

DENMARK AND EUROPE: DID THE NOVEMBER ELECTIONS CHANGE ANYTHING?

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The Danish parliamentary election on Nov.20, 2001 brought a landslide victory to the Liberal-Conservative-right populist opposition with a combined gain of 10.2 per cent of the votes, and with a majority to the right for the first time since 1929 (Table 1 and Appendix Table 1 and 2). This victory was won in spite of a prosperous economy, and in spite of high saliency of welfare and low saliency of taxes among voters. However, immigration was the most important issue in the campaign, and apart from the Liberals, the right wing populist and 'Euro-sceptic' Danish People's Party increased its share of the vote from 7.4 per cent to 12.0 per cent. This paper seeks to explain the outcome of the election, and to trace out the messages from the election as far as Denmark's relationship to Europe is concerned.

Table 1. The Danish Parliamentary Election, 2001. Percentages.

	percentage of valid votes		N of seats	
	2001	change	2001	change
Unitary list (red/green)	2.4	-0.3	4	-1
Socialist People's Party	6.4	-1.2	12	-2
Social Democrats	29.1	-6.8	52	-12
Radical Liberals	5.2	+1.3	9	+2
Centre Democrats	1.8	-2.5	-	-8
Christian People's Party	2.3	-0.2	4	0
Liberal Party ('Venstre')	31.2	+7.2	56	+14
Cons.People's Party	9.1	+0.2	16	-
Danish People's Party (populist)	12.0	+4.6	22	+9
Progress Party (extreme)	0.6	-1.8	-	-4
Moderate+Populist right	52.9	+10.2	94	+19
Others/outside parties	0.0	-0.4	-	-
Valid votes, total	100.0	100.0	175	-
not including Greenland/Faeroe Islands (2+2 seats). Source: Ministry of the Interior.				

The campaign and voters' political agenda

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The election was held in the aftermath of the 11th September terror attacks, during the war against Afghanistan, and the prime minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen had apparently hoped to ‘cash in’ a (perceived) gain in popularity. However, terrorism and global politics soon lost salience during the campaign. By Nov. 2-7, two weeks before the election, only ten per cent mentioned any foreign policy or defence issue (including terrorism and EU) as important, according to a pre-election survey conducted by the author (Table 2).¹

Table 2. Political agenda among Danish voters, 1998-2001. Percentages mentioning issue as important (up to four answers accepted).

	1998 (election)	feb. 2000	feb. 2001	nov.2-7, 2001
1.Unemployment	16	6	3	2
2.Economic problems	17	8	6	7
3.Taxes	11	12	11	8
1-3. Any econ.prob.	38		19	14
4. Environment	21	15	11	5
5.Welfare	68	57	50	62
6.Immigration	35	38	32	41
7.EU,foreign.pol.,defence	11	10	3	10 ¹⁾
8.Law and order	7	3	5	3
9. Any other issue	8	6	4	4
N	(2001)	(551)	(972)	(826)

1) Of which: Terrorism 6 per cent.

Wording: ‘Which are, in your opinion, the most important problem(s) that the politicians should deal with?’

Sources: 1998 election survey (Goul Andersen et al. 1999) and election campaign survey 2001a conducted by the author in cooperation with Ugebrevet Mandag Morgen and ACNielsen AIM (random sample, age 18+, N=826, telephone interviews conducted Nov 2-7, 2001).

¹The figure actually dropped from 14 per cent on Nov 2-4 to 7 per cent on Nov 5-7. The author conducted two pre-election surveys (2001a and 2001b) in cooperation with Ugebrevet Mandag Morgen and ACNielsen AIM (2001a: random sample, age 18+, N=826, telephone interviews conducted Nov 2-7, 2001; 2001b: the same, N=677, Nov 9-13, 2001).

Unemployment and economic problems which had dominated the political agenda from the mid-1970's to the mid-1990's were not salient issues either, nor did the promises of tax relief which had been put forward by nearly all parties except the Social Democrats and the Liberals, attract much interest (Table 3). Even the environment lost out. The only issues that remained really salient during the government's last term in office (1998-2001) were welfare and immigration. In the abovementioned survey, only 14 per cent of the voters mentioned an economic issue (including taxes and unemployment) as salient; 5 per cent mentioned the environment, 62 per cent mentioned at least one welfare issue, and 41 per cent mentioned immigration.

Why the government did not win on welfare

The Social Democratic-Radical Liberal government could look back on impressive achievements (Goul Andersen 2002): Seven years of economic prosperity, a decline of unemployment from 12.4 per cent in 1993 to about 5.2 per cent in 2001, no signs of inflation, balance of payment surplus, decline of public expenditures from 62.7 per cent of GDP in 1993 to 52.5 per cent in 2000, despite significant welfare improvements. Furthermore, welfare which is by tradition an issue 'owned' by the Social Democrats was the main issue on the voters' agenda whereas taxation was considered unimportant. Furthermore, prime minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen and his ministers were increasingly popular. How could a government possibly lose an election, seen against this background?

The main explanations seems to be the costs of governing and the successful efforts of the Liberal party to change its policy image. After two electoral defeats, the new leader of the Liberals (as from 1998), Anders Fogh Rasmussen, formerly known as a neo-liberal ideologue, made a highly significant centrist turn, abandoned all neoliberal rhetoric, and declared his strong support for the welfare state. Rather than tax relief, the Liberals promised a freezing of all taxes at the present level, as a safeguard against negative individual effects of future tax reforms. He campaigned on criticizing shortcomings of welfare services and promised increased budgets for hospitals, as well as a right to receive private hospital treatment for patients on waiting lists, financed by cutting foreign aid and active labour market policies.

All attempts by the government to raise doubt about the true intentions of the Liberals were in vain. Furthermore, Anders Fogh Rasmussen declared that unlike the former prime minister, who had cut back on the early retirement programme in spite of his promises in the 1998 election campaign, he strongly intended to keep his promises. Preliminary evidence from a 'mid-term' survey conducted in 2000 indicates that the Liberal party had already by then managed to change the party's policy image on welfare in centrist direction (Goul Andersen

2000c).

As a result, the Social Democrats had lost their ‘issue ownership’ on all welfare issues by 2001 (Table 3). There remained a small preference for the Social Democrats on the issues of ensuring proper conditions for the old, and ensuring a proper balance between taxes and social security, but the relative losses were significant as more and more people believed that a bourgeois government could perform better. In the case of health care, this even holds for a small majority. Also, for those voters who would prefer tax relief rather than welfare, a bourgeois government was a more convincing alternative than in 1998: A much larger share believed that having a bourgeois government would be beneficial to their own pocketbook.

In short, unlike in 1998, welfare issues did not, on balance, give voters incentives to vote for a reelection of the Social Democratic government. To fulfill this picture, Table 4 presents one issue on which there was clear difference in issue positions between the Social Democratic and the bourgeois alternative: The issue of right of patients to choose treatment on private hospitals. At this point, the Social Democrats warned against the danger of entering a new path of privatisation of health care. But they argued in vain: Two-thirds of the voters were favourable towards the Liberal position.

Table 3. Which government alternative is considered the best on welfare issues. Election survey 1998 and election campaign survey 2001. Percentages and Percentage Difference Indexes (PDI) in percentage points.

Which government alternative is the best...		Bourgeois gov.	No diff., don't know	Soc.Dem. gov.	PDI for Soc.Dem. gov.
To ensure proper conditions for old people	1998 election Nov 2001	17 34	39 23	44 43	+27 +9
To ensure a proper balance between taxes and social security	1998 election Nov 2001	25 36	31 21	44 43	+19 +7
To ensure a well-functioning health care system	1998 election Nov 2001	23 40	44 24	33 36	+10 -4
To ensure a reasonable refugee/immigration policy	1998 election Nov 2001	38 47	29 21	33 32	-5 -15
-and which government do you think would provide most money for yourself?	1998 election Nov 2001	34 45	34 31	32 24	-3 -21

Sources: 1998 election survey (Goul Andersen 1999 et al.) and election campaign survey 2001b conducted by the author in cooperation with Ugebrevet Mandag Morgen and ACNielsen AIM (random sample, age 18+, N=677, telephone interviews conducted Nov 9-13, 2001).

Table 4. Attitudes towards freedom of choice between public and private health care, 1999 and 2001.

There is much debate about the right to choose between public and private health care. Do you agree mostly with A or with B in the following little discussion? <u>A says:</u> The money should follow the patient so that patients can choose whether they want treatment in a public hospital or in a private hospital (for instance if they are on a waiting list). <u>B says:</u> If we start to give possibility to choose treatment in private hospitals, this will be much too expensive for society and will lead to a deterioration of public health care.	Agree mostly with A: private hospital treatment	Agree mostly with B: No private hospital treatment	Don't know	PDI: A minus B
1999	59	36	5	23
2001 (version 1 as above)	64	32	3	32
2001 (version 2: without reference to waiting lists)	63	31	6	32

Source 1999: Survey conducted by the author in cooperation with Ugebrevet Mandag Morgen and ACNielsen AIM. (random sample, age 18+, N=560, telephone interviews conducted Oct 12-15, 1999). 2001: Election campaign survey 2001b (see Table 3).

Immigration as an issue in the campaign

In short, given the voters' impression of the policy positions and the competence of the government alternatives, the Social Democratic-Radical Liberal government could not win on welfare any more. But it could lose on immigration.

Immigration was not a new issue on the voters' agenda in 2001. On the contrary, it had been permanently salient among Danish voters since the mid 1990's, including the 1998 election. This has been the case not only among xenophobes and right wing populists but also among supporters of 'immigration-friendly' parties (Goul Andersen 1999); besides, the preference for a bourgeois government on this issue was negligible in 1998 but much more outspoken in 2001.²

The high salience of immigration is not a reflection of a particularly high immigrant population. Including descendants born in Denmark, the proportion of immigrants had increased from 4.4 per cent in 1991 to 7.4 per cent in 2001, of which 2.1, respectively 4.1 per cent were of

²It must be underlined that these figures are not a mechanical reflection of party preferences. For instance, the government won credibility on economic policy from 1998 to 2001, and by 1998, only 10 per cent of the voters preferred a bourgeois government to handle environmental issues. None of these issues were salient in 2001, however.

non-western origin (Statistics Denmark 2001). The high saliency of immigration in Danish politics should rather be explained i) by the absence of other problems; ii) by the fact that immigration has never been taboo in the Danish media; and iii) by the presence of a right-wing populist party. This has made it an issue of party competition where not only the populists but also Liberals and Conservatives demanded tighter rules, in particular for family reunion and (in the 2001 campaign) for access to social security. Like in 1998, the centre and left wing parties were basically against tightening whereas the Social Democrats were somewhat ambivalent and divided, trying to contain the right parties by making unspecified promises of tightening.

There is little doubt that most voters favoured tightening, and that many voters acted accordingly. Critical positions prevailed in the campaign, and two days before the election, the country's largest newspaper (*Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten*) published a three-page long article about social fraud among some Lebanese refugees allegedly receiving Danish social security and working in Lebanon. In the end, all immigration-friendly parties except the Radical Liberals lost voters during the campaign.

It should perhaps be added that scepticism about immigration policy and uncertainty about how integration works is not as such tantamount to xenophobia. Attitudes are ambivalent (Togeby 1998), and Danish voters in fact consider integration of immigrants one of the most basic tasks of government - more important than for example providing full employment or alleviating inequality (Goul Andersen 2001). It is also worth noting that the number of immigrants elected to municipal councils doubled, from 26 to 52; besides, two immigrants were elected MP's. The unusually open debates and lack of 'political correctness' is sometimes suggested as an explanation why there are fewer racist assaults than in Sweden. It may also be noted that the most extreme among the far right wing populist parties, the Progress Party, committed political suicide when its founder, Mogens Glistrup (for some years excluded, but now back as the party's 'campaign leader') demanded that all Moslems should be expelled from the country. On the other hand, the rhetoric in the 2001 campaign was of kind rarely found among 'responsible' parties in democratic Western societies. It was very negative, threw suspicion on immigrants, and tended to refer to all immigrants as a 'problem'. Emotional manipulation and enemy images was also used very conspicuously when the Liberal party had an advertisement arguing for more law and order, illustrated by a big photograph from a trial where some young immigrants were convicted for rape, showing exited headscarf-dressed relatives angrily yelling at the press.

European perspectives

Curiously enough, Mogens Glistrup who founded the Progress Party as an anti-tax party in 1971 (in 1994, he was expelled by Pia Kjaersgaard who in 1996 broke out and formed her own Danish People's Party) has always been supporting European integration. Pia Kjaersgaard and The Danish People's Party, on the other hand, have argued strongly against further European integration and recommended a no in Danish referendums since 1986. At that time, the party was followed only by one-half of its voters but in 1998 and 2000, Danish People's Party voters have almost unanimously voted no (Table 5). Besides, the pro-european sentiments among Conservative and Liberal voters were significantly weakened in the 1998 and 2000 referenda. Is there a relationship between the election result and more EU-critical attitudes - do nationalism, xenophobia, and hostility towards Europe form a kind of syndrome, and does the 2001 election reflect a strengthening of such a syndrome?

Table 5. Voting in Danish EU referenda, by party choice. Percentage voting yes, as proportion of valid votes.

	1972	1986	1992	1993	1998	2000
Referendum result	63.3	56.2	49.3	56.8	55.0	46.9
Unitary list/red-green (left socialist)	n.a.	n.a.	0	4	11	5
Socialist People's Party	17	15	11	16	22	17
Social Democrats	59	24	33	49	52	52
Radical Liberals	73	75	64	58	70	74
Centre Democrats	.	(81)	68	81	75	58
Christian People's Party	.	(100)	55	50	58	26
Liberals	97	99	89	88	79	68
Conservative People's Party	89	95	79	85	78	69
Progress Party	.	(63)	33	45	27	7
Danish People's Party	20	12
Non-socialist party , total	87	91	73	77	66	n.a.
- Of which: Centre Parties ¹	73	82	64	67	69	n.a.
- Of which: Right Parties	93	93	75	77	66	n.a.
- Liberals and Conservatives	93	96	84	86	79	68
- Right Wing Populist	.	(63)	33	45	21	11

Source: Goul Andersen 2000b; Jakobsen, Reinert and Thomsen 2001.

At this point, it is possible to give a definitive and unambiguous answer, which is 'No'. In the first place, the EU issue hardly appeared in the campaign at all; it was referred to occasionally by the Radical Liberals (and by Mogens Glistrup) but hardly even mentioned by the other parties; also, it was absent from the voters' agenda.

Secondly, as mentioned above, (exaggerated) concern about immigration is not tantamount to xenophobia. Even though many immigrants have probably got another impression, most Danes are relatively tolerant and sympathetic to immigrants. There is much intolerance of anything resembling fundamentalist religion and perceived oppression of women, and there is much concern about immigrants being unable to find a position on the labour market, as well as about social fraud and crime. The major issue in the campaign was on family reunion in combination with the practice among some ethnic groups of families arranging marriages for their sons and daughters with a person from their home village abroad as this is considered to aggravate problems of integration. There is clearly a discrepancy between this concern and the actual figures (a total of 6.400 family reunions between spouses by 2000) but it appears too simple just to equate this with xenophobia. The concerns above are balanced against otherwise quite sympathetic attitudes. In this ambivalence, however, sceptical attitudes were predominant during the 2001 election campaign, and the Danish People's Party won large victories in areas where there are very few immigrants (which means that people had to rely more on impressions from the media than on personal experience). This ambivalence contributes to explain why attitudes tend to follow a pendulum with no signs of a long-term accumulation of hostility; rather the opposite.

Thirdly, there is little connection between anti-immigration attitudes and anti-European attitudes. There are two strongholds of Euro-scepticism: The postmaterialist left and the populist right. Over time, the latter group has become increasingly negative towards the EU whereas the former has become increasingly positive (Goul Andersen 2000b). Since 1998, there has been a weak association between attitudes to immigration and attitudes to the EU. But it remains so weak that it is reported only because of its theoretical significance, not because of the strength of the association.

Finally, and most significantly, opinion surveys reveal increasingly positive attitudes towards Europe. This, in the first poll after the election, 52 per cent indicated that they would vote 'yes' in a new would-be referendum about Danish participation in the common currency; only 40 per cent would vote 'no' (Greens/Børsen 07.12.2001). This is the highest figure since the 2000 referendum and reflects increasingly positive attitudes towards Europe since the spring 2001, not least since Sep.11th.

As a matter of fact, Danes' attitudes towards Europe are also ambivalent: As can be noted from the Eurobarometer surveys, Danes express increasingly positive attitudes towards the standard questions of support for the Union; they range high on indicators of European solidarity; they have generally been among the most positive towards the enlargement of the EU; and they are not particularly concerned about nationalist issues such as protection on national language etc. Basic orientations are becoming more and more European, and there is a strong increase in feelings of European identity. It is only when it comes to matters of national vs. European decision-making, that the Danes stand out as significantly more nation-oriented than most other nationalities on most (but not all) issues (Goul Andersen 2000a; Goul Andersen and Hoff 2001: ch.11). The reluctance to accept EU or joint decision-making is likely to remain strong even in the years to come. But as far as the more diffuse support for Europe is concerned, there is a long-term trend towards more European orientations. These attitudes, and the ambivalence between them, is not at all affected by the present election.

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Appendix Table 1. Danish Parliamentary Elections, 1990-2001. Percentages.

	percentage of votes					N of seats	
	1990	1994	1998	2001	change	2001	change
Unitary list (red/green)	1.7	3.1	2.7	2.4	-0.3	4	-1
Socialist People's Party	8.3	7.3	7.6	6.4	-1.2	12	-2
Social Democrats	37.4	34.6	35.9	29.1	-6.8	52	-12
Radical Liberals	3.5	4.6	3.9	5.2	+1.3	9	+2
Centre Democrats	5.1	2.8	.3	1.8	-2.5	-	-8
Christian People's Party	2.3	1.9	2.5	2.3	-0.2	4	0
Liberal Party ('Venstre')	15.8	23.3	24.0	31.2	+7.2	56	+14
Cons.People's Party	16.0	15.0	8.9	9.1	+0.2	16	-
Danish People's Party	.	.	7.4	12.0	+4.6	22	+9
Progress Party	6.4	6.4	2.4	0.6	-1.8	-	-4
Others/outside parties	3.5 ¹⁾	1.0	0.4 ²⁾	0.0	-0.4	-	-
Valid votes, total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	175	-
Turnout	82.8	84.3	86.0	87.1			
Not valid votes	0.79	0.98	0.76	1.01			
not including Greenland/Faeroe Islands							
1) Greens (0.9), Justice Party (Georgist) (0.5), Common Course (Left populist) (1.8), Humanist (0.0), Outside parties (0.3)							
2) Democratic Renewal (anti-EU;centrist) (0.4), Outside parties (0.1)							

Appendix Table 2. Danish Parliamentary Elections, 1990-2001. Party groups. Percentages.

	percentage of votes					N of seats	
	1990	1994	1998	2001	change	seats	change
Left Wing, subtotal	12.6	10.4	10.3	8.8	-1.5	16	-2
Social Democrats	37.4	34.6	35.9	29.1	-6.8	52	-11
Socialist parties, subtotal	50.0	45.0	46.2	37.9	-8.3	68	-13
Centre Parties, subtotal	11.4	9.3	10.7	9.2	-1.5	13	-6
Moderate right, subtotal	31.8	38.3	32.9	40.3	+7.4	72	+14
Populist Right, subtotal	6.4	6.4	9.8	12.6	+2.8	22	+5
Mod.+Pop. Right, subtotal	38.2	44.7	42.7	52.9	+10.2	94	+19
Others/outside parties	0.8	1.0	0.4	0.0	-0.4	-	-
Valid votes, total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	175	-