Exploiting Sociocultural Issues in Election Campaign Discourse: The Case of Nyans in Sweden

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Abstract: The Swedish far-right party, the Sweden Democrats (SD), came to power in 2022 and is currently the second-largest party in the Swedish Parliament, the Riksdag. While it has been propagandizing an anti-migrant discourse, another newly founded party has been producing a counter-discourse. The newly created Nyans party claims to represent migrants and minorities in Sweden. However, its discourse uses controversial issues that could potentially misrepresent those communities. Our study aimed to analyze Nyans' Facebook posts published in the month leading up to the 2022 elections. Through our analysis process, which lasted from January to August 2023, we applied a critical discourse analysis approach to uncover the relationship between sociocultural issues and their social, political, and ideological contexts. The results reveal that Nyans' discourse focused on opposing left-wing parties and aligned itself with the far-right. The discourse aligned with misinformation campaigns on social media when addressing sociocultural issues. These issues include the childcare law, the burning of the *Qur'an*, and the veil, which are pertinent to a particular perspective in the Muslim community and do not necessarily represent immigrants or minorities.

Keywords: propaganda; representation; agenda setting; Partiet Nyans; critical discourse analysis; media discourse; political communication

1. Introduction

Some scholars argue that there is a limited impact of social media on political elections, as candidates' utilization of online platforms and citizens' engagement show minimal influence on voting decisions [1]. However, empirical evidence suggests that social media plays a substantial role in shaping electoral outcomes, as party campaign strategies minimize potential backlash against other parties, attract attention, increase political prominence, and mobilize ideologically aligned voters [2]. Regardless of the magnitude, social media has undeniably become an integral tool for political parties in their electoral campaigns, significantly contributing to the determination of election results. Thus, it is essential to delve deeper into the rhetoric of these campaigns rather than measure the impact.

In Sweden, as in many other EU contexts, the impact of right-wing populist parties is strongly felt, highlighting their adeptness in leveraging social media [3,4]. These parties rally around common themes, including immigration and the blaming of political elites, which constitute the foundation of their populist narrative [5]. To fully grasp the social media strategies and communication styles employed by populist parties, it is crucial to examine their political positioning and the different phases they experience within the life cycle model of such parties [6]. This requires a comprehensive understanding of the underlying discourse and the political and ideological influences that shape it, especially in their social media content.

Distinguishing between the two far-right subcategories can be challenging [7]. However, Mudde Cas's framework identifies the radical right (far right), which operates with reservations within parliamentary democracy, and the extreme right, which rejects democratic principles and may employ non-parliamentary methods [8]. Typically, political

parties participating in the electoral process align with the radical right, especially those engaging in parliamentary elections. Far-right populist discourse reflects the communication style of these groups, often characterized by exclusivity, anti-pluralism, and a rejection of societal diversity. Nevertheless, it can pose a democratic threat when it questions the legitimacy of electoral results and claims exclusive representation of the people [9]. The Nyans party's discourse can be categorized as far-right discourse, although it is recognized that this party differs in its ideological reference from other extreme-right parties in Europe and Sweden.

The analysis of Swedish far-right populist discourse reveals a nostalgia for a bygone era and a cohesive national identity. This narrative blends notions of cultural conformity and socioeconomic equity in opposition to the divisive political agendas of various elites, asserting the belief that everything was better in the past. The discourse places particular emphasis on resistance to immigration, emphasizing cultural concerns. This includes arguments that immigration poses a threat to Swedish culture, as immigrants are perceived as not adhering to the same social norms and behaving differently from natives. Over time, the fear of the "other" has become increasingly mainstream in Sweden and elsewhere [9]. In our understanding, culture encompasses a wide range of aspects, including traditions, food, religion, and language [10]. In this context, the Nyans party's adoption of these sociocultural principles in its political discourse aligns with a right-wing populist approach, even if its ideological foundation draws on Islamic religious references when addressing and evaluating these issues.

While the areas close to where immigrants live voted in favor of the right-wing party in Sweden, a new Swedish immigrant party had great support within these low-income neighborhoods in the last Swedish general election in 2022. For example, over 30 percent of the voters cast their votes for the Nyans party in Rosengård, a segregated, low-income neighborhood in Malmö [11,12]. This party was founded in 2019 by Mikail Yüksel, a Swedish politician of Turkish descent. Nyans is a party specifically focused on issues that its founders view as affecting Muslims in Sweden [13]. In the 2022 Swedish general election, the Nyans party gained 28,352 votes [14], and its candidates became council members in two Swedish cities [15].

The party's central claim is that it is a representative of migrants who are facing several challenges, such as Afrophobia, Islamophobia, Antisemitism, so-called "Christophobia," and many types of discrimination and inequality within Swedish society [16,17]. According to its literature, the party is positioning itself as the "protector of all minorities." Nyans has been accused by many journalists and politicians of being a pro-Islamic Party, a Muslim party [18], an Islamist party [19], and a Pro-Erdoğan Islamist party [20]. Furthermore, a *Sydsvenskan* newspaper review showed that several Nyans candidates in the Skåne region spread conspiracy theories and hatred against Jews and Shia Muslims [21]. The party has also been accused of running populist campaigns in the 2022 elections using specific controversial issues, such as Muslim women's veils (Hijab), the burning of the *Qur'an*, and childcare by Swedish social services. These issues were at the core of debates within the Muslim migrant communities during the last year in immigrant neighborhoods of major cities [15,22].

The Nyans case in Sweden is no exception in the European context. All of the profound transformations that the EU is witnessing, some of which are closely linked to immigration, such as the emergence of the far right, are also accompanied by the emergence of some minor parties that claim to defend immigrants, while in general, they carry an ideology that is predominantly Islamic, for example, the Islam Party in Belgium, which won two seats in Brussels [23], and the Nida [24] and Denk [25] parties in the Netherlands. Although these parties are still small and have not yet achieved wide electoral popularity, what distinguishes them, similar to the far right, is the use of discourse that focuses mainly on sociocultural issues, especially those linked to religious associations that play on the emotions of voters. This makes approaching such issues extremely important. This discourse is consistent with the discourse of the far right in that it employs immigration issues. While

the far right seeks to raise the fear of immigrant culture, these emerging parties work to foster fear of forced cultural dissolution.

The emergence of such newly established parties and the issues they have raised warrant a thorough investigation, which can establish an initial perspective of media discourse and subsequently explore the ideological and intellectual framework within which it operates. Therefore, the following research questions can guide our inquiry: (1) How does the Nyans party set its media agenda? (2) What specific issues are chosen and emphasized within the Nyans party's discourse, particularly in the context of Sweden's socio-political landscape? (3) What are the potential broader implications within Swedish society as a result of the Nyans party's discourse and its media representation?

We will begin by presenting our theoretical framework, providing a clear exposition of agenda-setting theory and representation theory and demonstrating their relevance to our research. The methodology section will outline our approach, encompassing the application of critical discourse analysis, the elucidation of data collection methods, and a description of our analytical approach. We contend that the burning of the *Qur'an* and the social services law were central to the Nyans party's election campaign, with other elements serving as supplementary issues. Hence, we conducted an in-depth analysis of the Nyans party's agenda-setting strategies by closely examining their media content and identifying the core campaign issues. Additionally, we dedicated a substantial portion of our research to probing how the Nyans party portrays minority groups and the resulting implications within the broader social and cultural contexts. Subsequently, we embarked on a comprehensive discussion, synthesizing research findings and critically evaluating their implications for Swedish society and politics.

Literature Review

The literature on campaigning and media technology highlights the role of these new technologies in driving such changes. In fact, new information and communication technologies are increasingly being integrated into political campaigning efforts in many countries [26]. Social media has become a particularly prominent and rapidly growing phenomenon in the context of election campaigns [27]. Social media has both direct and indirect impacts on elections, as it provides an affordable and efficient way to reach different voter segments while also increasing a campaign's leverage through traditional media and word of mouth [28]. This does not imply that people are completely governed by the media's agenda. However, their media use is certainly driven by their motivations [29].

Given the significance of social media in election campaigns, Ohme and his colleagues found that first-time voters can better comprehend campaign information by following it on social media. This, in turn, helps them make more confident decisions regarding their vote choice [30]. Consequently, far-right parties use this feature to engage their followers on social media, surpassing their mainstream counterparts in politics and media. They are more reactive in commenting on and sharing their followers' posts [4]. During election campaigns, the far right focuses on immigration, border security, and national identity issues. They exploit social media platforms to contest mainstream discourse, advance exclusionary worldviews, and reshape hierarchies of influence, thereby amplifying the visibility and impact of far-right ideologies and intensifying political polarization [31]. These issues are of significant interest to the far right, as they specifically target native citizens and promote a hostile discourse toward foreigners, immigrants, and individuals from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. In the Swedish context, the Sweden Democrats (SD) primarily concentrate on identity politics, emphasizing the sociocultural dimension of values rather than solely focusing on socioeconomic matters. Their discourse underscores the notion that newcomers to Sweden do not necessarily abandon their values from their home countries at the Swedish border. The various challenges facing Sweden today, including honor oppression, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, segregation, and the emergence of parallel societies, illustrate that many immigrants retain and practice their values in Sweden, impacting the broader society [9]. These issues prove to be pivotal elements in

the far-right discourse, primarily aimed at the established Swedish electorate. Conversely, the Nyans party approaches these same issues from a perspective that opposes the discourse of the extreme right, directing its message toward Swedish voters with immigrant backgrounds, particularly Muslims. Consequently, there is a shared focus on these issues, albeit with distinctions in how they are utilized, their target audiences, and the cultural contexts they address. The incorporation of such issues into the Nyans party's discourse positions it as a far-right party, albeit from an Islamic standpoint, which contrasts with the SD discourse in Sweden.

Rydgren and Ruth demonstrated that the probability of voting for the Swedish radical right is highest in areas located near socioeconomically disadvantaged regions with a high concentration of immigrants [32]. This establishes a direct link between migration issues and their influence on election results, not only in Sweden but also in other EU countries [33,34]. However, the implications of populist discourse, mainly when propagated by the far right, raise concerns about potential detrimental effects on liberal democracy. Understanding the role of news intermediaries like social media platforms in disseminating alternative news content is crucial to prevent such effects. Addressing the favorable opportunity structures that these platforms create for populist messaging is essential, as they can have profound societal consequences [35]. Therefore, this study aims to bridge the gap in understanding one component of the populist discourse, precisely as it aligns with the discourse of the Swedish far right. While migration and integration are fundamental subjects, their treatment differs. Notably, the areas that voted for the extreme right are situated near those that voted for the Nyans party [36]. This implies that immigration-related domains serve as a junction where the Swedish far right seeks to capitalize on immigration issues for an electoral advantage while the Islamic extremist right endeavors to exploit immigrant concerns within these societies. Given the need for an examination of this phenomenon and an analysis of how these issues are utilized, this paper aims to address this gap by conducting a comprehensive analysis employing critical discourse analysis. This approach contributes to yielding consistent results that shed light on this phenomenon, offering valuable tools for analyzing comparable discourses in similar contexts, particularly within the European sphere.

2. Materials and Methods

For this media discourse analysis, we will examine the materials posted on the Nyans party's Facebook pages in Swedish and Arabic from 11 August to 11 September 2022. This period was selected because it encompasses the month leading up to the election, and a party's social media platform activity increases significantly in the final weeks before election day [37]. The timeline analysis reveals noticeable spikes in social media activity frequency as the election approaches, reaching their peak on election day itself, showcasing the heightened engagement of social media activists during this crucial period [38].

The Nyans party has two Facebook pages: the first is the Swedish page, which is the official one [39], and the other is the Arabic version [40], which the party does not officially affiliate with, but we chose it for several reasons: (1) the page hosted the party's main events, while the official one does not have any events; (2) the page streamed four live videos, three of them by Rami Hussein, one of the party's founders, a party board member, and the party secretary [17], on 17, 19, and 25 August 2022, which definitely means that he is the page administrator, as he was live in one of these videos inside his car alone; (3) the page links the Arabic version of the party website; and (4) the page posted the Arabic version of some candidates' videos that were posted on the Swedish page.

We gathered 66 posts from the Swedish page and 150 from the Arabic page. Our argument centers on the notion that the analysis of discourse and the identification of ideology are not solely confined to textual communication but also encompass non-verbal semiotic cues, such as images, photographs, and videos [41]. This means that the analysis will include those non-textual connotations, such as the selection of certain scenes or images that carry certain symbols. Therefore, we collected 25 photos from the Swedish page and

79 from the Arabic page, along with 21 videos from the Swedish version and 46 from the Arabic version. However, we excluded some posts and their related media based on five criteria: (1) posts that do not have any comments from the public, (2) announcements for campaign events, including interviews with the party secretary, (3) posts exclusively containing technical information, such as the candidates' biographies, unless they included extra information, (4) repeated posts, and (5) posts containing general information, such as information on how to vote. Social media discourse predominantly relies on visual elements, including images and videos, in addition to text [42]. Consequently, visuals are the primary semiotic signs that should be considered when utilizing CDA. Accordingly, we chose 40 posts from the Swedish Facebook page, including 14 photos and 10 videos, and 62 posts from the Arabic Facebook page, including 44 photos and 18 videos.

2.1. Analysis Framework (Critical Discourse Analysis)

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) emphasizes the relationship between discourse and power, ideology, institutions, and social identities [43]. CDA's primary focus on dominance and inequality stems from its commitment to addressing pressing social issues [44]. Consequently, the analysis conducted within this framework explores how discourse relates to its social and political contexts while examining the components utilized to convey this content to the intended audience. It is necessary, therefore, to analyze the discourse if we want to reach out and understand the reality [45] and the institution's functions in the political aspect [46,47]. CDA can also be used as a framework for the analysis of national identities [45] and human rights discourse [48]. It focuses on the form that the "language above the sentence" takes, looking at structural properties but paying little attention to the social ideas that inform the way people use and interpret language [49], with more concentration on discovering and defining the dominance of the themes [46]. Discourse is seen as a culturally and socially organized way of speaking [50]. From this point, many approaches have emerged to analyze the discourse, the most important of which is the critical analysis of the discourse, especially the critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the media discourse.

In order to analyze Nyans' media discourse effectively, we can identify patterns in how spoken and written discourse is represented. By doing so, we can assess how these patterns align with the ideology, as proposed by Fairclough [51]. This analytical approach allows us to uncover the significant role played by cultural and social contexts in shaping the dynamics of the election campaign.

CDA, as outlined by Fairclough [51,52], aims to shed light on the often-concealed social determinants and consequences of discourse. It seeks to elucidate the intricate relationship between our use of language and its unperceived effects, a connection that may go unnoticed in everyday circumstances, as noted by Bourdieu [53]. By revealing this intricate relationship, we can effectively address issues that might be overlooked by the audience, particularly decision-makers, especially when dealing with problematic discourse that requires deconstruction. In essence, this approach helps bring into focus the underlying dynamics of Nyans' media discourse, enabling a deeper understanding of its ideological implications and the broader sociocultural context that shapes the discourse during the election campaign.

As discussed above, political parties strategically emphasize certain issues they believe will influence public attitudes. Consequently, these issues become the focal points of their media campaigns to sway public opinion in their favor. Moreover, political parties engage in framing the media discourse surrounding these issues. According to Entman [54], framing entails defining issues, identifying the underlying forces that give rise to problems, making moral judgments, evaluating the causes and effects of problems, suggesting remedies, and predicting the likely outcomes of those remedies (p. 52) through a process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative highlighting connections among them to promote a particular interpretation [55]. Selection and exclusion are among the most important framing tools, as the discourse works to decide which events are selected

and make them salient and which events are excluded [56]. Thus, it is crucial to identify the agendas of political parties and analyze the media discourse surrounding these issues by using CDA as an analytical framework. This approach enables us to determine which issues take center stage as the primary focus of the electoral campaign, identify the issues that have been excluded, explore the factors influencing the selection of these issues, and examine how the party presents its vision for a solution, taking into account the social and political contexts.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

To apply CDA effectively, this paper builds upon two fundamental theoretical concepts: agenda setting and representation. Agenda setting provides insights into the analysis of the discourse employed by the Nyans party and how the party's Facebook pages emphasize specific issues to shape its election campaign. On the other hand, the theory of representation aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the party's chosen representation in its political program and assess how well it aligns with the party's media performance on its Facebook pages.

2.2.1. Agenda Setting

Political parties often attempt to shape opinions and priorities through the media, a process known as "media agenda-setting" [57,58] or "agenda-building" [59,60]. By choosing what information to highlight and how to present it, parties can influence how much importance the public assigns to specific issues and shape their perceptions of political reality. This can be particularly effective during campaigns, when parties may try to set the "agenda" by featuring the statements and positions of their candidates.

Some studies affirm that media coverage strongly influences the political agenda in all of its stages by shaping political reality and influencing the importance of issues. For example, during campaigns, they may determine the "agenda" by applying several methods, including featuring candidates' statements, priming with issue ownership, and the process of crystallizing pre-existing political predispositions [61–63]. The media can shape public priorities and perceptions through agenda setting, as the attention given to specific issues can influence how the public views them and evaluates politicians. The agenda-setting measurement method focuses on determining the main issues that the media emphasized during a campaign and the specific content of the media coverage [62].

All parties aim to shape the election campaign agenda, influencing voters' perspectives. Media outlets also seek to set the campaign agenda, determining which issues are essential. However, Sweden's landscape differs from those of many other countries due to its strong party press. Most daily newspapers in Sweden are connected to political parties through ownership or other loyalties. This affiliation was evident in the editorials and the coverage dedicated to the affiliated party [64,65]. However, since the 1980s, political parties have surrendered their ownership, and local newspapers have become less political tools and more commercial enterprises [64]. Moreover, with social media, agenda setting is no longer monopolized by mainstream media and political elites. The widespread reach, interaction, and diverse ideas facilitated by social media introduce a new dimension to agenda setting, allowing different factors to easily influence the discourse, including political parties [66]. Hence, examining social media content, whether on party platforms or associated personalities [4], becomes a suitable approach for measuring partisan agendas, particularly during election periods. We assert that social media platforms serve as tools that political parties fully utilize to shape their agendas independently, free from the constraints of traditional media. This unique capability is what grants Nyans the greatest advantage in both setting its agenda and effectively reaching its target audience.

2.2.2. Representation

Representation involves using language, signs, and images to convey meaning about the world to others. Knowing how meaning is created and shared within a culture involves

representing things through language and symbols [67]. Thus, it is a vital part of studying the performance of the media, especially in election campaigns, where the media can highlight some issues and exclude others, creating representation problems. This can result in the neglect of significant issues, such as crime, education, health, corruption, and unemployment [68]. At the same time, issues such as gender and sexual politics [69] or migration [70] could become significant issues during election campaigns. This has implications for society, as misrepresentation promotes controversial discourses, whether in the traditional press or on social media. This directly affects some social components, whether those components are based on gender or other groups and minorities, such as immigrants.

One of the representation issues here is under- or over-representation, which impacts election media campaigns, especially toward ethnic minorities. This is because the roles in which ethnic minorities have been depicted in media have tended to be restricted and stereotypical, constructing a narrow and generalized version of the lives and identities of such populations [71]. Some scholars argue that social media provides women with a platform to challenge their marginalization and stereotypical portrayal in mainstream print and broadcast media [72]. Social media also allows minorities to express themselves politically and to actively engage in political discussions [73]. However, some argue that while social media platforms, especially Twitter, offer valuable communication channels, they can also become a breeding ground for gendered abuse, the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes, and the spread of hate speech directed at religious, ethnic, or sexual minority groups [74–76]. Thus, these spaces of expression intricately intertwine with the surrounding social and political conditions. While they serve as tools of representation, reflecting society's values, they can also become platforms for social conflicts. Therefore, examining these issues and establishing meaningful connections between them and their respective social and political contexts is essential.

3. Results

The findings indicate that sociocultural issues significantly overshadowed topics related to the economy, energy, and social welfare in the election campaign. As depicted in Table 1, issues such as Islamophobia, the burning of the *Qur'an* [77], the "removal of children from their families" [78], the hijab, and male circumcision were prominent, while topics concerning the economy, energy, social welfare, and others were conspicuously absent. Even when criticizing other parties, the criticism was often rooted in sociocultural concerns.

Table 1. Agenda setting in the social media discourse of the Nyans party.

Issue	The Frequency of the Issue in the Facebook Posts		
	Swedish Page	**Arabic Page**	*N*
Criticizing left parties	10	22	32
Racism and discrimination	3	25	28
Minorities	4	20	24
Childcare law (LVU)	5	16	21
Islamophobia	7	13	20
Qur'an burning	3	14	17
Women's veils (Hijab)	3	12	15
Male circumcision	2	6	8
Criticizing right parties	1	6	7
Religion freedom	3	4	7
Religious schools	3	4	7
Migration and integration	0	7	7
Palestine	4	2	6
Accommodation	0	4	4
Transportation	0	4	4
Crime	0	3	3

Framing essentially involves selection and exclusion [54]. Thus, the election campaign of the Nyans party centered around the selection of some issues and the exclusion of others. Therefore, the party directs its discourse toward a certain category of immigrants and conservative Muslims, as we will prove in the coming sections. These issues were chosen because they constitute a great sensitivity among a group of people who fear that their religious beliefs will be compromised.

3.1. Criticizing Leftist Parties

The analysis revealed that Nyans' media discourse during its election campaign was heavily centered on the criticism of left-leaning parties, particularly the Social Democratic Party and the Left Party. Despite the explicit anti-immigrant discourse coming from SD, Nyans' discourse works to make the left appear to be the most salient enemy of immigrants while simultaneously excluding the far right from this criticism. This was observed in approximately 32 out of 102 posts. The Nyans party employed language that was highly critical of the left bloc's policies, stating that the bloc had prioritized stricter policies against immigrants and Muslims. Nour Mallah, a candidate for the Nyans party, was specifically named in a video published on 21 August 2022. In the video, she claims that both right-wing and left-wing parties are vying to create laws that "suppress" the religious freedom of Muslims. This broad statement is repeated frequently in the discourse without providing any specific examples. This criticism does not address any comprehensive economic or social issues. Instead, it stems from a perspective that perceives ongoing and systematic discrimination against what is referred to as the Muslim minority.

The criticism of the leftist parties falls into two categories: the first involves portraying the left as having passed laws that target Muslims, such as laws related to honor-based violence or leniency in cases of burning the *Qur'an*. The second category involves intimating or warning against potential future actions that the left is believed to be planning, such as banning the veil (Hijab), which is a hot issue in some other EU countries [79]. Another issue that was brought up is male circumcision. This topic has not reached the main official discussion in Sweden, but there was a similar discussion in the Netherlands, where the Muslim and Jewish communities joined up and defeated it [80]. In this context, the language shows the ideological dimensions that direct the discourse [43], as the party and its representatives use religious concepts. The reference in this context is the religious and social concepts that pertain to a specific group. Nyans' discourse seeks to compile a wide range of arguments and issues that can impact the sentiments of Muslim voters and uses them as a means of intimidation, whether these issues have already been raised, such as laws related to honor-based violence, or not, as in the case of male circumcision.

Defining problems is one of the framing tools [54]; therefore, Nyans mainly framed the problem with the left. The main arguments used to criticize the party, as articulated in several videos by Rami Hussein (Nyans' board member and party secretary), are that the Left Party is communist and hostile to religions and that it aims to ban male circumcision and cut funding for religious schools. The Social Democratic Party, on the other hand, is accused of adopting far-right legislation that clamps down on Muslims and of passing an "honor law" [1], allegedly to prevent Muslims from raising their children with moral and religious values. This hostile criticism toward the left bloc is understandable, as immigrants traditionally voted for the left [81]. The Nyans party wanted to discredit the left, so the rhetoric against it was more intense than the rhetoric against the anti-immigrant far right.

3.2. Discrimination against Minorities

Despite efforts by Nyans' politicians to include non-Muslims in their electoral campaign, the discourse remained dominated by symbols, issues, and personalities representing the Muslim community. Their discourse reflects a salient attempt to counter perceived racism, discrimination, and Islamophobia.

The politicians of the Nyans party claim that they support "all minorities". This was confirmed by the party's candidate for Parliament, Malmö and Skåne County Council,

Anwar Al-Saleh, in a video on 7 September 2022. However, as reviewed, all of the afore-mentioned issues only pertain to Muslims, with the first demand being the recognition of Muslims as a national minority. This is also stated by Nour Mallah in a video published on 10 September 2022, in which she asserts that Nyans is the only party that focuses on minorities. Mallah goes on to claim that Swedish parties have not paid attention to the voices of the immigrant Muslim minority. Thus, the party's definition of who is considered a minority is clearly limited to Muslims. As such, what is described as racism or discrimination is often viewed through this perspective. While the discourse here defines its own concept of minorities, it notably excludes a major portion of minorities present within Swedish society.

On 4 September 2022, a propaganda video was released featuring Samy Laham, the party's Malmö candidate, discussing the various forms of discrimination experienced by the targeted audience. The video begins with a depiction of harassment toward veiled women; he says,

> *My sister, I know that you are fighting for your hijab. My brother, I see the importance of your name and the color of your skin in the workplace. My little sister, I hear how you are being harassed. My brothers, I know that you are tired of empty promises.*

The video concludes with footage of the *Qur'an* being burned by far-right Danish–Swedish politician Rasmus Paludan in Malmö in April 2022, after which Laham reaffirms the party's commitment to standing against Islamophobia and racism. It is evident that the party's media discourse portrays the challenges faced by Muslim citizens as primarily cultural and social, with a focus on the issues of the veil and the burning of the *Qur'an*. Despite reports indicating profound challenges among some Swedes with immigrant backgrounds, particularly related to economic and employment issues, including harassment and threats on the basis of ethnic background [82], Nyans' discourse selected these emotionally charged topics while excluding other important economic and social issues, such as education.

3.3. Childcare Law (LVU)

There were numerous accusations that Swedish social services were engaging in the "kidnapping" of Muslim children in an effort to secularize them; such accusations were levied by several media outlets outside Sweden, especially from the Middle East [83]. This led the Swedish government to denounce the circulation of viral videos that were spreading mistrust among immigrant families as part of a "disinformation campaign." [84]. During the year 2022, this issue gained significance on the internet and various social media platforms, particularly Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok. The campaign not only impacted the Swedish government but also caused concern among immigrant families in Sweden. As a result, the Nyans party utilized this issue as a central focus of their electoral campaign.

The Nyans party exploited the fears of some families, particularly those who follow Arabic-language accounts, by starting with a foundational demand for the reform of the LVU law (Lagen med Särskilda Bestämmelser om Vård av Unga). LVU stands for the Swedish Care of Young Persons law (1990), which grants social services the authority to safeguard individuals under 21 [85]. Nyans alleges that there is misuse of the LVU law. According to the party's candidate in Stockholm, Ahmed al-Maghrabi, in a video on 10 September 2022,

> *"We demanded an investigation into all cases related to the misuse of the Social LVU. As long as Sweden is governed by law, why is it afraid of such demands?"*

Nyans therefore seems to position itself as a different entity, not a Swedish institution. Al-Maghrabi's statement does not target the institutions within the country; rather, he asks, Why "is Sweden afraid"? The question assumes two sides. On one side, we find Sweden, with all of its institutions and people, and on the other is Nyans, which positions itself against the country. This portrays Nyans' targeted voter as an isolated individual rather than a Swedish citizen.

Although it is unclear whether the media used explicit language referencing the alleged "kidnapping of children", the Facebook Arabic page features videos of some Nyans supporters, including some influencers known for their systematic campaigns against social services, calling for participation in the elections under the banner of "the issue of child kidnapping." One such influencer is the activist Ali Sidani, whose video was shared by Nyans Arabic page on 31 August 2022. This means that Nyans media indirectly adapts the misleading information provided by those influencers.

3.4. Qur'an Burning

This is evident in the party's media outputs, including the statements of party candidates and the production of videos and photos. When asked how the party plans to appeal to Muslim immigrant voters, Mallah responded in a video republished on the party's page on 11 August 2022, stating that these voters did not find any other politicians who would listen to their concerns. Mallah emphasized that the Nyans party was the only one that stood against the crime of burning the *Qur'an* and recognized it as an incitement against an "ethnic group" rather than an issue of freedom of expression. Despite this clear confusion between the religious and ethnic aspects of the Muslim minority, the party's attempts to acknowledge the pain and concerns of these voters, as per Mallah, have struck a chord with a substantial portion of the community. This statement suggests that these emotional issues were selected to be the foundation of the party's campaign and that the party views the social services system as racist in its practices.

The use of imagery featuring a burnt *Qur'an* in the party's artistic production serves as an emotional appeal to viewers and is evident in multiple videos and photos published by the party. The party's messaging also suggests that the election is not just a routine political event, but rather a referendum on the party's agenda, with a central focus on "the criminalization of burning the *Qur'an*," as stated by Anwar Al-Saleh in a video published on the party's Arabic page on 8 September 2022. As Nyans was only able to win 30% of the vote in immigrant-heavy areas such as Rosengård, we can argue that their message was not well received by the majority of their target population.

3.5. Representation

Despite the party's efforts to position itself as a representative of all minority groups and immigrants in Sweden, the party's media discourse reveals a bias toward primarily focusing on the Muslim community. When questioned about this highlight, the party's secretary, Rami Hussein, cites the high rates of hate crimes directed toward Muslims in Sweden and the perceived lack of representation for this minority within other political parties as justification for the party's focus. However, the party's political platform includes criminalizing the denial of the genocide of Bosnian Muslims in the Srebrenica massacre, without providing clear reasoning for this stance. Furthermore, the party's platform makes no mention of criminalizing the denial of the Armenian Genocide or Yazidi Genocide.

Representation utilizes language, signs, and images to convey meaning and plays a crucial role in creating and sharing cultural understanding through symbolic means, including social media [67]. Employing the symbolic and linguistic dimensions of representation, Nyans' discourse attempted to reach its target group. During the electoral campaign, the media coverage of the campaign heavily reflected the party's focus on the Muslim community in Sweden. This was evident in the prevalence of issues with a religious dimension, such as the burning of the *Qur'an* and the veil. The party also emphasized its opposition to potential restrictions on Muslim women wearing the veil and prominently featured images of veiled women candidates in promotional materials. This dominance of images of veiled women candidates, however, does not accurately represent the diversity of all communities, immigrants, or Muslims. This disparity in representation becomes evident through the emphasis on topics with an Islamic connection and the exclusion of those related to other non-Muslim minorities.

Data analysis has revealed that the media discourse is largely directed toward those who speak Arabic: 50% of the videos analyzed and published on the party's Swedish-language page were translated into Arabic, indicating a clear targeting of Swedish-Muslim voters who speak Arabic. This is further supported by the fact that the Arabic language was dominant among the other languages spoken by Muslims in Sweden. Other languages, such as Kurdish, Pashto, Urdu, Turkish, Persian, Somali, and Bosnian, do not appear in the media discourse, which suggests that the representation of Muslim voters in Nyans media is limited to Arabic-speaking Muslims and does not accurately reflect the diversity of the Muslim population in Sweden.

3.6. Nyans Party's Media Discourse Model

To effectively convey the results of our analysis of the Nyans party's media discourse during its election campaign, Figure 1 illustrates how the political agenda was set and how subsequent discourse was crafted to engage a predefined audience, which diverged from the party's officially declared policies. As depicted in this model, the party's official stance articulated a commitment to serving vulnerable groups in Swedish society, particularly those with immigrant backgrounds, and expressed an intention to embrace more inclusive policies toward immigrants. Despite these declarations, the party's agenda primarily focused on critiquing the policies of the left parties, a political bloc often associated with issues relevant to immigrants. This strategic emphasis resulted in creating a media discourse that aligns more closely with the narrative of the Swedish right and far right, which is known for its critical stance toward leftist policies concerning migration.
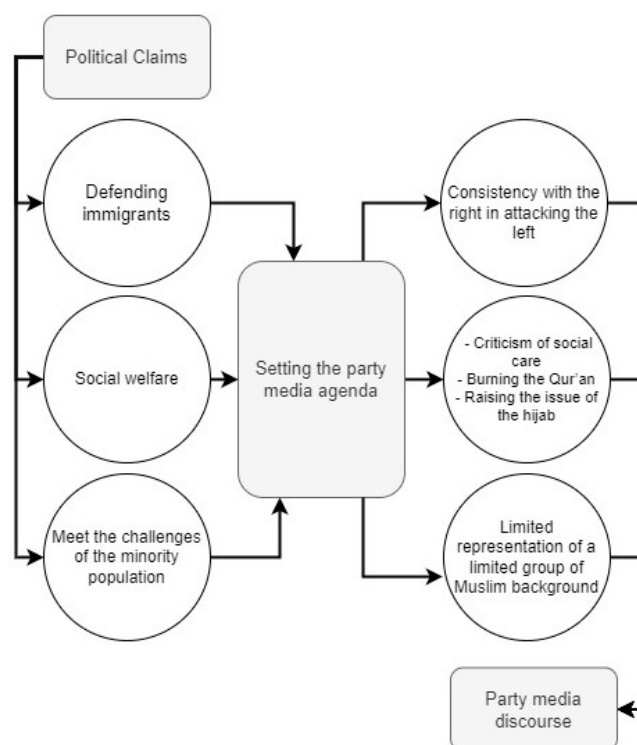
Figure 1. Formation of Nyans party's media agenda and media discourse.

While Sweden grapples with significant societal challenges, particularly concerning the integration of new immigrants, the Nyans party opted not to address the broader Swedish audience with solutions to these issues. Instead, the party set its agenda to appeal selectively to citizens with immigrant backgrounds, deliberately excluding topics of immigration, integration, and social welfare. The salience shifted toward contentious sociocultural matters, including the burning of the *Qur'an* and associated claims, as well

as questioning the authority of social services. Consequently, the resulting discourse resembled propaganda more closely than a genuine election campaign.

All of these elements converge on the issue of representation. It has become evident from the Nyans' political policy that it aspires to represent religious and ethnic minorities in Sweden, with a particular emphasis on the Muslim minority. The under- or over-representation of minorities in election media campaigns is a significant issue. When present, the portrayal of minorities in the media tends to be limited and stereotypical, resulting in a narrow and generalized depiction of their lives and identities [71]. Accordingly, our paper shows how the Nyans party's representation of the Muslim minority in Sweden raises concerns about its accuracy and inclusivity. Despite claiming to represent all minority groups and immigrants, the party's focus and foundational documents reveal a clear bias toward the Muslim community. While the party justifies this focus by citing hate crimes against Muslims and a lack of representation in other parties, there are inconsistencies in their platform. During the electoral campaign, the media coverage heavily reflected the party's emphasis on the Muslim community, particularly through issues with a religious dimension. However, this dominant portrayal of veiled women candidates does not accurately represent the diversity within communities, immigrants, or Muslims. Furthermore, the party's media discourse primarily targets Arabic-speaking Muslims, excluding other languages and diverse Muslim communities in Sweden. This skewed representation does not accurately reflect the Muslim population as a whole.

4. Discussion

Research indicates that social media plays a crucial role in election campaigns, particularly for first-time voters. By following campaign information on social media, these individuals can better comprehend the content, leading to increased confidence in their vote choice [30]. Our results demonstrate that the Nyans party practiced its media campaign in Arabic rather than Swedish on their Facebook pages. The reasoning behind this is that the party recognizes that the target audience, mostly Arabic-speaking immigrants who arrived in Sweden after 2014, may not have a strong command of the Swedish language. Therefore, reaching and convincing this specific immigrant group requires addressing them in Arabic and catering to their linguistic needs. While the party portrays itself as a Swedish national party in its literature and is gearing up to participate in the European parliamentary elections in 2024 [86], its 2022 election campaign materials have unveiled a rather narrow target audience. This revelation is based on both the linguistic constraints and the accompanying content found in the party's media strategy, highlighting a primary focus on Arabic-speaking Muslim immigrants.

For several decades, political parties in Sweden have traditionally centered their election agendas around economic and employment issues, as well as education, taxation, health, and social welfare [65,87,88]. However, over the past ten years, there has been a shift toward non-economic issues such as immigration, refugees, climate change, and law. These issues have increasingly been adopted by extreme-right parties across the European Union [35,89]. In this context, Nyans, among other allegedly pro-Islam parties and Pro-Erdogan in the EU [13,23,25], emerges as a challenge to these narratives. The party's media discourse seeks to instill fear among immigrants by emphasizing cultural and social issues central to the party's cultural identity. Furthermore, the analysis has demonstrated that the party prioritizes these issues over economic concerns. However, it adopts a populist narrative opposite to that of far-right parties; it creates fears among immigrants and questions Swedish institutions and political parties.

The discourse in the public sphere of several nations has become increasingly divisive, characterized by an "us vs. them" mentality that draws a clear distinction between a perceived national in-group and those deemed to be different, particularly individuals of a different religion [90]. This divisive discourse is promoted by populist political parties, which use cultural and social issues, particularly immigration, to polarize the masses and gain support for their political agendas [91,92]. The right-wing party, the Sweden

Democrats (SD), was winning votes close to the low-income areas inhabited by immigrants in Stockholm, Malmö, and Gothenburg [32], and the results of recent elections showed that the Nyans party won a large proportion of the votes within these areas [12]. Our results show how the Nyans party creates a discourse that reinforces this dangerous division, both in and around these areas and at the country level in general. This analysis illustrates how the media discourse of the Nyans party contributes to this dichotomy between "us" and "them" by prioritizing sociocultural demands rather than focusing on the comprehensive national demands, interests, and needs. This approach also provides the far-right wing with justification for their fears about the impact of immigrants on cultural and social change in society.

5. Conclusions

While this new party could address a potential gap in the Swedish political landscape, it has opted to narrow its media agenda to a limited set of sociocultural issues. Many of these concerns are grounded not in current practices but rather in accusations or apprehensions regarding the future. Critical issues such as economics, transportation, housing, integration into the labor market, education, security concerns, and gang conflicts are excluded from this focused agenda.

This paper demonstrates that Nyans' social media discourse surrounding the electoral campaign strategically sets its agenda with a focus on specific topics, such as criticizing left-wing parties and highlighting sensitive issues with sociocultural connections, such as the burning of the *Qur'an*, attempts to ban the veil, and the childcare law LVU. Notably, there was a lack of discourse on other important economic and social issues, including education, employment, crime control, and integration. The Nyans party's discourse failed to provide specific examples or clarifications regarding alleged laws that restrict the religious freedom of Muslims. Additionally, while the party claimed to represent all minorities and immigrants, the research reveals a bias toward primarily emphasizing the Muslim community, neglecting the diverse communities within Sweden's Muslim population. The results indicate an inaccurate portrayal of Muslims, perpetuating stereotypes that they have their own attitudes apart from the rest of Swedish society. This depiction is unrealistic and fails to acknowledge the diversity of Muslim society and its range of intellectual and political perspectives. These findings shed light on new parties' exploitation of controversial issues and their amplification in political discourse, ultimately contributing to societal polarization. This discourse also has the potential to exacerbate the divisive narrative perpetuated by the extreme right, further polarizing into distinct "us" and "them" factions.

Despite the initial perception that places the Nyans party in opposition to far-right parties in Sweden, CDA reveals structural similarities between the Nyans and far-right parties, namely, SD. Consequently, the Nyan's discourse aligns more with a far-right perspective, considering their cultural and ideological Islamic background, which shapes their approach to the discussed issues. In the Swedish context, it becomes evident that the sociocultural issues addressed by SD closely resemble those addressed by the Nyans, differing primarily in their perspective and evaluation of these issues.

6. Limitations

The primary objective of this paper was to analyze the media discourse of the Nyans party during its recent campaign in the Swedish general elections. We focused on posts published on the party's Facebook pages in the month leading up to the elections. While we recognize the potential benefits of analyzing data both before and after this period, we chose to concentrate on this month because we observed a notably heightened intensity of publications during this timeframe compared to the periods before and after. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge another limitation in our approach, which is related to language. As our native language is Arabic, we had a deeper understanding of Arabic expressions and their translation into English. However, we encountered challenges when dealing with the Swedish language, which is not our mother tongue. To mitigate this

limitation, we made an effort to utilize texts that had alternative English translations on the other page or versions that had been translated into Arabic. In all instances, these translations were reviewed to ensure the accurate conveyance of meanings within their respective contexts.

7. Future Research

While our research primarily centered on analyzing data derived from the Nyans party's Facebook posts, we contend that this analysis provides insights into the overarching structure of Nyans' discourse. Nevertheless, we consider it vital to conduct comparative research between the party's media discourse and its political literature. Such a comparison can help elucidate the distinctions between the party's ideological foundations as articulated in its literature and its ideological representation in media discursive practice. Moreover, we place considerable importance on studying the party's discourse in its interaction with the broader audience. In this regard, there is a need to explore public interactions through reactions, comments, and sharing, which will enable us to gauge the extent to which this discourse can influence the public and monitor the emergence of various phenomena resulting from such interactions.

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Note

[1]   Honor law refers to honor-related crimes, which are crimes committed in whole or in part to preserve or restore the reputation of a person or family, kindred, or other similar group based on a notion of honor (Swedish Prosecution Authority, 2021).

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