

The Local Council Elections in Denmark 1970

In Denmark local council elections are held in March every fourth year. However, the elections held on 3 March 1970 had a special significance in that they followed directly after the implementation of the largest Danish municipality reform in modern times. It was, besides, the first election since the coalition of the three "bourgeois" parties took over government from the Social Democrats.

The tendencies from one local council election directly up to the following could be subdivided into two main components: a national variation and local variations.

The national variation consists of the trends that can be regarded as being common to most of the municipalities and which are generally interpreted as reflecting the country-wide political attitudes in the local council elections.

The local variations or the local deviations from the national trends are generally interpreted either as reflecting the local restructuring of the population or as indices of purely local conflicts with the corresponding changes in attitudes.

The Municipality Reform and Municipality Elections

A municipality reform restructures the local units. Such a rearrangement of the local units could create new local conflicts which in their turn could lead to local variations and ultimately to changes in the relative significance of the two main components.

Although it is not intended that this article should primarily discuss the municipality reform, nevertheless a brief sketch of the altered setting for local council elections is necessary for understanding how the reform could be reflected in these elections.

In principle, Denmark (understand hereafter Denmark as being exclusive of Greenland and the Faroes) after the reform is divided into two types of municipalities which can be regarded as belonging to two levels: the primary and the county municipalities.

Primary municipalities embrace a rural area or a town with the adjoining area. A county municipality embraces the areas of a number of primary municipalities. Exceptions from this main rule are the Copenhagen and Frederiksberg municipalities which are not under Copenhagen county municipality. During the local council elections of 3 March 1970, therefore, the voters in all the municipalities with the exception of Copenhagen and Frederiksberg could vote for candidates for two local councils, the primary municipal council and the county council.

Before the reform Denmark was divided up into three types of municipalities: rural, city and county municipalities. The "rural" municipalities varied markedly in size and level of urbanization, but were largely made up of minor country districts. The city municipalities on the other hand were considerably urbanized.

Before the reform, it was often the case that rural municipalities which had become suburbs were not administratively integrated into the corresponding town municipalities.

Further, the pre-reform county municipalities cannot be compared with the post-reform county municipalities since the former did not normally embrace the town municipalities within their geographical confines. In addition, there were, before the reform, counties which embraced one or two county municipalities as well as the towns within their areas.

In effect, the reform substantially simplified the municipal structure.

Another significant feature of the reform was the tendency towards fewer but larger local units. In April 1969 there were 1064 municipalities in Denmark, but after the implementation of the municipal reform this number was slashed down to 277. This was achieved partly through an amalgamation of the minor rural municipalities and partly through the integration of suburban municipalities into the neighbouring town municipalities.

However, the amalgamations occurred in some areas with some degree of resentment. A number of rural municipalities had to be forced into amalgamations which cut across traditional barriers. Furthermore, many suburban municipalities protested against being

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However, the amalgamations occurred in some areas with some degree of resentment. A number of rural municipalities had to be forced into amalgamations which cut across traditional barriers. Furthermore, many suburban municipalities protested against being

incorporated into town municipalities, especially because the taxation rates in many suburban municipalities were different from those prevailing in the town municipalities into which they were integrated.

The municipal reform also reduced the number of county municipalities. Before the reform there were 22 counties and 25 county municipalities in Denmark, but after the reform only 14 county municipalities were left. The process of reducing the number of counties involved some difficulties as well. However, with respect to county council elections, it is not so much the local as the national component that counts.

A third feature of the municipal reform may also be mentioned. There is a growing tendency to shift the responsibility for more tasks over to the municipalities and to place a larger part of the economic burden on the local units. Since the local units have been simultaneously larger, one could say that the offices in the local councils now carry more power and influence.

Before describing the effects which the municipality reform could have on the municipal elections, we will briefly sketch the main features of the preceding municipal elections.

The Main Features of Local Council Elections

Voting turnout is lower at a local council election than at a parliamentary election. It is again lower during an election to the county councils than at municipal council elections. Furthermore, it is lower in the major than in the minor municipalities. If one compares the voting turnout during local council elections in Denmark with polls in other countries, one is necessarily led to conclude that polls in Denmark are generally high since 70-80 % of the eligible voters cast their votes.

Local council elections are characterized by many local issue lists. We here have in mind those lists which do not use the symbols of any of the national parties. However, these local lists can often be associated with one or the other party or groups of parties. It is, for example, proper to associate an "agricultural list" with the "Agrarian Liberal Party" (Venstre), if, of course, this party is not standing in this municipality, just as it is appropriate to associate a "labour list in municipality X" with the Social Democrats. A number of similar examples can easily be called to mind. But generally it is quite difficult to interpret what actually lies behind a list symbol unless its antecedents are known.

We are thus led to the problem of whether local conflicts often create bases for coalitions which cut across traditional party boundaries. Such conflicts could be about how much of the municipal tax should be levied on land or on wage income. In such a case, the parties and the lists which have mainly appealed to farmers are hereby joined together in opposition to the lists which represent the self-employed in urban industries and wage-earners.

Conflicts could, however, arise over school or social issues which again would give rise to other types of coalitions. It is such issues as these that to a large degree explain why local lists appear.

A third feature which should be emphasized is the percentage voting for persons. Votes for persons in preference to votes for lists are very important at municipal elections. In county council elections the fraction of votes cast for persons is higher than in parliamentary elections where votes for lists dominate.

However, the fraction of votes cast for persons varies considerably with the size of the municipality. In the minor municipalities most of the votes are cast for persons, whilst in the major town municipalities only a small fraction of votes are cast for persons. This cannot be directly interpreted as showing that the issue of persons is relegated to the background in the larger municipalities, but it most probably reflects the inconvenience effects of the stipulation in a number of the larger municipalities which demanded that a voter who wants to cast his/her vote for a person should write the chosen candidate's name on the ballot-paper.

In other words, local council elections are characterized to a considerable degree by the

local lists which mirror the local conflicts as well as by personal manifestations of sympathy or antipathy towards the standing candidates. These two features emphasize the local variations surrounding the national trends during local council elections.

The general picture in the fifties and sixties was that the Social Democrats' share of the votes cast was on the average 3-4 % less at the local council elections¹ than at the parliamentary elections. The Radical Liberal Party (Radikale Venstre), which up to the 1968 parliamentary election was one of the minor parties, scored on the average 2 % less at local council elections than at the parliamentary elections.

The strength of the Conservative People's Party (Konservative Folkeparti) at the local council elections is about the same as at parliamentary elections. However, there is substantial fluctuation in the strength of the Agrarian Liberal Party. This party scores about 9 % less at local council elections than at parliamentary elections. It must be realized though that this party does not put up candidates in a number of municipalities where the local lists with symbols normally associated with agricultural interests are firmly established.

The strength of the Socialist People's Party (Socialistisk Folkeparti) cannot be assessed with certainty because the material basis for such a pronouncement is at the moment very poor. It appears nevertheless that it is weaker during local council elections than during parliamentary elections.

This is the general characteristic of all the minor parties which, most often, contest the local council elections in only a few municipalities. Even in these, they have little prospects of having their candidates voted into the local councils. The only exception, though, is the Communist Party which draws just about the same percentage of votes at the local council elections as at the parliamentary elections.

What consequences could a municipal reform have on municipal elections? Before the 1970 election a number of hypotheses were put forward in this connection. We shall only refer to the most important ones here.

One hypothesis postulated that the voters' personal knowledge of the candidates would be reduced as a result of the emergence of larger constituencies. Since the elections in many small and rural municipalities were formerly characterized by a large percentage voting for persons, one should now expect as a consequence of this hypothesis that an increasing fraction of the votes would be cast for the parties and the lists.

Another stated that the emergence of larger constituencies would "politicize" the local council elections. For, where the local conflicts were ignored in favour of the national issues, one would expect that the fraction of votes for the local lists would be reduced and that the electoral lists and the list-alliances would follow the national party boundaries to a larger extent than was previously the case.

Yet another hypothesis pointed out that since the voting turnout, as mentioned earlier, varies considerably with the size of the municipality, it is to be expected that there would be a decreasing voting turnout with the transition to the larger constituencies.

One could, however, marshal up three counter-hypotheses. Since the amalgamations gave rise to problems in many cases, one could expect that these problems would be manifested in the local council elections in the form of a higher percentage voting for persons, in more local lists and more votes cast for these, and finally in a higher voting turnout. One could in effect expect that the voters in many of the old rural municipalities would ensure that their municipality be represented in the new municipal councils.

Before testing the plausibility of these hypotheses, we will briefly sketch the main features of the local council elections in 1970. We hasten to point out here and now that it is not possible to test all the hypotheses on the basis of the available material.

The Material for an Ecological Analysis

In March 1971 it was still difficult to draw safe conclusions in connection with the local council elections of March 1970 since the official electoral statistics were still not yet available.

A number of the larger municipalities have published reports of the elections, but with

respect to quite a number of the municipalities, one has to make do with the preliminary figures.

For a few municipalities there is a lack of material. However, these mentioned sources of error will hardly seriously affect the conclusions which we draw in this article.

It is not really the aim of this article to state the precise tendencies; rather, we aim at making a rough estimate of the main trends. For this purpose we have decided to use a very simple but rewarding technique, namely graphical estimates on the basis of scatter diagrams.

A pure description of the municipal elections as such is of very limited use and interest. In the meantime the municipal reform magnifies the task involved in comparing this municipal election with earlier municipal and parliamentary elections. Where the municipalities were simply lumped together and where the county boundaries follow the municipal boundaries the task is manageable. But where municipalities were split up or where the new county boundaries cut across former municipalities, the task becomes quite enormous. We have solved the last problem in this way: if, for example, 80 % of the inhabitants of municipality X were transferred to a new municipality Y, then 80 % of the votes cast for all the parties in the old municipality are transferred to Y, i.e. in proportion to the fraction of the inhabitants transferred from X. This could be a source of minor deviations from the official figures whenever these do appear, but they will hardly nullify our conclusions.

Since the task as indicated above is greater than one would be led to believe, our comparative analysis of the main features of municipal elections will not go beyond 1966. With respect to the county council election, we have chosen not to compare it with the preceding county council elections but to use the parliamentary election of 1968 as a basis for comparison.

Voting Turnout

The poll in the primary municipalities varied from about 61 % to about 85 %. The average poll for the municipalities was about 76 %. But the fraction of eligible voters in the whole country which turned out at the municipal election was about 73 %. The difference between the average poll for the municipalities and the total poll can be explained by the fact that the total poll is the weighted average of the municipal polls, where the numbers of eligible voters in the municipalities are the weights. Voting turnout was higher in the many minor municipalities than in the larger ones and this is why the municipal average poll is higher than the total.

The relation between the size of a municipality and voting turnout is not simply linear. For municipalities with about 5000 eligible voters, the average poll was about 77 %. But in municipalities with about 10,000 voters it was 74 %. Municipalities with 20,000 eligible voters had an average poll of about 73 %, and those with about 100,000 voters about 70 % poll. Copenhagen, the country's largest municipality, had a poll of 61 %. In other words there is less reduction in the size of the poll as we move from the minor to the medium-sized municipalities than from the medium-sized to the larger municipalities. One of the municipalities deviated markedly from the noted trend. This is Gladsaxe municipality, which with a little under 50,000 eligible voters has a voting turnout of 78 %. This level of poll is more typical for the minor municipalities with under 10,000 eligible voters than for the larger municipalities. But Gladsaxe deviates also in a number of other characteristics from the general trends during municipal elections. The local factors are regarded to be of greater significance in this municipality than the national trends.

We must admit, however, that there are great variations within the noted tendencies. But a considerable majority of the municipalities with under 10,000 eligible voters lie within the range of 72–82 % polls, just as municipalities with 10,000–50,000 eligible voters have 68–78 % polls, and all the municipalities with over 50,000 eligible voters have polls of from 72 % down to 61 % in Copenhagen.

The local council elections of 1970 were characterized by the lowest overall polls at similar elections since the Second World War. This could easily be adduced to support the hypothesis which holds that the creation of larger constituencies would lead to decreasing polls. But the ecological pattern points to a more complicated set of relations.

In fact a large number of municipalities had higher polls at this election than in the preceding municipal election, but these were mainly the minor municipalities. The fall in polls was largest in the major municipalities and a little larger in the islands than in Jutland. In effect, the relation between the size of the municipality and voting turnout was much more pronounced during this municipal election than during the preceding municipal election. One should, according to the hypothesis, expect a significant fall in polls in the new major municipalities, but the ecological pattern gives a different picture. Another hypothesis aiming to explain the falling polls was current in the daily press just after the election. It was stated that one could consider the election as a "protest election", that is to say, an election which a large part of the voters boycotted in protest against certain national issues and events. This point of view is very interesting because a parallel interpretation was given to the local council elections of 1966 when the Socialist People's Party's share of the votes turned out to be higher than expected. This party's electoral breakthrough at this election was generally associated with its housing policy, i.e. a national issue. Although this hypothesis elicits some interest, it nevertheless has the drawback characteristic of so many *a posteriori* hypotheses in that one can hardly confirm or confute them.

The Lists and Parties at the Municipal Election 1970

Before we take up the issue of the national trends behind local council elections we will briefly compare the post-election positions of the different lists and parties and also follow up the fortunes of the individual lists and parties since the preceding election.

Compared to the municipal elections of 1966, the Social Democrats made advances in almost all the municipalities. This trend was expected by many commentators because the municipal election of 1966 was considered to have been exceptionally unfavourable to the Social Democrats. However, the size of the advance (8 %) created some surprise. The Social Democrats made strong gains in the major municipalities. If we group municipalities according to size, we note that the gains made by the Social Democrats were larger in the Jutlandian municipalities than in the municipalities of corresponding size on the islands. In the capital, including the suburbs, the gains of the Social Democrats were as high as 13 %, and for the municipality of Copenhagen it was 14 %. Gladsaxe municipality set the record with an almost 21 % advance for the Social Democrats. In the few municipalities where the Social Democrats registered losses, the number of eligible voters was under 10,000.

As a result of these gains, the Social Democrats appeared as the dominating list in almost all the major municipalities and their share of votes was typically 46–50 %. In a few of the suburban municipalities of Copenhagen, the Social Democrats' share of the votes was over 60 %. In the minor municipalities on the islands, the Social Democrats' share of the votes fluctuated around 40 %, whilst in the corresponding Jutlandian municipalities it was around 30 %. Although one could be tempted to consider the latter as being relatively low, it is nevertheless the Social Democratic list which received the largest share of votes in all types of municipalities.

Granted that the Social Democratic list dominated in the majority of the municipalities it is, however, only in one-fifth of the municipalities that this party achieved an overall majority in the municipal council. If one roughly compares the pre-election composition of the municipal councils with their post-election composition, one notes that there is only a slight shift in favour of the left wing parties.

In relation to the preceding municipal election, the Radical Liberals made advances. But this party's gain of about 4 % was neither as considerable as the Social Democratic Party's nor was it a surprise.

At the local council elections and in the parliamentary election of 1966, the Radical Liberals were clearly one of the minor parties. It was only in the parliamentary election of 1968 that its share of votes became sizeable. One could thus expect that the advance it made in 1968 would rub off on the 1970 municipal elections. Though one could detect an ecological pattern in the Social Democratic advance, one cannot in the same way point out any major connection between type of municipality and the Radical Liberal advance. For the Radical Liberals it is rather a question of "uniform switch".

The Radical Liberal Party was at the local council election of 1970, as in the preceding election, particularly strong in the minor municipalities on the islands. It must be mentioned that the Radical Liberal Party did not put up any candidates in several municipalities, especially in the Jutlandian municipalities.

This party's share of the votes was not a dominating factor in any of the municipalities. But its local political influence was sizeable. At the 1966 municipal election, this party stood with the Social Democrats. But after the formation of the coalition government of the three "bourgeois" parties, it broke its connection with the Social Democratic Party at the local level as well. The loss of this supporting party goes to explain why the number of municipal councils in which the Social Democrats gained a working majority does not compare with this party's percentage advance in the share of votes.

While the Social Democratic Party and the Radical Liberal Party made advances, the Conservative People's Party registered an overall loss of about 1 %. There were nonetheless marked local variations behind this overall picture.

In the minor municipalities, the Conservatives made advances, but in the major municipalities and especially in the capital and its suburbs, this party registered losses. In general, Conservative losses were larger in the municipalities on the islands than in the Jutlandian municipalities. There was a clear advance for this party in the minor Jutlandian municipalities. We must here note that this party was contesting a municipal election in a number of these municipalities for the first time. Thus its results at this election cannot be analysed independently but must be related to the results of a number of local lists which had Conservative inclinations.

The net result of the municipal election was that the Conservative People's Party appeared as the strongest rival to the Social Democrats in most of the larger municipalities. The Conservatives had, however, a stronger position in the municipalities on the islands than in the Jutlandian municipalities. Finally, it was only in a couple of the suburban municipalities of Copenhagen that one could say that it was a dominating list.

The gains of the Agrarian Liberal Party were just as large as the Radical Liberal Party's. But it was not in this connection a question of "uniform switch", since the ecological pattern of the Agrarian Liberal Party's success is extremely complicated. In the capital and its suburbs where this party was hitherto weak, it registered losses. In the other municipalities on the islands one can almost say that this party was stable. Its gains were substantial only in the Jutlandian municipalities. In the minor municipalities of Jutland it had a typical gain of about 10 %, although large deviations from this tendency can be seen in this type of municipality.

As with the Conservatives, the advances made by the Agrarian Liberal Party must be related to the fact that this party had not earlier contested local council elections in a large number of the Jutlandian municipalities - Jutland being this party's national political stronghold.

Much of the explanation for this is that there were local issue lists like the Agricultural List, etc. which were often associated with the Agrarian Liberal Party. For this reason, this party at the local council election of 1970, as with the preceding ones, appears to have had its stronghold in the minor municipalities on the islands, where it was, with its share of about 30 % of the votes, a clear rival to the Social Democratic Party. In the Jutlandian municipalities it received 20 % of the votes, a share which was considerably smaller than

its share on the islands. However, this party received a lower share in the major municipalities on the islands; in the capital and its suburbs it was a share of 3 % of the votes cast, the fifth largest party.

A decline at the 1970 local council election was forecast for the Socialist People's Party. This party had exceptionally good results at the local council election of 1966 and, subsequently, it had not only experienced a breakaway² but also a decline at the parliamentary election of 1968.

It was quite a surprise to many commentators that the Socialist People's Party received only 3 % of the votes, considering that it contested the election in more municipalities in 1970 than it did in 1966. Its share of 3 % of the votes cast corresponds to more than a halving of its share in the previous municipal election. Its 10 % decline in the capital and its suburbs, which were in fact its stronghold in the 1966 municipal elections, was quite considerable (1966: 18 %; 1970: 8 %). This party's share of votes was also halved in the other major municipalities where it did not normally receive as many votes as in the capital. Consequently, it only had a sizeable share of votes in the latter. In terms of municipal politics, this party is, however, important in that in some of the municipalities on the islands it tips the scale in favour of the Social Democrats.

For most of the small parties, there were very minor variations that can hardly be analysed systematically. On the whole they won seats in only a few municipalities. One of these, the Left Socialists, requires some attention.

This party received at the 1968 parliamentary election 2 % of the votes, which is the share of votes necessary for gaining representation in Parliament. Consequently, the fortunes of this party at the municipal election were awaited with some excitement.

This was the first municipal election it was contesting. At this election it received under 1 % of the votes which came mainly from the capital and its suburbs. Its share of votes in Copenhagen was, however, enough to ensure a seat in the town council. This result can by no means be interpreted as a victory for the Left Socialists since they formerly controlled a mayoral office in Copenhagen.³

The most interesting group at the municipal election was not actually the national parties, but rather the local issue lists. One could with some justification say that they made the greatest loss at this election since their total share of votes declined by about 12 %. Their losses occurred mainly in Jutland and especially in the minor municipalities there.

In these minor municipalities, the local lists together had, with two-thirds of the votes, a clear majority in 1966. In 1970, this fell to 40 %.

Relatively, this decline was largest in the major Jutlandian municipalities where the share of the local lists fell from 1/4 to 1/50. On the islands, the local lists were important only in the minor municipalities, and even in these their decline was considerable since together they received only a little over one-third of the corresponding figure of 14 % for 1966. These figures indicate that local council elections, starting with the municipal election of 1970, have become considerably "party-political".

Unfortunately, we cannot on the basis of the available material concretely specify the local lists that have suffered some losses.

But we can analyse the ecological relation between the variations of the Agrarian Liberal Party and the Conservative People's Party on the one hand and the local lists on the other hand.

In this analysis we shall ignore those municipalities in which the three named lists have not contested the municipal elections.

On the islands, the initial position of the local lists was rather weak and the pattern of variation becomes thus too slender to allow conclusions to be based on it.

We can, however, trace a rudimentary relation between the variation for the Agrarian Liberals and the local lists since the former appear to make advances where the latter suffer severe losses.

In the Jutlandian municipalities the initial position and variation pattern of the local lists are more sizeable than on the islands. There is a slight tendency for the Conservative People's Party to make gains where the local lists have registered severe losses. Where the local lists have suffered minor losses, the Conservatives tend to be stable or on the decline. The relation between the variation pattern for the Agrarian Liberals and the local lists is more conspicuous in the Jutlandian municipalities. The more severe the losses of the local lists are, the greater the gains of the Agrarian Liberals. However, these two tendencies seldom neutralize each other. Where the decline of the local lists is under 10 %, the Agrarian Liberals register some losses on the whole. The correlation emphasizes partly that advances for the Agrarian Liberals should be associated with a decline for the local lists, and partly that it is quite doubtful whether the Agrarian Liberals have made real gains in relation to the earlier municipal election or whether there is in this connection a question of a change in list-denotations.

The County Council Election

The municipal election is hardly the best point of departure if one seeks to come to grips with the national trends lying behind local council elections. On the contrary, county council elections would serve this purpose. This is so because at county council elections the local issues are not so important and hence the local lists play a rather subordinate role. Besides, all the major parties contest all county council elections. We shall therefore compare the county council elections of 1970 with the parliamentary election of 1968. As earlier mentioned, Copenhagen and Frederiksberg do not come under the county municipal arrangement and will thus be considered separately.

At the county council election, the Social Democrats made substantial advances. This party's share of the votes increased from about 34 % to about 42 % which was the peak of its previous achievement at the parliamentary elections of 1960 and 1964. Social Democratic advances appear to be a little larger on the islands than in Jutland.

In contrast the Radical Liberal Party suffered a decline in relation to the preceding parliamentary election for its share of votes fell from 15 % to 10 %. This decline was largest in the county municipality of Copenhagen where its share of votes was almost halved.

The Conservative People's Party made only a slight advance of 1 %; 1968: 20 %, 1970: 21 %. The Agrarian Liberal Party rose correspondingly from about 21 % to about 22 %. The Socialist People's Party registered a marked decline since its share of votes of 6 % at the preceding parliamentary election was halved. The other small parties did not put up candidates in all the county municipalities and for this reason a similar comparison should not be made for them.

Both in Copenhagen and Frederiksberg the Social Democratic Party was the only party that made any advance. In Copenhagen this advance amounted to about 14 %. The greatest loss of 6 % was registered in Copenhagen by the Radical Liberal Party. In Frederiksberg the Radical Liberal Party's decline was as large as the Conservative decline, viz. ca. 8 %. The Socialist People's Party and the Left Socialists registered just about the same percentage decline of 2 %.

We thus note that the general pattern is again evident in these two municipalities.

We now consider, municipality for municipality, the changes in the parties' shares of votes from the last parliamentary election to the county council election. We find that it is only for one of these parties that we can delineate a pattern clear enough to justify some conclusions: the Social Democratic Party has made the strongest gains in the municipalities which were already its strongholds.

This polarization pattern is interesting in itself. For at the parliamentary elections in the sixties this party's variation pattern tended to equalize its shares of votes in the different types of municipalities.

For the other parties, we have simply a spread scatter. There is no clear-cut connection between the variations of these parties and that of the Social Democrats.

Ecological Analysis and Survey Investigations

Hitherto, this review has been based on ecological considerations. We have noted the net swings in the parties' shares of votes in certain types of municipalities. But we did not get any impression of the voter migrations which gave substance to these net swings.

This task is made difficult by the fact that the polls at the county council election were nearly 20 % lower than the polls at the last parliamentary election. The outcome of the county council election does not necessarily have to be the result of migrations between parties but could have been caused by migration from parties to the groups of abstainers. In this connection, there is no reason to think of the abstainers who on various grounds have been prevented from voting, or those who seldom turn out, as the group which traditionally turns out at parliamentary elections but seldom votes at local council elections. But there might be a very central group of abstainers who, being dissatisfied with a party over a national issue, have failed to vote at the local council elections because they felt that they lacked alternatives.

In order to be able to concretize migrations between parties, we must have data on individuals. The situation would have been ideal from a purely research point of view if there was no secrecy surrounding balloting, thus allowing for individual changes to be registered.

An alternative is panel studies, where individual developments in a country-wide sample are followed up over time. But we have no such studies from which we can see how people have migrated since the last parliamentary election. Another solution to this problem is an interview investigation where one inquires into people's current and previous attitudes and actions. Here, the problem of fluctuations in memory comes into the picture. Besides, there is the problem of getting people to admit that they abstained from voting.

The only available material that can throw some light on the voter-migration problem is the local society investigation which the Sociological Department of the Institute of Political Science, University of Aarhus, undertook on behalf of the Danish Television Services, on the night of the county council election day.

The Odder Study

When the Danish TV asked the Sociological Department to undertake an investigation which could give some impression of the extent of voter-migration at the election, a very important restriction was attached: the results should be available on the night of the ballot day itself. This restriction excluded a country-wide interview investigation since, for technical reasons, national data could not be collected and coded in one day.

However, valuable experience had been acquired during the referendum on the 18 years voting age. Events showed that it was technically possible to produce some results within a fairly short time and it appeared that the local trends almost mirrored the national trends. A local investigation cannot, of course, have the same degree of precision and validity as a country-wide study. It is impossible to find an area which, with respect to all possible characteristics, is composed as the total population. One has to choose an area on the basis of a few characteristics considered to be central to the study. Where the election one wishes to describe is characterized by major local variations, a local investigation has hardly any use.

On the basis of political, economic, and demographic characteristics, Odder, a municipality of Eastern Jutland, was chosen as the area for study. Odder municipality deviated somehow from the total electorate in respect of these characteristics. In terms of politics, for example, there were relatively few votes for the Socialist People's Party, the Left Socialists, and the Communist Party, whilst the Social Democrats and the Justice Party (Single-taxers) received relatively many votes. The municipality has relatively few inhabi-

tants in industries connected with agriculture. Finally, a relatively large number of the inhabitants were over 65 years of age. All these go to emphasize that one should *not* expect in Odder municipality a tendency which both in direction and strength corresponds to the country-wide tendencies. Therefore one ought to ask about the direction of the variations instead of asking about the relative strength of the parties in the area.

The Plan of the Investigation and its Execution

When the voters of the old Odder municipality had voted at the municipal and county council election, they received questionnaires in a locality nearby. These questionnaires contained questions about their age, the parties they voted for at the municipal and county council election, the parties they voted for at the last parliamentary election as well as about the parties they would have voted for if the local council election were a parliamentary election. Finally the questionnaire contained questions on a number of country-wide issues. The questionnaires were filled out in special polling booths and those completed were put into special ballot boxes. The answers were coded and later transferred to punchcards. Tables were set up on the basis of the punchcards. Simple calculations were made *in situ* and the ensuing results were sent to the Danish Television Services in Copenhagen.

The first point that should be noted is that only the voters who had been through the official polling booths could participate in this investigation. The population that was investigated was therefore clearly defined with respect to their voting activity. It is, however, difficult to analyse the group of abstainers on this basis.

Another important feature of the investigation plan was that it rested on questionnaires which as a rule were filled in by the respondents themselves. Only those who suffered from poor sight were directly interviewed. Since the question about the last parliamentary election was retrospective, one cannot exclude the possibility of error even though the action that was asked about was probably important to the respondents. The question of which party one would have voted for if it had been a parliamentary election is hypothetical, and one should view the answers with some circumspection, even though the respondents can be said to have just been in a similar situation and perhaps had put such a question to themselves.

Eighty-six per cent of those who participated at the local council elections in the old Odder municipality answered one or more of the questions in the questionnaire. This is not an unsatisfactory percentage rate of response.

A high rate of response does not guarantee the correctness of the results. For, if the 14 % who would not participate in this study deviated in important characteristics from the participants, the material would have an important element of error.

Since those who refused to participate were on the whole elderly people, there is good reason to reconsider the representativeness of the material.

However, there was a good fit between the results of the study in Odder and the official election results in Odder. The average deviation was less than 1 % for the municipal election and $\frac{1}{4}$ % for the county council election.

We cannot rule out that those who did not participate in the investigation did not deviate in other political characteristics from the respondents.

There is hardly any reason for attaching any importance to the analysis of the municipal election results in this community. Since the local component was rather pronounced, the results would probably deviate considerably from the national average. Only the Social Democrats, the Radical Liberal Party, the Agrarian Liberal Party, the Conservatives, and the Justice Party contested the municipal election in Odder.

However, it must be mentioned that we can trace a clear connection in the material between the party voted for at the municipal election and the party preferred at the county council election. This connection was very clear with respect to the Social

Democratic Party. The material also indicates that those who voted for parties to the left of the Social Democrats at the county council election preferred, on the whole, the Social Democrats at the municipal election.

Voter Migrations in Odder

The Odder study shows that it is quite appropriate to attach a national significance to the county council elections. 88 % of the respondents stated that they had voted for the same party at the county council election as they would have voted for if it had been a parliamentary election. However, there is some indication that this result should be accepted with some reservations, for over 40 % of those who would have voted for the Socialist People's Party if it had been a parliamentary election voted for the Social Democrats at the county council election.

The tendency which clearly characterized the county council elections was the Social Democratic Party's advance. The material from the Odder study shows this also. Here, in relation to the 1968 Parliamentary elections, the Social Democrats registered a 5 % advance at the hypothetical parliamentary election. The three coalition parties yielded 1 % to the Social Democrats and the other 4 % came from a diminution of the share of the parties left of the Social Democrats. Behind this net swing there are, however, greater voter-migrations since even the Social Democrats lost votes to the other parties.

Twelve per cent of the respondents appear to have changed party affiliation since the parliamentary election of 1968.

Voter migration was large, especially between the Radical Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party. For every five voters who went over to the Social Democrats, one went the opposite way. 30 % of the "new" Social Democrats came from the ranks of the Radical Liberals and this corresponds approximately to $\frac{1}{5}$ of those who voted for the Radical Liberals at the 1968 parliamentary election in the study.

The migration between the Social Democrats and the Conservatives is also considerable. The migration ratio was 4:1 in favour of the Social Democrats. The voters who formerly voted Conservative made up $\frac{1}{5}$ of the "new" Social Democrats. This corresponds to approximately $\frac{1}{20}$ of those who voted for the Conservative Party in 1968 in the study.

The migration between the parties at the extreme left and the Social Democrats meant far more to the former than to the latter. This made up $\frac{1}{10}$ of the new Social Democrats, a fraction which corresponds to $\frac{1}{4}$ of those who voted for these parties in 1968. Two-fifths of those who voted for the first time chose the Social Democrats. This new entry to the ranks of the Social Democrats was, however, less significant than the migration from the Radical Liberals and the Conservatives.

An interesting feature of the new Social Democrats is their age. While the fraction of the respondents below 30 years of age who would have voted for the Social Democrats at the hypothetical election in 1970 was 22 %, a corresponding fraction among the new Social Democrats is 46 %.

Less than $\frac{1}{4}$ of the new Social Democrats were over 50 years of age while the corresponding fraction for all the Social Democrats in the study was about $\frac{2}{5}$.⁴ In other words the average age of those who vote Social Democrat has become lower since the last parliamentary election. Whereas the fraction of the respondents who voted for the Radical Liberals in the last parliamentary election was characterized by a low average age, the study shows that the average age of this party's supporters is now slightly higher, although still below the average age for all the respondents. The migrations do not appear to have altered the age composition of the other parties. The Conservatives are still characterized by many supporters of middle age, the Agrarian Liberals by a high average age, and the Socialist People's Party by a low average age.

We have already raised the problem of whether one could ascribe the Social Democratic advances to migrations or to a higher voting turnout of this party's supporters. A direct

analysis of this question is not possible because the Odder study only embraced those who actually voted at the local council elections. However, the study gives some basis for an estimate.

The problem arises where some of the electorate abstained from voting at the county council elections although they participated at the last parliamentary election.

An estimate of the voting turnout can be made by relating the number of the respondents who stated that they voted for a certain party in 1968 to the number of votes this party actually received in this municipality. We are well aware that this estimate has a number of drawbacks. In the first place there has been some migration to and from the municipality since the last parliamentary election. Secondly, a number of those who voted at the last parliamentary election have died. Thirdly, the denominator is reduced since a number of those who voted at the local council elections refused to take part in the study. And finally, some of the respondents could possibly have made some errors in the information they gave about their party affiliations in 1968.

The conclusion we draw is that if we relate the number of votes each party received for 1968 in this study to the number of votes actually registered for it in 1968, the Social Democrats appear to have had a larger poll than the Agrarian Liberals and the Radical Liberals, but a little less than the Conservatives. The Socialist People's Party appear to have had the lowest poll among all the major parties.

In the same way we can calculate an average poll for all the parties. By putting this average poll in relation to the Social Democratic poll, it is possible to calculate how many votes the higher Social Democratic poll means for this party. This calculation shows that of the 5 % gains made by the Social Democrats, only a little under 2 % can be explained by the higher Social Democratic poll. There is nothing in the Odder material which indicates that the Conservative decline derives from a lower poll. These conclusions are, however, tentative.

The Local Council Election as a Pre-Parliamentary Election

If we use the results of the county council elections as a basis for forecasting the results of the coming parliamentary election, we should expect a Social Democratic advance and some decline for the government parties. Further support for this forecasted result is given by the Odder study as well as by the opinion polls made by Gallup and Observa. It must be admitted however that it is unrealistic to base forecasts about the outcome of the next parliamentary election on a material gathered in a situation where the persons and issues of the coming election are not specified. Although a county council election is the nearest one could get to a parliamentary election, the issues and persons involved in the former are not quite the same as in the latter. Again, the intensity of electoral campaigns cannot be compared in these two situations.

A good deal of the electorate appears to be stable. But the voters who make their decisions at the eleventh hour have a great political significance, since only small changes in the voter preferences are needed to make a substantial recomposition of the political situation.

Opinion polls and local council elections may indicate the same tendencies, but a parliamentary election might still contain some elements of surprise.

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NOTES

¹ Here meaning rural and town municipal.

² The Left Socialists.

³ Elected 1966 on Socialist People's Party list.

⁴ The new Social Democrats include those who in April 1970 voted for the first time. When these are excluded from the computations, 39 % of the new Social Democrats were under 30 years of age, while 25 % were over 50 years old.