



# DANISH PARTY MEMBERSHIP

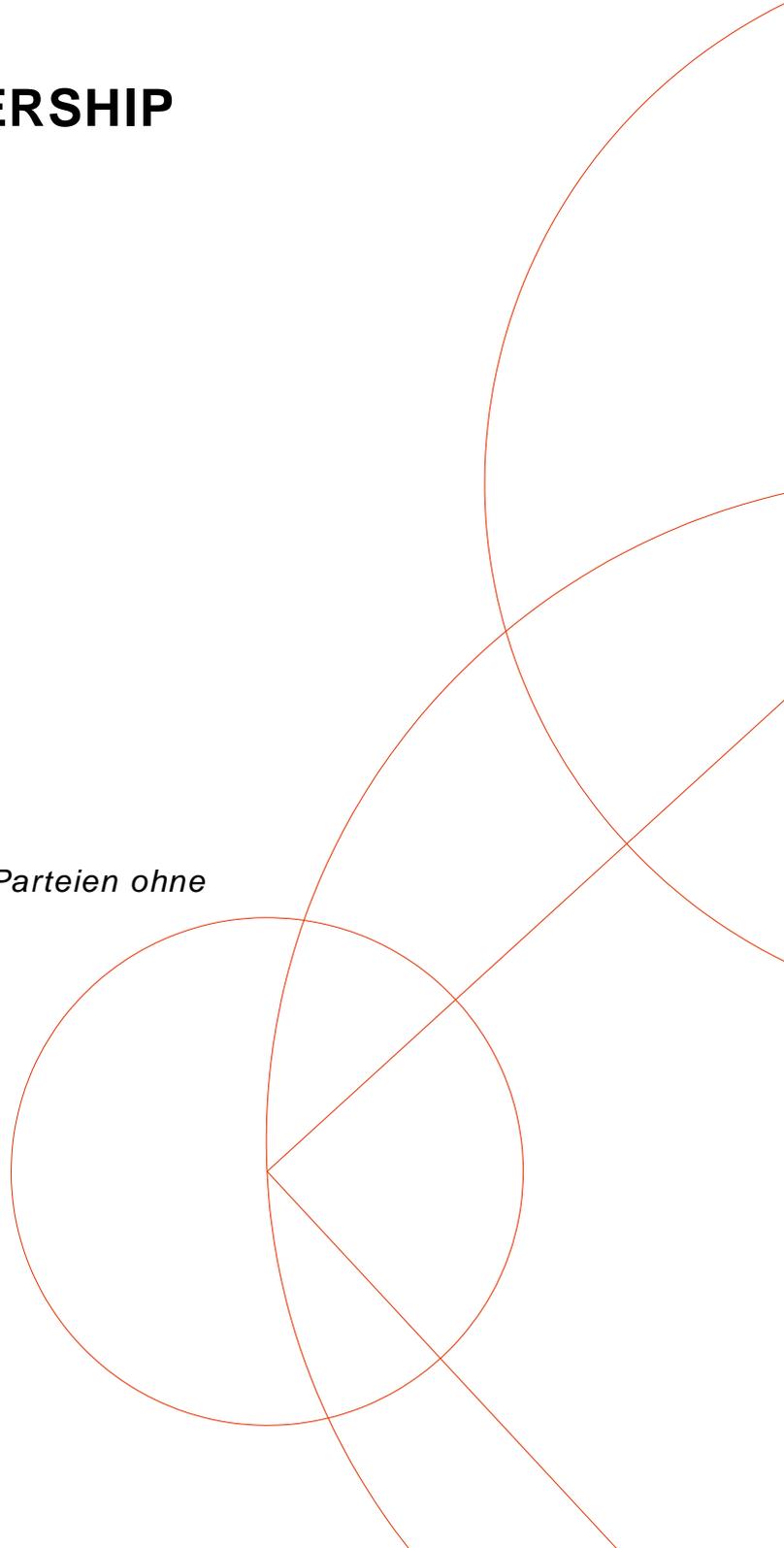
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# Danish Party Membership

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**Abstract** Political parties have as their main assignment the creation of linkage between citizens and government. They provide one of several channels of participation in modern democracies. Yet, the general trend across the Western world is that party membership figures decline. The purpose of this article is to report on the state of Danish party membership; the numbers and participation. The claim of the article is that total membership figures hide evidence of membership renewal and increases, and that mere party membership figures are insufficient when evaluating political parties as channels of participation. Instead, membership figures at party level as well as the participation of party members need to be taken into account in order to assess parties as channels of participation. This is supported by the analyses reported here which show that even though membership figures are declining, parties still attract new members, that party membership figures are not declining in all parties, and that party members vary in their participation in a wide variety of party activities, such as traditional campaigning activities, political discussions and financial contributions. Hence, this article contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of parties as channels of participation. These results allow for an elaboration on the consequences for and future role of political parties within modern democracies.

**Keywords** Parties; party membership, Denmark; participation; funding; campaigning; recruiting; democracy

## 1. Parties as channels of participation

Party membership is in decline across Europe (Katz & Mair et al. 1992; Scarrow 2000; Mair & van Biezen 2001; van Biezen et al. 2009). The share of the electorate enrolled in European parties around 2008 is on average less than five percent, varying from less than one percent in Poland and Latvia to a little more than 17 percent in Austria (van Biezen et al. 2009). Whether the low party membership numbers prove to be a problem for parties as channels of participation depends not solely on the sheer numbers but also on the manner with which party members contribute to party life. Party membership has ‘a polymorphic nature’ (Heidar 1994) and is therefore expected to vary in terms of its contribution to parties as channels of participation. This variation needs to be assessed in order to comprehensively understand how parties perform in a participatory democratic perspective. Several studies have dealt with party member participation (for example, Bille & Elklit 2003; Cross & Young 2004; Gallagher & Marsh 2002, 2004; Hansen 2002; Hansen & Heidar 2005; Heidar & Saglie 2002, 2003; Pedersen 2003; Pedersen et al. 2004; Seyd & Whiteley 1992, 2002;

Whiteley et al. 1994). However, the purpose of this article is, on the basis of the Danish case, to show how total membership figures are insufficient when assessing parties as channels of participation as party membership figures and participation varies among parties.

The Danish case is presented in section *two*. The membership figures are analysed in section *three*, while the analyses of the participation of Danish party members are found in section *four*. Section *five* contains the concluding remarks.

## 2. The Danish case and data

Denmark is a suitable case when exploring the parties as channels of participation in the light of declines in party membership figures. In an international comparison the Danish member/electorate ratio was high in 1960 at above 20 pct., but it has experienced a drastic decline reaching 5 pct. in 2000. This drastic decline makes it particularly interesting to analyse party member participation in the Danish case. Furthermore, Danish parties have traditionally played an important role in parliamentary democracy, they have practically had a monopoly on getting candidates elected for parliament and they have had strong links to society. Danish parties are thus important political actors in representative democracy as it is practised in Denmark.

The comparative analysis includes nine parties. Parties included in the analyses are those represented in the Danish parliament, *Folketinget*, in the spring of 2000. The inclusion of such a broad spectrum of parties allows for a broad understanding of the phenomenon of party membership. The nine parties are, in order of left-right placement by their own members: The Red-Green Alliance (RGA), Socialist People's Party (SPP), Social Democratic Party (SDP), Social Liberal Party (SLP), Centre Democrats (CD), Christian People's Party (ChPP), Liberal Party (LP), Conservative People's Party (CPP) and Danish People's Party (DPP).

In the task at hand, party members are defined as formally enrolled, dues-paying individuals. The formal definition is the way in which Danish parties themselves define their members through their membership criteria. The analysis is based on data from the parties and a survey of Danish party members conducted in 2000-01.<sup>1</sup> The survey was comprehensive. The sample comprised a random sample from the parties' membership files (1,000 members from each of the three largest parties and 800 members from each of the six smaller parties). The overall response rate was 68 pct. Though the membership survey is dated, it is not completely outdated. Even if party member

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<sup>1</sup> The survey was financed by 'Magtudredningen', University of Aarhus and University of Copenhagen, and conducted by Lars Bille (University of Copenhagen), Roger Buch (University of Southern Denmark), Jørgen Elklit (University of Aarhus), Bernhard Hansen (University of Aarhus), Hans Jørgen Nielsen (University of Copenhagen), and Karina Pedersen (University of Copenhagen).

participation within parties has changed dramatically, the overall differences among members and parties are expected to be the same. One exception is the Danish People's Party which was rather new in 2000 whereby an increase in the levels would be expected.

### **3. Danish party membership – the figures**

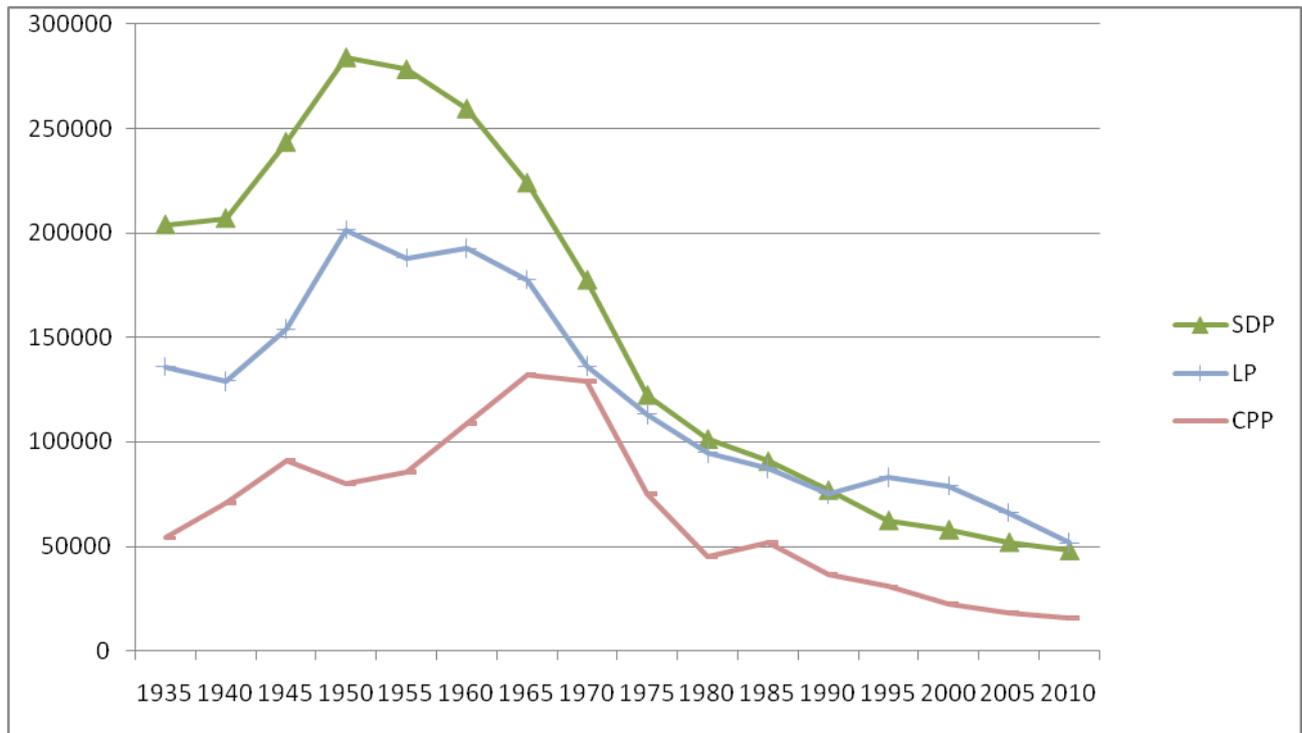
Party members provide legitimacy, as they not only serve as a reflection of the parties' appeal to society (Katz 1990: 152; Scarrow 1996: 42); they also enable parties to sustain a semblance of the image of a mass party (Mair 1997: 148). Tendencies in the number of members also matter, as increasing numbers may be taken as a signal of progress, vitality, or increasing electoral support (Scarrow 1996: 176).

Denmark is one of the few countries that prior to the Second World War had well-established, democratic, membership-based parties on both sides of the left-right ideological spectrum (Scarrow 2000: 93). Prior to the Second World War, the Social Democratic Party had almost 200,000 members and organised thereby more than a quarter of their electorate (Meyer 1965: 79). The Liberal Party had around 130,000 members, the Conservatives around 70,000 and the Social Liberals 30,000 (Thomsen 1992: 378).

Membership-based party organisations flourished in Denmark, as well as in the rest of Western Europe, in the decades following the Second World War. Looking, first, at the three largest parties in the Danish party system (Figure 1), the Social Democrats and Liberals peaked immediately after the war with membership figures of around 286,000 and 200,000 in 1950, whereas the Conservatives in 1967 with 143,000 members (Bille 1997: 256-8; Thomsen 1992: 378). The general trend is downwards. However, there are exceptions, namely the Conservatives in the 1960s and beginning of the 1980s, and the Liberals in the beginning of the 1990s.

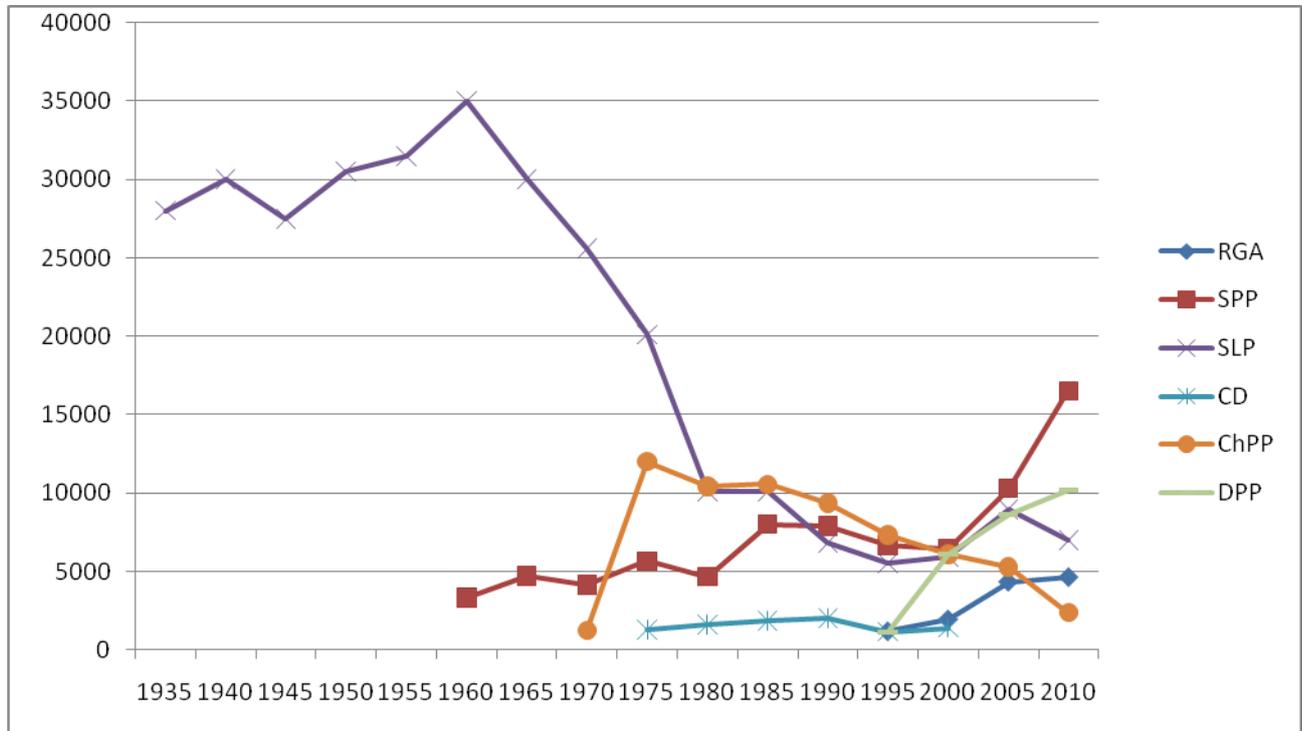
Turning to the smaller parties, figure 2 shows, first, that one of the old parties, the Social Liberals, has never reached the levels of the three abovementioned parties. The Social Liberals peaked in 1960 with 35,000 members, and have experienced a steady decline from then on till the turn of the century after which the party has gained ground. The remaining parties in figure 2 are all newer parties. A comparison of the scales of figure 1 and 2 shows that the newer parties have not been able to establish membership organisations that even remotely resemble the membership organizations of the Social Democrats and Liberals. However, some of them have overtaken the Social Liberals and are closing in on the Conservatives. But, overall, the newer parties have not compensated for the decline in the number of members among the older parties.

Figure 1. Membership figures 1935-2010, the three largest Danish parties.



However, more importantly figure 2 shows that membership figures are not only about decline. The Centre Democrats ceased to exist following their exit from parliament in 2001. The Christian People's Party was very successful as a membership organization in its first ten years; however, since 1980 it has experienced a slow but steady decline in their membership figure. Even though not represented in parliament since 2005, it is still in existence with a membership of more than 2000. After years of decline, the Social Liberals almost doubled their membership 1995-2005; however, a reversal has hit the party. The remaining three younger parties are experiencing substantial increases in their membership figures after the turn of the century (and after the change of government in 2001): The Danish People's Party almost doubled their membership, the Red-Green Alliance more than doubled its membership, and the Socialist People's Party has three times as many members now compared to 2000.

Figure 2. Membership figures 1935-2010, the six smallest Danish parties.



In addition, Table 1 shows that not only parties with increasing membership figures but all parties *are* enrolling new members at all times. The problem for the large, old parties is that they loose more members (many for ‘natural reasons’ such as age or directly to the undertaker) than they are able to recruit.

Table 1. Year of Enrollment, pct.

	RGA	SPP	SDP	SLP	CD	ChPP	LP	CoPP	DPP	All
-1969	-	5	25	21	-	-	27	31	-	24
1970-1979	-	19	21	18	19	38	13	16	-	17
1980-1989	14	33	20	18	20	26	18	24	-	19
1990-1994	32	16	12	12	18	17	17	9	-	14
1995-1997	24	11	10	15	14	11	17	10	29	14
1998-2000	30	16	10	16	29	8	8	10	71	12

In sum, the total party membership figure for the Danish parties are in decline but conceals that some parties are experiencing increasing figures, and that all parties are actually still enrolling members and hence to some extent act as a channel of participation. However, are party members merely signing up or actually contributing more substantially to their parties?

#### **4. Danish party membership – the participation**

Political parties form a channel for political participation. In so doing, they contribute to the political mobilisation, socialisation and integration of (part of) the electorate (King 1969: 123-8). Parties do this when enabling and encouraging the involvement of members of society in party activities within the party arena, as well as in the public sphere.

Membership figures is not a good indicator of party activism because the participation of party members is expected to vary, both at the system level due to, for example, variation in party laws, electoral systems, and public financing, at the organizational level due to variation in, for example, party structure and organization, ideology, and the party leadership's attitude towards party member participation; as well as at the individual level, where some party members choose simply to pay dues whereas others engage in many activities. Hence, it is necessary to take a closer look at how party members actually participate, that is, how much and how they participate.

Participation is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. Here, the amount of party member participation is assessed with the width of participation, that is, the share of members taking part in a given party activity (Parry 1972: 11; Heidar 1994). The type of party activity is determined on the basis of how the activity contributes to the party. A number of scholars have argued how party members impute costs as well as benefits on electorally motivated political parties (Katz 1990; Elklit 1991; Scarrow 1994, 1996: 41-6; Seyd & Whiteley 1992; Whiteley et al. 1994). Inspired by this, a distinction is made between four types of party member activities: funding, campaigning, interest aggregation and policy formulation, and candidate recruitment; elaborated upon in the analysis below.

##### ***Funding***

One way in which party members contribute to parties through their participation is by providing revenue. Financial contributions might take the form of dues, party tax, general donations and donations to election campaigns or other specific activities, as well as lotteries and the like. On the other hand, party members also provide parties with expenses (Katz 1990: 152). There are absolute material costs in creating and sustaining a membership organisation, for example in maintaining membership records, organising meetings and producing and distributing information, as well as opportunity costs (relative material costs), as money spent on members may not be spent on voters or anything else.

Party members contribute to their parties with financial means. Financial contributions are not always regarded as a form of political participation; however, considering financial contributions to be a specific aspect of party member activity is increasingly supported by other research on party member activity. When Seyd and Whiteley previously distinguished between three aspects of party activity – contact, campaigning and representation – they included financial aspects to be a dimension of campaigning, as it plays an important role in this regard. It continues to do so, but due to the increasing relevance of ‘credit-card’ membership in voluntary organisations in Britain, they deem that it should be treated as an independent aspect of political participation in parties (2002: 77). Parties and party members may opt for this kind of party membership, and it therefore deserves to be treated as an independent characteristic of party member participation.

Since dues make up the membership requirement it is more interesting to see whether party members contribute voluntarily to the parties. Table 2 shows that between a tenth and a quarter of Danish party members contribute voluntarily to their parties in non-election years. Even though members of the two left-wing parties make the highest contributions in the form of dues and party taxes, they are not any less inclined towards voluntary financial contributions. The members of the other parties do not make voluntary contributions that compensate for the higher dues and traditions for paying party taxes in the two left-wing parties. The extent to which party members make voluntary donations varies extensively between parties. The Christian People’s Party has a particularly high share of members making voluntary contributions to their party, whereas Centre Democrats and Liberals are markedly less inclined towards doing so. Most parties encourage their members to make financial contributions in election campaigns (Pedersen 2003). However, large variation is found among parties in the extent to which their members provide campaigning funds. Again, most members of the Christian People’s Party are contributing, as around half the members contributed in 1998. The smallest share of contributors is found in the Danish People’s Party, Centre Democratic Party and Social Democratic Party, where less than one in seven has contributed.

Table 2. Party Member Participation in Different Types of Party Activities, pct.

	RGA	SPP	SDP	SLP	CD	ChPP	LP	CoPP	DPP	All
<b>Funding</b>										
Voluntary contribution in non-election year	24	21	14	20	9	42	10	22	15	14
Voluntary contribution in election campaign	31	28	14	30	9	49	20	27	8	20
<b>Campaigning</b>										
Attend public election meeting	45	40	46	41	34	31	34	43	21	39
Put up election posters	34	31	20	23	25	24	15	20	13	19
Deliver leaflets	56	42	35	31	28	35	21	27	24	28
Discuss party policies with non-members	91	85	79	83	80	72	68	77	76	74
Encourage voters to vote for the party	86	68	74	65	63	78	61	66	71	67
<b>Interest aggregation and policy formulation</b>										
Participate in sub-national meetings	63	61	52	65	56	53	50	64	47	53
Participate in social and cultural arrangements	67	59	51	46	45	35	39	46	26	44
Participate in working groups	52	52	42	41	36	24	31	37	15	36
Formulate proposals	38	39	36	34	27	17	19	23	9	26
<b>Candidate recruitment</b>										
Potential officeholder	19	22	14	20	31	8	13	17	24	15

### *Campaigning*

Party members may provide free labour, or manpower resources, both between and during elections (Katz 1990: 152; Scarrow 1996: 44). Party members may engage in a number of party activities beneficial to parties in their quest for votes. At election time party members, for example, participate in putting up election posters, distributing leaflets in the streets, manning party stalls and arranging meetings. Party members may be beneficial to the party between elections by engaging in campaigns for political issues, recruiting members and taking part in and arranging political and social events. Party members may thus contribute with labour resources in many different ways. Party members are of special importance in conducting labour-intensive activities, though fund increases and new techniques have ushered in more capital-intensive activities. The general tendency is that the West European parties increasingly engage in capital-intensive activities, especially during election campaigns (Bowler & Farrell 1992: 227; Butler & Ranney 1992: 280-3; Farrell & Webb 2000; Norris 2000).

Financial resources cannot necessarily substitute party activists completely, however. There are differences in the amount of money available to parties, and not all labour-intensive activities

can be substituted by capital-intensive activities. It may be perceived as illegitimate for parties to hire people to take on assignments that have previously been performed by members, and there may also be some legal limits as to what kind of activities parties may engage in and how much money they can spend in an election campaign. Furthermore, members may be more effective than capital in regard to some activities.

When assessing the share of party members having attended a public election meeting in the national election in 1998, parties display similar participation rates (with the exception of the Danish People's Party). In general, two in five party members have attended such a meeting (Table 2). Posters with party symbols, slogans and candidates' pictures hanging from the light posts along the streets of Danish towns and countryside would seem to be a fundamental prerequisite for an election to occur in this country, even though representatives from national headquarters disagree as to whether the posters are effective in getting votes or merely, like Christmas decorations, are an unavoidable tradition (Pedersen 2003). In general, a fifth of the party members have participated in putting up election posters (Table 2). This share is larger in the two left-wing parties than is the case in the other parties, but variation is otherwise limited. The variation when it comes to leaflet distribution is more marked. Parties and candidates publish election leaflets, brochures and pamphlets with their primary electoral messages and slogans. In election campaigns, parties spread their messages by distributing party leaflets, either of a general nature or produced specifically for the election. This propaganda material can be distributed by individuals in the streets, in front of grocery stores, at party stalls, to households, etc. In general, roughly one quarter of all party members helped distribute party leaflets during the national election in 1998 (Table 2).

The extent to which party members contribute to vote-structuring and -mobilization varies among members and parties. Even though the Social Democratic Party only has three members for every four members in the Liberal Party, the Social Democratic Party has just as many or possibly more activists available than the Liberal Party in the election campaign activities. Likewise, in some of the smaller parties party members contribute more to campaigning and thus some sort of vote-structuring than in other of the smaller parties.

A special kind of activity that is beneficial to the party without being a party activity as such is party members' presence in neighbourhoods, local communities and workplaces. Everyday contact with ordinary people provides opportunity for 'outreach', the chance to favourably influence their opinions towards the party. Members may thus act as "ambassadors to the community" (Scarrow 1996: 43) or "representative figureheads in their local communities" (Whiteley et al. 1994: 4). The advantage of having members present in neighbourhoods, local communities and workplaces is that

contacts made there are more informal and might well therefore have a greater impact if party members choose to engage in outreach, than is the case with formal party campaigning. Party members can legitimise opinions or enhance the image of the party with their mere presence. In this way, party membership may provide “a base for proselytizing in the wider community; and it helps to publicize the existence of the ideology among potential believers” (Ware 1996: 63). Party members’ outreach into their immediate environments is relevant, both in election campaigns and between elections, but is of particular relevance in the latter period. People are less aware of the political ‘propaganda’ performed by members in the inter-election period, and parties are not otherwise campaigning substantially, thus increasing the difference potentially made by the party members’ outreach provision.

The extent to which the local presence of party members is an electoral advantage to parties, may be assessed on the basis of whether party members discuss party politics with non-members or encourage voters to vote for the party. It might be expected that party members are politically interested citizens often discussing politics with other citizens; however, evidence indicates that this is not always the case. Between nine and 32 percent of all party members (a quarter on average) have not discussed party policies with non-members in the last five years (Table 2). Even more party members have not encouraged other voters to vote for their party. As such, these members are quite passive; and they are probably not participating at all. In general, members of the parties left of centre on the traditional left-right scale are more inclined to talk politics than are the members of the parties to the right of the centre. The higher share of Social Democrats discussing party policies with non-members relative to the share among the Liberals makes up for some, but not all, of the difference in their membership figures.

### ***Interest aggregation and policy formulation***

Even though far from alone in this, parties play an important role in preference aggregation and policy formulation. Parties are concerned with public policy through their representation in government, parliament and other offices (King 1969: 135-7). Parties may influence governmental institutions either by being present in them or by formulating proposals and influencing the debate and agenda. But parties need not ‘make up’ policies themselves as policy formulation may occur on the basis of interest aggregation among the electorate. Parties attend to the aggregation and articulation of interests in contest with a number of other actors in the political system, such as interest organisations, civil servants, ministers and the media. Parties must address a broad spectrum of interests, whereas many of these other actors exclusively attend to narrow, specific

interests. Parties are required to assume a position on a wide range of political issues, and they are therefore also obliged to prioritise between areas so as to be able to present their body of policies as a cohesive whole (Bille 1997: 21). This also entails playing a role in the formulation of political goals, aims, or priorities; again in contest with other actors such as interest organisations and single-issue movements. Parties must therefore aggregate a broad range of varying ideas and interests into a cohesive set of political demands.

Participation provides party members with opportunity to come in contact with both (potential) voters, party representatives and the party leadership, and members may therefore contribute as a linkage, or channel of communication, between party leadership and society at large (Scarrow 1996: 44). Members may contribute to “the complex interaction between political voters about the issues which emerge on the political scene” (Seyd & Whiteley 1992: 3), thus serving as the eyes and ears of the parties (Whiteley et al. 1994: 4). Communication is a two-way process, involving both bottom-up communication, where members provide the party leadership with information about voters’ concerns, and top-down communication, where members explain and justify the party’s policies to voters. The new information and communication technologies have provided parties with an alternative to party members in regard to communication, as these new technologies facilitate a more direct means of communication than the older mass media, such as newspapers, radio and TV.

The prevailing organisational principle pertaining to the internal arena in Danish political parties is that of delegatory democracy. This is observed in practise in internal party offices and meetings. Party meetings are a very traditional party activity and an important type of communicative party activity. It is therefore also expected to be an important characteristic of party member participation. Party life actually centres on meetings, but on many different kinds of meetings. There are annual general meetings held at each organisational level formally required for the working of the party and stated in party statutes, meetings where candidates are nominated or other important decisions are discussed and/or made, and social gatherings where political aspects play little or no role. Meetings are an important part of many different decision-making processes, and simultaneously have social and educational functions in regard to party members.

Meetings closest to rank-and-file members are those at the branch, constituency and regional levels of the party. These meetings are referred to in the following as sub-national meetings. In most party branches, party members have the opportunity to attend meetings that have competence in regard to a range of different matters. But to what extent do party members actually participate? Table 2 shows that between a third and half of all party members have not participated in any

meetings at the sub-national levels within a five-year period. With meeting attendance within the last year as a traditional measure of party activity, these members could be termed passive members. While an important aspect of party life, less than half the party members have participated in social and cultural arrangements in their party within the last five years (Table 2). The variation among parties is substantial. Members of the two left-wing parties are once again the most active.

Party members may contribute to party innovation by generating ideas and being innovative both in relation to party policies and party organisation (Scarrow 1996: 44-5). Parties have been provided with an alternative to members regarding innovation in their establishment of a party bureaucracy and may also attain such input from other bodies such as think tanks, focus groups and individual resource-persons supporting the party. However, by participation in working groups and in the formulation of proposals members may contribute with innovation to political parties. Table 2 shows that between one in six and more than half the members have done so. Only a quarter of the party members have participated in formulating political proposals to be passed in the party, ranging from nine percent in the Danish People's Party to 39 percent in the Socialist People's Party. In both cases the variation among parties is substantial.

### ***Candidate recruitment***

Parties are defined in a number of different ways with discriminating elements such as actors, actions or activities, consequences, purposes, domains, functions and structures (Sartori 1976: 61). However, common for a number of definitions is the emphasis placed on the definition of parties in terms of their role in public elections (see, for example, Epstein 1967: 9; Sartori 1976: 64; Panebianco 1988: 6; Rustow 1956: 169; Meyer 1965: 12; Sjöblom 1968: 21; Pedersen 1982: 5; Schlesinger 1984: 374; Bille 1997: 17). The criterion of discrimination is the electoral one. Hence parties are responsible for the recruitment, training and socialisation of political leadership (King 1969: 129-31). Generally speaking, political parties almost have a monopoly in terms of the election of parliamentarians, and government is primarily comprised of party representatives. In addition to the government, there are possibly other offices to be filled out by parties represented in parliament or government. Since nomination of candidates is a central feature of political parties, party members potentially play an important role in the recruitment process; they form a recruitment pool from which the party may engage personnel for public offices on different levels such as local, regional, national and international (Scarrow 1996: 45). In other words, party members are 'warm bodies' (Mair 1997: 147). But party members may also contribute by finding appropriate candidates

outside their parties. Should there be an insufficient number of qualified candidates within the party, parties must look among their non-member supporters and the electorate at large.

In regard to public offices the most interesting question is whether party members provide a recruitment pool from which parties may recruit candidates for public offices, not whether they have such offices at present (since this depends more on electoral results). Whether or not party members would like to stand for public election if encouraged by the party is indicated in Table 2. It shows that between 8 and 31 percent of the members are willing to stand for public office if approached to do so by the party at either the local, regional or national level of government. Since party members vary among parties in their readiness to stand for public election, membership figures alone do not indicate the number of potential candidates parties have available to perform their vital assignment in regard to recruiting and nominating candidates for public offices. As an example, of the four middle-sized parties, the Socialist People's Party and Social Liberal Party have twice as many potential candidates for local elections, and the Danish People's Party three times as many potential candidates, than does the Christian People's Party. The extent to which party members provide a recruitment pool from which parties may nominate candidates thus differs widely among parties, which is something that might prove particularly problematic in light of the lack of candidates experienced by some parties in some regions. Parties' performance of the function of the recruitment, training and socialising of political leadership may therefore vary; a variation that membership figures are not able to capture.

## **5. Concluding remarks**

Notwithstanding the deficiencies of single country comparative analyses, this article shows that total membership figures conceal that some parties are experiencing increasing figures and that all parties are enrolling new members. Furthermore, the variation in party member participation across parties as well as across party members and types of party activities implies that membership figures alone do not provide an adequate indicator of whether and how parties provide a channel of participation. Membership figures provide rough indicators of participation, but are insufficient in more accurate accounts. What are the democratic implications? Any assessment of this type depends on the normative democratic model on which it is based (Allern & Pedersen 2007).

In a democratic perspective based on the principles of competitive democracy focusing on parties' electoral assignments, the level and type of party member participation in the Danish case do not make the proverbial alarm clocks ring. Parties nominate candidates, engage in campaigning

and provide an arena for office seeking and participation for citizens to whom this is of interest. A fair number of members indicate that they are ready to stand for election if encouraged to do so by their party. Should they be of insufficient number or quality, parties recruit candidates among the general citizenry. The most essential assignment of parties, to nominate candidates for public offices, is thus not endangered by the levels of participation within parties.

However, considered from a more participatory democratic perspective, the characterisation of party member participation may call for concern due to the relatively low levels of participation. With or without a golden past it may, from a participatory point of view, be argued that it is problematic not only that merely a small share of citizens enrol in a party but also that such a large share of the members remain passive. It may, of course, be argued that parties are accessible and that people therefore are provided with the opportunity to participate should they want to. Yet, the low degree of participation does not give a sense of parties as large-scale providers of political mobilisation and socialisation.

The channels of political participation in representative democracy as practised in Denmark and other advanced industrial societies develop over time. There are thus several traditional as well as newer channels of participation for citizens to engage in. Notwithstanding various democratic perspectives it could be discussed whether parties have earned the substantial amounts of public financing granted them on the basis of their election results. On the one hand, if parties are worthy of public financial support due to their nomination of candidates for public office this is not an issue to be discussed. On the other hand, if this support is granted on the basis of parties' performance of other democratic assignments as well, the picture presented above calls for some public concern.

Furthermore, the analysis of party member participation shows that it is no wonder if certain parties deliberately choose to drop some of the traditional mass party characteristics of their party organizations and develop more into 'modern cadre parties' (cf. Koole 1994). If members are not contributing in any marked way towards parties' democratic performance they are too costly to attract. However, this analysis sheds no light on parties' perspective on party membership, that is, whether and to what extent political parties actually value these contributions from party members; and whether parties vary in their perspective on party membership. This is an essential question to be addressed before fully responding to the question whether declining party membership figures present a problem for parties and thereby for representative democracy.

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