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Cartel Parties and Beyond: What Characterizes Danish Parties?²

Abstract: The cartel party model was published almost 30 years ago, and in this seminal article, Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair argued that Denmark was a most likely case for cartel party tendencies due to the collaborative nature of lawmaking with broad policy coalitions. Research at the time indicated that Danish parties only had cartel party traits at the party level, not at the party system level. However, since then, several new parties have been formed, and established parties have changed. Hence, the purpose here is to show whether six established and six new Danish parties are cartel parties at both the party and system level. The conclusion is that across established and new parties, and the party and system levels, there is increased cartelization in combination with traits from other party types.

Keywords: party types, Denmark, cartel, party financing, party member

Introduction

Almost 30 years ago, Richard S. Katz and Peter Mair published their seminal *Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party* as both a sum up of the project they had led on how parties organize in democracies, and as a starting point for the journal of Party Politics, promoting further party research. Their article not only summed up the

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development in parties' organization and their democratic role but also pointed to future developments. Katz and Mair argued that Denmark was one of the most likely case for cartel party tendencies due to the collaborative nature of lawmaking with broad policy coalitions along with Austria, Germany, Finland, Norway and Sweden (1995, p. 17). However, research at the time indicated that Danish parties only had cartel party traits at the party level, not at the party system level (Bille, 1997; Pedersen, 2004). Since then, several new parties have been formed in the Danish party system many of which have been relevant in Giovanni Sartori's sense (1976). In this article, I depict and discuss what characterizes the six established parties, six new parties, and the Danish system as such.

The following section presents the party types with an emphasis on the cartel party model, where after the Danish case and data applied here are represented. The main part is divided in four. The first part shortly takes stock of how the parties organized by the mid-1990s. The second and third parts characterize how, respectively, established and new parties organize, while the fourth focus on the system level of the cartel party thesis. The conclusion is that across established and new parties, and the party and system levels, cartelization has increased but that we also see traits from other party types.

The party types

Katz and Mair's (1995) seminal article on how parties organize in the first issue of the journal *Party Politics* was based upon data collected on West European and US parties in 1960–1990 (Katz, Mair, 1992; 1994; 2018). It summed up the party types in the literature in three ideal types, namely the elite party, mass party and catch-all party (Duverger, 1951; Kirchheimer, 1966; Panebianco, 1988), and the current trends at the time, which they labelled the cartel party model.

Cartel parties are characterized by politics as a profession, capital rather than labour intensive party work and campaigning, financing by the state rather than members and other volunteers, mutual autonomy between the party elite and rank-and-file members, blurring of the distinction between members and non-members, individualizing of membership, members providing legitimacy rather than political input, manpower etc., privileged access to major/state channels of communication, and mainly representing as agents of the state (Katz, Mair, 1995; 2018, p. 141). While party types depict characteristics with single parties, the cartel party model includes a system level dimension when cartel parties “collude” to exclude newcomers/fringe parties, which they as lawmakers may do by organizing public party financing, public media and the electoral system to favour established parties and disfavour newcomers and fringe parties.

Not all in the Katz and Mair party organization project supported the idea of the cartel party (see e.g., Koole, 1996). Furthermore, new theoretical models

have been added, often developed on the basis of empirical party organizations, as party scholars have previously done, including Katz and Mair themselves. First, Katz and Mair's dialectical approach to party organization development implies that they themselves did not regard the cartel party model as neither the model, nor the *grand finale* of party types (2018). In particular, they emphasize the populist opposition to the "cozy arrangements of the established parties" (Katz, Mair, 2018, p. 152), both from the left and right. Hence, the cartel party model itself, due to the "collusion nature" of the established parties, in itself includes its reaction.

Other types of parties have been seen as well, proposing different organizational forms to the mainstream parties. Several of the more recent party types center on the party leader. Jonathan Hopkin and Caterina Paolucci (1999) developed the business-firm party characterized with an entrepreneur from "outside politics", minimal party organization and strong links to corporate resources on the basis of Berlusconi's Forza Italia. In a similar vein, inspired by the Dutch Freedom Party and Swiss Lega dei Ticinesi, Reinhard Mazzoleni and Gerrit Voerman (2016) define memberless parties, characterized by the founder-owner's exclusive decision-making power, with small party offices and a heavy emphasis on the party leader's persona. While the general trend has been diminishing emphasis on party members, the opposite is found in movement parties, which emphasize grass root involvement and intra-party democracy around one or a few issues in national level rather than branch level structure; a party type inspired by the Greens in the 1970s (Kitschelt, 1988; 2006).

As mentioned in the introduction, Katz and Mair argued that Denmark was one of the most likely case for cartel party tendencies (1995: 17). Hence, the expectation is that the established parties in Denmark have taken on more cartel party characteristics. In regard to the six new parties, three scenarios could be expected: 1. *Copycats*: Based on the importance of the party context for how parties organize, one expectation is that new parties organize like the established parties (Katz, Mair, 1992; Bille, 1997; Scarrow, Webb, Poguntke, 2017). 2. *Cartel parties*: Since the cartel party type pointed to the current and future trends of party organization, these new parties could to a larger extent take on cartel party characteristics. 3. *Beyond cartel parties*: It is also reasonable to believe, that how party organize has developed well beyond the cartel party model within the three decades which has passed, hence, that (new) parties to a larger extent organize according to the newer party types, e.g., as depicted by the various party types within the literature.

The Danish case and data

The relevance of the Danish case lies first and foremost in the argument by Katz and Mair about Denmark being one among other most likely cases for cartel party tendencies (1995: 17).

The Danish case includes a plethora of parties. Emphasis in this paper is on the 12 Danish parties at the time of publication are represented in parliament, which vary across age from two to more than hundred years, from leftwing to rightwing on both the redistributive and value ideological dimensions, and in the size of both parliamentary representation and party membership (for more, see Green-Pedersen, Kosiara-Pedersen, 2020).

The analysis is based on secondary data: Status by the mid-1990s (Bille 1997) and newer research (Kosiara-Pedersen, 2019a; 2019b; 2020; Bischoff, Kosiara-Pedersen, 2023), the Political Party Database (PPDB; Poguntke et al., 2016; Scarrow, Webb, Poguntke, 2017) as well as current party statutes and other party documents, media coverage and interview. All included in the list of references. The analysis of the cartel party at the system level relies on analyses of 1. The electoral law, including the rules on parties getting eligible to field candidates (Folketingsvalgloven, 2024), 2. Law on public party financing (Partistøtteloven, 2024), and public coverage parties' media access based on prior court decisions (Andersen, Pedersen, 1999; Pedersen, 2004).

Status by the mid-1990s

Lars Bille contributed with the Danish case to the Katz and Mair comparative project (Katz, Mair, 1992; 1994) upon which the cartel party thesis was developed. Bille (1997) concluded his extensive research project on how eight Danish parties organized in 1960–1995, that the Danish parties in 1995 were hybrids of several party types: From the mass party model, they had the branch-based structure and rights and duties granted to party members. Catch-all party characteristics included a broader appeal than to only one segment of society, the use of campaign professionals, and declining membership figures. Danish parties adhered to several of the cartel party characteristics, in particular a high level of public financing, increased focus on voters rather than members, integration into the state, professionalization and specialization within the increasing party headquarters, and individualizing of member rights. Hence, at the party level, the Danish parties did take on several of the cartel party traits. However, there was no marked differences between the established, governing, mainstream parties and newcomers.

Turning to the system level characteristics of the cartel party model, further analyses of the Danish parties in the 1990s (Andersen, Pedersen, 1999; Pedersen,

2004) concluded that the established parties had not formed a cartel in the way of successfully hindering new parties and reserving the public financing and media access to themselves. On the contrary, the public party financing regime was advantageous to new parties with low levels of votes required to get access to the financing (less than 1/20 of the votes that a seat in parliament required). All parties are granted access to the party leader debates and party presentations on media with public service requirements.

In sum, by the end of the 1990s, Danish parties at the party level have both mass party, catch-all and cartel party characteristics, however, the system level aspects of the cartel party model do not fit well. The Danish case shows a tension between the cartel party characteristics at the system and party levels, where neither the public party financing, media access at election time and eligibility criteria to stand for election are favouring the established parties and hindering new parties. However, at that party level, on the backbone of traditional mass party organizational traits, the Danish parties had a substantial number of cartel party characteristics.

What characterizes the established parties since the mid-1990s?

Parties are conservative organizations, not eager to change unless there is a reason to, either due to changes in leadership or external shocks (Harmel, Janda, 1994). The established Danish parties have to a large extent sustained their formal organizations with local branch organizations, representation via delegation at the regional level and at annual meetings, with party members having a strong say on candidate nomination in the 92 nomination districts, or at least within the ten electoral districts (Venstre, 2012; Kosiara-Pedersen, 2019a; 2020; Det Konservative Folkeparti, 2021; Enhedslisten, 2021; Socialdemokratiet, 2021; Socialistisk Folkeparti, 2022; Radikale Venstre, 2022; Bischoff, Kosiara-Pedersen, 2023). However, some trends are clear even if changes to parties' formal structure is more limited.

By the end of the 1990s Lars Bille found a trend towards individualization of party member rights in regard to candidate nomination across the parties included in the Katz and Mair project (Bille, 2001), and this trend is continued, also by increasing use of both open and closed primaries (see e.g., Kenig et al., 2015; Sandri, Seddone, Venturino, 2015; Cross et al., 2016). Western democracies have seen a trend towards expanding the inclusion in the leadership selection processes beyond the party elite to members (Pilet, Cross, 2014) and even to open primaries where non-members may register to participate (Sandri, Seddone, Venturino, 2015). However, the Danish case has not seen these changes. Party members have been decisive in some of the Danish party leader selections since the 1990s, e.g., in membership ballots in the Social Democrats and Green

Left, and at the annual meeting with the Liberals, but the party elite and/or parliamentary party groups have been decisive more often, and there are no openings for non-members.

Declining membership figures changes the delegated intra-party democracy, but formal changes are limited. Parties continue to emphasize their branch structure and party members' rights and duties. Plebiscitary intra-party democracy has not been expanded (Achury et al., 2020) in Denmark. However, annual meetings are open for more rank-and-file members. Also, beyond the statutes, there is a marked blurring of the distinction between members and other party supporters, e.g., with information being shared widely to all supporters on social media, mobilization of both members and supporters at and between campaigns, and candidate recruitment beyond the party organization.

Dues make up a decreasing share of party income, and in particular in between elections, when private contributions (from companies, interest organizations and individuals) are limited, the public party financing makes up a substantial share of parties' budgets. Some of the older parties, the Social Democrats, Liberals and Conservatives, have links to companies and interest organizations to a much larger extent than the other parties (except for Liberal Alliance), hence, in particular in election years, due to these contributions, they depend less on public funding.

Party headquarters have in all the established parties been strengthened. All parties except the Liberals have their party headquarters in the parliamentary building and based on analysis of the web sites and job openings, party staff are professional specialists working with policy development, communication and organizational development, including on member engagement. Established parties have professionalized in this manner.

What characterizes the newer parties since their creation?

Since the publication of the cartel article in 1995, six new parties have managed to gain and retain representation in the Danish parliament. To what extent are they 1. Copycats; 2. Cartel parties; or 3. Beyond cartel parties?

Katz and Mair in particular pointed to the trend, that new parties emerged with the purpose of being different from the established parties, what has been labelled "anti-party-system-parties", in particular on the right wing (1995, p. 24; 2018, p. 151). The first new Danish party in the mid-1990s was exactly one of these parties, grouped with Vlaams Belang and Front National. The Danish People's Party split from the Progress Party and ended up being the successful survivor when the latter lost representation in parliament in 2000, and the former gained substantial influence as parliamentary majority party with the

liberal-conservative government 2001–2011 (Kosiara-Pedersen, 2019b; 2020). The founder of the Progress Party, Mogens Glistrup, was unsuccessful in creating the personal party he originally wanted due to resistance among his supporters, and the Progress Party ended up much like the mainstream parties (Bille, 1997). In contrast, Pia Kjærsgaard, the founder of the Danish Peoples' Party, laid much emphasis on organizing like the established parties, yet, with a higher level of central control; e.g., candidates are to be approved by the party headquarters, and expulsions may not be appealed to the party congress (Pedersen, Ringsmose, 2005), but otherwise, the branch structure, formal member rights etc. resemble that of the established parties (Dansk Folkeparti, 2006).

In 2007, *New Alliance* was formed as a center party by two (Conservative and Social Liberal) MPs and a Social Liberal MEP in reaction to the influence of right-wing Danish People's Party. Hence, as a reaction to the populist, right-wing reaction to the cartel parties (Katz, 2020). At first, the party was bottom up with engagement much alike what characterizes Birgitte Nyborg's new party in Borgen (which aired prior to the party formation). However, the various policy development groups did not all add up, and the party leadership had to take control to the extent that they managed. Some traditional party structure emerged (Kosiara-Pedersen, 2019). The grass-root, bottom-up approach was completely left when *New Alliance* in 2009 was renamed *Liberal Alliance* and moved to the rightwing on the redistributive, economic dimension. The party relied heavily on financial contributions from a bank and its owner, who also had a say on party policies. This kind of substantial private funding differs from the remaining parties; three of the old parties have strong links with interest organizations and center-right also some companies, and the *Alternative* did get some private financial support in the start but otherwise this is not seen among other parties. Rank-and-file members may all take part in the annual meeting, but there is a high level of central control e.g., of candidate nomination (*Liberal Alliance*, 2022). In sum, *Liberal Alliance* has several of the cartel party characteristics.

Katz (2020) points also to Green parties as a family of niche parties created after the cartel party types. These parties are not necessarily using anti-cartel rhetoric but, like all new parties, place themselves in relation to the established parties in the system. In 2015, a former Social Liberal MP and minister formed *The Alternative*. They were not only in name but also in organization different from the established parties (Kosiara-Pedersen, Kristiansen, 2016). The *Alternative* was created as a grass roots organization with much inspiration from social movements, that is, a movement party, including several activities not traditionally found within parties, such as crafting and cooking (*Alternativet*, 2022). Deliberative fora and other types of activities engaged a wider circle of supporters, however, the party leadership realized that some central control was needed to ensure coherence among the many policy development circles. Much like *New Alliance*, *The Alternative* was required by their representation in the

parliamentary arena to establish some level of central control even if the grass root democracy is continuously valued.

In 2015, *New Right* was formed by two former local Conservatives with a program placing them on the right-wing on both the redistributive, economic and the integration/immigration political dimensions of the Danish party system. They established a traditional party organization with branch organizations, annual meeting, and members with rights and duties, however, with some central control, e.g., that the national committee appoints the lead candidates at elections (Nye Borgerlige, 2021). However, *New Right* also emphasize their party creator and leader in intra-party decision-making, policy development and campaigning.

Even more party leader focus is found in the two new parties making it into parliament for the first time in 2022, *The Moderates* and *The Danish Democrats*. Both were both formed by two former high-profiled Liberals and both gained substantial support (8–9 pct.) for new parties. This level of personalization of parties is not a new phenomenon in Denmark. As mentioned above, *Glstrup* tried to organize *The Progress Party* in this way, and the *Centre-Democrats*, another new successful party in 1973, was in many ways dependent on the party founder *Erhard Jacobsen* (Bille, 1997). More recently, at the 2019 election, two new parties stood for election but did not make it, namely the *Hard Line* and *Klaus Riskær Pedersen* party, both of which are personal parties, without any party organizations, driven by the party owners who also picked the candidates and decided on election pledges.

The Moderates was formed by *Lars Løkke Rasmussen*, former Prime Minister, minister and chair of the *Liberals*. In August 2019, he was challenged as Liberal party chair and chose to step down. After some time as rank-and-file MP, he left the party 1 January 2021. At first, he formed a political network, with online thematic discussions. *The Moderates* was formally established at the founding annual meeting in June 2022. Prior to this, statutes were created by the party elite (*Moderaterne*, 2022). This institutionalized the party to a degree but also left flexibility as it includes the statement that these statutes would only function until the annual meeting in 2024. Rank-and-file member rights include to attend, speak and vote at the annual meeting, hence, not the delegated intra-party democracy known from the other Danish parties. Much authority and decision-making power is rested within the national committee, including appointing the chair for the ten regional branches, which are central in this organization. As a curiosity, contrary to other Danish parties, the *Moderates* chose to organize their youth (under 25 years) within the party. They are ensured representation in the national committee with two out of the ten elected at the annual meeting, with same rights and obligations as other members. In sum, *the Moderates* have institutionalized a member-based party organization with some degree of centralized control.

The Danish Democrats was also a successful new party at the 2022 election. Former minister and vice-chair of the Liberals, Inger Støjberg, left the Liberals when they supported the parliamentary vote putting her to the Rigsret (“impeachment”) in 2021. Støjberg was accused and later convicted for her handling of cases concerning the accommodation of married or cohabiting asylum seekers, one of whom was a minor, which had not taken place in accordance with administrative law rules and principles when she was Minister of Integration (Gauja, Kosiara-Pedersen, 2021). Støjberg left parliament upon the sentence of 60 days of unconditional prison, which she served in her home in the spring of 2022. Right thereafter, in June 2022, she formally formed her party, Danmarksdemokraterne – Inger Støjberg, and quickly collected voter signatures to become eligible to stand for election. She single-handedly nominated candidates for the 2022 election. Inger Støjberg got around 200 applications, of which she selected 50–60, which she interviewed over the summer. Preferably “spending 3–4 hours at their kitchen table in order to experience the potential candidate within their everyday and family setting” (Støjberg according to Hansen 2024). It was only after the 2022 election, that a party organization with members, branches, a strong national committee and an annual meeting was created (Danmarksdemokraterne, 2024). The branches are not depicted as empty shells, e.g., branches are required to establish an “activity committee” and nominate candidates for local elections. All members are invited to the annual meeting, but their rights are not specified in the statutes. Some central control is seen, e.g., that the “election committee” under the national committee is to appoint branch chairs and candidates at EP, national and regional elections, approve candidate lists for local elections, and may decline member enrolment. Hence, members have less rights here than in the established parties. Also, the Danish Democrats statutes are to be revised according to the development.

In sum, at the party level, new parties enrol members, organize branches, hold annual meetings; hence, have classic mass party structures. They organize to institutionalize, even in parties where party leader entrepreneurs play a central role in the creation. Party members are not central for campaigning, financing or as recruitment pool but they are enrolled and granted rights and duties, and no represented parties are without members, even though Støjberg’s organization came late and is yet to institutionalize.

More or less cartel at the system level since the mid-1990s?

By the end of the 1990s, the Danish political system was not characterized by the system level characteristics depicted in the cartel party model. So, what is the current status?

The electoral system has a low threshold for representation (usually the 2 pct. threshold is the one surpassed). However, the process for collecting signatures to be eligible to stand for election was more cumbersome, requiring some organizational support. The process was tightened in 1989 with a requirement of legal authorization of the voter signature (mailing back and forth with the voter's municipality). However, the digitalization of the collection of voter signatures up to the 2015 election implied a marked lowering of the (organizational) threshold to become eligible to stand for election (Folketingsvalgloven, 2024). The digitalization means that supporters of potential parties are not required to stand on the streets, squares and shopping centers to collect voter signatures, and there is no mailing back and forth to municipal authorities. Everything can take place online. Voters sign but need to confirm their signature a week later.

The public party financing was from its establishment in 1987 generous to small and new parties by setting the barrier to get the funding low. The barrier to get funding is less than 1/20 of what a seat "costs" in votes. This implied e.g., that the three parties standing for election in 2019 but not gaining representation, all got public party support per vote until the following election. However, some tightening has taken place which makes it less beneficial for unrepresented parties. The rules now stipulate that to be eligible for public party financing, a party needs to either gain representation, get 3.2/175 of the votes (equal to 1.8 pct. of the votes), or both acquired 2/175 of the votes at the general election and gained representation in either one (of five) regional councils or three (out of 98) municipalities (Partistøtteloven, 2024). Hence, parties need close to representation to gain access to public financing, which is a clear cartelization tendency.

There are no changes in the formal rules on access to public service broadcasters. Based on the constitutional paragraph on proportional representation, courts have previously ruled that all parties eligible to stand for election are to be treated equally. Hence, all eligible parties are to be presented equally in the campaign programs, e.g., all party leaders need to be included in a party leader debate (and given about equal speaking time). News coverage is exempt from these rules enabling unequal coverage. Even if small and new parties hence have some favourable media access to the state broadcaster, the media system is markedly changed due to new technologies and changed media consumption. The public service broadcasters' campaign coverage makes up a substantially smaller share of the "media campaign" now compared to the 1990s. Parties, candidates and other political actors to a large extent use social media for campaign communication. Political ads are still banned from national television, historically limiting the importance of money in campaigning (hence, not disadvantaging new and small parties). However, this ban does not apply to web sites, social media etc., possibly increasing the impact of money as a resource for gaining electoral support.

In sum, there are some cartelization at the system level since party financing now requires support closer to representation, and the equal access to public service campaign coverage is of less importance. However, digitalization has eased parties' access to the ballot. As in the late 1990s, some but not all the system level cartel traits are found in Denmark.

Concluding discussion

Katz and Mair's cartel party model published in 1995 both summed up the development of how parties organize and pointed to expected developments. While they argued that Denmark was a most likely case for cartel party tendencies due to the collaborative nature of lawmaking with broad policy coalitions, at the time, Danish parties only had some cartel party traits at the party level, and a bit at the system level. The purpose here was to see how well the cartel party thesis fits 30 years after, and the conclusion is that across established and new parties, and the party and system levels, cartelization has increased but that the Danish parties are not purely cartel parties.

At the party level, the branch based, member-enrolling model of party organization provides the core for both established and new Danish parties. While members retain formal rights, these are more limited in newer parties. None of the parties have formally granted non-members rights in the decision-making procedures, hence, the blurring of the distinction between members and supporters is mainly seen in way parties offer low price memberships or introductory memberships, and how they develop affiliation through social media. However, parties are financed in large part by the public, and their organization is professionalized.

At the party system level, the established Danish parties have not successfully formed a cartel even if the trend goes in the direction of more cartelization. The increasing number of parties with parliamentary representation has consequences at both the electoral (one-man parties gain accelerated media coverage and visibility) and parliamentary arenas (the increasing difficulties for small parliamentary party groups to manage the workload in general, and in particular control the government), opened up for discussions of further cartelization. Access to public party financing has been tightened, and discussions of the number of required voter signatures as well as the electoral threshold is at least discussed. While this is a protection of the already represented, it is also a response to the challenges of increased fragmentation.

Turning to the democratic implications of how parties organize, one of the most marked changes over the years is that parties are dwindling as channels of participation between elections. Established parties have been transformed from

membership-based parties to campaign organizations, and new parties have either organized without members or in a way where members and other supporters are not essential for how the party works. The blurring of the distinction between members and other supporters have not been implemented in a way in which the activism is blossoming in another way. However, in regard to the vote-structuring in campaigns, and the interest aggregation and policy formulation, parties are in general alive and well. The professionalization in the form of e.g., expertized staff and increased application of professional tools of communication, campaigning and organization, the centralization of decision-making procedures, and lesser dependence on members' dues and contributions for financing are characteristics of strong party organizations. Parties are still, as the burgeoning party literature in the 1990s stated, changing rather than declining.

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