes the core explanation for policy *divergence*, even if the leadership factor has also contributed. The last factor, refugee inflow, is argued to not be causal for divergence.

1 Introduction

In 2022, Denmark's refugee policy can be characterised as one of the strictest in Europe, with policies proposing zero asylum seekers arriving to the country, external processing in third countries, as well as confiscation of asylum seekers' valuables upon arrival to cover the cost of their stay (Chatham House, 2021). Neighbouring Sweden, on the other hand, has until recently upheld a very different approach, welcoming more than 160,000 asylum seekers in 2015, remaining largely open during a period when most other European states closed their borders to refugees (Foreign Policy, 2021). Interestingly, both countries have until recently been led by their respective Social Democratic parties. The Social Democratic parties of Sweden and Denmark have many things in common, emerging as the dominant political force in their respective country in the early 20th century, creating two of the most generous welfare systems in the world, and recognising a shared culture (Brochmann, 2021, p. 199). Originally experiencing immigration mainly for economic reasons and at low levels in the early Twentieth Century, both countries received growing numbers of refugees in the decades following the Second World War, initially adopting common policies (ibid.). Since the 1980s, however, a policy divergence has taken place, in which the Danish Social Democratic Party has become a fervent advocate for tighter border restrictions and immigration control, leaning on any party on the political spectrum to achieve policy goals, while the Swedish Social Democratic Party has taken the opposite approach, leading the parties in the Swedish Parliament that are opposed to any collaboration or association with the country's anti-immigration party.

Consequently, there today exists a clear difference in refugee policy as well as discourse between the two Social Democratic parties, despite both sides continuously referring to each other as ‘sister parties’ (Dagens Nyheter, 2021). Existing scholarship on Scandinavian asylum policy suggests many different explanations underlying policy divergence. Rarely, however, has there been a systematic attempt to apply comparative methods to understand that divergence. That is why this research aims at filling a gap in existing literature by gathering central factors for policy change, assessing and reviewing their influence on policy divergence. Thus, this paper seeks to explore the following question:

What explains the refugee policy divergence between the Swedish and Danish Social Democratic parties?

This question is of importance not only as it sheds light on the factors that shape asylum policy, but it also has broader implications for understanding how contrasting asylum policies can sometimes emerge in seemingly similar political environments over time. The comparison therefore has the potential to challenge the view that political systems and ruling parties play a determining role in asylum policy. It offers the chance to contest the view that asylum policies are shaped in structurally deterministic ways and instead sheds light on the role of contingency, agency, and leadership in refugee policy.

Literature review

This paper aims to contribute to research on the comparative politics of refugee policy within liberal democratic states. Reflecting this, three different strands of literature offer a starting point for identifying competing explanations for refugee policy change in the case of the Social Democratic parties in Denmark and Sweden: 1) literature on the comparative politics of asylum in Scandinavia; 2) research on the comparative politics of asylum in general; 3) work on the comparative politics of Scandinavian social democratic parties.

First, the literature on the comparative politics of asylum in Scandinavia offers many leads and potential reasons explaining the divergence in policy between the two parties, having originally been largely similar, only to diverge in the 1980s, as claimed by scholars like Grete Brochmann (2021, p. 195). She presents a history implying that an earlier influence of anti-immigration parties in Denmark, causing a politicisation of refugees and other immigrants, led to internal conflict within the Danish Social Democratic Party, in which the strict side took precedence and decided to follow the anti-immigrant notions of its opposition parties (ibid, pp. 199-301). Opposingly, the hegemonic position of the Social Democrats in Sweden meant that it had few incentives to adapt to anti-immigration forces or even politicise the issue of immigration (ibid.). However, the Swedish Social Democrats eventually lost government to a liberal coalition which called for more open immigration policies in general, causing a reaction of anti-immigration sentiment, which the Swedish Social Democrats have had to consider ever since, first inheriting the liberal policy when returning to government, only to impose restrictions following the crisis of 2015 (ibid.). Consequently, Brochmann builds a theory that policy divergence can be explained by the fact that the two Social Democratic parties have engaged with their surrounding political playfields to different extents. The weaker position of the Danish Social Democratic Party, as compared to the Swedish one, would then explain why the former party seems to have been more prone to adapt to another policy than the one originally held by both parties.

Second, this argument can also be found in the literature on the comparative politics of social democratic parties in Scandinavia, where scholars like Green-Pedersen and Odmark (2008, p. 368) support the theory of party politics as the dominant factor for policy divergence due to a weaker Social Democratic Party in Denmark as compared to Sweden. Similarly, Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup (2008, p. 611) argue that party competition generates policy change, with the Danish Social Democrats being more prone to this change because of their weaker position. However, scholar Michael Baggesen Klitgaard (2007, p. 175) goes to the root of dominance and argues that the influence of the Social Democratic parties is built on their creation of the welfare state, through which they have reshaped political institutions to be more likely to stay in power themselves. A more extensive reshaping would thus give the Swedish Social Democrats an advantage over their Danish sister party.

Third, literature on comparative politics of asylum broadly supports these arguments as well, with scholars like Peter Hall (1993, p. 288) proposing party politics to play an important role in policy change. This strand also contains many further suggestions, with scholars like d'Appollonia (2017, p. 252) mentioning safeguarding of culture and norms as an important driver of policy change, and others proposing public opinion as a contributing factor (Lahav, 2004, p. 30; Cornelius et al. 1994), relating back to the other strands proposing that the Social Democrats have adapted to voters by engaging with policies of other parties. Scholar Christian Joppke (1999, p. 110) argues that asylum policy is built on a balance between the two principles of human rights protection and popular sovereignty, which have become increasingly conflicting. Similarly, Gibney (2014) contends that asylum policy is decided based on a tug-war between courts and politicians, with the former representing asylum seekers and the latter representing public will. Following such a notion, policy change would then be explained by a sway in this balance, caused by a change in strength of either principle. Such a change could take place through increased demands by the public for their representatives to impose restrictionism, if the former views immigrants as a threat, be it for cultural, economic, or security reasons (d'Appollonia, 2017, p. 252). As parties seek to represent the electorate, a failure to respond to such demands may then lead to loss of voters.

However, continuing in the same strand, scholar Boswell (2003, pp. 619-624) argues that political consensus on an issue may completely exclude said matter from the political agenda and discourse, thus prohibiting the growth of certain issues as they remain undiscussed by representatives. Such an argument fits well with that of Sweden specifically, where the hegemonic position of the Social Democrats could be considered conducive to such 'consensus' when regarding asylum policy. Additionally, Boin et al. (2012, pp. 121-22) claim that parties in opposition use policy change as their utmost tool against a ruling government, developing a new policy to offer an alternative to a ruling government, thus making a party more conducive to change when it is in opposition compared to in government. This would make sense for the Danish Social Democratic Party, which has spent a longer time in opposition than its Swedish counterpart, and is the one to have moved away from the common starting point the most, as the coming chapters will show.

Consequently, there is much scholarship from all three strands of literature arguing that refugee policy change is a result of the Social Democratic parties interacting with, and adapting to, voters and other parties. Accordingly, a varying degree of interaction or adaptation between the two Social Democratic parties with their respective surroundings would explain why their asylum policies have diverged. From this analysis, a first hypothesis is derived:

H1: Different levels of engagement with party politics explain the divergence of Swedish and Danish Social Democratic parties on refugee policy

However, all three strands of literature contain further suggestions for change. Returning to the strand of literature on the comparative politics of asylum in Scandinavia, the argument of Brochmann (2021, p. 206) implying internal disputes within the Danish Social Democrats, in which one side took precedence, further generates a discussion of the importance of leadership, which she also includes in her work. Brochmann argues that when exploring the recent history of the Social Democratic parties in Sweden and Denmark, it becomes clear that different party leaders have made different impacts on policy (ibid.).

Similarly, the literature on the comparative politics of social democratic parties in Scandinavia suggests that leadership plays a part. Scholar Susi Meret (2021, p. 238) emphasises the importance of leadership when discussing recent changes in policy of the Danish Social Democrats, arguing that the leader since 2015, Mette Frederiksen, has taken a strict approach on refugee policy, refusing to compromise internally in the party. Meret further argues that Frederiksen is the key proponent for her party cooperating with the right-wing and anti-immigrant Danish People's Party (*Dansk Folkeparti*), enabling implementation of Social Democratic social policy, but with the immigration issue becoming further radicalised as the two parties compete for the voters that value this issue highly (ibid.). Moreover, Meret's mentioning of considerable internal dissatisfaction within the Danish Social Democratic Party regarding immigration broadly, and asylum specifically, hints at where the power to decide the policy expressed outwards lies, namely with the leader.

Furthermore, the strand of literature relating to comparative politics of asylum in general further substantiates the argument that leadership plays a role. Sabchev (2019; 2022) argues that leadership is essential in determining how a country will treat refugees seeking to enter. He mentions the case of Angela Merkel in Germany at the dawn of the migrant crisis in 2015, and how her role and determination to keep the country open to asylum seekers became a decisive factor in the German response to the crisis (Sabchev, 2019). This argument is also presented by Blume et al. (2016), as well as by Mayer (2016, p. 14), who calls the German openness a personal political project of Merkel, further saying that another leader may have set the country on a much different course. Sabchev (2022, p. 306) also mentions the case of Greece, arguing that the different local leaderships of Greek municipalities have resulted in widely different policies on the reception of refugees. Further, Tosun, Galanti, and Howlett (2022, p. 337) argue that policy change is often used as a strategic measure by leaders to improve their own policy performance. This is seconded by Lees-Marshment (2016, p. 167), who argues that even if leaders tend to monitor public opinion, they only use polls and similar as guidelines on how to present an already decided policy. This would mean that the direction of policy change is essentially decided by leaders rather than the public.

Scholarly literature of all three strands thus implies that leadership is influential for asylum policy changes in either direction. Consequently, leaders with different values or influence across the two parties would explain divergence. This leads to the second hypothesis:

H2: Different leadership of the respective Social Democratic parties has caused refugee policy divergence

However, another aspect can be identified in all three strands of literature, namely that of refugee inflow. In the strand of literature on the comparative politics of asylum in Scandinavia, authors like Anniken Hagelund (2020) argue that a considerable refugee inflow can be decisive for policy change, discussing the three Scandinavian countries during the migrant crisis of 2015 specifically. Hagelund means that the external shock caused by a sudden inflow led to policy change, but that the crisis was understood differently in the countries and that the resulting policy responses in the countries were not entirely of the same nature (Hagelund, 2020, p. 2).

Similarly, the literature on the comparative politics of social democratic parties in Scandinavia shows how refugee inflow matters to policy change. Meret (2021, p. 234) shows how anti-immigration sentiments in Denmark grew following the migrant crisis of 2015, bringing electoral growth to the far right and pushing asylum to the political forefront, inducing the Social Democrats to back both decisions on opt-outs from UN refugee quotas as well as the implementation of the infamous ‘jewellery law’. In a similar manner, the ruling Swedish Social Democrats implemented restrictive policy changes in 2015 when the country experienced a significant inflow of asylum seekers, breaking its own tradition of openness (Regeringskansliet, 2015). As such, there is reason to believe that a larger inflow than previously is conducive for policy change.

Comparably, in the literature concerning comparative politics of asylum in general, scholars like Schmidt and Radaelli (2004, p. 186) as well as Sagar (2003, p. 181) also argue that a sizeable refugee inflow is more likely to cause policy change, due to the financial and political implications it infers. Similarly, d’Appollonia (2017, p. 260) mentions how inflow increases concerns over security and economy, even if actual numbers are often vastly overestimated by both governments and media. That said, the importance of inflow levels on policy can be further substantiated by the arguments of scholars Thielemann and Dewan (2007, p. 4), who mean that smaller states are ‘free-riding’ on the commitments to humanitarianism that larger states have made. This would explain why Sweden and Denmark have experienced different levels of refugee inflow, as the former has a population twice the size of the latter, making it more likely to experience and take on a larger burden during international times of crisis according to the argument presented by the scholars (ibid.). Thus, combined with the earlier arguments of inflow as conducive for policy change, this provides for a third hypothesis:

H3: Different levels of refugee inflow to Sweden and Denmark have caused refugee policy divergence between the Swedish and Danish Social Democratic parties

Consequently, the literature review provides three central factors that are proposed to cause change. The centrality of these factors is assumed due to the presence of all three causal reasons in all three strands of literature. That said, they are by no means the only factors that affect policy change, but their centrality singles them out as appropriate focal points of this research. Nonetheless, existing scholarship presents several other influential factors that are worth mentioning. Some literature argues that a fundamental difference in national identities is key to understanding why the Danish and Swedish Social Democratic parties have adopted different refugee policies. Scholars like Brochmann (2021, p. 203) talk of Swedish identity as a humanitarian force since the Second World War, becoming more used to immigration in general and, as a larger country, being more familiar with multiculturalism than Denmark, but also deciding to pursue the establishment of a civic national identity, while Denmark remains primarily ethnic-focused. Moreover, Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup (2008, p. 611) talk about the importance of media and how it can both shape as well as include or exclude certain policy matters or

information, thus playing a part in the development of policy divergence between two states. Jacobsen (1996, p. 655) discusses divergence as also potentially stemming from different conclusions regarding costs versus benefits of welcoming asylum seekers, or because of different relationships with the refugee-expelling country in question. Finally, Schrover and Moloney (2013, p. 7) emphasise the importance of refugee inflow *type*, arguing that as the demographic makeup of inflows to two countries may differ, they will cause divergent policy developments.

As such, a gap in the literature can be found for what this research seeks to understand. First and foremost, most of the literature studied focuses on policy change rather than policy divergence. While divergence is always the result of change, change does not always have to result in divergence. This can be explained by the comparative nature of divergence, as two parties both developing their policy in a similar direction will have conducted change without having diverged from one another. The lack of research on divergence further reveals a gap in that few studies focus on policy divergence taking place in an otherwise similar context, such as with the Social Democratic parties of the similar Sweden and Denmark. This similarity provides for an isolation of differences, making them easier to detect and potentially apply to the study of less similar cases. Therefore, this research fits in with the broader general literature in that the findings in a study of Sweden and Denmark are applicable beyond these two countries.

Moreover, two more gaps can be identified by this literature review. First, while much literature seeks to understand the policy developments of the two Social Democratic parties on immigration as a whole, a focus on asylum policy specifically is largely missing. While often grouped together, immigration and asylum policy are not the same, and this research emphasizes its focus on the latter. Second, the studies of asylum policy that do exist are sparse in discussing relative importance of causal factors. While this literature review has clearly identified many factors, the influence of these factors compared to each other is absent, leaving this research with the aspiration to bring some clarity to the matter.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study seeking to assess and weigh three existing, competing explanations for asylum policy divergence against one another, evaluating their relative importance for refugee policy divergence between the Swedish and Danish Social Democrats. Thus, it is a study within the field of comparative politics, analysing a relationship between variables in two similar cases for theory-building purposes, providing insight regarding how refugee policy is made, but also exploring what causes policy divergence. This paper uses the terms refugee policy and asylum policy interchangeably, and when referring to refugees, such as when discussing refugee inflow, this also encompasses asylum seekers unless otherwise stated. This research is informed by the theory of policy change put forth in the literature review, which lists party politics, leadership, and refugee inflow as causal factors for refugee policy change, but ultimately seeks to develop this theory by focusing on policy divergence rather than policy change. From the literature review, the three independent variables are derived, and will be examined in the Scandinavian context where the dependent variable is refugee policy divergence.

The empirical research is primarily based on archival studies, drawing upon a body of primary and secondary sources, including newspapers, party manifestos, and existing scholarly literature, as well as government data on refugee inflow when discussing the final causal factor. The sources are selected differently for different time periods, with the first chapter (on the 1980s) relying heavily on previous scholarly work, primarily because the issue of refugees and asylum was not politicised

in the way it is today, with newspapers as well as party manifestos from the time containing hardly anything on the matter. However, as one progresses through time, newspapers and party documents are more readily available and can thus be relied on for a more direct analysis. While party manifestos present information that one can interpret accordingly, newspapers may contain a bias depending on political affiliation of the author or newspaper. This bias will be accounted for by only using larger mainstream newspapers in the two countries as well as internationally acclaimed news agencies as sources, preferably those viewed as being close to the political centre, as one can assume this positionality in combination with the large following as proof of a more impartial reporting than that conducted by smaller news sources on the ends of the political spectrum. Nevertheless, a risk of bias remains, which is why no single newspaper will be solely relied upon. Instead, facts on which the analysis is based will be built on news articles compared with, and complementing, each other and other sources.

As existing scholarship has already made known that party politics, party leaders, and refugee inflow influence policy change, this research seeks to assess whether these factors are relevant to the case at hand, and to what extent they have been conducive to divergence. This is why methods such as process-tracing or contribution analysis are not entirely sufficient for the research sought, as neither method can value the relative importance of causal factors against each other, which is what this research seeks to do (Beach and Brun Pedersen, 2013). That said, the theory of process-tracing as developed by Alexander George and Andrew Bennett (2005) does provide some help to the first step of analysis for this research. Process-tracing seeks to understand whether the independent variable is causal to the dependent variable, exploring causal mechanisms by identifying ways in which they are connected to an outcome, how they should act if present, and how they actually acted in the period studied (George and Bennett, 2005). Consequently, it helps the research in that it provides a framework for identifying the factors present, albeit without consideration for relative importance.

Nevertheless, it is this relative importance that is ultimately sought for this research, even if the determination of presence of factors is an important first step. By analysing the relative importance of factors during policy changes over time, one can not only establish a theory for change, but identify periods in which the respective parties promoted certain policies for certain reasons, as the causal factors may not be of continuous significance. The method for research is grounded on the desire to weigh relative importance, which has been developed by scholar John Mayne (2019, p. 5). He stresses the significance of giving meaning to the term ‘importance’, and this research will use one of his definitions, which is to value importance on a basis of *the role played* (ibid.). Mayne argues that the varying roles that a factor can play in causality must be assessed, listing triggering, supporting, facilitating, and accelerating as four such roles (ibid.). These four roles lie at the foundation for the comparison of this research, as a categorization of the three causal factors into either of these four roles will help to value their contribution to divergence. In essence, the use of Mayne’s theory makes this research a counterfactual analysis, as his four roles are ultimately more or less dependent on each other for implementation, with the triggering factor being of the most ultimate importance for a policy change to take place at all. Mahoney and Barrenechea (2019, p. 307) define counterfactual analysis as figuring out if event Y would not have taken place without event X happening in a setting where it is hypothesised that X caused Y in case Z. Following this definition, this research is thus a counterfactual analysis not only as it seeks to understand if some causal factors (X) trigger other causal factors (Y) to cause change, but also as it seeks to understand if all the studied causal factors (X) will have caused divergence (Y). Accordingly, the three hypotheses outlined in the literature review will be qualitatively tested by exploring their presence, role, and influence.

However, there remains a risk for omitted variable bias, as there will be other factors that are influencing policy divergence than the three factors stated in the hypotheses. Therefore, due to the limitations on the scope of this research, this paper is cognisant of the difficulty in drawing definitive conclusions, acknowledging that other factors such as media, national identity, refugee inflow type, and other domestic interests may have influenced divergence, thus motivating further research regarding such other causal factors.

The motivation for selecting the cases of the Social Democratic parties of Sweden and Denmark is based on a desire for in-depth knowledge regarding the divergence emerging in this very case, between not only two countries of great similarity, but also between two parties that share the same ideological roots, name, and even refer to each other as sister parties. Consequently, the choice to focus on the Social Democratic parties of these countries is not only grounded in the historical power position held by these parties, but by the fact that it furthers the similarity between the two cases, helping to identify the factors that matter in deciding refugee policy. As such, while providing an in-depth understanding for Scandinavian refugee policymaking, the research also contributes to wider literature on what shapes refugee policy.

Further, this research makes an original contribution for three more reasons. Firstly, it seeks to evaluate and give weight to factors that have merely been identified by other scholars, thus taking the analysis of asylum policy determinants one step further. Secondly, through the construction of its chapters, this research identifies and divides the time since the 1980s into three distinct policy periods regarding refugee policy, as causal factors can be said to have been more or less influential in some periods over others. As a result, this work is distinctive as it is not only comparative across countries, but also across time, which distinguishes it from other literature on comparative asylum. Thirdly, the incorporation of sources in Swedish and Danish into research written in English contributes to an increased accessibility of information and scholarship focusing on countries in which English is not the first language of research. Overall, this research seeks to establish an understanding for asylum policy divergence in a field where convergence is more commonly studied.

Argument and structure

This paper argues that the policy divergence between the social democratic parties of Sweden and Denmark can first and foremost be explained by the factor of party politics. In the periods studied, the Danish Social Democratic Party never had the same amount of influence as its Swedish counterpart, forcing the former to make more concessions and changes to its policy in order to remain appealing to the electorate. Hence, this research makes the argument that asylum policy divergence is mainly caused by party politics, including policy-shaping matters such as party size, but also further aspects such as whether the party in question sits in government or opposition, or what kind of parties it has to coexist with. Therefore, this argument extends beyond that of the scholars in the literature review as it considers party politics to matter not only because of a different level of party-political engagement between the Swedish and Danish Social Democrats, but also as the political playfields in which the two parties operate differ.

Furthermore, this paper acknowledges the importance of the leadership factor, especially following the change of the millennium, with leaders like Mette Frederiksen, openly admitting that there is internal conflict within her party about the policy she favours, but that she is determined to prevail (Meret, 2021, p. 238). However, while this paper shows that leadership can also be an important

factor, the party-political factor remains most significant throughout the periods studied, acting as a triggering factor for divergence in both periods that exhibit overall divergence. Thus, this is a call for a shift in scholarly focus when trying to understand asylum policymaking, as it is less about ideology and more about the arena in which policy is made.

	1980s	Early 21 st Century	Since 2015
Danish Social Democrats	<i>Party politics</i>	<i>Party politics, Leadership</i>	<i>Refugee inflow, Party politics, Leadership</i>
Swedish Social Democrats	<i>(No policy change)</i>	<i>Party politics, Leadership</i>	<i>Refugee inflow, Party politics</i>

Table 1. This table demonstrates the causal factors for asylum policy change of the two parties in the three different periods studied. The periods are marked in dark green or dark red, showing whether overall divergence (dark green) or convergence (dark red) took place. The causal factors in light green are conducive to divergence, the light red to convergence, and the yellow to neither. However, the table shows that divergence (dark green) only takes place in periods when at least one of the two parties is moving away from the other in policy, with the other party not following.

Moreover, this paper argues that the factor of refugee inflow is not a direct cause for divergence, as the higher levels of inflow experienced by Sweden as compared to Denmark show how an increased inflow is not necessarily associated with a less welcoming policy, which would have left Sweden more restrictive than Denmark rather than the opposite. Instead, in the cases studied, moments of higher inflow can be seen to have caused some restrictionism in both countries, especially in the period following 2015, thus leaving refugee inflow to rather be a direct cause for convergence in policy. Consequently, this paper presents a theoretical framework which argues not only that party politics and leadership are influential causal factors for policy divergence, but also that refugee inflow is not a causal factor in the case studied. Table 1 outlines the argument conveyed regarding when and why divergence has taken place between the two Social Democratic parties.

To convey this argument, this paper will be divided into three chapters following a historical timeline. Each chapter will be structured focusing first on the Danish Social Democrats, then the Swedish Social Democrats, followed by an analysis that engages with the three hypotheses and the theory by Mayne.

Chapter 2 explores the divergence that first developed in the 1980s. The key policy event here is the 1985 change in policy by the Danish Social Democrats to support certain restrictions to the country's asylum policy. The chapter explores the Danish move from a common social democratic policy and how its weaker position forced it to engage in party politics in a way the far stronger Swedish Social Democrats did not.

Chapter 3 focuses on another era of significance, namely the period beginning in the early 21st century, which is when both the Social Democratic parties of Denmark and Sweden were not in government, with opposition parties implementing refugee policies that were stricter in Denmark, and more liberal in Sweden. Significantly, Sweden also saw the entry of the anti-immigrant Sweden Democrats into Parliament, politicising the issue of immigration to an extent previously unseen.

Chapter 4 explores how the divergence has been shaped by the 2015 migrant crisis, exploring developments since then by reviewing the applicability of the three hypotheses for divergence. The key argument here is that the period following 2015 has seen a convergence in policy, mainly due to a U-turn in policy by the Swedish Social Democrats as a result of the large inflow of asylum seekers in 2015.

Finally, the conclusion chapter aims at finishing the research, summarizing with what success each hypothesis has been applied to and influenced the developments in the time periods studied. As such, it seeks to come to a conclusion regarding the overall level of influence each aspect has had on policy divergence. Moreover, it discusses further findings of this research that are notable and to be applied to the study of policy divergence broadly.

2 The 1980s: Emergence of Divergence

In order to understand how refugee policy developed, one must first examine when and why divergence began. While both countries had signed the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees as well as its 1967 Protocol, a significant inflow of humanitarian migrants was not experienced in Sweden and Denmark until the 1980s, which is when the first steps towards divergence emerged (Brochmann, 2021, p. 206). Other types of immigration had already become politicised in the two countries, with labour immigration having been restricted by both parties in the late 1970s once it became clear that labour demand alone would not regulate the inflow of workers (ibid.). This first move of restricting immigration became essential to the subsequent development of refugee policy. The stop in labour immigration drastically changed the makeup of the types of immigrants arriving in the countries, with refugees replacing labour migrants as the most common type of immigrants together with those immigrating for family reasons (ibid.). This position was further boosted by a rise in humanitarian migrants reaching northern Europe in their search for safety from war, persecution, or conflict (ibid, p. 202). As such, by 1980, Sweden and Denmark made actual use of their passive yet supportive refugee and asylum policy, and the issue was given attention in a way not seen before (Brochmann and Hagelund, 2012).

Danish Social Democrats: Playing the game of party politics

The Danish Social Democrats were the first to change their stance. After having lost the election of 1982, no longer leading or participating in the government, the Danish Social Democrats were originally key actors in the passing of a liberal act in 1983 that went against the wishes of the new centre-right government (Farbøl et al. 2019). This Aliens Act of 1983 provided for a right to asylum to all those with cases for asylum or family reunification under processing, and gave equal refugee status to those seeking asylum without fitting into the 1951 Convention frame, named *de facto* refugees as they were fleeing other circumstances that made it improper to send them back (Schmidt, 2012, p. 79). The new Act led to a notable increase in asylum seekers, going from 300 in 1983 to 4,300 in 1984, and further to 8,700 in 1985 (Farbøl et al. 2019), causing the centre-right government as well as Social Democratic mayors in areas with a heavy inflow to plea to the majority opposition to impose restrictions out of a concern that asylum seekers were actively choosing Denmark because of its liberal law (ibid.). The Social Democratic Party originally kept its stance, steadfast in favour for the principle of helping those in need (ibid.). However, in late

1985, this steadfastness crumbled as the party, despite internal opposition, changed its position and collaborated with the government on the implementation of restrictions of the Act, infringing the rights of the *de facto* refugees and opening up for involuntary repatriation as well as the direct dismissal on the border of those without an obvious ground for asylum (ibid; Chatham House, 2021). Hence, the Danish Social Democrats had left the old stance on humanitarianism behind.

However, the analytical challenge is to identify the causal factors behind this change. One potential factor is the push from within the party as several social democratic mayors of Danish towns expressed concerns about a lacking integration capacity (Farbøl et al. 2019). The issue of mayors protesting what they considered to be a much too liberal policy by their own party reveals a core issue to consider when examining the Danish Social Democratic Party, namely the internal conflict. Already when immigration as a whole became politicised in the 1970s, the topic was subject to much debate within the party, with members both high and low supporting either side (Vad Jønsson, 2013a, p. 54). Regarding refugee and asylum policy, a 1987 report and its reception within the party show how the issue was a matter of contention, and interestingly for this research, that the party leader was not leading the group for policy reform (ibid.). This report focused on immigration, and was crafted by the Party Immigration Committee (*indvandrerdvalg*), spearheaded by member Vibeke Storm Rasmussen (ibid, p. 66-70). Most notably, the report suggested a yearly cap of 5,000 immigrants in total, including both refugees and labour migrants, as the Committee considered this number to be the realistic amount of people that the country could integrate in a year (ibid.). The report led to much debate within the party, and once leaked to the press, caused much public scepticism (ibid.). However, the report was never officially taken on by the party, and the party leader of the time, Anker Jørgesen, did not endorse it (ibid.). Rather, when he was replaced in mid-1987, the new leader Svend Auken took a stance against it, emphasising his party's strong beliefs of humanism and against racism (ibid.). The producer of the 1987 report, Storm Rasmussen, accompanied by certain outspoken mayors, thus came to be on one side in the internal conflict, with the party leader and most other high-ranking members on the other. In the following years, the two sides found a middle ground on the policy, making the Social Democratic policy less open than previously, albeit not as strict as Storm Rasmussen proposed (Vad Jønsson, 2013b, p. 34). Nevertheless, this shows that the positioning of the party leader at the time, opposing restrictions, does not explain why the Social Democrats decided to vote with the government on restraining humanitarian immigration in 1985.

A factor which can provide some clarity to the Social Democratic decision to support restrictions in 1985 is party politics. First of all, the stance can be explained by an exchange in support between the party and the centre-right government. The policy change within the Social Democratic Party to join the side seeking to implement certain restrictions to the humanitarian immigration does not necessarily mean it adhered to their own vision of that particular policy. Rather, it could be considered a trade-off, as the centre-right government in return voted in favour of a Social Democratic plan for integration policy in 1992 (Vad Jønsson, 2013c, pp. 191-192). As such, the policy change was a mere concession that stemmed from the party's need to make such choices in order to have influence in other areas. Additionally, it is also important to stress the position of the Danish Social Democrats in opposition at the time, as reconquering of governmental powers had become central on the party agenda by this time (Vad Jønsson, 2013b, p. 26). Thus, it is valid to consider policy developments of the party at this time to be grounded on not just mere ideology, but on a carefully crafted strategy to appeal to voters and ultimately regain governmental power. Consequently, it is evident that in one way or another, the policy change of 1985 was influenced by a party-political causal factor.

However, this research does not only seek to understand what caused policy *change*, but policy *divergence*. The difference between the two becomes clear when one addresses the factor of refugee inflow around the time of this key policy change, as an increase in asylum applicant numbers can be seen (Farbøl et al. 2019). This increased refugee inflow to Denmark in the 1980s contributed to policy change as it raised the attention of the rulers as well as the media and the public. Nonetheless, as this research seeks to understand the causal factors of divergence rather than mere policy change, the case of the Swedish Social Democrats at the time must be reviewed as well. To know if one party has embarked on divergence from its sister party, one must also know the standing of the latter.

Swedish Social Democrats: Steadfastness and neutrality

In Sweden, a similar policy as the Danish Aliens Act of 1983 was implemented already in 1976, when the ruling Social Democrats broadened the country's asylum system to also include *de facto* refugees, defined similarly to the Danish term (Wikrén, 1984, p. 2). However, despite criticism from parties on the right, actively voicing their desire to remove this addition, the broadened term remained with majority support in the Swedish Parliament and survives to this day (Sveriges Riksdag, 1989; 2005). The Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme (in office 1969-76 and 1982-86) attributed the country's generous policy to Swedish neutrality, a central value of the Swedish Social Democrats since the First World War, allowing the country to welcome humanitarian migrants that other countries would not due to their international alliances (Sveriges Riksdag, 1979). Similarly to Denmark, Sweden experienced an increase in refugee numbers not only because it broadened its scope of protection, but also because more humanitarian migrants made their way to the country than before. In 1983, the country granted residence permits to 3,668 people for flight reasons, followed by 5,413 in 1984, and further to 7,314 in 1985 (Swedish Migration Agency, 2022). This inflow continued to escalate, reaching a local peak in 1989 when 24,879 people were granted a permit (ibid.). After this point, the inflow was stopped by the Social Democrats themselves – a move supported by both the second and third largest parties (Parkhouse, 2016, pp. 3-4). The reason given was the unprecedented numbers of asylum seekers seen in 1989, with anticipated numbers of Bulgarian Turks specifically as a particular concern (ibid.). This led to the Social Democratic government announcing in December the same year that only UN quota refugees were to be welcomed (ibid.). After the loss of governmental powers following the election of 1991, the same parties that had supported the Social Democratic in their full stop repealed this decision after claiming government, and the Social Democratic Party did not object (ibid.). That is why the two-year stop should not be considered a complete policy shift, but rather a tool to address a specific concern, as the Social Democrats as well as other parties favoured a return to a more open policy once the matter at hand had been addressed. Nevertheless, this became the first restriction to asylum in Sweden since implementation of the 1951 Refugee Convention. In the years that followed, some more permanent changes were made to the Swedish refugee policy, most notably the introduction of time limits on asylum permits (ibid.).

Analysis: Politicisation and why size matters

Consequently, there are many significant differences that emerged between the Swedish and Danish Social Democrats in the 1980s, but also similarities showing why certain causal factors are not applicable in the development of divergence. Analysing the situation by going through the three hypotheses systematically, this analysis begins by discussing party politics. As already established in the examination of Danish Social Democrats, party politics played an important role

in achieving policy change. When the two parties are compared, it becomes clear that the Swedish Social Democrats did not engage in the same type of party-political trade-offs as the Danish Social Democrats. One can identify two reasons for this difference; party strength and politicisation of refugee issues. Regarding the former, in all Swedish parliamentary elections between 1932 and 1988, the Social Democrats received between 41 and 54 percent of the votes (Statistics Sweden, 2022a). In the same period, the Danish Social Democrats fluctuated between a high of 46 percent and a low of 25 in their parliamentary elections (Folketinget, 2022). As such, at times in this period, the Swedish Social Democratic Party was almost twice as big as its Danish counterpart. The sheer size of the Swedish Social Democratic Party allowed it to rule policy as it pleased, leaning on the wide variety of parties in the Swedish Parliament during the times when they did not have parliamentary majority, but nevertheless remaining continuously large enough to set the rules of the game, leading government in the period 1936 to 1976 as well as between 1982 and 1991 (Sveriges Riksdag, 2022). The Danish Social Democrats, on the other hand, did not command such authority, meaning that they had to make concessions and compromises with other parties to a higher degree than the Swedish Social Democrats. Additionally, concerning the second point, politicisation, the Danish party had to position itself more clearly on immigration as early as 1973, which is when the anti-immigration Progress Party entered Parliament, turning immigration into a politicised topic as it was one of the latter's core issues (Folketinget, 2022; Brochmann, 2021, p. 200). In Sweden, such a party did not gain seats in Parliament until 1991, losing said seats in the following election (Sveriges Riksdag, 2022). While all parties of the two parliaments had opinions on refugees and asylum, the Danish debate was thus pulled further towards restrictionism as a party with immigration as a key issue had gained a place in the Danish Parliament. Therefore, one can identify the different levels of engagement with party politics as a causal factor of the divergence that emerged between the two Social Democratic parties in the 1980s.

However, to weigh its influence against other factors, one must consider the other two hypotheses. With respect to the leadership factor, the analysis above reveals that the actions of the Danish Social Democrats did not necessarily reflect the views of the leaders, described to have supported the humanitarian side of the internal conflict. Conversely, the standing of the Swedish Social Democrats appears to be in line with leader views, with Olof Palme defending the open policy. That is why, with the leaders of both parties in the 1980s largely supporting continuance of a humanitarian and open policy, but with the Danish party developing a gradual shift in policy while the Swedish did not, one can conclude that leadership in terms of differing values between leaders of the two parties was not a decisive factor in the first divergence that emerged. Moreover, as one cannot identify any internal struggles within the Swedish Social Democratic Party, pointing at its leader as a decisive force in keeping the party stance favouring open refugee policy, as opposed to the Danish party, one cannot identify leadership as influential in the terms of different strength either.

Furthermore, there is the third factor of refugee inflow. One can see that inflow was experienced by Denmark as well as Sweden in the period studied. That said, one cannot observe that a difference in such inflow caused policy divergence. The reasoning behind this can be found in the development of restrictions as a response to an increased inflow that can be found in both countries. While more notable in Denmark, with restrictions implemented as a response to a growing inflow of *de facto* refugees, the temporary full stop implemented by the Swedish Social Democrats and other larger parties in late 1989 show how Sweden responded to an increased inflow as well, albeit for a shorter time. Accordingly, one can build a theory that as migrant inflow increases, states become more likely to implement restrictions. This could be conducive to policy divergence in the case that only one of the two states experienced refugee inflow and thus had its

Social Democratic Party change policy. However, as both Denmark and Sweden experienced inflow, and as the Danish Social Democratic Party, despite Denmark receiving fewer humanitarian migrants than Sweden, was the one of the two parties to make the more permanent step towards restrictionism, one can conclude that varying levels of inflow did not cause divergence.

Divergence on a basis of inflow would only have made sense if the party of the country receiving most refugees was the one to develop the strictest policy. In this case, it is the opposite, meaning that it is not the variance in inflow between Sweden and Denmark that causes divergence, as the Danish Social Democrats appear to be prone to policy change at a lower inflow level than their Swedish counterpart. As such, even if inflow may have caused policy change in both countries, it is not appropriate to say that it is the variance between these two inflows that explain policy divergence.

Using the method of Mayne (2019) to estimate the relative importance of factors by categorising their respective role as either triggering, supporting, facilitating, or accelerating, one can make certain conclusions. In the 1980s, particularly surrounding the policy divergence that emerged between the Danish and Swedish Social Democrats when the former supported restrictions in 1985, one can dismiss two of the three factors. Leadership cannot be identified as a causal factor as this examination has neither found difference in leaders' values nor evidence to suggest that the leader of one party has more influence over party policy than the other. Moreover, refugee inflow did not act as a causal factor, as the Danish party supported restrictions at a lower inflow level than the Swedish one. Nevertheless, it did contribute to the discussion that ultimately led to the entry of the Danish Progress Party onto the stage of national politics. This party-political event is what can be considered the *triggering* factor in the case of Denmark as it forced Danish parties to take a stance on a previously undiscussed issue. Additionally, the divergence that emerged between the two Social Democratic parties because of this was *facilitated* by the very fact that the Danish Social Democrats had to engage with other parties, making concessions and compromises due to a lack of a hegemonic size in parliament, seeking to regain governmental power. Further, one can identify that the factor of party politics also acts as an *accelerating* factor as the position of the Danish Progress Party in Parliament can be considered to have lowered the threshold for the level at which a growing refugee inflow becomes an issue worth addressing in Parliament. Thus, the party-political factor can be assigned to at least three of the four roles posed by Mayne, while the other causal factors played no roles at this time.

3 The New Millennium: Divergence in Opposition

While this paper has already identified a starting point for divergence in the 1980s, a period in which this divergence accelerated notably can be seen in the years that followed the new millennium. Notably, both Social Democratic parties spent a considerable time in opposition, during which they had to both position themselves against the doings of an opponent in government, as well as sharpen their policies with the goal to regain governmental powers. This chapter will examine how the refugee policy of the two parties developed in the period when they were part of the opposition, which was 2001 to 2011 for the Danish Social Democratic Party, and 2006 to 2014 for the Swedish party. The argument that party politics played a key role is even more central to this period, but also with leadership emerging as a contributing factor as difference between leaders of the two parties grew. Refugee inflow as a factor remains inapplicable, as the

Danish party continued to promote a stricter policy than its Swedish sister party despite experiencing a smaller inflow of humanitarian migrants.

Danish Social Democrats: The effects of a handbag

Beginning with the Danish Social Democratic Party, the party faced a new reality after the election in 2001, as it for the first time was no longer the biggest party in Parliament (Folketinget, 2022). The main opponent, the Liberal Party (*Venstre*), received 31 percent of the votes, compared to the 29 percent received by the Social Democrats, and consequently formed a centre-right government with the Conservative Party (*De Konservative*). However, what was essential to the positioning of the Social Democrats was the fact that the new government could only take up office with the support of the Danish People's Party, the anti-immigrant successor party of the Progress Party mentioned in the previous chapter (Salo and Rydgren, 2021, pp. 23-30). As such, the People's Party received considerable political influence, and used this to achieve significant restrictions to immigration (ibid.). In 2002, the 1983 Aliens Act was effectively undone, as the People's Party in cooperation with the new centre-right government replaced *de facto* refugees with 'protection status', which made people fleeing war and conflict ineligible for asylum unless they risked death, torture or similar inhuman treatment in their country of origin. Moreover, the right to family reunion was restricted, and the threshold for years needed in Denmark to get a permit for permanent residence was raised to seven years from the previous three (Mielcke Hansen, 2016). The Social Democrats, now in opposition, therefore had to position themselves against a new national refugee policy, as well as address the reality that the People's Party threatened Social Democratic success in elections, as both parties competed for working-class voters (Salo and Rydgren, 2021, pp. 23-30). This became obvious in early 2003, when the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions, LO, announced that it would no longer exclusively cooperate with the Social Democratic Party and fund its campaigns, as the Confederation had experienced a notable drop in members. Hence, it considered its interests best preserved in conversation with several parties, and while the People's Party remained unnamed, it was implied that LO sought to regain supporters of this party to its midst (ibid.).

Consequently, immigration had become a key issue for voters by the beginning of the new millennium, and the Social Democratic Party, abandoned by both LO and many of its voters, thus saw a need to adapt to the new political reality. Therefore, for the party to present a new manifesto on immigration and integration in June 2003, proposing considerable limits to immigration, appears as too much of a coincidence to not be somewhat of a response to recent setbacks (Salo and Rydgren, 2021, pp. 23-30). The party now acknowledged that immigration and asylum must be restricted, agreeing with several of the policy implementations performed by the centre-right government and the supporting People's Party (Information, 2003). As such, even if the Social Democrats maintained some objections, this change meant that a broad majority in the Danish Parliament supported a restrictive asylum policy. Hence, one can clearly identify the presence of the factor of party politics in the period following the devastating election for the Danish Social Democrats in 2001, explaining its policy change.

Nevertheless, the emergence of an influential leadership factor can also be seen, most notably after the 2005 election, when it became clear that the policy adaptation had not successfully made voters return to the Social Democrats (Salo and Rydgren, 2021, pp. 23-30). This is when the party chose its first female leader, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, whose leadership came to be influential not only as the Social Democratic Party took a right-turn on economic policy, but because her persona contributed to a problem the party battled with, namely image (Politico, 2012). The party

increasingly had to fight off critique about having become elitist, led by a few upper-middle class cosmopolitans with no knowledge of life outside Copenhagen – a narrative happily supported by the People’s Party, themselves claiming to represent the ‘common people’ (ibid.). The new leader Helle Thorning-Schmidt was largely seen as contributing to this issue, alienating parts of the electorate due to her fondness for expensive clothes and handbags, earning her the nickname ‘Gucci Helle’ (ibid.). This is important as scholars have suggested that the criticism of the Party in general, and of Thorning-Schmidt in particular, influenced the party line in the election of 2007, when it left its previous focus on global poverty and instead focused on the ‘average Dane’ (Salo and Rydgren, 2021, pp. 23-30). In the attempt to appeal to such voters, the stance for a restrictive immigration policy was consolidated. To stand out from parties on the right, the Social Democratic Party emphasised sturdy integration policies for the few that arrived, such as giving asylum seekers the right to work (ibid.). As such, leadership can be said to have influenced the policy change of the Danish Social Democratic Party at the time, not because Thorning-Schmidt necessarily held certain values that pulled policy in one direction, but because she contributed to an identity crisis within the party that caused it to bend for electoral favour more fervently than before. Whether the root to this is actually sexism, with Thorning-Schmidt’s fashion choices being given more attention because she is a woman, is worth further consideration. Nonetheless, as peculiar as it may sound, an expensive handbag thus indirectly became a contributing factor to the hardening of party policy, as the party sought to compensate for the elitism it exuded. More broadly, this also tells of the importance of public perception to a party, and of a prevailing importance for voters to be able to identify themselves with those they elect to represent them, beyond mere political opinions.

Swedish Social Democrats: Entry of a new opponent

Turning to Sweden, several significant events took place in the new millennium that came to be essential for the development of Swedish Social Democratic refugee policy, showing that Denmark was no longer the only place in which policy changes interesting for the study of divergence occurred. First and foremost, the Social Democrats entered opposition in 2006, as a devastating election saw a centre-right coalition form a majority government without the need for Social Democratic support (Brochmann, 2021). The new government pursued a liberal stance on immigration broadly, enabling people from beyond the EU and EEA to come to Sweden for work as long as a demand for such labour could be proven (ibid, p. 212.). Moreover, the new government abandoned a Scandinavian tradition of not mixing immigration with asylum when they began to allow denied asylum seekers to stay if they could prove that they had employment in Sweden instead (ibid.). Thus, contrastingly to the Danish centre-right government, the Swedish one made refugee and immigration policy more liberal, and it was against this new reality that the Swedish Social Democratic Party had to position itself.

However, such positioning was very much influenced by another factor, namely the entry of the populist anti-immigration Sweden Democrats into Parliament in the following election in 2010. With roots in neo-Nazism, the entry was met with much disapproval among the other parties of Parliament, which found consensus in their mutual refusal to collaborate with or in any way be associated with the Sweden Democrats (Salo and Rydgren, 2021, pp. 38-51). One of the most vocal opponents of the party was Mona Sahlin, the leader of the Social Democrats at the time (ibid.). She vowed to never make her party dependent on the Sweden Democrats, and to never surrender against xenophobia (ibid.). Nevertheless, her failure to bring the Social Democrats back to power in 2010 ultimately led to her departure from the leadership role, but the stance taken by Sahlin consolidated the party line against the Sweden Democrats and resultingly also on asylum

and immigration. The person eventually becoming the new long-term leader for the Social Democrats, Stefan Löfven, chosen for his labour union background as the party sought to regain lost voters and go back to its roots, maintained this stance (ibid.). Thus, even if all parties originally opposed the Sweden Democrats, the leadership of the Social Democrats contributed to the firmness of this opposition.

Analysis: Adapting in opposite directions

Consequently, it is possible to detect a difference in policy divergence between the period of opposition as compared to the developments of the 1980s. While 1980s divergence was largely a result of policy change of the Danish Social Democrats as the Swedish sister party upheld an existing policy, the period of opposition in the new millennium exhibits divergence stemming from both parties moving in opposite directions. Going through the three hypotheses, their application to the above examination shows that party politics play an even stronger role than in the previous chapter. The enhanced importance of this causal factor can be explained by the very fact that the Swedish Social Democrats consolidated their policy line because of the entry of the Sweden Democrats into Swedish Parliament. Even if the Social Democratic policy did not change drastically, refugee issues became politicised to an extent not previously seen in Swedish politics, with the Swedish Social Democrats confirming humanitarianism as the party line. Moreover, the very fact that the party had lost considerable voter support in the elections of the early noughties meant that it was no longer big enough to dictate policy on its own. Accordingly, the Swedish Social Democratic Party had approached a situation more similar to the one of its Danish sister party. However, while this similarity could have provided for policy convergence, the different policy stances of their respective governments explain why policy divergence between the parties took place, and hence why the causal factor of party politics was present. The Swedish centre-right government promoted a liberal asylum policy, with consensus among all ‘older’ parties to exclude the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats from policy-making, whilst the Danish centre-right government promoted restrictions, and held government because of its cooperation with the anti-immigration Danish People’s Party. The different reactions to the two anti-immigration parties in the two countries could be explained by the different roots of the parties, with the Sweden Democrats having a past of neo-Nazism while the Danish People’s Party stemmed from anti-tax and agrarian populism (Salo and Rydgren, 2021, p. 38). This would explain not only why the other Swedish parties were so unwilling to cooperate with their new colleague, but also why the issue of immigration became so contentious and polarized in Sweden, as the anti-immigrant side and the Sweden Democrats effectively became the same thing. To oppose immigration thus meant to associate oneself with the problematic past of the Sweden Democrats. Consequently, it is the positionings of the two Social Democratic parties against their respective anti-immigration party and government that explain the continuance and deepening of policy divergence. This is notable as it shows how party politics acted as a causal factor for divergence not only because of different levels of party-political engagement, as seen in the first chapter, but also as the party-political contexts in which the two parties operated differed. This finding provides for an addition to existing literature, as scholars like Brochmann (2021) or Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup (2008) focus on party politics as influential based on engagement level, not properly accounting for the difference in the political setting in which the two parties operate.

Moreover, concerning leadership, it is possible to see that it was present and contributing to the policy developments in both countries whilst, importantly, being different between the two. In Sweden, the leaders of the Social Democrats in general, and Mona Sahlin in particular, facilitated a discourse that was very critical of the Sweden Democrats, partly by becoming more vocal in

support of humanitarianism. In Denmark, the leadership contributed less in terms of stances, as the party effectively adopted the refugee policy of its opponents, seeking to stand out through a rigorous integration policy instead. Nevertheless, the persona of Helle Thorning-Schmidt did affect the party and its stance, contributing to the image of the party as having become elitist, which it tried to counteract by changing its policy to appeal to working-class voters, including a strict immigration policy overall. As such, while not being instigators of reform, the leaders of the two Social Democratic parties in one way or another had a deepening effect of the policy path that the respective party had chosen.

Furthermore, in terms of refugee inflow, it was not a causal factor for divergence. It is safe to say that refugee inflow influenced the policy developments in the two countries, most notably in Sweden where the liberal policy of the Swedish centre-right government led to an increased inflow which likely boosted support for the Sweden Democrats (Swedish Migration Agency, 2022). However, in the period of opposition beginning for the two Social Democratic parties in the noughties, it was not the *difference* in inflow that caused divergence. While the countries did indeed have different levels of inflow, with Sweden welcoming many more than Denmark, this difference does not explain the policy divergence (Swedish Migration Agency, 2022; Statistics Denmark, 2022). This is motivated by the fact that the Swedish Social Democrats remained with the open policy despite operating in the country with the greater inflow, while the Danish party did the opposite in a setting with a lower inflow. Consequently, had refugee inflow been a causal factor for divergence, the country with the greater inflow would have diverged in policy towards restrictionism. As this was not the case, inflow was not conducive to divergence at this time.

As such, it has been established that two of the three causal factors were present in this period. Following the theory by Mayne (2019), the respective roles held by the causal factors are determined in order to establish their relative importance. The role held by the party-political factor in this period can be identified as *triggering*, with both parties changing or consolidating their policy in different directions as a result of their position in opposition, as well as their positioning vis-à-vis anti-immigration parties. The role of the leadership factor is identified as *supporting* due to the leaders not changing the party stance, but rather consolidating an already existing policy. Moreover, leadership can be considered to have held an *accelerating* role in that leaders of both parties likely made a diverging policy change take place sooner and/or more powerfully, even if it would have happened regardless, here referring to the Swedish Social Democratic stance against the Sweden Democrats and the Danish Social Democratic actions to combat an elitist image. Furthermore, refugee inflow does not have a role as the policy divergence cannot be linked to the difference in inflow.

4 After 2015: Signs of Convergence

This third chapter focuses on a third and final period, which is the time after the 2015 migrant crisis, affecting both Sweden and Denmark as well as the policies of its respective Social Democratic Party. With a significant inflow of asylum seekers as well as continuously growing anti-immigration parties, the Social Democratic parties, both weakened compared to the 20th century, had to navigate a new reality. While party politics remain an important factor in this period, the influences of leadership as well as refugee inflow are evident. Moreover, the Swedish Social Democrats had reclaimed government, while their Danish sister party was pushed back into opposition in 2015, and thus developed its policy from that standpoint (Kosiara-Pedersen, 2016, p.

870). Nevertheless, this chapter shows that with the considerable inflow experienced in 2015-16 and the years after, convergence took place in the policy of the two Social Democratic parties, as even the Swedish Social Democratic Party eventually had to bend to public pressures wanting immediate restrictions.

Danish Social Democrats: Frederiksen's way or the highway

The Danish Social Democrats with leader Helle Thorning-Schmidt had to leave government after the election in June 2015, being replaced by the Liberals in government, and Thorning-Schmidt being replaced by Mette Frederiksen as the leader of the Social Democrats (Kosiara-Pedersen, 2016, p. 877). Like the Swedish sister party had desired when choosing union-worker Stefan Löfven as their new leader, the new leader for the Danish Social Democratic Party had the task of bringing back the working-class voters to the party (ibid.). Under the leadership of Frederiksen, the party took a U-turn on economic policy, leaving its support for a liberal policy behind and adopting stances that would appeal better to the party's traditional voting base (Salo and Rydgren, 2021, pp. 33-37). The immigration policy, however, remained right-wing, and was even further deepened in this direction, together with socio-cultural and legal policies (ibid.). While the economic policy change can be explained by recent economic hardships stemming from the financial crisis of 2008, the continued and deepened immigration policy stance stemmed not only from a continued combat with the Danish People's Party, but also from the inflow of asylum seekers into Europe around the year 2015 (ibid.). Peaking at a level of 21,315 asylum seekers in Denmark in 2015, it was a clear change from previous years in which the number of asylum seekers had only progressed above 10,000 once since the beginning of the new millennium, in 2014 (Statistics Denmark, 2022).

Consequently, three factors can be clearly identified as influencing the policy development of the Danish Social Democratic Party in the years following 2015. First is party politics, as the party for the first time acknowledged that the Danish People's Party had become their main opponents, and actively sought to attract voters lost to the People's Party, which after the election of 2015 had become comparable in size with its 21 percent of the votes compared to the Social Democratic 26 percent (Salo and Rydgren, 2021, pp. 33-37; Folketinget, 2022). Second, there is the factor of refugee inflow, as the unprecedented numbers of asylum seekers coming to the country caused a public debate which ultimately led to a multiparty agreement in which the Social Democrats and others supported an emergency implementation of border controls (ibid.). Third, there is the leadership factor, or more specifically Mette Frederiksen, who influenced the party line by criticising its lack of harmony with the opinions of core voters on immigration policy (Kristeligt Dagblad, 2019). Frederiksen herself took a hard line on asylum policy, claiming that if she had her way, it would not be possible for refugees to apply for asylum in Denmark (Chatham House, 2021). This statement was presented in relation to a 2018 immigration policy reform plan by the Social Democratic Party, named 'Fair and Realistic' (*Retfærdig og Realistisk*), in which it was suggested that the Danish asylum system should be moved to a third country (Socialdemokratiet, 2018, pp. 4-5). As such, Frederiksen did not want to end asylum in Denmark, but instead sought to end the possibility to make 'spontaneous' applications in the country, wanting to do this elsewhere and instead only welcoming quota refugees (ibid.). By doing this, Frederiksen meant that the control of the Danish borders could be recovered (ibid.). With the change in leadership, one can see a difference in direction than previously. While this could be attributed to a desire within the party for change after a bad election in 2015, the comments by Frederiksen that that her immigration policy was non-negotiable within the party, acknowledging the existence of internal conflict, and that they will have to replace her rather than force her to change, reveal that the

policy shift is more about her than the party as a whole (Meret, 2021, p. 238). Nevertheless, the decisive policy stance seemed to pay off, as the Social Democrats could return to government after the election in 2019, in which it made a moderate gain while the Danish People's Party lost half of its voters (Folketinget, 2022). Consequently, by appropriating the anti-immigration policies of the People's Party, the Social Democrats and other mainstream parties had effectively brought an end to the winning streak of the single-issue party.

Swedish Social Democrats: U-turns and loss of isolation consensus

In Sweden, the Social Democrats had returned to government in 2014, and had inherited a liberal immigration and asylum policy that it keenly upheld in the light of its opposition to the Sweden Democrats (Salo and Rydgren, 2021, pp. 48-52). This policy, however, was fundamentally altered in November 2015 (Regeringskansliet, 2015). With an inflow that had been growing steadily in the 21st century, the growth escalated in 2014 with around 81,000 asylum applicants as compared to around 54,000 in 2013 (Statistics Sweden, 2022b). In 2015, there were 162,000 applicants (ibid.). It was when experiencing this unprecedented inflow that the Social Democratic government suggested 'breathing space' (Regeringskansliet, 2015). What this actually entailed was a drastic change in the Swedish asylum policy, in which the country would only welcome asylum seekers in line with the minimum requirements set out by international and EU law (ibid.). Moreover, the November announcement provided for restrictions to family reunion, temporary residence permits, as well as the implementation of border controls between Sweden and Denmark, as the inflow came via the latter (ibid.). The move was motivated by the struggles of local administrations to process and take care of the large numbers (ibid.). However, the Social Democratic government further justified their move by criticising other EU member states for their unwillingness to share the burden (ibid.). The government meant that Sweden had by this point taken in more than its fair share, arguing that it could thus rightfully implement restrictions (ibid.). Consequently, the Social Democratic government managed to not only respond to the local calls for restrictions, likely stopping an even larger number of voters from joining the Sweden Democrats had the inflow continued, but also made peace with its pro-immigration supporters by blaming the EU and framing the policy change as necessary rather than good. As such, it is possible to identify not only refugee inflow as a causal factor for change at this time, but also party politics, as the Social Democrats seemed to have acted in line with what would gain them the most votes and the Sweden Democrats as few as possible.

Nevertheless, in the election of 2018, it became clear that many of the Social Democrats' former voters did not consider the 'breathing space' enough. The party got its lowest percentage of voters in a hundred years, at 28.3 percent, while the Sweden Democrats received 17.5 percent, its best result so far (Statistics Sweden, 2022a). Thus, despite having adopted a new policy in which they proposed restricted immigration and deeper EU cooperation and burden-sharing, it is obvious that the Social Democrats lost voters to the Sweden Democrats. The growth of the Sweden Democrats is also important in that it left neither of the two mainstream blocs in parliament with a majority, as the anti-immigrant party had established itself comfortably in between (ibid.). Only through the break-up of the four-party centre-right bloc into parties willing and unwilling to implement their politics with the support of the Sweden Democrats could the Social Democrats remain in government, backed by the two centre-right parties who considered it paramount to keep the Sweden Democrats out of power (Salo and Rydgren, 2021, pp. 64-67). However, this break-up is further notable in that it ultimately caused the other two centre-right parties to announce that they would cooperate with the Sweden Democrats on equal terms as other parties, normalising the party and its place in national politics (Expressen, 2019; Sveriges Radio, 2019). Since then, two new

blocs have thus formed, with one closer to the centre, and one further to the right. As such, even though the Social Democrats remain in government, they have to navigate a political arena that has been pulled further to the right, with a majority of parties in Parliament supporting a restrictive asylum policy (Salo and Rydgren, 2021, pp. 64-67).

Analysis: A period of convergence

For the first time in this research, it is possible to detect convergence in the asylum policies of the two Social Democratic parties rather than divergence. This is solely due to the fact that the Swedish Social Democrats made a drastic change in their policy towards restrictionism. Nevertheless, the asylum policies remain with important differences, and the policy developments are still contributing to an understanding of the functioning of the causal factors for divergence, namely in the way that this period exhibits why divergence did *not* take place.

First, beginning with party politics in the period after 2015, both Social Democratic parties now navigated political arenas in which there was an established anti-immigration party. Moreover, both Social Democratic parties had lost a considerable number of voters to these very parties, and thus they had in common that they now acknowledged these parties as their biggest opponents. Hence, party politics did not cause divergence in this instance as the two parties now found themselves in similar positions. That said, it did cause some differences in the sense that the Danish Social Democrats continued to deepen their restrictionism rather than meet the Swedish Social Democrats halfway. This can be explained by the stronger position held by the Danish People's Party as an accepted political player in Danish politics compared to the Sweden Democrats in Swedish politics. Further, one could discuss whether the fact that one of the two Social Democratic parties ruled government while the other did not played a role in this difference, as the notably strict policy change proposed by the Danish Social Democrats in opposition could be considered a move to attract voters. However, the examination of the role of party politics in this period shows that when the opponents of the two Social Democratic parties propose the same policies rather than opposite, and when both Social Democratic parties are weak enough to feel forced to engage in one way or another, divergence will not take place.

Second, the factor of leadership is not applicable for divergence in this period. Although Mette Frederiksen is undoubtedly a cause for deepening of Danish Social Democratic restrictionism, this development is not conducive to policy divergence as the Swedish Social Democratic policy made a leap towards the Danish one at this time. As such, the actions of the Swedish party are decisive in this period as its moves were conducive to policy convergence, while the Danish party merely deepened an already existing policy. Consequently, the lack of difference in policies promoted makes leadership unconducive to divergence at this time. While the opinions of Mette Frederiksen are at this point abundantly clear, the leader of the Swedish Social Democrats, Prime Minister Stefan Löfven, supported the Swedish policy change, and so the two leaders were ultimately on the same page that restrictionism was necessary. Thus, the development of convergence seems reasonable.

Third, while refugee inflow numbers in 2015 reveal that there was a clear difference between the two countries, they did not play a determining role in policy divergence. Instead, the inflow was conducive to convergence, as the number of people coming to the countries, albeit larger in Sweden, ultimately caused both countries to make their policies more restrictive. That said, refugee inflow did not cause full convergence, as the Swedish Social Democrats remained the more liberal despite operating in the country with the larger inflow. Nevertheless, it did play a

role, showing how, in the case of the Social Democratic parties of Sweden and Denmark, refugee inflow has caused policy convergence rather than divergence.

Due to the lack of divergence, the four roles of Mayne (2019) cannot be applied to the causal factors in this instance. However, they can be applied in the assessment of their contribution to convergence, which is helpful in showing how the same factors can cause a different outcome. As the convergence at this time can be explained by the policy change of the Swedish Social Democrats alone, that is where roles must be assigned. The *triggering* factor for the policy change that led to convergence was the refugee inflow, causing demands for restrictions in Sweden. Party politics, on the other hand, played a *supporting* as well as *accelerating* role in that other parties pushed for restrictions, and as there existed a very real fear among Social Democrats of further loss of voters to the Sweden Democrats unless measures were taken. Consequently, this shows how causal factors that are conducive to divergence can also be the contributors to convergence. If returning to Table 1 (p. 14), the third column exhibits this, showing how it only takes one party moving in the policy direction of the other for convergence to take place.

5 Conclusion

This chapter concludes by integrating the analyses from the three chapters, summarising the findings, and making an overarching assessment of the relevance of the three main hypotheses over time. First, it discusses the important difference between policy change and policy divergence that this research has touched upon. Second, it discusses the importance of difference in order for a causal factor to be influential. Third, it answers the research question on a broader scale, trying to see commonalities over time in the role and significance of the three hypotheses.

Policy change vs policy divergence

The most important distinction that has been made in this research is that between policy change and policy divergence. The three chapters have shown that even when policy change occurs, this does not necessarily mean that divergence will occur. Policy divergence is not merely dependent on policy change, but also on the direction of change in relation to the policy held by the other party. As Table 1 (p. 14) illustrates, policy change only has to take place in one of the two parties in order for divergence to take place, as long as the other party either retains its extant policy or develops it in the opposite direction of its sister party. The three empirical chapters have offered three contrasting scenarios for examining policy divergence.

The first chapter showed divergence as a result of one party changing its policy from a somewhat common agenda that the other party remained adherent to. The second chapter showed that divergence also takes place when both parties are changing their policy, but in opposite directions. Finally, the third chapter showed that even if one party continues to deepen its policy away from the original common starting point of the two parties, divergence does not take place if the second party decides to shift its policy towards the first. Instead, this causes policy convergence, even if the same factors that were conducive to divergence are still at play in the first party.

Consequently, this paper has highlighted how the policy developments of two parties can result in either policy divergence or convergence. Because of the bipartisan nature of divergence, policy change can cause either outcome. This does not mean that the developments of the two parties have to be related or interdependent in any way, but merely that divergence can only be determined by comparing two parties and their respective development. As such, the study of divergence is a study of duality. This means that a conclusion can be made, stating that the emergence of policy divergence is wholly dependent on (1) policy change in one party, and (2) policy standstill or change in the opposite direction, of the other party. Therefore, although this research studies the relative importance of causal factors for asylum policy divergence, it also makes a contribution to the wider study of policy divergence in its emphasis on duality.

The importance of difference

Furthermore, in the examination of relative importance of causal factors for policy divergence, this research has made an important finding in the significance of difference. This can be understood when reviewing the key influential factor throughout the three periods, namely party politics. Its prime position is explained by the prevalence with which we see the factor throughout the chapters. In the first chapter, party politics caused divergence as the Swedish party did not have to engage in it to the same extent that the Danish party did. In the second chapter, party politics caused divergence as the ruling governments in the two countries proposed opposite policies to which the Social Democratic parties in opposition had to adapt to. In the third chapter, however, party politics caused *convergence*, as both Social Democratic parties had become weakened, and as their opponents proposed the same policy, namely restrictionism. Consequently, while party politics is a key factor of influence, it does not necessarily produce divergence unless the party politics in question differ between the two countries studied. Thus, party politics is dependent on difference in order to produce divergence.

Moreover, the two other factors of leadership and refugee inflow show why difference is so essential. Only when the leadership between the leaders of the two parties differs – be it through opinions or influence – can leadership be said to truly cause divergence. As such, even if one of the parties has a strong leader with certain views, this is only of importance if this very leader is contrasting the leader of the other party. While leadership may always be conducive to policy change, the bipartisan nature of divergence means that two leaderships exist, and that they must be different to play a role of importance. That said, just because there is a difference between the two parties studied regarding certain factors does not mean that it will be causal for divergence. This is shown by the third hypothesis, refugee inflow, as the Swedish Social Democratic Party maintained a more liberal policy than its Danish sister party despite operating in the country with the larger, and thus different, inflow. However, the 2015 inflow experienced by both countries shows that when a significant refugee inflow is shared, it will cause convergence. That said, the level of inflow at which this will take place for a party differs, with the Danish party having a lower threshold for reacting than its Swedish counterpart. Thus, refugee inflow is a causal factor for change, but not for divergence. The different responses by the two parties to respective inflow level are explained by party politics and leadership, meaning that it is not the level of inflow that causes divergence, but the other factors. Nevertheless, even if not all factors containing difference are conducive to divergence, the difference is essential to any potential causal factors. Just as this research could have instead focused on media impact or refugee inflow type, the difference would have been crucial for these factors as well. As such, one can make the conclusion that a potential causal factor for divergence will only be influential if a difference in this factor can be exhibited between the two cases studied.

Relative importance

Finally, even though this research makes contributions to the general study of policy divergence, it is paramount to also discuss this very specific case and provide an answer to the research question posed. In explaining what has caused refugee policy divergence, this research has provided analysis regarding three posed causal factors, seeking to weigh their relative importance for a more nuanced understanding of what matters more. Having used the four roles provided by John Mayne (2019), assigning the three causal factors as either triggering, facilitating, supporting, or accelerating, a pattern can be seen across the three periods studied. While all three factors can be confirmed as causing policy change, only two exhibit causing policy divergence, namely party politics, and leadership. In the two periods in which overall divergence took place, party politics is assessed as the *triggering* factor for divergence in both, also playing further roles in the first period. However, in the second period, leadership also plays a part, showing how the difference in leadership was conducive to divergence. Returning to the theory of counterfactuals, the analysis shows that the influence of the leadership factor was only made possible because of the party-political factor triggering a change. The third factor, refugee inflow, is only applicable in the final and third period, in which convergence took place. Although it may have been conducive to policy change in the other periods, it was not the difference in refugee inflow that caused diverging policies between the parties. Therefore, while surely possible in other cases, refugee inflow was not causal for the divergence that developed between the Swedish and Danish Social Democratic parties in the periods studied. Consequently, in terms of relative importance for policy divergence in the case studied, the party-political factor weighs heaviest, then followed by leadership, while refugee inflow is not applicable.

The findings of the research contrast previous literature for several reasons. Regarding party politics, it deepens the understanding proposed by scholars such as Brochmann (2021) by saying that party politics have not only been influential as one of the two Social Democratic parties has engaged more with it than the other, but also as the two parties have operated in different political contexts, with main opponents proposing opposite policies and with anti-immigration parties stemming from widely different contexts. This finding can be further applied to broader literature on comparative politics of asylum in general, as it adds another layer to the argument that asylum policy is a ‘tug-of-war’ between courts and politicians, as argued by Gibney (2014) as well as Joppke (1999), showing how restrictionism is not necessarily driven by popular sovereignty, but by party-political interplay. Regarding leadership, this research goes beyond existing literature in its revelation that leaders can have an impact not only through their values and political influence, but also because of their appearance, as seen with Helle Thorning-Schmidt. Finally, regarding refugee inflow, this research can only draw the conclusion that it was not causal for the divergence taking place between the Social Democratic parties of Sweden and Denmark, leaving it possible that this can happen elsewhere.

Nevertheless, this research is conscious of its narrow focus on just three potential causal factors, and acknowledges the importance of other factors as well. As a matter of fact, this research has identified further causal factors that may be of significant importance, yet to be examined by other scholarship. While this research touched upon a few factors that previous scholarship mentions, such as media impact or refugee inflow type, two less discussed potential factors were identified in the second chapter. The first one is sexism, here mostly surrounding the Danish party-leader Helle Thorning-Schmidt and her fashion choices. One could pose the question whether the core driver of this attention is not her expensive taste, but rather her gender, as women are more commonly judged based on appearance than their male peers. While both Social Democratic parties have had female leaders, a suggestion for further research would be to explain whether there exist

differences in sexism between Sweden and Denmark that could explain why Helle Thorning-Schmidt became known for her handbags rather than her politics. Furthermore, the second potential causal factor identified in this research is the different roots of the two anti-immigration parties that the respective Social Democratic Party had to operate next to. While this plays into the party-political factor and the argument that the party-political playfields of the two Social Democratic parties differed, it is worth examining on its own. The neo-Nazi roots of the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats as opposed to the agrarian populist and anti-tax background of the Danish People's Party would explain why the other Swedish parties in Parliament reacted so strongly when the party first entered Parliament. It would further explain why the Social Democrats in Sweden continue to refuse cooperation with their anti-immigration party, while such cooperation is less contentious for the Danish Social Democrats. As such, it may be that this lies at the core of divergence, thus necessitating further study. Moreover, further insight could be gained from reviewing asylum policy divergence compared to the development and potential divergence of other policies of the two Social Democratic parties, helping to identify further causal factors and showing whether asylum policy constitutes a distinctive realm of policymaking.

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