

SLEEPING OR ACTIVE PARTNERS?

Danish Party Members at the Turn
of the Millennium

*Karina Pedersen, Lars Bille, Roger Buch, Jørgen Elklit,
Bernhard Hansen and Hans Jørgen Nielsen*

ABSTRACT

The article is based on a newly conducted survey of Danish party members. It shows that Danish party members enrol because of the ideology and national policies of the preferred party, and because they want to support the party. A significant number of members leave their party every year, and as many as one-fifth consider leaving, but new members also enrol. Compared to voters, members are not gender and age representative, but are to some extent representative when it comes to education. Members vary in levels of and types of activities they engage in, ranging from those who only pay dues to a small elite of very active members. Parties as channels of participation are characterized by both vitality and lethargy.

KEY WORDS ■ Denmark ■ party member activity ■ party members ■ political participation

The Danish conception of party organization has traditionally been membership-oriented. The purpose of creating and maintaining membership structures was to establish a means by which voters could communicate their interests and viewpoints to party representatives in national, regional and local governments, to mobilize and encapsulate the voters and to create a stable source of party income. During the first half of the twentieth century, parties' legitimacy and representativeness came to rest more and more upon their ability to form – and maintain – strong membership organizations.

The four old parties – the Social Democratic Party (founded 1871), the Social Liberal Party (1905), the Liberal Party (founded in 1870 by liberal groups in Parliament) and the Conservative People's Party (gradually

developed since the mid-1870s, renamed in 1915) – perceived themselves as the prime representative organizations of the people. The organizational similarities of Danish political parties are more significant than the differences. The four old parties established the standard and the new parties – the Socialist People's Party (founded 1959), the Christian People's Party (1970), the Progress Party (1972), the Centre Democrats (1973), the Red–Green Alliance (1990) and the Danish People's Party (1995) – followed suit. Furthermore, while there have been relatively frequent minor structural shifts and adjustments, reflecting a process of flexible adaptation to a changing environment, the basic structures have remained essentially unaltered (Bille, 1994).

All Danish parties make a formal distinction between the parliamentary party and the membership party. The latter is made up of local branches, constituency organizations, regional organizations, a national conference and national executives organized along mainly hierarchical lines. They also perceive themselves as representative parties, and all attach a great deal of importance to having the individual party members represented (either directly or indirectly) in the leading party bodies. These basic characteristics are common to all Danish parties, whether old or young, left or right, secular or Christian, large or small, and they result in a relatively high degree of organizational stability. What has not been stable is the number of party members.

The trend in membership is clear: the traditional Danish mass parties have all experienced a dramatic reduction in the number of individual members. Starting in the 1950s, the reduction accelerated in the 1970s, slowed down in the 1980s and stabilized in the 1990s, albeit still with a minor downward trend. The decline has not been compensated for by any significant increase in the membership of the new parties which, despite having adopted an organizational structure similar to that of the traditional mass party, and despite explicitly hoping to organize as large a proportion of the electorate as possible, have not succeeded in persuading voters to join in any significant numbers. In sum, the individual membership (which is also the only kind of membership) of the Danish political parties has decreased from a total of about 615,000 in 1960 to about 180,000 in 2000 or from around 22 percent of the electorate in 1960 to less than 5 percent in 2000.

With membership declining so dramatically it could be asked whether or not the parties are still able to fulfil the functions traditionally assigned to them in representative democracies. Here, however, we limit ourselves to an overview of Danish party members at the turn of the millennium and an examination of their role as channels of political participation.

This article is based on a large survey conducted in 2000/1 of members of nine Danish political parties. In order of left–right placement (according to party members), the parties are: the Red–Green Alliance (RGA), the Socialist People's Party (SPP), the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the Social Liberal Party (SLP), the Centre Democrats (CD), the Christian People's

Party (ChP), the Liberal Party (LP), the Conservative People's Party (CoP) and the Danish People's Party (DPP). Questionnaires were sent to 1,000 members of the Social Democratic Party, the Liberal Party and the Conservative People's Party, and to 800 members of the other parties. When all members are analysed together it is done on the basis of weighting based on the party's share of the overall number of members. The two largest parties, the Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party, comprise a large proportion of the members (around three-quarters) and therefore impact heavily on overall averages. Response rates vary between 60 and 80 percent with the total average being 68 percent. Response rates compare well with similar surveys.¹ Owing to the different size of party memberships, the number of questionnaires sent out and the varying response rates, the total number of respondents as a proportion of party members varies. So, for example, the Liberal Party respondents make up 0.76 percent of the party's 79,000 members, whereas the Centre Democrats make up 36 percent of that party's 1,400 members. The sample size and response rates provide a solid basis for analysis. This kind of systematic, comprehensive study of Danish party members has never been conducted before, and it therefore enables us to answer a number of previously unanswered questions. But it also explains why time-series data are not available.

Three issues guide our examination of Danish party membership. The first is why citizens enrol in parties. The second is the extent to which members are representative of voters in socio-demographic terms. This question is important for an assessment of the representative character of political parties as channels of participation and thereby of the quality of the representative system. The third issue is what party members do in their parties and how their activities contribute. It is necessary to take into account party members' activities and what these contribute overall to the parties and to their role in representative democracy in general before determining whether declining party membership figures indicate that parties are in crisis. By analysing members' party activities and the role they play, one can see whether or not members are a substantial resource for the party.

Enrolment

What are the motives for enrolling in a Danish party? Party members were asked to give up to four reasons for their initial enrolment. The most frequent reason given was the party's ideology, mentioned by 54 percent of all members. Ideology is not necessarily narrowly conceived by members, but may include the general image of the party. The second most often cited reason (46 percent) was 'support for the party', which is also a very general statement covering not just policies and ideology but also a broad identification with the party. Specific party policies were mentioned by 31 percent of all members. In particular, the party leader was mentioned as a reason

for joining by members in parties with charismatic leaders, such as the Danish People's Party, the Centre Democrats and the Liberal Party. More than 40 percent of the members at either end of the political spectrum, namely the Red-Green Alliance and the Danish People's Party, indicate their opposition to other parties as a major reason for enrolling.

Turning to some of the reasons for enrolment *not* mentioned by party members, the most notable is the desire to have a political career. Party members may abstain, however, from mentioning this reason partly due to a social norm about not promoting oneself. Also, the extent to which a person's friends, colleagues and family influence whether or not one should enrol in a party is not commonly referred to. However, one-fifth of Social Democratic and Liberal Party members refer to these personal influences as an important reason for joining. But otherwise this kind of personal influence is limited. The role of organizations in prompting membership is also limited; only among Social Democrats do unions and employers' organizations play any significant role. Altogether, party members indicate more ideological and collective reasons for enrolling than selective reasons.

Do party members remain in their party once enrolled? Interviews with central office party bureaucrats suggest a substantial and constant flow in and out of the parties. A way of estimating this flow, and thereby the potential stability of the membership, is to ask if members ever consider leaving their party. A little less than one-fifth of all members have considered leaving the party within the past year, which we consider a substantial number. About one-quarter of our party samples have considered leaving the Conservative Party, the Social Liberal Party, the Socialist People's Party and the Centre Democrats; the fewest to consider this option were among members of the Danish People's Party (6 percent), which might be explained by their more recent enrolment.

Social Representativeness

Who are the people who participate in political parties? The low ratio of members to voters indicates the risk that members only represent small groups of voters with specific ideological views and interests. To what extent are they representative of a party's electors? Representativeness may be understood and gauged in many ways (Esaiasson and Holmberg, 1996; Pitkin, 1967; Widfeldt, 1997), but congruity of opinions and attitudes, and of demographic and socio-economic composition, between a party's members and voters is the most commonly applied; this is our focus here.

It is well documented that women are under-represented in political parties. The political mobilization of women, which took place in the 1970s and 1980s, largely bypassed the political parties (Togeby, 1992). At this time, female members made up around 38 percent of total party membership (Andersen, 1993: 55). In spite of the markedly changed roles that

women play today in Danish society, their overall share of party membership seems to be declining (from 38 to 33 percent in 2000). Women remain under-represented among all party members. As indicated in Table 1, the Socialist People's Party has the highest share of female members (46 percent), followed by the Christian People's Party. Lowest female shares are found in the Liberal Party (29 percent) and Danish People's Party. The high score of the Socialist People's Party is explained by their tradition of focusing on gender equality and cooperation with the women's movement. Gender equality is more ingrained in the party culture.

Comparisons of female shares of the electorate and the membership of individual parties show a limited degree of gender representativeness. Least representative in this regard are the Centre Democrats and the Red-Green Alliance, with a female deficit among the members of 32 and 24 percentage points, respectively, and a female surplus among the voters of 16 and 18 percentage points, respectively. The Danish People's Party shows the largest degree of gender congruity. The survey confirms that only to some extent have the parties been able to attract the experiences and interests of the female part of the population and that parties as channels of participation remain dominated by men.

This gender imbalance can be a problem not only concerning social justice but also for the impact it may have on political outcomes. Men and women within the same party differ in their opinions. Female members place themselves more to the left on the left-right scale and to a greater degree than males support expansion of the welfare state and preventive measures as opposed to more punishment with regard to crime, more sympathetic treatment of refugees and immigrants and a greater concern for the environment (Pedersen, 2002a).

Table 1. Gender of members (2000-1) and voters (1998) (percentages)

	RGA	SPP	SDP	SLP	CD	ChP	LP	CoP	DPP	All
Male members	62	54	65	65	66	59	71	68	70	67
Female members	38	46	35	35	34	41	29	32	30	33
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	631	545	634	608	492	547	587	596	535	5,175
Male voters	41	44	54	55	42	49	60	56	63	49
Female voters	59	56	46	45	58	51	40	44	37	51
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	58	161	577	83	81	41	463	195	131	1,790

Note: The table is based on the question 'Please indicate your gender' (male, female). The average for all members is weighted but the total N is not. Missing cases are disregarded. Source: 2000-1 survey of Danish Party Members and Election Study of the 1998 general election.

Table 2 demonstrates that the age profile of party members is skewed away from the young and is not representative of the electorate generally. While the age group 18 to 39 comprised 37 percent of the voters in 1998, it comprises only 17 percent of all party members. At the other end of the age scale, people above the age of 60 made up 26 percent of the electorate as compared to 40 percent of the members. The young are strongly under-represented, and the old strongly over-represented among party members. The differences among parties reflect both their electoral appeal and recruitment strategies. The Red-Green Alliance has an ideological profile which appeals to younger voters and because of the party's recent establishment has a large share of new members. The Social Democrats, on the other hand, have not been successful in attracting new members recently, so young generations are under-represented.

Since there are age differences in political opinions among party members, the skewed age representativeness may have an impact on policies promoted by the parties. Members of different ages take different stances towards, for example, welfare issues where the older the member the stronger the

Table 2. Age of members (2000-1) and voters (1998) (percentages)

	<i>RGA</i>	<i>SPP</i>	<i>SDP</i>	<i>SLP</i>	<i>CD</i>	<i>ChP</i>	<i>LP</i>	<i>CoP</i>	<i>DPP</i>	<i>All</i>
Members										
39 years and under	33	23	11	27	29	18	21	14	19	17
40-59	55	62	47	36	37	40	42	36	38	43
60 years and above	12	15	42	37	34	42	37	50	43	40
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Average age	44	48	56	53	51	55	54	58	55	55
N	631	546	635	607	490	545	588	590	530	5,162
Voters										
39 years and under	53	48	31	39	40	56	36	34	31	37
40-59	38	42	44	29	36	27	33	30	38	37
60 years and above	9	10	25	22	24	17	31	36	31	26
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Average age	38	42	49	42	46	42	48	50	49	47
N	58	160	577	83	81	41	463	195	131	1,789

Note: The table is based on the question 'What is your year of birth?'. The average for all members is weighted but the total N is not. Missing cases are disregarded.

Source: 2000-1 survey of Danish Party Members and Election Study of the 1998 national election.

support for public health and pensions. Also, the older the members, the less inclined they are towards accepting refugees and immigrants and towards supporting environmental concerns (Pedersen, 2002b).

Education is an important individual resource, and time and again political participation studies have demonstrated a strong positive correlation between individual resources and levels of political participation (Milbrath and Goel, 1977: 98; Nie et al., 1996: 2; Verba et al., 1995: 19). The knowledge and competence that an individual acquires through education can enhance the understanding of political processes, thereby creating a potential motivation for political participation. We therefore expect that the longer the period of education the more inclined a person will be to enrol in a party. Previously, however, this was not the case in Denmark (Damgaard, 1980; Togeby, 1992), but now it appears to correspond better with expectations.

Table 3 shows that among all Danish party members, more than one-third have a high school diploma. Another third have less than nine years of schooling, which is a larger share than among voters at large.² The reason for this is the age distribution of members in the parties. Members above the age of 60 belong to a generation where many did not receive a particularly long education. It is therefore no surprise that the two old class parties – the Social Democrats and the Liberals – still have a relatively large share of their members with below average years of education. It is interesting to note that the Christian People's Party and the Danish People's Party also have relatively more members with limited education. The recently established Danish People's Party has attracted (older) members with a limited education. Its share of members with a high school diploma is also the lowest of all parties, closely followed by the Christian People's Party.

The parties are in general fairly representative when voters' and members' levels of education are compared. But there is a general tendency towards a larger percentage of members than voters with a high school degree, which confirms the expected relationship between resources and political participation.

Party Member Activity

The extent to which opportunities exist in liberal democracies for political participation and influence is important. Political parties provide one channel among several through which people may participate and potentially exert influence. The extent to which political parties are important in this regard depends on whether or not party members are actually participating within their parties. Are parties characterized by vitality and activity or by lethargy and passivity?

The extent to which members participate in party activities may initially be assessed on the basis of the average number of hours they spend on party

Table 3. Educational levels of members (2000–1) and voters (1998) (percentages)

	<i>RGA</i>	<i>SPP</i>	<i>SDP</i>	<i>SLP</i>	<i>CD</i>	<i>CbP</i>	<i>LP</i>	<i>CoP</i>	<i>DPP</i>	<i>All</i>
Share of members with high school diploma	70	59	29	61	47	29	34	54	23	37
Share of members without high school diploma	30	41	71	39	53	71	66	46	77	63
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	632	538	634	597	491	536	560	591	531	5,061
Share of voters with high school diploma	67	54	21	65	39	35	27	34	10	29
Share of voters without high school diploma	33	46	79	35	61	65	73	66	90	71
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	58	160	576	83	80	40	463	195	130	1,996

Note: The table is based on the question 'What school education have you obtained?' (less than 7 years, 7–8 years, 9–10 years, high school/A-levels, other). Note that the category high school diploma includes the traditional, business and technical high school diplomas. The average for all members is weighted but the total N is not. Missing cases are disregarded.

Source: 2000–1 survey of Danish Party Members and Election Study of the 1998 general election.

activities during a month. Table 4 indicates that more than half (56 percent) of party members spend no time at all on party activities. These are the 'passive members'. The Christian People's Party has more passive members (7 in 10) than any other party, while the Red–Green Alliance has the lowest (slightly more than 1 in 3). Members spending 1 to 5 hours on party activities, the 'semi-active', make up less than one-third of all members. Just over 1 in 10 are active members spending more than 5 hours a month on party activities. The Christian People's Party and the Liberal Party have only 7 and 8 percent active members, respectively. The leftist Red–Green Alliance and the Socialist People's Party both have 25 percent active members. In general, parties to the left display larger shares of active members than parties to the right, except for the Danish People's Party. On the other hand, there is no similarity between parties with similar size or age. The largest party, the Liberal Party, has a low share of active members, whereas the second largest party, the Social Democratic Party, has an above average

Table 4. Average time spent by party members on party activities in a month (percentages)

	<i>RGA</i>	<i>SPP</i>	<i>SDP</i>	<i>SLP</i>	<i>CD</i>	<i>ChP</i>	<i>LP</i>	<i>CoP</i>	<i>DPP</i>	<i>All</i>
Passive members (0 hours)	37	46	56	45	45	69	60	52	55	56
Semi-active members (1–5 hours)	38	29	27	40	38	24	32	36	29	31
Active members (>5 hours)	25	25	17	15	17	7	8	12	16	13
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Average	6	7	5	4	5	2	3	3	5	4
N	595	513	574	548	435	479	525	532	454	4,655

Note: The table is based on the question ‘How much time do you devote to party activities in the average month?’. The average for all members is weighted but the total N is not. Missing cases are disregarded.

Source: 2000–1 survey of Danish Party Members.

share of active members. Along with the Conservatives and the Social Liberals, these two parties are the oldest and their shares of active members differ, as do the shares of the younger parties.

Party members range from passive members who pay their dues but spend no time at all on party activities to full-time party activists. A similar picture is revealed when members’ participation in local party meetings is measured. We can see in Table 5 that about two out of five party members have not attended any such meetings, whereas almost one in three have attended two or more.

Table 5. Meeting attendance of party members at the local level (percentages)

	<i>RGA</i>	<i>SPP</i>	<i>SDP</i>	<i>SLP</i>	<i>CD</i>	<i>ChP</i>	<i>LP</i>	<i>CoP</i>	<i>DPP</i>	<i>All</i>
No meetings	38	40	41	41	50	54	45	37	46	43
1–2 meetings	17	20	24	21	24	27	29	29	27	27
More than 2 meetings	45	40	35	38	26	19	26	34	27	30
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Average	6	6	5	4	2	2	2	4	2	3
N	631	539	622	595	480	532	582	593	516	5,090

Note: The table is based on the question ‘How often have you attended a meeting in your local party branch within the last year? (All kinds of meetings)’. The average for all members is weighted but the total N is not. Missing cases are disregarded.

Source: 2000–1 survey of Danish Party Members.

However, the average number of hours spent on the party in a month or the number of branch meetings attended does not tell us the whole story about how party members contribute to their parties and their role in representative democracy. Within their financial and judicial limits, parties may choose between labour-intensive or capital-intensive activities. The general tendency is that West European parties increasingly use capital-intensive activities such as commercials, advertisements, focus groups and opinion polls, especially during election campaigns (Bowler and Farrell, 1992: 227; Butler and Ranney, 1992: 280–3). Danish parties have long withheld from this development because of limited financial resources, but the introduction of public financing in 1987, and a significant increase in public funding in 1995, enabled the parties to engage in more capital-intensive activities (Andersen and Pedersen, 1999). More money is spent on election campaigns than previously. Parties advertise more in newspapers, spend more money on their presentation programmes on television and make some use of focus groups. The public relations and information sections of the party organizations have also been professionalized.

However, this does not imply that parties do not need the participation and activity of their members. The financial resources of Danish parties are still limited compared to international standards and not all labour-intensive activities can be replaced by capital-intensive activities. The public may also regard it as inappropriate for parties to hire people to take on assignments that have earlier been performed by party members since this indicates that parties lack a basis of support or neglect their rank-and-file members. Furthermore, there are legal limits to what parties can do. In Denmark there are no limits on parties' spending, but political commercials are not allowed on national radio and TV. Parties therefore still depend on the activities of their members.

Table 6 indicates that only a small number of members became engaged in campaign activities during the 1998 general election. Between one-half (in the two leftist parties) and three-quarters (in the Liberal Party) of members were not active in the 1998 election campaign. Two-fifths attended election meetings organized by their party, more than a quarter delivered party leaflets, while election posters were put up by a fifth of members. Only very few participated in other activities such as fundraising, canvassing voters and mailing leaflets. Participation varies between parties. Members of the Red–Green Alliance participate most, followed by members of the Socialist People's Party. These left-wing parties are characterized by more member participation than the other parties (Pedersen, 2003). The lowest levels of participation are found in the Danish People's Party (expected because of the recent enrolment of a large proportion of the membership) and the largest party, the Liberal Party. As in the case of party activism, there are no common traits among parties of the same size or age.

Members contribute voluntary manpower resources but also provide financial contributions. A study of party funding shows that membership

Table 6. Members' participation in selected election-campaign activities (percentages)

	RGA	SPP	SDP	SLP	CD	ChP	LP	CoP	DPP	All
Election meetings organized by their party	45	40	46	41	34	31	34	43	21	39
Delivery of election handouts	58	42	35	31	38	35	21	27	24	28
Put up election posters	34	31	20	23	25	24	15	20	13	19
N (minimum)	587	510	530	548	445	453	513	519	419	4,458

Note: The table is based on the questions 'Thinking about the parliamentary election in March 1998, how often did you 1) attend an election meeting organized by the party, 2) deliver party leaflets, and 3) put up election posters?' (not at all, once, twice, three or more times).

The average for all members is weighted but the total N is not. Missing cases are disregarded.

Source: 2000-1 survey of Danish Party Members.

has become more expensive in all parties except the Centre Democrats (Bille, 1997: 132-3), even the increasing dues have not compensated for the loss of income arising from a decline in membership. The financial importance of party members has declined if measured on the basis of their subscriptions as a share of total party income (Bille, 1997: 191). But members' dues still make up a substantial share of the income of local party organizations. This enables various activities to take place and provides some financial autonomy for local parties. Secondly, the public funds must be spent within the financial year and cannot be saved for future election campaigns. By contrast members' and other supporters' dues and voluntary contributions, together with contributions from organizations such as trade unions and employers' organizations, provide money which parties can plan to spend on campaign activities. The financial contributions of members are therefore potentially more important than might be deduced from a simple perusal of their accounts.

Financial contributions from members vary greatly among Danish parties. The self-reported dues and voluntary contributions in 1999 differ between, on the one hand, the Red-Green Alliance and the Socialist People's Party, where members, on average, pay the equivalent of €81 and €85, respectively (half of the members contribute more than €80) and, on the other hand, the Centre Democrats, where members contribute the least, i.e. an average of only €24 (and only a tenth of the members give more than €33). The Liberal Party (€28) and the Danish People's Party (€30) also have low averages.

Party members are often in contact with other citizens and as such may act as 'ambassadors to the community' (Scarrow, 1996: 43) or as 'representative figureheads in their local communities' (Whiteley et al., 1994: 4).

Members that are visible in the local environment convey 'the impression that a party is more than just an enterprise of the political elite' (Scarrow, 2000: 84). Party members' outreach into their immediate environments is of particular relevance between elections; since the parties are not otherwise campaigning during these inter-election periods, the potential impact of this kind of local presence (or outreach) could be significant. Here, outreach is assessed on the basis of whether or not party members within the last five years have discussed party policies with non-members *and* in the 1998 election campaign tried to convince non-members to vote for their party. More than one in two of all members have engaged in this form of party outreach. Table 7 shows that the largest share of outreach providers is found in the Red-Green Alliance and the smallest in the Liberal Party, but there are no big differences between the parties. An assessment of the impact of these outreach activities is beyond the remit of this article, but comparative research (Seyd and Whiteley, 1992; Whiteley et al., 1994) suggests that outreach activities have a significant impact on electoral outcomes.

The electoral process – including candidate nomination – lies at the very heart of representative democracy. Candidate recruitment for transnational, national, regional and local elections remains virtually inconceivable without political parties. Members contribute to parties by providing a pool of personnel from whom parties may recruit candidates for public offices at different levels. The extent to which members are ready to hold these positions is gauged on the basis of questions on members' willingness to stand for election at the municipality, county or national levels if encouraged by the party.

Overall, 15 percent of members are willing to stand for election if encouraged, but Table 8 demonstrates that there is some variation between parties.

Table 7. The outreach contribution of party members (percentages)

	RGA	SPP	SDP	SLP	CD	ChP	LP	CoP	DPP	All
No outreach provision	19	33	32	38	43	35	48	40	39	40
Outreach provision	81	67	68	62	57	65	52	60	61	60
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	586	479	522	527	421	429	486	495	425	4,370

Note: The table is based on the questions 'How often have you participated in the following listed activities within the last five years? 1) Discussed party policies with non-members' (never, once, 2–5 times, 6–10 times, more than 10 times) and 'Thinking about the parliamentary election in March 1998, how often did you encourage voters to vote for the party?' (not at all, once, twice, three or more times). Members providing outreach are those indicating that they have engaged in both activities at least once. The average for all members is weighted but the total N is not. Missing cases are disregarded.

Source: 2000–1 survey of Danish Party Members.

Only 8 percent of the members in the Christian People's Party, compared with 31 percent of the Centre Democrats, are ready to stand for election. This implies that even though the Centre Democrats have only 1,400 members they do not have a smaller number of potential candidates than the Christian People's Party with 6,120 members. Since the question on which this is based may overestimate the recruitment potential, because it involves potential rather than actual nomination, and since the geographic dispersion of potential candidates is probably uneven, this does not amount to claiming that some parties do not from time to time experience recruitment problems. But overall, there appears to be a sufficient number of potential candidates available.

Our conclusion is that the extent to which members participate in different party activities varies. But what is the trend? The declining number of party members should imply that the number of party activists is also declining. Whether or not there is such a trend depends on the timescale of any comparison. Whether or not there has ever existed a 'golden age' in which members were (almost) all active is certainly questionable, but this is something that cannot be assessed owing to the lack of time-series data. The decline argument is based on a comparison between the present and an image, probably false, of how things used to be.

Andersen and Hoff (2001: 56–7) argue that the decline in party membership in Denmark is mainly caused by passive members leaving, which implies that the general level of party activity has not declined. Only actual members are included in our 2000–1 survey, which makes it impossible to say whether it is primarily passive or active members who leave the parties. However, a survey question asked members about the extent to which they were active in their party, and whether their activism had changed compared with five years previously. Two in five remain just as active (or passive) as five years ago, while another two in five are less active, and one in five are

Table 8. Recruitment potential for public office of party members (percentages)

	<i>RGA</i>	<i>SPP</i>	<i>SDP</i>	<i>SLP</i>	<i>CD</i>	<i>ChP</i>	<i>LP</i>	<i>CoP</i>	<i>DPP</i>	<i>All</i>
No recruitment potential	81	78	86	80	69	92	87	82	76	85
Recruitment potential	19	22	14	20	31	8	13	17	24	15
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	637	552	643	616	503	559	597	612	547	5,266

Note: The table is based on the question 'If the party asked you, would you then accept to be nominated as a candidate to 1) local council, 2) regional council, and 3) national parliament?' (yes, would consider, no, do not know). Members with recruitment potential are those responding yes. The average for all members is weighted but N for all is not. Missing cases are disregarded.

Source: 2000–1 survey of Danish Party Members.

more active. Thus members of Danish parties have in general become less active. The decline in membership figures is accompanied by a general decline in party activity; in other words, the picture is the same as in Britain (Whiteley and Seyd, 1998: 133).

Conclusions

The primary purpose of this article is to present an overview of current Danish party members. We have found that members enrol primarily because of the ideology and national policies of their party, and because they want to support that party. In general, the reasons members give for enrolling in a party are more ideological, collective and altruistic than they are selective. We have also found that, compared to their party's voters, members are not gender and age representative, but to a large extent are representative in educational terms.

The participation of members varies depending on activities. Parties may rely on about one-fifth or one-quarter of their members for the provision of manpower at elections; thus relatively few are active at this important time for parties. Members' financial contributions to their parties are significant and the fact that their contributions vary has substantial implications for the parties. Members participate considerably in outreach activities as they often discuss their party's policies with other voters and encourage them to vote for the party. This kind of informal campaigning may be of more importance now that members do not participate so much in traditional election campaigning. Finally, members are providing a sufficient pool of potential candidates for public elections from which parties can recruit.

Members vary in their overall levels of party activity, the types of activities they engage in and the intensity of their engagement (cf. Heidar, 1994). Around one-half of Danish members do not engage in any other activity than paying their dues. Others only engage in an occasional party activity – usually the annual general meeting in the local party branches. A small fraction of members – about one in seven – are very active and engage in various activities at election times and also between elections. However, according to their own calculations, members are less active than they were five years ago.

The absolute decline in membership and the relative decline in activism mean that Danish parties may experience problems in fulfilling their role as legitimate channels of participation and thereby as a linkage between society and government.

Notes

The survey was conducted by Lars Bille, Hans Jørgen Nielsen and Karina Pedersen (University of Copenhagen), Jørgen Elklit and Bernhard Hansen (University of Aarhus) and Roger Buch (University of Southern Denmark, Odense). The survey was