

## **From radical right to neo-nationalist: Danish party politics, 1973-2011**

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### **Abstract**

This research note provides a case study illustrating cross-national trends reported in recent research on the radical right. Using party manifesto data, we examine Denmark from 1973-2011 and find that the radical right has moved toward economic leftism and social conservatism, creating a cleavage within the party family over time. Furthermore, nationalist claims increasingly distinguish the Danish radical right from other party families, including their radical right predecessors.

### **Keywords**

radical right, nationalism

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Toward the end of the last century, Betz (1994) identified two ideal types of politics within the Western European radical right party family: neoliberal populism and national populism. He argued that the relative weight of neoliberalism and nationalism in a party's program determines whether we should consider a party one or the other. By the mid-1990s, Betz pointed to the latter's increasing prominence (Betz, 1994:108).

In our previous research, we analyzed cross-national and longitudinal party-level data and found that the radical right has indeed changed in this direction, abandoning neoliberalism for neo-nationalism, a form of nationalism occurring when nation-state boundaries are settled but perceived to be under threat (Eger and Valdez, 2015). Our analyses reveal that radical right parties, on average, have shifted from right-wing to left-wing economic positions. In the 1970s and 80s, the economic issues most important to radical right parties were free enterprise capitalism, traditional economic orthodoxy, and government efficiency. Beginning in the mid-1990s, however, welfare state expansion became the most salient economic issue. During this time, social issues also increased in prominence, and parties became more authoritarian. Relying on the same database, we find that in recent decades radical right parties also increasingly make nationalist claims, while other major party families' average positions have remained globalist (Eger and Valdez, 2018). The size of this difference has grown substantially over time; thus, nationalist sentiments increasingly distinguish contemporary radical right parties from other party families, including their radical right predecessors.

Despite party idiosyncrasies and variation in national contexts, our previous research demonstrates clear cross-national trends. Nevertheless, cases studies are valuable for illustrating such observable patterns. Other scholarship has identified Denmark as a useful case for research on the radical right (Rydgren 2004; Andersen and Bjørklund, 1990), and we follow suit here, relying on manifesto data and party histories to provide a case study of the

cross-national patterns described above. Indeed, the Danish radical right is marked by changes in leadership, internal disputes, and a party split that provide a clearly demarcated transition from neoliberalism to neo-nationalism and an example of general trends in Western Europe. In this research note, we perform analyses similar to those found in our cross-national work but focus only on Denmark.

## **Data**

The Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al., 2016) relies on content analysis to code and report parties' policy positions as a percentage of space in electoral manifestos. The dataset includes parties that any won legislative seats in a democratic election for 56 countries since 1945. These data allow for comparisons of party positions and their salience over time. Table 1 details our Danish subsample, which covers all 16 national elections between 1971 and 2011 for a total of 145 manifestos from 15 parties and 6 party families. Data for the most recent 2015 national election is currently unavailable.

We disaggregate the dataset's right-left index (*rile*) into its economic ("left" versus "right") and social ("conservative/authoritarian" versus "progressive/libertarian") components (Benoit and Laver, 2007; Prosser, 2014). The full list of variables used to calculate each dimension is reported in table 2. We also create measures of nationalism and globalism. The full list of variables used to capture their social, political, and economic dimensions is found in table 3.

**Table 1. Danish political parties included in analysis**

<b>Party family</b>	<b>Party name and abbreviation</b>	<b>Election years in dataset</b>	<b>Total</b>
Radical right	Progress Party	FP 1973, 1975, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1994, 1998	16
	Danish People's Party	DF 1998, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011	
Conservative	Conservative People's Party	KF 1971, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1979, 1994, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011	16
Christian Democratic	Christian People's Party	KrF 1971, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1981, 1994, 1998, 2001, 2005	14
Liberal	Danish Social-Liberal Party	RV 1971, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1994, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011	34
	Liberals	V 1971, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1994, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011	
	New Alliance	NY 2007	
	Liberal Alliance	LA 2011	
Social Democrat	Social Democratic Party	SD 1971, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1994, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011	28
	Centre Democrats	CD 1973, 1975, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1998, 1998, 2005	
Socialist	Socialist People's Party	SF 1971, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1994, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011	37
	Danish Communist Party	DKP 1971, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1984	
	Left Socialist Party	VS 1971, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1984	
	Common Course	FK 1987	
	Red-Green Unity List	EL 1994, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011	
<b>Total</b>			<b>145</b>

*Source:* Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR), Version 2016b

**Table 2. Statements representing four dimensions of disaggregated right-left scale**

<b><u>Economic left</u></b>	<b><u>Economic right</u></b>
<i>market regulation (per403)</i>	<i>free enterprise (per401)</i>
<i>economic planning (per404)</i>	<i>incentives (per402)</i>
<i>protectionism: positive (per406)</i>	<i>protectionism: negative (per407)</i>
<i>controlled economy (per412)</i>	<i>economic orthodoxy (per414)</i>
<i>nationalisation (per413)</i>	<i>welfare state limitation (per505)</i>
<i>welfare state expansion (per504)</i>	
<i>education expansion (per506)</i>	
<i>labor groups: positive (per701)</i>	
<b><u>Social libertarian</u></b>	<b><u>Social authoritarian</u></b>
<i>anti-imperialism: positive (per103)</i>	<i>military: positive (per104)</i>
<i>military: negative (per105)</i>	<i>constitutionalism: positive (per203)</i>
<i>peace: positive (per106)</i>	<i>political authority (per305)</i>
<i>internationalism: positive (per107)</i>	<i>national way of life: positive (per601)</i>
<i>democracy (per202)</i>	<i>traditional morality: positive (per603)</i>
	<i>law and order (per605)</i>
	<i>social harmony (per606)</i>

*Source:* Manifesto Project Codebook (MRG/CMP/MARPOR), Version 2016b

*Notes:* See codebook for detailed description of each item in *rile*; we count freedom and human rights (per201) as a social issue in figure 3 but because it is not easily categorized as authoritarian or libertarian, we do not use it to locate parties in figure 1.

**Table 3. Statements representative of nationalist or globalist sentiments**

<b>Nationalism</b>	<b>Globalism</b>
<b><u>Social dimension</u></b>	
<b><i>National way of life: positive statements (per601)</i></b>	<b><i>National way of life: negative statements (per602)</i></b>
Appeals to patriotism or nationalism	Opposition to patriotism or nationalism
<b><i>Multiculturalism: negative statements (per608)</i></b>	<b><i>Multiculturalism: positive statements (per607)</i></b>
Enforcement or encouragement of cultural integration. Appeals for cultural homogeneity in society	Favourable mentions of cultural diversity and cultural plurality within domestic societies
<b><u>Economic dimension</u></b>	
<b><i>Protectionism: positive statements (per406)</i></b>	<b><i>Protectionism: negative statements (per407)</i></b>
Favourable mentions of extending or maintaining the protection of internal markets via tariffs, export subsidies, or other restrictions	Support for the concept of free trade and open markets. Calls for abolishing all means of market protection
<b><u>Political dimension</u></b>	
<b><i>Internationalism: negative statements (per109)</i></b>	<b><i>Internationalism: positive statements (per107)</i></b>
Negative references to international cooperation; favourable mentions of national independence and sovereignty with regard to foreign policy	Statements in favor of international cooperation, which may include support for the United Nations, international courts and organizations, global governance, or foreign aid
<b><i>European Community/Union: negative statements (per110)</i></b>	<b><i>European Community/Union: positive statements (per108)</i></b>
Negative references to the European Community/Union, its policies or member-state financial contributions to it	Favourable mentions of European Community/Union, which may include support for its expansion
<b><i>Military/defense: positive statements (per104)</i></b>	<b><i>Military/defense: negative statements (per105)</i></b>
Statements regarding the importance of external security and defense, which may include calls for increases in military strength or spending	Negative references to the military or use of military power to solve conflicts, which may include calls for disarmament, ends to conscription, or decreases in military spending

Source: Manifiesto Project Codebook (MRG/CMP/MARPOR), Version 2016b

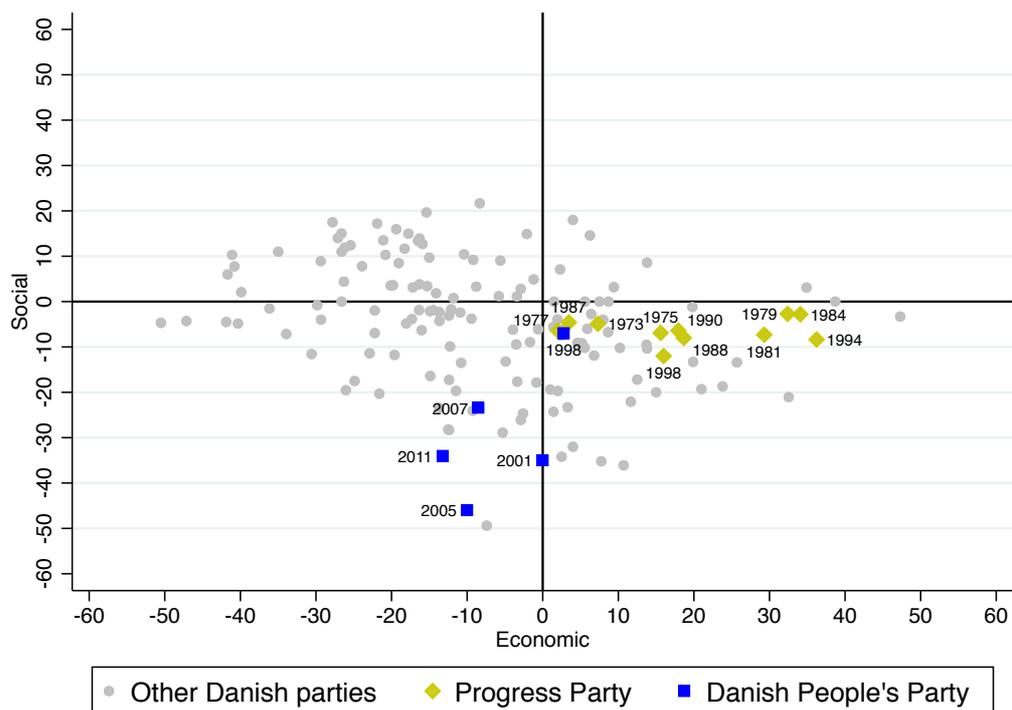
## Analysis

Figure 1 locates all parties in two-dimensional political space. To do this, we calculate the parties' positions on economic and social dimensions in each election year (see table 2):

$$\text{Economic position} = \Sigma (\text{right-wing statements}) - \Sigma (\text{left-wing statements})$$

$$\text{Social position} = \Sigma (\text{progressive statements}) - \Sigma (\text{conservative statements})$$

Two Danish parties are commonly classified as radical right in the literature: the Progress Party (*Fremskridtspartiet*, FP) and the Danish People's Party (*Dansk Folkeparti*, DF). The Progress Party occupied a space that is economically right-wing, while its successor, the Danish People's Party, is more authoritarian and left-of-center economically.

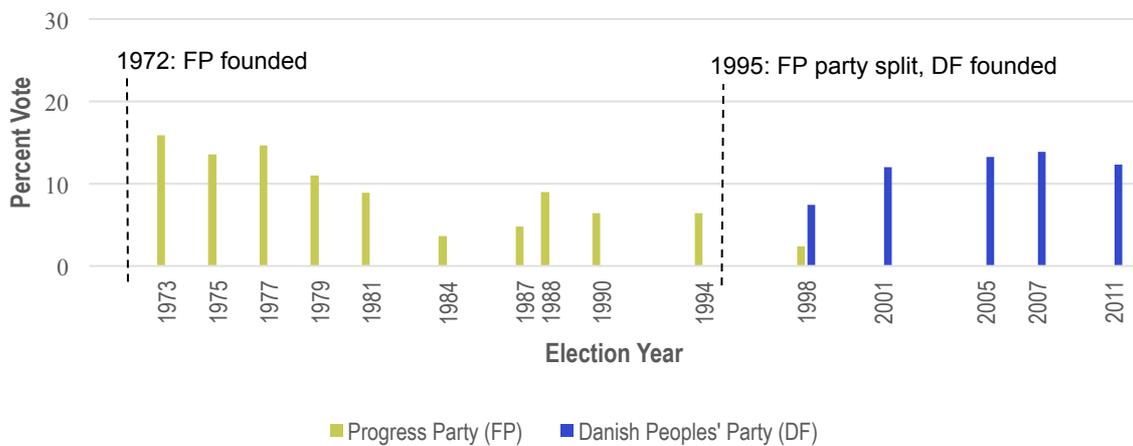


**Figure 1. Location of Danish political parties, by economic and social positions**

Source: Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR), Version 2016b

Notes: Authors' calculations based on *rile*. Positive values on the economic dimension (x-axis) represent rightist positions, and negative values represent leftist positions. Positive values on the social dimension (y-axis) represent libertarian/progressive positions, and negative values present authoritarian/conservative positions.

The Danish radical right has been electorally successful since the early 1970s, despite leadership changes and party splits (see figure 2). Although neither radical right party has been popular enough to hold cabinet positions or be part of a governing coalition, they have consistently held parliamentary seats since 1973 and have been relatively successful in the Danish context. Denmark has a highly consensual system of proportional representation (Lijphart, 1999) where minority coalition governments are the norm. FP provided parliamentary support in 1973, and DF has provided parliamentary support to four minority governments this century. DF is credited with influencing the implementation of several regressive immigration and citizenship restrictions in the 2000s (Mouritsen and Olsen, 2013) as well as during the recent refugee crisis (Polakow-Suransky, 2017). In 2015, DF garnered 21.1% of the vote.



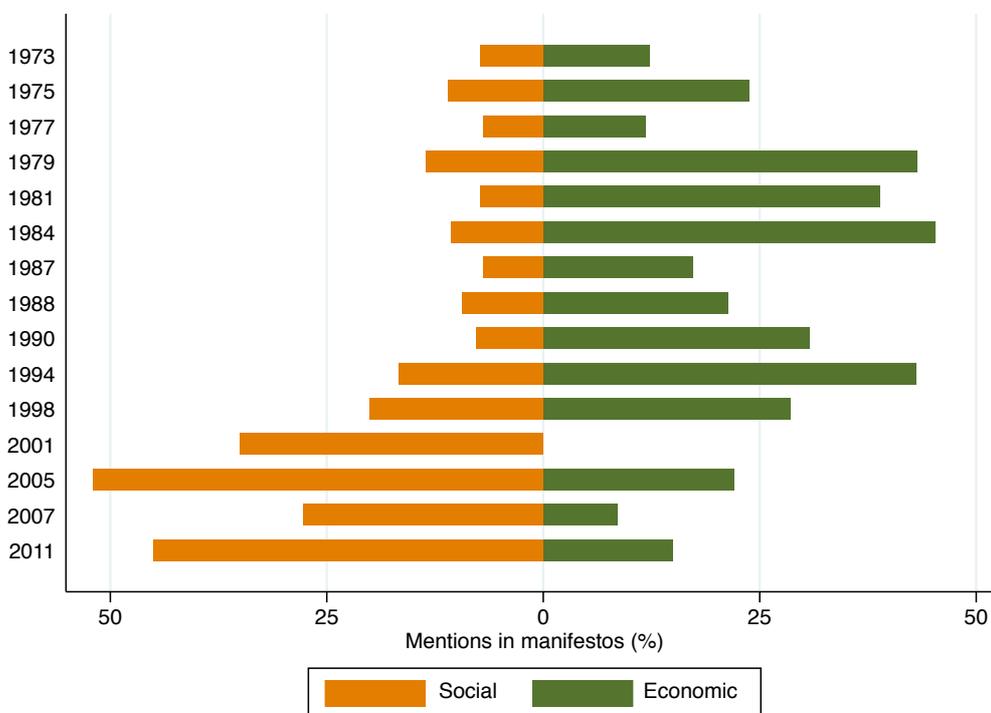
**Figure 2. Electoral performance of Danish radical right parties in national elections, 1973-2011**

Founded in 1972, FP became the second largest party in parliament during the 1973 landslide election in which five new parties won seats. The party did not, however, focus on the issues we typically associate with the radical right today, such as opposing multiculturalism (Andersen and Bjørklund, 1990). Primarily an anti-tax protest party, its founder Mogens Glistrup claimed on a television appearance to have paid zero income tax the previous year, a bold claim in a universalistic and social democratic welfare state. The issue mentioned most frequently in the party's manifesto was government efficiency (14.8%), and within Danish political space, FP was just to the right of the liberal party, *Venstre*.

For most of the 1970s and early 80s, economic liberalism remained the party's primary focus, and statements in favor of economic liberalism, economic orthodoxy, and free enterprise were the most frequent in their manifestos. The party's support for right-wing economics peaked in the early 1980s, around the same time several other countries took a turn toward neoliberalism in the Reagan-Thatcher era. However, this focus decreased in the mid-1980s when Glistrup was jailed for tax fraud and the party assumed new leadership.

The new leader, Pia Kjærsgaard, led the party through a quick succession of national elections in 1987, 1988, and 1990, during which economic issues, both right and left, declined in importance to the party. During the 1980s, the party had begun to develop an explicitly anti-immigration stance, a common response to increasing immigration among radical right parties in Western Europe. Though the oil crisis and subsequent recession drastically slowed labor migration, overall levels of migration continued to increase due to family reunification and new streams of migrants brought about by the collapse of the USSR and the onset of the Yugoslav Wars. In the late 1980s, Glistrup returned to the party after his release from jail and disagreed with Kjærsgaard's pragmatist approach in seeking cooperation with other parties. In 1995, this internal strife resulted in Kjærsgaard and three other high-ranking members splitting from FP to form the Danish People's Party (DF).

DF debuted with 7.4% of the vote in the 1998 election and looked remarkably different from its predecessor. First, DF shifted focus from economic to social issues. We use the disaggregated right-left variables presented in table 2 to illustrate the relative prominence of social and economic issues over time. Figure 3 shows that, after the mid-1990s when DF enters the scene, the percentage of space that social issues occupy in manifestos (orange bars), begins to outweigh the sum of economic issues (green bars).

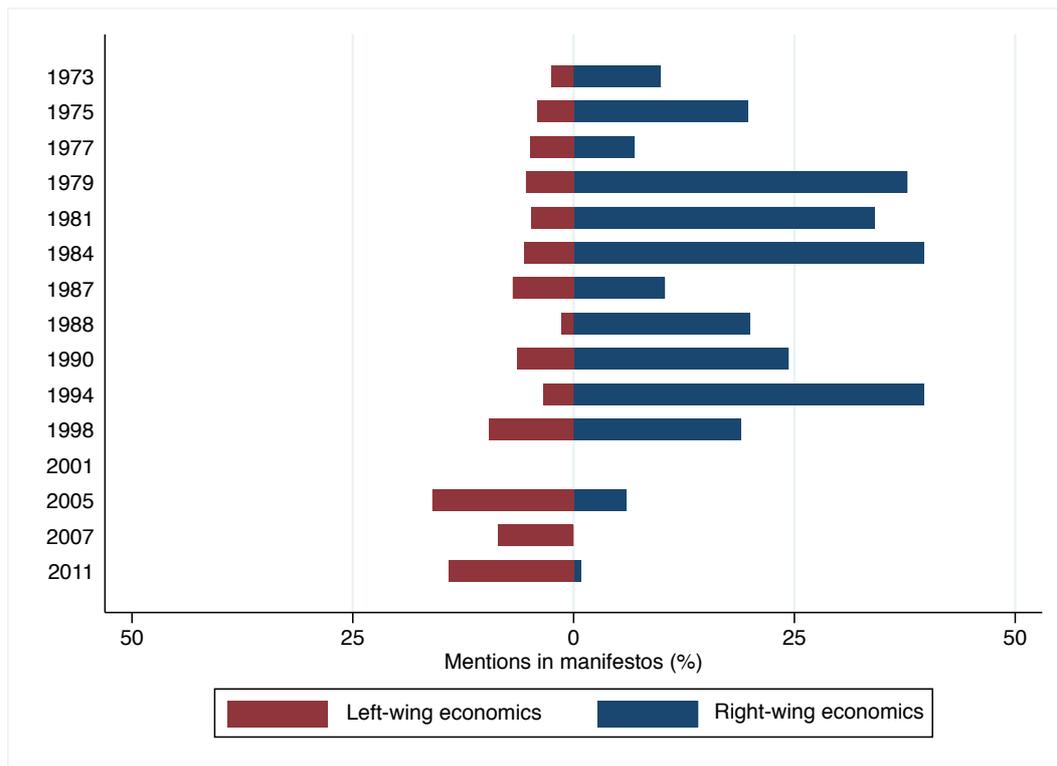


**Figure 3. Saliency of social and economic issues, Danish radical right**

Source: Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR), Version 2016b

Notes: Authors' calculations based on *rile*. Each colored bar represents the sum of specific issues as a percentage of manifestos in an election year. In 2001, DF did not mention economic issues.

Moreover, this new party differed from FP in another, perhaps even more significant, way: it abandoned neoliberal economics. Although its mention of economics is relatively low, figure 4 shows that, when DF does mention economic issues, they are increasingly left-wing.



**Figure 4. Saliency of left- and right-wing economics, Danish radical right**

Source: Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR), Version 2016b

Notes: Authors' calculations based on *rile*. Each colored bar represents the sum of specific issues as a percentage of manifestos in an election year. In 2001, DF did not mention economic issues.

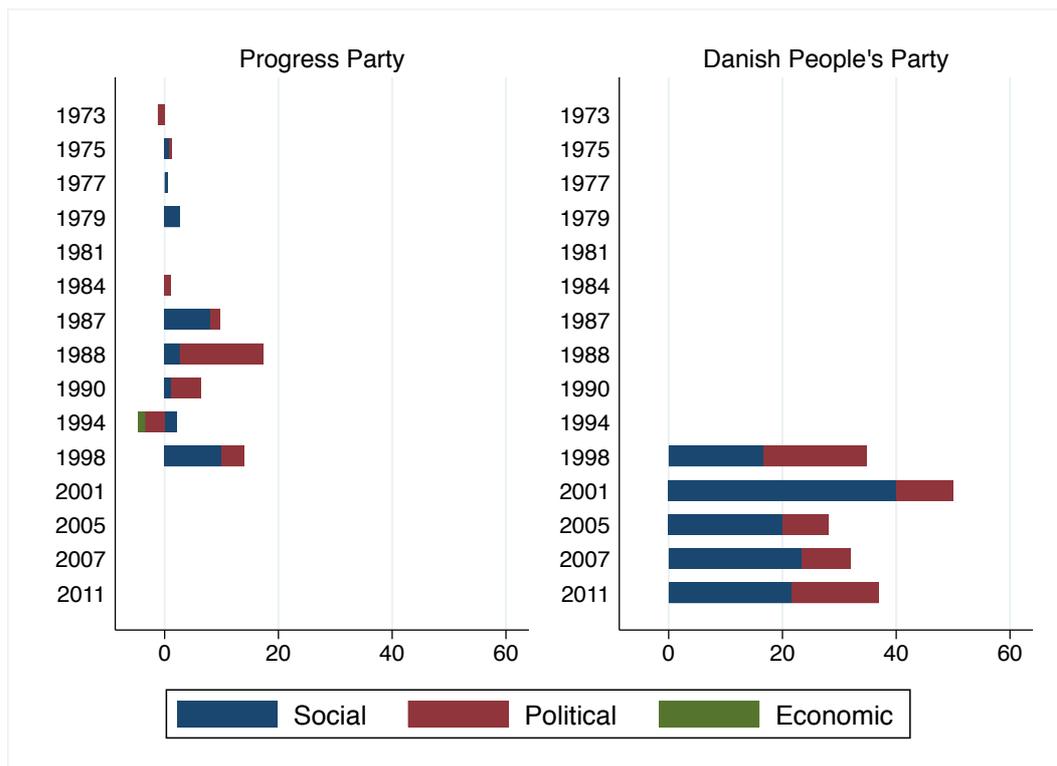
To summarize, the economic message of the radical right has shifted, as DF is generally supportive of the welfare state; however, economic issues simply hold less importance than in the past. Instead, the party has focused on social issues and developed a platform with a nationalist bent, consistent with the notion that the sovereignty and identity of the nation-state is under threat from external forces such as the EU and immigration. To calculate the level of nationalism in a party platform we use variables in table 3:

$$\text{Nationalism} = \Sigma (\text{nationalist statements}) - \Sigma (\text{globalist statements})$$

A positive value indicates the average stance is nationalist, while a negative value indicates that the average stance is globalist.

When we compare levels of social, political, and economic nationalism in both parties' platforms, figure 5 makes clear that the Danish radical right increasingly emphasizes nationalist concerns over time. First, DF is critical of Danish membership in the European Union, which is a clear departure from the Progress Party's initial stance. In fact, in 1973, FP made only positive statements about the European Community (the EU's predecessor) in its debut manifesto. Second, although both opposition to multiculturalism and support for traditional Danish culture increased in the 1980s, DF's strong emphasis on these issues distinguishes it from its predecessor. Finally, it is also worth noting that, although DF increasingly emphasizes left-wing economics, it has not taken a stance on economic protectionism during this time.

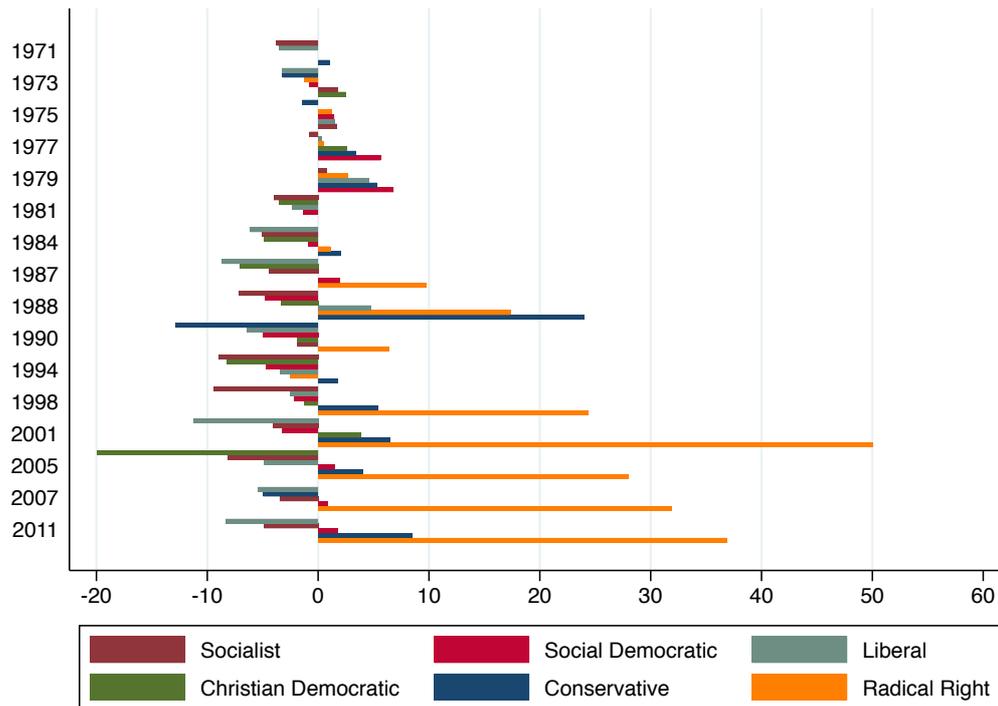
Figure 6 shows that this shift toward nationalism is a recent phenomenon. In its early years, the radical right was no different from other parties in terms of nationalist or globalist stances, but since 1998, the Danish radical right has made more nationalist claims than any other party family. Indeed, nationalism is the distinguishing feature of the radical right this century.



**Figure 5. Nationalism in Danish radical right politics**

Source: Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR), Version 2016b

Notes: Authors' calculations. Values on the x-axis represent the average share of election manifestos devoted to nationalist positions net of globalist positions. A positive value indicates the average stance is nationalist, while a negative value indicates that the average stance is globalist.



**Figure 6. Nationalism in Danish politics, by party family**

*Source:* Manifesto Project (MRG/CMP/MARPOR), Version 2016b

*Notes:* Authors' calculations. Values on the x-axis represent the average share of election manifestos devoted to nationalist positions net of globalist positions. A positive value indicates the average stance is nationalist, while a negative value indicates that the average stance is globalist.

**Conclusion**

These analyses show that the Danish radical right has abandoned neoliberalism for neo-nationalism. The Danish radical right began as economically right-wing and socially centrist but has changed positions over time, becoming less concerned with economics (but also more left-wing) and more socially conservative and nationalistic. This evolution is consistent with our previous research that shows that the average position of all radical right parties in Western Europe follows this trajectory. Over time, this party family has indeed traded neoliberalism for social conservatism, authoritarianism, and nationalism. We argue these differences represent an important cleavage in the party family with differences in policy positions substantial enough to identify two distinct party families: the traditional radical right and the contemporary neo-nationalist.

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