

## Research Note

### Democratic Denmark: outlier or town crier?

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#### Abstract

Denmark is often heralded as a democratic ideal. The Danish democracy appears to ensure representation of its citizenry. Yet, does Denmark, in fact, shine as a democratic leader, a beacon of light in the political darkness? Or does it serve merely as an unworkable utopian outlier? We attempt to answer such questions by analyzing voter data from national studies in Denmark and several other advanced democracies, spanning many decades. We compare three normative, highly relevant, measures of democratic performance: voice, choice, and satisfaction. Voice refers to voter participation in the system. Choice refers to the scope of viable party choices. Satisfaction refers to generalized support for the democracy's functioning. In combination, these three measures will provide an index of democratic performance. To the extent Denmark obtains distinctively higher performance scores, its role as a "beacon of light" relative to other Western democracies may continue.

#### Résumé

Le Danemark est souvent présenté comme un modèle démocratique. La démocratie danoise semble garantir la représentation de ses citoyens. Pourtant, le Danemark brille-t-il réellement comme un chef de file démocratique, un phare dans l'obscurité politique? Ou n'est-il qu'une utopie irréalisable? Nous tentons de répondre à ces questions en analysant les données électorales issues d'études nationales menées au Danemark et dans plusieurs autres démocraties avancées, sur plusieurs décennies. Nous comparons trois indicateurs normatifs et pertinents de la performance démocratique: la participation citoyenne, le choix et la satisfaction. La participation citoyenne désigne l'engagement des électeurs dans le système. Le choix renvoie à l'éventail des partis politiques viables. La satisfaction renvoie au soutien général apporté au fonctionnement de la démocratie. Combinées, ces trois mesures permettent d'établir un indice de performance démocratique. Si le Danemark obtient des scores nettement supérieurs, son rôle de modèle parmi les démocraties occidentales pourrait se maintenir.

**Keywords:** representation, electoral behaviour, democratic performance, party choice.

**Mots-clés :** représentation, comportement électoral, performance démocratique, choix du parti.

#### Introduction

Democracy as a system of representation and societal decision-making has come under increased pressure in recent years. Political leaders such as Bolsonaro in Brazil and Trump in the US question its legitimacy and the outcome of their elections, while other political leaders increasingly seem to undermine key political institutions such as the freedom of speech or the integrity of the ballot. Denmark, in contrast, has often been heralded as a democratic ideal (New York Times, 2017, 2022). Denmark for instance became part of the US presidential election in 2015 via Bernie Sanders in a debate with Hillary Clinton: "I think we should look to countries like Denmark [...], and learn from what they have accomplished" (CNN, 2016). As well, scholars have started to dig for the roots of the Danish miracle (Andersen 2023; Fukuyama 2012). Despite the influx of immigrants, multiculturalization of society, jobs losses from globalization, periods of economic recession and financial austerity, electoral participation has persisted at a high level. In general, voter preferences are heard at elections, according to a comprehensive and current study (Stubager et al. 2021; see also Bengtsson et al., 2014). Despite all, Danish

democracy appears able to ensure the representation of its people. Is Denmark, indeed, a beacon of democracy providing, so to say, news releases for their town criers to proclaim in the public square? Or does it only stimulate a utopian yearning, mostly represented in travel brochures? (See the international campaign recently launched, for ‘Denmark’s next town crier.’)<sup>1</sup>.

We provide answers by analyzing voting and elections data from national studies in Denmark and several other advanced democracies including Canada and the US, covering multiple decades. The analysis focuses on a comparison of normatively relevant measures of democratic performance among countries considered liberal democracies: Voice, Choice, and Satisfaction. Conceptually, voice refers to the degree to which voters participate in the political system. Choice refers to the range of partisan choices (party and ideology) available to the electorate. Satisfaction refers to the degree of support for the democracy’s functioning. Below, we examine these dimensions of democracy in detail, eventually arriving at a Democratic Performance Index, for use in comparing the Danish polity to other advanced democratic systems. As shall be seen, the Danish system passes the various tests with, perhaps surprisingly, flying colors.

Our exercise may be relevant beyond an interest per se in Denmark as a democratic beacon since we are not aware of any widely established measure of democratic performance in the literature which is applicable to advanced democracies. A vigorous literature discusses democratic quality and minimalist or broader definitions of liberal democracy that allows us to separate democracies from autocracies etc. (e.g., Bollen, 2000; Coppedge et al. 2011; Munck 2016; Møller & Skaaning, 2010; Vanhanen, 2000). Yet, this concept of democratic quality is different from our concept of democratic performance since democratic quality focuses in large part on political institutions. This is not very productive for our endeavor since we aim to compare Denmark to other advanced democracies that already ensure basic rights, electoral integrity, the rule of law etc.

### **Comparative democracy: Its meaning and range**

Especially since the likes of Dahl (1956) and Lipset (1960), scientific students of comparative politics have worried over how to measure democracy. The definition of the concept has long been vigorously debated (Sartori, 1984; Munck 2016; Møller & Skaaning, 2010). Numerous quantitative investigations tried to isolate its components and even weigh the importance of those components (e.g., Bollen, 2000; Coppedge et al. 2011; Vanhanen 2000). Since the 1970s, different organizations, such as Freedom House and Polity, have systematically calibrated the democratic characteristics of countries across the globe. More recently, democratic practice has expanded, beyond North America and Western Europe, particularly into Latin America. After 1980, a ‘Third Wave of Democracy’ swept over Latin America, bringing with it more than 300 free and fair elections (Carlin et al., 2015, 1). Despite this apparent march of progress, it did not result in a wider consolidation of democracy in the region (Puddington, 2014a, 2014b). These rankings of Freedom House remind us that democracy is not an “either/or” property; instead, it exists on a continuum, with some countries ranking near the top of the index, and some near the bottom, depending on their collective characteristics. A well-cited body of research has shown that two of the most decisive factors making for democracy are free speech and fair elections (e.g., Burkhart and Lewis-Beck, 1994; Munck 2012). These two traits would seem, on the face of it, to be quite important. However, there is some disagreement even there. For example, John Mueller (1999), in his provocative volume, argues that free speech by itself represents a condition sufficient to bring about democracy.

Identification of what traits define democracy matters because certain ones have high positive valence. That is, normatively speaking, they are greatly valued. Dahl (1971), in his classic work on polyarchy, spelled out seven political institutions necessary for democracy to come about; they could be summarized as follows: fair elections, free speech, universal suffrage, multiple information sources, independent political parties, citizens run for office, a government responsible to voters. As these institutional characteristics implant themselves, a polity matures into an established democracy. Different studies, for research purposes, have classified democracies under investigation as “leading” or “major.” For example, Michael Lewis-Beck (1988, preface), in his foundational work on economics and elections, labelled Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United States as “leading Western democracies.” While few would argue that categorization to be inappropriate for those countries, others could certainly be added to the list. For example, Denmark, the case at hand, clearly fits, along with Nordic neighbors, such as Iceland, Finland, Norway, and Sweden (Bengtsson et al., 2014).

The countries named above certainly merit the “democracy” moniker. However, Adam Smith’s “impartial spectator” would undoubtedly say that they are not equally democratic. (Raphael, 2007). Their metric assessment on the Freedom House (2023) scale would support this spectator’s claim; for example, the United States ranks at the bottom of the pack with a score of 83, France is middling at 89, while Norway scores a “perfect” 100. But is Norway really “perfect?” The Freedom House index rests on items measuring two broad dimensions—Political Rights and Civil Liberties. Such constructs do have high normative valence and are included in our three dimensions of democracy—Voice, Choice, and Satisfaction. Voice corresponds closely to the Dahl components of free speech, universal suffrage, and citizens running for office. Choice contains his components of fair elections, multiple information sources, and independent political parties. Satisfaction taps Dahl’s last dimension, a government responsive to the electorate.<sup>2</sup>

Discussion of preferred measures highlights a problem observed by Arend Lijphart (1971): comparative studies of democracies face methodological obstacles, in particular difficulties of small sample sizes. To help remedy this condition, he advocated a focus on ‘comparable cases’ and ‘key variables.’ We attend to these conditions herein, examining a group of liberal democracies over time and the role of core variables—three in number. This approach offers models with a workable parsimony. However, they are admittedly less ambitious than more complex measures such as *The Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index* (2024).

## **Data and hypotheses**

We wish to gather quantitative measures of these three dimensions of democracy via analysis of aggregate indicators from a pooled cross-sectional time-series of countries. This raises the immediate question of sample scope. Should it be a draw from, at one extreme, virtually all countries of the world? Or, at the other extreme, from only countries which are fully democratic? Since we regard “democracy” as a property that exists on a continuum, the sampling question is not straightforward. We decided on a sample that allowed a rather complete collection of data on the relevant variables, from a set of countries easily recognized as functioning, if imperfect, democracies. This strategy allows variance on the variable, as well as a minimal number of missing observations. In other words, we look at a well-measured, but mixed, set of what Dahl (1966), might have called established Western democracies. We would expect that such countries, having competitive elections operating with a relatively free flow of information and little corruption, will likely have governments that are held accountable to the

voters. In these circumstances, the outcome aspect of democracy – our third dimension labeled Satisfaction – should be a serviceable barometer of how Voice and Choice are working.

Thus, we compare Denmark to a range of other advanced democracies that possess considerable breadth and depth. Our central hypothesis is that, nevertheless, Denmark will distinguish itself by exceptional marks on our high-normative valence constructs of Voice, Choice, and Satisfaction. Indeed, overall, it should stand out as a democratic beacon, when compared to its “rival” democracies. Our test sample, then, consists of 21 established Western democracies. Apart from Denmark, the countries are Austria, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, the US. This selection of countries makes a hard test of our argument in the sense that especially close neighbors, like Finland, Norway, Iceland, and Sweden, might equally be considered as of ‘beacons of democracy’ (Andersen, 2023). After all, these Nordic countries have similar political institutions and therefore, presumably, pursue the same democratic goals.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, these countries have encountered much the same scale of societal change. The last half century has, for these countries and others in the sample, experienced tensions related to ethnic minorities, financial austerity, and geographic inequality in the periphery. Hence, such pressures might actually work against our dominant hypothesis—that despite all, Denmark remains the leading democratic lighthouse, with its beam set high above a middling value.

If, in these mature democracies, we consulted certain indicators of basic democratic rights and institutions, e.g., from the V.Dem database, we would discover very little variation in the rule of law, freedoms of association, and basic electoral quality (Coppedge et al. 2015; Norris et al. 2014; Teorell et al. 2019). Instead, we examine indicators that are increasingly debated in modern democracies, such as voter participation rates and voter satisfaction with democracy (Kostelka and Blais 2018; Ezrow and Xezonakis 2016). Thus, we focus on Democratic Performance as distinguished from the more common and more encompassing concept of democratic quality that for instance also includes the democratic political institutions (Munck 2012). Denmark – like most other advanced democracies – has come under pressure to uphold economic prosperity, adjust to a knowledge-based and service economy and, at the same time, accommodate diversity from an influx of immigrants (Stubager et al., 2021). How Denmark has recently coped with these challenges could serve as guidepost for other democratic systems. To put current critical developments into a bigger picture, we cover data across fifty-five years in the countries of study (1970-2025). The analysis unfolds across them, by comparing these normatively relevant measures of democratic performance: Voice, Choice, and Satisfaction.<sup>4</sup> We examine each set of measures, in turn.

### *Voice*

We measure Voice by voter turnout in national elections, 1970 to 2024, in our 21 advanced democracies, using the variable ‘v2elvaptrn’ from the V.Dem database (Coppedge et al. 2025; more on voter turnout in Blais, 2006). We prefer this direct, objective measure to more subjective measures of, e.g., electoral participation of voter or civil-society organizations based on expert assessments (Coppedge et al. 2025). In each national election, the turnout variable measures the percentage (%) of the adult voting-age population who cast a vote, according to official results. The variable ranges from a low turnout (34.9%) to a very high turnout (95.4%) with an average of 73.5%. The variation is respectable (standard deviation is 12.7%). The sample size is large, 355 observations (averaging 17.1 per country). Irrespective of the electoral system, the turnout rate represents an important indicator of public legitimacy and support for the country’s political institutions. Even a slight decrease in turnout often causes a debate about

whether democratic institutions are eroding, with the people disaffecting from the political system.

Importantly, a high turnout rate in Denmark would not simply be a product of an unusually easy (e.g., digital), access to the ballot on election day. Danes, like most other voters in Western democracies, must show up and enter the cue at the local polling station in order to physically cast their vote. The general trend in the turnout rate in the 21 countries included in our analysis is slightly downward from a usually high level, sometimes above 80%. However, despite this general trend of decline, there exists substantial cross-country and temporal variation, with Denmark in the high end of the ranking (details in Appendix Section I).

### *Choice*

To measure Choice, we use the CMP database (Lehmann et al., 2025), summing the number of parties in parliament that received more than five percent of the vote in recent elections (the authors manually filled in on the most recent elections). This cutoff helps ensure we only count parties that mobilize enough voters to have an impact in parliament. We have 322 observations for this indicator (15.5 on average per country). We take ‘Choice’ as an important indicator, in that voters with a plethora of options in elections have a greater chance of voting for a party near their ideal preference. Of course, this comes partly from the electoral system itself, e.g., a full and fair multiparty system becomes more likely with proportional representation and a low entry threshold. Yet, even within political systems based on proportional electoral representation, the number of parties varies considerably. In this regard, the supply of parties rests also on societal mobilization and, ultimately, political entrepreneurship.<sup>5</sup> Choice reveals, then, the degree to which the country’s democracy is ‘alive and kicking.’<sup>6</sup> The average number of parties is 4.8 (st.d. is 1.7) and can vary considerably, e.g., from a minimum of two (the US) to a maximum of eleven (Israel). The general trend is weakly upward. Denmark does not appear to diverge from this overall pattern in any unique and noticeable way (details in Appendix Section II).

Ideology can also shape voters’ choice at elections. Thus, as an additional indicator of Choice, we measure the ideological range among parties in parliament. A larger number of parties typically ensures a greater variety of ideological positions in parliament, but this is not automatic. We quantify the actual ideological diversity of each party, utilizing the ‘RILE’ score from the CMP dataset (Lehmann et al., 2022). It combines positional measures across a range of issue areas, so arriving at an overall ideological score from most leftist party (-100) to most rightist party (+100). The range of these scores in a country shows, for each election, its ideological diversity. We do not see any systematic trend across the countries of analysis. In most cases we perceive fluctuation around a flat trend line. Denmark remains solidly in the high end in this distribution (details in Appendix Section II).

### *Satisfaction*

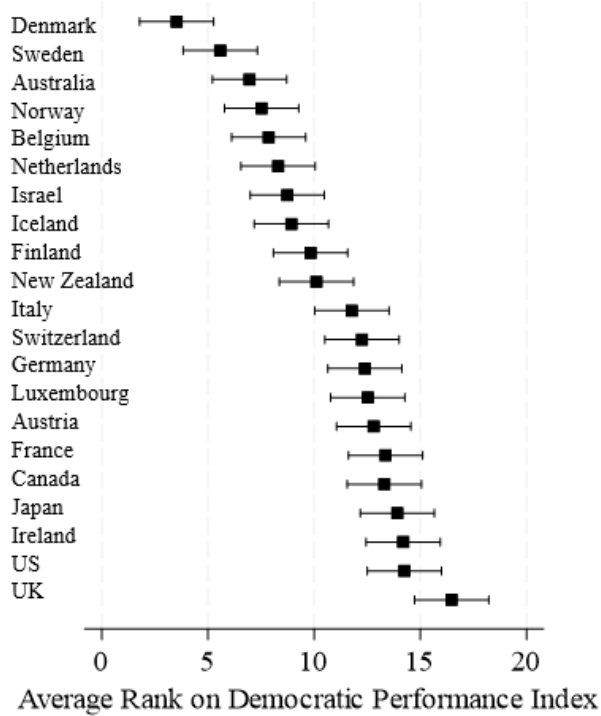
Finally, we measure Satisfaction as voters’ aggregate level of reported satisfaction with democracy in each country for each year. We include Satisfaction since democracy ultimately is for the people and therefore rests on their acceptance of and support for the system of governance. This concept could also include public trust in politicians and the political institutions (Hetherington, 1998), but we do not include this for a lack of data with long and broad coverage. The measure of satisfaction ranges in values from “very dissatisfied (0) to “very satisfied” (1), typically scored on a 4-point scale presented to respondents in a nationally representative sample. We compiled the available data from the Eurobarometer (Schmitt et al., 2022 and EB ZA7982/ZA7886), the European Voters database (Schmitt, 2021), Quality of

Government database (Teorell et al., 2022; more on its measurement in Linde and Ekman, 2003), and World/European Value Surveys (Haerpfer et al. 2022). Overall, the mean satisfaction score registers positive (0.56, st.d. is 0.10), with a minimum of 0.22 (Belgium) and a maximum of 0.85 (Germany), and moderate variation over time. Denmark stands out with its very visible growth in satisfaction over time, from about 0.5 to almost 0.8 (details in Appendix Section III).

In the foregoing, the unit of analysis is the country, measured over time, via public opinion and aggregate statistical indicators. To the extent that Denmark obtains higher scores on these dimensions than other advanced democracies, the Danish democracy could be seen as a "beacon of light" for other countries. On four separate, highly valenced democratic indicators, Denmark tends to rank high compared to other advanced democracies (see Appendix). But each of these indicators, by itself, makes for an incomplete picture. Fundamental democratic attitudes and behaviour, when fully measured, should rest on our three central concepts — Voice, Choice, and Satisfaction. Therefore, to reduce error, we combine them into a simple additive index of the country's rank as a democracy. In this way, we assign for each country its overall rank score, labelling it our Democratic Performance Index.<sup>7</sup>

## Results

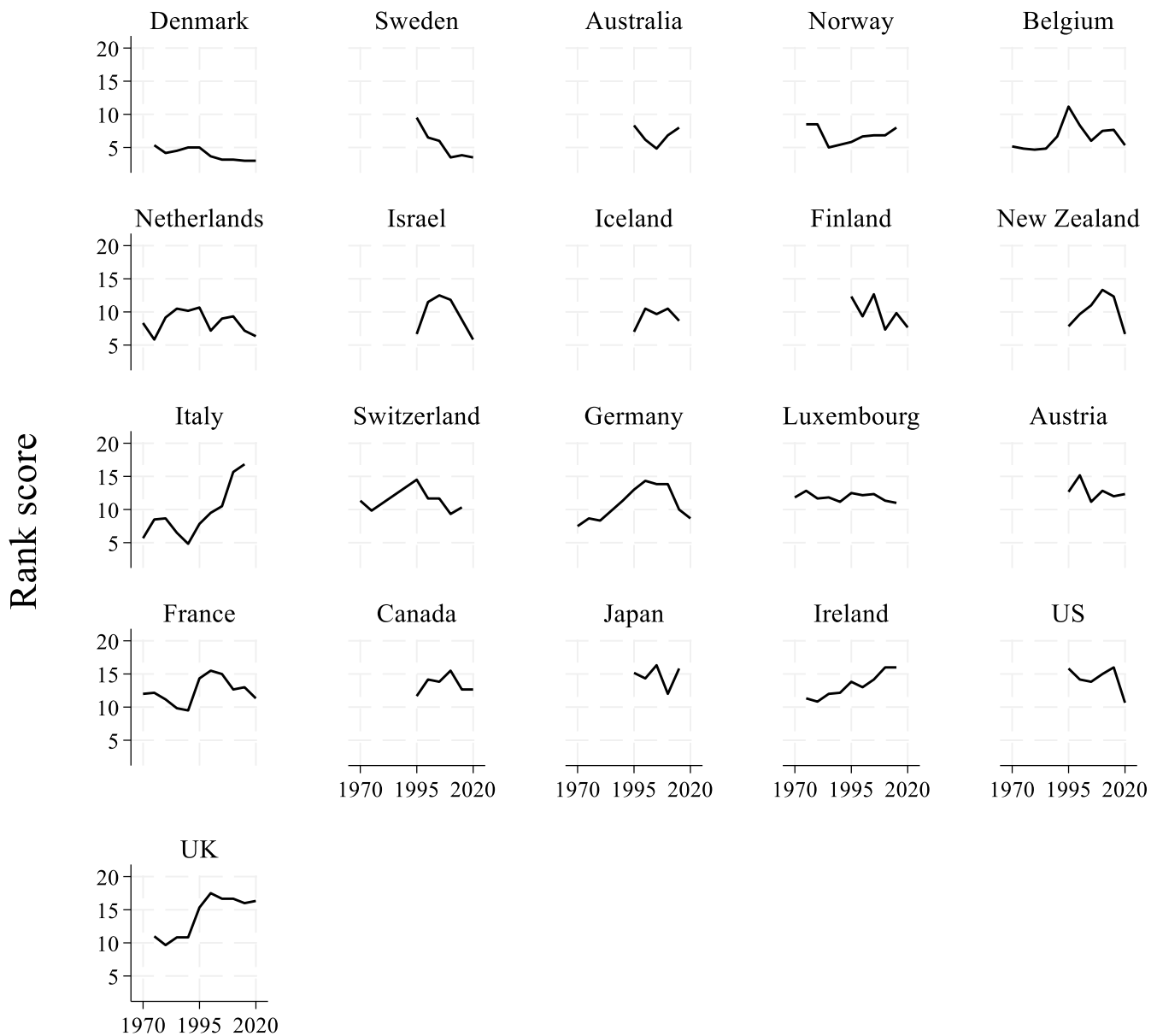
Now, to the critical question: how are these democracies ranked in the modern era? Figure 1 reports the average rank-scores of each country over time<sup>8</sup> since 1995, using our Democracy Performance index. This overall rank is marked in the figure by the black squares. Denmark tops the league – and does so at quite some distance from most of its nearest neighbors— Sweden, Australia and Norway in 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> positions, respectively.<sup>9</sup> (The Danish index equals 3.5, so clearly outdistances its competitors.) Yet, Denmark is not perfect and does not score straight 1<sup>st</sup>-medals across the indicators. Still, the runners-up, Sweden and Australia, score well below Denmark, with scores of 5.4 and 7.0, respectively. Moreover, the horizontal lines, which indicate the confidence intervals for the estimated index scores, do not overlap for Denmark and Australia and Norway (it does for Sweden in the two-tailed p-test). This demonstrates that Denmark in modern time (after 1995) systematically stands above and beyond other countries (except Sweden) when it comes to democratic performance. (We confirm this through further analysis in Appendix Section IV.) Toward the bottom of the ranking clusters a group of three (Ireland, UK, and the US) with average rankings around 15. Thus, the US finds itself opposite to Denmark with an index more than four times worse than Denmark. Canada trails the US with an average rank of 13.

**Figure 1.** Each country's average ranking on the Democratic Performance Index.

Note: The black box indicates the average rank for each country across 5-year periods, 1995-2024 based on a univariate OLS regression. The horizontal lines mark the 95% confidence intervals. The rank is based on four indicators—turnout, number of parties, ideological range, and satisfaction with democracy.

Figure 2, which shows the index score by 5-year intervals for each of the 21 countries, reveals some remarkable developments since 1970 (since 1995 for some countries, see footnote 8). Notice that a smaller number on the y-axis translates to a higher relative ranking across countries. Denmark is among the lowest from the outset (followed closely by Sweden and Australia); nevertheless, it manages a slight but unmistakable downward trend. Thus, despite economic challenges and major societal transformation, Denmark has been able to consolidate, even improve, its position at the top of the ranking. Sweden barely trails Denmark in this development, while Norway keeps a solid low-hanging line at the top of the rank. Noteworthy developments come from two disparate countries—Finland and the US—who have made steep climbs in the rankings, the US from a very low starting point to top-10. In contrast, Belgium, Canada, France, Iceland, Israel, New Zealand, and Switzerland have all been sliding down the rank for some time but are bouncing back more recently. Ireland, Italy, and the UK, in particular, have been sliding over the period, with much deteriorating democratic performance since the start. These patterns also confirm that these Democracy Performance Indices are not merely cut in stone by the political institutions in the country. For instance, in the two clearest single-member plurality electoral systems, the US improves markedly while the UK dives deep down the rankings. In further analysis in Appendix Section V, we regress the Democratic Performance Index on common societal indicators and find preliminary signs that our democratic performance index relates to societal transformation.

**Figure 2.** Democracy Performance Index for each country, (rank-scores in 5-year intervals).



Note: For details on the Democracy Performance Index, see text. On the x-axis, “1970” is the period 1970-1974 etc.

### Conclusion

Denmark, indeed, appears as a ‘beacon of light,’ even outshining perhaps “the best in the west”, and close Scandinavian cousins, in terms of its democratic performance, when compared to this select group of democratic countries. Across four indicators on three dimensions (Choice, Voice, Satisfaction), Denmark stands at the top rank. When these indicator scores are combined into a Democratic Performance Index, it falls at a distance from even its nearest competitor, Sweden. Scandinavian countries are generally high on the rank with the US at the very bottom, closely trailed by the UK and Canada. Moreover, we find evidence that large-scale societal challenges, such as increased immigration and reduced economic growth, have not undermined Danish

democracy. As a case study of future prospects for democratic governance, it certainly provides an encouraging example.

Moreover, this comparison of Denmark to other advanced democracies has brought a new measure of democratic performance to light that might inspire future work. We envision an unprecedented opportunity to gain insights on how and why modern democracies wax and wane in their democratic performance. In terms of further understanding the Danish 'beacon of light', one first step for future research would be to join forces with historical case-studies (e.g., Andersen, 2023) and trace democratic performance and its causes closer to the origins of modern democracy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Tom Benney, official town crier of Salisbury, South Australia, in cooperation with the Denmark Festival of Voice, recently launched a campaign, "Are you Denmark's next Town Crier?" (March 19, 2018).

<sup>2</sup> The aim of this study is not to resolve long-standing debates about how to best measure Democracy. Our aim is more modest – we want to contribute to an important public and scholarly debate about whether Denmark indeed is a 'democratic beacon' among liberal democracies based on relevant measures of democratic representation for modern democracies.

<sup>3</sup> This is compared to other countries such as the US and the UK with their diverging political institutions. They make up a very small selection of our sample and therefore alone could not explain Denmark taking a high rank on our measures of democracy.

<sup>4</sup> We focus on what we consider core features of democratic performance in advanced democracies without denying that more features might exist.

<sup>5</sup> We could therefore also measure party supply in relation to the cleavage structure in a country, but we refrain from that to keep our measure intuitively easy to understand and apply.

<sup>6</sup> Since this measure may penalize the single-member plurality electoral systems in the UK, the US, and Canada in our analysis, we experimented with excluding them in the analysis. We found that correction did not change our conclusions.

<sup>7</sup> Choice contains two indicators which are averaged before entering the index to ensure equal weight of the three indicators in this aggregation procedure.

<sup>8</sup> We calculate the average score per country per 5-year intervals (so 21 countries in 11 periods from 1970-2024 ~ 231 observations) and use OLS regression to estimate the average score for each country across periods. Since satisfaction data are missing for several countries until 1995 (see Table 2), Table 1 only covers six periods from 1995-2020.

<sup>9</sup> Another Nordic country, Norway, tops the Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index.

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**Appendices: Democratic Denmark: Outlier or Town Crier?**

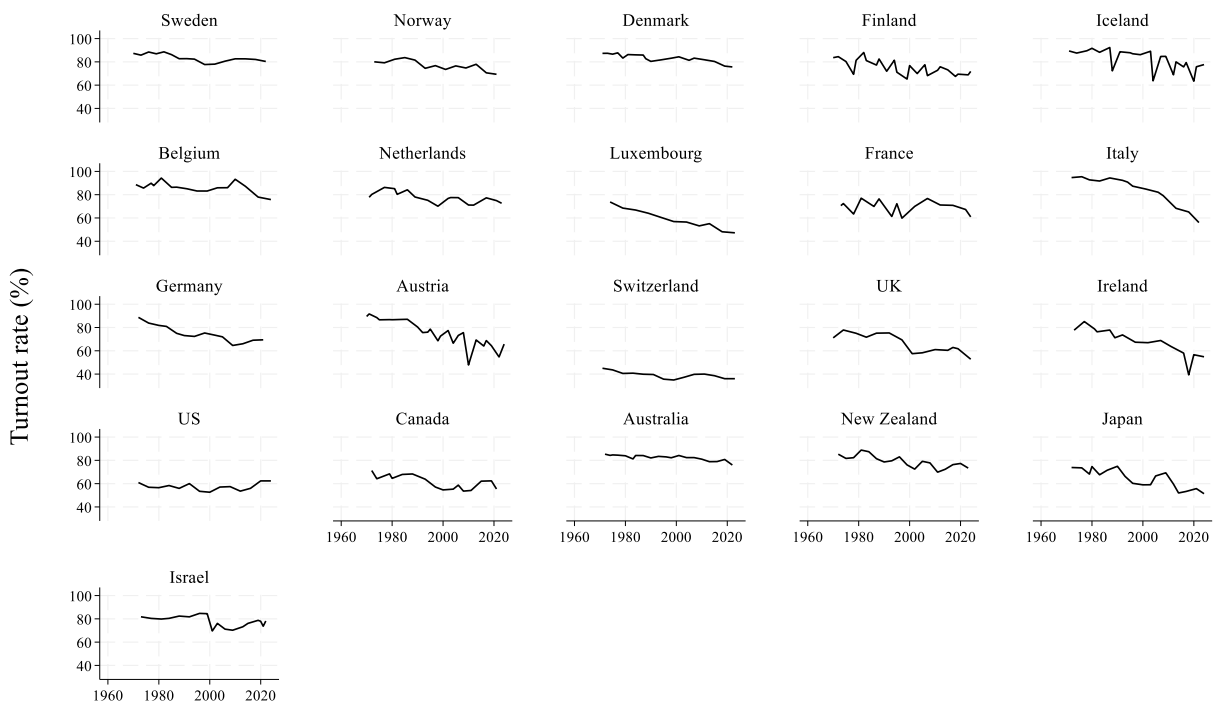
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**Section I – Voice: patterns and development**

The general trend in the turnout rate in the 21 countries included in our analysis is slightly downward from a usually high level, sometimes above 80%. This is the case in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Belgium, and New Zealand. The drop is much greater in Finland and close to dramatic in Germany, Austria, and the UK. Turnout in France and Canada is fairly stable, although with a lower starting point of around 60%. Overall, an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression of turnout on time suggests a systematic annual decline rate across countries of one quarter of a percentage point. Thus, over a 20-year-period, the turnout rate decline appears a not inconsiderable five percentage points.

**Figure A1.** The turnout rate per election in 21 Western democracies as an indicator of Voice.



Source: V.Dem database (Coppedge et al., 2022).

## Section II – Choice: patterns and development

Figure 2 shows for each country the number of parliamentary parties that received more than five percent of the vote in elections over time. The general trend is weakly upward—an OLS regression of the number of parties on time indicates an annual growth rate of 0.02. So, over 20 years, the number of parties grew by 0.4 (about 25% of a standard deviation), on average. We see this weak development reflected in rather flat lines (small bumps up and down notwithstanding) in several countries—Norway, Denmark, Finland, UK, Canada, and Australia. For Belgium, Sweden and, more recently, the Netherlands and Germany, there has been a greater growth in the number of parties. Denmark does not appear to diverge from this overall pattern in any unique and noticeable way.

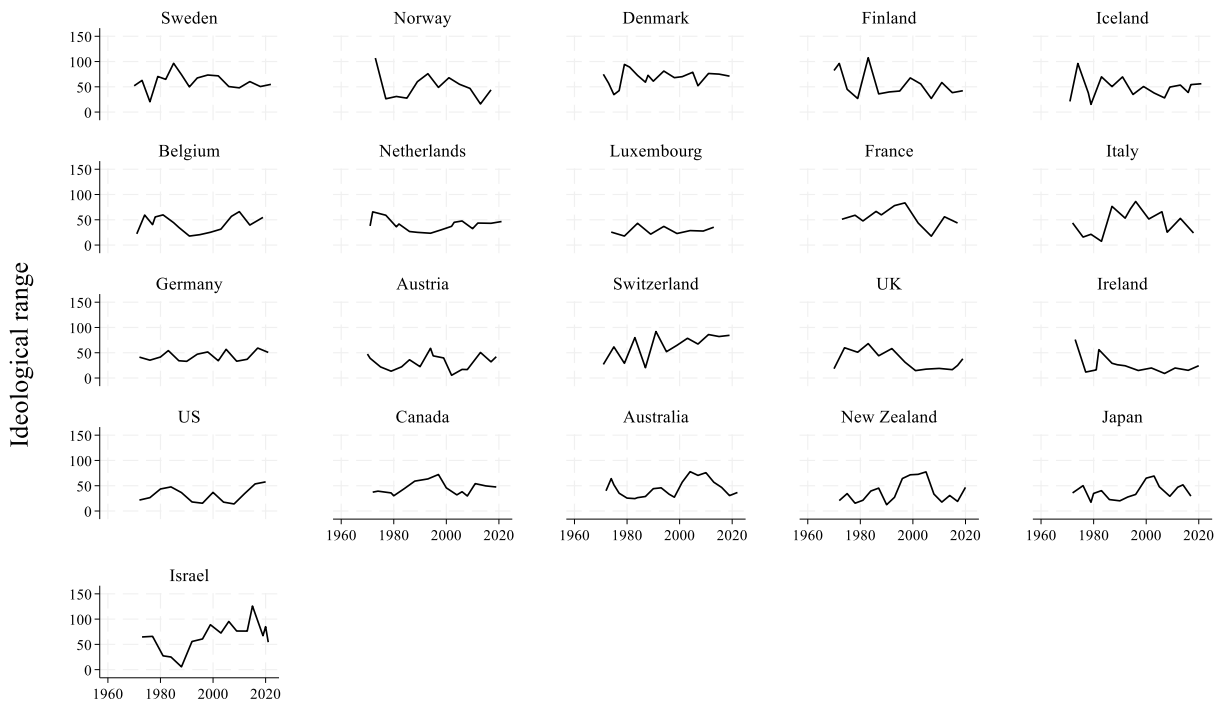
**Figure A2.** The number of parties in parliament per election in 15 Western democracies as one indicator of Choice.



Source: CMP-data (Lehmann et al. 2022). We only count parties who scored at least 5% of the votes.

In terms of ideology, we have 303 observations for this indicator (20.2 on average per country) with a minimum of 17 and a maximum of 26. The average ideological range on the 200 unit-scale is 47.5 (standard deviation is 21.9) with a minimum of 5.5 and a maximum of 127.4. Hence, considerable variation in party ideology exists. An OLS regression of ideological range on time does not reveal any systematic trend across the countries of analysis. Rather Figure 3 shows rather bumpy developments in each country. In most cases we perceive fluctuation around a flat trend line, ending close to where it started. See in particular the cases of Norway, Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, and France. The ideological range did decrease considerably in Sweden, but also noticeably in Finland and New Zealand. However, it improved markedly in Switzerland. Denmark remains solidly in the high end in terms of ideological range, hovering around 75.

**Figure A3.** The ideological range among parties in parliament per election in 21 Western democracies as another indicator of Choice.

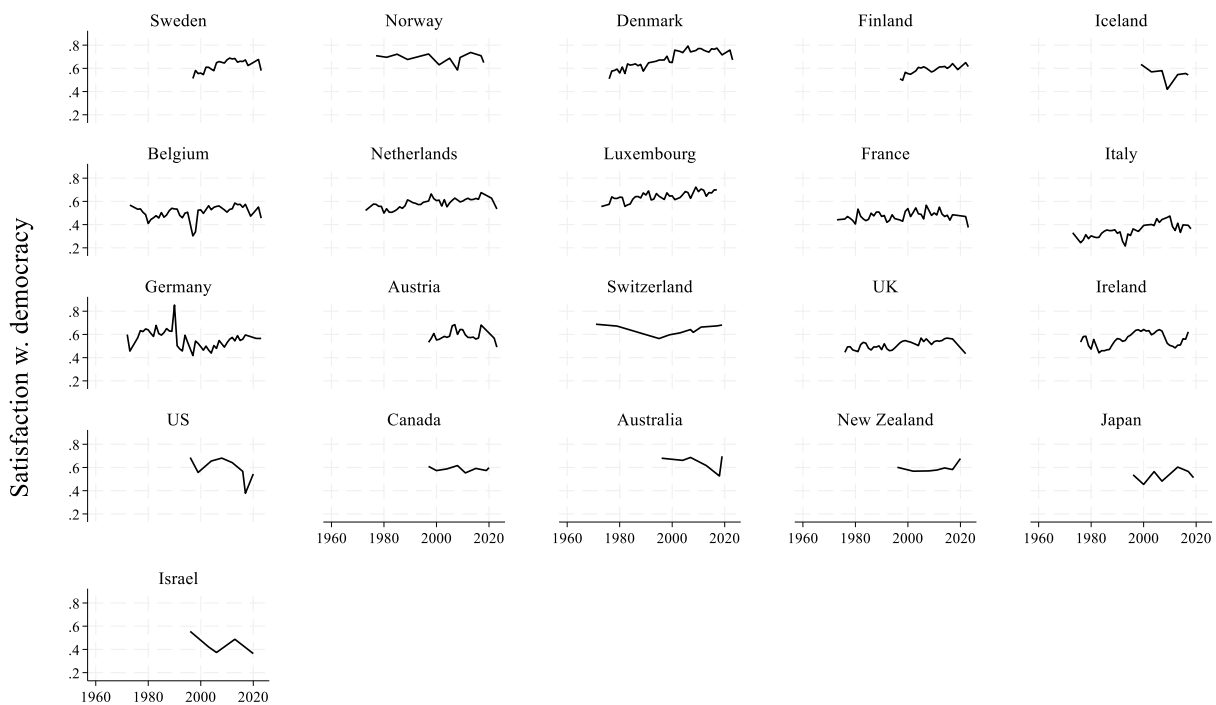


Source: CMP-data (Lehmann et al. 2022).

**Section III – Satisfaction: patterns and development**

In terms of the indicator for satisfaction, we have 344 observations with an average of 22.9 per country. Figure 4 provides an overview of the data on satisfaction. As visible in Figure 4, we have extensive time-series across our period of analysis for many of the countries. Yet, in some countries, including Sweden, Austria, Finland, US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, timelines are not as long and mainly more recent. Overall, the mean satisfaction score registers positive (0.57), with a minimum of 0.30 (Belgium) and a maximum of 0.85 (Germany). Generally, variation is moderate, with a standard deviation of 0.09. Regressing satisfaction on time reveals a faint upward trend of 0.002. Over a 20-year period, this translates to an average increase of 0.04, i.e., a little less than half a standard deviation. The general upward trend hides considerable cross-country variation, however. Denmark stands out with its very visible growth in satisfaction over time, from about 0.5 to almost 0.8. In most other countries, the trend is small fluctuations around a rather flat line. Netherlands, Sweden, and the UK have experienced slight increases. The trend line is less discernible in the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, where the periods of data are shorter.

**Figure A4.** The level of Satisfaction with democracy among voters per election in 21 Western democracies.



Source: Eurobarometer (Schmitt et al., 2022), European Voter Database (Schmitt, 2021), and Quality of Government (Teorell et al., 2022), Eurobarometer ZA7886 and ZA7982.

**Section IV – Further analysis to Figure 1****Table A1.** Predicting the average rank across the four indicators using 5-year intervals in 21 countries, 1995-2020.

	(1)
<i>Reference: Denmark</i>	
Sweden	1.64 (1.23)
Norway	3.69*** (1.23)
Finland	6.14*** (1.23)
Iceland	5.01*** (1.23)
Belgium	3.92*** (1.23)
Netherlands	4.61*** (1.23)
Luxembourg	8.89*** (1.23)
France	9.81*** (1.23)
Italy	8.00*** (1.23)
Germany	8.61*** (1.23)
Austria	9.14*** (1.23)
Switzerland	8.53*** (1.23)
UK	12.67*** (1.23)
Ireland	10.58*** (1.23)
US	10.50*** (1.23)
Canada	9.47*** (1.23)
Australia	3.14*** (1.23)
New Zealand	6.39*** (1.23)
Japan	10.11*** (1.23)
Israel	4.96*** (1.23)
Constant	4.06*** (0.97)
Observations	126

Note. OLS Regression with period fixed effects. Standard errors in parentheses \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

**Table A1.1. Correlation matrix for countries' ranks on the three dimensions across periods**

	<b>Voice</b>	<b>Choice</b>
<b>Choice</b>	<b>0.35</b>	
<b>Satisfaction</b>	-0.03	0.002

Note: Coefficients at  $p < 0.05$  in bold.

Table A1.1. shows that each country's rank on *Voice* and *Choice* correlate systematically across periods at a moderate rate ( $\beta$  is 0.35) whereas neither *Voice* nor *Choice* correlate with *Satisfaction*.

### Section V – Do societal pressure challenge democratic performance?

To gain further insight, we eventually conduct OLS analyses, regressing the Democratic Performance Index on independent variables representing common challenges to the democratic fabric. This includes immigration pressure (displacement data, the UNHCR), economic growth (GDP rates, the World Bank), and the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial society, (agricultural and service employment data, the World Bank). These variables are commonly used to understand how societal changes affect elections and democratic development (see e.g., Stubager et al. 2021). Looking at these variables over time, we observe the asylum rate has gone up, GDP growth has withered a bit overall, and employment has shifted from agriculture to services (as confirmed in the further analysis in Table A2). Further, we have linearly interpolated these mostly annual predictor variables to close minor data gaps. This yields the following initial sample sizes: on the asylum displacement rate,  $N = 750$ , on GDP growth,  $N = 735$ , on the agricultural and service employment,  $N = 435$ . However, since the average rank-scores are calculated per 5-year interval for each country, this ultimately reduces the working number of observations (Israel is not included to this analysis).

In Table A3, we use common socioeconomic indicators of long-term changes to test to what extent this predicts the countries' average rank scores (per 5-year intervals). We control for the population size of each country (in millions) and for the use of enforced compulsory voting based on the variable "v2elcomvot" from V.Dem. Interestingly, several estimates are statistically significant. Modernization, as indicated by GDP growth, and the related transformation in the economy and labour markets, from industrial production to post-industrial production, points to improvements in democratic performance on our index. For example, for each 1% increase in employment in services, the 5-year rank-score systematically rises by 0.67 on the rank. This preliminary evidence points to possible connections between societal transformations and democratic performance which call for further examined in future research.

**Table A2.** Development in key independent variables over time.

	(1) Immigration	(2) GDP growth	(3) Agricultural employe nt	(4) Service employe nt
Year	0.08*** (0.00)	-0.03*** (0.00)	-0.10*** (0.00)	0.39*** (0.00)
Constant	-151.01*** (6.58)	64.17*** (6.58)	213.89*** (2.62)	-699.57*** (6.24)
Observations	750	735	435	435

Note: Standard errors in parentheses \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

**Table A3.** Predicting the average Democratic Performance index, at 5-year intervals.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Asylum rate	0.02 (0.13 )				
GDP per capita		0.15 (0.17 )			
GDP growth			0.26* (0.15 )		
Employment in agriculture				-1.66* (0.86 )	
Employment in services					0.67** (0.33 )
Compulsory voting	-1.66** (0.73 )	-1.62** (0.72 )	-1.63** (0.70 )	-0.53 (0.90 )	-0.58 (0.90 )
Population (millions)	0.00 (0.05 )	0.03 (0.04 )	0.05 (0.04 )	-0.55** (0.26 )	-0.78** (0.36 )
Constant	10.66*** (1.94 )	9.21*** (2.28 )	7.99*** (2.26 )	42.36*** (15.1 1)	-1.84 (8.28 )
Observations	207	207	207	132	132

Note: OLS regression with standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .