

**Shifting Discourses in a Decade of Crisis:
*Security, Normalisation, and Ideological
Change in Swedish Party Manifestos, 2014–2022***

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Abstract

This thesis examines how Swedish political parties have discursively constructed crisis, security, and social protection in party manifestos between 2014 and 2022. Drawing on an integrative analytical framework that combines Critical Discourse Analysis, crisis theory, and normalisation theory, the study analyses how language functions as both a medium and a mechanism of ideological change during periods of heightened uncertainty.

Using a longitudinal thematic discourse-analytical approach, the thesis investigates how parties frame and prioritise key policy areas related to migration, security, and healthcare; how discursive and rhetorical strategies are employed to construct meaning, assign responsibility, and legitimise political responses; and how these shifts reflect processes of discursive normalisation and ideological boundary change. The analysis focuses on manifestos from the Sweden Democrats (SD), the Social Democrats (S), and the Left Party (V), capturing variation across challenger, mainstream, and left-oppositional positions within the Swedish party system.

The findings demonstrate a progressive reorganisation of Swedish political discourse in which security and preparedness emerge as central organising logics across policy domains. Crisis rhetoric becomes a structuring feature rather than an episodic response, shaping how welfare, migration, and social order are articulated. While discursive convergence occurs at the level of issue linkage and rhetorical expectations, ideological divergence persists in how parties define threats, responsibility, and legitimate protection. The thesis contributes to research on political communication and ideological transformation by showing how crisis-driven discourse reshapes the boundaries of legitimate political speech without erasing ideological conflict.

Keywords: *Political discourse, Crisis rhetoric, Discursive normalisation, Security, Party manifestos, Sweden*

Table of Content

Abstract.....	2
Table of Content	3
List of Figures & Tables.....	4
List of Appendices	4
1. Introduction.....	5
1.1 Research Objectives	7
1.2 Structure.....	8
1.3 Scope of Study.....	8
2. Previous Research & Theoretical Framework.....	9
2.1 Language, Power, and Discourse	9
2.2 Crisis, Meaning and Political Rhetoric.....	10
2.3 Normalisation and Mainstreaming of Radical Rhetoric.....	12
2.4 Integrative Analytical Framework (IF)	14
3. Methodological Framework.....	18
3.1 Research Rationale.....	18
3.2 Research Procedures	19
3.3 Reflexivity	22
3.4 Limitations & Delimitations.....	23
4. Results.....	23
4.1 The Social Democrats	23
4.2 The Sweden Democrats.....	24
4.3 The Left Party	26
5. Analysis.....	27
5.1 Crisis Rhetoric: How each party makes sense of crisis	27
5.2 Discursive Boundary Shifts and Normalisation	35
5.3 Ideological Rearticulation and Thematic Hybridisation.....	40
6. Conclusion	44
6.1 Synthesis: Crisis → Discursive Struggle → Normalisation.....	44
6.2 What These Shifts Reveal about Swedish Party Politics	46
6.3 Future Research	49
7. Reference List.....	50

List of Figures & Tables

- Table 1.1 Crisis-Theme Rationale, p. 7
- Table 2.1 Discursive Strategies, p. 16
- Table 2.2 Topoi, p. 17
- Figure 3.1 Methods Flowchart, p. 19
- Table 3.1 Themes and Subthemes, p. 21
- Figure 4.1 S results summary, p. 24
- Figure 4.2 SD results summary, p. 25
- Figure 4.3 V results summary, p. 26
- Table 5.1 Threat Trajectory, p. 29
- Table 5.2 Responsibility & Blame Trajectory, p. 31
- Table 5.3 Legitimation Trajectory, p. 35
- Table 5.4 Security/Welfare Hybridisation, p. 38
- Table 5.5 D&S Trajectory, p. 41
- Table 5.6 Welfare as Security Trajectory, p. 42
- Table 5.7 M&I Trajectory, p. 44

List of Appendices¹

- Appendix 1 – Data Sheet
- Appendix 2 – Coded Paragraphs²
- Appendix 3 – Codebook
- Appendix 4 – Results Summary

¹ Available in separate files

² This document will contain only the coding of paragraphs used or referenced to in Chapter 5. For a complete list contact the author.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, Sweden has often been portrayed as a model of political stability, strong democratic institutions, and a generous welfare state. Yet, over the past ten years, this image has been challenged. A series of overlapping crises – among others, the 2015 migration influx, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the 2022 security realignment following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine – have altered both the political landscape and how Swedish parties communicate their visions. During such periods, political language takes on a strategic function: it frames uncertainty, allocates responsibility, and reshapes collective understandings of the national interest. While Sweden remains a consolidated democracy, its party discourse has become increasingly contested, reflecting tensions between welfare universalism, national security, and identity politics (Backlund, 2020; Oscarsson, et al., 2021).

Sweden’s political landscape has long been characterised by consensus-oriented governance and a party system anchored in social democracy (Backlund, 2020; Oscarsson, et al., 2021). For much of the post-war period, the Social Democrats (S) dominated national politics, shaping an image of Sweden as a model of welfare universalism and egalitarianism. The multi-party system, however, has become increasingly fragmented over the past two decades. Traditional blocs – the left-leaning ‘red-green’ alliance and the centre-right ‘Alliance for Sweden’ – have weakened as new cleavages have emerged around issues of migration, security, and national identity. The rise of the Sweden Democrats (SD) since the 2010s disrupted the established cordon sanitaire that once separated mainstream and radical right politics, forcing other parties to recalibrate their rhetorical and strategic positions. These developments have reshaped the conditions of political communication: questions once framed in terms of welfare and solidarity are now frequently articulated through registers of safety, belonging, and moral responsibility.

Against this backdrop, political communication has grown more rhetorically charged. Concepts such as *trygghet* (safety), *välstånd* (welfare), and *försvar* (defence) now appear in new combinations and tones, often linked to issues of migration, integration, and belonging. This study explores more than just what political parties talk about; rather, it examines how the following three themes are discussed: Migration & Integration (M&I), Defence & Security (D&S), and Healthcare & Preparedness (H&P). These themes were chosen as they each correspond, overall, to a crisis-type event during the studied period (see Table 1.1). Understanding how political parties use and redefine such terms over time provides insight into how Swedish political culture adapts to crisis and change. This study, therefore, examines how the aims and language of political parties in the

Swedish parliament have shifted across three electoral cycles: 2014, 2018, and 2022. Due to the constraints of this project, it was decided to focus on three parties fitting this criterion. These were S, SD, and the Left Party (V). These three parties span both mainstream and challenger positions within Sweden's political spectrum, where questions of welfare, inclusion, and national identity are most explicitly contested. Together, they span a broad ideological range, from the nationalist-conservative SD to the social-democratic and mainstream traditions of S, and the ultra-socialist V, allowing for an analysis of how both mainstream and challenger parties negotiate the evolving language of migration & integration, healthcare & preparedness, and defence & security.

Existing research on political communication has shown that crises often accelerate linguistic and ideological shifts. Scholars of crisis rhetoric (e.g., Boin et al. 2016, Windsor et al. 2014) describe such moments as “breakdowns of familiar symbolic frameworks,” where political actors must renegotiate legitimacy and control. At the same time, scholars such as Cammaerts (2020) and Krzyżanowski (2020) have traced how exclusionary or radical narratives migrate into mainstream discourse: a process often described as the *normalisation* of marginal rhetoric. While a growing body of literature explores these dynamics at the European level, comparatively few studies have examined how they unfold over time in the Swedish context. Previous research tends to focus on a single election, issue, or party, leaving a gap in understanding how rhetorical shifts develop longitudinally across multiple electoral cycles.

The purpose of this study is therefore to explore how three political parties have rearticulated key policy themes and rhetorical strategies in response to the social and political challenges of the past decade. Specifically, the research investigates how the parties' official election manifestos construct meaning and legitimacy in three policy areas relevant to crises near each election cycle. Table 1.1 summarises the alignment between electoral cycles, crisis contexts, and analytical themes. By comparing these documents over time, the study seeks to uncover both continuity and change in political expression and ideological positioning.

Table 1.1: Crisis-Theme rationale

Electoral Cycle	Dominant Crisis Context	Analytical Theme
2014-	Climate Crisis	Defence & Security
2014–2018	2015 Migration Crisis	Migration & Integration
2018–2022	COVID-19 Pandemic	Healthcare & Preparedness
2018-	Gang Criminality Crisis	Defence & Security
2014 + 2022-	Annexation / War in Ukraine	Defence & Security

1.1 Research Objectives

The overarching objective of this thesis is to identify and interpret shifts in political aims and language within Swedish party discourse between 2014 and 2022. The analysis focuses on how the Sweden Democrats (SD), the Social Democrats (S), and the Left Party (V) articulate certain policy themes and how these articulations reflect broader socio-political developments. The idea is to extend current understandings of Swedish political change by integrating the empirical findings on polarisation and party strategy into a discourse-theoretical model of ideological transformation under conditions of crisis.

Three questions guide the investigation:

1. How do Swedish party manifestos between 2014 and 2022 frame, prioritise, and reorganise key policy areas related to migration, security, and healthcare?
2. How do parties use discursive and rhetorical strategies to construct meaning, assign responsibility, and legitimise policy responses?
3. In what ways do linguistic and rhetorical shifts across the three electoral cycles reflect processes of discursive normalisation, ideological boundary change, and evolving party-system dynamics?

Together, these prompts aim to illuminate how these parties negotiate meaning and authority within shifting national and international contexts.

1.2 Structure

The thesis is organised into six chapters. Following this introduction, **Chapter 2** provides previous literature and presents the theoretical framework, outlining key literature on critical discourse analysis, crisis rhetoric, and the normalisation of political discourse. **Chapter 3** details the methodological approach and discusses methods used to collect and analyse data. **Chapter 4** presents the findings of the thematic and comparative analyses, while **Chapter 5** delves deeper into the previously introduced theoretical lens and interprets the findings through it. Finally, **Chapter 6** synthesises the empirical findings in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework, identifying broader patterns of ideological change, crisis rhetoric, and discursive normalisation in Swedish party politics. It discusses the implications of these patterns for understanding contemporary political communication in Sweden.

1.3 Scope of Study

The scope of this study is deliberately defined to ensure depth and analytical coherence. The corpus includes only official national-level election manifestos from the Sweden Democrats (SD), the Social Democrats (S), and the Left Party (V) published in 2014, 2018 and 2022³. While party manifestos are programmatic texts rather than real-time communication, their longitudinal consistency makes them particularly suitable for tracing durable ideological and discursive shifts. These documents represent the parties' most formal and strategically curated articulations of political aims and values, making them particularly suitable for analysing ideologically durable discourse. Other forms of communication – such as speeches, debates, or social media content – are excluded to maintain comparability across parties and time.

The temporal delimitation to 2014–2022 captures a decade marked by multiple overlapping crises that have shaped Swedish political communication, including the migration crisis, the pandemic, and changing national security conditions. Focusing on this period allows for a coherent longitudinal comparison of how parties adapted their language to shifting realities. Although preliminary materials from the 2024–2025 period exist, they were excluded because they are partial or non-final. Limiting the analysis to complete electoral cycles ensures consistency in document type, comparability across parties, and analytical reliability.

³ The Moderate Party (M) was considered, however did not have a manifesto for 2014, which was necessary to be included in this study.

2. Previous Research & Theoretical Framework

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first three sections build up three theoretical and empirical pillars of relevant research: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Crisis Theory, and Normalisation Theory. Here, I reflect upon and discuss ideas within each theory, as well as their usage in the Swedish political context. The last section combines these three into the Integrative Framework that is then applied in the Analysis chapter. I have also included a research-backed gap where this study could fit.

2.1 Language, Power, and Discourse

The connection between language and power has long been a central concern within the humanities and social sciences. As Fairclough (1995) argues, language is not a neutral medium for communication but a social practice through which power relations are produced, maintained, and sometimes challenged. Meaning, in this view, is never fixed; it is negotiated through the interplay between linguistic form and social context. The way political actors frame, phrase, and legitimise their messages is not just a stylistic choice but a meaningful action that shapes public understanding. For example, describing immigration as a ‘crisis’ rather than a ‘challenge’ encourages citizens to see it as an urgent threat rather than a manageable issue.

Building on Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism, discourse is inherently social because every utterance responds to, and anticipates, other voices (Bakhtin, 1981). Political texts are thus dialogical sites where competing ideological perspectives struggle for dominance. Blackledge (2005) expands on this by arguing that ideology resides in language use itself: certain linguistic structures become normalised to the extent that they appear natural, obscuring the power relations that sustain them; for example, labelling protest as ‘disorder’ rather than ‘dissent’ normalises state authority and frames opposition as illegitimate. In this sense, linguistic practice is both constitutive of and constituted by wider social structures (ibid).

CDA provides a systematic way to explore this duality. CDA views discourse as simultaneously a text, a discursive practice, and a social practice (Fairclough, 1992). These three dimensions correspond respectively to the linguistic features of the text (lexical choice, syntax, modality), the processes of its production and interpretation, and the broader socio-historical conditions that make particular meanings possible. Analysing texts at these levels reveals how language mediates ideology and power.

In Sweden, for example, *trygghet* (safety) has become a central yet contested concept through which parties negotiate meanings of welfare, safety, and belonging (Airas & Truedsson, 2020). As Heber (2023) shows, the emotional framing of *otrygghet* (insecurity) often outweighs empirical indicators of insecurity, illustrating how discourse constructs lived reality. The same word may therefore have markedly different ideological meanings depending on context. CDA enables the researcher to expose these subtleties by identifying patterns of nomination (who or what is named), predication (how actors are described), and argumentation (the reasoning that justifies claims, as well as perspectivation (how speakers position themselves in relation to what is said) and intensification or mitigation (how statements are emotionally charged or softened)⁴ (Wodak & Meyer, 2001:§2⁵; see table 2.2).

This analytical attention to language as power aligns closely with concerns of political science. As Fairclough (1995) observed, discourse does not simply mirror political developments; it actively organises them by shaping what is perceived as feasible or legitimate. Power operates through the social conventions governing what may be said and by whom (ibid.). In political manifestos, such orders of discourse determine the ideological boundaries of debate. CDA, by examining how these orders evolve over time, helps reveal how crises or new ideological currents become linguistically normalised. Equally important is the notion of recontextualization; the transfer and transformation of meanings across different discursive fields (Blackledge, 2005). Analysing these processes provides a way to trace how the ideological foundations of political life evolve through language.

In summary, CDA provides a theoretical foundation for this thesis by conceptualising political discourse as a dynamic interplay among text, ideology, and power. It provides the conceptual tools to investigate how language reflects and reconstructs Sweden's shifting political order, especially when understood alongside complementary perspectives on crisis communication and normalisation discussed in the following sections.

2.2 Crisis, Meaning and Political Rhetoric

While discourse analysis explains how language constructs social reality, it does not in itself account for why certain shifts in language occur at specific historical moments. Boin et al.

⁴ These Discursive Strategies are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

⁵ This book also draws selectively on elements of the Discourse–Historical Approach, particularly in tracing intertextual references to national history and identity. For simplicity, I have incorporated these under CDA.

(2016:7) defines crisis as when “a social system [...] experiences an urgent threat to its basic structures or fundamental values, which harbors many ‘unknowns’ and appears to require a far-reaching response.” For this project, it is useful to view crisis as a discursive rupture; a period when established meanings are destabilised and political actors compete to impose new interpretations. Crises create opportunities for redefinition; they interrupt the taken-for-granted and open a space for rhetorical innovation (Boin et al., 2016).

Boin and colleagues argue that leaders facing crises must engage in sense-making, decision-making, meaning-making, accountability management, and stay or reform (Boin et al., 2016). These stages are not purely administrative but deeply communicative: they involve crafting narratives that assign responsibility, propose remedies, and restore legitimacy. Language is, therefore, the key arena through which crises are politically managed. Windsor et al. (2014) reason that the language of leadership in crisis reveals the balance between persuasion and control.

In political rhetoric, discourse often operates through recurrent topoi; argumentative ‘conclusion rules’ that connect claims to their underlying justifications (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). A topos is a familiar “if-then” rule that sounds like common sense; for example, the topos of burden follows the logic that if something is seen as a burden, it should be reduced. Topoi⁶, thus, function as common-sense warrants that legitimise political decisions and mobilise publics, allowing speakers to move seamlessly from description to prescription. Through such linguistic strategies, political actors transform material disruptions into moral and emotional narratives. Complementing this, Benoit (1997) emphasises how leaders strategically manage these discursive constructions of responsibility by employing rhetorical strategies such as denial, evasion, minimisation, corrective action, or mortification. Both perspectives highlight language as the key medium through which political actors seek to restore credibility, control interpretation, and stabilise public order during moments of crisis.

From a discourse-analytical perspective, crises thus function as moments of intensified interdiscursivity. Competing orders of discourse collide and are re-negotiated; for example, economic, moral, and security discourses may become intertwined in political responses to crisis. Fairclough (1995) emphasises that such intersections are crucial because they allow new ideological configurations to emerge.

⁶ Topoi are discussed in more detail in Chapters 2.4 and 3.

The process of meaning-making in crisis also entails the construction of collective identity. Leaders narrate crises through binaries such as responsible/irresponsible or safe/threatened, thereby defining who belongs to the moral community. This is what Boin et al. (2016) describe as symbolic frameworks, which use narratives to reaffirm or reformulate the moral order. In Sweden, such symbolic politics has often taken the form of appeals to national exceptionalism and moral responsibility. During the 2015 refugee crisis, for instance, political leaders alternated between solidarity and control frames, constructing Sweden as both humanitarian example and an overburdened victim (Aronson, 2020). More recently, narratives around NATO membership and the war in Ukraine have reconfigured collective identity around international solidarity and defensive responsibility (Voytiv, 2025). These storylines connect directly to the themes of safety, welfare, and defence, each of which becomes a vessel for the moral re-ordering of society.

Integrating crisis theory with CDA thus enables this thesis to explain when and why discursive shifts occur. CDA uncovers the mechanisms of linguistic change, while crisis theory clarifies the temporal and political triggers that make such change possible. Together, they allow for an examination of how Swedish parties have used crises to redefine ideological boundaries, justify new policies, and negotiate legitimacy.

2.3 Normalisation and Mainstreaming of Radical Rhetoric

Whereas crisis theory explains how new meanings arise, the concept of normalisation addresses how these meanings become accepted and routinised over time. In political communication, normalisation refers to the process by which once radical or marginal ideas are incorporated into mainstream discourse, often through linguistic adaptation. This transformation rarely occurs abruptly; it unfolds gradually through repetition, moral reframing, and the blurring of ideological boundaries (Cammaerts, 2020).

Krzyżanowski (2020) describes normalisation as a discursive shift of boundaries, whereby what was previously considered unacceptable becomes legitimate. Importantly, this does not always involve the radical right entering government but rather the diffusion of its frames and vocabulary into the rhetoric of centrist or even progressive actors (*ibid*). In practice, this involves three interrelated mechanisms: borrowing, softening, and repetition. Borrowing occurs when mainstream parties adopt stylistic or thematic elements from marginal discourse. Softening refers

to the rearticulation of exclusionary claims in more technocratic or moral language. Repetition, finally, normalises such frames through sheer frequency, gradually eroding their association with extremism.

Brown et al. (2021) expand this framework by emphasising the role of media and elites in mainstreaming radical ideas. They argue that normalisation is not simply a bottom-up cultural process but often facilitated by established actors who, through strategic ambiguity, reproduce and legitimise the very discourses they claim to contest (ibid). This dynamic is evident across Europe, where narratives around national identity, immigration and security have converged even among ideologically different parties. Corrochano et al. (2024) similarly highlight how the coexistence of ‘linguistic moderation and ideological radicality’ enables exclusionary politics to thrive under a veneer of pragmatism.

From a discourse-analytical perspective, normalisation can be studied by tracing how particular orders of discourse evolve, how the boundaries of acceptable talk shift within specific thematic domains. Fairclough (1995) suggests that when new discourses penetrate existing ones, they create ‘hybrid’ discourses that blend conflicting ideological elements. This hybridity is particularly visible in policy areas such as welfare and security, where moral and managerial vocabularies coexist. In the Swedish case, for instance, the language of safety increasingly merges welfare-state solidarity with law-and-order rhetoric, while discussions of welfare adopt tones of efficiency, control, and conditionality (Hermansson, 2022; Idevall Hagren & Bellander, 2023). These developments reflect a broader European trend in which the rhetoric of care becomes intertwined with that of surveillance and responsibility, for dealing with social problems such as gangs and youth criminality.

Krzyżanowski (2018) further conceptualises this process through the notion of discursive mainstreaming, a mechanism of legitimation that redefines what counts as politically acceptable. Mainstreaming operates through intertextual borrowing between political texts, media discourse, and bureaucratic language. For this reason, analysing party manifestos offers a valuable window into the institutionalisation of new discursive norms. These texts codify ideological change, thus reflecting if and how the linguistic logic of the radical or marginal is partially assimilated into the platforms of traditional parties.

Recent Swedish research corroborates these theoretical accounts of discursive normalisation with empirical and institutional evidence. Oscarsson et al. (2021) demonstrate that ideological cleavages have become increasingly structured around a cultural rather than economic value dimension. Questions of migration, integration and moral belonging now define the primary axis of political conflict, producing what the authors term a 'värderingsdimension' (value dimension) that cuts across traditional left–right alignments. This transformation mirrors the discursive hybridisation described by Krzyżanowski (2020); whereby moral and security vocabularies intertwine in mainstream rhetoric.

At the same time, Backlund's (2020) analysis of coalition formation reveals how strategic isolation of the Sweden Democrats gradually evolved into rhetorical and procedural accommodation once reputational constraints shifted. His findings suggest that institutional exclusion can, under certain strategic conditions, ultimately lead to linguistic convergence and policy co-optation of policy positions. Together, these studies locate the Swedish trajectory of normalisation within both discursive and institutional dynamics: an expanding cultural polarisation that redefines legitimacy, and a recalibration of party strategy that renders previously radical frames politically admissible.

Within this thesis, normalisation theory provides the lens for understanding why discursive shifts persist beyond the crises that initially triggered them. Whereas crisis discourse is reactive, normalisation describes consolidation: the sedimentation of new ideological common sense, that is, the gradual stabilisation of new ways of thinking as taken-for-granted. Together with CDA, this framework allows for an examination of how Swedish political language evolves not only in moments of turbulence but also through everyday reiteration and accommodation.

2.4 Integrative Analytical Framework (IF)

The preceding sections suggest that Sweden's evolving political discourse on safety and belonging reflects a dual process: intensifying cultural polarisation in the public sphere alongside calculated moderation and adaptation within elite political practice. Capturing this dynamic requires an analytical framework capable of accounting for linguistic construction, temporal disruption, and ideological stabilisation simultaneously. No single theoretical perspective sufficiently explains how political language shifts during crises, how competing interpretations emerge, or how certain meanings become sedimented over time. For this reason, the present study adopts an integrative analytical framework in which Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), crisis theory, and normalisation theory are treated as mutually constitutive.

At its core, the framework builds on a shared understanding of language as both a medium and a mechanism of power. In line with Fairclough's (1992; 1995) conception of discourse as text, discursive practice, and social practice, political communication is understood not merely as the transmission of ideas but as a site where ideology is actively produced, contested, and stabilised. Linguistic choices are therefore political acts: they define problems, assign responsibility, legitimise policy responses, and delineate the boundaries of moral and political community. This assumption underpins all three theoretical perspectives integrated in the framework.

Crisis theory introduces a temporal and situational dimension to this discursive understanding. As Boin et al. (2016) argue, crises disrupt established symbolic frameworks and compel political actors to engage in intensified sense-making and meaning-making. Such moments are characterised by heightened uncertainty, moral pressure, and demands for decisive action. From a discursive perspective, crises function as ruptures in which previously taken-for-granted meanings become unstable, opening space for rhetorical innovation and ideological rearticulation. Political actors must explain what has gone wrong, who is responsible, and what must be done – tasks that are primarily accomplished through language.

Normalisation theory explains how these crisis-induced discursive shifts persist beyond their initial context. Rather than viewing ideological change as abrupt or exceptional, normalisation theory conceptualises it as a gradual boundary shift in what is considered legitimate political speech (Krzyżanowski, 2020; Cammaerts, 2020). Through repetition, moral reframing, and interdiscursive blending, narratives that were once marginal, controversial, or crisis-specific may become embedded in mainstream political communication. Normalisation thus captures the process by which crisis rhetoric transitions from reactive sense-making to durable political common sense.

Taken together, these perspectives form a temporal model of discursive transformation:

Crisis → Discursive Struggle → Normalisation of New Frames

During crises, multiple discourses – humanitarian, economic, security-oriented, and moral – intersect and compete. Political actors engage in a discursive struggle over meaning, mobilising linguistic resources to stabilise preferred interpretations. Over time, as certain framings are

reiterated across electoral cycles, policy documents, and political actors, they reshape the boundaries of legitimate discourse and become normalised within the political field.

Operationalising the Integrative Framework

To translate this theoretical framework into empirical analysis, the study operationalises discursive struggle and normalisation through discursive strategies and topoi, drawn from the discourse-historical approach within CDA (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). These analytical tools provide a systematic bridge between linguistic form and rhetorical function.

The five discursive strategies employed in this study – nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and intensification/mitigation – are summarised in Table 2.1. Together, they capture how political actors and processes are named, evaluated, justified, positioned, and emotionally framed. These strategies allow the analysis to trace how crises are linguistically constructed: who is portrayed as a threat or a victim, which actions are depicted as necessary or inevitable, and how urgency or restraint is rhetorically achieved.

Strategy	Definition	Function in political discourse
Nomination	Naming or labeling actors/groups	Defines who is “in” and “out”
Predication	Assigning traits/attributes to actors	Constructs moral or evaluative meaning
Argumentation	Providing reasoning or cause-effect links	Justifies actions or stances
Perspectivisation	Expressing viewpoint or stance	Marks ideological position or in-group identity
Intensification OR Mitigation	Amplifying or downplaying force of statements	Shapes emotional tone

Topoi, summarised in Table 2.2, function as the argumentative logics that connect descriptive claims to normative conclusions. They operate as common-sense ‘if-then’ rules that legitimise political action – for example, if something constitutes a danger, it must be prevented; if a system is overburdened, it must be restricted or reformed. The eight topoi employed in this study represent a condensed, context-sensitive adaptation of the broader typology proposed by Reisigl and Wodak (in Wodak & Meyer, 2001). This reduction ensures analytical focus while retaining theoretical grounding.

By combining discursive strategies and topoi, the framework enables an examination of how descriptive problem constructions are transformed into moral, managerial, or ethical justifications for political action. Discursive strategies reveal *how* something is said, topoi reveal *why* that formulation legitimises a particular response. Tracing these patterns longitudinally allows the study to identify both short-term crisis rhetoric and longer-term processes of discursive normalisation across parties and electoral cycles.

Topoi	Logic
Danger/Threat (D/T)	If something poses a danger or threat, one should act to prevent it.
Burden/Overload (B/O)	If an institution, system, or society is overburdened, measures should be taken to ease the load.
Responsibility (R)	If an actor is responsible for a problem, they must act to solve or prevent it.
Justice/Fairness (J/F)	If cases are similar, they should be treated equally and injustices corrected.
Humanitarianism (H)	If an action aligns with humanitarian values or protects human dignity, it should be undertaken.
Advantage/Usefulness (A/U)	If an action is useful or beneficial (or avoids unnecessary cost), it should be done.
History/Tradition (H/T)	Because history shows certain consequences, we should act accordingly.
Culture /Identity (C/I)	Because the culture or identity of a group is distinctive, it must be protected or maintained.

Analytical Implications

This integrative framework underpins the study’s use of Thematic Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis across time and party lines. Thematic coding identifies recurring policy domains, while discursive strategies and topoi provide the analytical lenses through which rhetorical and ideological change is interpreted. The longitudinal design enables the analysis to distinguish between reactive crisis framing and durable discursive shifts, thereby capturing how political language adapts, stabilises, and reorganises itself in response to sustained crisis conditions.

Research Gap & Contribution

Existing scholarship has offered important insights into Swedish political communication. Studies of safety (Airas & Truedsson, 2020; Heber, 2023), populist narratives (Hermansson, 2022), and crisis rhetoric (Aronson, 2020; Voytiv, 2025) demonstrate the richness of the national context, while recent analyses of political polarisation (Oscarsson et al., 2021) and coalition strategy (Backlund, 2020) provide a broader understanding of the structural and institutional transformations shaping the party system. Yet, these contributions remain largely detached from discourse-analytical approaches: they identify *what* forms of polarisation and strategic realignment

have occurred, but not *how* such shifts are linguistically constructed, normalised, and emotionally sustained across time.

This thesis addresses that gap by examining how the Sweden Democrats (SD), the Social Democrats (S), and the Left Party (V) have linguistically reconstructed their political aims through successive crises. By combining CDA, crisis theory and normalisation, the study connects discursive processes to the political mechanisms identified in previous research. It thereby reveals how the chosen themes function as evolving discursive anchors linking ideology, identity, and legitimacy. The framework thus extends current understandings of Swedish political change by integrating the empirical findings on polarisation and party strategy into a discourse-theoretical model of ideological transformation under conditions of crisis.

3. Methodological Framework

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section discusses the methodology and rationale behind the research plan. The second section goes through the method application step by step. The third section delves into the transparency and reflexivity of the study, and the last section discusses some practical limitations and delimitations.

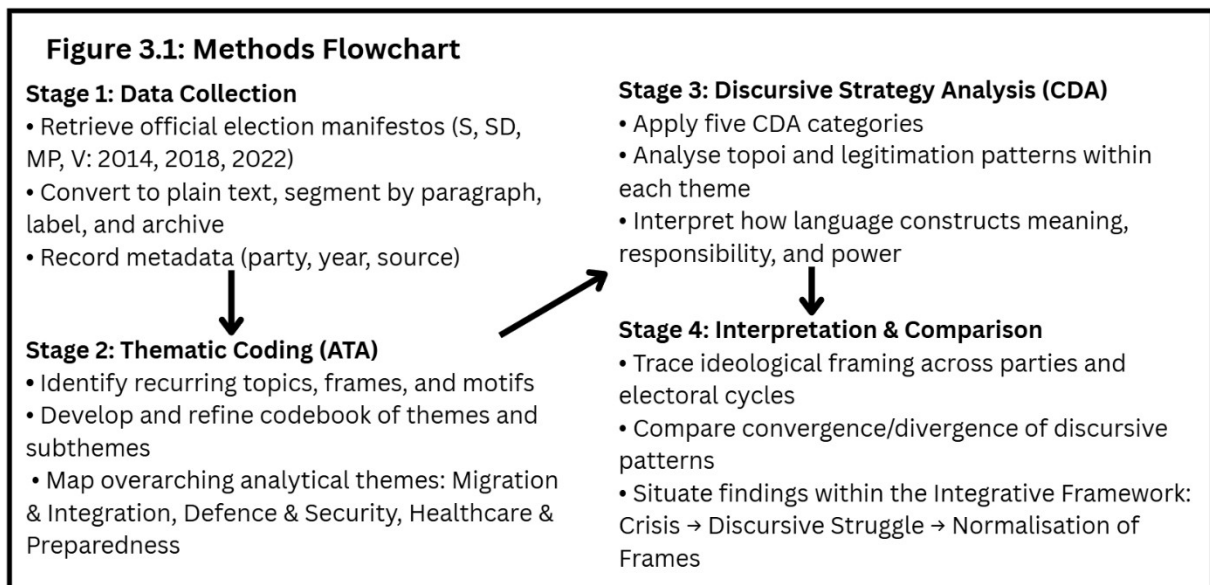
3.1 Research Rationale

Building on the integrative analytical framework developed in Chapter 2, this study adopts a longitudinal thematic discourse-analytical design to examine how Swedish party rhetoric evolves across electoral cycles. This study adopts an interpretative and comparative mixed-method design. The primary aim is to examine how the political aims and language of the Sweden Democrats (SD), the Social Democrats (S), and the Left Party (V) have evolved across three electoral periods (2014, 2018, and 2022). An interpretative approach is appropriate because the study focuses on the meaning, framing, and rhetorical construction of political messages rather than on quantifying voter behaviour or measuring opinion shifts. The interest lies in how ideas, priorities, and identities are expressed and negotiated through language, and how these discursive changes reflect broader social and political transformations.

To analyse this, the research employs Applied Thematic Analysis (ATA) as the overarching methodological framework (Guest et al. 2012). ATA offers a systematic yet flexible process for identifying, coding, and comparing patterns of meaning across large textual corpora. It provides transparency, traceability, and analytical rigour to compare multiple documents over time while

remaining open to new or unexpected themes emerging from the data. In this study, ATA will be used as a sieve to weed out the non-relevant themes from the relevant themes.

Because the study seeks not only to identify recurring themes but also to understand their discursive and ideological significance, ATA is combined with elements of the Integrative Analytical Framework (IF) (chapter 2.4). While ATA structures the coding and data reduction, IF provides the interpretive lens through which linguistic and rhetorical strategies are examined. The combination allows the analysis to move from *what* is present (identified themes and linguistic patterns) to *how* those themes are discussed (discursive strategies, topoi, and legitimation practices). For the coding, specifically, I employ the five discursive strategies⁷ and eight *topoi*⁸ to explore how the themes are constructed and justified. These analytical layers capture both the viewpoint and the underlying emotive logic of political argumentation. This integration is particularly well-suited for research, where language both reflects and constructs shifts in ideology, policy priorities, and public narratives during times of crisis. This method is summarised in Figure 3.1.



3.2 Research Procedures

Step 1: Data Collection & Preparation

The study is based on a purposive sample of official party documents produced by the chosen parties: SD, S, and V. The corpus includes national election manifestos and party programmes from 2014, 2018, and 2022. These documents were chosen because they represent each party's

⁷ Nomination, Predication, Perspectivisation, Argumentation, Intensification, Mitigation. Further discussed in Chapter 2.

⁸ Legitimation strategies/topoi, further discussed in Chapter 2.

most authoritative statements of political aims and priorities during key electoral cycles. The sampling strategy is therefore selective.

All documents were collected from *Svenske Nationell Datatjänst* (Swedish National Data Service, SND), which provides access to research data for the social sciences and humanities, in plain-text format to ensure consistent analysis. Each file was labelled by *party* and *year* (e.g., SD_2018_manifesto.txt) and stored in a structured folder system. A metadata sheet recorded document titles, publication dates, and sources to maintain transparency⁹.

Texts were segmented at paragraph level, as paragraphs typically express one coherent idea or argument. Each segment received a unique ID number, allowing direct reference between coded excerpts and source texts. The subsequent coding was conducted manually using Microsoft Word and Excel¹⁰. An analysis log documented analytic decisions, ensuring traceability and consistency throughout the process.

Step 2: Coding Theme Development

The analysis followed the principles of ATA as outlined by Guest et al. (2012). Coding was conducted through a hybrid inductive-deductive approach, allowing theoretically informed themes to guide initial coding while remaining open to new patterns and subcodes emerging from the data. The initial code list drew from prior research and early readings of the manifestos focusing on the already chosen overarching themes: Migration & Integration, Defence & Security, and Healthcare & Preparedness. Table 3.1 shows what the final themes and subthemes were.

Each paragraph was coded for its dominant theme and subtheme, while notes were made if additional subthemes could be found. A codebook was developed iteratively, including code definitions, keywords, and inclusion/exclusion criteria¹¹. After a careful initial coding, definitions were refined to ensure internal consistency. Coding decisions, revisions, and interpretative thoughts were recorded in the analysis log to maintain an audit trail, supporting both transparency and reflexivity.

⁹ See Appendix 1 for Data Sheet of the collected data.

¹⁰ See Appendix 2 for a selection of coded paragraphs, based on the quotes used in Chapter 5.

¹¹ See Appendix 3 for Codebook.

Table 3.1: Themes & Subthemes		
Themes	Subthemes	Definition
Migration & Integration (M&I)	Responsibility / Burden	Migration as a cost, strain, or unfair load.
	Control & Borders	Emphasising regulation, limits, border control.
	Integration / Adaptation	Assimilation, language, culture, or “Swedish values.”
	Humanitarian / Solidarity	Migration in moral, humanitarian, or empathy terms.
	Criminality & (In)security	Migration as a driver of crime or social disorder.
	Categorised Migration	Differentiates between types of migration, without evaluative notions
Defence & Security (D&S)	Military Defence	Focus on defence capability, spending, NATO, armed forces.
	Domestic Security / Crime	Law enforcement, crime or order issue.
	Civil Protection / Emergency	Crisis readiness, total defence, civil contingency.
	Everyday / Gendered Safety	Everyday safety, social stability, and moral order in communities.
	Environmental Security	Security and resilience related to climate change, energy, or environmental risks.
	Sovereignty / Autonomy	National self-determination/control, independence from supranational influence.
	Value-based Security	Framing of ideological conflict and global safety
Healthcare & Preparedness (H&P)	Access & Equality	Availability, waiting times, regional disparities.
	System Efficiency	Organisation, management, staffing, public-private balance.
	Pandemic Lessons / Resilience	References to COVID, lessons, crisis readiness, preparedness.
	Welfare as Security	When health is framed as part of trygghet or national safety.
	Inequality & Vulnerability	When healthcare discussions link to segregation or social divides.
Crossover Subthemes	Responsibility & Blame	Assigning credit or blame for crises or decline
	Moral Legitimation/Authenticity	Emotional appeals to sincerity, moral rightness or wrongness
	Crisis / Decline Framing	Language describing Sweden as declining, unstable, or in crisis

Step 3: IF Coding and Analysis

This phase applies the five discursive strategies outlined in Table 2.1 – nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and intensification/mitigation – to analyse how political actors, actions, and processes are named, evaluated, justified, and emotionally framed across party manifestos. These strategies were used to trace how ideological positions are linguistically constructed in the data and how boundaries between in-groups and out-groups are discursively maintained or contested.

In parallel, eight topoi (Table 2.2) were employed to capture the recurrent argumentative logics through which policy claims are legitimised. The condensed adaptation of the broader typology proposed by Reisigl and Wodak (in Wodak & Meyer, 2001), follows the principle of context-sensitive operationalisation, allowing the analytical framework to remain theoretically grounded while being tailored to the political and crisis-related discourse of Swedish party manifestos. Together, the discursive strategies and topoi enable a systematic analysis of how descriptive claims are transformed into normative conclusions, facilitating structured comparison across parties and election years.

An interpretative element was added through analytic notes, where the researcher reflected on the rationale for each categorisation. Once all documents were coded, the data were organised to trace changes across parties and over time. Comparisons were conducted both within parties across electoral cycles and between parties within the same year to identify convergence, divergence, or reframing of key themes.

3.3 Reflexivity

The study followed the quality principles proposed in ATA to ensure credibility and dependability. Credibility was enhanced through a transparent analytic process: all coding decisions, codebook revisions, and interpretive notes were documented in an analysis log. The use of direct quotations in the results further anchors interpretations in the data. Dependability was ensured through a consistent coding protocol and a pilot test on a subset of documents to refine code definitions and application. There was no inter-coder validation due to the individual nature of the project. Ethical considerations were marginal as the study uses publicly available documents with no personal or sensitive data.

Reflexivity was prioritised throughout the analysis. As a researcher's background and assumptions may influence interpretation, particularly in politically charged contexts or translations; thus, the analysis log was used to record reflections on potential bias and evolving perspectives. This ongoing reflexive practice supported both transparency and analytical integrity.

3.4 Limitations & Delimitations

Every methodological design entail trade-off between depth, scope, and feasibility. The following section outlines the practical and analytical limitations of the study and the delimitations intentionally set to preserve interpretive coherence.

The analysis is conducted on texts originally written in Swedish, while the thesis itself is presented in English. Quotations are translated by the author, with care taken to preserve linguistic nuances and rhetorical meaning as accurately as possible. The focus is on meaning, framing, and rhetorical strategy, rather than on measuring voter responses or media effects. While digital tools such as NVivo or MAXQDA could facilitate computer-assisted coding, these programs require paid licences that were beyond the scope of this project. Instead, the study employs a careful analytic approach to ensure that the analysis remains feasible within available resources while preserving contextual sensitivity and interpretive transparency.

4. Results

This chapter is divided into three parts, discussing findings made within each of the themes: Defence & Security (D&S), Healthcare & Preparedness (H&P), and Migration & Integration (M&I). The chapter is structured by party.¹²

4.1 The Social Democrats

The Social Democrats (S) move from framing security primarily as social welfare (2014) to emphasising policing and domestic order (2018). By 2022, the discourse further shifts toward defence, NATO orientation, and national preparedness, using stronger argumentation topoi of danger/threat and responsibility.

The S manifesto (2014) was in this analysis made up of 117 units of analysis (UoA) where of 40 were deemed relevant for this project. Within those 23 were themed D&S, 15 H&P, and 2 M&I. The main object of discussions (sub-themes) were respectively Value-based Security, System Efficiency, and Humanitarian and Moral Argumentation. As for discursive strategy, all had Argumentation as the main one, followed by Perspectivisation. The overall, most used topoi was Justice/Fairness¹³. If we look divided by theme, these were the results: Responsibility (D&S), Burden/Overload and Justice/Fairness equally (H&P), and Justice/Fairness (M&I).

¹² This chapter and its tables are based on the Result Summaries in Appendix 4.

¹³ This includes both individually and in combinations.

In the 2018 manifesto 107 out of 149 UoAs were deemed relevant, divided into 69 in D&S, 21 in H&P, and 17 in M&I. Here the dominant subthemes were Domestic Security/Crime (D&S), System Efficiency (H&P), and Control & Borders and Integration/Adaptation equally (M&I). The discursive strategy most used was by far Argumentation, and the overall dominant topoi were Advantage/Usefulness followed by Justice/Fairness. Respective, by theme, these were dominant: Advantage/Usefulness and Danger/Threat (D&S), Justice/Fairness and Burden/Overload (H&P), and Responsibility (M&I).

The 2022 manifesto includes 82 relevant UoAs of 93 total. They are divided into 56 UoAs in D&S, 17 for H&P, and 9 for M&I. The most dominant sub-themes were, respectively, Environmental Security, Welfare as Security, and Integration/Adaptation. The largest discursive strategy was Perspectivisation followed closely by Argumentation. The topoi were: Danger/Threat and Responsibility (D&S), Responsibility and Justice/Fairness (H&P), and Burden/Overload (M&I) respectively, and overall Responsibility.

Table 4.1: S Results Summary

Year	Dominant Theme	Core Subthemes	Main Discursive Strategy	Dominant Topoi
2014	D&S	Value-based Security, System Efficiency	Argumentation	Justice/Fairness, Responsibility
2018	D&S	Domestic Security/Crime	Argumentation	Advantage/Usefulness
2022	D&S	Environmental Security	Perspectivisation , Argumentation	Advantage/Usefulness , Justice/Fairness, Danger/Threat

4.2 The Sweden Democrats

The party moves from framing security primarily through cultural and civilisational threat narratives (2014), where migration and multiculturalism are constructed as risks to national cohesion. By 2018, the discourse shifts toward a stronger focus on domestic order, crime, and social disorder, with migration increasingly embedded as the root cause of violence and insecurity. By 2022, SD advances a near-total securitisation of society: economic strain, welfare overload, and criminality are all linked to migration, producing a collapse-oriented narrative.

The 2014 manifesto was in this analysis made up of 166 UoAs where 90 were deemed relevant for this project. Of those, 34 were themed D&S, 31 H&P, and 25 M&I. The main sub-themes were respectively Everyday/Gendered Safety, Access & Equality, and Integration/Adaptation. As for discursive strategy, all had Argumentation as dominant. The overall, most used topoi was Culture/Identity. If we look divided by theme, these were the results: Culture/Identity (D&S and M&I), and Advantage/Usefulness (H&P).

In the 2018 manifesto 149 out of 282 UoAs were deemed relevant, divided into 55 in D&S, 43 in H&P, and 51 in M&I. Here the dominant subthemes were Everyday/Gendered Safety (D&S), System Efficiency and Access & Equality (H&P), and Control & Borders (M&I). The discursive strategy most used was by far Argumentation, and the overall dominant topoi were Advantage/Usefulness followed by Justice/Fairness. Respective, by theme, these were dominant: Advantage/Usefulness (D&S), Justice/Fairness (H&P), and Culture/Identity (M&I).

The 2022 manifesto includes 357 relevant UoAs of 596 total. They are divided into 200 UoAs in D&S, 61 for H&P, and 96 for M&I. The most dominant sub-themes were, respectively, Domestic Security/Crime, System Efficiency, and Integration/Adaptation. The largest discursive strategy was Argumentation. The topoi were: Advantage/Usefulness (D&S), Responsibility (H&P and M&I) respectively, and overall, Justice/Fairness followed by Responsibility.

Table 4.2: SD Results Summary

Year	Dominant Theme	Core Subthemes	Main Discursive Strategy	Dominant Topoi
2014	D&S	Integration/Adaptation, Access & Equality	Argumentation	Culture/Identity
2018	D&S	Everyday/Gendered Safety, Access & Equality, System Efficiency, Control & Borders	Argumentation	Advantage/Usefulness, Justice/Fairness
2022	D&S	Domestic Security/Crime, Integration/Adaptation	Argumentation	Justice/Fairness, Responsibility

4.3 The Left Party

The party moves from framing security mainly as a question of welfare integrity and social equality (2014), where privatisation and profit motives are positioned as key threats to the Swedish model. By 2018, the discourse expands to include democratic security, linking rising inequality, racism, and right-wing extremism to broader risks facing both social cohesion and vulnerable groups. By 2022, V articulates a fully systemic security framework: climate crisis, marketisation, and widening class divides are treated as structural threats requiring transformative state intervention.

The 2014 manifesto was in this analysis made up of 137 UoAs where of 61 were deemed relevant for this project. Of those, 37 were themed D&S, 20 H&P, and 4 M&I. The main sub-themes were respectively Everyday/Gendered Safety, Welfare as Security, and Humanitarian/Solidarity. As for discursive strategy, all had Perspectivisation as the dominant. The overall, most used topoi was Justice/Fairness. If we look divided by theme, these were the results: Justice/Fairness (D&S and H&P), and Humanitarianism (M&I).

In the 2018 manifesto 78 out of 116 UoAs were deemed relevant, divided into 49 in D&S, 19 in H&P, and 10 in M&I. Here the dominant subthemes were Everyday/Gendered Safety (D&S), Access & Equality (H&P), and Humanitarianism and Integration/Adaptation equally (M&I). The discursive strategy most used was by far Perspectivisation, and the overall dominant topoi was Justice/Fairness. By theme, these were dominant: Justice/Fairness (D&S and H&P), and Humanitarianism (M&I).

Year	Dominant Theme	Core Subthemes	Main Discursive Strategy	Dominant Topoi
2014	D&S	Everyday/Gendered Safety, Environmental Security	Perspectivisation	Justice/Fairness
2018	D&S	Everyday/Gendered Safety	Perspectivisation	Justice/Fairness
2022	D&S	Environmental Security	Perspectivisation	Justice/Fairness, Responsibility

The 2022 manifesto includes 58 relevant UoAs of 80 total. They are divided into 34 UoAs in D&S, 20 for H&P, and 4 for M&I. The most dominant sub-themes were, respectively, Environmental Security, System Efficiency, and Integration/Adaptation. The largest discursive strategy was Perspectivisation. The topoi were: Responsibility (D&S), Justice/Fairness (H&P), Humanitarianism (M&I), and overall, Justice/Fairness.

5. Analysis

This chapter applies the integrative analytical framework (IF) developed in Chapter 2 to interpret how Swedish political parties construct crisis, responsibility, and legitimacy through language. Rather than treating discursive strategies as purely descriptive features, the analysis understands them as rhetorical tools through which parties define problems, justify policy responses, and position themselves ideologically.

Discursive strategies such as nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivisation, and intensification or mitigation are therefore analysed in terms of the rhetorical functions they perform within crisis narratives. Similarly, topoi are treated as legitimising logics that connect problem constructions to normative conclusions. By examining how these strategies and topoi are mobilised across parties and electoral cycles, the analysis traces both reactive crisis framing and longer-term processes of discursive normalisation.

The following sections move beyond describing what parties say to analysing how discursive resources are used to construct meaning, allocate responsibility, and rearticulate ideological boundaries over time. These patterns are brought together in the concluding synthesis (Chapter 6.1), which traces how crisis-driven discursive struggles can become normalised political frames.

5.1 Crisis Rhetoric: How each party makes sense of crisis

In this section, the analysis examines how the three parties employ discursive strategies and topoi to make sense of the crises characterising the 2014–2022 period. By focusing on the topoi of danger/threat, responsibility, burden/overload, justice/fairness, and advantage/usefulness, the section demonstrates how each party narrates the nature of crisis, identifies its sources, and articulates the appropriate political response. These patterns reveal distinct rhetorical trajectories: escalating securitisation in SD's discourse, increasingly threat-oriented language in S's rhetoric, and structural reframing of crisis by V. Together, these discursive formations illustrate how crisis

rhetoric both reflects and drives ideological rearticulation within Swedish political communication.

Threat Construction: The Escalation of Danger/Threat

Threat construction is a core component of crisis rhetoric. Across the three electoral cycles, all parties make increasing use of the topos of danger/threat¹⁴, but they do so with different emphases, intensities, and ideological aims.

SD's rhetoric already employed pronounced danger framing in 2014, particularly through cultural and civilisational threat narratives. Insecurity is associated not only with crime but with an erosion of national cohesion, attributed to multiculturalism and failed integration. This framing is captured in claims that governing parties have "made Sweden a little less beautiful and a little less remarkable for each year."¹⁵ (SD_2014_006). By 2018, insecurity becomes normalised and every day, embedded in references to violence, disorder, and social instability, such as "our country is not faring well."¹⁶ (SD_2018_049). By 2022, SD's manifestos, according to this study, exhibit a near-maximalist threat construction, in which societal decline is narratively linked to migration, welfare overload, and crime: "Sweden has become a country marked by crisis and division."¹⁷ (SD_2022_001). Here, D/T becomes the discursive anchor tying disparate issues into a coherent collapse narrative. This escalation reflects threat amplification, where insecurity is not merely described but constructed as existential and urgent in order to justify far-reaching interventions.

S's rhetoric shows a marked shift from 2014 to 2022. In 2014, danger is framed primarily in social terms, where threats arise from welfare inequality, unemployment, or institutional inadequacy, such as the risk of "a welfare system built on low basic security and charitable provision."¹⁸ (S_2014_079). By 2018, however, a more explicitly security-oriented threat logic appears, particularly concerning crime, extremism, and domestic order: "Sweden is facing new threats, including extreme weather events, cyberattacks, influence operations, violent extremism, and terrorism."¹⁹ (S_2018_142). This reframing aligns with the broader public debate in which safety increasingly merged with law-and-order discourse. By 2022, S adopts an additional threat logic tied to national defence and geopolitical instability, situating insecurity within "a period of

¹⁴ To some extent shortened to D/T or Danger.

¹⁵ "har gjort Sverige lite mindre fint och lite mindre fantastiskt för varje år."

¹⁶ "Vårt land mår inte bra"

¹⁷ "Sverige [har] blivit ett land i kris och splittring"

¹⁸ "en välfärd byggd på låg grundtrygghet och välgörenhet"

¹⁹ "Sverige möts av nya hot, som extremväder, IT-attacker, påverkanskampanjer, våldsbejakande extremism och terrorism."

significant change”²⁰ marked by war, pandemic, and climate crisis (S_2022_077). D/T thus migrates from social policy to the domains of defence and national security. This trajectory indicates an incremental but clear intensification of securitised language, suggesting responsiveness to shifting political pressures and crisis contexts.

V also employs the topos of danger, but with a fundamentally different rhetorical orientation. In 2014, insecurity is constructed around structural inequality and welfare erosion, where “a society marked by widening disparities between rich and poor,” is described as “fertile ground for racist and fascist movements and parties.”²¹ (V_2014_007). By 2018, V introduces democratic and ideological threats, such as racism, right-wing extremism, and erosion of democratic institutions (V_2018_018). By 2022, this logic is reframed in systemic terms, with climate change, marketisation of welfare, and long-term deterioration become the central threats to social security and collective well-being (V_2022_078). Rather than attributing danger to specific groups, V constructs crises as embedded in structural conditions. This reflects a rhetorical strategy of systemic threat reframing, shifting the location of crisis from individual behaviour to political-economic structures.

While all three parties intensify their use of danger topoi over time, they articulate different objects of threat (Figure 5.1). These trajectories illustrate distinct forms of crisis sense-making aligned with each party’s ideological project.

	2014	2018	2022	Overall Threat Trajectory
SD	Cultural and identity-based threats linked to migration and multiculturalism; focus on cohesion and everyday safety.	Intensified threat framing linking migration to crime, disorder, and welfare strain; danger normalised.	Systemic securitisation fusing migration, crime, welfare, and institutional decline into an existential collapse narrative.	Escalation from cultural threat → societal insecurity → systemic collapse; security becomes the master frame.
S	Social and economic risks to welfare, equality, and cohesion; security embedded in welfare discourse.	Shift toward domestic security, with crime and local safety added to welfare concerns.	National and geopolitical threats dominate; defence and preparedness frame security as existential.	Gradual securitisation from welfare risk → domestic security → national defence.
V	Welfare, gendered safety, and equality threatened by privatisation and social injustice.	Democratic and ideological threats foregrounded, including racism and right-wing extremism.	Structural threats dominate, with climate change and marketisation framed as long-term security risks.	Shift from social injustice → democratic erosion → systemic insecurity; security reattached to structures.

²⁰ ”en omvälvande tid”

²¹ ”Ett samhälle med ökande skillnader mellan rika och fattiga [...] är en grogrund för rasistiska och fascistiska rörelser och partier”

Responsibility and Blame Allocation Across Parties

The second major component of crisis rhetoric is responsibility attribution. Assigning blame is crucial for political actors, as it defines both the causes of crisis and the legitimacy of proposed solutions. In CDA terms, this is often realised through nomination and predication strategies combined with topoi of responsibility and burden/overload.

SD's responsibility logic is consistent and direct across all three cycles. The party repeatedly attributes responsibility for social disorder, welfare strain, and insecurity to the political establishment's handling of migration and integration. Rather than assigning blame to specific individuals, SD constructs a collective system-level culpability: integration politics, failed migration politics, ruling politicians, the establishment, and current and previous governments become responsible actors. This rhetorical strategy distributes blame across broad political and bureaucratic entities, allowing SD to position itself as a corrective outsider, claiming to "work for a Sweden where people can feel safe – regardless of time of day, regardless of place"²² (SD_2018_052). By 2022, this logic intensifies into a narrative of institutional overload, where welfare, healthcare, and policing are portrayed as simultaneously failing. Responsibility is thus expanded across multiple governance domains, culminating in the claim that mainstream parties have "inflicted [wounds] on the Swedish social body"²³ that must now be healed (SD_2022_002).

In 2014, S tends to describe problems in terms of general societal issues or failures of prior policy agendas without clear attribution of blame. Responsibility is diffuse and embedded in structural conditions such as underfunding or inequality. Early formulations stress "something is starting to fall apart"²⁴ in welfare and labour-market outcomes, while avoiding explicit culpability (S_2014_002). By 2018, responsibility attribution becomes more targeted. S increasingly contrasts its own proposals with those of political opponents and identifies criminal organisations, inadequate regulation, or sectoral mismanagement as contributing factors (e.g. S_2018_014; S_2018_116). Further, responsibility is rhetorically extended to the voter, framing the election as a "referendum on our welfare."²⁵ (S_2018_014; e.g. S_2018_013). By 2022, responsibility becomes more central and targeted. The government is positioned as the primary responsible actor for ensuring national preparedness, defence capability, and social stability in claims for "responsible leadership for Sweden – both in times of crisis and prosperity."²⁶ (S_2022_007). The

²² "verkar för ett Sverige där människor ska kunna känna sig trygga — oavsett tid på dygnet, oavsett plats."

²³ "rivit upp [sår] i den svenska samhällskroppen."

²⁴ "något håller på att gå sönder"

²⁵ "folkomröstning om vår välfärd"

²⁶ "ansvarstagande ledarskap för Sverige – både i kris och i medgång."

rhetorical shift is from diagnostic generality to state-centred accountability, reflecting the growing salience of crises that require authoritative responses.

V consistently attributes responsibility to structural forces rather than individuals or specific groups. Across all cycles, the party positions marketisation, privatisation, profit motives, and right-wing ideology as responsible for social insecurity (e.g. V_2014_007; V_2018_005; V_2022_002). Over time, this logic expands to include the long-term growth of class inequality, the erosion of welfare through privatisation, and the abandonment of political responsibility in favour of market ideology. In contrast to SD’s rising blame and S’s increasing state responsibility framing, V treats crisis as the outcome of systems shaped by economic inequality and ideological conflict. Further, V recurrently posits itself as the only good way forward, in claims that “the Left Party must be the one to lead political change.”²⁷ (V_2022_074). By 2022, responsibility extends to global structures: climate capitalism, geopolitical instability, and democratic erosion. This aligns with V’s broader rhetorical project of exposing underlying socio-economic causes rather than surface-level symptoms.

Responsibility attribution reflects contrasting ideological commitments (Figure 5.2). These constructions shape each party’s claim to legitimacy as crisis manager.

Table 5.2: Responsibility & Blame Trajectory

	2014	2018	2022	Complete Picture
SD	Blame attributed to political establishment and migration policy failures; responsibility framed as system-level mismanagement.	Expanded blame to welfare, policing, and integration systems; overload and institutional failure foregrounded.	Comprehensive responsibility failure across state systems; establishment framed as collectively culpable for societal breakdown.	Escalation from policy failure → system overload → total institutional blame; SD positioned as corrective outsider.
S	Responsibility diffuse and structural; problems framed as inherited policy conditions and underinvestment.	Increased attribution to specific actors (criminal groups, policy mismanagement); voters positioned as ultimate decision-makers.	Responsibility recentred on the state; leadership, preparedness, and defence framed as core state obligations.	Shift from diffuse structural responsibility → actor-specific blame → state-centred accountability.
V	Responsibility attributed to marketisation, inequality, and privatisation; crisis framed as systemic injustice.	Expansion to ideological and democratic responsibility; right-wing forces framed as destabilising agents.	Responsibility extended to global and structural forces (climate capitalism, geopolitics).	Consistent structural blame logic; responsibility shifts outward from national inequality → global systemic causes.

Legitimisation Through Moral and Pragmatic Appeals

A central function of crisis rhetoric is not merely to describe crises or attribute responsibility but to justify *why* particular responses are necessary, appropriate, or morally warranted. This

²⁷ “Vänsterpartiet som ska leda den politiska förändringen”

justificatory work – what Fairclough (1995) refers to as the ideological function of discourse - operates through topoi that supply the reasoning linking crisis diagnosis to proposed action. In the manifestos analysed here, three broad types of topoi serve as the primary foundations of legitimisation: advantage/usefulness, justice/fairness, and humanitarianism. Each corresponds to a distinct rhetorical mode: managerial, moral, and ethical legitimacy. The distribution and evolution of these topoi across the political spectrum reveal how parties articulate competing visions of crisis management and political authority.

Advantage/Usefulness → Managerial Legitimacy

The A/U topos legitimises political action by asserting that a given measure is effective, beneficial, or produces superior outcomes. Although it is often associated with technocratic or efficiency-oriented rhetoric, the ideological meaning of ‘usefulness’ varies significantly between parties. All three parties mobilise this topos, but they do so to justify various kinds of crisis responses and draw on distinct conceptions of what counts as beneficial for society.

For S, utility-based arguments are closely tied to the idea of a competent and capable state. Particularly from 2018 onward, reforms are justified as necessary to improve coordination, staffing and preparedness within welfare and security institutions (e.g. S_2022_040). Crisis is framed as evidence that systems must be upgraded, exemplified by calls for “a stronger society”²⁸ through large-scale recruitment of nurses, police officers and teachers to improve welfare and security outcomes (S_2018_008). Usefulness is therefore attached to institutional strengthening and state-led problem-solving, consistent with social-democratic traditions of pragmatic governance.

SD’s use of the A/U topos differs markedly in its ideological function. Efficiency arguments are invoked primarily to justify restrictive measures – reduced migration, tightened border controls, tougher sentencing, or welfare prioritisation for citizens (SD_2014_011; SD_2018_004; SD_2022_068; SD_2022_080). The argument is not that systems need more resources but that they must be shielded from overuse or misuse. Usefulness thus becomes a form of managerial securitisation, where restrictive policies are framed as the only practical way to restore order or preserve welfare for insiders. This technocratic framing masks the ideological character of the proposals, turning them into seemingly necessary crisis responses.

²⁸ ”Ett starkare samhälle”

V also employs A/U, but its rhetorical logic is fundamentally different. Rather than efficiency in the managerial or technocratic sense, V emphasises usefulness in terms of social effectiveness - that policies should maximise equality, well-being, and democratic integrity. For V, public systems are 'useful' when they produce equitable outcomes, prevent exploitation, and ensure that welfare resources remain in public hands. V relies on this topos in three ways: (1) Welfare efficiency, (2) Crisis resilience through public ownership, and (3) Redistribution as functional policy. V justifies anti-privatisation measures by arguing that public provision is more efficient, stable, and crisis-resilient than market-led alternatives (1). Usefulness here means better outcomes for society, not reduced costs or bureaucratic optimisation (V_2014_084). V also argues that crises such as the pandemic, climate threats, or democratic erosion reveal the inefficiency of market logics (2). Publicly controlled systems are framed as more effective in preventing shortages, protecting vulnerable groups, and ensuring long-term preparedness (V_2018_064). Even redistribution is framed not only as morally just but practically beneficial for social cohesion, equality, and national resilience (3). Thus, V uses usefulness to support transformative social policies, not managerial streamlining (V_2018_107). Together, these patterns show that V's version of the A/U is rooted in a social-democratic, egalitarian conception of utility, framing policy effectiveness in terms of collective outcomes rather than technocratic performance.

Justice/Fairness → Moral Legitimacy

The justice/fairness²⁹ topos builds legitimacy by appealing to widely held moral values: equality, reciprocity, deservedness, and social solidarity. It frames crisis responses not as matters of efficiency but as matters of right and wrong. All parties employ this topos, but they do so in markedly separate ways.

For V, J/F is the central legitimating resource across all electoral cycles. Crises are framed as injustices produced by structural inequality, marketisation, and democratic erosion. Proposed measures - investing in welfare, reversing privatisation, strengthening workers' rights - are justified as necessary to restore fairness and protect vulnerable groups (V_2018_008). V thus deploys moral legitimacy to challenge power hierarchies, emphasising collective responsibility and distributive justice. This aligns with the party's broader ideological grounding and with discourse-analytical findings that left-wing actors often use moral-emotive registers to highlight structural harms.

²⁹ Shortened to J/F, justice, or fairness.

S employs justice/fairness to support reforms aimed at protecting the welfare state and ensuring that social systems remain equitable. For instance, arguments that welfare resources must be allocated fairly or that crime prevention is necessary to ensure equal safety for all citizens reflect an attempt to fuse moral claims with pragmatic governance (S_2018_078; S_2022_021). In S's discourse, fairness provides a normative foundation for policy changes that might otherwise appear technocratic or politically costly.

SD also uses J/F, but primarily in exclusionary ways. The party frequently frames crisis responses as necessary to restore fairness to 'ordinary Swedes' who are depicted as disadvantaged by migration policy or by elites prioritising outsiders (SD_2014_038; SD_2022_363). This creates a form of moral legitimacy grounded in resentment-based justice, where fairness is invoked to draw boundaries between deserving insiders and undeserving others.

Humanitarianism → Ethical Legitimacy

The humanitarianism³⁰ topos legitimises political responses by appealing to ethical obligations toward human dignity, solidarity, and compassion. It is less frequently invoked than the A/U or J/F topoi, but where it appears, it carries significant rhetorical weight, signalling a values-based, rights-oriented approach to crisis.

V consistently uses humanitarian appeals to justify inclusive migration policies, equitable welfare provision, and protections for marginalised groups. This positions V's crisis rhetoric within an ethics of care framework, asserting that crises expose moral obligations rather than merely technical challenges (V_2014_128; V_2022_029). Such appeals reinforce the party's ideological emphasis on solidarity and social justice, and they function rhetorically to counter securitised or exclusionary crisis narratives.

In 2014, S's rhetoric includes humanitarian justification, particularly in the area of migration and international solidarity. However, this form of legitimation diminishes in later years as the party adopts increasingly securitised and managerial framings (S_2014_107; S_2014_109; S_2018_010; S_2018_093; S_2022_007; S_2022_053). The rhetorical shift mirrors the broader European trend where humanitarian appeals become politically constrained during prolonged migration and security crises.

³⁰ Shortened to H

SD uses humanitarianism to legitimise its migration politics, as well as focus on directing aid in the affected area, rather than allowing an influx of refugees (SD_2018_194). There is also another aspect of H argued, using communal and solidarity focused legitimacy arguments, such as “a Sweden where the weak and vulnerable, through the strength of the community, can rely on the support of the stronger.”³¹ (SD_2014_153). This deployment functions rhetorically to delegitimise competitors’ claims while bolstering SD’s own pragmatic-managerial posture.

Although, all parties use the different legitimisation topoi analysed here, they differ greatly in the ideological and underlying rhetorical logic of their use. This can be seen in the following figure (Figure 5.3).

Table 5.3: Legitimisation Trajectory

	SD	S	V	Complete Picture
Managerial	Restrictive efficiency; protection of systems from overload	Institutional capacity; competent state management	Social effectiveness; equality and public control	Usefulness legitimises action, but “what counts as effective” is ideologically defined
Moral	Exclusionary fairness; deserving insiders vs outsiders	Protective fairness; equal access and social order	Distributive justice; correcting structural inequality	Fairness invoked across parties, but grounded in competing moral economies
Ethical	Conditional humanitarianism; aid over admission, in-group solidarity	Declining humanitarianism; constrained by securitisation	Central ethical appeal; rights, dignity, solidarity	Humanitarianism narrows over time, polarising ethical legitimacy
Complete Picture	Legitimacy through protection and restriction	Legitimacy through responsible governance	Legitimacy through solidarity and structural critique	Crisis legitimisation splits into managerial, moral, and ethical authority claims

5.2 Discursive Boundary Shifts and Normalisation

Using the longitudinal data from 2014–2022, this section identifies three primary dimensions of discursive normalisation: (1) the mainstreaming of security-led migration frames, (2) the hybridisation of welfare and security discourses, and (3) shifting emotional and moral boundaries expressed through culture, identity, and fairness. These developments illustrate how crisis-driven narratives become sedimented into the political field, reshaping ideological centres and altering the expectations of legitimate political speech.

Mainstreaming of Security-Led Migration Frames

One of the clearest patterns across the decade is the progressive mainstreaming of frames that link migration and integration to security, social order, and system capacity. Sweden Democrats

³¹ “Ett Sverige där de svaga och utsatta, genom kraften i gemenskapen, skall kunna räkna med de starkares stöd.”

employ this linkage consistently from 2014, constructing migration as a threat to cultural cohesion and welfare sustainability. Early formulations frame immigration policy as a matter of responsibility and system preservation, where migration must be rendered “an asset rather than a burden to society”³² (SD_2014_028). This discourse relies heavily on the Culture/Identity, Danger/Threat, and Responsibility topoi, positioning migration as a source of systemic overload and societal risk.

By 2018, elements of SD’s securitised framing appear, albeit softened, in the Social Democrats’ rhetoric. While S does not adopt SD’s ethnocultural language, it increasingly acknowledges migration as a challenge to system capacity and local-level integration. This shift is reflected in the rising prominence of the Burden/Overload and Responsibility topoi in S’s discourse, particularly through emphasis on work requirements, language acquisition, and proportional responsibility for refugee reception (S_2018_050; S_2018_059). By 2022, migration-related challenges are further linked to segregation and social instability, including references to social breakdown and violence (S_2022_020). This indicates a reframing rather than ideological convergence: S adopts a more managerial-security rationale rather than SD’s cultural-security narrative. Nevertheless, the shift marks a widening of discursive space in which linking migration to security becomes politically acceptable.

The Left Party (V) resists securitisation more explicitly, but even here partial discursive uptake is visible by 2022. References to integration challenges and systemic pressures increase, though they remain firmly embedded within a structural and solidarity-oriented framework focused on inequality, labour exploitation, and welfare cuts. V’s rhetoric reframes integration problems as the result of market-oriented reforms rather than migrant behaviour, criticising policies that impose low wages or reduced welfare on those “not born in Sweden” as exploitative and socially corrosive (V_2022_038). This reflects partial uptake without ideological alignment, corresponding to what Krzyzanowski (2018) terms *passive normalisation*: a process in which a narrative becomes unavoidable even for actors who contest its premises.

Across the decade, the linkage between migration and security shifts from a fringe or contested issue to a mainstream rhetorical expectation. The boundaries of acceptable discourse thus move toward recognising migration as a security-relevant theme, albeit with differing ideological

³² “en tillgång och inte en belastning för samhället”

inflections across parties. This reflects a broader European pattern in which migration becomes discursively integrated with crisis narratives, altering the conceptual landscape of political debate.

Hybridisation of Welfare and Security Discourses

A second major dimension of normalisation is the hybridisation of welfare and security discourses, where safety becomes a shared but contested discursive anchor. This hybridisation reflects Fairclough's concept of *interdiscursivity*, where elements from different discursive domains blend to form new configurations of meaning.

SD consistently redefines 'safety' as protection from culturally defined outsiders and social disorder. Welfare is reframed not as a universal right but as a resource that must be protected for the national in-group. This logic is explicit in formulations that emphasise helping others "in times as difficult and turbulent as these" while asserting that the "foremost duty is to guarantee good living conditions, safety, and welfare for the people of Sweden"³³ (SD_2014_002). This ideological blending merges security with welfare prioritisation, producing a hybrid discourse in which welfare functions as a boundary-making tool. This represents an early form of discursive innovation that later influences other parties.

S progressively adopts a security-oriented interpretation of safety across the electoral cycles (S_2014_079, S_2018_142, S_2022_077). This trajectory shows a gradual repositioning of safety from the domain of social policy to that of national security, mirroring the crisis contexts of the time. S thus shifts its centre of rhetorical gravity, hybridising welfare logic (universal protection) with increasingly securitised rationales.

V also hybridises welfare and security but in a fundamentally different direction. For V, insecurity arises from privatisation, marketisation, class inequality, climate threats, and democratic erosion. Safety is therefore framed as protection through collective capacity and welfare rights rather than protection from culturally defined threats. This is reflected in formulations that position contemporary crisis – "the climate crisis, inequality, unemployment, widening class divides, racism, and injustices between women and men."³⁴ – as solvable through political choices and strengthened collective systems (V_2014_004; V_2022_080). This interpretation resists the

³³ "i så svåra och oroliga tider som dessa [...] främsta uppgift är att garantera människorna i Sverige goda levnadsförhållanden, trygghet och välfärd"

³⁴ "klimatkrisen, ojämlikheten, arbetslösheten, de ökade klassklyftorna, rasismen och orättvisorna mellan kvinnor och män." - V_2014_004

securitised meanings advanced by SD and partially adopted by S, illustrating how hybridisation does not always produce convergence; it can also deepen ideological contrast.

The concept of safety becomes a discursive battleground that all parties must engage with (Table 5.4). Its meaning shifts along ideological lines, but the discursive expectation that political actors address security in terms of everyday life, welfare access, and national resilience becomes stabilised across the political spectrum. This marks a boundary shift: safety transitions from a social-democratic welfare keyword to a multifaceted security concept.

Table 5.4: Security/Welfare Hybridisation

Dimension of Safety	SD	S	V	Stabilised Effect
Primary Threat Source	Cultural outsiders, disorder	Crime, preparedness, national risk	Structural inequality, climate, democracy	Safety becomes crisis-sensitive and threat-oriented
Role of Welfare	Protected resource for in-group	Universal protection under strain	Rights-based shield against systemic forces	Welfare rearticulated as security infrastructure
Security Logic	Exclusionary and preventive	Managerial and state-centred	Structural and transformative	Security decoupled from policing alone
Overall Hybridisation	Welfare → boundary-making	Welfare + securitisation	Welfare → systemic security	Safety stabilised as a hybrid welfare-security concept

Emotional and Moral Boundary-Setting

Normalisation is not only about policy content or issue linkage but also about shifts in the emotional and moral boundaries through which communities are defined. These boundaries mainly are constructed through the Culture/Identity, Justice/Fairness, and History/Tradition³⁵ topoi, which assign moral significance to insiders, outsiders, and the imagined continuity of the national community.

SD uses Culture/Identity and History/Tradition topoi to create strong emotional boundaries between ‘ordinary Swedes’ and those positioned as outsiders. This is evident in claims that Swedish society and culture are “something to be proud of”³⁶ (SD_2022_005) and in calls for a “historically rooted, shared Swedish culture”³⁷ as the basis for cohesion and solidarity (SD_2014_119). Fairness is simultaneously framed in insider-oriented terms, where welfare and safety are depicted as threatened by migration, multiculturalism, or elite mismanagement

³⁵ Also referred to as H/T
³⁶ ”något att vara stolt över”
³⁷ “historiskt rotad, gemensam svensk kultur”

(SD_2014_138; SD_2018_278). This boundary-making is central to SD's political identity and becomes increasingly normalised in political debate, even when other parties do not adopt the same ideological framing.

S rarely employs explicit cultural boundaries but increasingly constructs moral boundaries through the Responsibility and Danger/Threat topoi. By 2022, S increasingly draws moral boundaries through duty, responsibility, and national cohesion in response to crisis conditions. Moral authority is articulated through appeals to diligence and solidarity, alongside a sense that “what is right should prevail”³⁸ (S_2022_003). Related formulations intensify civic expectations around crime policy and national security commitments (e.g. S_2022_012; S_2022_078), redrawing boundaries around appropriate behaviour and collective obligation without adopting exclusionary ethnocultural language. While not exclusionary, these narratives still redraw boundaries around national unity and appropriate civic behaviour, aligning with crisis conditions that demand cohesion and sacrifice.

V maintains an alternative boundary logic, where moral community is defined by solidarity, equality, and shared vulnerability rather than cultural identity. Humanitarianism remains central, and History/Tradition is invoked to reference Sweden's welfare-state legacy and democratic values – “a few decades ago, Sweden was the most equal country in the world”³⁹ (V_2018_004; e.g. V_2022_014; V_2022_048). V constructs outsiders not as migrants but as exploitative actors and concentrated economic power, including “multi-millionaires [...] lobbyists, banks, and large corporations”⁴⁰ (V_2018_006). This counter-narrative attempts to resist securitised and exclusionary boundaries but still participates in the broader discursive tendency to define crisis through moral lines of protection and threat.

Across the parties, moral and emotional boundaries become increasingly salient in rhetoric, even as their content diverges ideologically. What becomes normalised is not any specific boundary but the expectation that political actors define who is at risk, who must be protected, and who or what threatens the community. This marks a significant discursive shift in Swedish political communication: moral boundary-making becomes an essential element of legitimate crisis discourse.

³⁸ ”rätt ska vara rätt.”

³⁹ “För några decennier sedan var Sverige världens mest jämlika land.”

⁴⁰ ”mångmiljonärer [...] sina lobbyister, banker och storföretag”

5.3 Ideological Rearticulation and Thematic Hybridisation

Across the 2014–2022 period, Defence & Security, Healthcare & Preparedness, and Migration & Integration increasingly overlap as discursive formations. This section explores three dimensions of this ideological rearticulation: (1) the evolving meaning of defence and security, (2) the reframing of welfare as a security apparatus, and (3) the emergence of migration as a cross-domain discursive anchor. Together, these developments illustrate how crisis conditions encourage political actors to blend previously separate issue areas into broader ideological narratives of risk, protection, and resilience.

The Evolving Meaning of Defence & Security

Across the decade, the semantic field of *security* expands, diversifies, and acquires new ideological valences across all three parties. Defence & Security shifts from a limited policy domain to a foundational lens through which multiple social and political issues are interpreted.

For SD, security rhetoric begins in 2014 embedded in narratives of cultural protection and everyday safety. This early securitisation is rooted in Culture/Identity and Danger/Threat, framing security as the defence of a threatened national community. By 2018, security expands beyond cultural and everyday threats to encompass welfare systems, health services, and public institutions. By 2022, SD articulates an almost totalising conception of security: society is depicted as under strain from migration, criminality, welfare overload, and geopolitical threats. Defence becomes not simply military but civilisational, positioning SD as the protector of the national body against internal and external erosion. This evolution illustrates how early radical securitisation provides the foundation for broader ideological expansion, consistent with research on the discursive mainstreaming of far-right narratives.

In 2014, S frames security primarily in social-democratic terms, rooted in welfare provision, equality, and social cohesion. By 2018, however, S increasingly adopts domestic security language, emphasising policing, crime prevention, and order. The 2022 manifesto marks another major shift: the entry of NATO, national preparedness, and geopolitical responsibility transforms S's security rhetoric into one centred on national defence and resilience. This trajectory reveals how crises prompt an upward shift in the scale of security: 2014 - individuals and communities, 2018 - municipalities and domestic institutions, 2022 - the nation-state and international alliances. S thus moves from viewing security as a social good to viewing it as a strategic imperative, reflecting a rearticulation of social-democratic ideology under conditions of geopolitical instability.

V consistently resists securitisation directed at individuals or groups, instead framing security as protection from structural harms. In 2014, security equals robust welfare provision and gendered safety, whilst in 2018, security moves towards democratic protection from racism, inequality, and extremism, and finally, in 2022 security corresponds to climate resilience, public ownership, and freedom from market-driven vulnerability. V thus expands security into a structural and systemic concept, where threats arise from capitalism, privatisation, climate change, and inequality. Unlike SD and S, V does not escalate interpersonal or cultural threats; instead, V’s security narrative widens to encompass global systems and long-term risks.

Across all parties, security becomes an increasingly central ideological register, but with divergent meanings (figure 5.5). These variations illustrate how the same discursive field – Defence & Security – is rearticulated according to different ideological logics under crisis conditions.

Table 5.5: Defence & Security Trajectory

	SD	S	V	Complete Picture
2014	Cultural protection and everyday safety	Welfare, equality, social cohesion	Welfare security, gendered safety	Security rooted in social protection
2018	Welfare systems and public order	Domestic security and policing	Democratic protection from extremism	Security expands to institutions
2022	Totalising civilisational security	National defence, NATO, preparedness	Structural and global security	Security becomes systemic and strategic
Overall Trajectory	Cultural → societal → civilisational security	Social → domestic → geopolitical security	Social → democratic → structural security	Defence & security shift from policy area to ideological master frame

Welfare as a Security Apparatus

A central ideological transformation across the decade is the reframing of welfare as a form of security infrastructure. Whereas welfare was traditionally conceptualised within social-democratic and leftist frameworks as a distributive system ensuring equality and well-being, crisis rhetoric increasingly recasts welfare as instrumental to societal resilience, domestic order, and national preparedness.

SD’s welfare discourse becomes increasingly securitised over time. Welfare systems are framed as vulnerable to strain caused by migration, inefficiency, and criminality. The Burden/Overload and Advantage/Usefulness topoi dominate, justifying welfare reforms as measures to ‘protect’ the system from collapse. Welfare becomes a form of societal armour, but accessible primarily to

insiders. This reframes welfare from a universal right into a conditional security instrument for maintaining national cohesion.

For S, welfare increasingly becomes integrated into the language of preparedness and capacity. In 2014, welfare is a moral and social institution; by 2018, it is part of domestic security; and by 2022, it is more explicitly tied to national crisis management, healthcare preparedness, and defence capacity. Investment in welfare is justified not only on fairness grounds but also as a means to build resilience against future crises. This hybridisation marks a significant ideological shift: social-democratic welfare becomes both moral and strategic.

V consistently frames welfare as a shield against systemic threats such as privatisation, labour precarity, and inequality. This conceptualisation deepens across the decade: welfare is presented not simply as social support but as infrastructural protection guaranteeing democratic stability and climate resilience. For V, welfare is the mechanism through which society defends itself from market-driven vulnerability, making it a core security asset in a broad, structural sense.

Across the political spectrum, welfare becomes securitised, but through different ideological lenses (Figure 5.6). Welfare thus becomes a key node in the blending of social and security discourses.

Table 5.6: Welfare as Security Trajectory

	SD	S	V	Complete Picture
2014	Welfare as national resource under cultural threat	Welfare as moral and social institution	Welfare as protection against inequality	Welfare rooted in social protection
2018	Welfare as system under strain and overload	Welfare integrated into domestic security	Welfare as defence against democratic erosion	Welfare enters security discourse
2022	Welfare as conditional security for insiders	Welfare as crisis infrastructure and preparedness	Welfare as structural and climate resilience	Welfare becomes security infrastructure
Overall Trajectory	Universal → conditional welfare security	Moral → strategic welfare	Social → structural security	Welfare normalised as a security apparatus

Migration & Integration as a Discursive Anchor

A final component of ideological rearticulation is the way Migration & Integration evolves into a central discursive anchor that shapes how other policy areas are framed and understood. Over the decade, migration becomes increasingly embedded in discussions of healthcare, welfare capacity, domestic security, and even national defence. This expansion reflects not only changing

political priorities but also a process of discursive normalisation in which migration becomes a default interpretive lens for explaining social and institutional challenges.

In the welfare and healthcare domain, migration is progressively invoked as part of broader debates about system strain and institutional capacity. For SD, this link is explicit and foundational: migration is repeatedly described as a primary source of pressure on welfare systems, healthcare access, and public expenditures. S does not adopt this framing wholesale, but by 2018 it begins acknowledging administrative and integration-related challenges that affect local welfare provision, indicating a shift toward a more pragmatic engagement with system pressure narratives. V approaches these dynamics differently, refusing causal claims that connect migration to burden, but nonetheless addressing how structural inequalities and underfunded public services disproportionately affect migrant communities. In doing so, V still situates migration within welfare debates, but through a lens of vulnerability rather than strain.

A similar pattern is visible in security discourse. SD maintains a highly securitised construction of migration throughout the period, associating it with criminality, social disorder, and cultural fragmentation. S, while rejecting the identity-based dimensions of SD's narrative, nonetheless increasingly integrates migration into discussions of social cohesion, local safety, and crime prevention. V again resists these associations but incorporates migration into its discussions of segregation, racism, and socio-economic marginalisation, framing insecurity as a consequence of structural failures rather than individual behaviours or cultural traits. Thus, even when resisting securitisation, V's rhetoric inadvertently anchors security discussions in the broader context of migration.

By 2022, migration also appears indirectly within defence and geopolitical narratives. SD frames regional instability as a driver of migration pressure, reinforcing the necessity of strict border controls. S adopts a more institutional version of this logic, suggesting that successful integration and social cohesion strengthen Sweden's resilience in times of international crisis. V situates migration within its humanitarian and solidarity-based understanding of global responsibility, especially in relation to war and displacement. This shows that migration, even when not central, becomes an expected dimension of how parties interpret Sweden's role in a changing global landscape.

Across these domains, Migration & Integration becomes a discursive node through which multiple political arguments are channelled. Its presence is not uniform across parties, nor does it carry consistent ideological meaning. Yet the very fact that migration appears as a reference point in welfare debates, healthcare challenges, crime narratives, and defence discourse indicates a significant boundary shift. Migration transitions from being one policy issue among many to becoming a cross-cutting explanatory framework for a variety of political concerns. This development exemplifies two core mechanisms of discursive normalisation: first, *interdiscursivity*, as migration becomes woven into distinct policy areas; and second, *boundary shift*, as political actors across the spectrum become compelled to address its implications, even when doing so critically or defensively.

In this sense, migration does not merely operate as a theme but as a structuring discourse. It organises how parties’ articulate threats, responsibilities, system performance, and Sweden’s place in an increasingly unstable world. The ideological meanings differ across SD, S, and V, but migration’s anchoring function remains stable, revealing its significant role in the rearticulation of Swedish political communication during a decade of crises (Figure 5.7).

Table 5.7: Migration & Integration As Discursive Anchor

	SD	S	V	Complete Picture
Welfare & Healthcare	Migration as primary source of strain and overload	Administrative and integration challenges affecting capacity	Migration framed through vulnerability and underfunding	Migration embedded in welfare capacity debates
Security & Social Order	Migration securitised via crime, disorder, and identity threat	Migration linked to cohesion and local safety	Migration linked to racism and structural marginalisation	Migration normalised within security discourse
Defence & Geopolitics (2022)	Migration pressure linked to instability and border defence	Integration framed as resilience and preparedness	Migration framed through humanitarian responsibility	Migration enters defence narratives indirectly
Overall Function	Explanatory lens for societal breakdown	Pragmatic governance challenge	Structural injustice context	Migration stabilised as a cross-cutting interpretive frame

6. Conclusion

This chapter will be three-part: (1) concluding synthesis of IF, (2) answering the research questions, and (3) future research.

6.1 Synthesis: Crisis → Discursive Struggle → Normalisation

This thesis set out to examine how Swedish political parties have rearticulated key policy themes in response to a decade marked by multiple overlapping crises. Using the Integrative Framework

developed in Chapter 2 – which conceptualises discursive transformation as a temporal progression from *crisis*, to *discursive struggle*, to *the normalisation of new frames* – the analysis reveals that Swedish party communication experienced rhetorical and ideological restructuring between 2014 and 2022. The evidence across the three themes (Defence & Security, Healthcare & Preparedness, and Migration & Integration) demonstrates that crises function not only as moments of disruption but also as catalysts for long-term shifts in political meaning-making.

Crisis: The destabilisation of established meanings

Each electoral cycle corresponded with a distinct crisis context: migration (2015-2016), gang criminality (2018-), pandemic (2020-21), and geopolitical instability following Russia's invasion of Ukraine (2022)⁴¹. These crises disrupted existing discursive equilibriums and compelled parties to reinterpret concepts such as safety, welfare, integration, and national responsibility. As the IF predict, these disruptions created openings for new narratives and rhetorical strategies that enabled parties to allocate responsibility, identify threats, and justify new policy agendas.

Discursive Struggle: Competing interpretations and rhetorical logics

During these periods of instability, parties engaged in an intensified struggle over meaning. SD expanded its long-standing securitised migration narrative into a comprehensive collapse discourse, integrating welfare, crime, and national cohesion into a broad threat framework. S moved from welfare-centred rhetoric to increasingly security-oriented language, culminating in the adoption of defence and preparedness discourse by 2022. V resisted securitisation but reinterpreted security in structural terms, framing threats as outcomes of inequality, privatisation, and climate risk.

These divergent rhetorical trajectories demonstrate how crises reopen ideological space and create opportunities for parties to redefine their core concepts and identity narratives.

Normalisation: Formation of new discursive boundaries

Over time, repeated crisis framing led certain meanings to become normalised across the political landscape. Migration, once a discrete policy domain, became a cross-cutting explanatory mechanism linking welfare strain, healthcare capacity, crime, and even national defence. Safety shifted from a primarily social-democratic value to a multi-domain, security-infused concept invoked by all parties, though with different ideological inflections. Welfare was similarly

⁴¹ Refers to Table 1.1

rearticulated as a form of national preparedness or structural protection, moving beyond its traditional redistributive framing.

The IF sequence thus captures a decade-long process in which crisis-driven discursive innovations first emerged, then competed, and ultimately became integrated into mainstream political rhetoric. The Swedish political field did not simply react to crises; it absorbed them into its ideological fabric, producing hybridised, securitised, and increasingly normalised configurations of political meaning.

6.2 What These Shifts Reveal about Swedish Party Politics

Taken together, the longitudinal findings provide insight into broader transformations occurring within Swedish political communication. Three overarching developments stand out corresponding to each research question: the shifting ideological centre, the changing function of crisis rhetoric, and the evolving relationship between mainstream and challenger parties.

A shifting ideological centre: Security as the new organising axis

The first major insight concerns a noticeable reorientation of the ideological centre of gravity toward security-focused politics. Across all three parties, security becomes not merely one theme among others but a structuring principle that increasingly frames discussions of welfare, migration, healthcare, and national preparedness.

In the early part of the decade, security appeared primarily in traditional left-right formations: for S and V, it was closely tied to welfare integrity, gendered safety, and social cohesion, while SD invoked it through identity-based and cultural threat narratives. Over time, however, the semantic field of security expanded across party lines. By 2022, S had embraced a fully articulated national security agenda – integrating NATO membership, defence capabilities, and crisis preparedness – marking a significant departure from its earlier welfare-oriented discourse. V, while resisting securitisation directed at specific groups, nevertheless brought security into debates about marketisation, climate risk, and democratic erosion, constructing systemic protection as a core political priority.

What emerges is an ideological centre in which security and preparedness function as overarching political rationalities. This does not imply homogeneity; rather, each party rearticulates the meaning of security according to its own ideological commitments. Yet the fact that all three

parties increasingly frame their political visions around some form of protection, resilience, or system capacity reflects a broader shift in Swedish political discourse. The traditional welfare-state logic centred on universal rights and social equality is supplemented, and in some cases partially displaced, by a logic of safeguarding the nation, its institutions, and its future viability.

This evolution signals that crisis-driven rhetoric has not merely influenced short-term communication but has contributed to a deeper recalibration of what is politically salient and ideologically central in Sweden today.

Crisis rhetoric as a structuring rather than episodic feature

The second insight concerns the altered role of crisis rhetoric within Swedish political communication. The analysis reveals that crisis is no longer treated as an episodic disruption demanding temporary linguistic shifts; instead, crisis rhetoric has become a stable component of political argumentation.

In early manifestos, crisis language tends to appear in relation to specific, discrete events, such as migration flows or welfare strain, and is often framed as resolvable through targeted reform. By 2018, however, crisis rhetoric takes on a more continuous character. SD, for instance, sustains an uninterrupted narrative of societal decline, presenting the Swedish state as perpetually overwhelmed by migration, criminality, and cultural fragmentation. Their discourse frames crisis not as a situational occurrence but as a chronic condition requiring permanent vigilance and restrictive governance.

S also undergoes a rhetorical transformation, moving from social welfare challenges toward a sustained focus on domestic insecurity and, by 2022, geopolitical instability. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine further normalise the use of crisis language in mainstream political discourse, enabling S to adopt a more assertive security posture without abandoning its social-democratic grounding.

V, while critical of traditional crisis framings, nevertheless incorporates crisis rhetoric in a way that emphasises systemic, long-term threats: climate change, privatisation, inequality, and democratic degradation. Crises are thus framed not as acute shocks but as structural vulnerabilities requiring transformative political intervention.

The cumulative effect is that crisis narratives become structuring rather than reactive. Political visions across the spectrum are increasingly articulated through expectations of future disruptions and the necessity of preparing society to withstand them. This shift mirrors broader international trends in which risk management, resilience building, and preparedness orientations become embedded in political discourse. In Sweden, this evolution marks a departure from historical narratives of stability, consensus, and incremental reform toward a political culture that anticipates uncertainty and constructs policy around mitigating its effects.

Convergence and divergence between mainstream and challenger parties

A third key insight concerns how rhetorical practices have evolved in relation to the party system's internal dynamics, particularly the interactions between the mainstream party (S), the fringe party (V), and the challenger party (SD). The longitudinal perspective reveals both convergence and divergence, operating simultaneously but in different registers.

Convergence occurs primarily in the discursive terrain, not the ideological content. Over time, SD's early emphasis on security, societal strain, and system overload shapes the broader rhetorical environment, even when other parties do not adopt SD's underlying framings. By 2018 and 2022, S references integration challenges, welfare pressure, and domestic security using pragmatic or managerial reasoning; echoing SD's issue linkages without replicating its ethnocultural narrative. Even V, which rejects the securitisation of migration, increasingly addresses pressures on welfare and social cohesion, though strictly within a structural or solidarity-based framework. This convergence reflects what normalisation theory describes as *discursive diffusion*: certain ways of framing political problems become difficult for other actors to ignore, even if they reinterpret them through opposing values.

Yet ideological divergence persists, particularly in the meanings parties attach to these shared discursive elements. SD continues to construct crisis through cultural and behavioural threat narratives; S operates within a framework of state responsibility and institutional resilience; and V foregrounds systemic inequalities and democratic vulnerabilities. Thus, while parties increasingly operate within overlapping issue domains, they construct fundamentally different ideological logics around them.

This dual process - convergence in discursive structures and divergence in ideological meaning - illustrates a central feature of contemporary Swedish political communication. Challenger parties influence *how* issues are publicly discussed, while mainstream parties maintain clear ideological boundaries regarding *why* these issues matter and *what solutions* they warrant. It reflects a political

environment in which rhetorical expectations shift more rapidly than ideological identities, producing complexity in both communication and interpretation.

6.3 Future Research

As with all qualitative research, this study is shaped by a series of methodological and analytical limitations that provide important context for interpreting its findings. Future research would benefit from expanding beyond manifestos to a multi-genre corpus incorporating parliamentary debates, media appearances, and digital communication. Such work could further illuminate how discursive frames travel across contexts and how party rhetoric adapts to real-time events. Longitudinal, cross-national comparisons could also clarify whether the patterns identified in Sweden reflect broader European trends in crisis communication, securitisation, and discursive normalisation. Also, longer longitudinal, and broader studies on all the Swedish parliamentary parties could substantiate and further elaborate on the findings of this thesis. Finally, future research of this kind is vital for advancing theoretical models of political communication and refining methodological approaches capable of capturing the complex interplay between discourse, crisis, and political strategy.

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