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DENMARK

Carina Bischoff and Marlene Wind
1 Geographical position

Located in northern Europe, Denmark occupies a strategically important geographical position between its Scandinavian neighbours and Continental Europe, in the narrow straits connecting the Baltic Sea to the North Sea. The country covers an area of 42,894 square kilometres, and has a population of over 5.5 million, largely concentrated in the cities, with an urbanization rate of 87 per cent. In religious, ethnic, and cultural terms, Denmark is highly homogenous compared to many other European countries. In recent decades, however, there has been a growing population of immigrants with different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Some 10 per cent of the population today descends from immigrants and of these 67 per cent are of non-Western origin. The Kingdom of Denmark also includes the Faroe Islands and Greenland in the North Atlantic, both of which enjoy the status of autonomous territories.

2 Historical background

The official history of Denmark dates back to the ninth and tenth centuries, when the Vikings established the first political structures. In 1397 Denmark, Norway, and Sweden formed a union under a common crown, known as the Union of Kalmar.

During WWI, the country maintained its neutrality and, as a result of Germany’s defeat, it regained territory to the south. In 1940 Denmark was occupied by the Nazis. Initially the government remained in place, but it resigned in 1943.
In 1973 Denmark entered the EEC and was hit by the international oil crisis at the same time. Years of prosperity were replaced by an economic slump and higher unemployment, which lasted through the 1980s.

3 Geopolitical profile

As one of the founding members, Denmark has been well integrated in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) since 1949. Although allied with some reservations and a relatively small defence budget for most of the Cold War period, the country has generally had a strong pro-American position in terms of its security policy. Moreover, Denmark is well integrated into the civil, yet not the military, part of the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union.

Like other Scandinavian countries, Denmark has one of the most generous development aid policies in the world. It is a founding member of the United Nations, a member of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD), and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

4 Overview of the political landscape

Denmark is a constitutional monarchy in which the head of state plays a non-political ceremonial role. It is a unitary state, with two tiers of political representation below the national level consisting of 98 municipalities and 5 regions. The system of government is parliamentary democracy. It has a unicameral Parliament, called Folketinget, which consists of 179 members, including two representatives from Greenland and two representatives from the Faroe Islands, elected by a proportional electoral system. The courts do not play an active role in the political life of the country and the legality of parliamentary decisions has only rarely been challenged.

No single party has won a majority of seats since 1909, thus the most common form of government has been of minority coalitions that have initiated a tradition of broad collaboration between parties in Parliament.

At the time of the 2009 European election, eight parties were represented in Parliament. The centre-right coalition government was led by Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen from the Liberal Party (Venstre). Since 2001, the Conservative and Liberal Parties were in power, but were replaced by a centre-left coalition guided by the leader of the Social Democratic Party and first female Prime Minister, Helle Thorning-Schmidt.

5 Brief account of the political parties

Since October 2011, eight parties have been represented in the Folketinget, and a few more contest elections. In addition to these, two parties have emerged that only participate in elections to the European Parliament.

The Socialdemokraterne (Social Democratic Party) is the main party on the left of the political spectrum in Denmark. It was founded in 1871 to represent the interests of the working class and by 1924, it had become the largest party with the support of more than a third of the electorate. It formed a government for the first time in 1924 and in the six succeeding decades. From 1924 to 1982, the Social Democrats were almost permanently in office, except for 13 years, forming a government alone or in coalition with the Radikale Venstre (the Social Liberal Party). The pattern changed in 1982 when the Social Democrats lost power to a coalition of the centre-right that stayed in power until 1993. From 2001 to 2011 the Social Democrats were out of office once
more, but in 2011 they won the elections and formed a coalition government with the Social Liberals and the Socialistisk Folkeparti (the Socialist People’s Party).

The Social Democratic Party has ideological roots in socialism and has historically been closely affiliated with the working-class movement and the unions. In the post-war period, the party advocated social and economic changes through reform and supported the expansion of the welfare state with high growth and employment, a strong public sector, and redistribution policies as a means of diminishing social and economic inequalities. Due to its strong influence on government in the twentieth century, the party has played a key role in the construction and expansion of the generous welfare state and the large public sector in Denmark. Partly as a result of social and economic changes, its strength as the primary representative of the working class has eroded. On the one hand, it appeals to a broader constituency and, on the other hand, the working-class vote is shared more broadly across the parties in the system.

Socialistisk Folkeparti, SF (Socialist People’s Party), founded in 1959, emerged as a splinter party from the former Communist Party. Its original programme emphasized commitment to the introduction of socialism by democratic means, public ownership of the means of production, neutrality, disarmament, and solidarity with the Third World. Today, the Socialist profile is toned down and the party advocates social and economic equality through redistribution within a controlled market economy. At the heart of its politics lies a commitment to the ‘green agenda’ as well as the promotion of human rights, feminism, and increasing democratic participation in the workplace. Since its inception, it has received on average 8 per cent of the votes, with 9.6 per cent at the 2011 elections, it is the second largest party on the left. After 50 years as an opposition party, it entered into government for the first time in 2011 in a coalition with the Social Democrats and the Social Liberal Party. Until then, it had only served as a supporting party to Social Democratic governments in the mid-1960s, which caused severe internal rifts over compromises made, and again in the 1990s. As part of its preparation for, and participation in, the government coalition, the party chose a more

Table 12.2 List of political parties in Denmark

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original name</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socialdemokraterne</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Social Democrats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venstre</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>Liberal Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialistisk Folkeparti</td>
<td>SF</td>
<td>Socialist People’s Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dansk Folkeparti</td>
<td>DF</td>
<td>Danish People’s Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Det Konservative Folkeparti</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>Conservative People’s Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folkbevægelsen mod EU</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>People’s Movement Against the EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Det Radikale Venstre</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Social Liberal Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junibevægelsen</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>June Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhedslisten</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Unity List</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Alliance/New Alliance</td>
<td>LA</td>
<td>Liberal Alliance/New Alliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centrum Demokraterne</td>
<td>CD</td>
<td>Centre Democrats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retsforbundet</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Justice Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristendemokraterne</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>Christian Democrats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venstre Socialisterne</td>
<td>VS</td>
<td>Left Socialist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fremskridspartiet</td>
<td>Z</td>
<td>Progressive Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danmarks Kommunistiske Parti</td>
<td>DKP</td>
<td>Denmark’s Communist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felles Kurs</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Common Course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Grønne</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Green Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minoritetspartiet</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Minority Party</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
pragmatic route for winning influence and had to compromise on a number of issues, including its advocacy for an open immigration policy.

Founded in 1989, Enhedslisten (Unity List), also known as the Red–Green Alliance, represents the fusion of several small parties on the extreme left that were unable to win representation on their own. Until the election in 2011, where it won 6.7 per cent of the vote, its support had been fluctuating at around 2–3 per cent. The compromises made by the SF combined with the economic crises and a hugely popular party leader undoubtedly contributed to this result. Its programme reflects a commitment to democratic socialism, with the long-term aim of attaining a classless society and the collective ownership of the means of production. It strongly opposes social inequalities and refuses to support political agreements that entail a reduction in welfare provisions. As its name indicates, it has a strong Green profile, and also supports global solidarity, disarmament, and an open immigration policy. It currently supports the centre-left coalition in government.

Det Radikale Venstre (the Social Liberal Party) was founded in 1905, as a result of internal dissension in Venstre (the Liberal Party), mainly over matters of defence where it took an anti-military position. It is ideologically centrist in opposing both socialism as well as pure capitalism and has pursued an agenda promoting social welfare in balance with a liberal concern for individual rights. Opposed to the advocacy of special interests, it has argued for a ‘reasoned’ approach to politics and has favoured broad collaboration among the parties. The promotion of education is a core issue for the party that, among others, also supports a Green agenda, generous international aid, and a liberal approach to immigration. It is also the Folketinget’s most pro-European party. Before 2001, it had a pivotal role as ‘king-maker’ in the Danish party system and even when it was not in government, it was typically an essential part of the political majorities behind agreements. Under the 2001–2011 right-wing government, it lost this key role, but it is now back in power. It has been closely associated with the Social Democrats as a coalition partner in government, but on a few occasions, in 1968–1971 and 1988–1990, it has also entered into coalitions with the parties on the centre–right. At the 2011 election, it obtained 9.5 per cent of the votes and became a very influential partner in the centre-left government.

Venstre (the Liberal Party) was founded in 1870 by different groups who shared their commitment to liberalism, advocacy for agrarian interests, as well as opposition to the existing regime. Venstre became the majority party in Parliament in 1872 and played a leading role in constitutional battles for the introduction of parliamentary democracy. It formed a government for the first time in 1901 and dominated governments, alternating with the Social Liberal Party, until 1924. Apart from its participation in the broad unity government during the German Occupation in WWII and as leader of a coalition government with the Conservative Party from 1950 to 1953, it did not re-enter government before 1968 as part of a three-party coalition. After two short-lived governments in the 1970s, one in an odd alliance with the Social Democrats, it participated in the stable coalition of centre–right parties that governed from 1982 to 1993. In 2001, it became the largest party and led the right-wing government that was in power until 2011.

Following the decline of agriculture and the depopulation of the countryside from the 1950s, its original platform of defending agrarian interests was transformed into that of a broader liberal party. Its electoral support had ranged from 20 to 30 per cent in the decades immediately after the war, but was reduced to a mere 10 per cent by the late 1980s. In the 1990s, the party developed a sharper ideological profile emphasizing a downsizing of the public sector, increased reliance on market forces and privatization, as well as individual freedoms. Growing in electoral support, but failing to win government power in 1998, it changed strategy to appeal to parties and voters in the political centre. It formed a government in a minority coalition with the Conservative party in 2001–2011, with the Danish People’s Party as its stable parliamentary support.
Det Konservative Folkeparti (the Conservative People’s Party) was founded in 1915 representing a re-organization of conservative groups that supported the Danish king in the constitutional battles leading up to parliamentary democracy. Like other Conservative parties, it has emphasized the importance of the nation, its history, culture and community, and stressed the importance of a strong national defence. Economically, it emphasizes the importance of private property and advocates pro-business policies without committing to a strong ideology of free market forces. In relation to the public sector, it has emphasized the importance of modernization and downscaling as well as decentralization to the local level. With the support of around 20 per cent of the electorate for most of the post-war period, with a drastic but short-lived dip in the 1970s, the party’s electoral support started sliding in the 1990s and has been stable at 10 per cent until it hit a low 5.9 per cent in 2011. In addition to being challenged by parties both on the left and on the right, the party has suffered from internal conflicts over leadership. In the post-war period, the Conservative party was the second party in three coalition governments with centre-right parties, (1950–1953; 1968–1971; 2001–2011) and held the post of Prime Minister in the coalition that ruled from 1982 to 1993.

Dansk Folkeparti (Danish People’s Party) was established in 1995 by four prominent members of the ‘Progress Party’, which burst onto the political scene in 1973 with a radical agenda of drastic tax-cuts, anti-defence spending and strong Euroscepticism. Defeated electorally after the emergence of the Danish People’s Party, the Progress Party soon disappeared. The Danish People’s Party is typically described as a party on the right due to its highly Nationalist values, its emphasis on law and order, and its strong anti-immigration policies. Its role as a stable parliamentary supporter of the centre-right government from 2001 to 2011 underlines this classification. However, rather than continuing the minimal state rhetoric of its predecessor, it has adopted a platform of supporting social welfare with an emphasis on care for the elderly. In its socio-economic policies, it can be regarded as a party on the centre-left. Its advocacy for restricting immigration, and even reversing it, has played a significant role in Danish politics. On the one hand, it has struck a cord with segments of the population and the party has the stable support of 12–14 per cent of voters. On the other hand, it has been able to put pressure on the other parties that in many cases have moved closer to the Danish People’s Party on the issue, and as the supporting party of the late government it effectively put its mark on policy.

Liberal Alliance (Liberal Alliance) is a new party, which represents a reformed continuation of the New Alliance Party that emerged in the 2007 elections. It advocates economic liberalism and promotes tax reductions and cut-backs in welfare services. In accordance with its Liberal views, it is opposed to state regulation of the personal lives of citizens and restrictions on immigration, provided immigrants ‘pay for themselves’. It is also critical of the EU, which it considers to be too detailed in its regulation. While supporting the return of a right-wing government, it is critical of the levels of taxes and public spending that were endorsed by a government of the Liberal and Conservative parties from 2001 to 2011. At the election in 2011, it won 5 per cent of the votes.

In addition to the parties represented in Parliament, two other parties run in the European Parliament elections on Eurosceptic platforms. The two parties are not regular parties as they do not hold policies on most issues. These include first, the non-partisan Folkebevægelsen mod EU (People’s Movement Against the EU) that formed in connection with the debate on Danish accession in 1972. It started as a weak network, bringing together local committees, organizations, and party members united by their Euroscepticism and had a strong impact on the public referendum debate. It was the only non-parliamentary party that made a bid for participating in the EP elections in 1979 and it has participated in every election since then.
Junibevægelsen (June Movement) emerged after the referendum in 1993 in opposition to further integration into the EU, but was not opposed to membership as such. After its failure to obtain a seat in the 2009 EP elections, the party dissolved itself.

5.1 Party attitudes towards the European Union

The parties currently represented in the Folketinget or in the EP European Parliament can roughly be divided into three groups based on their positions on European issues:

- **Pro-EU**: the Social Liberal, the Social Democratic, the Liberal and the Conservative parties. They are in favour of membership and also for abolishing the opt-outs so that Denmark can regain its status as full member of the EU.

- **Pro-EU membership, but with reservations regarding the areas covered by the opt-outs**: the Socialist People’s Party, a main architect of the Danish opt-outs, has changed its position in recent years. It now favours joining the Common Security and Defence Policy as well as Justice and Home Affairs, but does not want to enter into the euro-zone mainly due to the lack of a social aspect in the EMU. The Liberal Alliance is also against joining the EMU due to both the current economic situation in Europe and an increasing sceptical attitude towards the EU in general.

- **Eurosceptics**: leaving the European Union is the ultimate goal of the People’s Movement Against the EU, which opposes the EU’s infringement on national self-determination and would like Denmark to have its own voice in international fora. The Danish People’s Party is also EU-sceptic due to concerns about the loss of national sovereignty. The Unity List opposes EU membership because of its market driven pro-business policies and lack of democracy.

Over the past four decades, there have been signs of tension between popular opinion and political parties’ positions on Europe. Differences in the support given to the parties in the national Folketinget elections and the EP elections give evidence of this phenomenon. Figure 12.2 shows the gap between the share of votes of hard Eurosceptic parties at the Folketinget and European elections respectively.

![Graph showing Eurosceptic party performance at EP and national elections in Denmark: 1979–2009](https://example.com/graph.png)

**Figure 12.2** Eurosceptic party performance at EP and national elections in Denmark: 1979–2009

As seen in the figure, there has been a persistent gap between the support for Eurosceptic parties at EP and national elections, albeit that it has clearly waned over time. The highest, 25 per cent gap was registered in the late 1970s, and a 20 per cent difference was reached in the mid-1990s. The narrowing of the gap is a result of both declining support for hard Eurosceptics at EP elections as well as increasing support for Eurosceptics at national elections over the last decade. In the 2009 EP election, 25 per cent of the voters still supported Eurosceptic parties compared to 15 per cent at the preceding national election in 2007. The difference between the two party systems has been able to subsist, due to the low salience of EU issues in domestic elections on the one hand, and the participation of two additional parties with Eurosceptic profiles in the EP elections, on the other. The two additional parties have provided Eurosceptic voters with an opportunity to vote for parties they agreed with in EP elections and arguably eased some of the pressure on the parties in domestic politics. The two types of elections have therefore maintained a stronger degree of separation than has been seen elsewhere in Europe.

With the exception of the Socialist People’s Party, which had received 5–10 per cent of the vote in the elections prior to the referendum on accession, all of the established parties, recommended a positive vote. The vast majority of the 36.7 per cent voting ‘No’ thus did so in opposition to their party’s recommendations. There was a sense of disharmony between the attitudes of the elite and the general population, and the gap would not close quickly. Generally, the parties in the Folketinget have held a more positive view on Denmark’s involvement in Europe than the general population has. The tension has traditionally been strongest on the left, where Euroscepticism has always been strongest. In fact, until the mid and late 1990s Euroscepticism in Denmark was largely a left-wing phenomenon fuelled by an antipathy towards Conservative, capitalist, and Catholic Europe. Europe was perceived as a danger to the Danish welfare state and was the preserver of an unjust global order which created a ‘Fortress Europe’ to the detriment of Third World countries; it was also seen as a threat to national democracy and identity.

Of the parties represented in Parliament, only the Socialist People’s Party held a Eurosceptic position the first two decades following Denmark’s accession, but at the EP elections it was joined by the Popular Movement against the EEC/EU. After the referendum on Maastricht in the early 1990s, the Progress Party – no longer in Parliament – on the right distanced itself from its previously pro-European stance and its successful ‘successor’, the Danish People’s Party, arrived on the stage in 1995 with a clear Eurosceptic agenda. Unlike the sceptics on the left, the new right-wing critique focusses on the threat of open borders in Europe. In their view, the EU results in an influx of immigrants and criminals to Denmark. Moreover, the EU is seen as a threat to national identity, democracy, and sovereignty. The issue of immigration has been very important in Danish politics from the 1990s onwards and creating a link between attitudes to the EU and immigration could have undermined the separation of attitudes on the EU and domestic politics that has been maintained in Denmark. Until now, the EU has not been a salient issue in connection with national elections.

With regard to the representation of voters’ opinions, there was hardly any discrepancy on the centre-right on the question of membership of the EEC, but voters of the centre-left parties, the Social Democrats and the Social Liberal Party, were from the beginning quite evenly split on this issue. The tension over the question of membership on the left was not confined to the relationship between voters and parties, but also manifested itself in intra-party dissension, though without leading to the formation of proper factions or splits within parties. At the first European election, four members of the Social Democratic Party obtained nomination to the list of the anti-EEC Popular Movement. The leader of the Social Democratic Party responded to this by threatening them with exclusion and one of the candidates gave up the nomination as a result. Over the years, the Social Democratic Party has had its share of internal debates and
disagreements over Europe and although it played a leading role in bringing Denmark into the
EEC, it has been a less enthusiastic supporter of the European project than, for instance, the
Liberal Party.

The parties in Parliament have typically recommended positive votes in referenda on
Europe, but their advice has gone unheeded by large sections of citizens on several occa-
sions. In 1986, the opposite occurred when 56 per cent of voters endorsed the adoption of
the Single European Act (SEA). This happened in spite of the low degree of support for the
EEC observed in the early 1980s and also went against the recommendation of the majority in
Parliament. It was, however, in accordance with the advice given by the popular incumbent
centre-right government.

Differences in positions over the SEA also represented the first major disagreement on
European policy between the Social Democratic Party and the Liberal Party. Together, the
two parties had formed a majority that largely defined Danish EU policy in the first decade
following Danish accession. However, after the coalition of centre-right parties took office in
1982, the Social Democrats formed a parliamentary majority on important matters of foreign
policy in alliance with the Social Liberal Party that supported the government on domestic
policies and thus made it possible for it to remain in office.

However, on the question of the SEA, the voters supported the government. This election
was significant not only due to its outcome, but because, according to observers, it marked the
end of the ‘membership’ discussion and the beginning of the debate on ‘union’ and further inte-
gration in the EU (Worre, 1989, 100). On this issue, the pro-membership parties did not see eye
to eye, as evidenced by their different positions on the SEA. The Liberals, the Conservatives,
and the now-defunct Centre Democrats were described as ‘federalists’ with their pro-integration
views, while the Social Democrats, Social Liberals, as well as the Progress Party and the Christian
Democrats, were characterized as ‘pragmatic pro-Europeans’ or ‘states rights’ advocates as they
were sceptical of transferring further powers to Brussels and giving up the national veto.

Analysis of voters’ views in the late 1980s showed that voters on the centre-right were more
in line with the position of the pragmatic pro-Europeans than the ‘federalist’ positions taken by
their own parties. The tension between party and voter attitudes on Europe has therefore not
only been a problem on the left, although it was mostly over the extent of integration on the
right. In the late 1980s, the ‘states rights’ parties dominated in the Folketinget with only one-
sixth of the votes going to hard Eurosceptics and a third to the ‘federalists’ (Worre, 1989, 101).

Following the SEA election, the Social Democrats and the Socialist People’s Party went
through a period of adjusting their positions on Europe and common ground with the govern-
ment was found. A broadly negotiated position included the inclusion of new areas in European
collaboration such as education, culture, environment, and a strengthened social dimension as
well as coordination on foreign policy.

Differences did not disappear, however. Although they recommended a ‘Yes’ to the Maas-
tricht Treaty in 1992, the Social Democrats had reservations about collaboration on defence and
a common currency, and both the Socialist People’s Party and the Progress Party did not support
signing the treaty. Following the Danish ‘No’ to the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, the government
in close collaboration with the parties in Parliament, negotiated the Edinburgh Agreement, which
allowed Denmark to retain its membership of the EU while ‘opting out’ of four areas covered
by the treaty, which include: participation in the third phase of EMU (the euro); the Common
Security and Defence Policy; parts of the Justice and Home Affairs Policy; and citizenship of the
European Union. The so-called ‘opt-outs’ have been an important issue in Danish EU politics
since the Edinburgh Agreement was adopted in 1993. Several of the parties behind the agreement
have since argued for abolishing some or all of the opt-outs, but so far without success.
6 Public opinion and the European Union

Over the years, Danish public opinion on Europe has not been characterized by strong stability. When it said ‘Yes’ to joining the European Economic Community in a referendum held on 2 October 1972, it was not by a slim margin but with 63.4 per cent in favour, and with a turnout of 90.1 per cent. In addition, the referendum debate was described as ‘the most lively public debate in modern Danish history’ (Sørensen, 1979, 51). However, compared to the divisive campaign and vote in Norway that resulted in a resounding ‘No’ the same year, the Danish accession went smoothly.

After Denmark’s entry to the EEC, popular support for membership declined, as Figure 12.2 illustrates. The proportion of the population who thought that EEC membership was ‘a good thing’ dropped significantly during the 1970s while more and more, instead, considered it ‘a bad thing’. Subsequently, for a short period, the Eurosceptics actually outnumbered the Europhiles, but since the mid-1980s, the overall trend has been more pro-European, with a steady decline of the share of negative as well as neutral views. This trend was only broken by a dip in the first half of the 1990s, where the share in favour of membership fell below 50 per cent. Since 2003, however, the proportion of Danes supporting membership has been steady at 60–67 per cent. As shown in Table 12.3, turnout in the various referenda on Europe testifies to an engaged, yet divided population.

In the first referendum following accession, held in 1986, there were no evident signs of a large discrepancy between voter opinions and party positions. The centre-left parties recommended a ‘No’ to the Single European Act, while the centre-right parties of the incumbent government advocated a ‘Yes’. The positive outcome meant that Denmark was one of the first EC countries to ratify the SEA. As such, the 1992 Referendum on the Maastricht Treaty was therefore a bit of a shock to the political system. It was the first defeat of an incumbent government on European issues when a slim, but nonetheless effective, majority of voters turned it down. However, the ‘No’ did not go only against the government, but also against the party system that endorsed a treaty that they believed Denmark had successfully helped shape in accordance with its interests. Since this potentially threatened the ongoing European integration process and Denmark’s
Denmark

Table 12.3 Referenda on Europe in Denmark

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Turnout</th>
<th>‘Yes’</th>
<th>‘No’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Danish EC membership</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>90.1%</td>
<td>63.4%</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single European Act</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>75.4%</td>
<td>56.2%</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maastricht Treaty</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>83.1%</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
<td>50.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maastricht Treaty and Edinburgh Agreement</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>86.5%</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amsterdam Treaty</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
<td>55.1%</td>
<td>44.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Euro Opt-out</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>87.6%</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>53.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


participation, the government responded by negotiating a number of ‘opt-outs’. These envisaged the possibility for Denmark to sign the treaty while remaining outside certain policy areas, including defence, EMU, judicial and police cooperation, and union citizenship. The new agreement, known as the Edinburgh agreement, was approved with a comfortable, albeit not particularly enthusiastic, majority of voters in 1993. It also sparked major riots in Copenhagen, as protesters argued that the new referendum effectively represented a cancellation of the people’s voice that had just been heard the year before. It also resulted in the formation of a new Eurosceptic ‘party’, the June Movement, which – as noted earlier – was opposed to further EU integration but not EU membership as such.

The opt-outs have widely been perceived by the political parties as a hindrance to the effective participation of Denmark in the EU, and the issue of holding a new referendum with the aim of abolishing them is a recurring theme in the Danish political debate. However, the parties are also aware that they must tread carefully. In 2000, due to favourable opinion polls, the incumbent centre-left government thought that the time was ripe to abolish the EMU opt-out and it called for a referendum on the euro. The Danes voted to remain outside of the euro-zone, despite the fact that most of the parties advocated a ‘Yes’ vote. Since then, no further referenda have been held although this was on the agenda of the centre-right government in power from 2001 to 2011. The image of Danes as reluctant Europeans that favour membership of the EU but are sceptical towards transferring national sovereignty has solidified in spite of the attempts by parties to pull voters in a more pro-European direction.

7 National and EP electoral systems

The 179 Danish members of the Folketinget are elected by a two-tier proportional representation (PR) system. The election date is set by the Prime Minister no later than four years from the previous election. One hundred and thirty-five seats are filled in multi-member electoral districts grouped into three regions that are subdivided into ten districts, which are in turn divided into 92 constituencies. Voters may cast a ballot for a district party list, or for a specific candidate. Most parties today use a type of non-ordered list that gives voters direct influence over which of the candidates get elected. In addition, 40 compensatory seats are allocated to parties that have received 2 per cent of the votes, to ensure a more proportional outcome of the election. The constituency and compensatory seats are distributed according to the d’Hondt and the Sainte-Laguës methods respectively. In practice then, the electoral system requires parties to win 2 per cent of the votes to obtain representation in the Folketinget. Four seats are allocated to the representatives from the Faroe Islands and Greenland.
The Danish EP elections are based on legislation dating back to 1977. All Danish parties represented in the Folketinget or the EP are entitled to run for EP representation. The parties must submit a list with a maximum of 20 candidates no later than four weeks prior to EP elections. Danish voters choose between individual candidates from non-ordered party lists, which means that votes for individual candidates determine who gets elected. The only exception has been the Liberal Alliance, which has used an ordered party list. The allocation of the 13 Danish seats is based on the d'Hondt method and there is only a single electoral constituency, which means that voters can vote for any of the candidates presented, unlike in Folketinget elections when they are restricted to voting for a candidate within one of the ten electoral districts. The 13 Danish seats amounts to one less than the 14 MEPs Denmark elected in the 2004 EP election.

In 2009 all parties, except the Danish People’s Party, joined electoral alliances that generally increased their chances of obtaining a seat. The first alliance announced to voters was the Eurosceptic alliance, consisting of the June Movement and The People's Movement Against the EU. Later, the Socialist People’s Party, the Social Democrats and the Social-Liberal Party announced that they would join forces, despite the fact that the Social Liberals and Socialist People’s Party rarely see eye to eye on EU matters. Finally, the Liberal Alliance, the Conservatives, and the Liberals formed an alliance.

These alliances had a stronger foundation in national politics and in their prospects for gaining an electoral advantage than they had in European affairs. The fact that alliances reflect strategic concerns rather than European policy is not a new phenomenon, but goes back to the first European elections (Worre, 1989, 104).

### 8 A glance at the EP and national elections

As Tables 12.4 and 12.5 show, voters have a very different level of engagement in the two types of elections. Participation in national elections has fluctuated between 83 and 89 per cent, while turnout at EP elections has been consistently lower at 46–53 per cent.

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Note:
<sup>1</sup> The Left Socialist Party joined the Red–Green Alliance in 1989.
EP election turnout has traditionally been significantly lower than in the national parliamentary elections, where the average turnout has been 85 per cent since 1979. One of the most notable differences between the two types of elections is the involvement of the two Eurosceptic parties, the Popular Movement and the June Movement, in the EP Elections. Until 2004 these two parties gained 20–25 per cent of the votes. Their vote share has, however, been reduced at the last two elections, and only the Popular Movement has still obtained a notable vote share, while the June Movement dissolved shortly after a poor result in the 2009 election. The strongly Eurosceptic vote at EP elections is now mainly divided between the Popular Movement and the Danish People’s Party. As discussed in Section 6, there have historically been more Eurosceptic voters than parties in the national party system, and at EP elections the Eurosceptic parties have received a higher vote share than in national elections.

The campaigns in connection with the European elections in 1979 and 1984 were strongly dominated by the question of Danish membership of the EEC. The 1979 election received massive coverage in the media and observers even talked of public fatigue with European issues.

Table 12.5 National election results in Denmark: 1979–2011 (%)

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Source: Danmarks Statistik Befolkning og Valg (2010) [www.dst.dk/valg].

Notes:
* At the 2011 National Election New Alliance changed its name to Liberal Alliance.
* Also known as the Red–Green Alliance.
afterwards (Sørensen, 1979, 60). Compared to the 1979 election, domestic issues appeared to play a greater role in 1984. On the one hand, the leading party in government, the Conservative Party, increased its vote share, and on the other hand turnout was higher, mainly from the voters on the right, which was interpreted as support for a government that had suffered a series of defeats in Parliament over foreign policy issues during preceding years (Elder, 1984, 82). By 1989, the membership discussion had, to a large extent, been replaced by the debate on further integration and ‘union’ in Europe (Worre, 1989, 100). As Torben Worre (1989) comments, ‘Danish membership of the EC was no longer on the agenda of the 1989 election campaigns, and there was, for the first time ever, almost a consensus on the Danish EC policy.’

However, the effect of this consensus was to strengthen the tendency among parties to focus on domestic issues and the results also testified to the impact of domestic politics although the European cleavage was still dominant. The following EP elections were dominated by the issue of integration and the institutions of the EU rather than substantive policies. In 1999, the campaign focused on travel costs and MEP per diem payments as well as on the failures of the EP to reform itself. Moreover, the focus was placed on Danish opt-outs. This was also the first election in which right-wing scepticism had to be taken seriously (Nielsen, 2001).

The 2004 election witnessed a more EU positive campaign than Denmark had experienced before. Most candidates, who were pro-European, focussed on the benefits of membership to Denmark in such areas as food safety, consumer protection and international crime. Among the parties represented in the Folketinget, the Danish People’s Party on the political right was the only one with a sceptical message. Together with the June and Popular Movements, they warned against the Constitutional Treaty and the loss of national sovereignty it would entail. The Danish People’s Party also emphasized the threat of immigration (Knudsen, 2004). The shift towards a more overall positive campaign was evident in the results where the three sceptical parties together polled 10 per cent less of the votes than they did in 1999.

9 The 2009 European election

9.1 Party lists

Denmark has no restrictions with regards to the length of EP election campaigns, but public attention usually does not turn towards the election until approximately two weeks prior to polling day. Furthermore, there are no Danish rules limiting the use of opinion or exit polls.

One hundred and two candidates were up for election, 60 per cent of whom were males. The average candidate was 44.9 years old. Compared to national elections, candidates played a much stronger and independent role whilst the parties did not bother to publish proper manifestos. The top lists included well-known politicians, such as former Conservative leader and minister Bendt Bendtsen, former Liberal spokesman Jens Rohde, former Socialist MP and MEP Margrethe Auken, former MP and MEP for the People’s Movement Against the EU Søren Søndergaard, and the Danish People’s Party’s MP and spokesman on EU affairs Morten Messerschmidt.

Bendtsen had to contend with bad media coverage concerning several cases of travel expenses paid by influential private companies during his time in office as minister. He was also widely criticized for stating that he wished to go to Brussels in order to have more spare time. During the election campaign, both Rohde and Bendtsen ended up arguing most forcefully for clawing back powers from Brussels to the Member States. In particular, the debate about border control and cross-border crime were key issues in many of their public televised debates. Formally, Bendtsen focussed on the climate and the financial crisis, but it was the fight against cross-border crime and national self-determination that ended up dominating his campaign. Rohde also
raised crucial issues such as Green job creation, less bureaucracy in Brussels, and equality and freedom, but he spoke relatively little about these compared to the issue of national sovereignty and taking back powers from Brussels.

Early in the campaign, Messerschmidt was seen as a very visible and articulate candidate. He received positive media attention for his rather detailed knowledge about the EU and because of his party’s widely discussed slogan: ‘Give us Denmark back.’ A reintroduction of national border control was central to his campaign and he argued against Turkish EU membership and expanding the EU budget.

Social Democrat MEP Dan Jørgensen was a relatively unknown candidate, despite the fact that it was his second term. When nominated as the party’s leading candidate, the press thus nicknamed him ‘Dan Who?’ (Quist, 2008). Representing the largest Danish party in the EP, Jørgensen nevertheless did a good job during the campaign, with a strong focus on the environment, animal welfare, and the fight against social dumping. The party managed to retain 4 of their 5 EP seats. The Social Democrats had an exceptionally good election in 2004, when former Prime Minister Poul Nyrop Rasmussen was its leading candidate. No one expected a repetition of that extraordinary result, and losing just one seat was therefore seen as a success.

Margrethe Auken was a veteran for the Socialists and was elected together with the young Emilie Turunen. Their campaign focussed on climate, the fight against social dumping, and putting an end to trans-border crime. The election generally launched a new generation of politicians, including some of the youngest leading candidates ever.

Morten Messerschmidt, from the Danish People’s Party, was only 28 years old, Dan Jørgensen, from the Social Democrats’ and the Social-Liberal Party’s leading candidate, Sofie Carsten Nielsen, were 34. Completely unknown to the public before entering the campaign, Nielsen had to fight bad opinion polls for the Social Liberals, but was ultimately seen as the ‘greatest hit’ of the election due to her very clear pro-EU statements (Engell, 2009). Her main themes were more on Europe, together with a strong focus on fighting climate change, getting more well-educated immigrants to Europe, and economic aid for Eastern and Central Europe.

The positive campaign evaluations did not, however, prove successful at the polls.

Another young leading candidate was 26-year-old Benjamin Dickow from the Liberal Alliance. He was on a ‘mission impossible’ from the outset, with polls giving the Liberal Alliance less than 0.5 per cent of the vote. MEP and leading candidate for the June Movement, Hanne Dahl, also faced a daunting challenge in defending her seat after the retirement of the June Movement’s grand old man and long-standing MEP Jens-Peter Bonde. Polls gave Dahl little chance to defend the seat, which also explained why the June Movement decided to form an electoral alliance with the People’s Movement against the EU.

9.2 Electoral campaign

A basic analysis of Danish news was carried out in an attempt to ascertain the most discussed issues of the EP campaign. The analysis is based on a search in Infomedia, a Danish news database, for relevant articles in the ten largest Danish newspapers – Politiken, Berlingske Tidende, Jyllands-Posten, Information, Borsen, Weekendavisen, Erhvervsbladet, B.T., Ekstra Bladet, and Kristeligt Dagblad – between 7 May and 7 June 2009.

One of the topics emerging early in the campaign was the regularly discussed question in Denmark regarding Turkish EU membership. The debate was opened by former minister and leading Conservative candidate Bendt Bendtsen, stating that Turkey should never obtain full membership. Despite the fact that this is not even a matter for the European Parliament to decide, the discussion about Turkey and Islamic values once again proved to be a hot topic in public debate.
This debate is also related somewhat to another archetypical debate in Denmark regarding the issue of immigration. The European Court of Justice’s *Metock* verdict from 2008, and whether or not it undermined strict Danish immigration rules, remained an intensely debated topic in the election campaign. The Nationalistic and EU-sceptic Danish People’s Party and their popular candidate Morten Messerschmidt were particularly active in working to get this issue onto the agenda. The slogan ‘Give us Denmark back’ could very well be seen as a response to the *Metock* verdict and the claim that the EU has obtained jurisdiction over internal matters such as immigration.

Along the same lines, it came as a bit of a surprise when otherwise pro-European Social Democrat Dan Jørgensen suggested the reintroduction of border controls at the Danish–German border. The argument, embraced by almost all of the other candidates, except Social Liberal Sofie Carsten Nielsen, was that Denmark had lost control over the influx of criminals and immigrants due to Schengen cooperation.

A common European health system and patients’ rights were among the most prominent subjects in the debate among the issues focussing on common European cooperation. Leading Social Liberal Party candidate Sofie Carsten Nielsen received attention and support from other parties when she suggested that rare diseases should be treated at centralized EU hospitals. This never became a salient topic, however, as reflected by the fact that only seven newspaper articles appeared on the matter.

With the upcoming UN Climate Summit, COP15, in December 2009 in Copenhagen, climate change and the role of the EU as an important actor attracted significant public interest. All of the parties jumped on board and attempted to label themselves ‘green’. The Socialist People’s Party was probably the most successful in this regard, using catchy sound bites such as ‘express trains between the EU capitals’ and ‘the construction of 154 windmills every week in the EU’.

As a general topic underlying many of the other debates, the financial crisis and unemployment received attention from all of the parties, and solutions to the economic crisis were often suggested along with solutions to the climate crisis, such as so-called ‘green growth’.

### 9.3 Electoral results

EP election turnout has traditionally been significantly lower than in national parliamentary elections, where the average turnout has been 85 per cent since 1979. Compared to the previous Euro-elections, the 2009 contest clearly stood out, with its unusually high turnout at 59.5 per cent.

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<td>20.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Liberal Alliance</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Danish People’s Party</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Turnout</strong></td>
<td><strong>59.5</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This cannot plausibly be attributed to matters related to Europe alone, as a referendum on constitutional reform, namely the Act of Succession, was held simultaneously. The referendum drew a lot of attention in the media, and a prominent theme was whether a low turnout could jeopardize the ratification of the Act. It is therefore likely that this brought out more voters than otherwise had been the case. In 2009, EU supporters and sceptics went to the polls in equal numbers. While Eurosceptics were not under-represented, the young and less educated clearly were (Bhatti and Hansen, 2009).

The outcome of the 2009 EP election showed that the Euro sceptic vote was divided equally between the two strongest EU opponents, namely the Popular Movement and the Danish
People’s party, while the historically stronger and more moderate Eurosceptic June Movement only won a small per cent of the vote and lost its seat. The Danish People’s Party doubled its share of the vote with respect to earlier elections. It is reasonable to speculate that an effective campaign by its front-runner, combined with an increased turnout related to the simultaneous vote on the Act of Succession, contributed to such an extraordinary result.

Since its first election in 1994, the June Movement was clearly the strongest Eurosceptic movement, participating in the EP but not national elections. In a reversal of fortune, the Popular Movement doubled its vote share, a somewhat surprising outcome that was possibly indicative of a greater polarization of positions on Europe. Another reason for the increase in support for the Popular Movement could be that the political message that came from the party was much clearer than the message from the June Movement, where the former called for exiting the Union outright, whereas the June Movement had become more pro-European; it wanted to remain in the Union and work to reform it from within. Since many ordinary party candidates also proposed to reform Europe, the June Movement seemed to have lost its raison d’être. In any case, the poor results proved fatal, as the June Movement decided to dissolve itself shortly after the elections. The Socialist People’s Party also enjoyed a remarkable success, doubling both its vote share and seats. The dramatic increase in support is most certainly a reflection of national politics, as the party’s popularity soared at the time of the elections. Unsurprisingly, the Social Democrats lost ground compared to the previous election, where, as mentioned above, former Prime Minister Nyrrup Rasmussen was the leading candidate and drew a historic 32 per cent for the party. Disregarding the 2004 election, however, the party had its best election since 1979 in spite of its virtually unknown front-runner. The government parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives, largely held their positions, which might have been disappointing for the Conservatives in view of the fact that their former party leader was their chief candidate and they had hoped for a stronger draw.

The only party that took an offensive pro-Europe stance, the Social Liberals, fared very poorly and lost its seat. This result most likely also relates to its dwindling support in the national arena.

9.4 Campaign finance

In Denmark, political parties have access to public funding to pursue their political activities. Virtually all parties and independent members obtaining just 1,000 votes in the latest Folketinget election are eligible for support. While there are no equivalent provisions for EP elections, the money allocated to the parties participating in the other national elections can be used for the Euro-campaign (http://valg.im.dk/Valg/Partistoette, 2011). Moreover, a special fund for information on the EU has been established and all parties represented in the Folketinget or in the European Parliament can benefit from it. The fund is used to ‘promote debate and information about Europe, including development of participatory democracy’ (Undervisningsministeriet BEK 192, 2011, §1). Two-thirds of the available funds, 8 million DKK or about €1.1 million in total, are granted to parties in proportion with their share of seats in the Folketinget and in the European Parliament (ibid., §2). The remainder is distributed equally among the parties. Precise figures for campaign spending for the 2009 EP election are not available. However, based on the official accounts of the political parties, the total expenditure of all parties can be estimated to be approximately 20 million DKK, equivalent to €2.7 million. The highest amount of spending, 6.9 million DKK, was reported by the Liberal Party (Venstre) on the EP election, followed by the Social Democrats with 4.4 million DKK, and the Socialist People’s Party with 3.1 million DKK. The Conservative Party and the Danish People’s Party appear to have spent
similar amounts, but their accounts conflate EP and municipal election spending. The smaller parties, the Social Liberal Party, the Red–Green Alliance and the Popular Movement, reported spending a bit less than 0.5 million DKK, corresponding to €70,000 each. Compared to this, the estimated spending of all the parties at the previous national election was around 100 million DKK (€13.5 million).

10 Theoretical interpretation of Euro-elections

10.1 Second-Order Election theory

In Denmark, there are two sources of the discrepancy between the party system in European and national elections. First, there are parties running in the general elections that abstain from participating in the EP contest. Of the seven sets of EP elections, parties that have gained votes in the previous parliamentary election chose not to participate in the subsequent EP election on 20 occasions. These decisions were clearly related to size, as evidenced by the average electoral returns in the previous national elections obtained by the abstaining parties, which was a mere 1.6 per cent of the votes, compared to 11.6 per cent for the parties that did participate. The probability of a party winning 2 per cent of the national vote deciding to participate in the subsequent EP elections can be estimated at 30 per cent. Conversely, parties taking 4 per cent in national elections are almost 100 per cent certain to participate in the EP elections. The choice of the very small parties to decline to run can be explained by strategic concerns. The legal threshold to win seats in the Danish Parliament election is 2 per cent, while the lowest vote share for an EP seat is approximately 4.3 per cent. It is actually possible to win as much as 7 per cent of the vote and, nevertheless, fail to secure a seat. Some of the small parties, therefore, throw their weight behind some of the other parties running. The left-wing Red–Green Alliance, for example, has never run independently, instead supporting the Popular Movement against the EU. The higher thresholds have also encouraged other parties to enter into electoral alliances in an attempt to maximize their share of the seats. In the 2009 election, the Danish People’s Party was the only party not to engage in such an alliance. It is worth noting that these alliances were anchored in national rather than European patterns of conflict. For example, the Social Liberals and Liberals are both members of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), but did not engage in an electoral alliance together, as the former was in the opposition and the latter was part of the government on the national scene.

The low turnout clearly indicates that voters do not accord the same respect to EP elections as national elections. A simple comparison of the mean vote shares in the national and European elections reveals that parties running in national elections generally lose shares, on average 2.6 per cent, as the Eurosceptic lists that only participate in EP elections have successfully attracted some of their voters. Examination of the specific patterns of gains and losses indicates that small parties are the only parties with a small net gain. Government parties lose more than opposition parties, which is in line with the second-order hypothesis. With respect to partisan fortunes, left parties suffer more, followed by the right, while the centre parties fare best.

Party size appears to play a key role, which is somewhat strange, since the Danish electoral system and pattern of government formation are not particularly biased towards smaller parties, and there is therefore no particular reason to believe that the opportunity to vote sincerely in EP elections would make a major difference. It is possible, however, that voters tend to focus on the larger parties that are contesting for the post of Prime Minister in national elections and the absence of this focus favours the smaller parties. A multivariate analysis confirms that government
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parties are punished by voters. The same goes for the parties on the left, which also lose more than others parties, likely due to the stronger Euroscepticism typically among their voters. The parties on the right emerge as the relative winners, and the centre parties fall between the two blocs in terms of electoral losses. The Green motive is not included, since the time period, and thus the number of elections, is limited.

As an additional check on whether EP election results can be interpreted as a signal relevant to the domestic political situation, it is interesting to investigate whether party fortunes in the EP elections represent a harbinger of the events to follow in the national election. There is clear evidence suggesting that EP elections function as a commentary on national politics inasmuch as the results indicate how well parties will do in the upcoming national election.

Finally, Hix and Marsh (2007) suggest high volatility compared to national elections as an indicator of whether citizens vote on the basis of European issues. Volatility in EP elections is distinctly higher than in the Folketinget elections. However, this could also be expected due to the difference between the party system in national and European elections.

10.2 Europe Salience theory

Analyses of voter behaviour in Denmark demonstrated that the two Eurosceptic movements participating solely in EP elections attract most of their voters from the left (Bhatti and Hansen, 2009). Eurosceptic and Green parties did better than other parties, but their losses were only smaller by a slight margin. On a simple comparison of vote shares in EP elections compared to the previous national election, there is thus support for both the Second-Order Election and European Salience hypotheses.

Size and Euroscepticism are the strongest predictors of vote share differences between national and European parliamentary elections. However, the evidence is that Eurosceptic parties in the Folketinget obtain on average lower vote shares in EP elections than other parties do, which directly contradicts the European hypotheses. As already mentioned, the only plausible explanation for this is that the two Eurosceptic EP election ‘parties’, the June Movement and Popular Movement, attract many of the votes that would otherwise go to the Eurosceptic parties represented in the Folketinget. The result must be interpreted in this light. The mere presence of a gap between the votes cast at the EP and Folketinget elections indicates how voters express their views on the EU in the EP elections rather than in national elections.

References

Primary sources

Denmark

Secondary sources


