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Denmark and Sweden: The Collision Between Welfare State Politics and Immigration

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The Scandinavian welfare states of Denmark and Sweden have famously similar socio-political and cultural systems, ones which have advanced the common perception of these nations as united in a common humanitarian and progressive global position. However there exists a significant divergence within either nation's approach to immigration, asylum and integration policy, one indicative of the deeply ingrained deviations in popular understandings of national belonging and perspectives on greater European and global integration. By contextualizing the historical progressions of either nation and juxtaposing their individual responses to both the 2015 European refugee crisis and the contemporary Ukrainian conflict and resulting refugee crisis, it becomes apparent that these often-merged nations operate within starkly different realms of migration policy. This trend is emblematic of a more isolationist and nativist approach generally adopted in Denmark versus the more liberal and multilateral approach popularized in Sweden.

Keywords

immigration, asylum policy, refugees, welfare states, European integration

Disciplines

Immigration Law | Migration Studies | Scandinavian Studies

Comments

Written for as a Senior Thesis in International Affairs and Independent Research Project in Copenhagen, Denmark.

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The Collision Between Welfare State Politics and Immigration

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Senior Thesis in International Affairs

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May 6th, 2022

Abstract

The Scandinavian welfare states of Denmark and Sweden have famously similar socio-political and cultural systems, ones which have advanced the common perception of these nations as united in a common humanitarian and progressive global position. However there exists a significant divergence within either nation's approach to immigration, asylum and integration policy, one indicative of the deeply ingrained deviations in popular understandings of national belonging and perspectives on greater European and global integration. By contextualizing the historical progressions of either nation and juxtaposing their individual responses to both the 2015 European refugee crisis and the contemporary Ukrainian conflict and resulting refugee crisis, it becomes apparent that these often-merged nations operate within starkly different realms of migration policy. This trend is emblematic of a more isolationist and nativist approach generally adopted in Denmark versus the more liberal and multilateral approach popularized in Sweden.

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Introduction

The Scandinavian welfare states of Denmark and Sweden have famously similar socio-political and cultural systems, ones which have advanced the common perception of these nations as united in a common humanitarian and progressive global position. Furthermore, these two nations “share many background factors considered important for how states respond to immigration: they [both] have small, open economies built around universal welfare states; they have similar histories of immigration; and, egalitarianism is held in high esteem, as are individual autonomy and constitutional rights.”¹ However there exists a significant divergence within either nation’s approach to immigration, asylum and integration policy, one indicative of the ingrained deviations in popular understandings of national belonging and perspectives on greater European and global integration. By contextualizing the historical progressions of either nation and juxtaposing their individual responses to both the 2015 European refugee crisis and the contemporary Ukrainian conflict and resulting refugee crisis, it becomes apparent that these often-merged nations operate within starkly different realms of migration policy. This trend is emblematic of a more isolationist and nativist approach generally adopted in Denmark versus the more liberal and multilateral approach popularized in Sweden.

For the purpose of this analysis, the term *refugee* will designate a person as defined by the United Nations Refugee Council’s *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, ratified in 1951. Outlining the parameters of refugee classification as being a person who is “unable to or willing to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted

¹ Kristina Bækker Simonsen, “Political Approaches to Immigration in Scandinavia since 1995,” Nordics Info (Aarhus University, February 18, 2019), <https://nordics.info/show/artikel/political-approaches-to-immigration-in-scandinavia-since-1995>.

for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion,” this indicator references at-risk individuals and groups whose status has been affirmed via the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).² Conversely, *asylum* and *asylum-seeker* is applied to individual cases who are seeking international protection without a definitive status as decided by the UNHCR. Both are factors in greater movements of people between nation-states, both permanently and temporarily, in a larger system of immigration and migratory patterns.

Lastly, the term *welfare state* can refer to a wide range of socio-economic structures, with differentiations based on both geographics and implementation methodology. This paper will specifically examine the structure which is primarily operated in Western Europe, which Paul Spicker identifies as the *social protection welfare state*. This system, as opposed to the ideal model, is facilitated not solely by the state but rather a collaborative effort between “government, independent, voluntary, and autonomous public services,” a function which is funded by progressive tax rates.³ This model differs from the widely-institutionalized Liberal or Anglo-Saxon model operating in some capacity in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and even the United States, wherein benefits are limited to only those considered most disadvantaged.⁴ It is important to note that the interaction between the welfare state and immigration has become a key point in the political discord in Scandinavia as nations struggle to balance welfare principles with increasing globalization and mobilization. This paper will specifically seek to highlight how, despite common notions of welfare states as being wholly egalitarian and progressive in nature,

² “Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees,” Convention relating to the Status of Refugees § (1951).

³ Paul Spicker, “Welfare States,” An Introduction to Social Policy, 2022, <http://www.spicker.uk/social-policy/wstate.htm>.

⁴ Gøsta Esping-Andersen, “The Three Political Economies of the Welfare State,” *International Journal of Sociology* 20, no. 3 (1990): pp. 92-123.

their interactions with immigrants and refugees (particularly non-westerners) have often contradicted this perception. Rather, a case study of policy and thought evolution in both Denmark and Sweden reveals that welfare chauvinism and nativism have become major factors in crafting more restrictive public opinion and legislation, particularly in Denmark. The resulting dichotomy showcases two very distinctive, but deeply ingrained, approaches between the otherwise frequently similar neighboring countries.

A Brief Historical Examination of Immigration and Refugee Policy in the Nordic States

Scandinavia, unlike a majority of Western Europe, existed relatively separate from global immigration patterns prior to the 1960s as prior movements were primarily intraregional. Because of the relative newness of Nordic immigration, historical and political analyses of the long-term effects of these movements have been limited, especially prior to the turn of the century when nearly all newcomers were first-generation migrants. Most initial studies additionally evaluated the topic as a mainly societal issue, emphasizing the integral components of immigration rather than posing more policy-centric questions. The 1960s saw discourse centered most commonly around the economic utility of immigration, with guest worker programs serving as the driving force behind the massive and industrialized post-war economic boom. The 1970s, triggered by the oil crisis of 1973 and subsequent recession, redirected dialogue towards rising socio-economic concerns, often utilizing migrants as scapegoats for rising normative issues including unemployment, housing shortages and inflation. A decade later, the 1980s were embedded with the realization of the permanence of what were previously understood as temporary commitments. This realization once more shifted the focus towards incorporating the more lasting cultural impact

of these new populations in both Europe and Scandinavia.⁵ This final repositioning would become a focal point of successive dialogue, inextricably linking the development of multicultural societies to rising fears surrounding the preservation of traditional national culture and identity.

Denmark's historical involvement in the Second World War has become a point of national embarrassment for Danes as the nation submitted to and, to a certain extent, collaborated with Nazi occupation; repeatedly denied admission to a number of fleeing Jewish refugees along the national border with Germany; and between 1940 and 1943, expelled a number of Jewish refugees then residing in Denmark, many of whom were later killed in German extermination camps. Even after the war's ultimate end in 1945, "Denmark continued to behave harshly toward people in need," seen in the government's continued expulsion of Jews and on one occasion in 1947, the denial of refuge to approximately 4,400 Jewish asylum-seekers aboard the ship *Exodus*. The following years were marked by significant hardship for those attempting to return to Denmark and obtain/reobtain citizenship, with the process taking up to ten years for many. This checkered past is one only recently confronted in popular conversation and historical renditions and analyses, where the focus has been placed more centrally on Danish resistance efforts and the successful operation which effectively saved the lives of 7,000 Danish Jews through their relocation to Sweden in 1943.⁶ The following years were marked by significant hardship for those attempting to return to Denmark and obtain/reobtain citizenship, with the process taking up to ten years for many. Both Denmark's war policy and war memory have been a focal point of recent historical dialogue, as rising discussion in recent years has highlighted how Danish and Swedish approaches to immigrants and refugees emerged as early as the second World War, when refugees began to make up a large

⁵ Sven Tägil et al., "Immigration to Scandinavia after World War II," in *Ethnicity and Nation Building in the Nordic World* (London: Hurst, 1995), pp. 283-290.

⁶ Vilhjálmur Örn Vilhjálmsón and Bent Blüdnikow, "Rescue, Expulsion, and Collaboration: Denmark's Difficulties with Its World War II Past," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 18 (2006): pp. 3-29.

proportion of global concern, with certain actions of Denmark during the period resonating with modern-day refugees.

Alternatively, Sweden adopted a marginally different war policy, though it must be recognized that geopolitical considerations created a different reality for Sweden than one faced in Denmark. Unlike Sweden, the Danes had suffered several devastating military losses over the prior centuries and also directly bordered Germany. Thus, while Denmark's primary concern was Germany's military position along the southern front, the Baltic Sea provided a buffer zone between Sweden and the war which eased the imposition of an immediate territorial threat. Rather, Sweden's focus additionally focused on the additional threat of Soviet Union opposition, a country which had become increasingly hostile towards neighboring Finland.⁷ These geographical considerations, in tandem with economic factors and historical relations, prompted Sweden's neutrality policy, wherein the country did not provide government-sanctioned military aid to either side.⁸ Despite this refrain, Sweden served as a key factor in the rescue of thousands of Danish Jews facing persecution upon the Nazi occupation in 1940.⁹ Collaboration with Norwegian refugee institutions additionally facilitated crucial aid to refugees residing in Scandinavia within a variety of economic, education and social sectors. These efforts also extended to refugees in the Baltic states, particularly in 1944 when the Sweden government assumed responsibility for the tens of thousands of civilians that the Baltic national associations did not have the resources or capacity to assist. This massive growth in Sweden's refugee responsibility launched the transformational shift of understanding refugees as a state responsibility rather than that of only designated offices

⁷ Steven Koblik, "Sweden's Attempts to Aid Jews, 1939-1945," *Scandinavian Studies* 56, no. 2 (1984): pp. 89-113, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40918381>.

⁸ C. Peter Chen, "Sweden in World War II," World War II Database (Lava Development, LLC, April 2007), <https://ww2db.com/country/sweden>.

⁹ Erin Blakemore, "Why 90 Percent of Danish Jews Survived the Holocaust," *History* (A&E Television Networks, January 7, 2019), <https://www.history.com/news/wwii-danish-jews-survival-holocaust>.

and committees. This marked a watershed change in the way refugee policy is handled in Sweden.¹⁰ These nuances within the approaches of Denmark and Sweden hold thematic similarities to later immigration responses and migration crises, especially those concerning refugees. The two nations experienced contrary shifts in the mid-20th century, with Sweden gradually transitioning to a more globally oriented and open welfare state whereas Denmark initiated a trajectory to maintain and even extend restrictions towards outsiders.

During the immediate post-war period, as Soviet satellite states legitimized and treaty negotiations redefined geographic boundaries, the resulting border adjustments in the Baltic states, Poland and Germany had a significant impact on Nordic immigration patterns. Sweden in particular took in a large number of Eastern Europeans fleeing the economic hardships and instability of Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe. Prior to 1944, the nation's documented total immigrant population never exceeded 10,000 (with one exception in 1920) but between 1943 and 1944, the number more than doubled, growing from 6,249 newcomers annually to approximately 30,000 by the end of 1946.¹¹ This growth reflected the change that, "henceforth, Sweden admitted more or less everybody who sought asylum in the country and the Swedish state guaranteed their rights," a change brought forth by the economic strife and rising political revolutions in the East accompanied with goals to reunite with relatives or for labor opportunities.¹² And although a number of people would ultimately return to their countries of origin, many would stay in Scandinavia,

¹⁰ Mikael Byström, "When the State Stepped into the Arena: The Swedish Welfare State, Refugees and Immigrants 1930s–50s," *Journal of Contemporary History* 49, no. 3 (July 2014): pp. 599-621, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009414528259>.

¹¹ "Population and Population Changes 1749–2021," Statistiska Centralbyrån (Statistics Sweden, February 22, 2022), <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/population/population-composition/population-statistics/pong/tables-and-graphs/yearly-statistics--the-whole-country/population-and-population-changes/>.

¹² Byström, "When the State Stepped into the Arena: The Swedish Welfare State, Refugees and Immigrants 1930s–50s," 599-621.

becoming interwoven in Swedish society. This would permanently alter the demographics of the nation and instigate a shift from homogeneity towards greater diversity than most other Nordic nations.

Denmark, alternatively, perhaps due to size or a difference in proximity to Eastern Europe, took in considerably fewer immigrants after World War II. While Sweden's total reported refugee population in 1960 totaled around 26,000 people, Denmark's of that year fell at only 2,300. This number remained relatively stagnant until the early 1980s, never exceeding 4,400 refugees.¹³ Primary movement into the country, and into much of Western Europe, especially from non-western countries, stemmed from the introduction of guest worker programs which rose to popularity in West Germany, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Denmark. Economic prosperity was significantly boosted in the post-war era and initiated this new, economically-based system of migration, restructuring the previously passive movement of people and centering the previously peripheral Nordic region more solidly in migratory trends of the latter half of the century into the next.¹⁴ In response to the increased labor demands generated by the exponential economic boom of the 1950s and labor shortages brought on by the war, the 1960s saw a rise in labor migration, with most of Scandinavia's guest workers arriving from Yugoslavia, Pakistan and Morocco. These new populations satisfied demands, fueled the massive industrial growth of the era and comprised the "first large group of visible minorities to settle in Denmark in modern times," creating the first significant diversification of the country's population.¹⁵ The movements of Turkish workers into

¹³ "Refugee Population by Country or Territory of Asylum - Denmark," The World Bank Data (The World Bank Group), accessed April 2, 2022, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SM.POP.REFG?locations=DK>.

¹⁴ Stephen Castles, "The Guest-Worker in Western Europe - an Obituary," *International Migration Review* 20, no. 4 (1986): p. 761, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2545735>.

¹⁵ Silke Holmqvist, "The Figure of the Guest Worker - Emotions, Places and Images of Immigration in Denmark c. 1960-1989," Institut for Kultur og Samfund (Aarhus Universitet, January 7, 2022), [https://pure.au.dk/portal/da/projects/arbejdstitel-gaesterne-som-aldrig-tog-hjem\(3cb9bbb3-3fc6-448a-9c78-a5be55474d04\).html](https://pure.au.dk/portal/da/projects/arbejdstitel-gaesterne-som-aldrig-tog-hjem(3cb9bbb3-3fc6-448a-9c78-a5be55474d04).html).

Denmark, for example, reshaped the nation's cultural makeup, this minority group now the largest in the country. Motivated by the economic opportunity presented by a recovering Europe and propelled by political unrest in Turkey (which would result in two coups in 1960 and 1980), these workers, most commonly young men, migrated for short periods to provide cheap labor for European businesses, often sending earnings back to families in their home countries. Because of the looseness of regulations at the time, exact statistics on the total number of people moving to Denmark during this period is widely undocumented, though estimates place totals at a minimum of 20,000 foreign workers in Denmark by 1970.¹⁶

This influx, however, was not met without reservations, particularly in Denmark where many feared that the new additions to the labor market would impair opportunity for Danish workers, a concern exacerbated by the country's 1973 accession into the European Community. In response, a definite process was delineated to mitigate labor migration, one predicated on Danish employers' assurance that they had "tried in vain to find 'qualified Danish labor.'"¹⁷ Concerns were further quelled by the inherent impermanence of these programs, the label 'guest worker' implying a temporality to the foreigners' stays. In Sweden, however, despite a few expressed reservations, "foreign workers were generally afforded the same economic and social rights as Swedish workers," receiving equal access to health insurance and unemployment benefits.¹⁸ It must be noted that during the period of peak labor migration into Sweden, which

¹⁶ N. Wium Olesen et al., "Danish Immigration Policy, 1970-1992," Nordics Info (Aarhus University, November 7, 2019), <https://nordics.info/show/artikel/danish-immigration-policy-1970-1992-1>.

¹⁷ Heidi Vad Jønsson and Klaus Petersen, "Denmark: A National Welfare State Meets the World," *Immigration Policy and the Scandinavian Welfare State 1945–2010*, 2012, pp. 97-148, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137015167_3.

¹⁸ Byström, "When the State Stepped into the Arena: The Swedish Welfare State, Refugees and Immigrants 1930s–50s," 599-621.

occurred between 1949 and 1971, migrants came primarily from Finland and southern Europe as opposed to the non-western populations who applied for work in Denmark.¹⁹

Yet despite the implied temporality of these programs, the movements of people into Europe persisted as economic stagnation and contraction reverberated at an international level beginning in the early 1960s. Though the guest workers of the former decade were expected to return to their countries of origin following the duration of their temporary work permits, a vast majority of these laborers stayed in their host countries, their families often joining through the then easily navigated reunification programs. Both due to the deteriorating socio-political climates in their home countries and the greater economic opportunity of Europe at the time, families were increasingly incentivized to migrate to either join relatives abroad or start a new life elsewhere. Once settled and when beginning the process of integration through education, housing selection and employment, the prospect of leaving became even less feasible. Therefore, though these guest worker programs across Western Europe were discontinued in 1974, these migrants often matriculated, ultimately serving as pioneers of contemporary permanent migration.²⁰

Furthermore, this unexpected permanence played a significant role in reshaping Nordic (and European) sentiment towards foreign laborers and migrants, a negative shift augmented by the 1973 Oil Crisis. As these workers and their families settled into their new communities, they lost what was seen as a crucial component of their utility to Europeans: their flexibility and mobility. This settlement also prompted an increased “demand for social capital investment in housing, educational, health and social amenities” to accommodate and integrate these populations. When left unmet, these demands frequently resulted in “urban decay, social tension

¹⁹ Charles Westin, “Sweden: Restrictive Immigration Policy and Multiculturalism,” Migration Policy Institute (Migration Policy Institute, March 2, 2017), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/sweden-restrictive-immigration-policy-and-multiculturalism>.

²⁰ Castles, “The Guest-Worker in Western Europe - an Obituary,” 761-778.

and political conflict.”²¹ This rising dichotomy, inextricably the responsibility of the state, was made increasingly difficult to cope with given the global recession which served for more restrictive migration policy and, on a broader level, paved the way for the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s. Though the fundamental changes brought on by this new wave of political orientation were less prominent in the Nordic welfare states, the shift towards a more conservative approach was rather reflected in the attitudes of the public and in the government’s addendum of harsher limitations. Denmark, for example, imposed an immediate termination of labor migration in 1973, spurred by the growing unemployment rate and increasingly protectionist public sentiment.²²

Despite this rising protectionism, which persisted throughout the remainder of the decade, there was a certain willingness to adopt more open policy, one reflected in Queen Margrethe’s 1983 New Year’s Eve address, which called for a renewed commitment to “people from other parts of the world.” She articulated that, despite the many cultural dissimilarities which existed between Danes and foreigners, “1983 is not just our year; it must also be theirs.”²³ This sentiment translated well into the new Aliens Act implemented in June of that year and labeled a “humanitarian refugee policy.” The act permitted anyone to travel to Denmark as a ‘tourist’ where they would then find employment and be granted residency. Designated as “Europe’s most liberal act for non-citizens,” the 1983 Aliens Act initially saw massive increases in the number of people entering Denmark, though increasing opposition and struggles to matriculate newcomers ultimately led to restrictive revisions beginning in 1985.²⁴ The act made Denmark a decisively more attractive destination for incoming migrants and refugees, spurring a greater number to enter

²¹ Castles, “The Guest-Worker in Western Europe - an Obituary,” 761-778.

²² N. Wium Olesen et al., “Danish Immigration Policy, 1970-1992.”

²³ Jønsson and Petersen, “Denmark: A National Welfare State Meets the World.”

²⁴ N. Wium Olesen et al., “Danish Immigration Policy, 1970-1992.”

the country following its ratification. The Aliens Act also came during a period of heightened global conflict and political instability. European dissuasive efforts of the previous decade did little to quell the massive mobilizations of Middle Eastern and Global South populations. Faced with political unrest, economic crises and violent civil conflicts, millions embarked on often perilous journeys to find safety and economic security in Europe. Individual crises such as the Iran-Iraq wars of the 1980s and the war in former Yugoslavia during the 1990s only compounded the influx of foreigners to Europe and Scandinavia.²⁵ As opposed to previous dilemmas of former decades, these conflicts posed a different form of migration, one shaped by the movement of refugees and asylum seekers as opposed to economic migrants. This distinction became a critical point of divergence and one which has since driven debate, particularly a focal point in recent years.

The migration surge of the 1980s and 1990s prompted a sweeping critical response from social conservatives, who successfully argued for more comprehensive (and limited) immigration policy hoped to curtail the growing influxes of people. Conservative criticism's prominence was supplemented by the media's increasing role in shaping public opinion of migrants and refugees, one often skewed with negative portrayals of these foreign groups as burdens on the cherished welfare state systems. This helped to create the more modern narrative of "immigrants as a social problem," one propagated most commonly by right-wing parties, which made substantial gains in the Danish parliament during the 1980s.²⁶ Sweden, however, responded quite differently to the changing global narrative as the country transitioned away from the economic-oriented labor migrations of the 1950s and 1960s, a process which had been instrumental in developing the public sector and enabling the creation of the modern welfare seen today. Since the 1970s, Sweden's

²⁵ Jønsson and Petersen, "Denmark: A National Welfare State Meets the World."

²⁶ Jønsson and Petersen, "Denmark: A National Welfare State Meets the World."

immigration pattern shifted towards refugees, becoming one which consisted “mainly of refugee migration and family reunification from non-European countries in the Middle East and Latin America.” This trend significantly shifted the nation’s ethnic makeup, the resulting alteration to the former homogeneity having become a crucial point of divergence between Sweden and Denmark.²⁷

The distinctions in Scandinavian approaches to migration and refugees which began to emerge during the Cold War laid the foundation for the definitive and paradigm shift of policy which occurred during the early 2000s, as Denmark adopted even greater restrictions across nearly every level of the migration sector. The massive enlargement of the European Union brought on by the collapse of the Soviet Union raised concerns in Denmark specifically regarding the future of intra-continental migration, as many of the newly independent Eastern states were in unstable stages of transition. In response to these worries and preexisting anti-immigrant attitudes, the Danish government implemented a “long succession of more or less incremental policy changes that have tightened asylum rights, raised the bar for access to permanent residence and citizenship, and restricted immigrants’ rights to social welfare benefits.”²⁸ In 1993, the Edinburgh Agreement outlined four “opt-outs” thereafter applied to Danish EU membership. One of which, the opt-out of the Justice and Home Affairs EU policy framework, excuses Denmark from legal obligations surrounding EU asylum standards. This has been a vastly important policy for deciding Danish relations pertaining to immigration with the greater European Union.²⁹ Between 1995 and 2005, Denmark introduced formal language requirements for citizenship, a citizenship test and increased the required number of residency years in their citizenship curriculum, all the while maintaining

²⁷ Westin, “Sweden: Restrictive Immigration Policy and Multiculturalism.”

²⁸ Simonsen, “Political Approaches to Immigration in Scandinavia since 1995.”

²⁹ “The Danish Opt-Outs from EU Cooperation,” The Danish Parliament, August 14, 2019, <https://www.thedanishparliament.dk/en/eu-information-centre/the-danish-opt-outs-from-eu-cooperation>.

greatly reduced access to social benefits and refusing to permit dual citizenship.³⁰ During the same period, Sweden imposed no language requirements or citizenship tests, introduced dual citizenship allowances and kept their required residency period at five years.³¹ Since these introductions, immigration has often been considered the most divisive policy sector in the region, with Denmark repeatedly adopting what has been one of the most hard-lined approaches in Western Europe as Sweden continues to maintain one of the most liberal approaches.

The Welfare State Meets Globalization

Since the inception of the welfare state in Nordic countries, its position in defining socio-political and economic institutions has pervaded discussions along a wide range of sectors. The famed systems of Denmark and Sweden have made these nations appear to be attractive destinations, wherein many newcomers and prospective citizens have hopefully anticipated strong governmental assistance with their relocation and integration efforts. Thus the attractiveness of the Nordic region to both Eastern Europeans and non-Europeans relied heavily on the area's reputation as a welfare society. Although the system was initially introduced in the late 18th century with a series of reforms inspired by industrialization and urbanization, it was not fully incorporated into the legal structures of Denmark and Sweden until after the Second World War, as the region began to become more fully intertwined with global movements of people.³² The foreign laborers during this initial construction period were therefore instrumental in funding the creation of the welfare

³⁰ Vibeke Jakobsen, Tomas Korpi, and Thomas Lorentzen, "Immigration and Integration Policy and Labour Market Attainment among Immigrants to Scandinavia," *European Journal of Population* 35, no. 2 (2018): pp. 305-328, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-018-9483-3>.

³¹ "History," Swedish Migration Agency, September 10, 2020, <https://www.migrationsverket.se/English/About-the-Migration-Agency/Migration-to-Sweden/History.html>.

³² Stein Kuhnle, "The Beginnings of the Nordic Welfare States: Similarities and Differences," *Acta Sociologica* 21, no. 1_suppl (1978): pp. 9-33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000169937802101s02>.

state. This dual development served to center the debate of immigration policy around what role and in what capacity the welfare state should interact with migrants and refugees.

Until the emergence of social upheavals and wars towards the end of the century, the welfare systems existed relatively separate from foreigners, who were distanced by temporary visas and a lack of social integration into Scandinavian society. Yet with the rise of international conflicts and mobilizations in the late 20th century, the established welfare systems were progressively expected to guarantee assistance and social protection for those arriving from marginalized and at-risk situations, extending help across fields including healthcare, economic support, education, housing security, political resources and employment opportunity. The shifts in expectations, however, differed from what was then the general understanding of the welfare state: an operation reliant on the collaboration between the state and citizens of a socially-cohesive community, ones who were born into the system and thus fully active and understanding of its common culture and functioning.³³ This inherent and often undisclosed aspect of the Nordic welfare states in turn tended to neglect newly arrived foreigners based on the ingrained yet unsaid principle: they were not a native Scandinavian.

Denmark and Sweden: Divergence in Scandinavia

Understanding the variances in policy between Denmark and Sweden despite their similar economic and political structures lends to what researchers have identified as the two most plausible explanations for the divergence: conceptions of national identity and political party dynamics. Although “these explanations are not mutually exclusive... [they] may supplement each

³³ Helle Strauss and Gurid Aga Askeland, “The Nordic Welfare Model, Civil Society and Social Work,” in *Global Social Work: Crossing Borders, Blurring Boundaries* (Sydney University Press, 2014), pp. 241-254.

other to give a more nuanced account of the causes of Danish policy movement versus Swedish stability.”³⁴ There have also emerged varying patterns of representation in media platforms, ones which have played a fundamental role in shaping public perspectives, contributing to the dichotomy between conservative and liberal migration and integration policy. At an international level, it can be difficult for the global public to separate Sweden and Denmark given the constant merging of the two nations in socio-political and economic representations. Yet closer examination reveals pivotal and historically significant polarities in identification which have shaped policy, ones which are emphasized in political debates and media coverage. As Kristina Bækker Simonsen articulated:

The differences between Danish and Swedish immigration politics have been the focus not only of scholarly but also public and political attention since at least 2010. It is not uncommon for Danish politicians to argue for more restrictive immigration policies with reference to the undesirable ‘Swedish conditions’ that would purportedly result from a too liberal approach. The ‘political correctness’ of Swedes is presented as an obstacle to talking about real and serious problems with immigrant integration. On the other side of the Great Belt, Swedish ministers dubbed the restrictive Danish asylum policy ‘disloyal’ (*osolidarisk*) during the 2015/2016 refugee crisis, and, in Sweden, the climate of the Danish debate is considered polarizing and potentially damaging for integration.³⁵

This intraregional strife is indicative of a larger struggle to grapple with the relationship between Nordic homogeneity and an increasingly globalized world. Yet whilst Denmark has arguably turned inwards, often isolating itself within a greater European and global narrative, Sweden has, to an extent, embraced this change. The nuances of this dissonance are reflected in either nation’s understanding of national belonging and national sense-making procedures, their political party systems and through media discourse.

³⁴ Simonsen, “Political Approaches to Immigration in Scandinavia since 1995.”

³⁵ Simonsen, “Political Approaches to Immigration in Scandinavia since 1995.”

National Belonging and Sense-Making in the Nordic Region

Global perspectives of Scandinavia have categorized the region as socially progressive and hyper-modern, champions of egalitarianism and adaptive to an ever-changing global world order. The Sustainable Development Solutions Network, a global initiative underwritten by the United Nations, published yearly “World Happiness Reports” in collaboration with Gallup World Poll data. Initially released in 2012, the poll highlights a shift in developmental analysis away from historically popularized methods of understanding national development (e.g., through the lens of GDP per capita). Over the past decade of reports, Scandinavia has repeatedly led the polls, securing a seemingly permanent position in the top ten happiest and most content countries in the world.³⁶ This reputation has driven the conglomeration of the Nordic states as a unified region, homogeneous in every aspect beyond just demographically. Yet this reputation precludes the disregarded possibility and reality that there is disharmony within the region.

In 1991, political scientist Benedict Anderson introduced the revolutionary concept of the ‘imagined community’ as a way of further analyzing nationalism, a concept which has become a central component of the changing world order yet one which had then been difficult to fully define and study. Anderson’s book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, was a poignant and singular exploration into the rapid and unprecedented growth of nationalist sentiment in the postwar era. Claiming that these ideas of nation, nationality and nationalism emerged in the late 18th century, Anderson posited that these concepts link the various distillations of historic factors and self-consciousness with various “political and ideological

³⁶ Frank Martela et al., “The Nordic Exceptionalism: What Explains Why the Nordic Countries Are Constantly among the Happiest in the World,” World Happiness Report (Sustainable Development Solutions Network, March 20, 2020), <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2020/the-nordic-exceptionalism-what-explains-why-the-nordic-countries-are-constantly-among-the-happiest-in-the-world/>.

constellations.”³⁷ In an almost paradoxical shift, as the world experienced globalization, mobilization and integration, many nations (European countries in particular) experienced a growth in nationalism which shaped interaction with the changing global narrative. The variances in these interactions are aptly exemplified in the Nordic case.

Defining national identity as “the national community’s self-image... which requires not only ideas of who belongs, but also of who does not belong to the national community,” this concept can be further extended as the process of dictating national in-groups and out-groups, a “process of exclusion.”³⁸ The inherent exclusionary aspect of the national community is dictated by the simple criteria of birthplace yet, in a greater European context, extends to incorporate a larger, more encompassing idea of identity, one centered on identifying as a European in addition to being a specific country’s national. Certain commonalities have shaped what it means to be a European and have generated a noticeable separation from those who are not. This supranational bond is solidified by common historical, ethnic, religious, linguistic and political frameworks, ones centered on Christianity as the root of liberal democracy. This shared foundation is also more narrowly applicable in the Nordic case, guided by what Mikael Byström of Uppsala University designated as the ‘Nordic prerogative.’ Defined by “older ideas about Nordic or Scandinavian ‘people’s’ geographical, cultural, economic and political affinity,” this prerogative corresponds with the boundary construction of nationalism whilst acting at a regional level. Though initially adopted in the mid-19th century to unite people under a common idea of Scandinavia, ‘Nordism’ evolved to encapsulate a more political and societal unification and camaraderie, one bound by

³⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

³⁸ Kristina Bakkær Simonsen, “How the Host Nation's Boundary Drawing Affects Immigrants' Belonging,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42, no. 7 (February 2016): pp. 1153-1176, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2016.1138854>.

what was deemed the essential elements of Nordic identity. This political collaboration was solidified with the establishment of the Nordic Council in 1963.³⁹

Lastly, the final tier to Danish and Swedish self-identification beyond European and regional is that of ethnicity and nationality. Research has demonstrated that, contrary to popular belief, economies and regime type does not solely decide immigration and integration policy. Rather, many of the differences in such policies are influenced by what Kristian Kreigbaum Jensen has outlined as conceptions of national identity. As identified in his research, the national identities of Sweden and Denmark differ greatly despite the many cultural similarities, these differences having been shaped by both history as well as along lines of relative determinism and voluntarism. In Denmark, for example, national identity is “presented as historically determined, and immigrants must engage in long processes of socialization to become Danish.” This, Jensen highlights, can be demonstrated through the early childhood socialization initiatives, aimed at fully integrating children of foreigners into the Danish way of life. Alternatively, Sweden’s national identity is “moldable, being shaped in processes of collective negotiation. At the individual level, national identity is seen as something one can choose.” This in turn implies that immigrants and refugees can become a part of a “dynamic Swedish nation by actively choosing to belong.”⁴⁰

Citizenship requirements are a fundamental component of integration policy and a factor in deciding migrant intent, outlining the process through which non-native members of society can officially become a fully recognized part of a nation. In this regard, citizenship can most aptly be defined as “a set of practices (juridical, political, economic and cultural) which define a person as

³⁹ Byström, “When the State Stepped into the Arena: The Swedish Welfare State, Refugees and Immigrants 1930s–50s,” 599-621.

⁴⁰ Kristian Kriegbaum Jensen, “Scandinavian Immigrant Integration Politics: Varieties of the Civic Turn: Phd Dissertation” (dissertation, Politica, 2016); Simonsen, “Political Approaches to Immigration in Scandinavia since 1995.”

a competent member of society, and which as a consequence shape the flow of resources to persons and social groups.”⁴¹ In extension, citizenship guidelines hint at how open a country is towards non-natives depending on how restrictive or difficult it is to obtain. The process additionally guides how new arrivals are treated in relation to state-operated programs including those of education, welfare and taxes. Denmark falls at one end of this spectrum, with notoriously stringent requirements for citizenship, whereas Sweden has maintained much looser guidelines. Currently, Denmark requires prospective citizens to have highly comprehensive Danish language skills, an extensive understanding of Danish history and culture and nine years of residency to be a candidate for citizenship. These requirements also apply to refugee cases, with the only exception being that refugees need only eight years of residency as opposed to nine. For the final five years of this term, self-sufficiency must also be proved to Danish authorities to legitimize citizenship. Comparatively, Sweden exhibits drastically looser conditions, with fewer demands and a residency requirement of only five years. The noticeable differences in citizenship accessibility are largely influenced by the political parties in either nation, with Denmark’s strict demands largely the result of the greater influence of the right-wing populist Danish People’s Party.⁴²

The demographics of Sweden serve as another factor in shaping modern dialogue and policy. Due to the relative openness of Sweden’s borders in the postwar period and the large migratory trends of previous decades, Sweden now has one of the largest foreign-born populations in Europe. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reported in 2019 that approximately 19.5% of the Swedish population was foreign-born. That same year,

⁴¹ Bryan S Turner, *Citizenship and Social Theory* (London: Sage, 1993).

⁴² Gergana Yovova, “Obtaining Citizenship in Scandinavia: Denmark’s Rules Seen as Too Stringent,” European Website on Integration (Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, February 4, 2020), https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/obtaining-citizenship-scandinavia-denmarks-rules-seen-too-stringent_en.

Denmark's proportion of foreign-born residents fell at only 10.5%.⁴³ Sweden also serves as the home for the seventh-largest proportion of refugees per capita across the world.⁴⁴ The very presence of these diverse populations has been a consequential factor in defining the tenets of nationalism. The resulting variances between Denmark and Sweden are a vital component in understanding how either country's sense of national belonging and citizenship have shaped how the public interacts with immigration policy, migrants and refugees.

Political Party Dynamics and the Asynchronous Rise of Right-Wing Populism in Denmark & Sweden

The development of political parties in Scandinavia has been instrumental in shaping the region's policy and international relations. The system's ever-changing dynamic character emerged in the 1970s with a shift in political party prevalence and political orientations prompting the emergence of a whole new array of parties and was further expanded during the 1990s. Political party dynamics have since underlined national identities and governance in the Nordic states, thus playing an influential role in constructing policy and shaping public opinion, most notably through the success of extreme right-wing parties seen particularly in Denmark and Norway. The party systems in Denmark and Sweden have become arguably the most important actors behind the narrow Danish approach and Sweden's contrary openness.

Historically, these parties have existed as the predominant mechanism with which citizens interact with the government. Political parties have remained especially popular in the Nordic welfare states largely due to their function as facilitators of citizen input. Welfare states tend to

⁴³ "Foreign-Born Population (Indicator)," *OECD Migration*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5a368e1b-en>.

⁴⁴ Kerrie Holloway and Amy Leach, "Public Narratives and Attitudes towards Refugees and Other Migrants: Sweden Country Profile," ODI (ODI, June 2022), https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/sweden_migration_country_profile.pdf.

generate greater political participation and civic engagement given the government's strengthened position in dictating the lives of its citizens, creating a larger 'stake' for the electorate.⁴⁵ Greater public involvement prompted the multi-party system, wherein nearly all perspectives have allocated representation in parliament. The primary party actors in the Nordic political arena were originally coordinated between three main poles of political orientation: labor, capital and the rural periphery and urban center.⁴⁶ All three poles traditionally represented the three main sectors of the population: the working class, the bourgeoisie and the agrarian public. As the system has evolved, the poles transformed into the five-party system popularized in the Nordic countries during the Cold War. Then, as new parties began to surface in the 1980s and older parties (specifically communist) began to fade, this five-party system was once more replaced by one of even larger membership. The most notable new additions to the party framework in Denmark and Sweden include Christian-centered parties, left-libertarian parties, Socialist parties and right-wing populist parties. The latter has become the most notable opponent to immigration and integration. Initially created as agrarian-oriented parties primarily concerned with taxes, the 1980s saw a convergence of Nordic right-wing parties as anti-immigrant and anti-refugee.⁴⁷ Since, although there have been some fluctuations in influence, the continuous presence of this vocal opposition towards immigration has guided restrictive trends. In Denmark, this was particularly impactful as conservative parties gained immediate traction in the political and public realms but in Sweden, a lack of early influence postponed the rise of any significant opposition until after the turn of the century.

⁴⁵ Jorgen Goul Anderson and Jens Hoff, *Democracy and Citizenship in Scandinavia*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

⁴⁶ Jan Sundberg, "The Enduring Scandinavian Party System," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 22, no. 3 (1999): pp. 221-241, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.00014>.

⁴⁷ Anderson and Hoff, *Democracy and Citizenship in Scandinavia*.

The Progress Party, created in the 1970s to address tax concerns, was the most notable pioneer of the anti-immigrant thought and nationalistic isolationism which preceded the Danish People's Party (DPP). Founded in 1995, the DPP now serves as the most prominent vocalist of more stringent policy.⁴⁸ Yet as these parties began to emerge in Denmark and Norway, Sweden failed to see the early establishment of a dominant and enduring populist movement, most likely because the country failed to meet what have been identified as the preconditions for such an emergence. Generally, populist parties have found rapid growth and success during either periods of party system turbulence or transitional periods. The induction of Denmark into the European Community (EC) in 1973 generated voter polarization which gave way to extremism. At that point, Sweden had yet to apply for EC accession and thus was excused from the turbulence that came with induction. Because of this, the rise of a similar party in Sweden was delayed until the late 1980s with the creation of the Swedish Democrats (SD) in 1988.⁴⁹ These parties began to steadily represent a larger portion of the electorate, though the SD progressed at a much slower pace than the DPP. Now, "contemporary elections are characterized by greater fluidity in the vote, greater volatility in electoral outcomes, and even a growing turnover in the number of types of parties being represented."⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Jørgen Goul Andersen and Tor Bjørklund, "Structural Changes and New Cleavages: The Progress Parties in Denmark and Norway," *Acta Sociologica* 33, no. 3 (1990): pp. 195-217, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000169939003300303>.

⁴⁹ Jørgen Goul Andersen and Tor Bjørklund, "Radical Right-Win Populism in Scandinavia: From Tax-Revolt to Neo-Liberalism and Xenophobia," in *The Politics of the Extreme Right: Right from the Margins to the Mainstream*, ed. Paul Hainsworth (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), pp. 193-234.

⁵⁰ Jan Sundberg, "The Enduring Scandinavian Party System," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 22, no. 3 (1999): pp. 221-241, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.00014>.

Figure 1. The Recent Trajectory of Right-Wing Populist Parties in Denmark & Sweden

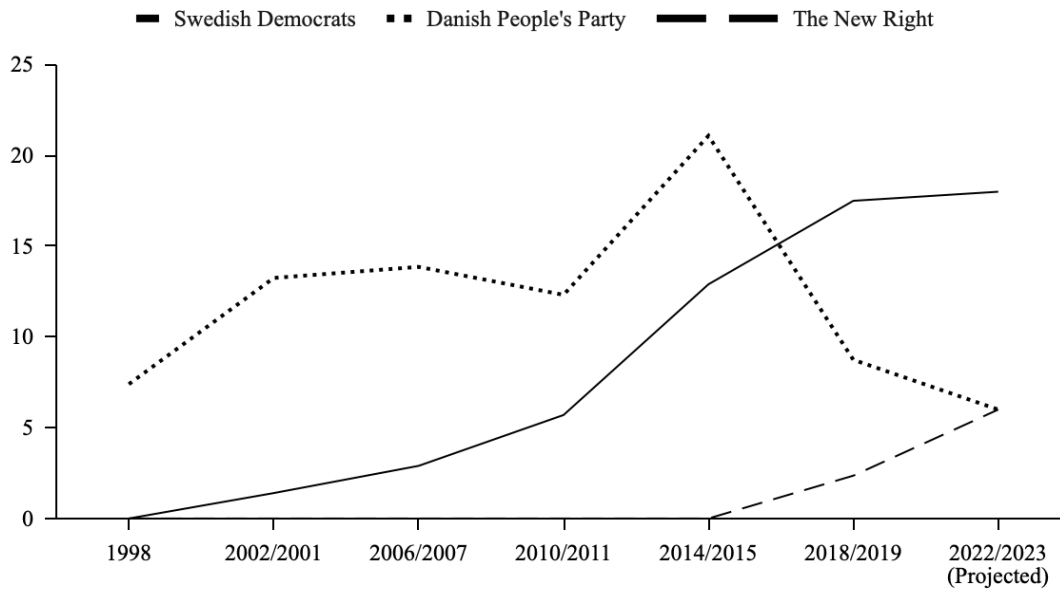


Figure 1. offers a simplistic view of the trajectory of the contemporary Scandinavian right-wing populist parties since their entrance into elections in 1998. In the case of both countries, there was a significant spike during the 2015 refugee crisis, as seen in the increased representation of the Swedish Democrats and the introduction of the New Right party in Denmark. However, it is interesting to note a decline in the Danish People’s Party’s electoral success in the 2019 elections and in the predictions for the 2023 elections. Election archival data is provided by Official Statistics of Sweden and the Inter-Parliamentary Union whilst projections for the 2022 and 2023 elections are based on a polling of voter intent conducted by Politico.⁵¹

As Jørgen Goul Andersen and Tor Bjørklund noted, the right-wing populist parties of Sweden and Denmark did not have any historical ties to extremism although they often have exhibited similar characteristics to extremist parties elsewhere, rooted in neoliberalism and

⁵¹ Arnau Busquets, “Sweden — National Parliament Voting Intention,” POLITICO (POLITICO, April 24, 2022), <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/sweden/>; “Historical Archive of Parliamentary Election Results,” Inter-Parliamentary Union (Inter-Parliamentary Union), accessed May 5, 2022, http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2087_arc.htm; “Historical Statistics of Elections 1910–2018,” Statistiska Centralbyrån (Statistics Sweden), accessed May 5, 2022, <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/democracy/general-elections/general-elections-results/pong/tables-and-graphs/historical-statistics-of-election-results/historical-statistics-of-elections-19102018/>; Giulia Poloni, “Denmark — National Parliament Voting Intention,” POLITICO (POLITICO, March 10, 2022), <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/denmark/>.

xenophobia. This relation became especially apparent during the late 1990s, when immigration became a highly stigmatized topic, and has remained at the forefront of concerns since. Globalization additionally increased the prevalence of the Danish People's Party as the Nordic region struggled to grapple with integration and safeguarding traditional culture. The DPP focused on circulating the narrative of foreigners as a threat to the Danish way of life and political dynamic and by 1994, nearly two thirds of its constituency considered immigrants to be a threat to national identity.⁵²

This xenophobic mistrust of immigrants, specifically non-westerners, has been propagated by the narratives of fear driven mainly by the Danish People's Party and the Swedish Democrats. Throughout their research, Anders Hellström and Peter Hervik classified the resulting disposition as being 'beastlike': harsh, negative and "impossible to negotiate with." These beasts are constructed by feeding on public fears of what is "not recognized as native goods." This nativism became a tool to defend the (native) population against a globalizing economy and increasingly integrated world, claiming to defend the cherished histories and cultures of Nordic society. In Denmark, nativism has been driven mainly by intensive anti-Islamic sentiment and the belief that Muslim culture and values exist as the antithesis to those of the West. The 9/11 terrorist attacks of 2001 thus bolstered the DPP's political influence as the party had, since its inception only six years prior, operated along a platform harshly critical of Muslim religion and culture, championing its claim that "We are proud of being Danish, since we are not like the Muslims." The Swedish Democrats, alternatively, faced greater difficulty gaining momentum because the party's anti-immigration alignment disagreed with the mainstream Swedish party tendency of dissociating from more controversial and stigmatized topics (e.g., immigration). In Sweden, the most successful

⁵² Andersen and Bjørklund, "Radical Right-Win Populism in Scandinavia: From Tax-Revolt to Neo-Liberalism and Xenophobia," 193-234.

parties have traditionally been those which oriented themselves around the image of Sweden as “morally superior,” an ideal extended to immigration and asylum policy. For this reason, the Swedish Democrats were initially isolated as the “other” or “anti-Swedish” given their dissension with this core tenet of Swedish pride. This dissociation created a rift between the SDs and other Swedish parties, one that deepened even after the party’s late arrival to the national parliament in 2010. So where Hellström and Hervik identify the Danish ‘beast’ as being Islamic-based, Sweden has rather oriented this ‘beast’ around the Swedish Democrats themselves. This highlights a principal factor in shaping Sweden’s more liberal approach as being that proponents for increased restrictions have faced more opposition in passing legislation.⁵³

Additionally, recent years in Denmark have seen the introduction and rise of a new extremist right-wing party which has voiced its frustrations with what it’s deemed the weak stances of the DPP. *The Nye Borgerlige* or *The New Right* party, headed by Pernille Vermund, first ran in the 2019 elections with a platform centered around staunch opposition to the incumbent government’s supposed “‘slack’ migration and asylum policies.”⁵⁴ Amongst its demands includes a ban on headscarves in public schools and institutions; the acceptance of only refugees who have already secured employment; and to fully withdraw from the UN Refugee Convention and the European Union.⁵⁵ Frequently reliant on nostalgic appeals in marketing ploys, this party has drawn most support from manual workers and elderly Danes. It has also found success through its capitalization on modern fears, using the child bride controversy of 2019, the MeToo movement

⁵³ Anders Hellström and Peter Hervik, “Feeding the Beast: Nourishing Nativist Appeals in Sweden and in Denmark,” *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 15, no. 3 (2013): pp. 449-467, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-013-0293-5>.

⁵⁴ Anita Nissen and Birte Siim, “The Danish ‘New Right’: Replacing ‘Old’ Welfare Chauvinism with a Neoliberal Far Right Agenda,” C-REX - Center for Research on Extremism (University of Oslo, April 15, 2021), <https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/news-and-events/right-now/2021/the-danish-new-right.html>.

⁵⁵ Vas Panagiotopoulos, “Meet Denmark’s New Anti-Islam, Anti-Immigration, Anti-Tax Party,” POLITICO (POLITICO, February 14, 2017), <https://www.politico.eu/article/meet-denmarks-new-anti-islam-anti-immigration-anti-tax-party-nye-borgerlige-new-right-ernest-vermund/>.

of 2020 and the more recent COVID-19 pandemic to appeal to traditional western values surrounding personal freedom and Christianity. Although the New Right only received 2.3% of votes in 2019, it has experienced rapid growth since its inception, with membership more than doubling within the first year and predictions estimating that the next elections will see voting results ranging between 9-11%.⁵⁶

Beyond this surfacing of even more extreme far-right movements, there is also evidence demonstrating that Denmark's left-wing parties have gradually adopted relatively conservative immigration legislation in recent years, a move most likely aimed to combat the rising influence of their competition. Ozlem Cekic, a former representative for Denmark's Socialist People's Party, noted that the party's shift towards more restrictive policy has mainly been geared towards Arab immigrants. Historically a more liberal and open party, it was a shock to many members, and to Cevik, when the party's chairwoman, Pia Olsen Dyhr, declared radical Islam as the greatest threat to Danish "society, freedom and community" in 2016. This statement set a dangerous precedent for how the Danish left interacts with Muslim minorities and many politicians now regularly rely on xenophobic anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim appeals to attract voters, regardless of party affiliation.⁵⁷ And although this tactic is more fully embedded in far-right populist parties, the presence of such an approach in the traditionally liberal parties signifies a concerning shift, one geared towards nativism over all else.

Beyond an emergence of new parties, the increasing support for extreme conservatism was confirmed by a 2014 study on the impact of immigration on local municipality election results in

⁵⁶ Nissen and Siim, "The Danish 'New Right': Replacing 'Old' Welfare Chauvinism with a Neoliberal Far Right Agenda."

⁵⁷ Regin Winther Poulsen, "How the Danish Left Adopted a Far-Right Immigration Policy," Foreign Policy, July 12, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/12/denmark-refugees-frederiksen-danish-left-adopted-a-far-right-immigration-policy/>.

Denmark. Research Nikolaj Harmon found a strong correlation between increases in ethnic diversity and a “significant positive effect on the electoral success of anti-immigrant nationalist parties.” In tandem with this relationship, increased local diversity has decreased support for and the success of traditional liberal left-wing parties. Findings demonstrated that this trend prevailed across both local and national elections, creating a twofold effect in Scandinavia wherein increases in immigration and ethnic populations have prompted increased support for anti-immigrant parties, leading to tighter legislation when these parties are elected to office.⁵⁸

Anti-immigrant sentiment has additionally been augmented by financial instability as “economically distressed voters oppose immigration as they fear increased labor market competition.” This has been felt in both Denmark and Sweden, serving as the chief motivator for right-wing inclinations in Sweden as opposed to the nativist appeals in Denmark. Economic fears have become especially prominent amongst low-skilled Swedish laborers, studies demonstrating that there is a definitive correlation between layoff notices and greater support for the Swedish Democrats. This phenomenon relies on the idea that low-skilled workers are seen as more susceptible to the consequences of immigration and globalization, a vulnerability that induces fear-based anti-immigrant perspectives rather than ethnic-based.⁵⁹ As the economy has globalized, fears have been compounded as Swedish companies have outsourced production and foreign labor has provided a cheap alternative for domestic industry. Largely due to this, as well as the recent destigmatization of anti-immigrant sentiment in the political and public sphere, Swedish right-wing, anti-immigration populist parties have seen significant increases in electoral success, highlighted

⁵⁸ Nikolaj A. Harmon, “Immigration, Ethnic Diversity, and Political Outcomes: Evidence from Denmark,” *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics* 120, no. 4 (November 2018): pp. 1043-1074, <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjoe.12239>.

⁵⁹ Sirus H. Dehdari, “Economic Distress and Support for Radical Right Parties—Evidence from Sweden,” *Comparative Political Studies*, June 30, 2021.

in Figure 2. The predicted growth of conservative affiliation will have a significant impact on Swedish immigration and refugee policy moving forward.

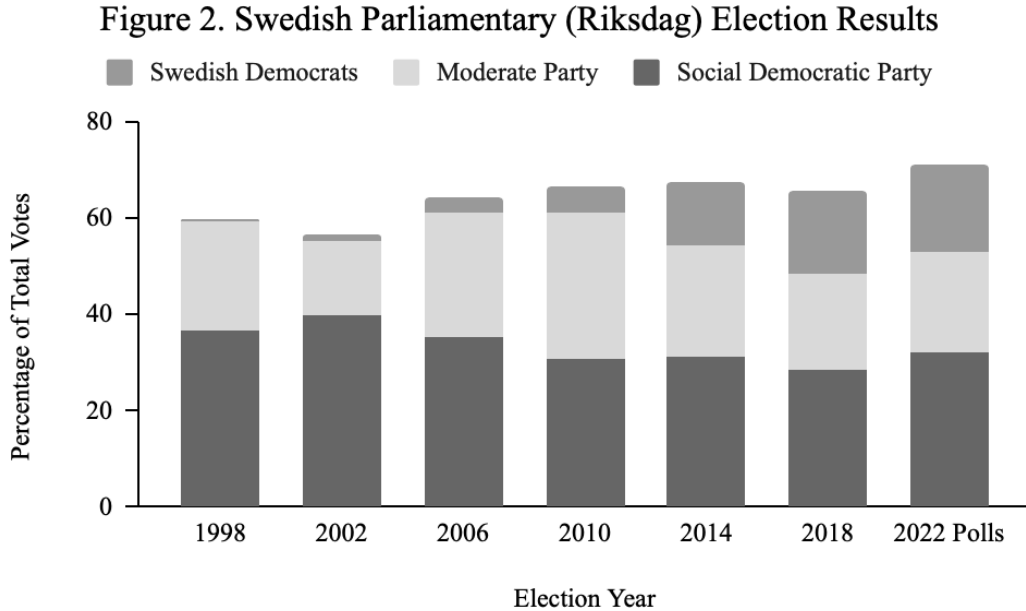


Figure 2. depicts election results for the Swedish parliament (Riksdag), which are conducted on a quadrennial basis, as are Denmark’s. As in Figure 3, the data for the upcoming elections (which will occur in September of 2022) reflects estimations based on polling of voter intent conducted in early May 2022. The graph demonstrates that, similarly to Denmark, the right-wing populist party in Sweden, the Swedish Democrats, witnessed a bolstering of their parliamentary representation beginning in 2014, one which has remained consistent since whereas the Danish People’s Party has seen a decline in representation. Election results are provided by Official Statistics of Sweden and polling data is provided by Politico, a global nonpartisan political organization operating in Europe launched in mid-2015.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Arnau Busquets, “Sweden — National Parliament Voting Intention,” POLITICO (POLITICO, April 24, 2022), <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/sweden/>; “Historical Statistics of Elections 1910–2018,” Statistiska Centralbyrån (Statistics Sweden), accessed May 5, 2022, <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/democracy/general-elections/general-elections-results/pong/tables-and-graphs/historical-statistics-of-election-results/historical-statistics-of-elections-19102018/>.

Figure 3. Danish Parliamentary Election Results

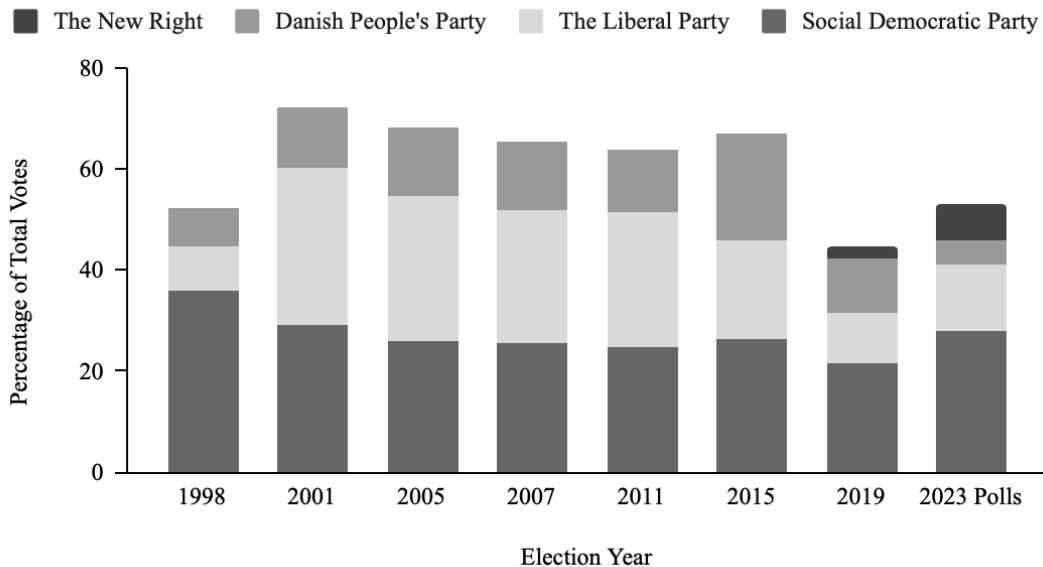


Figure 3. showcases Danish parliamentary election results since the introduction of the Danish People’s Party in 1998, with the 2023 election predictions based on current polling of indicated voting intent. Results demonstrate that far-right wing populism experienced a large burst in electoral success in 2015, most probably spurred by the refugee crisis. Since, support has stagnated, though the emergence and predicted growth of the new, more extremist, party, The New Right, indicates the perseverance of nativist-fueled anti-immigration sentiment in Denmark. Election results are provided by Statistic Denmark and polling is conducted by Politico; a global nonpartisan political organization launched in mid-2015.⁶¹

The Role of the Media in Political & Public Discourse

Alongside political parties as the catalyst for divergence in Scandinavia, the role of the media has been immense in shaping both public and political discourse. As the primary facilitator of communication between political actors and the public beyond polls and ballots, the media has been central in feeding the so-called ‘beasts’ of nativism which drive public sentiment and

⁶¹ “Historical Archive of Parliamentary Election Results,” Inter-Parliamentary Union (Inter-Parliamentary Union), accessed May 5, 2022, http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2087_arc.htm; Giulia Poloni, “Denmark — National Parliament Voting Intention,” POLITICO (POLITICO, March 10, 2022), <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/denmark/>.

restrictive policy. A major factor in determining the recent growth of right-right populist parties has been a strong media presence which frames information to cater to public fears and misconceptions surrounding foreigners. The New Right's rise to popularity in Denmark, for example, can be widely attributed to its "strong social media communication strategy," one which frequently employs popular culture and Danish tradition to appeal to a wider demographic. The party's most effective motivator of voters has been the utilization of Denmark's cultural history to invoke nostalgia in the Danish elderly and instill a renewed sense of native-centric national pride which has fueled the 'othering' of people and cultures that differ.⁶²

Perhaps the most dominant example of media presence in action is the infamous Danish cartoon crisis of 2005 and 2006, which remains a point of heavy debate along the intersection of free speech and cultural sensitivity. In September 2005, the popular Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, published a series of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in situations which exhibit highly problematic stereotypes surround Islamic religion and Muslims. In one such cartoon, the Prophet is pictured "wearing a turban shaped as a bomb with a burning fuse." The article, which was widely circulated amongst the national audience, quickly erupted at a global level, drawing severe criticism, demonstrations, formal condemnations from eleven Muslim nations and a rebuke from the United Nations. Further backlash was generated upon the newspaper's refusal to offer a formal apology for the publication, cultural editor Flemming Rose claiming that "the cartoons did nothing that transcends the cultural norms of secular Denmark."⁶³

⁶² Nissen and Siim, "The Danish 'New Right': Replacing 'Old' Welfare Chauvinism with a Neoliberal Far Right Agenda."

⁶³ Dan Bilefsky, "Cartoons Ignite Cultural Combat in Denmark," *The New York Times* (*The New York Times*, January 1, 2006), <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/01/world/europe/cartoons-ignite-cultural-combat-in-denmark.html>.

Both the article and its reactions were made particularly momentous given the expressed apathy of the publishers as well as its exemplification of the anti-Muslim sentiment which has continued to spread in Europe since 9/11. The resulting disputes accentuated the precarious line between Denmark's fiercely defended liberal speech laws and the damaging Islamophobia which many right-wing parties have inflamed.⁶⁴ Shockwaves from the controversy resonate to this day, both the cartoons and responses showcasing the deep-seated national radicalization and internalized racism which have been thinly veiled by the adamant defense of personal freedoms. In its wake, Denmark has been challenged with balancing legal immunity with calls to counter internalized racist rhetoric, a process made more difficult given the often-degenerative role of the media in amplifying modern misconceptions regarding non-western cultures and religions. The cartoons and general Danish apathy towards them arguably proved that extremist associations with Muslims are "the product of the 21st century sensationalist media that perpetuates the idea of Islam as an aggressive, extremist religious faith," a portrayal that grossly misrepresents Muslim interactions with Europe of the time. In fact, in 2005, a large majority of Muslim Europeans were directly in favor of "European political institutions— elections, governments, and the police— and, according to some opinion surveys, more trusting of those institutions than was the general population."⁶⁵ Unfortunately, the offensive cartoons published that year drastically transformed opinions towards Danish media outlets and the government. This disruptive anti-Islamic narrative has since continued to be driven by popular media and has directly contributed to the rise of nativism in both Denmark and Sweden.

⁶⁴ Dan Bilefsky, "Denmark Is Unlikely Front in Islam-West Culture War," *The New York Times* (*The New York Times*, January 8, 2006), <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/08/world/europe/denmark-is-unlikely-front-in-islamwest-culture-war.html>.

⁶⁵ Anfal Y. Nyhan, "Danish Cartoon Controversy," *The First-Year Papers (2010-Present)*, 2010, <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1017&context=fypapers>.

Though there has not been such an international media crisis in Sweden, there has emerged a rising tide of xenophobic-fueled calls for tighter restrictions on immigration and asylum policy, one which contradicts that long-established Swedish liberal approach to borders, citizenship and integration. A recent examination of the blogospheres of Sweden and Denmark found that, even prior to the 2015 crisis, both countries were already experiencing a definitive shift underpinned by the claim that “cultural diversity is incompatible with social cohesion and thus a perceived threat to the welfare system.” Thus although it has commonly been perceived that Swedish integration policy exists as a juxtaposition to Danish restiveness, within the country’s blogosphere permeates a deep-seated “welfare chauvinism and opposition to multiculturalism” which is actually cohesively aligned with Denmark.⁶⁶ Authors Anders Hellström and Mahama Tawat concluded that within each nation’s respective blogosphere, opinions on migration, multiculturalism and integration were nearly identical, both arenas exhibiting the shared beliefs that:

1. “We [the government & natives] should help citizens first.” This is largely in reference to pensioners and economically distressed citizens native to Sweden and Denmark.
2. “Denmark and Sweden cannot afford multiculturalism.” This plays particularly into the dichotomy between the welfare state and immigration, wherein many native Scandinavians are increasingly calling for tighter restrictions on the grounds that immigrants and refugees require a disproportionate amount of welfare investment. In Sweden, this message is communicated along similar lines of neo-racism as seen in Denmark, with the Nordic prerogative driving mistrust of anything and anyone considered non-western.
3. “Culture should be for everyone and not divided among different sections in society, rather it must be framed as one national culture.” Felt especially in Sweden, where unity is seen as central to Swedish superiority, it is underwritten in society that “Swedes must learn to appreciate their own culture.” This inherently implies that, although Swedes may have a more open policy, any newcomer is expected to conform to traditional Swedish customs and practices with the same vigorous appreciation.

⁶⁶ Mahama Tawat and Anders Hellström, “Trouble in the Homeland: How Cultural Identity and Welfare Politics Merge in Contemporary Danish and Swedish Politics,” in *Nostalgia and Hope: Intersections between Politics of Culture, Welfare, and Migration in Europe* (Springer Open, 2020), pp. 19-34.

4. “Our common cultural heritage is important to recognize.” Once more calling on classic nativism, this tenet asserts that Nordic and national history, culture, and political structures are superior and thus any prospective member of Nordic society must adopt that same perspective.⁶⁷

This analysis seemingly contradicts what’s been previously understood about Swedish public opinion. Yet despite this rising tide of nativism and anti-immigrant ideologies, the Swedish political party system and the fabric of its national identity has made it implicitly more difficult for grassroots anti-immigration legislation to be implemented. Therefore, regardless of the blogospheres’ content and unlike Denmark, it is less likely for any severe restrictions to surface.

The tone of media reports on immigration is another prominent factor in creating and solidifying modern misconceptions. A 2021 report released by the European Commission found that, within the European Community, Danes rank the highest in regard to misconceiving integration and migration topics.⁶⁸ This notion was further solidified by recent polling conducted by the Videnscenter for Integration, which spotlighted the many modern misconceptions surrounding non-western migrants. These have notably played a role in shaping Denmark’s notoriously narrow refugee and migrant policy approaches. This “misguided reality” signaled that approximately 75% of the Danish public believed integration tactics to be far less successful than they have been. Further polling also revealed that Danes overestimate the crime and unemployment rates of non-westerners whilst also underestimating education enrollment numbers and how many support gender

⁶⁷ Tawat and Hellström, “Trouble in the Homeland: How Cultural Identity and Welfare Politics Merge in Contemporary Danish and Swedish Politics.”

⁶⁸ Michala Clante Bendixen, “Denmark: Survey Finds That Majority Overestimates Integration Problems,” European Website on Integration, December 9, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/denmark-survey-finds-majority-overestimates-integration-problems_en.

equality and democracy.⁶⁹ As the founder of the Danish Knowledge Center on Integration, Rasmus Brygger, stated, “people who vote for parties with a hard policy on migration tend to think that integration is less successful than it is and... from a democratic angle, it’s risky if voters are basing their attitudes on something which is far from the truth.”⁷⁰ Once more, these baseless attitudes are primarily fueled by sensationalist media which draws more heavily on popular fears than actual facts, feeding into the cycle of biased-voting practices which empower restrictive legislation.

The media’s impact on public knowledge and perception is a function of both visibility and the tone of conveyed messages, a relationship made especially important in more homogenous states such as Denmark and Sweden, where interactions with ‘outsiders’ are often guided by media’s portrayals of alternative perspectives. For this reason, “most people [in such nations] have a media-based impression of immigrants and immigration,” thus expanding the importance of having wide-reaching and accurate representations in media output. Unfortunately, the responsive value of sensational news has redefined media tendencies to focus on more shocking, and commonly unfavorable, portrayals of minority groups. Research has demonstrated that greater coverage of anti-immigrant politicians, organizations and narratives furthers ethnic threat perceptions. A 2010 study on the role of media in forwarding oppositional attitudes towards immigration found that the comparatively high salience of negative messages on immigration in the Danish media fluctuated in both quantity and content in tandem with political party influence, with the

⁶⁹ Rasmus Brygger, Karen Nielsen Breidahl, and Jørgen Ghoul Andersen, “Denmark: Majority Strongly Overestimates Integration Problems,” European Website on Integration (The European Commission, November 29, 2021), https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/denmark-majority-strongly-overestimates-integration-problems_en.

⁷⁰ Brygger, Breidahl, and Andersen, “Denmark: Majority Strongly Overestimates Integration Problems.”

highest salience reported in 2008 following the electoral success of the Danish People's Party. Greater media salience has historically corresponded with an increase in negative associations and messages surrounding immigrants. Yet this relationship is largely dependent on the tone of messages involved, a variable which relies heavily on the recent rise in sensationalism as the most prominent threat to accurate representation.⁷¹

The Rhetoric & Legacy of the 2015 Refugee Crisis

The 2015 European refugee crisis marked a paradigm shift for European countries and their approaches to asylum, immigration and integration policy. For many, this crisis solidified isolationism and nativism more concretely into the national fabric, bringing about increased calls for harsher limitations on applicable policy ranging from admittance to resource allocation. In both Denmark and Sweden, the crisis prompted the adoption of more constrained policies, but the extent of these restrictions varied widely between the two nations. Although Sweden restructured specific policy sectors (e.g., asylum and family reunification policy) to be more narrow, the country remained one of the most open throughout Europe and served as the final destination for a vast number of refugees. Conversely, Denmark elected to adopt a substantially more conservative approach.

Instability in the Middle East resulting from authoritarianism, war and ethnic divisions has displaced millions over the past several decades. Yet 2015 saw a significant increase in the number of refugees arriving in Europe as they mainly fled Syria, Afghanistan, Libya, Sudan, Iraq, Yemen

⁷¹ Marijn Van Klingereren et al., "Real World Is Not Enough: The Media as an Additional Source of Negative Attitudes Toward Immigration, Comparing Denmark and the Netherlands," *European Sociological Review* 31, no. 3 (June 2015): pp. 268-283.

and other conflict-ridden states.⁷² The most prominent demographic of the crisis were those fleeing war in Syria, these refugees, more than four million in total, comprising one fifth of the world's total refugee population in 2015.⁷³ This surge in Syrian refugee populations was largely the result of growing hopelessness within the country as it was confronted with a long history and probable future of violence, a reality which had already upheaved the nation's political, social and economic systems. 2014 saw an additional escalation of the conflict and usage of indiscriminate violence with no likelihood of de-escalation as governmental forces and militias incited violence, conducted arbitrary arrests and persecuted countless civilians. Sponsored by the extremist group Islamic State (ISIS) and Jabhat al-Nusra, an al-Qaeda affiliate organization in Syria, human rights violations and intensifying threats against the public invoked desperation and Syrians reacted by fleeing, hoping to find safety along the shores and borders of nearby Europe.⁷⁴ The terror incited by the Taliban, a militant Islamic and jihadist organization, created an augmenting humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan which further spurred the movements of many Afghans towards Europe.⁷⁵

Deewa Faqiri, a twenty-three-year-old Afghani refugee from Kabul currently living in Copenhagen, was one such refugee. At seventeen, Faqiri's father uprooted her family in hope of escaping the violence which has wracked Afghanistan for years, motivated by the violent extremism which had hospitalized her mother, killed her uncle and threatened the lives and welfare of her and her siblings. During their journey to Europe, however, the family was separated and Faqiri was left alone with her two younger sisters, just five and eleven, she has yet to be reunited

⁷² "Refugee Crisis Explained," CAFOD, April 26, 2022, <https://cafod.org.uk/News/International-news/Refugee-crisis-Q-A>.

⁷³ Caroline Mortimer, "One in Five Syrians Is a Refugee, UN Confirms," The Independent (Independent Digital News and Media, July 9, 2015), <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/un-confirm-one-in-five-syrians-are-now-refugees-10377271.html>.

⁷⁴ "World Report 2015: Syria," Human Rights Watch (Human Rights Watch, January 25, 2016), <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/syria>.

⁷⁵ "Afghanistan Crisis: How You Can Help," CAFOD, May 3, 2022, <https://cafod.org.uk/News/Emergencies-news/Afghanistan-crisis>.

with her brothers or parents, whose whereabouts remain unknown. The dangerous and traumatic journey ultimately brought the trio to Denmark, where the hostile and hardened asylum process prioritized economic utility over individual wellbeing. Faqiri reflected that, since her arrival, she has been faced with the constant derogatory Danish perception that she is a burden to the welfare state, a categorization which has been detrimental to her sense of belonging and which has hindered access to opportunities. Despite this marginalization, Faqiri has made impressive strides towards obtaining a degree in higher education, having graduated with perfect attendance and the highest GPA from a Danish-speaking high school, and is now employed at a corporate law firm in Copenhagen. After five years in the country, her permanent asylum status remains undecided.⁷⁶

The movement of people to Europe is not a recent development, the process having continuously evolved particularly over the past half century following the collapse of colonialism and throughout a period of an ever-changing global order. Yet in 2015, the influx of refugees to Europe reached staggering new levels, with a record-breaking 1.5 million migrants applying for asylum in the European Union, Norway and Switzerland. This total nearly doubled the previous record of asylum applications reviewed by the EU of 700,000 people, which occurred following the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1992. The shift of main crossing routes resulted in tragedy for several thousand refugees and those who successfully arrived in Europe were met with varying degrees of welcome as countries struggled to effectively respond to and cope with the rising crisis. Sweden received the second highest number of first-time asylum seekers that year, taking in 1,600 per 100,000 people (second only to Hungary with 1,770 per 100,000). Denmark, however, received only 370 per 100,000 people.⁷⁷ Tensions were additionally heightened as certain countries,

⁷⁶ Faqiri, Deewa. The Perspective of an Afghan Refugee in Copenhagen. Personal, April 26, 2022.

⁷⁷ Phillip Connor, "Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015," Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, August 2, 2016), <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/>.

particularly the more geographically proximate southern nations (e.g., Greece and Italy) faced a disproportionate burden due to the uneven dispersion of newcomers. In an attempt to alleviate this burden, the EU initiated coordinated relocation efforts in September of 2015, planning to relocate 160,000 refugees from Italy and Greece to other member states. Denmark refused to participate in the relocation efforts, joined only by the United Kingdom.⁷⁸

Through his research, Anniken Hagelund identified a key, yet often overlooked, component of immigration and migration policy construction, one predicated on the varying compositions of sense-making within nations. By utilizing popular media, Hagelund noted that variances in sense-making have often guided political action and response, a phenomenon well-exhibited in the 2015 refugee crisis. Throughout the crisis and its aftermath, the media played a profound role in shaping discourse and in exemplifying the distinctive perspectives of the Nordic states. Whereas Sweden adopted a more lenient and open approach, one synonymous with their broader reflections on citizenship, Denmark narrowed policy even further, the newly tightened restrictions indicative of an ever-growing nationalistic-fueled ‘race to the bottom.’ Common in welfare states, those whose socio-economic protection programs construct a more attractive destination for refugees, the implementation of restrictive policies so as to lessen a nation’s appeal underlined what has been coined this ‘race to the bottom.’ The cases of Sweden and Denmark, however, offer opposing perspectives on the welfare state’s positions in this race and on Scandinavian response to this exogenous shock. As Hagelund so aptly described, “despite many

⁷⁸ “Migrant Crisis: Migration to Europe Explained in Seven Charts,” BBC News (BBC, March 4, 2016), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911>.

similarities in size, culture, language, politics, labor markets and welfare systems, there exists a persistent pattern of intra-Scandinavian differences within immigration policy.”⁷⁹

Sweden opted to adopt a more humanitarian-focused approach, something reflected in both policy and media discourse and sentiment reflected well in the early 2015 article in the publication *Aftonbladet* with the question: “Shall we save humans’ lives– or let them down?” Even throughout the period of consolidation, which took place in November 2015 as the large numbers of refugees became unmanageable, the government’s evident regret at the decision to restrict entry reflected the emphasis Swedes placed on morality during crisis response. Additionally, new restrictions aimed at encouraging self-sufficiency as a prerequisite for permanent residency were often balanced by measures to improve municipal capacity for coordinating integration. These efforts included greater budgeting for housing projects and a more defined curriculum for language and orientation programs. Unfortunately, the “favorable conditions offered to asylum seekers in Sweden led to fewer refugees to seek asylum in other [EU] member states, thus making it easier for other states to dodge their share of the burden.” In response to this argument, and in an attempt to encourage other EU member states to increase their efforts, Sweden once more implemented new temporary regulations at the end of 2015.⁸⁰

The Swedish case exemplifies the paradox of ‘asylum magnets,’ in which “favorable conditions in receiving countries work to attract more asylum seekers to the countries that offer good conditions and thus allow countries with restrictive policies to dodge their rightful part of the responsibility.” Therefore, rather than being driven by internal opposition as seen in Denmark,

⁷⁹ Anniken Hagelund, “After the Refugee Crisis: Public Discourse and Policy Change in Denmark, Norway and Sweden,” *Comparative Migration Studies* 8, no. 1 (2020): pp. 1-17, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-019-0169-8>.

⁸⁰ Hagelund, “After the Refugee Crisis: Public Discourse and Policy Change in Denmark, Norway and Sweden,” 1-17.

Swedish introductions of harsher refugee policy during the 2015 crisis were more so inspired by a need for equity within the greater EU response.⁸¹ In the wake of the crisis' peak, Swedes polled second only to Greece in dissatisfaction with the European Union's response, with only 10% of those polled reporting approval.⁸² The disapproval was largely inspired by the failure of other nations to offer the same support and openness which Sweden projected and what has been considered an inequitable burden placed on the more active countries such as Sweden and Germany, these two nations comprising the largest number of admitted refugees relative to population size in the entire EU.⁸³

Sweden, along with representatives of the UN Refugee Council, was particularly critical of Denmark's strategy, fearing that it would set a dangerous precedent for other nations to imitate. Reproval was also not limited to solely international, as Secretary-General of the Danish Refugee Council Adreas Kamm iterated, "it [Danish policy] will maybe lead to discrimination, to marginalization, to ghettos, whatever. And I'm afraid it will not lead to positive integration." As Sweden was struggling to balance its humanitarian mission of safely harboring and integrating refugees into Europe, Denmark repeatedly reduced asylum application acceptances, narrowed citizenship qualifications, limited benefits for non-citizens and made the process of familial reunification exceedingly more difficult. And although the Swedish government declined to offer a formal condemnation of Denmark's approach, it was evident in Stockholm that "they [Swedes]

⁸¹ Hagelund, "After the Refugee Crisis: Public Discourse and Policy Change in Denmark, Norway and Sweden," 1-17.

⁸² "Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015," Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project (Pew Research Center, August 20, 2020), <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/08/02/number-of-refugees-to-europe-surges-to-record-1-3-million-in-2015/>.

⁸³ Hagelund, "After the Refugee Crisis: Public Discourse and Policy Change in Denmark, Norway and Sweden," 1-17.

believed that their southern neighbor [was] being distinctly uncharitable.” Alternatively, Denmark maintained its position that the Swedish approach was too “naive.”⁸⁴

Denmark’s more ethno-nationalistic approach inspired these key policy diversions, aimed at reducing the repercussions of the crisis for native Danes. Augmented by the electoral success of a conservative-liberal coalition in mid-2015, the country was swift in drastically cutting benefits for asylum seekers and imposing more stringent requirements for asylum acceptance and residency. One of the most controversial moves was the implementation of what would become known as the “Jewelry Law,” a regulation which was subjected to intensive domestic and international criticism. Passed in January 2016, the law allows for authorities to confiscate any possessions— including cash, jewelry, gold amongst others— valued at above 10,000 Danish kroner (approximately \$1,450 USD) on the grounds that the items would offset the costs imposed on Denmark for a refugee’s entrance and stay in the country. Only after sweeping international backlash were sentimental items such as wedding rings and family portraits exempted from confiscation. The same bill also outlined a conditional three-year waiting period before refugees in Denmark could apply for familial reunification, another component of the legislation deemed inhuman by both domestic and international organizations and governments. Strongly supported by the Danish People’s Party and other far-right coalitions, the bill remains highly contested, with widespread opposition present even within the country’s own parliament.⁸⁵ In the summer of 2015, the European Court of Human Rights found the three-year stipulation for reunification to be in violation of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights which protects refugees’ right

⁸⁴ PBS, PBS (PBS News Hour, September 4, 2015).

⁸⁵ Dan Bilefsky, “Danish Law Requires Asylum Seekers to Hand over Valuables,” The New York Times (The New York Times, January 26, 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/27/world/europe/denmark-asks-refugees-for-valuables.html>.

to family life. Despite the verdict, for the thousands of affected refugees, “the damage had already been done.”⁸⁶

Ultimately, Denmark’s actions prior to, throughout and following the 2015 crisis indicated a strong presence of welfare duality within the country. Also referenced as welfare chauvinism or welfare state nationalism, this ideology generally argues for restrictions of welfare benefits to certain groups, more specifically those who are considered “our own.”⁸⁷ More specifically, the concept is “used as an argumentation strategy by right-wing populist parties, which described a rhetorical connection between the problems of the welfare states and, in essence, immigration,” with the focus being “placed on categorizing state residents in two extremes: the ‘nourishing’ and ‘debilitating’ and the contradictions between them in the competition for the society’s scarce resources.”⁸⁸ This tactic has become particularly prominent in the Danish political sphere given the inherent power and popularity of right-wing coalitions as well as their disproportionate focus on welfare dualism within party platforms, these groups often arguing for the reservation of social welfare benefits for only those who are long-standing residents. Support for welfare dualism is supplemented by modern misconceptions surrounding immigrants’ and refugees’ work ethic, reliance on social services and crime rates, misconceptions which are particularly rampant in Denmark as compared to other Nordic states.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Michala Clante Bendixen, “Denmark: European Court of Human Rights Says Three-Year Rule Violates Refugees’ Right to Family Life,” European Website on Integration (The European Commission, July 9, 2021), https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/news/denmark-european-court-human-rights-says-three-year-rule-violates-refugees-right-family-life_en.

⁸⁷ Andersen and Bjørklund, “Structural Changes and New Cleavages: The Progress Parties in Denmark and Norway.”

⁸⁸ “Welfare Chauvinism,” ECPS (European Center for Populism Studies, December 29, 2020), <https://www.populismstudies.org/Vocabulary/welfare-chauvinism/>.

⁸⁹ Ann-Helén Bay, Henning Finseraas, and Axel West Pedersen, “Welfare Dualism in Two Scandinavian Welfare States: Public Opinion and Party Politics,” *West European Politics* 36, no. 1 (2013): pp. 199-220, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2013.742757>.

Antithetical of Sweden's media discourse throughout 2015, which centered on the moral obligation presented by the crisis and need for greater unity within the EU's approach, much of Denmark's media publications cited "the liberality of Europe's refugee policy as part of the problem, accentuated in an April edition of *Jyllandsposten*. The Danish newspaper shifted both the blame and responsibility for dealing with the crisis away from Denmark by instead allocating responsibility to "Europe's politicians... [who] maintain the perspective that refugees from poverty can succeed in reaching the promised continent," further arguing that "they have not been able to tighten immigration legislation in a matter where it would be clear even to the last human smuggler that you cannot get residence in Europe purely for economic reasons."⁹⁰ The emphasis on refugees as the product of purely economic circumstances further deterred humanitarian sentiment in the country and overlooked the more pressing matter of individual security and welfare which drove over 75% of these migrants as they fled persecution in the Middle East and Africa.⁹¹

2015 additionally served as a turning point in how countries mitigate immigration and its impact, a process which has traditionally incorporated greater assurances for "social protection, children's rights and integration." And although aspects of these aims persist in contemporary refugee law, there have emerged new methods by which nations approach refugees and asylum-seeking minors in particular. More recently, spurred by the unparalleled severity of the 2015 crisis, there has been a shift across the EU towards externalization policies, tighter border controls, harsher application processes and deportations aimed at both adults and minors. This approach,

⁹⁰ Hagelund, "After the Refugee Crisis: Public Discourse and Policy Change in Denmark, Norway and Sweden," 1-17.

⁹¹ William Spindler, "2015: The Year of Europe's Refugee Crisis," UNHCR (The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, December 8, 2015), <https://www.unhcr.org/news/stories/2015/12/56ec1ebde/2015-year-europes-refugee-crisis.html>.

epitomized by the European Return Platform for Unaccompanied Minors, was especially pushed by Scandinavian states yet the legislation has been faulty and widely criticized. Research conducted by Marianne Garvik and Marko Valenta specifically analyzed the “recent restrictive policy responses towards unaccompanied Afghan minors in Denmark, Sweden and Norway” to identify core differences between the three Nordic nations. The examination of unaccompanied, non-western minors was paramount in showcasing policy abnormalities and impact given the heightened vulnerability of this demographic. Findings suggested that Denmark has implemented far more stringent policy than its two Scandinavian neighbors, only granting temporary asylum statuses and temporary residence permits regardless of application reason or case. There has also been an increasing trend of migratory concerns overshadowing the social protection and welfare of at-risk migrants and refugees, as demonstrated in the case of unaccompanied Afghan minors. Prior to the 2015 crisis, for example, this demographic was “as a rule granted permanent permits to stay in both Sweden and Norway... [wherein] in contrast, most of the unaccompanied Afghan minors who arrived in Scandinavia in 2015 were granted temporary residence permits.” The semi-legality of these cases has created later, and lasting repercussions especially given the precarity of the citizenship process, particularly in Denmark where it is more tedious.⁹² The researchers ultimately concluded that:

These temporary and semi-legal residents face huge challenges regarding insecurity and how to plan for their future. Non-citizens have been placed in an even more vulnerable position. Their attempt to gain residency permits has been blocked by the authorities. Non-citizens are seen as outsiders and not a part of society. The semi-legal categories of refugees force these people to become second-class citizens who must climb the ladder to a more secure position. Accordingly, this new type of citizenship may be subject to a unique set of punishments and rewards. As several researchers point out, semi-legal citizens may risk sliding downwards to illegality if they fail to meet the authorities’ requirements (Goldring and Landolt

⁹² Marianne Garvik and Marko Valenta, “Seeking Asylum in Scandinavia: A Comparative Analysis of Recent Restrictive Policy Responses towards Unaccompanied Afghan Minors in Denmark, Sweden and Norway,” *Comparative Migration Studies* 9, no. 1 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-020-00221-1>.

2013). In this way, the new migration control policies and the aim of deterrence have not only contributed to a hard outside but also to a hard inside approach (Bosniak 2007). Hence, the Scandinavian model and ideal of universal and equal citizenship have been transformed into systems based on stratification and differential inclusion of unaccompanied migrant children. This new Scandinavian approach to citizenship not only contributes to insecure positions of semi-legal and non-citizens, it may also have a long-standing effect on reconceptualizing what is meant by protection and universalism within Scandinavia.⁹³

Paired with the high risk of deportation once they turn 18, the authors also found that Afghan minors, and refugees in general, faced increasingly strict barriers in Denmark. Sweden, alternatively, has been perceived as an “immigrant-friendly and open-minded country in the European context and compared to its Scandinavian neighbors.”⁹⁴ Yet, as in many other EU states, the 2015 crisis brought on a slew of more restrictive policies. However, Sweden’s changes paled in comparison to the harsh limitations imposed in other nations (e.g., Denmark) and at the end of the crisis, Sweden remained one of the most open and accessible. These two varying approaches signified intra-European and intra-Scandinavian disharmony within refugee and asylum policy, a fact which has contradicted previous perceptions of the two as unified on every front.

The legacy of this crisis pervades European social, political and economic structures to this day. Its impact in Denmark and Sweden has demonstrated that the crisis has yet to end as refugees and migrants continue to face marginalization and residency uncertainty even years following their arrivals in Europe. For the Syrian refugees in Denmark, the insecurity of asylum statuses has remained at the forefront of unease and international criticism has noted how “no European country has gone as far as Denmark to make Syrian refugees feel unwelcome.” Concerns were amplified by the 2019 governmental decision to reassess and, in certain cases, revoke the residency permits

⁹³ Garvik and Valenta, “Seeking Asylum in Scandinavia: A Comparative Analysis of Recent Restrictive Policy Responses towards Unaccompanied Afghan Minors in Denmark, Sweden and Norway.”

⁹⁴ Garvik and Valenta, “Seeking Asylum in Scandinavia: A Comparative Analysis of Recent Restrictive Policy Responses towards Unaccompanied Afghan Minors in Denmark, Sweden and Norway.”

of over 1,000 Syrians. Beyond the highly controversial revocations, a lack of diplomatic relations with the Syrian government has left many stuck in limbo in detention and deportation centers, the experience taking both a physical and mental toll on the refugees.⁹⁵ With this decision, Denmark became the first European nation (in April 2021) to revoke the residence status of more than 200 Syrian refugees from the wider Damascus region, drawing condemnation from EU lawmakers, the UN Refugee Agency and several human rights organizations. Danish authorities claimed that certain areas of Syria have become deemed safe for refugees to return to despite contradictions put forth by several human rights and security organizations. The Human Rights Watch condemned the actions of the Danish government, asserting that “it’s not safe for refugees to return. The risks of arbitrary arrest, persecution and torture by the Syrian security services continue to this day.” The 1,200 refugees from that region who had their cases with immigration reassessed in 2021, many of whom are women or elderly, expressed their fears of persecution and violence should they return to the country still controlled by the authoritarian dictator, President Bashar al-Assad.⁹⁶ The decision marked the critical stance of the Danish government and once more solidified the authority and influence on the conservative far-right.

Undoubtedly, the 2015 refugee crisis remains at the forefront of domestic and international political discourse. It marked a paradigm shift in the way Europeans view and understand immigration and asylum policy and has driven dialogue surrounding borders, belonging and EU policy unification. Both Denmark and Sweden encountered rising nativism in response to the unprecedented influx of asylum-seeking populations to Scandinavia, a sentiment which has

⁹⁵ Elian Peltier and Jasmina Nielsen, “These Refugees Can’t Stay in Denmark, but They Can’t Be Sent Home,” *The New York Times* (*The New York Times*, March 7, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/world/europe/denmark-syrian-refugees.html>.

⁹⁶ Adrienne Murray, “Denmark Asylum: The Syrian Refugees No Longer Welcome to Stay,” *BBC News* (*BBC*, May 19, 2021), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57156835>.

endured and solidified the role of national sense-making, political parties and the media in defining the national schema and policy approaches. As a new crisis has emerged in the Ukraine, many are looking back at 2015 as both an example and warning for guiding newly mobilized refugees, a process which has invoked a sense of dissonance when comparing the two crises and once more exemplifies the distinctions that exist in the interactions, both public and political, between the Nordic states and non-western versus western refugees.

Crisis in Today's World: The Ukrainian Conflict & A New Wave of Refugees

February 28th, 2022 marked a watershed moment in Russo-Ukrainian relations and instigated a crisis which has arguably become the most pressing threat to European security and international world order in the contemporary climate. The Russian invasion of Ukraine marked the culmination of Vladimir Putin's efforts to undermine the political and cultural sovereignty of a nation that has long been subjected to Russian aggression. The implications of this conflict, however, extend far beyond Europe's eastern borders and into the framework of international democratic peace, stability and security.

Putin has long vocalized his intent to 'reclaim' the Ukraine, this being the primary justification for the bloody 2014 annexation of Crimea and Russian involvement with anti-governmental separatist movements in the country. Although Ukraine officially obtained independence from the former Union of Soviet Republics (USSR) in 1991 after its collapse, relations between the two nations have remained tightly intertwined since, with tensions surrounding electoral credibility and possibly collusion polarizing Ukrainians, particularly

between the east and west.⁹⁷ Putin's belief in Russia's inherent ownership of Ukraine is indicative of a nostalgia for former Soviet glory, an ideal which has consistently driven the sentiment behind his national addresses, and one which he reiterated and expounded upon in the "bizarre and at times unhinged" speech he delivered just three days prior to the invasion. In the speech, Putin outlined his motivations and listed his grievances against both recent Ukrainian political moves and the West's supposed encroachment into the Russian sphere of influence which has remained in contention since the Cold War. The speech addressed growing tensions surrounding the possibility of the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the claimed artificiality of Ukrainian national identity and the supposed growing moral decay sponsored by the West's liberal progressivism which has threatened the traditional values of Orthodox Russia.⁹⁸ The alarming commentary left the world in a state of horrified anticipation, a feeling only intensified as Russia's brutal assault on major Ukrainian cities began only days afterwards.

Over 5.3 million people have been displaced since the beginning of the invasion, a continuously growing number as people have fled to the safety of Western Europe.⁹⁹ This influx is nearly quadruple that of the number of refugees who entered Europe throughout the entirety of 2015.¹⁰⁰ The implications of this inflow have largely been concealed as many European nations have united on the priority of aiding Ukrainian resistance movements and sanctioning the Russian government to hopefully expedite the conflict's end. This unity, amongst other factors, exemplifies the fact that despite the exponentially higher number of refugees compared to 2015, reactions to

⁹⁷ Silvia Aloisi and Frank Jack Daniel, "Timeline: The Events Leading up to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," Reuters (Thomson Reuters, March 1, 2022), <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/events-leading-up-russias-invasion-ukraine-2022-02-28/>.

⁹⁸ Jeffrey Mankoff, "Russia's War in Ukraine: Identity, History, and Conflict," Center for Strategic & International Studies (The Center for Strategic & International Studies, April 19, 2022), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-war-ukraine-identity-history-and-conflict>.

⁹⁹ "Operational Data Portal: Ukraine Refugee Situation," May 4, 2022.

¹⁰⁰ Connor, "Number of Refugees to Europe Surges to Record 1.3 Million in 2015."

those fleeing Ukraine have differed greatly to those of 2015 and towards non-western refugees in general.

Undoubtedly, the reasoning behind variances in national responses extends beyond purely ethnic-based. Henrik Nordentoft, the official representative for the UNHCR in the Nordic region (a region constituting eight countries), cited the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, geographical proximity, demographics, social media and a stronger collective willingness as being crucial factors in shaping the urgency and openness behind contemporary European responsiveness. Citing the latter as being one of the most detrimental factors in limiting European effectiveness in 2015, Nordentoft noted that the (mostly) united front of Europe has been instrumental in developing productive and impactful responses at both a political and public level, with the implementation of sanctions and distribution of military support aided by the grassroots initiatives targeting issues involving social security and humanitarian dilemmas.¹⁰¹ This unification is most likely a factor of several contributors.

First, unlike in 2015, the COVID-19 pandemic has created space in the economic reality of nations which has not been there before, the new gaps in the labor force negating previous arguments surrounding labor competition as deterrents for immigrant and refugee acceptance. Second, the relative proximity of Ukraine has generated feelings of greater responsibility within Western Europe, a continent which additionally has a history of facing Russian aggression and one still coping with remnants of Cold War memory. This proximity-inspired willingness is reflective of the common argument that refugees should be first assembled in the safest proximate country before being relocated through EU-monitored networks so as to limit unregistered movements and disproportionate burdening. This reasoning was one popularly implemented in Danish dialogue

¹⁰¹ Cantrell, Amy, and Henrik Nordentoft. Refugee Policy in the Nordic Region. Personal, March 15, 2022.

during 2015. The nearness of Ukraine additionally lends to the perception of an immediate threat, with Europeans fearing that further escalation of the conflict could bring it directly into their own countries. Third, the demographics beyond ethnicity have been a factor in the regard that Ukrainians are one singularly defined group. Unlike today's crisis, in which the entirety of the refugee population is fleeing one singular nation-state and are of one ethnicity, the 2015 crisis incorporated a wide array of peoples and reasons behind their mobilization. This perplexity made it difficult for the European public to understand the identities and incentives of non-western refugees in 2015, thus limiting unity in both understanding and response. Additionally, today's Ukrainian refugees are generally understood to be "temporary" asylum-seekers as opposed to the more permanent refugee status of those fleeing the Middle East and Africa in 2015. Because of the belief that, at some point, these new refugees will return to Ukraine, Europe has experienced a greater capacity to accommodate these populations based on the sole justification that any arising complications or repercussions for European economies or systems will not be lasting.¹⁰²

Fourth, the role of the media has altered the way in which content is disseminated and which messages are amplified. Nordentoft noted that social media in particular "can be very problematic because it allows a very small minority to hijack popular discourse."¹⁰³ This was evident in 2015 with the establishment of misconceptions and stories which fueled Islamophobia and anti-refugee perspectives. Now, however, social media has become a paramount tool in creating vital links of communication and the dispersion of visual media has galvanized the world into taking definitive action. The emotional documentations of the conflict and its aftermath have been made far more accessible due to social media and this in turn has created stronger global support for governmental action, whether that be volunteering aid to Ukrainian relief organizations

¹⁰² US Embassy Representative, discussion with Amy Cantrell, May 2, 2022.

¹⁰³ Cantrell, Amy, and Henrik Nordentoft. Refugee Policy in the Nordic Region. Personal, March 15, 2022.

or implementing sanctions against Russia.¹⁰⁴ The pathos-oriented proliferation of these images and videos is something that was not nearly as widespread in 2015, though it must be noted that the number of users on now popularized platforms has more than doubled since the beginning of the previous European refugee crisis.¹⁰⁵ Yet the mere expansion of users has given rise to increasingly prominent methods of communication, such as photojournalism, which has become a powerful tool for the Ukrainian authorities and public. However, equally important in determining how media is perceived by the audience is the nature of the content delivered.

Studies have shown that visual dehumanization has widely destructive implications for the socio-political reactions to the groups they are depicting. The phenomenon of the ‘identifiable victim effect’ has been proved to generate greater empathy yet in 2015, the vast majority of “images in Western media depicted refugees as large unidentifiable groups.” This framing dehumanizes groups and thus has explicit negative political repercussions and paves the way for xenophobic narratives to break through the media’s more complacent mass imaging. Furthermore, increased exposure to visualizations of large, unidentifiable groupings has been shown to increase the viewer’s tendency to support more anti-refugee policies.¹⁰⁶ More specific to the individual circumstances of 2015 and 2022, there exist scientifically proven biases which impact the way audiences interact with visuals. In the European context, specifically in northern and western regions of predominantly white populations, the demographics of Ukrainians have constructed

¹⁰⁴ Megan Specia, “How Ukrainians Are Using Social Media to Stir Resistance ...,” *The New York Times* (The New York Times, March 25, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/25/world/europe/ukraine-war-social-media.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Sara Brown, “In Russia-Ukraine War, Social Media Stokes Ingenuity, Disinformation,” MIT Management Sloan School (MIT Sloan School of Management, April 6, 2022), <https://mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/russia-ukraine-war-social-media-stokes-ingenuity-disinformation>.

¹⁰⁶ Manos Tsakiris et al., “When the Lens Is Too Wide: The Political Consequences of the Visual Dehumanization of Refugees,” *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 8 (2021): pp. 1-16, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-021-00786-x>.

more favorable audiences purely on the basis that people are “more likely to respond more empathetically to images of people who look like them.”¹⁰⁷ This unfortunate reality is one deeply rooted in both social psychology but also the Nordic and European homogenous sense of identity and refers to the imagined communities previously discussed.

Particularly demonstrated in the Nordic region, ethnicity has been a prominent factor in defining interactions between natives and refugees/immigrants both at a public and political level. Perhaps the most notable example of Nordic preference is the recent adjustment to the application of the 2016 Jewelry Law, previously applied to all refugees entering Denmark regardless of ethnicity or country of origin. However, Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen confirmed in early March that Ukrainians would be exempted from any seizure of valuables or cash. Frederiksen claimed that the move was attributed to the proximity of the Ukrainian conflict and that it was aimed to fulfill Denmark’s obligation to assist those fleeing Russian aggression.¹⁰⁸ The exemption will be instrumental in allowing for easier movement and integration into Denmark, yet its announcement was met with bitterness and criticism from the Muslim and Arab refugees who have faced a very different reality. As Rana Khoury, a Syrian-American postdoctoral associate researcher at Princeton University remarked, “What’s happening in Ukraine is incredibly tragic and heart wrenching to watch but like many others, I also saw these same countries who have put up so many obstacles to refugees fleeing conflicts in the Middle East open up their borders to Ukrainians.” These obstacles ranged from the requirements of visas to enter the European Union (a requirement which Ukrainians have also been exempted from) to physical acts of violence along

¹⁰⁷ Manos Tsakiris, “Ukraine: How Social Media Images from the Ground Could Be Affecting Our Response to the War,” *The Conversation*, April 26, 2022, <https://theconversation.com/ukraine-how-social-media-images-from-the-ground-could-be-affecting-our-response-to-the-war-178722>.

¹⁰⁸ Atila Altuntas, “Denmark Will Not Seize Jewelry from Ukrainian Refugees: Prime Minister,” *Anadolu Ajansı* (Anadolu Agency, March 5, 2022), <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/denmark-will-not-seize-jewelry-from-ukrainian-refugees-prime-minister/2524701>.

borders.¹⁰⁹ The differences have been heavily felt by the non-western migrants and refugees both within Europe and those who are still struggling to find safety within its borders.

Lastly, as previously mentioned, the collective willingness of Europe has been a crucial factor in sponsoring common collective action. Political moves such as the Jewelry Law alteration exemplify the noticeably warmer approach to Ukrainians compared to the Arab and Muslim migrants of previous years. Deewa Faqiri, a twenty-three-year-old Afghan refugee, remarked that perhaps the biggest blow to morale for non-western refugees in Europe were the visualizations of Europeans at transportation centers across Denmark and Europe, readily awaiting Ukrainians and offering immediate aid and shelter. The videos, though moving, reflect the stark difference in public willingness to western versus non-western refugees, a fact that has drastically impeded refugee morale. This widespread solidarity hints at the double standard of refugee and migration situations, with experts saying that “Ukrainian refugees face a more welcoming environment because they are white.”¹¹⁰ Faqiri also noted that the popularized argument of defending democracy as the reason for greater involvement insults the very fabric of these minority communities, most of whom fled the terror and indiscriminate violence of authoritarian regimes and militant organizations in the Middle East.¹¹¹ A United States representative working at the embassy in Copenhagen further remarked that several of the violent tactics being utilized by Russian forces in Ukraine were also implemented in countries such as Syria and Afghanistan and remain dominant threats to Middle Eastern states and populations.¹¹² The blatant hostility that non-

¹⁰⁹ Mona El-Naggar, “In Mideast, After Decades of War, the Mass Flight from Ukraine Resonates,” *The New York Times* (The New York Times, February 26, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/26/world/middleeast/refugees-ukraine-middle-east.html>.

¹¹⁰ Deena Zaru, “Europe’s Unified Welcome of Ukrainian Refugees Exposes ‘Double Standard’ for Nonwhite Asylum Seekers,” *ABC News* (ABC News Network, March 8, 2022), <https://abcnews.go.com/International/europes-unified-ukrainian-refugees-exposes-double-standard-nonwhite/story?id=83251970>.

¹¹¹ Faqiri, Deewa. *The Perspective of an Afghan Refugee in Copenhagen*. Personal, April 26, 2022.

¹¹² US Embassy Representative, discussion with Amy Cantrell, May 2, 2022.

western refugees have encountered in Europe throughout the history of their movement resonates with deep-seated notions of racial bias and prejudice, ones which have been amplified and demonstrated through the juxtaposing crises.

Even Sweden, which hosted one of the largest populations of Syrian asylum-seekers, has seen a rising tide of xenophobia, a recent development but one which has received exponentially growing support. The recent “Quran burning ‘tours,’” though highly criticized, reflect the increasing availability of anti-Muslim sentiment in Swedish discourse, something which has been previously minimized. The instigator of the inflammatory demonstrations, Rasmus Paludan, has been conducting the burnings during Ramadan, a holy month of Islam. Yet, as in Denmark, the Swedish commitment to the protection of liberal free speech has paved the way for Paludan’s growing platform. The events have called into question the rising necessity of defining how far authorities can go to protect this fundamental right whilst also respecting the cultures of values of Muslim and Arabic minorities.¹¹³ Additionally, many Syrians still present in the country remain “stuck... without access to employment, education or other social services.”¹¹⁴ Meanwhile, the UNHCR has commended the country’s flexible funding programs as being essential to the agency’s mission to provide aid and rescue for the millions fleeing Ukraine.¹¹⁵

Ultimately, as both Scandinavia and the wider European Union has faced the Ukrainian conflict and resulting refugee crisis, discrepancies within responses have revealed underlying preferences in both public thought and policy formations, ones geared more favorably towards

¹¹³ Leila Nazirevic, “Quran Burning ‘Tour’ Shows Spotlight on Rising Swedish Far Right,” Anadolu Ajansi, April 24, 2022, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/quran-burning-tour-shows-spotlight-on-rising-swedish-far-right/2571466>.

¹¹⁴ Zaru, “Europe’s Unified Welcome of Ukrainian Refugees Exposes ‘Double Standard’ for Nonwhite Asylum Seekers.”

¹¹⁵ “Sweden’s Support Provides a Lifeline to People Fleeing and Displaced in Ukraine,” UNHCR Nordic and Baltic Countries (UNHCR, March 8, 2022), <https://www.unhcr.org/neu/76513-swedens-support-provides-a-lifeline-to-people-fleeing-and-displaced-in-ukraine.html>.

western migrants and refugees. As the continent struggles to aid Ukrainian resistance and properly facilitate the evacuation and relocation of affected civilians, questions have emerged as to why reactions have varied so greatly to those of 2015. Though there are a large number of factors beyond ethnicity and race which have influenced this divergence, it has become apparent that the socio-political schema of Denmark, Sweden and Europe as a whole is one underwritten by nativism and growing opposition to non-western migration.

Conclusion

In 1951, Denmark and Sweden became two of the pioneering signatories of the United Nations' *Convention Relation to the Status of Refugees*.¹¹⁶ The revolutionary legislation was the first to address the growing dilemma of refugees in the post-war era and became a principal document in defining the coordinative procedure and obligatory relationship between signatory states and the UNHCR. The UNHCR's statute more specifically dictates the primary functioning of these operations to be dependent on state cooperation with "admitting refugees to their [signatories'] territories... [and] promoting the assimilation of refugees, especially by facilitating their naturalization."¹¹⁷ Unmistakably, the evolution of migratory patterns which followed the ratification of both the UN Convention and the UNHCR statute has redefined both the ease and conditions for fulfilling this mission. In response, immigration and asylum politics have been at the forefront of Nordic and European dialogue for the past several decades. Sweden and Denmark have maintained their commitment to these documents, for example through their annual contributions to the UNHCR's budget, donating \$124,742,413 USD and \$95,555,108 USD

¹¹⁶ "Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees," Convention relating to the Status of Refugees § (1951).

¹¹⁷ "General Assembly Resolution 428 (V)," UNHCR (the United Nations high commissioner for refugees, December 14, 1950), <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c39e1.pdf>.

respectively in the most recent report.¹¹⁸ However, the tenets of these documents legally bind signatory states (including Denmark and Sweden) to a common objective of effectively and efficiently accepting, integrating and providing protection for refugees. This mission is only becoming more paramount to global stability and security as the COVID-19 pandemic, violent conflicts and the growing climate crisis continue to threaten the very fabric of the global political economy. For this reason, Denmark and Sweden must further mobilize to encourage and assist in the creation of durable solutions to cope with the growing dilemmas of constantly evolving global structures.

Denmark and Sweden have existed as often merged nations in the international community, their shared histories, political and economic structures, and cultures spurring a perceived overlap which has shaped global understandings of the region as homogeneous both demographically but also across all levels of domestic and international interaction. Yet despite this perception and their many similarities, the two nations have continuously demonstrated that there exist deeply rooted variances in the way they perceive and respond to issues of immigration and to asylum-seekers. Two roads diverged and Denmark has repeatedly engaged in restrictive and nativist approaches whereas Sweden's commitment to liberal humanitarianism has inspired more open and integration policy adoptions. And although public perspectives in each nation have drifted towards more ethno-nationalistic in recent years, fueled by growing Islamophobia and the 2015 European refugee crisis, the disharmony between the two states in regard to their perspectives on national responsibility and willingness to assist in the allocation and integration of migrants and refugees remains at the forefront of divergence.

¹¹⁸ "Update on Budgets and Funding (2020-2021)," Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme (UNHCR, March 4, 2021), <https://www.unhcr.org/605c429d4.pdf>.

As the two nations join the European and global community in encountering the growing Ukrainian refugee crisis, they are once more faced with the challenge of homogenous welfare state politics colliding with growing mobilization and globalization. The changing dynamic of the global order has called into question the responsibility of these states in offsetting the challenges which emerge from such movements and crises. Denmark and Sweden must now realize the implications of nativism and the disillusioned isolationism which has polarized populations and hindered effective and productive integration. Understanding and countering the deeply rooted biases within the Nordic region now remains paramount in both national and greater European cooperation and stability.

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