



Denmark — Va-PoReg Country Report

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06/05/1849 Start Constitutional Monarchy: The King granted limited voting rights in 1834 but only to property owners and with limited power. When King Frederick succeeded to the throne in January 1848, he was met by demands for a constitution and end to absolutism. Following these demands, first proper voting rights came in 06/05/1849, as the June Constitution of 1848 was signed by Frederick, to “men over 30 of good reputation”.¹ But in the subsequent years the rules were changed a number of times, and it was not until the change of the constitution in 1915 that all men and women living within the kingdom had influence on all chambers.² Based on our observations, only multiparty legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. As per Polity5’s classification, the executive’s authority was subject to minor institutional constraints during this time. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem’s JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive.

07/24/1901 End Constitutional Monarchy/Start (Monarchical) Electoral Oligarchy (Patriarchal): Denmark effectively started operating as a parliamentary democracy with the cabinet Deutzer. In Danish, the establishment of the new cabinet is denoted as a shift of government (systemskiftet).³ Except for the Easter Crisis of 1920, no Danish government since this event has been established against the vote of a majority of the members of parliament.⁴ Women gained the right to vote in 1915. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. During this time the country held competitive, clean and free and fair elections (LIED, V-Dem CEI and V-Dem EF&FI). Besides, political liberties were present until 1913 (LIED). V-Dem’s PCLI scores full political liberties since 1901. During this regime period, V-Dem’s JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem’s LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also comprehensive.

05/07/1915 End (Monarchical) Electoral Oligarchy (Patriarchal)/Start (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy: On this date women could vote for the first time in parliamentary elections.⁵ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED, V-Dem’s CEI and V-Dem’s EF&FI maintained their scores. The constitution of 1849, which remained in effect with some amendments during that era, enshrined a range of civil and political liberties (Faerkel 1982). According to LIED political liberties were achieved from 1919 to 1932 and V-Dem’s PCLI also indicates full political liberties. In this regime period several parties alternated in forming one-party governments, but they had a strong tendency to be terminated prematurely due to economic and fiscal problems. In 1929 the government stabilized as Thorvald Stauning led coalitions with differing partners. Stauning served as prime minister for six consecutive legislatures until 1942.⁶ Denmark implemented significant social and labor-market reforms, laying the foundation for the contemporary welfare state.⁷ According to Polity5, during this period, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem’s JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. In this period Denmark maintained effective constraints on the executive, comprehensive protection of civil and political rights, and a cooperative multiparty environment. Political competition remained within the bounds of constitutional legality, and social conflict was mediated through institutional channels such as collective

bargaining and party negotiation rather than violence. The extension of suffrage in 1915 thus marked not only formal inclusiveness but also the consolidation of a liberal democratic regime capable of integrating social reform without authoritarian reaction.

04/09/1940 End (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy/Start Indirect Rule Occupation Regime [by Germany, Right-Wing (Fascist) Autocracy]: On this date Operation Weserübung was conducted, which led to the occupation of Denmark by Germany. Following this, the Danish government and king continued to operate in a de facto protectorate until 08/29/1943, when Germany took direct military control over Denmark. Based on our observations, only multiparty legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Besides, during the occupation, LIED considers political liberties as absent and V-Dem's PCLI as somewhat present. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also comprehensive.

08/29/1943 End Indirect Rule Occupation Regime [by Germany, Right-Wing (Fascist) Autocracy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Germany, Right-Wing (Fascist) Autocracy]: No legislative elections took place during this period (LIED). There was direct military control by Germany.⁸ Based on our observations, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Furthermore, political liberties remained absent until 1945 (LIED). V-Dem's PCLI scores them as somewhat present in 1943 and 1945 and as ambiguous in 1944. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are comprehensive. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive.

05/05/1945 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Germany, Right-Wing (Fascist) Autocracy]/Start (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy: Denmark returned operating as a parliamentary representative democracy with a ceremonial monarch. The nation state is decentralized and unitary, with Queen Margrethe II serving as the head of state.⁹ In 1953 the constitution was substantially revised. The new constitution reduced the national legislature to one chamber, the Folketing. All members were to be selected based on proportional representation.¹⁰ The governmental power regularly alternates between different parties across the political spectrum, which govern in coalitions of usually two parties. This underscores the competitiveness and political competition in national elections.¹¹ Danish elections are widely recognized for being free and fair. They are conducted in an open and transparent manner, ensuring that all political parties have a fair chance to compete. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED categorizes all elections in this regime period as competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI scores them as free and fair as well as clean and fair. Denmark consistently has one of the highest voter turnouts in the world. This reflects a strong democratic culture where citizens are actively engaged in the political process. Danish politics is characterized by a multi-party system with no single party holding an absolute majority in the Folketing since the early 20th century. This necessitates negotiations and compromise among various parties (Nannestad 2009). Civil liberties are a high priority in Denmark. For example, freedom of religion and freedom of assembly are upheld.¹² According to FH, for the assessed regime period, the country is categorized as free with a score between 2 and 4, which corresponds to our interpretation of free. Regarding the political liberties both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI affirm that they were constantly present since 1946. Denmark is known for high levels of transparency and accountability in its political institutions. This is reflected in the public's satisfaction with these institutions and the country's regular ranking as one of the least corrupt in the world. These attributes indicate a high quality of democracy in Denmark, characterized by stable governance, strong institutions, and a culture of consensus and cooperation. The Danish judiciary operates independently.¹³ However, the system's complexity, with multiple parties and the need for coalition-building, can sometimes slow down decision-making processes. Despite these challenges, Denmark's democratic system is widely regarded as robust and effective. LIED and Row classify the regime in their highest categories polyarchy respectively

liberal democracy. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. On 11/01/2022 in the Kingdom of Denmark general elections were held. In line with the Danish democratic tradition, these elections were deemed free and fair (OSCE 2023a).

(Monarchical) Liberal Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Notes

- ¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37
- ² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37
- ³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deuntzer_Cabinet; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarchy_of_Denmark
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deuntzer_Cabinet
- ⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_in_Denmark; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1915_Danish_Folketing_election
- ⁶ <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html>, see narratives for version 5.0, Denmark_R: 2-3.
- ⁷ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denmark#Constitutional_monarchy_\(1849%E2%80%93present\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denmark#Constitutional_monarchy_(1849%E2%80%93present))
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denmark_in_World_War_II
- ⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Denmark
- ¹⁰ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Denmark/Postwar-Denmark-1945-c-1990>;
https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Denmark_1953?lang=en
- ¹¹ <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html> , see narratives for version 5.0, Denmark_V.
- ¹² <https://freedomhouse.org/country/denmark/freedom-world/2022>
- ¹³ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/denmark/freedom-world/2022>

References

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