

DENMARK

High media independence and informal democratic traditions in the newsroom

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Introduction

Denmark is a small Northern European country with 5.8 million inhabitants. Together with Sweden and Norway, Denmark is part of a group of Scandinavian welfare states with a tradition of public support for both broadcasters and newspapers, strong professional associations for journalists, and a significant share of foundation-owned newspapers. Politically, Denmark is considered a mature liberal democracy.

Freedom in the World 2021: status “free” (Score: 97/100, stable since 2017).

Denmark is a robust democracy with regular free and fair elections. Citizens enjoy full political rights, the government protects free expression and association, and the judiciary functions independently. However, Denmark has struggled to uphold fundamental freedoms for immigrants and other newcomers. (Freedom House, 2021)

Liberal Democracy Index 2020: Denmark is placed in the Top 10% bracket (rank 1 of measured countries, up from 5 in 2016) (Varieties of Democracy Institute, 2017, 2021).

Freedom of Expression Index 2018: rank 2 of measured countries, up from 6 in 2016 (Varieties of Democracy Institute, 2017, 2019).

2020 World Press Freedom Index: rank 3 of 180 countries (after Norway and Finland, 1 and 2, respectively), up from 5 in 2019 (Reporters Without Borders, 2020).

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Denmark is a parliamentary democracy and, since 1953, the Danish Parliament has consisted of only one chamber: Folketinget. Elections to parliament (Folketinget) are held at least every four years, but it is within the power of the prime minister to call elections sooner, if he or she wishes to do so. Elections to the Danish Parliament are based on proportional representation. The parliament has 179 members, including four elected from Greenland and the Faroe Islands, which belong to the commonwealth. In 2020, there are ten national parties in the parliament making up two political blocs – the red and blue blocs. On the left, the red bloc includes the Social Democrats, The Social Liberals, The Socialist People's Party, The Red–Green Alliance, and The Alternative (newly formed in 2015). On the right, the blue bloc includes The Liberals, The New Liberals (formed in 2018), The Conservatives, The Danish People's Party, and Liberal Alliance. In 2019, the election saw the Social Democrats form a single party minority government with the support of all parties in the red bloc except The Alternative.

The Danish media landscape has been characterised as a dual media system (Helles et al., 2011) with two dominant actors: the two public service broadcasters, Danmarks Radio (DR) and TV 2 on the one hand; and daily newspapers, most owned by foundations and some in commercial ownership, on the other hand. While data from the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2020) indicated that the reach of the public broadcasters had fallen since the first Reuters survey in 2013, in 2020, DR and TV 2 still reached most Danes on a weekly basis. Thus, according to the 2020 Reuters report, offline DR TV and radio reached 59 per cent of the Danish population, whereas TV 2 (TV 2 Nyhederne and 24-hour news channel TV 2 News) reached 54 per cent. Both offline and online, the largest Danish newspapers are the two tabloids, *B.T.* and *Ekstra Bladet*, who rank third and fourth in online news reach with the two public broadcasters ranking first (DR) and second (TV 2). Meanwhile, the traditional morning newspapers are struggling with a fall in their print editions but are gaining momentum online (e.g., *Politiken* reaching 14% of the Danish population online in 2020, but just 6% offline). Private television plays a relatively minor role in Denmark. Today, the private market in Denmark is largely made up by Nordic Entertainment Group (NENT), whose television channels are funded by advertisements. Discovery Networks Denmark also plays a big part within the private television market; it owns 11 commercial television channels and streaming services, such as Kanal 5 and Eurosport. Some studies show that the Nordic Entertainment Group channels reach about 10 per cent of the viewers, whereas Discovery reaches about 5 per cent.

Covid-19

From mid-March to mid-May 2020, the Danish government led by the Social Democrats imposed a large number of restrictions on liberal freedoms in Denmark, such as closing borders to neighbouring countries, banning all public gatherings and events with more than 100 participants, shutting down many parts of the public sector, closing schools and universities, as well as limiting public transportation. A large part of the staff from both public service broadcasters were also sent home by the Ministry of Culture. However, this was later admitted as being a breach of the arm's length principle.

During this shutdown, linear public service television increased their audience share, as did daily newspapers online. A report published in late August by the Danish Media Association – the industry organisation for private Danish media – showed an increase in the Danes' willingness to pay for online news during the Covid-19 crisis. In June 2020, around 100,000 more Danes had access to paid digital news services as compared with October 2019. The study also indicates that during the Covid-19 crisis, Danes gained more trust in the news media and to a large extent preferred to get their news from traditional news channels rather than from social media (Danske Medier, 2020).

However, because of the economic restrictions, advertising slumped between 30 to 50 per cent. This resulted in revenue losses in advertising-based media and led to lay-offs in several media companies, including at *Berlingske*, which is a part of our sample. In order to prevent further layoffs and collapse of media companies, the government provided two aid-packages to the private Danish news media. This prevented closures and mass firing in the media industry to some extent. On 9 June 2020, however, Denmark's second largest media company, JyskFynske Medier, announced cut-backs due to loss in advertisement revenues during the Covid-19 pandemic, which may result in the firing of up to 100 employees (Marckmann, 2020; Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen, 2020). A side effect of the aid packages has been that several media outlets have registered with the Press Council (Nyhus, 2020). The Press Council is the institution in Denmark that handles complaints about the media covered by the Media Liability Act – and it is a requirement to be registered with the Press Council to access the aid packages.

Leading news media sample

Our media sample for the Media for Democracy Monitor (MDM) 2021 consists of ten leading news media representing different types of outlets and different types of ownership: two public service broadcasters (DR & TV 2) and the seven national newspapers: *Politiken* (centre-left), *Berlingske* (centre-right), *Jyllands-Posten* (centre-right), *Information* (centre-left), *Kristeligt Dagblad* (centre-right), *Børsen* (centre-right), *Ekstra Bladet* (centre-left), and *B.T.* (centre-right).

Indicators

Dimension: Freedom / Information (F)

(F1) Geographic distribution of news media availability 3 POINTS

A wide variety of news media are broadly available all over Denmark.

Denmark has a total of 31 daily paid-for newspapers and one free newspaper. Compared with other Scandinavian countries, Denmark has the smallest number of newspapers, which to a certain extent is an effect of different strategies of public media support (which in Sweden is directed towards the “second” newspaper of a given region). Eight of the 31 newspapers are considered national newspapers (*Politiken*, *Berlingske*, *Jyllands-Posten*, *B.T.*, *Ekstra-Bladet*, *Information*, *Kristeligt Dagblad*, and *Børsen*), while the rest are either regional or local newspapers, covering all parts of the country. From 2010 to 2018, readership of the printed press fell by 41 per cent. On an average day in 2018, about 1.6 million Danes read a printed newspaper, whereas more than 1.9 million Danes accessed an online news site of a daily newspaper (Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen, 2019d). The biggest national newspapers online are the two tabloids, *B.T.* and *Ekstra Bladet*, while the biggest regional newspaper is *Jyske Vestkysten*. However, the biggest of all online news sites are the two public service broadcasters TV 2 and DR (Schröder et al., 2019).

According to the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2020), the willingness to pay for news in Denmark is at 17 per cent, the lowest amongst Nordic countries. Norway, at 42 per cent, has the highest willingness to pay for news in the world, followed by Sweden in second position at 27 per cent and Finland a close third at 19 per cent (Schröder et al., 2020). In general, Danish newspapers have managed to survive in a disrupted news market; there have been layoffs, but major media outlets have not closed. The regional and local media, however, are suffering an immense economic struggle.

In 2018, 85 per cent of Danish households had at least one television hooked up to a television signal. However, the remaining 15 per cent could have possibly either owned a Smart-TV that was hooked up to the Internet instead or streamed television on their computers (Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen, 2019e). In 2018, almost 98 per cent of the Danish population had Internet access. However, there were some regional differences when it came to download speed, with the area around the capital Copenhagen having higher download speeds than the rest of the country (Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen, 2019b). Furthermore, both public service broadcasters and commercial broadcasters are expanding their streaming services, which is also forcing the shift from traditional television viewing to streaming. In Denmark, roughly 20 per cent of the population sub-

scribe to television packages with more than 50 channels. Although television viewing in general is falling, when measured in hours of viewing, public service television is still the most popular. Public service television includes both the two national broadcasters, DR and TV 2, and the eight regional television stations that are part of TV 2 and which cover all parts of the country (Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen, 2019e). Since January 2020, DR has three television channels: the main channel DR and two niche channels, DR 2 (focusing on politics and culture) and children's channel Ramasjang. Before 2020, DR had six channels. However, with the latest media policy reform in 2019, DRs budget was cut by 20 per cent, resulting in one channel (DR Culture) being merged with DR 2, and two other channels were reduced to streaming only (DR 3 for the younger audience and DR Ultra for children and younger viewers). Meanwhile, TV 2 has six channels: the main channel (just called TV 2) and five niche channels: TV Zulu (for younger viewers), TV 2 Charlie (for older viewers), TV 2 News (a 24-hour news channel), TV 2 sport, and TV 2 Fri (a channel focused on food, travel, and leisure).

DR also has the most popular radio stations in Denmark. In general, radio is still a popular platform in Denmark, though time spent daily on listening to radio in general dropped by four minutes – from 111 to 107 – from 2017 to 2018 (Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen, 2019c). As of January 2020, DR radio consists of seven radio channels with P4 being the most popular based on the number of listeners. P4 is made up of ten regional radio channels and comprised 40 per cent of the market in 2018, while P3, a channel aimed at younger listeners, came in a distant second with 12 per cent of the listing audience. Denmark also has a second FM public service radio provider, Radio 4, which took over the broadcasting licence of Radio 24/7 in 2020. Radio 24/7 had previously been de facto excluded from seeking to renew its licence, a process causing heated public debate and political controversy. Since 2020, a new DAB public service radio station, Radio Loud, has been conceived to target young listeners specifically; however, so far it has had very limited success.

(F2) Patterns of news media use (consumption of news) 3 POINTS

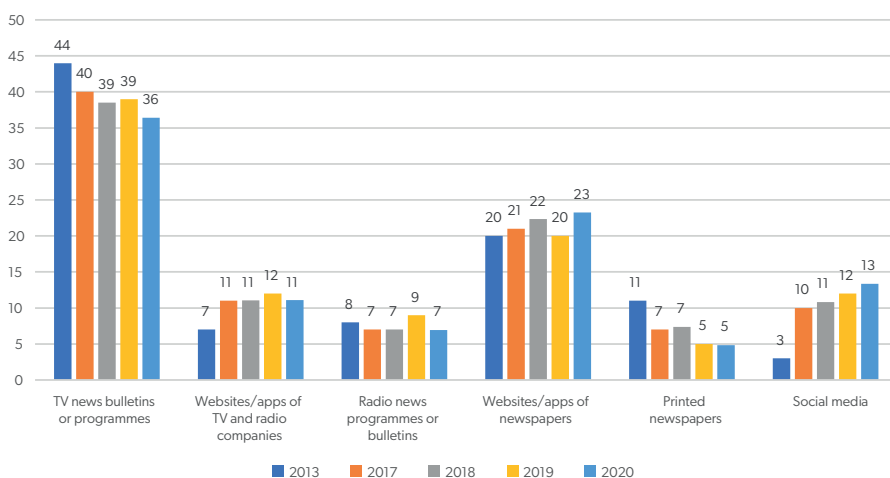
Public service television and online newspapers remain the prime sources of news and information in Denmark. Some age gaps in media use exist, particularly with regard to Danes under 25, who continue to consume news, but prefer to receive their news through social media.

News media is still central for Danes when it comes to getting news and being informed about society. According to the 2020 *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2020), 84 per cent of the Danish population access

news daily, and according to 2019 study Publicistisk Barometer [The Publicist Barometer] (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2019), most Danes (76%) considered journalistic news media important or very important for society. According to the report, only 15 per cent of Danish users indicated that they sometimes or often try to avoid news altogether – the second lowest rate (after Japan) among the 38 countries in the sample (Newman et al., 2020).

Overall, news media is widely used in Denmark by all segments of society and on a variety of platforms. Numbers from the Danish part of the Reuters report (see Figure 1) show that from 2013 to 2020, television, although declining, remained the preferred news source for most Danes, with newspapers' online sites coming second. Social media is the preferred news source of just 13 per cent in 2020 (Schröder et al., 2020).

Figure 1 Preferred news platforms in Denmark, 2013, 2017–2020 (per cent)



Source: Newman et al., 2020

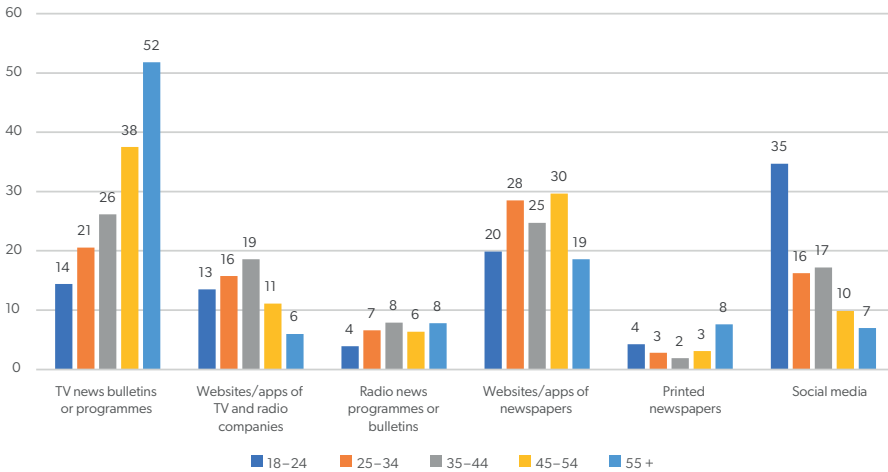
However, there is a widening gap between age groups when it comes to platform use, with older generations preferring television and the younger age group preferring social media (see Figure 2).

There were also some differences noted between genders, in patterns of media use: female users (37%) were more likely to have accessed news via social media than male users (24%) (Schröder et al., 2020).

Geographical cleavages in news consumption exist, though to a relatively minor degree. While users from the Copenhagen region were more likely to consume nationally distributed newspapers (online and offline – 65% reach within the last week), these “big city” papers still reached almost half of the

adult population in smaller towns and rural areas as well, where they supplemented regional and local newspaper consumption (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2019).

Figure 2 Preferred types of news media in Denmark by age, 2020 (per cent)



Source: Newman et al., 2020

Overall, age, gender, and geographical differences in news media use are comparatively less pronounced, and many Danes get their news from several different news platforms on a daily basis, with public service platforms (online and offline) still being part of most Danes’ news diet.

(F3) Diversity of news sources

2 POINTS

Diversity of news sources is relatively high but limited by reliance on a single national news agency and a decreasing number of foreign correspondents.

Denmark’s only national news agency, Ritzau, remains an important source across all Danish news media platforms. Ritzau is owned by eleven Danish news media, including Danmarks Radio, and has been found to be widely quoted as a source in online news sites (Lund et al., 2009; Blach-Ørsten et al., 2013). From 2012 to 2015, Berlingske News Agency existed as a rival to Ritzau; however, in the end, the small Danish media market could not sustain two national news agencies. According to interviewees,¹ Ritzau still plays a role in day-to-day reporting, but mostly online. For print editions, the national newspapers focus on their own original content.

Regarding the use of public relations (PR), journalists usually state that it has little or no influence on their work, while research often suggests otherwise. Kristensen (2004) argues that journalists and professional sources, including PR agencies, increasingly have become dependent on one another, while Wedel (2016), based on interviews of actors in the PR-industry, shows that news media is fundamental to PR work, and that selling stories, especially exclusives, to news media is a common and successful PR-practice.

Content exchange with partners and other media is still the exception, except with bigger international stories, such as the *Panama Papers*. In these instances, different news media – usually one of the public service broadcasters and one of the eight national newspapers – team up to do the coverage together. But news media also quote each other's stories, especially online (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2013), to an extent that news media – from time to time – accuse each other of over-quoting. This led to new guidelines for quoting by the interested organisation “Danske Medier” (Danish Media's Employer Organisation) that were passed in late 2014.

Sources in Danish news media have in several studies been found to be mostly elite and male, but more female sources have been appearing in recent years (Willig et al., 2015). Minorities, however, are still not widely represented in the news (Jørndrup, 2017).

(F4) Internal rules for practice of newsroom democracy 2 POINTS

Newsroom democracy in Denmark is well established. However, it is informal and carried out more in the professional culture rather than written down in formal, internal rules.

Interviewees describe a strong, but informal democratic culture in newsrooms that grants individual journalists veto rights, flat hierarchies, and participation in decision-making processes. Danish newsrooms do not have newsroom councils.

The Danish Media Liability Act of 1991 states that “the content and conduct of the media shall be in accordance with sound press ethics” (Pressenævnet, 2013: para. 1). The code of press ethics is written down in the “Advisory rules of sound press ethics”, last revised in 2013 (Pressenævnet, 2013). The Code of Ethics is further supervised by the Danish Press Council.

Besides the advisory rules, a 2015 study of media ethics in Denmark documented that most major news organisations either had published or were preparing to publish their own ethical guidelines online (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2015). In general, all media guidelines favour balanced and fair reporting, ideals that journalists themselves also mention in interviews. However, only a few of these guidelines focus on internal newsroom democracy. The rules that do address

these issues are rather vague, such as stating that journalists should not be asked to perform tasks that go against the advisory rules or be asked to perform a task that goes against his or her principles. Neither of these guidelines has ever been tested in the Danish Press Council.

With regard to influence on hiring an editor-in-chief, most of our respondents say that editors are hired or appointed without the participation of the regular journalistic staff. For public service outlets DR and TV 2, the board – including one member representing staff – is part of the hiring process when it comes to hiring at the top executive level.

To our and our interviewees' knowledge, there are no Danish news media who have internal rules to support and promote female journalists' careers or women's access to managerial positions, and we do not know of any formal systems of monitoring and evaluating the presence and participation of women in decision-making at all levels.

(F5) Company rules against *internal* influence on
newsroom/editorial staff

2 POINTS

The degree of independence of Danish newsrooms is high; editorial decisions remain in the domain of the editorial staff, but there is increasing collaboration between editorial and commercial departments.

With regard to ownership, Danish newspapers separate their newsrooms from owners, although there are not – in most cases – any legally binding rules in place. Most newspapers are foundation-owned, which serves as a safeguard against commercial pressure exerted by owners.

Interviewees state that owners stay out of the newsroom and that all editorial decisions are taken solely by editorial staff. While newsrooms and advertising are still two separate departments, more collaboration is taking place between the editorial and commercial parts of the papers. Also, there is a growth in news sections for which collaboration between journalists and the advertising department are more likely, such as travel, leisure, holidays, celebrities, and mobility (cars).

For public service media, the arm's length principle shields editorial staff from the influence of the board and politicians (see also indicator C2 – Independence of the news media from powerholders).

(F6) Company rules against external influence on newsroom/editorial staff

3 POINTS

Danish newsrooms are well shielded from external commercial influence. The increasing relevance of native advertising does, however, pose a potential gateway for increasing external influence.

With few exceptions, Danish news media do not solely rely on advertising revenues. Newspapers in Denmark are financed by public media subsidies, sales, and advertising. The national channels of TV 2 are financed by advertising and sponsorship, while the eight regional channels are financed via the same licence fee that is also the main finance for DR's radio and television channels, along with some sponsorship for specific types of programmes.

Protection from external influence in newsroom and editorial staff is a fundamental value of Danish news media and reporters and is mentioned explicitly in many guidelines (Willig et al., 2015; Blach-Ørsten et al., 2015). In DR's guidelines (Danmarks Radio, 2019a), it is highlighted that DR is independent and has full editorial rights to all its programmes. Likewise, the editorial guidelines of *Politiken* state that the newspaper is independent of political parties, organisations, financial interests, groups, and individuals (Willig et al., 2015). Editors and journalists all acknowledged that there are, and always have been, actors who try to influence the news, but that newsrooms are built to withstand that pressure. Our interviewees also did not report incidents of advertising clients attempting to influence editorial content.

In recent years, there has been a general increase in the use of so-called native advertising in Denmark, in other words, sponsored content that takes on a journalistic form. Today, much of professional media has internal guidelines for both production and dissemination of native advertising, and the largest media houses have designated staff who specialise in native advertising. Although in accordance with the Danish Marketing Practices Act and the Press Ethical Guidelines, as long as such content is clearly marked as paid-for content, studies have shown that actual marking practices are not always ideal, with users facing difficulties in identifying such content as advertising.

(F7) Procedures on news selection and news processing 3 POINTS

Most news media have formal procedures for news processing. For news selection, however, the formal procedures are far less detailed.

The education and professional training of Danish journalists are characterised by strong homogenisation and conservation of professional values – including those related to news selection and news processing (Willig, 2016). The

five so-called news criteria – timeliness, importance, identification, conflict, and sensation – are core professional values of all Danish journalists and used explicitly in newsrooms when selecting and processing news (Schultz, 2007; Willig, 2012). In addition, most news media houses have their own written policies stating different criteria for news selection and processing, alongside more implicit professional values such as “exclusivity” (Willig, 2012). In daily practice, news is selected and discussed in the many daily meetings among both the chief editors as well as section editors and staff. If common ground cannot be found on a story, it is either the editor or the editor-in-chief who makes the final decision, according to interviewees.

(F8) Rules and practices on internal gender equality 2 POINTS

Gender differences in terms of salary and positions persist, albeit to a lower degree than in other sectors and in other countries. There is relatively little emphasis on achieving gender equality through formal rules and initiatives, but in recent years, awareness has increased and large media organisations are beginning to explicitly articulate their goals on internal gender equality.

Compared with neighbouring Sweden, Denmark has fewer formal rules on gender equality, and less of a tradition of practising internal gender equality – generally, in both the public and private sector as well as, specifically, in the media industry. Public broadcaster DR has implemented a gender quota at the managerial level (minimum 40% women) and both DR and TV 2 monitor the in-house gender distribution and wage gap. Some newspaper companies (such as JP/Politikens Hus) include a formal commitment to equal pay in their annual and corporate social responsibility (CSR) report (JP/Politikens Hus, 2018: 19).

The salary gap between men and women in Denmark is 13 per cent in general (Poulsen, 2018), and 5 per cent in the media industry (Obitsø, 2020b). The salaries of female journalists are already a little lower at the entry level and there is a significant difference in the type of jobs that pay the most at entry level for either women or men (Obitsø, 2020a).

According to The Danish Union of Journalists, 48 per cent of their members are female and 52 per cent are male; however, members of the union do not necessarily work as journalists. According to a study on Danish journalists by Skovsgaard and colleagues (2012), 46 per cent of Danish journalists are women and 54 per cent are men. However, gender differences become wider at the top level and managerial positions (Andreassen, 2015, based on a Women and Media Industries in Europe report). The 2017 Media Pluralism Monitor places Denmark at low to medium risk on the dimension of “access to media for women”, stating that “women are still under represented compared to men

in the news, but women are well represented in the key positions in PSM” (Netterstrøm, 2017: 7).

Interviewees stated, on the one hand, that there is an increased focus on gender balance in the newsroom, but on the other, they acknowledged that there is still a pay gap between men and women, with men having higher salaries. Several stated that the pay gap is a high priority and needs to be addressed, and some mentioned that media strives for gender balance in inviting candidates to job interviews. Interestingly, they seldom referred to their own reports and written statements on the subject.

(F9) Gender equality in media content

1 POINT

Danish news media has no codified rules securing gender equality in media content, but an increased awareness of the issue exists.

Women are under-represented as sources in Danish news media, although independent studies show a different ratio of male and female sources. One study finds an increase in the number of female news sources in the average week from 1999 to 2012, from 16 per cent to 22 per cent (Willig et al., 2015), while the 2015 *Who Makes the News* Danish country report found 25 per cent of female sources at the time of study. This study also found that female journalists produced only 32 per cent of the news at the time (Jørndrup & Bentsen, 2015).

Despite these differences, only a few news media organisations have had an editorial focus on gender sensitivity in media content. Of these, the two newspapers *Information* and *Politiken* have both tried – but failed – to secure more equality in their media content, while the television programme *Deadline* on DR 2 has had more success including more women as guests in the programme. Several of the interviewees, however, stated that this has received an increased focus in the newsroom within internal editorial debates. Some also stated that they have taken measures to count the use of sources to secure a more balanced use.

(F10) Misinformation and digital platforms
(alias social media)

2 POINTS

There is high awareness on the issue of misinformation on digital platforms in Denmark; the actual amount of fake news and disinformation campaigns on social media appears, however, to be comparatively low. Defence mechanisms are in place, but they mostly rely on established journalistic fact-checking, while algorithmic and data-driven solutions are only slowly being tested by few media.

The debate about misinformation and fake news has been a big part of the public conversation in Denmark since 2016, and several leading news outlets (*Politiken*, *Berlingske*, DR) have regularly focused on the issue of “junk news” in media coverage. However, studies show that Danish media users come across very little misinformation and fake news in traditional news media (Schrøder et al., 2019). Studies of the 2019 national elections found very little evidence for the dissemination of misinformation on social media platforms (Guldbrandsen & Just, 2020; Derczynski et al., 2019).

Independent fact-checking is only done on a regular basis by the television programme *Detektor* on DR 2 and by the online news site Mandag Morgen, which has a sub-site, TjekDet, dedicated to fact checking. Interviewees state that controlling the validity of information is the core task of journalism, and this also goes for information on social media. A few of the interviewed media houses suggested that they have been trying more technical ways of verifying information, either themselves or via a third party.

(F11) Protection of journalists against (online) harassment 3 POINTS

There is increasing awareness for the issue of online harassment, and internal policies to address the issue are in place – although not always well implemented in practice. The trade union provides an ample level of assistance and guidance.

Our interviewees stated that online harassment is an increasing problem, especially – but not exclusively – for female reporters. Several Danish media have updated policies dealing with cyber harassment. One study conducted in 2018 suggests, however, that these policies have not yet fully translated into solid procedures for handling incidents of online harassment. Consequently, journalists may fail to report these incidents, and not all incidents are necessarily reported to the police (Østergaard, 2019). All interviewees found that when a journalist experienced and reported online or other types of harassment, the editors were there to help and possessed the resources to do so. Moreover, Dansk Journalistforbund [The Danish Union of Journalists] provides ample guidelines and assistance for its members (including freelance journalists) –

such as a 24/7 emergency phone number – and founded a “digital self-defence group” for journalists in 2019 (Therkildsen, 2019).

Dimension: Equality / Interest Mediation (E)

(E1) Media ownership concentration national level 2 POINTS

The level of media ownership concentration in Denmark is relatively high and primarily the result of Denmark being a small media market (as Danish is only spoken in Denmark).

According to the Danish country report in the Media Pluralism Monitor project, Denmark does not have specific laws regulating ownership of media; instead, the media market is regulated by general competition. There have been no legal cases (litigation) regarding media pluralism, nor regarding limitations on media pluralism. Neither has Denmark faced problems with politically affiliated business people taking control of central media outlets and using them for direct or indirect political influence (Willig & Blach-Ørsten, 2016). This is due to the large public service sector and to the tradition of foundation ownership. It is also important to note that Danish laws on public service radio and television demand diverse programming and that all public service media have editorial freedom. Furthermore, there is a media subsidy system (innovation pool and direct subsidies) for editorial content for the written press, online and in print, which is based on a general consideration for media pluralism. The Danish media system has various boards that function independently of the political system and work as defined in law and following their statutory obligations. Finally, pluralism of the media and of content is a general principle of the media laws, especially concerning public service and media subsidies (Willig & Blach-Ørsten, 2016).

Denmark does, however, show evidence of media ownership concentration at the national level. There are two explanations for this: 1) Denmark is a small media market, and 2) the Danish state is a large domestic media owner, owning the two large broadcasting companies as well as eight regional public service broadcasters (funded by licence fees), with one regional television channel each and regional windows on the largest television channel TV 2, if measured by audience. Furthermore (especially relevant to the cross-media ownership concentration) the largest national news agency (Ritzau) is owned by a large group of media companies including the Danish public service broadcaster DR (Willig & Blach-Ørsten, 2016).

Due to the market dominance of the two public service channels, CR3 (the total market share for the three largest suppliers) on the television market

is 0.86 (2018). Market concentration in the print media sector is somewhat lower, although still significant (as Danish newspapers have ceased to measure their circulation in 2014, a CR3 comparable to the other countries cannot be calculated).

(E2) Media ownership concentration regional (local) level 2 POINTS

There is a relatively high degree of media ownership concentration at the regional level in Denmark after a period of market consolidation in the last decade.

Until 2014, ownership of regional and local newspapers was characterised by five large “regional monopolies” (Schultz, 2007): Nordjydske Medier, Midtjyske Medier, Syddanske Medier, Fynske Medier, and Sjællandske Medier; however, this changed when Midtjyske Medier and Syddanske Medier were bought by Jyske Medier and renamed Jysk-Fynske Medier.

In 2020, one of the two large media companies – the foundation-owned JP/Politikens Hus – gathered its remaining 12 local newspapers (distributed in the eastern part of Jutland) under the ownership of *Jyllands-Posten*, after having sold off titles in Denmark (the northern part of Sealand) and Sweden (JP/Politikens Hus, 2020).

The other large media company, Berlingske Media – which has been in commercial ownership since 2000 and is now owned by Belgian De Peers-group – used to have a portfolio of local newspapers, but these have all been sold except for a minority share in one local newspaper, *Bornholms Tidende* (Qvitgau, 2011).

(E3) Diversity of news formats 3 POINTS

There is strong diversity in news formats in Denmark on all platforms and in both privately owned and public service media.

Danish news media provides for a large variety of different news formats. They are available in both printed and online media, owned by private foundations or owners, and in public service media, mainly provided electronically and digitally in broadcast, on-demand, and radio. Printed subscription newspapers in Denmark are traditionally broadsheets carrying a wide range of genres (original news items, telegrams, op-eds, backgrounds, features, columns, etc.) and a wide range of topics (politics, economy, current affairs, culture, sports, etc.), which are presented in different combinations, thus catering to different market segments. The online editions of legacy media houses also spill off from their

heritage and carry a relatively broad mix of genres and topics. The two printed tabloids also offer a mix of news genres (both original news and telegrams on current affairs, politics, crime, celebrity, and sports) as well as columns. They also have space for the public to comment on stories, and so forth. Meanwhile, the national public broadcaster DR carries a wide range of news formats on radio, television, and podcasts, both flow and on-demand. The regional public broadcaster TV 2, on the other hand, offers different news formats on flow and on-demand television as well as online. In total, almost all genres are supplied, and news is offered on local, national, and international levels.

(E4) Minority/Alternative media

2 POINTS

The only officially recognised minority group in Denmark, the Germans, have their own media. Other minorities are less visible and represented in the Danish media landscape.

Political minorities are represented by online (so-called alternative) media. The public broadcasters provide news for minorities with challenges concerning hearing, seeing, and reading.

German is the only officially recognised minority language and population in Denmark, and one newspaper carries news for this group. The German minority in Southern Jutland has its own newspaper, the well-established *Nordschleswiger*. Moreover, the Danish state heavily subsidises the Danish minority language newspaper *Flensborg Avis* in Germany. However, there are no (alternative) media organisations for other language minorities (for instance Turkish and Urdu speaking minorities) in the country, and attempts in the past have not been economically viable due to its relatively small market.

Public broadcaster DR no longer produces programmes that target minority groups; there are no private media houses either catering to (unofficial) minority languages, such as Turkish or Urdu. Even though immigration as an issue continues to be in the political and media spotlight, ethnic minority voices are still under-represented in news content (Jørndrup, 2017). Immigrants and their descendants have a substantially lower level of television and print news consumption than the average population (34% consume news several times a day; 9% have not consumed news within the last week), but are more likely than people of Danish origin to get their news through social media (Stenholt Engman, 2019).

The political majorities belonging to the centre-left and centre-right are represented by the printed and online legacy media, while the political minorities belonging to the far left or far right are more present in dedicated online media organisations. Alternative media in Denmark are directed towards political fringe audiences on the right- and left-wing of the political spectrum, as well

as catering to news audiences in search of “constructive” or “slow news”; but, that market is still rather limited (Mayerhöffer, in press; Blach-Ørsten & Mayerhöffer, in press).

The public broadcaster DR has an obligation to cater to the minority population of hearing- and sight-impaired individuals and people that have difficulties reading. While the 2017 Media Pluralism Monitor placed Denmark accordingly at low risk when it comes to access to media for people with disabilities, the risk for access for ethnic minorities had been rated at medium to high (Netterstrøm, 2017).

As part of the Danish Commonwealth, Greenland and the Faroe Islands have broadcast and print media in Greenlandic and Faroese. The public broadcasters are funded by the respective governments, and the newspapers are privately-owned. There are no media operating on the Danish mainland that cater to Greenlanders and Faroese based in Denmark.

(E5) Affordable public and private news media 2 POINTS

Public service media are relatively affordable. Newspapers – both print and online – are relatively expensive.

At the most general level, a Danish household spends around 7 per cent of its overall consumption on media related expenses such as streaming, television, telephone, newspapers, and so forth (Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen, 2019a). Compared with the past, this has somewhat declined and reflects a general decrease in media-related expenses in Danish households. Although the decrease does not concern one single form of media use, it is the biggest for media that is read and seen. The streaming shows, meanwhile, have seen an increase (Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen, 2019a). Danes pay a licence fee for public service television and radio, and Danish newspapers are generally priced higher than in the other Nordic countries (Schrøder et al., 2017) making a printed newspaper a product not affordable for all Danes. Prices for broadband access are in turn somewhat lower.

(E6) Content monitoring instruments 1 POINT

Content monitoring instruments are not widely implemented in the Danish media industry.

The content of privately-owned media houses who receive public media support are regularly monitored by the authority (The Media Board), but the information is not publicly available.

Public service media also provide content information to the authority (The Public Service Board) that is published annually in the form of Open Access reports.

Content monitoring reports are occasionally published by various organisations (e.g., universities and The Agency for Culture and Palaces). Private news media's annual reports do not include content monitoring.

The commercial company Infomedia offers media monitoring services, which are used by news media as well as authorities and private companies.

(E7) Code of ethics at the national level 3 POINTS

National media have high ethical standards and procedures on a formal as well as informal level.

The Media Liability Act of 1991 states that “the content and conduct of the media shall be in accordance with sound press ethics” (Pressenævnet, 2013: para. 1). The press ethics are written down in the “Advisory rules of sound press ethics” and were last revised in 2013 and are under the supervision of the Danish Press Council. However, new online news media must actively choose to register to be supervised by the Danish Press Council. While some have chosen to do so, some smaller alternative news sites have not. Overall, however, most Danish news media are supervised by the Press Council (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2015) and respect its rulings.

In 2019, the Press Council received 201 complaints about breaches of the sound press ethics. In 2018, that number was at 160. Only 21 per cent of the 201 complaints led to criticism from the Press Council (Pressenævnet, 2019). The complaints were about almost all types of media, with one tabloid and one public service radio station having the most complaints in 2019. In general, most complaints concern crime reporting or financial reporting (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2015). Our respondents confirmed that there is a high degree of focus on the sound press ethics, and that this focus is probably stronger now than it was previously.

(E8) Level of self-regulation 3 POINTS

The level of self-regulation is high in Denmark and part of a professional newsroom culture.

All ten of the leading Danish news media organisations have their own ethical rules and guidelines, with most of them being published online. A study shows

that there has been an increase in the development of internal guidelines and self-regulation from 2006 onwards (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2015). The internal guidelines supplement the guiding rules of sound press ethics and in some instances are more specific and far reaching, for instance, DR's 94-page book of rules and guidelines (Danmarks Radio, 2019a). One editor-in-chief argued that the internal rules were stricter than the general rules. Three Danish news media houses – DR, TV 2, and the newspaper *Politiken* – also have an ombudsman to address media content and receive complaints from users. DR's and TV 2's ombudsmen are mandatory by law, whereas *Politiken* has set up an ombudsman by choice – and is so far the only private media with an ombudsman in Denmark.

(E9) Participation

2 POINTS

News media in Denmark invite participation from the public and value comments, tips, and letters to the editor.

According to the respondents, maximum participation happens when citizens contact journalists with story tips, post comments about news stories in online newspapers, or write letters to the editor. Generally, media houses are very open to the participation of the public, and newspapers often print op-eds written by citizens.

More direct contact between the media and the public can be seen in lectures, public debates, or other activities where the media invites their audiences and the public. One newspaper's representatives travel around the country once a year to visit its audience. Public broadcaster DR has several initiatives, including ten regional dialog forums for securing input from its users (Danmarks Radio, 2019b). In the past decade, a small number of news media have experimented with open newsrooms or public news conferences, but none of those experiments have been implemented yet.

(E10) Rules and practices on internal pluralism

2 POINTS

The internal pluralism in Denmark is based more on practices than rules and most often discussed in relation to professional journalistic values.

Danish newspapers are not partial or political in nature. Most adhere to either a centre-right or centre-left universe in their editorial pages but strive to achieve a certain amount of pluralism in the opinion pages, while – in their self-understanding – working with professional values of impartiality in the news content.

Newsrooms will have daily discussions on the sources and opinions presented in the media, but the discussions are usually based on professional values (such

as news selection criteria or the self-understanding of the newspaper) rather than based on explicit values of internal pluralism. Interviewees, however, stated that they experienced increasing awareness regarding questions of internal pluralism.

To our knowledge, there are no standardised procedures in Danish news media to ensure internal pluralism and give voice to various groups; this includes public service media. The public broadcaster DR, however, has a Director of Pluralism and Diversity who is in charge of a range of pluralism activities regarding recruitment of participants in popular programmes, for positions as journalists, and so forth.

Dimension: Control / Watchdog (C)

(C1) Supervising the watchdog “control of the controllers”

2 POINTS

Media performance is often publicly discussed in media, and media themselves are a topic for critical journalistic coverage in special magazines and sometimes very rarely in media scandals.

DR and TV 2, the two public broadcasters, are obliged to have ombudsmen. One privately-owned newspaper, *Politiken*, has had a “reader’s editor” since 2001. Together, the ombudsmen contribute to public debate by writing columns and reports on media performances and coverage. Journalism scandals have generally been uncovered by other media houses rather than the media affected by the scandal.

Special interest magazine *Journalisten* provides a platform for debate on ethical questions among journalists. Meta-reflections on the role of the media (e.g., with regards to phenomena like racism, populism, or xenophobia) are not frequently taken up in editorials and columns of leading news media. There are generally only few formats providing meta-journalism, such as *Presselogen*, *Mennesker og Medier*, Mediawatch’s *Q podcast*, or DR’s satire programme *Tæt på Sandheden*. Recent scrutiny of “junk news” sites has been initiated by public and private media alike, while right-wing blogs and alternative media are critically monitoring the leading news media.

(C2) Independence of the news media from powerholders

3 POINTS

No formal or ownership-related influence looms over leading news media houses, but political parallelism is a factor for newspapers.

For the public service media, the relationship between news media and powerholders is guided by an arm's length principle (Moe & Mjøs, 2013), which means that “neither politicians nor the Ministry of Culture are involved in the concrete subsidy allocation or act as arbiters of taste” (Kulturministeriet, 2012: pp. 3–4). Thus, the principle is thought to prevent the political level (the Ministry of Culture, the boards of DR, and TV 2) from interfering in editorial discussions and day-to-day practices. In recent years, the arm's length principle has, however, occasionally been challenged by both board members of DR and politicians. They have also attacked specific journalists, programmes, or news coverage in very clear terms. Like the other Nordic countries, Denmark is in the process of shifting to a tax-based media licence system, which might put extra pressure on the arm's length principle in the future.

With the exception of Berlingske Media, newspapers are foundation-owned and thus not owned by non-media companies or political parties. Most Danish newspapers have their historic origins in the party press system. Though formally independent, the degree of political parallelism in news content and audience patterns continues to be comparatively high. Boards of leading news media are in turn largely shielded from powerful business interests. A recent Danish elite study showed that media executives and editors, with very few exceptions, do not form part of Danish elite circles (Larsen et al., 2015).

For the media sector as a whole, the Media Pluralism Monitor 2016 found Denmark to be at low risk when it comes to political influence, as well as at low risk for commercial and ownership-related influence over media content (Willig & Blach-Ørsten, 2016).

(C3) Transparency of data on leading news media

2 POINTS

Some data is published regularly, but not everything is easily accessible. Transparency requires data collection from several different sources, and it does not provide a uniform basis of comparison for all the leading news media.

The transparency of public service media cannot be measured definitively by relying only on obligatory public service statements, which are yearly reports of all receivers of public media support: DR (entirely funded by public media support), the regional TV 2 broadcasters, and various radio stations (Kultur-

ministeriet, 2020b). Such reports document different statistics on economy, audience reach, and content.

Written news media (both in print and online) can also receive public media support and are equally obliged to provide transparent reports on economy (Kulturministeriet, 2020a). The media committee appointed by the minister of cultural affairs oversees that the media who get public media support comply with various content criteria stated in the law (e.g., professional journalism). JP/Politiken (2018), Berlingske Media (2018), DR (2019), and TV 2 (2019) also publish annual reports – sometimes called CSR reports, and sometimes just yearly reports.

(C4) Journalism professionalism

3 POINTS

The journalism professionalism in Denmark is high with strong professional ethos.

According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), professionalisation of journalism has three components: autonomy of journalists; development of distinct professional norms and rules; and the public service orientation of journalists. The degree of autonomy of Danish journalists is relatively high, not least due to a combination of 1) a very strong union representing almost all Danish journalists, which has been very successful in securing high income and good working conditions for their members, and 2) the Danish welfare state model which gives (media) employers high flexibility and (media) employees high income security.

Until global digital intermediaries challenged the business model of national professional media organisations by attracting advertising spending to social media platforms, the economy of media companies in Denmark was good. In recent years, however, the economy has been challenged in news organisations and this has led to less job security and lower income for the youngest generation of journalists (see also indicator C5 – Journalists' job security). The professional culture of Danish journalists is strong and goes hand in hand with a homogenous development of distinct professional norms and rules (Willig, 2016). Regarding the third component, the public service orientation of Danish journalists is relatively high. First, electronic media carrying news are predominantly public service media. Second, regarding newspapers, Denmark has a tradition of not-for-profit ownership (Willig, 2010), reflected in mission statements and policy papers of individual news companies (Willig et al., 2015) as well as in the self-understanding of journalists (Skovsgaard, 2010; Willig et al., 2015). Thirdly, Denmark had a monopoly on journalism education until 1998, but even with the introduction of two new programmes of formal journalism educations at two different universities, all three forms of education are more alike than different, not least because they all include 12–18 months of paid internship (Willig, 2016).

(C5) Journalists' job security

2 POINTS

Journalists' job security in Denmark is generally high compared with other countries. However, the older generations have more secure job positions and privileges than their younger counterparts.

Traditionally, job security has been high in Denmark. But recent economic challenges to traditional news media have led to lay-offs and an increased use of freelance contracts. Although several interviewees did not feel that they experienced less job security than previously, a former head of The Danish Union of Journalists was more sceptical of recent developments, pointing especially to the unstable job security of the younger generation of journalists, highlighting an increased use of freelancers by more and more news media houses. Recent layoffs, as well as the Covid-19 crisis, have also led to a slight increase in the unemployment rate of journalists.

(C6) Practice of access to information

2 POINTS

Traditionally, Danish news media have enjoyed a relatively high widespread access to public information. However, a revision of the law in 2013 led to several restrictions that, despite debate and criticism, are still in place today.

The Danish Information Act has traditionally guaranteed widespread access to public information – so-called *aktindsigt* [access to documents]. It explicitly states the need to guarantee news media's role in delivering information to the public. Journalists enjoy certain privileges; for instance, public institutions are instructed to quickly react to requests from the media and cannot deny requests based on a lack of resources (Dansk Journalistforbund, 2020). However, only 40 per cent of requests are actually responded to on time (Dahlin, 2016).

However, the Act was revised in 2013 and now includes a number of significant and much-debated restrictions. Among others, correspondence between civil servants and ministers – as well as between ministers and members of parliament – is no longer publicly available (TI-DK, 2020). In this respect, the Danish Information Act now grants fewer rights to access than are in place at the EU level (Jørgensen, 2020). The system is also weakened by a rather ineffective complaints system (Obitsø, 2019).

A number of interviewees named an increasingly restricted access to political decision-makers and the revised Information Act as one of the key challenges for media's democratic role in Denmark today. A 2020 report of the Freedom of Speech Commission has concluded that the system of access to information is one of the main obstacles to an enlightened public debate in Denmark (Okholm et al., 2020).

(C7) The watchdog and the news media's mission statement 3 POINTS

All leading news media refer to the watchdog role and work to exercise it.

An analysis of news media's policies shows that most news media in Denmark adhere to the principle of critical and independent journalism that especially focuses on the "bearer of golden chains" (power-holders) (Willig et al., 2015). The role of a watchdog also presents an integral part of individual journalists' self-perception in Denmark. According to World of Journalism Data, a large majority of Danish journalists perceive monitoring and scrutinising political leaders, as well as businesses, as an extremely important part of their work; numbers are higher than in most other European countries (Skovsgaard, 2010; Skovsgaard et al, 2012).

(C8) Professional training 3 POINTS

Continuous "knowledge" training for journalists in news media are available and are usually funded by the employer.

Professional training, in particular, also with respect to data and investigative journalism, is widely available and well-established. The Danish Media Association and The Danish Union of Journalist's collaborate for the Educational Fund of the Press, which finances training courses for its members (including unemployed ones) as part of the collective wage agreement (Pressens Uddannelsesfond, 2020). This system is, however, heavily geared towards persons in traditional journalistic positions and has been criticised for not sufficiently catering to emerging "atypical" journalistic positions (Fagenes Fremtid, 2019). There is no tradition of offering courses that specifically target female journalists.

(C9) Watchdog function and financial resources 3 POINTS

Leading news media give high priority to well-funded investigative journalism

According to the interviewees, investigative journalism is highly prioritised, even more than in the previous years. The Danish Association for Investigative Journalism (since 1989) serves as a base for professional sparring and training; the association organises many workshops and conferences to discuss and promote investigative journalism and awards several annual prizes for investigative journalism. Denmark's most prestigious journalistic award, the Cavling Prize, heavily tilts towards primarily honouring investigative journalism, as well.

Most leading news media have installed specific task forces, or even editorial offices, for investigative journalism. For example, Tabloid *Ekstra Bladet* has, in October 2019, increased their focus on investigative journalism by erecting an editorial office with more than 20 journalists dedicated to the purpose. Journalists from leading Danish news media regularly join cross-border investigative journalistic projects. We do, however, lack data on the number of financial resources dedicated to investigative journalism.

Conclusions

This is the first time that Denmark is part of the Media Democracy Monitor project. The report shows that Denmark generally lives up to most of the democratic criteria regarding freedom of information, media pluralism, journalistic professionalism, equality, and the watchdog function of the news media. Despite economic pressure on the media industry – not helped by the current Covid-19 crisis – interviewees stated that media independence is high and that resources allocated to investigative journalism have increased in the recent year in leading news media.

Still, several challenges persist in the Danish news media. Interviewees stated that increased government control of information is a problem. A change to the Public Information Act in 2013 made it more difficult for the media to access information. A 2020 report on freedom of speech in Denmark points to this as a democratic problem that needs to be addressed (Justitsministeriet, 2020). The media itself does not score too highly when it comes to internal control of media content, access, and coverage of some minorities, as well as to fostering gender sensitivity and equality. A new threat to journalism, that of protecting journalists from online harassment, has in a short time become a priority in all major news media, who report setting up systems to protect and counsel journalists who come under attack.

With regard to internal democracy in the Danish newsrooms, Denmark has a strong – but informal – tradition of including journalists in their editorial discussions. Securing the media's democratic role through informal culture, rather than through codified rules and guidelines, is also more generally a characteristic feature for Danish news media. While this remains a robust and highly adaptive model at the present time, it also introduces an element of fragility in the long run.

Note

1. We conducted ten interviews with reporters and editors between February and March 2020, with additional interviews conducted in June 2020. We interviewed both current and former employees working in the leading Danish news media as well as two of the most important interest organisations: The Danish Union of Journalists and The Danish Media Association.

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