

## Some Results from the Danish 1987 Election

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In Denmark, the bourgeois four-party government led by the conservative Poul Schlüter was formed in September 1982. The change of government took place without an election. The Social Democratic government under Anker Jørgensen had found itself unable to carry on, depending as it was on support from two parties, the Socialist People's and the Radical Liberal party, who disagreed on almost every point concerning economic policies.

Soon after the accession of the bourgeois government, a marked improvement in the international business cycle set in. The four parties in government, moreover, proved capable of working as a team; and, in December 1983, when its budget had been voted down by both the socialist opposition and the anti-tax Progressive party, the government campaigned successfully to increase the combined vote for the four parties from 36.4 to 42.8 percent in the election on January 10, 1984.

Since then, Schlüter's government had commanded a slim majority in the *Folketing* with the aid of the Radical Liberal group. It is true that its majority worked mostly for the government's economic policy and not for a number of other policy areas such as foreign policy, environmental policy, civil rights policy and part of the social policy. However, the government refused to be unseated so long as a majority existed for its central economic policy.

This arrangement brought about relative parliamentary stability compared with the preceding years. Since 1971 it had become customary to announce an election at one or two yearly intervals. The present government, according to Prime Minister Schlüter, would sit through its four years, and, if re-elected, would continue for another four-year term. This meant that the next election could be expected some time during the autumn of 1987, and that the main issue would be whether the government and its supporting Radical Liberal party would be able to keep their majority.

An opportunity to announce the election came early in the autumn when the *Folketing* was assembled in mid-August in order to deal with a strike among computer personnel. No doubt Mr Schlüter hoped to surprise the

Social Democratic opposition, whose election machinery was not timed for a September election. In any event, the election was called for September 8, just within the three-week term required for a Danish election campaign.

This article reports on some preliminary results from this election, based on a telephone survey of 1,022 respondents conducted during the first two weeks after the election.

## The Election Result

Table 1 shows the official election result compared with the January 1984 election. Sixteen parties ran candidates, and nine succeeded in crossing the

Table 1. Results of the Danish Parliamentary Elections in September 1987 and in January 1984.

Party	1987 Election		1984 Election	
	Votes %	Seats	Votes (%)	Seats
Conservative	20.8	38	23.4	42
Agrarian Liberal	10.5	19	12.1	22
Center Democrats	4.8	9	4.6	8
Christian People's	2.4	4	2.7	5
Total, government	38.5	70	42.8	77
Social Democratic	29.3	54	31.6	56
Socialist People's	14.6	27	11.5	21
Left Socialist	1.4		2.7	5
Communist	0.9		0.7	
International Socialist	0.0		0.1	
Marxist-Leninist	0.0		0.0	
Total, socialists	46.2	81	46.5	82
Radical Liberal	6.2	11	5.5	10
Progressive	4.8	9	3.6	6
Common Course	2.2	4		
Single-Tax	0.5		1.5	
Greens	1.3			
Humanist	0.2			
Individual candidates	0.1		0.1	
Total, other	15.3	24	10.7	16
Total, Denmark proper <sup>1</sup>	100.0	175	100.0	175
Voting turnout	86.7		88.4	

<sup>1</sup> In addition, the Faroe Islands and Greenland each elect two members.

thresholds of representation, the most important of which is 2 percent of the vote. The nine parties in the new *Folketing* are the same as in the old, except that the Left Socialist party has been replaced by the Common Course party, a new party led by the former Communist leader of the seaman's trade union, Mr Preben Møller Hansen.

The most important aspect of the election result was the loss of 7 government seats, which meant that the government's working parliamentary majority was lost. Under pressure from the Radical Liberal leader Mr Helveg Petersen, Prime Minister Schlüter resigned temporarily in order to allow for negotiations for a new government. Mr Anker Jørgensen made an attempt to revive his 1982 coalition, and when this failed, he resigned as leader of the Social Democratic party. Already two days after the election, Mr Schlüter could resume his four-party coalition, although with the important change that the Radical Liberal group could now consider itself released from its supporting role.

In the new *Folketing* the situation with regard to who supports and who opposes the government is far from clear. Support may be received alternately from the Social Democrats, the Radical Liberals, and the Progressives; and conversely, a coalition composed of Social Democrats, Radical Liberals, and Socialist People's party members could force their policy upon the government. Clearly this is an unstable situation which could release a new election at any time.

The defeat of the government did not mean a victory for the opposition. As Table 1 shows, some internal shifting took place within the socialist bloc, the effect being to strengthen the Socialist People's party at the expense of both the Social Democrats and the Left Socialists. But in combination the three parties went back slightly, losing one seat. The victory went instead to the Progressive and the Common Course parties -- a fact which caused observers to speak of a new populism, since these two parties had campaigned for simple and direct solutions to the economic problems, for immediate improvement in old age pensions and health care capacity, and against the 'flow' of refugees and immigrants from southern countries.

Judging from the aggregate election result, however, the 1987 election does not appear to have been the sort of election in which strong short-term forces throw the voters far away from their normal partisan inclinations. The voting turnout was lower than in 1984, and in some important respects the new election redressed the deviations of the former election.

For example, during the period 1973-81 the bloc of four parties which constitute Mr Schlüter's government received 36 percent of the vote, as an average of five parliamentary elections. Against this background it is their success in the 1984 election that stands out, not the setback between 1984 and 1987.

Likewise, the success of the Progressive party in the latest election should be seen against the background of a particularly poor performance in 1984. For the entire period 1973–81, the Progressive party averaged no less than 13 percent of the vote, but by 1981 its strength had declined to 9 percent. In this light, the 4.8 percent which the party acquired in the latest election may perhaps best be described as a partial recovery from a severe crisis.

And perhaps most significantly of all, the total socialist vote of 46.2 percent (cf. Table 1) almost exactly equals the average vote for these parties over the past fifty years. In this respect both the 1984 and 1987 elections are normal. The fact that the government has changed from being a predominantly Social Democratic minority government during the 1970s to being a predominantly Conservative coalition government during the 1980s should therefore be seen as a consequence not of basically changed preferences among the voters, but of changes in the coalition pattern in parliament.

## The Continued Generation Gap

A threat to this long-range balance of partisan preferences might come from the generation gap in Danish voting behaviour. The rule of thumb, which applied for some twenty years, is that one third of each new cohort of electors vote to the left of the Social Democratic party. This rule worked even in the years when one bourgeois party was swelling, such as the Progressive party in 1973 or the Conservative party in 1984. Thus, in the long run the leftism of young voters has proved damaging especially to the Social Democratic party, whose support seems gradually to be undermined rather steadily from the left. To a much lesser extent the balance between the combined socialist vote and the combined bourgeois vote has been affected by the replacement of older cohorts by young cohorts of electors.

As Table 2 indicates, the 1987 election did not change this trend. The cohorts born during the 1960s, all of whom are now eligible, gave only 18 percent of their votes to the Social Democratic party, as against twice as many to the left-wing parties. The government parties and the Radical Liberals together received slightly more votes in the young cohorts than in the 1945–59 cohorts, but their main support comes from the older generations. The Progress party and the Common Course party together derive their support evenly among the cohorts, which is interesting since during the campaign these two parties appealed specifically to the aged, political observers consequently tending to believe that the main support for these parties came from the older generations.

It should be noted that in addition to losing the young voters, the Social Democratic party also lost many voters by direct vote shifting to the Socialist

Table 2. Party Choice (%) of Different Voter Cohorts.

Party Choice	Birth Years			
	1900-29	1930-44	1945-59	1960-69
Social Democratic	39	28	27	18
Left-wing parties	10	13	29	35
Total, socialist	49	41	56	53
Government party or Radical Liberal	47	52	35	40
Progress or Common Course	4	4	5	4
Green or Single-Tax	0	3	4	3
Total	100	100	100	100
No. (=100%)	(201)	(206)	(311)	(153)

People's party. Indeed, if we can rely on the vote recalls of the sample, the traffic between these two parties for the 1984-87 period was heavier than between any other pair of parties; and it tended strongly to be one-way traffic. It remains to be seen whether the generational change in Social Democratic leadership, which had put Mr Svend Auken in charge, will lead to a reversal of this trend.

## Class Differences

Another trend of some twenty years' duration is the reduction of class differences in the party choice. The magnitude and significance of the 'decline in class voting' depends on how the classes are defined, and especially on the distinction between various types of middle-class occupations. Table 3 makes a distinction between self-employed (including farmers), private white-collar salariat and public white-collar salariat.

Whereas the Social Democratic vote rises steadily across the Table from 7 to 38 percent, the left-wing vote culminates in the public salariat, one third of which votes left of the Social Democrats. As a result, the combined socialist vote is almost as high in the public salariat, as among the blue collar workers. Thus, the decline in the working class that goes with the coming of the service society has not led to any long-range decline in the socialist vote, and neither has the defection of working-class voters to various bourgeois parties or protest parties. Compensation has come in the form of socialist voting in the rapidly expanding public service class.

The government (and supporting Radical Liberal) vote, conversely, is predominantly found among the self-employed and the private salariat.

Table 3. Social Class Differences in the Party Choice (%).

Party Choice	Respondent's Social Class			
	Self-employed	Private Salaried	Public Salaried	Workers
Social Democratic	7	17	24	38
Left-wing parties	5	15	34	24
Total, socialist	12	32	58	62
Government party or Radical Liberal	79	61	35	30
Progress or Common Course	6	3	3	6
Green or Single-Tax	3	4	4	2
Total	100	100	100	100
No. (=100%)	(82)	(150)	(176)	(268)

Respondents without occupation were classified according to the occupation of their spouses. Respondents who were retired were omitted if their spouses did not have an occupation.

Nonetheless, around one third of the workers and the public salariat voted for the government, and the socialists' hold over the workers is further weakened by the 6 percent going to the Progress party or the Common Course party.

From Table 3 one gets the impression that a new type of class conflict has emerged, namely a conflict between the respective personnel of the private and the public sector, to compete with the older conflict between manual and non-manual occupations.

## Issues in the Election

Though a preliminary analysis gives little indication of what issues determined the 1987 election, it is of course important to study how the electorate reacted to the campaign. Like most Danish election campaigns, the 1987 campaign was dominated by the economic issues. A great deal of the debate between the major parties took the character of an assessment of the government's performance with regard to avoiding a trade deficit, finding job opportunities, and balancing the public budget. Table 4 indicates that one half of the voters mentioned the central economic issues as the most important political problem.

Among the other issues, the environmental problems are the only ones to occupy a place comparable with that of the economic problems. Social

Table 4. Percent of Respondents Mentioning Various Issues as the Most Important Political Problem.

Issue	Mentioned First	Mentioned First, Second, or Third
Balance of payments	27	36
Environment	14	25
Unemployment (including youth unemployment)	13	27
Economy in general	11	17
Social problems (incl. poverty)	4	13
Immigrants, refugees	3	6
Old age pensions	2	6
Peace and security	1	4
Other	15	—
Don't know	10	—
Total	100	—

issues, which had been promoted by the Social Democrats and the left-wing parties, were mostly mentioned in second or third place. Immigration and the flow of refugees may have swayed a small but critical number of voters, and we shall deal with these issues later. Finally, old age pensions and foreign policy issues were dealt with by several parties, and received scant attention among the voters.

## Economic Performance

The main question which voters had to deal with was whether the economy had improved or deteriorated, and to what extent the government could be held responsible for that development. It is not surprising that the stands taken by voters on this issue were strongly related to their party choice. This result may be read as an example of the high capacity for selective perception among voters, thereby giving no inducement for partisan change. However, as Table 5 shows, it is also true that a majority of the voters considered that the economy had been deteriorating. Thereby the perceptions of the electorate may well have been biased against the government, giving rise to a partial explanation why the government lost the election.

In Table 5 the parties are arranged in four blocs. Since the Radical Liberals were seen as allies of the government they have been included in the government bloc. Among the socialist parties it is natural to distinguish the Social Democratic party as the leading party and the alternative candidate for government. This leaves the Progressive party, the Common

Table 5. Party Choice (%) and Evaluations of the Country's Economic Development.

Party Choice	Economic Situation Compared with 2 or 3 Years Ago		
	Better	Same	Worse
Social Democratic Left-wing parties	13 6	24 21	42 32
Total, socialist	19	45	74
Government party or Radical Liberal Other non-socialist	73 8	46 9	21 5
Total	100	100	100
No. (=100%)	(220)	(282)	(342)

The question was, 'How is the economic situation of the whole country? Do you think that during the past two or three years the country's economic situation has become better or worse, or is it the same?'

Course party, the Single-Tax party and the Green party as a fourth group, and in subsequent tables it will be expedient to subdivide this group further.

As indicated in Table 5, the government parties and the Radical Liberal party between them received almost three quarters of the votes of those respondents who thought that the economy had improved, whereas the Social Democratic parties and the left-wing parties between them received an equally large share of those who thought the economy had gone the wrong way. The latter, however, outnumber the former by a ratio of more than three to two.

## Environmental Issues

As Table 4 shows, environmental issues were among the major concerns in the election campaign. Yet, they may have had little effect on the vote. In the propaganda films shown on television, most parties expressed environmental concerns, and these were often accompanied by pictures of attractive landscapes. With the possible exception of the Progressive party, all parties were more or less 'green', so it is hardly surprising that the message of the Green party itself drowned in this mood of general benevolence.

Below, the relation between party choice and the respondent's stand on two items from the questionnaire is examined. One item deals with the



choice between the political values of economic growth and environmental protection. The other deals more specifically with nitrogen pollution of the seas and drinking water, a problem which had all of a sudden cast the Danish farmers in a new light: as a craving minority insisting on piling up butter and grain in huge surplus inventories, and at the same time spoiling the quality of life of other citizens.

First it should be noted that those in favour of environmental protection are characterized by a 'No' response to the first item and a 'Yes' to the second. From the last line it can be seen that they outnumber their adversaries by a ratio of more than 3:1 on the first item and more than 5:1 on the second.

Secondly, from Table 6 it can be seen that in the majority groups of environmentalists there is a socialist vote of 56–57 percent, composed of slightly more Social Democratic than left-wing voters; 35–37 percent of the groups vote for the government or the Radical Liberal party. Thus, even though all of the Green party's voters are to be found in these groups, they account for only a small fraction of them. To the extent that environmentalism is a concern for the voters of a party, it generally appears to be satisfied within the party itself.

In the minority groups the vote goes overwhelmingly to the government parties. Where the farmers come under attack, those rallying to defend them are government voters, and in particular the Agrarian Liberal voters.

Table 6. Party Choice (%) and Stand on Environmental Issues.

Party Choice	Economic Growth Even at the Cost of Pollution		Stop Farmers' Pollution of Water	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Social Democratic	24	29	32	14
Left-wing parties	9	27	25	5
Total, socialist	33	56	57	19
Government party or Radical Liberal	60	37	35	75
Progress or Common Course	7	3	5	5
Green or Single-Tax	0	4	3	1
Total	100	100	100	100
No. (=100%)	(198)	(613)	(700)	(135)

The two items were, 'The economic growth must be ensured through industrial expansion, even though this will be in conflict with environmental interests', and 'We must immediately stop the farmers' pollution of the seas and drinking water'.

## Immigrants and Refugees

As Table 4 shows, only 3 percent of the voters considered the issue of immigrants and refugees to be the most important problem, and another 3 per cent ranked it second or third. During 1985 and 1986, the immigrants and refugees issue may well have ranked higher, as the newspapers were almost daily occupied with the problems of controlling the flow of refugees from the Middle East and the problems of integrating immigrants into Danish society. Throughout 1987 a stricter law and administrative practice has reduced the flow of refugees to an average of a few score per week, and it has been pointed out continually that the number of foreign-born amounts to less than 2 percent of the total Danish population. Nonetheless, the election campaigns of the Progress party and the Common Course party contained many references to this issue, and it was generally believed that support for these two parties came from those quarters of the population in which the fear of immigrants from countries with exotic ways of life was prominent.

In the questionnaire, one item measured attitude toward immigration while another dealt with the relation between refugees and 'the Danish culture and way of living'. Table 7 shows the relations between party choice

Table 7. Party Choice (%) and Attitude toward Immigrants and Refugees.

Party Choice	Immigrants Threat to National Identity		Refugees Must Conform to Our Way of Living	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Social Democratic	32	25	33	20
Left-wing parties	13	31	13	37
Total, socialist	45	56	46	57
Government party or Radical Liberal	46	39	46	38
Progress or Common Course	8	1	7	1
Green or Single-Tax	1	4	1	4
Total	100	100	100	100
No. (= 100%)	(395)	(428)	(471)	(304)

The first item asked the respondent to agree or disagree with the statement, 'Immigration constitutes a serious threat to our national identity.' The second item asked the respondent to agree either with the statement, 'If refugees are to live in this country they must conform to Danish culture and way of living', or with the statement, 'Refugees should have the same right as other people to keep their own culture and way of living'. The last column shows the party choice of those who agreed with the latter alternative.

and the responses to these two items. The table indicates that whether one is speaking of immigrants or refugees, attitude relates to party choice in almost the same fashion. Those who felt that immigrants constituted a threat to the Danish national identity or that the refugees should conform to Danish culture and ways of living voted disproportionately for the Progress party or the Common Course party, whereas those who did not share these feelings tended to prefer one of the left-wing parties or one of the two small parties, the Green and the Single-Tax party, neither of which acquired representation. Both the Social Democratic party and the government parties as a whole received more support in the former group than in the latter, which suggests that they might have suffered a bigger loss if they had expressed a more liberal stand on this issue.

## Conclusions

On the surface, the Danish 1987 election was a relatively quiet affair so far as the voters were concerned. The net gains and losses of the parties add up to around 9 percent of the votes cast (cf. Table 1). Furthermore, much of this change appears to have been due to the deviating nature of the foregoing election.

Tables 2–7 suggest, however, that below the surface the 1987 election fortified some cleavages that have been at work in the Danish electorate for a number of years. These cleavages separate socially defined groups as well as issue publics from one another, strongly limiting the freedom of parties to build lasting majority coalitions. Voters have put their representatives in a difficult situation; one representative remarked on election night that ‘the distrust of the electorate rose markedly among the politicians as the results were coming in’. Certainly, sensible party leadership is needed if the course of Danish politics is not to become too erratic in the future.