

## Chapter 2

# Media and politics in Denmark

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### Abstract

In this chapter, we point to some of the changes and continuities that have characterised the interplay between news media and politics in Denmark during the last two decades. The chapter has three main focus areas: first, we present key institutions and players within the Danish political and media systems; second, we point to some of the theoretical approaches that have dominated political communication research in Denmark since the early 2000s, among them institutional and sociological perspectives; and third, we conclude by suggesting some of the differences between political communication in Denmark, as both practice and research field, compared to the other Nordic countries. We aim to balance the chapter between a media studies approach and a political science approach to political communication, but, contrary to much other Danish political communication research, the chapter especially takes its point of departure in the former.

**Keywords:** Denmark, corporatism, media subsidies, mediatisation, welfare state

## Introduction

This chapter introduces political communication in Denmark, focusing especially on changes and continuities in the interplay between news media and politics from the early 2000s until today. First, we outline the main institutions and players within the Danish political system and media system. In regards to the political system, the chapter points to the weakened link between political parties and interest organisations, challenging the Danish corporatist structure, and to the increased splitting of the Danish political system into centre-left and centre-right blocs, challenging the tradition for broad consensus in Danish politics. In regards to the media system, a main focus is the mix of publicly and privately funded news media, including the most recent changes in Danish media policy and public news use, which suggest weakened political support for key public service institutions but increased attention to private news media.

Second, we introduce some of the theoretical perspectives that have informed Danish research about political communication since the early 2000s, especially institutional and sociological perspectives to news and politics. One key approach is mediatisation theory, which has especially influenced the intersection of media studies and political communication. Part of this research concerns the interconnected professionalisation of political communication (including public relations, spin, and lobbyism) and of political journalism (including journalism as an increasingly professionalised type of media labour). Audience studies is another approach that has played an increasingly significant role in Danish political communication research since the early 2000s. A common denominator across these perspectives is that Danish political communication research has long been, and still is, informed by two relatively separate approaches – a media studies approach and a political science approach with little collaboration and interplay. Though we aim to balance the two, this chapter especially takes its point of departure in the first approach.

Third, we conclude by pointing to some of the aspects that set political communication in Denmark, as both practice and a research field, apart from Sweden, Norway, and Finland. In terms of practice, a key difference is that politicians and political journalists in Denmark are in a state of “permanent campaign” due to the organisation of the national election terms. In terms of research, the continuous silos between media and journalism and political science perspectives make political communication a much more fragmented endeavour in Denmark compared to the other Nordic countries.

## The political system

Denmark is a parliamentary democracy, and since 1953, Folketinget [the Danish Parliament] has consisted of only one chamber. Elections to the Danish Parliament are based on proportional representation and held at least every four years, but it is within the power of the prime minister to call elections sooner, if they wish to do so (Esmark & Ørsten, 2008). The parliament has 179 members, including 4 elected from Greenland and the Faroe Islands, which belong to the commonwealth. Denmark is divided into three electoral regions (Metropolitan Copenhagen, Sealand-Southern Denmark, and Northern and Central Jutland) and ten multi-member constituencies subdivided into 92 nomination districts. The distribution of seats takes place at two levels, a multi-member constituency level and a national level. The first 135 seats of the parliament are allocated among the ten multi-member constituencies, while the 40 remaining seats are distributed in a compensatory fashion at the higher tier of the national level (Esmark & Ørsten, 2008; Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017a).

### *Key characteristics of the Danish political system*

Denmark practices what is known as negative parliamentarism, in which the government does not need to have a majority in the parliament, but it must not have a majority against it either. If there is a majority against the government, it must resign. The system of negative parliamentarism allows Denmark to be run by a minority government. In fact, many Danish governments have been minority governments holding less than 90 of the 179 seats in the parliament.

Another central characteristic of the Danish political system is its corporatist structure and tradition for consensus politics (Campbell & Pedersen, 2014; Christiansen & Rommetvedt, 1999; Esmark & Ørsten, 2008). Denmark has, just as Finland, Sweden, and Norway, a long tradition of corporatism, understood as the organised negotiations and deliberations between the state, employer associations, and unions (Campbell & Pedersen, 2014; Vesa et al., 2018). Traditionally, the Nordic countries have been regarded as some of the most corporatist liberal democracies in the world. At the heart of the corporatist structure is the so-called committee system. From the 1950s to about the mid-1980s, the system consisted of several hundred permanent tripartite committees – committees with members from the state, unions, and employee organisations – and focused on both policy development and policy implementation (Blom-Hansen, 2000; Campbell & Pedersen, 2014).

Turning to the party system, Denmark also fits the image of a multi-party system of consensus politics, as opposed to the dominance of two-party systems in majoritarian politics. The oldest Danish parties are the Conservatives (historically called Højre [right]) and the Liberals (now called Venstre [left]), which were formed among members of parliament in the decades following the ratification of the Danish constitution. The Danish Social Democratic Party was founded in 1871 and obtained its first seats in parliament in 1884. In 1905, the Social-Liberals broke away from the Liberals, completing the list of four parties usually considered the “grand old parties” in Denmark (Esmark & Ørsten, 2008). Since then, several political parties have come and gone, for instance, the Danish Communist Party that was founded in 1919 and gained representation in parliament from 1945–1960 and again from 1973–1979, but not since (Campbell & Pedersen, 2014). Traditionally, parties were linked closely to the labour market associations, with the Social Democrats closely linked to unions, and the Liberal Party and Conservatives closely linked to business and agricultural interest organisations.

### *Recent developments in Danish politics*

Today there are ten parties in the Danish Parliament making up two political blocs; the red and blue blocs. On the left, the red bloc includes the Social Demo-

crats, the Social Liberals, the Socialist People's Party, the Red–Green Alliance, and the Alternative Party. On the right, the blue bloc includes the Liberals, the Conservatives, the Danish People's Party, the Liberal Alliance, and the New Liberal Party. In a Nordic context, an important aspect of Danish politics is that the Social Democrats have not been as dominant as in Sweden and to some extent in Norway. Thus, power has shifted back and forth between the red bloc and the blue bloc in post-war Denmark (Esmark & Ørsten, 2008).

Even though the Danish political system is basically very stable, there have been several changes in recent years. Esmark and Ørsten (2008) point to Europeanisation as one of the important changes to the Danish political and administrative system from 1973 (when Denmark entered the Common Market) and onwards. Another trend points towards a slow process of de-corporatisation starting from the mid-1980s and leading to fewer committees and a lesser focus on tripartite negotiations (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017b; Blom-Hansen, 2000; Rommetvedt et al., 2013). According to studies by Blom-Hansen (2000) and Öberg and colleagues (2011), corporatism in Scandinavia peaked in the 1970s and 1980s and has declined, or weakened, in most sectors ever since. A study on corporatism in Finland by Vesa and colleagues (2018) suggests that corporatism has persisted there into the 2010s, while a study by Christiansen (2017) argues that though corporatism has weakened in Scandinavia, the corporatist structures still play a part in policy implementation.

In Denmark, corporatism is still considered to have peaked around 1980 and then declined (Blom-Hansen, 2000). The reasons for the decline are thought to be multiple, but both decentralisation of politics to the level of local government and the earlier-mentioned Europeanisation of politics have played a role. Other important factors that contribute to the decline of corporatism include more power to the Danish Parliament due to a more assertive opposition, financial cutbacks, and more fragmented unions experiencing declining membership (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017b; Öberg et al., 2011). As corporatism declines, at least in most of the Nordic countries, lobbyism is considered to be on the rise (Christiansen & Rommetvedt, 1999). But whereas corporatism describes a highly institutionalised way that organised interest and political actors may interact – boards, councils, committees, hearings, and so on – lobbyism is characterised by a much more informal, and mostly ad hoc, form of interaction (Christiansen & Rommetvedt, 1999; see also Ihlen et al., Chapter 15). Despite these differences, lobbyism and corporatism should not be viewed as opposites, but more as two opposite ends of a continuum of the different ways in which the interaction of organised interest and political actors may take place (Christiansen & Rommetvedt, 1999). Resourceful organisations, of course, may utilise both forms of interaction, should they wish to maximise their influence.

It is possible to distinguish between several types of lobbyism: parliamentary, governmental, bureaucratic, and media (Blach-Ørsten & Kristensen, 2016;

Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017b). Scandinavian studies of lobbyism are still few, however. In the case of Norway, Ihlen and Gullberg (2015) conclude that lobbyism has increased from the 1970s and onwards and that lobbyism has likely become more professionalised. In Sweden, Möller (2009) concludes that there is regular contact between politicians and lobbyists but that politicians are split in their views on lobbyism. In Denmark, a report by the communication agency Advice (2012) concludes that contacts between politicians and lobbyists are frequent for politicians in the Danish Parliament, and 60 per cent of the politicians surveyed answered that they had contacts with lobbyists several times a week.

For Danish political parties, the switch from traditional party voting to issue voting is one of the most significant changes in recent years. This switch has led to increased competition on a few central political issues, primarily immigration, which has been the focus of many recent Danish elections (Borre, 2005; Green-Pedersen, 2006). The trend towards more issue-based voting rather than more traditional party voting dates back to the 1970s, especially the 1973 election, where the Danish Progress Party won a landslide victory and paved the way for a more issue-based and populist approach to politics. Since then, the switch has led to increased competition between the political parties on a relatively small number of issues, such as the economy and immigration, which has helped boost populist politics (understood as loud rhetoric and simplified solutions to complex problems) across both the red and blue blocs. Indeed, as Blomqvist and Green-Pedersen (2004) argue, the growing importance of issue- rather than class-based voting is one of the biggest changes for political parties in Scandinavia to navigate when competing for voter support. They also argue that this shift has especially affected the Social Democrats in Denmark and Norway, whereas the Social Democrats in Sweden have been less affected.

Outside of electoral studies, research has found the same transformation of political orientations and participation from the field of ideology and programmatic politics to specific policy issues and ad hoc political projects. Such projects are typically based in the practical and “everyday” experience of the individual citizen, but can also take the form of identity politics, in which the fight for recognition of highly particular rights to specific political groups take focus, as opposed to a focus on the “classes” of conventional politics (Esmark & Ørsten, 2008). This is also evident in the rise of political populism in Denmark most often associated with the success of the Danish People’s Party and its rise to power (Bächler & Hopmann, 2017). The recent focus on so-called identity politics have not been as prominent in Denmark as in the US and Sweden, where issues such as sexuality and recognition have become a still larger part of politics. A recent study of political scandals in the wake of the #metoo movement, however, shows that both Sweden and Norway have had scandals focusing on politicians accused of sexual harassment, improper sexual behaviour towards young women, and the sharing of pornographic images,

whereas neither Denmark nor Finland have seen such scandals (Pollack et al., 2018; see also Kristensen & Roosvall, Chapter 9).

## The Danish media system

The Danish media system is part of what has, in recent years, been labelled “the media welfare state” (Syvertsen et al., 2014) and “the Nordic media market” (Ohlsson, 2015). Such terms have emerged in response to Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) grouping of the Nordic countries under “the democratic corporatist model” with a range of other Northern European countries. Though the Nordic media model shares many traits with media in these countries (e.g., Strömbäck et al., 2008), scholars have also emphasised its distinctiveness, as media in the Nordic region are seen as key pillars of “the Nordic welfare model” (Ahva et al., 2017; Ohlsson, 2015; Syvertsen et al., 2014). This is epitomised by the central role of public service broadcasters and the considerable indirect and direct subsidies also for privately-owned media in the Nordic region, such as printed and digital newspapers. In the following, we outline how continuities and changes within the Nordic media model take shape in the Danish context, especially from the turn of the twenty-first century and onwards, focusing on media regulation and news consumption.

### *Freedom of the press and media liability*

Section 91 in the Danish Constitutional Act of 1849 (Rigsarkiv, n.d.) represents an important landmark in regards to freedom of expression, as it instituted Danish citizens’ freedom to publish their thoughts in print and marked the end of censorship, even though individuals could be held responsible for their printing in a court of law. Already at this early stage, indirect subsidies were granted to newspapers in the form of reduced postal rates with the aim of supporting the emerging party press and, more broadly, freedom of expression (Flensburg, 2015: 88). The 1953 adjustment of the constitutional act (Ministry of the State, 1953: §77) rearticulated the issue of freedom to print to citizens’ liberty “to publish his ideas in print, in writing, and in speech” – the formulation applying today. These freedom rights must still be exercised in accordance with criminal law, prohibiting libel actions or utterances threatening national security, among others.

For quite some time, no exact reference was made to the liabilities of the press or institutionalised news media, but in 1992, the Media Liability Act (Engell, 1991) was introduced with the aim of specifying who is to be made responsible for media content in case of libel actions (criminal liability and liability for damages). The act also marks the establishment of the Danish Press Council, an independent council responsible for ruling in cases of published

content conflicting with sound press ethics. Overall, Denmark is considered among the most advanced in terms of media accountability, as many media organisations have formulated specific ethical guides in accordance with the overall Danish principles of sound press ethics, legitimised by the Media Liability Act (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2015).

Nonetheless, the media's "freedom of expression with responsibilities" regularly stirs public debate about which rights are more important – freedom of expression, and by extension the press, or considerations of, for instance, individuals or other matters. A recent case is the conviction by the high court of the national newspaper *Politiken* and its editor-in-chief, Christian Jensen, in February 2020 to pay a considerable fine for publishing most parts of a book about the Danish Security and Intelligence Service in the newspaper in 2016. The 2020 conviction was a tightening of the ruling by the district court in 2019. The publishing of the book, partly based on interviews with a former head of the service, had been hindered by the court due to its sensitive and confidential content. *Politiken* printed the book in view of its public importance and because the injunction of the court was seen as limiting freedom of expression and the press (C. Jensen, 2016).

### *Main media policy characteristics*

A key characteristic of the Danish media system and its news provision is hybridity (Kammer, 2017), as public service broadcasters and private printed or digital news media co-exist. This hybridity is an outcome of both social democratic and liberal democracy lines of thinking informing Danish (media) policy (Esmark & Ørsten, 2008). Regulation of public service broadcasters as well as a subsidy system to support the commercial press have been an important political issue since the mid-twentieth century, in accordance with the emergence of the welfare-state ideology (Esmark & Ørsten, 2008). A main goal of Danish media policy has been to ensure a diverse portfolio of media outlets and the production of quality media content and journalism and, by extension, to ensure the corner stone of Danish democracy, an informed citizenry (Kammer, 2016). Accordingly, public service has been a key principle in Denmark since the 1920s, with the introduction of radio (1926) and later television broadcasting (1951), epitomised by the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (originally Statsradiofonien, later renamed Danmarks Radio [DR]) and long financed by license fees. Today, DR is a large media organisation, spanning numerous television and radio channels as well as a website. In 1988, TV 2 was introduced, a state-owned television broadcaster, also serving public service goals, but since 2004 financed by advertising and, later on, subscriptions as well. TV 2 includes a line of segmented channels and seven regional channels, the latter of which are funded by licence fees.

Newspapers in Denmark are private enterprises, but the public service line of thinking also permeates their ethos and increasingly also the political actions put in place to subsidise these news media (Flensburg, 2015). While indirect media subsidies – such as zero-taxation on revenues and reduced postal charges for the distribution of newspapers – have a long tradition in Denmark, direct media subsidies for private news media are a newer phenomenon and include support of operational costs, subsidies for media with financial problems, distribution subsidies, and so on. Such initiatives have emerged during the 1990s and 2000s and signal increased political attention to a broader portfolio of media types, as the boundaries between public service, publicist, and commercial media have become increasingly blurred since the late twentieth century (Flensburg, 2015; Hjarvard & Kammer, 2015).

With these changes also followed increased political attention to the content, quality, and societal role of public service as well as private media. Public service contracts were, for example, introduced in the early 2000s, outlining various requirements that especially DR must fulfil, such as giving priority to Danish culture, children, and young adults. Similarly, in the second half of the 2000s, current affairs, politics, economics, and culture were stipulated as key areas for print and digital newspapers to cover to qualify for subsidies. Though an arm's-length principle has long characterised Danish media policy (e.g., Kammer, 2017) – both in regards to publicly funded public service broadcasters and privately-owned newspapers – this increased political attention to the contours of the media content can be viewed as a shortening of the distance between politicians and media content providers. Nonetheless, Søndergaard and Helles (2014: 41) argue that the key values of Danish media policy have remained quite constant, in other words, the aim of “securing the freedom of expression and pluralism of voices by actively supporting both private and public media”.

### *Recent media policy changes*

Danish media policy is still under the purview of the Danish Ministry of Culture, which signals a cultural policy approach to Danish media policy, as also exemplified by the named key values still being intact and by the increasing support to private newspapers as well (Flensburg, 2015). Nonetheless, the heated public and political debates about the most recent, major media policy regulations – the media subsidy reform in 2013–2014 (Ministry of Culture, 2013) and the Media Agreement for 2019–2023 (Ministry of Culture, 2018) – signal change: While media regulation and media support continue to be key pillars of Danish cultural policy, competition between various types of media has increased. As a consequence, audience and business interests are gaining grounds in the political thinking about the media. More broadly, this showcases that media policy is a highly politicised area in Denmark today.



Overall, the Law of Media Subsidy, phased in from 2014, marks a change from distribution subsidies, based on circulation numbers, to production subsidies, based on the journalistic content production measured by “the number of ‘journalistic full-time equivalents’ employed” at the given news media (Hjarvard & Kammer, 2015: 121). Or put differently, a change from indirect to direct subsidies. In this way, the law also marks a change from subsidising particular media platforms, the printed press in particular, to a “platform neutral” approach (Hjarvard & Kammer, 2015), taking the digital media environment and its new media types and platforms into consideration, for example, online-only news media. In addition, the Law of Media Subsidy reserves money for media innovation, allocated to new media start-ups or the development of existing media turning digital. A main focus is on written Internet-based outlets, and such new initiatives have to comply with the broad content requirements in terms of covering political, societal, and cultural issues. While international research has pointed to a turn towards a more liberal media model in many Western countries (e.g., Hallin & Mancini, 2004), Flensburg (2015) argues that the Law of Media Subsidy points in the opposite direction by showcasing a change from economical compensation to publicist motivation, precisely because private media, either digital or in print, can also receive direct subsidies today if their content production qualifies for it. Furthermore, the introduction of funding for media innovation signals a modernisation of Danish media policy, even though the more specific requirements may present some limits to actual innovation, according to Kammer (2017). Private news media have, however, also become increasingly dependent on these subsidies, as only very few Danish newspapers would have a surplus without them today (Schröder & Ørsten, 2018).

Denmark has a variety of newspaper titles – approximately 10 national newspapers published daily and around 20 local or regional newspapers (Gallup, 2018). Notwithstanding the smaller population and geographical area, these numbers are considerably lower compared to the other Nordic countries (Esmark & Ørsten, 2008). Especially the national newspapers play an agenda-setting role in the production and circulation of news in Denmark, whereas local newspapers have experienced challenges in recent years in terms of circulation, advertising, and public attention. Svith and colleagues (2017), for example, show that much local journalism is not about the local environment and involves little investigative journalism, which challenges the broader democratic role of these newspapers in Danish society. In addition, many of the newspapers with high circulation are owned by the same few, larger corporations – some being foundations targeted at making money to produce media content (e.g., JP/Politikens Hus and Jysk-Fynske Medier), others commercial and publicly traded businesses producing media content to make money for their investors (e.g., Berlingske Medier, owned by De Persgroup) (see also Kammer, 2017). In

terms of newspaper titles, there is thus relative diversity and external pluralism, since most titles have a distinct and segmented profile (e.g., Schultz, 2007), but in terms ownership, the Danish newspaper market is characterised by some concentration.

Another example of the increased political support to private news media in Denmark is the Media Agreement for 2019–2023 (Ministry of Culture, 2018), adopted by the rightwing coalition government and the Danish People's Party in the spring of 2018. A key element of the agreement is a 20 per cent reduction of the funding for DR over five years, including the closing of several DR television and radio channels. More specifically, the broad range of cultural topics and events, including sports and entertainment, that have formerly been part of DR's repertoire will be reduced. Key examples are that two television channels, DR2 and DRK, devoted to societal and cultural issues will be merged to one; DR3, a television channel targeted at young adults, and DR Ultra, a television channel targeted at tweens, will only be available online; a number of cultural and lifestyle television programmes will no longer be produced; and three radio channels devoted to different music genres – P6 Beat, P7 Mix, and P8 Jazz – will no longer exist.<sup>1</sup> In broader terms, this reflects a political ambition of changing DR from a media institution with a broad repertoire of offerings across a range of platforms – television, radio, and the Internet – to a distinct cultural institution with a narrower repertoire focusing on news, information, culture, and education, and with special attention to children and young people. This could be regarded as a media historical return to the cultural and societal role formerly occupied by DR.

Another significant change prompted by the Media Agreement for 2019–2023 is the replacement of the licence fee by a direct taxation, potentially making public service media more susceptible to political trends and fluctuations. While these changes may be seen as a weakening of Danish public media, and DR in particular, they are also a means of strengthening the private media players, which have for several years complained that DR has distorted especially the digital news market by providing free online news. In addition to the DR cutbacks, private digital news media will, for example, enjoy tax exemption on revenues in similar ways as printed news media, thus furthering the equaling of the conditions for print and digital news media initiated by the 2013–2014 Law of Media Subsidy. More funding is also allocated to the public service pool, distributing subsidies to, typically, private production companies producing Danish television drama and documentaries.

### *Danes' media use*

These policy changes link to changes in the Danish public's media use during the past decades, but also to the continued importance of Danish media

in the public's daily media diet. Especially public service institutions, such as DR and TV 2, have been relatively successful in maintaining a large audience despite increased competition from international media players and newer platforms. Danes, for example, mainly watch public service television (rather than non-public service television) (Agency for Culture and Palaces, 2018), two in three Danes access news via public service media platforms every week, and national quality media brands, such as public service providers and national newspapers, enjoy the trust of the population (Schrøder et al., 2018). Internet penetration in Denmark is among the highest worldwide (97%), and the use of digital media, including digital news consumption, is high, even though still relatively few Danes are willing to pay for digital news (15%) (Schrøder et al., 2018). As in most other countries, audiences and circulation numbers for printed newspapers have declined considerably during the 2010s, even if the decrease has stagnated in recent years (Agency for Culture and Palaces, 2018). The newspapers' digital platforms are news sources for many Danes, not least the tabloid newspapers. At the same time, social media, especially Facebook, have become an increasingly important source of news and other information for younger news consumers (Schrøder et al., 2019).

In summary, the regulatory changes during the 2010s suggest actions to sustain a varied portfolio of national media that can meet the changed patterns of media consumption among the Danish population in the digitalised and increasingly competitive media market, including actions to further media innovation and start-ups. While the policy actions point to weakened political consensus about the importance of public service broadcast media, they also suggest increased political support to private media. Overall, much public funding is still vested in regulating the Danish media market, indicating continuity in Danish media policy in terms of continued public support to the media. In 2019, DKK 4.9 billion were allocated to Danish media, including 410 million to printed and written Internet-based media and 3.6 billion to DR (Ministry of Culture, 2018). At the same time, the arm's-length principle is challenged.

### Main theoretical perspectives in Danish political communication research

In the democratic-corporatist model, the link between news media and democracy is stated much clearer than in the liberal model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). As mentioned, news media are seen – and regulated – as an important institution in society in Denmark. Thus, Danish research has long focused on how the news media fulfil their larger role in society.

*Mediatisation of politics, culture, and society*

In the 1970s, Danish media research was inspired by Habermas' theory of the public sphere, which often led to criticism of the news media for being part of the capitalistic system and not focusing enough on the plight of the working class (M. B. Andersen & Poulsen, 1974; Bondebjerg, 1976). More recently, a focus on the institutional role of the news media has been expressed in the development of an institutional and media central approach to mediatisation theory (Hjarvard, 2008). A key focus in this approach is to view mediatisation as a long-term structural transformation where media – understood as television, news media, social media, and so on – have become omnipresent, or part of almost all aspects of society – from political cross-media campaigning to children's play on tablets. Such studies of mediatisation have focused on the mediatisation of politics, but also of religion, parenthood, sports, culture, and so on. A main take-away from most of these studies, whether focusing on politics or culture, is that the media have become a central way of experiencing everyday life for most Danes. News media, such as public service radio and television, and social media, such as Facebook, are, as mentioned, a great part of most Danes' media diet.

A key aspect of the mediatisation of politics concerns the increasing professionalisation and mediatisation of election campaigns and politicians' interplay with journalists. Siune and Borre (1975) and Siune (1982, 1993) are among the first scholars to study the modern mediatised political campaign, both regarding national elections and European elections. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, these studies concluded, among other things, that politicians and political parties set the agenda and that journalists followed up, and questioned, the political agenda setting (Siune, 1982). Election studies of European, national, regional, and local elections have since been a main fixture in Danish political science (e.g., Albæk et al., 2010; J. G. Andersen et al., 2005; Elmelund-Præstekær et al., 2010; Hansen & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2015; Lund & Ørsten, 2004; Thomsen, 2001; see also Hopmann & Karlsen, Chapter 11). In recent years, studies of the mediatisation of politics have especially focused on the interplay of (news) media logics and political logics but increasingly also on social media logics in political communication. The Internet and social media have come to play an increasingly important role during national elections in Denmark, for example, both in politicians' communication strategies and in the public's accessing of political information and news (e.g., J. L. Jensen et al., 2016).

*The professionalisation of political communication and political journalism*

In 2000, Danish scholars from several disciplines launched a new focus on political communication and political journalism. They concluded that there were

only loose couplings between the political administration and professionalised media management at the time (Pedersen et al., 2000). This soon changed, however, as Danish politicians hired an increasing number of press and media advisors during the 2000s, inspired by the spin-doctor wave in British and American politics in the 1990s. This instigated several public committees in Denmark, put in place to scrutinise the changed interplay between the Danish political system and the news media (e.g., Ministry of Finance, 2004, 2013). The most recent committee (Ministry of Finance, 2013) concluded that today such special advisors not only offer counselling on media management but also political-tactical advice (Kristensen & Blach-Ørsten, 2015), exemplifying the increasing intertwinement or mutual adaption of media and politics, a key argument in the literature about the mediatisation of politics. The question of the professionalisation of political communication has recently been extended to include other political actors such as think tanks (Blach-Ørsten & Kristensen, 2016; Kelstrup, 2016) and lobbyists working in public relations firms and interest organisations (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017b). The underlying argument is that both mediatisation and de-corporatism has opened up more space for lobbyism, including so-called media lobbyism, where political actors try to use favourable media exposure to create attention and sympathy for the clients and their causes (Aagaard & Blach-Ørsten, 2018; Binderkrantz, 2012).

The research debates about the professionalisation of political communication in Denmark has also focused on the professionalisation of journalism (e.g., Albæk et al., 2015; Kristensen, 2000, 2003). Though journalism is not a profession in the traditional sense, applying sociological theory about professions has illuminated the increasingly professional traits of Danish journalists. A key characteristic of the democratic-corporatist model, including the Nordic media model, is a high degree of professionalism among journalists. In Denmark, such professional traits emerged during the twentieth century, especially in the second half, as journalists increasingly detached themselves from political ideologies and developed strong professional norms, gradually became more organised and educated, and adopted self-regulatory ethical standards. With the decline of the party press and the emergence of the omnibus press as well as public service media, Danish journalists adopted norms such as objectivity, autonomy, a public service ethos, and the role conception of the watchdog. Objectivity continues to be a key norm of Danish journalists, even if it is also contested and primarily an ideal. For Danish journalists, objectivity especially concerns striking a balance between various viewpoints and basing stories on facts (Albæk et al., 2015). Danish journalists also identify strongly with the watchdog role (Ahva et al., 2017) and, overall, feel freedom when choosing and reporting stories, as they experience little pressure from political authorities or business interests (Skovsgaard et al., 2012), or in other words, they experience autonomy in their professional practice.

These professional norms and values have been cultivated through education. Like in the other Nordic countries, journalism education in Denmark is based on an integrated model, combining theory and practice (Ahva et al., 2017), but the field has also experienced an academisation during the past decades. The first, longer formalised journalism programme emerged in the early 1970s and was of a vocational nature, but it was accompanied by academic journalism programmes in the late 1990s. Today, seven in ten Danish journalists have a journalism education – the number is even higher for political journalists (nine in ten) (Albæk et al., 2015). This academisation goes hand in hand with the increasing institutionalisation of journalism studies as a discipline of its own in Denmark from the early 2000s. Approximately 26,000 people are employed in the Danish media sector today, or 18,000 full-time equivalents (Agency for Culture and Palaces, 2016).<sup>2</sup> The large majority is organised in the Danish Union of Journalists, established in 1961 as a merger between a number of smaller organisations. Today, the union organises more than 18,000 people (Danish Union of Journalists, 2019) and is a strong player in the Danish media and communication industry. Contrary to its Norwegian and Swedish counterparts, the union organises not only journalists and professionals providing content to the media industry but also professionals working in the public relations and communication sector. This signals that the professional boundaries between journalism and strategic communication are somewhat blurred in Denmark (Kristensen, 2003), which occasionally stirs professional debates, especially among journalists. At the same time, the union has played an important part in harmonising the professional standards of Danish journalists and, in recent years, in supporting a sound ethical conduct (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2015). Thus, even though the professional title of “journalist” is not protected, Danish journalists have become increasingly professionalised.

### *Audience perspectives*

A last perspective to be highlighted in Danish political communication research is audience studies, including the public’s use of media, and news media in particular, to be informed political citizens. From early on, audiences’ response to the offerings of especially DR has been a focus point among scholars, politicians, and the Danish media industry (e.g., K. B. Jensen, 2001). Of particular interest from a political communication perspective has been the news cast of DR, TV-Avisen, for years viewed as the “big brother” of news in Denmark (e.g., K. B. Jensen, 1995: 16). While some studies have focused on how people make sense of news and the social and political role that news play in audiences’ everyday life (e.g., K. B. Jensen, 1988), others have pointed to how the public’s perception of the political is very much based on media discourses or framings (e.g., Phillips & Schrøder, 2004). Studies, however, also showcase public commitment to the

news media, as being an informed citizen is considered important, normatively and in everyday interaction with colleagues, friends, and family (e.g., Nielsen & Schrøder, 2014).

Since the early 2010s, two important, empirically driven contributions to the field have emerged, indicating a turn from qualitative to quantitative approaches: Since 2014, annual reports from the Agency for Culture and Palaces have provided important data about Danes' media use across legacy media and social media, as well as more specialised reports about particular media trends, such as the influence from global media players on the Danish media market or the role and economy of influencers on social media. In addition, the annual *Reuters Institute Digital News Report*, which compares the use of various digital media to access news in an increasingly large number of countries, includes a country report about Denmark, produced by Danish media scholars (e.g., Schrøder et al., 2018). While these studies continue the empirical tradition in Danish audience research, which is of both a qualitative and quantitative nature, especially the reports by the Agency for Culture and Palaces testify to the continued political attention to the public's media use, as these reports are funded as part of the media agreement. Furthermore, the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* testifies to the increasingly comparative nature of much political communication research in Denmark. Overall, the findings of these empirical studies document Danes' continued high attention and commitment to national quality media brands of both a public service and private nature, even if social media, especially Facebook, has also become an important component.

### Conclusion: Differences from the other Nordic countries and future research paths

This chapter has pointed to some of the historical traits and more recent developments in the interplay between media and politics in Denmark, highlighting recent media political changes in view of a reconfigured media landscape and changed patterns of media use as well as recent changes within the political system.

If looking beyond the Danish context to the neighbouring Nordic countries, a common trend across the Nordic region in terms of media policy seems to be the switch from financing public service radio and television via a licence fee to taxation. In Finland, the licence fee was replaced by a tax in early 2013, which was the case in Sweden in 2019 and in Norway in 2020. In Denmark, there will be a gradual change from a licence fee to taxation from 2019–2021, to be fully implemented in 2022. The recent political decision in Denmark to reduce the budget of the key public service provider DR by 20 per cent seems,

however, to be less in sync with the other Nordic countries. Despite switching from licence fees to a media tax in Sweden, the ambition is that the budget for public service should remain relatively stable (Harrie, 2019). In Finland, the most recent media policy agreement (2018–2023), for example, involves few changes and states that the budget for the media will remain stable for the period. For now, it seems that in Denmark the political involvement in how media institutions should perform has increased with implications for especially the offerings of DR, thus challenging the arm's-length principle between the media and the political system, perhaps more so than in the other Nordic countries. This points to media policy, including the implications of changed policy actions at both the national and the Nordic level, as a pertinent topic for future research, as Denmark seems to be taking different paths than the other Nordic countries in some regards.

Turning to the political system, the shift towards issue voting, especially with a focus on immigration as a dominant issue, seems to have affected Denmark more than the other Nordic countries, although immigration has also become a central issue in Norway and in the most recent Swedish election. With four years between elections, but no fixed election date, the Danish political system also seems to be highly suited for permanent campaigning with the questions of when the next election will happen often being floated by politicians as well as political commentators. Notwithstanding, the two most recent elections have been called at the end of the formal four-year election period. National and Nordic research about the implications of such – on the face of it, different – conditions for political communication and political campaigning might be worth pursuing.

Regarding research, Danish political communication research has mainly been addressed from either a humanities and partly sociological perspective or the perspective of political sciences, but more rarely from a combination of these. Research informed by the humanities and sociology has focused on, among other things, public sphere theory, epitomised by the Habermasian approach, and the sociology of professions, including spin and public relations, whereas research stemming from political science has traditionally had a special focus on elections, both national and European. The more recent study of the professionalisation of political communication and the mediatisation of politics and other institutions of society are perhaps the only examples of “schools” or research approaches that have been able to attract scholars from both the humanities and political sciences. Despite this, Danish research into news media, political communication, and media policy remains more fragmented than (we think) is the case in the other Nordic countries. A challenge for Danish research is thus that political communication is a growing research field, for example, in terms of the number of academic institutions and scholars engaging in such research. At the same time, this research lacks coordination and collaboration



across disciplines and universities, which potentially leads to research gaps as well as overlaps.

## Notes

1. See DR's overview of the implications of the reductions here: <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/overblik-disse-dr-programmer-og-kanaler-lukker> (last accessed March 23, 2019). The closing of P6 Beat and P8 Jazz has been postponed to the end of 2020.
2. Approximately 8,900 people (5,600 full-time equivalents) work in the Danish newspaper industry, and 6,500 people (5,600 full-time equivalents) work in the television industry (Agency for Culture and Palaces, 2016).

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