Global Researcher’s Initiative Case Study: Denmark

Andreas Reventlow

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*Update: Since this case study was conducted in 2017, Ms Vermund and her political party has entered the Danish parliament. In the June 2019 parliamentary election, her party Nye Borgerlige, won four seats.*

Summary

Pernille Vermund, the leader of the recently established right-wing political party, the New Conservatives, has throughout 2016 and in early 2017 made a series of statements in mainstream media and on social media, about immigrants in Denmark from the Middle East and North Africa. Her statements have been perceived as unusually discriminatory, racist, and as fuelling division and antagonism between immigrants and non-immigrants due to her extraordinary choice of words when referring to immigrants and those who support immigration. Her political supporters are mostly white, middle-aged men, potentially sufficient in numbers to allow Ms Vermund to gain seats in Parliament in the next election.

## Dangerous Speech Framework Analysis

Social and Historical Context

Like much of the rest of Europe, Danish immigration law has become increasingly restrictive in recent years. Since the mid-to-late 1990s, when the far-right Danish People’s Party (“Dansk Folkeparti”) started to gain traction and influence on the policies of Danish governments[[1]](#footnote-1), increasingly restrictive immigration and asylum policies have taken centre stage in most national political negotiation proceedings. While this was particularly the case between 2001-2011 where the Danish government consisted of the liberal and conservative parties, the years between 2011-2015 where the country’s social-liberal, social democratic and socialist parties served in government, also saw a remarkable turn towards the right on immigration and integration issues, introducing increasingly restrictive laws and policies.

Most recently, and in particular during the height of Europe’s self-proclaimed “immigration crisis”, the Danish public and political spheres have grown increasingly fixated on non-western immigrants, especially but not exclusively those of Muslim faith, with authorities introducing legislation criticised and labelled draconian by both national and international media. This includes most notably the passing of a law in 2016 which permits authorities to confiscate the personal possessions of asylum-seekers, which drew comparisons to the Third Reich and Nazi policies of confiscating large amounts of gold and other valuables from Jews and others.[[2]](#footnote-2) Other controversial measures taken by authorities included the government taking out advertisements in a Lebanese newspaper to dissuade refugees from coming to Denmark, the reduction of social benefits for recent refugees by nearly 50%, and the prolongation of the asylum-seeker family reunification process, a scheme that enables family members of immigrants to apply for a Danish residence permit from outside the country, from one to three years.[[3]](#footnote-3) [[4]](#footnote-4) [[5]](#footnote-5)

Although a large and extremely diverse group of people, non-western immigrants (particularly of Middle Eastern, South Asian or African descent) in Denmark have, as a whole, been met with increasing disapproval and harsh criticism by far-right politicians, commentators, outspoken individuals on social media, and so forth. Measuring public sentiment against such a broad group of people is difficult, but polling from 2015, prior to the passing of the above laws, suggests that 50% of the Danish population saw it necessary to make it more difficult for “non-westerners” to immigrate to Denmark.[[6]](#footnote-6) As some of the most controversial topics on the public agenda, immigration and integration are ever-present in both mainstream, niche and of course on social media. A variety of policies and other initiatives are regularly proposed by a variety of political parties targeting non-western immigrants (specifically those from the above-mentioned regions and more often than not, Muslims). Whether the main topic of contention is in immigration or simply Islam varies between the individual debates, but it is clear that both public and political agendas have grown increasingly anti-Muslim over the years.

Recent developments in Danish political speech include a non-binding statement[[7]](#footnote-7) issued by a simple majority of the Danish Parliament in February 2017 that provoked substantial public debate because it was perceived by many to suggest that people with one or two non-western parents could not be considered “Danish”. Public statements of a more directly racist nature are not uncommon, especially on the political far-right, with several cases[[8]](#footnote-8) over the years of individuals charged and found guilty of violating section 266b of the penal code, which proscribes threatening, denigrating or degrading speech against specific groups. Violent acts against non-western immigrants are relatively rare in Denmark, though in February 2017 four boys of Danish heritage threw a bottle of burning gasoline at a 16-year-old boy of Afghan heritage, who incurred severe burns as a result.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The Party of the Danes (Danskernes Parti) – a party founded in 2011 by a former member of the Danish neo-nazi party, the Danish National Socialist Movement – also provides a few examples of controversial instances of violent action or incitement, including the public distribution of 137 cans of “asylum spray”. Relabelled hair spray cans, the “asylum spray” was described as an "effective" and "legal" (in a nod to Denmark's ban on pepper spray) way of repelling asylum seekers and to protect citizens against migrants. The Party of the Danes is not considered part of the mainstream political landscape in Denmark, and is unlikely to enter parliament, although they may have a chance at running.[[10]](#footnote-10)

* Far-right action against immigrant communities in Denmark is not limited to political parties. Although neither of them have gained much mainstream traction, the two groups Soldiers of Odin and SIAD (“Stop the Islamisation of Denmark”) have been active on several occasions in ways which could be described as vigilantism. SIAD has been known to patrol the Danish-German border on the lookout for refugees trying to cross the border, but were ordered by Danish police to cease their activities as it interfered with their work.[[11]](#footnote-11) [[12]](#footnote-12) Soldiers of Odin, a group that has since been dissolved in Denmark but which exists in other Nordic countries, was established to “protect women and children from those who don’t know how to treat them with proper respect” – seemingly a reference to events in Cologne where women were mugged and assaulted on New Year’s Eve 2015.[[13]](#footnote-13) During their short existence in Denmark, Soldiers of Odin patrolled the streets of about 10 cities and towns, but there were no reports of any violent action.

### Message

**Speech Act 1**

This speech act was made in Ms Vermund’s column in the tabloid Ekstra Bladet published online on 18 July 2016. The column discusses what Ms Vermund sees as ‘inaction’ by the ‘political elite’ following the July 14 attack in Nice, France where 86 people were killed when a cargo truck was deliberately driven into crowds celebrating Bastille day. The column discusses specifically the response by the Danish Minister of Justice, Søren Pind, who had published a statement on Facebook, calling for unity and support to France, saying “We are at war with a death cult, not Islam. If we make it a war on Islam, it will never end.”

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| --- | --- |
| Danish original | English translation |
| ”Den islamiske vækkelse spreder død og ødelæggelse, hvor man tillader den at slå rod. Derfor handler det simpelthen om at luge ukrudtet ud, hvor det findes og sikre, at det ikke kan få fat igen.”  ”Så når politikerne bliver færdige med at fortælle, hvad terror IKKE handler om, hvad vi IKKE skal gøre og hvem der IKKE er skyldige, så var det måske på tide at oplyse os om, hvordan de vil luge ud.”  ”… Muslimske parallelsamfund lever efter egne sharia-værdier, men finansieres af offentlige velfærdsydelser. Det er som at nære en slange ved sit bryst. Ved at knytte retten til overførselsindkomster til statsborgerskabet, fjernes grundlaget for parallelsamfundene og eksistensgrundlaget for alle ’Grimhøjenes’ imamer.” | “The Islamic awakening is spreading death and destruction everywhere you allow it to take root. That is why it is simply a matter of weeding where [the weeds] are and to make sure they cannot take root again.”  “When the politicians are done telling us what terrorism is NOT about, what we should NOT do, and who are NOT guilty, perhaps it was time to inform us, how they are going to do the weeding.”  “… Muslim parallel societies live according to their own Sharia values, but are financed by public welfare benefits. That is like nurturing a snake from your breast. By tying public welfare payments to citizenship, you remove the foundation for parallel societies and the livelihood of all Imams from all ‘Grimhøjene’[[14]](#footnote-14).” |

Source: <http://ekstrabladet.dk/opinionen/pernillevermund/Fri-os-for-dumme-bortforklaringer/6194867>

Ms Vermund was asked about this specific statement in a subsequent interview, with the interviewer questioning her use of the word ‘ukrudt’ (weeds), and why she was using it to refer to Muslims. She responded that the weeds she had referred to was “the Islamic awakening”, not Muslims. Her wording in the Danish original is ambiguous and easily interpreted as though ‘weeds’ refers to people of a Muslim faith, although she does not say so explicitly. Making use of this very common rhetorical tactic ensures that her audience will easily make the connection. By referring to weeds, Ms Vermund achieves the not-so-subtle imagery of Islamism – whether political ideologies tied to Islam or more generally the Muslim faith and those who profess it – as something destructive which spreads uncontrollably and should be eradicated. Weeding out is not a harsh term as such in Danish, and can be used in other contexts without achieving similar imagery, but in this context where the audience may easily make the connection to Muslims as a whole, it stands out as particularly suggestive of perceived harmful effects of their presence in Danish society and a need to be rid of them.

In the second part of the speech act, Ms Vermund levels an attack on ‘politicians’ – clearly distancing herself from other politicians in doing so – and what she perceives as inaction by politicians she believes to be defending those who commit terrorist acts. This is a common method of Ms Vermund, and serves in this instance as a tactic of positioning herself and her suggested policies as the solution to the problem, including by deporting all immigrants with a criminal conviction[[15]](#footnote-15) (even those who have become Danish citizens) and by halting all asylum processes. As noted in the translation, Ms Vermund also suggests making welfare benefits dependent on citizenship (which it currently is not) to avoid supporting what she calls “parallel societies” governed by Sharia values. Her blunt imagery of ‘nurturing a snake from your breast’ clearly compares Islam and those who profess it to dangerous, venomous creatures. Like the previous example, Ms Vermund does not literally call Muslims or Islam snakes, but her audience will easily make the connection.

Together with other speech acts in this case study, Ms Vermund’s statements are clearly suggestive of immigrants and Muslims as less worthy, almost subhuman beings, who, as the next speech act also suggests, are not being dealt with appropriately. The subtler yet pervasive and more structurally embedded effect of her statements are the divisions she fuels between (Muslim) immigrants and non-immigrants, facilitating feelings of antagonism against “the other”.

**Speech Act 2**

This speech act from 2 August 2016 was made in an interview with Danish broadcaster TV2 published in writing on their website. The statement was part of Ms Vermund commenting on the European “refugee crisis”, where she blamed what she called “paralysed” politicians for not “simply dealing with the problem [of the refugee crisis]” because they are “unable or unwilling to take the bull by the horns”, warning that this might create turbulence and even “civil war”:

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| Danish original | English translation |
| ”Når Søren Pind (justitsminister, red.) siger, at vi gerne vil løse problemet, men at konventionerne forhindrer os, så bliver folk desperate. Sådan er det jo. Men hvis vi først mister respekten for vores retssystem, så skaber det konflikt og uro - i værste tilfælde en borgerkrig.” | “When Søren Pind [the Minister of Justice] says that he wants to solve [the refugee crisis] but that [human rights] conventions are preventing us, then people get desperate. That’s how it is. If we lose our respect for the justice system, it will create turbulence and conflict – and in the worst-case scenario, civil war.” |

Source: <http://nyheder.tv2.dk/politik/2016-08-02-ny-partiformand-snart-klar-til-valg-i-vaerste-fald-kan-det-ende-i-en-borgerkrig>

There is little subtlety in Ms Vermund’s speech in this example, with the main implication being that civil war may be around the corner unless politicians stop immigration. It is unclear whether Ms Vermund in fact believes this to be the case or whether she is using scaremongering tactics to underline how severe she perceives the problem to be. Whatever her motive, her choice of words could be easily perceived by her audience as a pretext to initiate a form of vigilantism. Whether it serves to establish supposed grounds for violent crimes is impossible to say, but it clearly suggests to her audience that she understands how frustrated they are – so frustrated that desperate times may call for desperate measures.

Ms Vermund was asked about her use of the term civil war in the interview under Speech Act 3 below on the Danish Broadcasting Corporation’s influential and popular political talk show *Deadline* a few weeks later.[[16]](#footnote-16) She is asked if people might not misconstrue her statements as a call to arms: “I use the language as well as I can – some people understand it in one way – others in other ways. It is important that we are not cowed, we must be able to express ourselves (…) I can’t say [whether people will understand it as a call to arms], but I believe that you should be responsible for your own actions. If we cannot speak about facts, we cannot find solutions.”

Ms Vermund is clearly aware of how her statements might be perceived by her audience, but justifies her words as protected by the right to free speech and by arguing for individual responsibility. As such, she fails to acknowledge and take responsibility for her potential role in providing justification or pretext for violence.

**Speech Act 3**

This speech act, which covers two separate statements, is from 17 August 2016 and was made during the aforementioned interview on the political talk show *Deadline*. The interview focused on the nature of public debate and the often-toxic comments on social media about immigrants, refugees, and especially Muslims. As such, the speech acts were made in a setting where the interviewer explicitly and specifically asked Ms Vermund whether she could understand why some people would use words such as ‘traitors’ (landsforræder), and ‘whore’ (luder) to describe people who assist refugees.

In the first speech act, Ms Vermund refers to ‘Venligboerne’ (venlig meaning friendly, boer short for citizen), a large, semi-organised, informal group of people who provide assistance (social, legal, logistical, and other forms) to marginalised groups in society, and in particular in refugees. Ms Vermund also refers to the group as ‘Væmmeligboerne’, a derogatory play on their name, ‘væmmelig’ meaning nasty. The discussion is concerned with whether this group, in helping refugees travel through Denmark and cross the border to Sweden during the summers of 2015 and 2016, can be labelled ‘traitors’ and whether their act constitutes a form of treason. Transporting people who are in Denmark without the proper permit or who have not applied for asylum may constitute an illegal act under Danish law.[[17]](#footnote-17)

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| --- | --- |
| Danish original | English translation |
| “Det var landsforræderi dengang man som Venligboer fragtede flygtninge henover landet.” | “It was treason when you, as Venligboer, transported refugees across the country.” |

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERH8MaOi8G4>

In Danish, the verb ‘landsforræderi’ is a very strong term used to describe the illegal act of treason, implying that those who commit it are both disloyal to their own country and perpetrating a crime for which the maximum penalty is life imprisonment.

Later in the interview, Ms Vermund is pressed by the interviewer to summarise her view on other people’s speech acts[[18]](#footnote-18), calling political opponents, or those whom one disagrees with politically, ‘traitors’ (as someone who commits treason against their country, ‘landsforræder’) and a series of other derogatory terms, including ‘double-dealing Islamist’. The question leading up to the speech act itself is provided for clarity.

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| Danish original | English translation |
| Interviewer: ”Jeg skal helt kort have dig til at sige det helt klart. Når man kalder en politisk modstander eller et menneske man er politisk uenig med for landsforræder eller for tvetunget islamist eller tyskertøs, så har du forståelse for det?”  Ms Vermund: ”Jamen, altså jeg kan jo godt forstå at man kan blive så frustreret, det kan jeg godt forstå ja.” | Interviewer: “Very briefly, I need you to say it very clearly. When people call a political opponent or a person who they disagree with politically, a traitor, or double-dealing Islamist or ‘tyskertøs’ (derogatory term for a woman who had a relationship with a German soldier during World War II), you understand that?”  Ms Vermund: “Well, I can understand that people can become so frustrated [that they would say that], I understand that, yes. |

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERH8MaOi8G4>

Using the term traitor to signify someone who commits treason is not common in Danish political discussions, but Ms Vermund uses it successfully as a unifying political message to signify to her audience that those who are not supportive of her policies and who are sympathetic to Muslim immigrants are disloyal and unpatriotic. Like several of her other statements, this is problematic as it helps fuel divisions between Muslim immigrants and non-immigrants in a classic simplistic “them and us” dichotomy, even if neither group is homogenous or cohesive.

By using the word traitor and expressing understanding for the use of ‘tyskertøs’, Ms Vermund makes use of war-like rhetoric which is quite unusual and unfitting in an average political discussion in Denmark, and only serves to harden public sentiment against “the other” and fuel polarisation. By using war rhetoric, she facilitates a sphere of symbolism wherein Muslims are occupiers, politicians are collaborators, and civilians sympathetic and seeking to assist them are traitors. Although there is no evidence that Ms Vermund wishes to bring back capital punishment for those who she believes are committing treason, her rhetorical tactics are both excessive and harmful.

**Speech Act 4**

This speech act is a series of statements from Ms Vermund’s opinion column on 12 September under the heading “Kriminelle, dovne og illoyale indvandrere skal stoppes” (“Criminal, lazy and disloyal immigrants must be stopped”). Her piece does not appear to be in response to any particular event. The below are selected excerpts from the piece which is also available in its entirety.

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| Danish original | English translation |
| ”Den katastrofale asyl- og udlændingepolitik fra 1983 har ødelagt trygheden i samfundet. Kvinder bliver voldtaget, jøder bliver forfulgt, kunstnere og politikere lever i konstant livsfare, mænd bliver stukket ned på åben gade, homoseksuelle bliver chikaneret, velfærden forringes og utrygheden stiger.”  Migranterne fra Nordafrika og Mellemøsten, som det danske folk gav fred og frihed – og som derfor ifølge vores kultur burde udvise taknemmelighed, flid og loyalitet – er i langt højere grad end andre indvandrere utaknemmelige, kriminelle, dovne og illoyale.  ”… de, der støtter den fortsatte indvandring fra de muslimske lande, accepterer forfølgelse af mindretal, undertrykkelse af kvinder, børn, homoseksuelle og ikke-muslimer samt begrænsninger af vores hidtil frie og demokratiske samfund som en rimelig pris, danskerne skal betale.” | ”The catastrophic asylum- and immigrant policies from 1983 have destroyed our society’s sense of safety. Women are raped, Jews persecuted, the lives of artists and politicians are under constant threat, men are stabbed in the street, homosexuals are harassed, welfare is deteriorating and insecurity is on the rise.”  “ The migrants from North Africa and the Middle East, who the Danish people have given peace and freedom – and who, according to our culture, should show gratitude, diligence and loyalty – are, to a much higher degree than other immigrants, ungrateful, criminal, lazy and disloyal.”  “ … those who support immigration from Muslim countries, accept the persecution of minorities, subjugation of women, children, homosexuals and non-Muslims, as well as limitations on our free and democratic society, as a reasonable price that the Danes have to pay.” |

Source: <http://ekstrabladet.dk/opinionen/pernillevermund/Kriminelle-dovne-og-illoyale-indvandrere-skal-stoppes/6288606>

In Ms Vermund’s first statement, she accuses, again in a not-so-subtle yet not entirely explicit way, refugees and other immigrants of raping women, persecuting Jews, threatening the lives of politicians and artists (the latter in an implicit reference to the cartoonists behind the 2006 Mohammed cartoons),[[19]](#footnote-19) stabbing men, harassing homosexuals, and generally causing a deterioration of the welfare of Danish society and a decrease in people’s sense of safety. Her generalisations make it clear to her audience the detrimental impact that she believes immigration has had, and continues to have, on Danish society. Her choice of words is clearly intended to strike fear in her audience, and (like in other statements) make it clear that this is in large part due to the actions of politicians including those who enacted Denmark’s 1983 immigration law, implicitly positioning herself and her party’s policies as the solution.

In the second statement, Ms Vermund utilises common rhetorical tactics in her efforts to fuel division and create a sense of otherness and antagonism against immigrants. It is unclear what Ms Vermund refers to when making the claim that immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa are more “criminal” than other immigrants, although it might be a statistical assessment from 2004 which noted that individuals of foreign descent were convicted of crimes more often than individuals of Danish descent, relative to the total number of each group in the country.[[20]](#footnote-20) That study did not however deal specifically with immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa as compared to other immigrants. Whether or not there is a factual foundation to sustain her claim does not really have an impact on her ability to make her point, which she underscores with other adjectives including laziness, ungratefulness and disloyalty – all characteristics which are impossible to say anything verifiable about but serve as means of “othering” Muslims and fuelling antagonistic feelings towards them.

In the last statement, Ms Vermund explicitly castigates those of who support immigration from Muslim countries, accusing them of willingly and knowingly putting at risk minorities, women, children, homosexuals, and anyone who is not a Muslim. With yet another common tactic to sow division, Ms Vermund achieves a similar effect to when she refers to those sympathetic to immigrants as traitors, fuelling tension between those who oppose and those who support her views and policies.

### Speaker(s)

Pernille Vermund is the current leader and one of three co-founders of the far-right political party, the New Conservatives (De Nye Borgerlige), which is known for its hard-line immigration policies, ultra-liberal economic policies, and national-conservative set of values. An architect by training, Ms Vermund is a relative newcomer to the Danish national political scene, having served for a few years on a local municipal council before she unsuccessfully ran for parliament for the Conservative People’s Party in 2015. Ms Vermund has had a quick rise to fame, with her party granted the right to run for parliament in September 2016, only about a year after the party was founded.[[21]](#footnote-21) A regular participant in mainstream political TV talk shows, and with a regular column in one of the most widely read tabloid newspapers in Denmark, Ms Vermund is widely known by the Danish public, with her statements and appearances covered frequently by both mainstream and niche media.

Ms Vermund’s statements are often criticised emphatically in opinion pieces and editorials in both left and right-leaning mainstream media outlets and she has often herself commented on the online harassment she faces online, emphasising that she takes an approach of “not letting herself be victimized” –­­­­on several occasions she has noted how she is used to “taking care of herself”, and would not have been able “to raise three boys, found a political party and run a business on the side “if she was not “resilient, tough and able to play the same game as the boys”.[[22]](#footnote-22) She is a talented communicator who comes across calm, accessible and to-the-point even when pressed on issues she does not appear particularly knowledgeable on, including the implications of her party’s policies were they to be enacted. She has a tendency to make broad and generalising statements to support her points. Her public communication (which includes political talk show appearances, her tabloid column and social media presence) is mostly focused on the issue of immigration and associated discussions such as ‘what it means to be Danish’[[23]](#footnote-23), though her Facebook profile also includes updates from her personal life including her children, cooking, and travels.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Although women appear among Ms Vermund’s followers on Facebook, polling has indicated that 7 out of 10 potential voters for her political party are male.[[25]](#footnote-25) Polls also suggest that most potential voters are between 40-69 years old, white, reasonably wealthy, and have a university degree. The prevalence of male voters is similar to France’s National Front and Germany’s Alternative für Deutschland, which are also both led by women and which see a majority of male voters. A charismatic woman in her early forties who conforms to societal standards for women’s appearance, Ms Vermund comes across as determined, with strong opinions, a strong character, and perhaps to some, charming. She no doubt has a very strong appeal to those who share her political views, some of whom often commend her for her “straight talk” and ability to “get things done”. Like other recent right-wing politicians in Europe and the United States, Ms Vermund actively distances herself and her party from what she calls “established politics,” levelling harsh criticism at other political parties and politicians, especially those closest to her on the political spectrum. This includes labelling Denmark’s very influential far-right party, the Danish People’s Party (Dansk Folkeparti), as “too compromising” in political negotiations, and “too afraid” of tackling “the real problems”.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Like Ms Vermund herself, her party the New Conservatives has also seen a remarkably quick rise to fame. Founded in 2015, the party gained in September 2016 the right[[27]](#footnote-27) to be allowed to run in the next parliamentary elections which are to be held no later than June 2019, but which could arrive sooner. The New Conservatives is one of 10 parties eligible to run with the other nine currently in parliament. In July 2016, the party polled at between 6-10% although other polls have indicated somewhat lower counts of around 2%, which is the minimum threshold that parties need to cross to gain a seat in parliament.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Among the New Conservative party’s most controversial policy suggestions is a complete and permanent halt to granting asylum to refugees. Several of the party’s immigrant policies fail to comply with the UN’s 1951 Refugee Convention, which defines the term ‘refugee’ and outlines the rights of the displaced, as well as the legal obligations of States to protect them. The party believes Denmark should abandon the Convention, comparing it to “sharia law” because it – like sharia law, Ms Vermund contends – is “out of touch with reality” and “a remnant of the past.”[[29]](#footnote-29) The party is by far the most popular of recent right-wing parties to emerge in Denmark. Several former members of the Danish People’s Party who were expelled from the party over the years either because of political infighting or for making blatantly racist comments in public have joined Ms Vermund’s party. The New Conservative party’s rise is explained in part by the vacuum left behind as the Danish People’s Party has used political compromises to gain influence.[[30]](#footnote-30) According to Ms Vermund, the Danish People’s Party, which by all accounts is also extremely far-right, is “too soft” on immigrants and does “too much talking and takes too little action.”[[31]](#footnote-31) Not unlike trends in the rest of Europe and the US, the rhetoric used to support these arguments and to illustrate the gap between the public and established parties, right-wing or not, seemingly resonates with voters. In September 2016, Ms Vermund blamed what she called “paralysed” politicians for not “simply dealing with the problem [of the refugee crisis]” because they are “unable or unwilling to take the bull by the horns”.[[32]](#footnote-32)

### Audience

Ms Vermund’s messages reached a large and diverse group of people representing a cross-section of society, including the immigrants and refugees who were targeted as well as those who agree and those who disagree with her statements and political views. All of Ms Vermund’s statements have been picked up by other mainstream media as well as niche-oriented media targeting either the extreme right or the extreme left, and have generated a substantial amount of debate on both social and legacy media, extending the initial reach of Ms Vermund’s statements.

The majority of Ms Vermund’s statements are made in her column in the tabloid Ekstra Bladet.. The average reader of Ekstra Bladet is male, between 30-59, and politically to the right of center with an average income roughly of the national average.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Ms Vermund’s principal audience – her supporters and those she aspires to convince to vote for her party – is a relatively homogenous group: predominantly male, white, between 40-69 years old, reasonably wealthy, and holding university degrees. As such, they are among the most privileged groups in Denmark, and do possess (on a very general level at least) the means to commit acts of violence against those targeted by Ms Vermund’s speech in the same way that other privileged groups who possess a position of power relative to others do (e.g. men over women, cisgender over transgender, white over black, and so forth). Denmark sees nearly eight times more violent crime committed by men than by women, and of violent crime acts committed by men in 2015, 59% were committed by individuals between 25-59. As such, in terms of their general group adherence, Ms Vermund’s supporters fit demographically with the group predominantly responsible for violent crime, although it is difficult to assess whether Ms Vermund’s supporters specifically are more or less likely to commit acts of violence than other groups.[[34]](#footnote-34)

### Medium

The majority of Ms Vermund’s statements were published in her opinion column in the Danish tabloid Ekstra Bladet, one of the more widely read daily newspapers in the country. In 2013, the print edition of Ekstra Bladet had approximately 200.000 readers, while the online version in 2009[[35]](#footnote-35) saw more than six million page views from about 500.000 individuals.[[36]](#footnote-36) [[37]](#footnote-37) Ekstra Bladet is widely known to be a tabloid although its journalism is generally respected in terms of its factual basis even as it is discounted for its hyperbolic tendencies, sensationalism, and right-leaning commentaries. Several journalists writing for Ekstra Bladet have been nominated for and have won the Danish equivalent of the Pulitzer prize. Their investigative journalism is considered of high quality, even by those who would otherwise not read the paper. Their online column section where Ms Vermund also publishes her pieces is known to generate in its comment sections very toxic, misogynist, and often anti-Muslim sentiment.[[38]](#footnote-38)

Ms Vermund’s statements made during the TV interview in Speech Act 3 were broadcast on the influential and popular political talk show *Deadline* on DR2, one of the main channels run by the Danish Broadcasting Corporation. In terms of its average audience, Deadline is almost a perfect opposite of Ekstra Bladet, as it generally attracts those with an above average income, post-graduate university degrees and generally more centrist or left-leaning political views, though it is watched by a broad cross-section of society. Politicians and commentators from across the political spectrum appear regularly on the show.

Ms Vermund’s statements made as part of her interview with TV2 in Speech Act 2, the commercial counterpart to the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, were published on their website, one of the most popular news websites in the country, which attracts readers from a broad cross-section of society. Their average reader is roughly representative of the national median when it comes to income and education.

As noted above, all of Ms Vermund’s statements were picked up by other mainstream or niche-oriented media, generally illustrative of the wide coverage she is afforded.

## Responses

### Supportive Responses

The opinion piece Ms Vermund published on 12 September (Speech Act 4), received 123 comments in the comments section of the online column, most of them posted within a few days of the publication of the piece.[[39]](#footnote-39) The comments are predominantly very supportive, praising Ms Vermund’s arguments, ideas and indicative of support to her political career, as is generally expected of the comments section of Ekstra Bladet as noted above. Supportive comments include:

“Why don’t you get it? In our world, religion and law are separate. Islam/the Quran is the law and the religion. A dangerous cocktail. But we ordered it ourselves – but do we have to drink it as well? I wish we would wake up after these hangovers.”

“Close the borders, and all migrants who have anything to do with Islam, send families back home if they cannot provide for themselves, and criminals must be expelled immediately, so we can have our wonderful country back the way it was before they came and performed terror on us. […] God save Denmark.”

“In Denmark, DANISH ethnicity and identity should be promoted. We should not use spend one dime on ‘integrating’ all sorts of foreigners. Or on ‘developing’ Kongo. The money needs to be spent on the Danes, and we must not finance our own destruction.”

All of the Speech Acts have been posted on Ms Vermund’s Facebook page, which has approximately 19,000 followers, and the posts each received 100-400 comments. Because her profile is public, those comments include some individuals who do not follow her or necessarily support her views, although it appears that the vast majority of comments are supportive.





Translation:

“Hussein Hamad: Islam is here to stay. Live with it”

(in response) “Lisa Dorethe Carter: And Muslims are more than welcome to practice their religion. But that doesn’t mean that those of us who are not Muslim should tolerate special rights founded in Islam, shovelled down our throats. And it doesn’t mean that any form of Sharia should be attached to the Danish constitution. If a Muslim doesn’t like being a Muslim in Denmark, then it is not the Danish society that needs to change.”

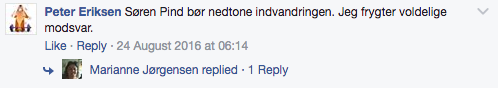
(in response) “Hussein Hamad: It’s not about special rights but about understanding of each other’s region [sic] and needs. That’s what you call mutual respect (…) Especially when you think about Denmark bombing the Middle East for the past 10 years. Wake up, man.”



Translation: “The problem with Muslims is that they only follow one law, and that’s Sharia. They couldn’t give a shit about our democratic legislation.”



Translation: “Hans Berg: I think unfortunately the solutionis the cut deeper to get rid of more of the cancer. All single, male asylum seekers below 35 who came here in the invasion wave last year, should be refused asylum and be deported immediately. Nice people will be targeted, but also the many parasites who hide in the flock. The rest of Europe should do the same.”



Translation: “Peter Eriksen: Søren Pind [Minister of Justice] should tone down immigration. I fear violent retribution.”

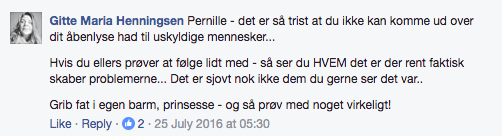


Translation: “Peer Tengstedt: Satirising Muslims is not as easy as it used to be when reality catches up with you – when you on a daily basis read about the Muslims’ ruthless savagery in this country where they have sought protection…”

Few if any widely influential figures or media outlets have praised Ms Vermund’s statements, although other politicians and commentators who are generally known to share her views have expressed support.

### Opposition/Counterspeech

All of the above Speech Acts have been criticized emphatically by a set of quite diverse commentators and politicians. The TV interview in Speech Act 3 was devoted to discussing the lack of civility in public debate and as such offered an informal rebuke, in the sense that the interviewer – an influential journalist and commentator who is rhetorically vastly superior to Ms Vermund ­– really took Ms Vermund to task, by systematically dissecting her statements and asking her repeatedly to clarify her intended meaning. He probes her, for example, on her use of the word “understand” and whether “her understanding the use of the word ‘tyskertøs’” means she also condones the use of the word. Ms Vermund’s statements have also been criticized in other left-leaning media.[[40]](#footnote-40) Ekstra Bladet, the tabloid that runs Ms Vermund’s column, has also published at least one critical article on her.[[41]](#footnote-41) Ms Vermund’s Facebook updates, and to a lesser degree her tweets, are also met with substantial opposition, even if the majority of comments appear to be supportive.



Translation: “Gitte Maria Henningsen: Pernille, it is so sad that you can’t get over your obvious hatred of innocent people… If you tried to keep up, you’d see who are actually creating the problems. It is not those you’d like it to be.”



“Translation: Alex Ferlini: Pernille Vermund: Gosh darn it, it’s incredible that you can’t see that you’re at least as much of an extremist as those you claim to be fighting. Luckily I can see that many in here aren’t falling for you national conservative right wing populism.”





“Translation: Runa Dorph-Petersen: Oh wow, the hateful woman could no longer hold back her loathing… The demented party leader strikes again.”

../../Desktop/Screen%20Shot%202017-04-06%20at%2010.41.02

Translation: “Costa Riga: You’re sick in the head, have it checked out.”

../../Desktop/Screen%20Shot%202017-04-06%20at%2010.38.35

Translation: “Helle Knudsen: Pernille: You’re an evil preacher of hate. You should be ashamed.”

Ms Vermund is surely a divisive figure amongst the vast majority of Danes, but that does not necessarily mean her influence is limited to those who find themselves on the margins of society. Her ability to appeal to individuals through her ultra-liberal economic policies, national-conservative values, and disdain for ‘established politics’ is similar to tactics employed elsewhere in Europe and the United States, which means that while she is easily derided in mainstream media and in the median public sphere for what are by the majority considered outrageous remarks, her influence politically and otherwise is not necessarily to be discounted.

### Incidents of Violence or Discrimination

The research undertaken for this case study found no cases of violence against immigrants or refugees where those who experienced the violence believe that it is spurred on by Ms Vermund’s speech acts. Even if it did exist, such a correlation would be very difficult to document if it existed. It is also difficult to document a correlation between Ms Vermund’s speech acts and any increase in her supporters’ feelings of fear or hatred against immigrants or refugees.

Acts of violence against any ethnic or religious group is relatively rare in Denmark. The most recent assessment of ‘perceived hate crimes’ in Denmark published by the Danish Ministry of Immigration and Integration, covers the period of 2014.[[42]](#footnote-42) Out of a total of 1.694 perceived hate crimes (which include violence and threats, violence, threats, forced acts of a sexual nature, vandalism, harassment, robbery, theft, and extortion), 142 individual cases are believed by their victims to be motivated by religion or belief, and 216 individual cases are believed by their victims to be motivated by ethnic origin or skin colour.[[43]](#footnote-43)

**Note on Contributor:**

Andreas Reventlow is the Head of Strategic Partnerships at International Media Support (IMS), where he oversees journalism programmes in countries affected by conflict and repression. He has extensive experience managing programmes on independent journalism, freedom of expression, and media in conflict. Andreas writes on issues such as the safety of journalists, free speech online and technology and human rights.

**The Global Research Initiative**

The authors of this study are part of the Dangerous Speech Project’s Global Research Initiative (GRI). The GRI is a network of scholars and practitioners who analyze dangerous speech in their home countries, to better understand it, and especially to learn how to diminish its harmful effects.

**The Dangerous Speech Project**

The Dangerous Speech Project is a team of experts on how speech leads to violence. We use our research to advise the tech industry, governments, and civil society on how to anticipate, minimize, and respond to harmful discourse in ways that prevent violence while also protecting freedom of expression.

1. Denmark has a long tradition of minority governments made up of party alliances, due to the principle of negative parliamentarianism (where a government may not remain in office with a majority against it) and its proportional representation system. Minority governments often have strong parliamentary majorities with the help of one or more supporting parties. Between 2001-2011, the alliance government of the Liberal Party (“Venstre”) and the Conservatives thus had stable parliamentary support from the Danish People's Party. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://politiken.dk/indland/art5601513/DF-Flygtninge-skal-aflevere-dyre-armb%C3%A5ndsure-ved-gr%C3%A6nsen> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/12/17/denmark-wants-to-seize-jewelry-from-refugees/?tid=a_inl> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <http://jyllands-posten.dk/politik/ECE8210571/Fakta-Her-er-regeringens-34-asylstramninger/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.nyidanmark.dk/en-us/coming\_to\_dk/familyreunification/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <http://www.altinget.dk/artikel/hver-anden-vil-have-mindre-ikke-vestlig-indvandring> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. http://cphpost.dk/news/poor-wording-in-resolution-denies-danishness-of-some-immigrants.html [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.kristeligt-dagblad.dk/leder/en-problematisk-dom-racisme> <https://www.information.dk/telegram/2010/09/fn-advarer-fjerne-racismeparagraf> <https://www.thelocal.dk/20161006/danish-nationalist-charged-with-racism-for-refugee-spray> https://www.b.dk/politiko/df-vil-omskrive-racismeparagraf [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <http://ekstrabladet.dk/112/fire-drenge-anholdt-kastede-braendende-flaske-med-benzin-mod-16-aarig/6523744> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/27/europe/asylum-spray-trnd/index.html> and

    <http://nyheder.tv2.dk/samfund/2016-09-28-dansk-asylspray-forarger-verden-over-afskyvaekkende-og-fremmedfjendsk> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. http://www.jv.dk/regionalt/Politiet-til-graensevogtere-Hold-jer-vaek/artikel/2392376 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. <https://siaddk.wordpress.com/2016/09/25/siad-patruljerer-ved-graensen/> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. https://www.information.dk/moti/2016/04/tanken-andres-doetre-fare [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ms Vermund is referring to a particular mosque (and other mosques like it) called Grimhøjmoskeen located in Denmark’s second city Aarhus, which has been accused of fermenting support to Islamic extremist groups. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ms Vermund does not go into detail about what this covers, and whether it extends to minor crimes or civil penalties as well. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERH8MaOi8G4> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. http://www.dr.dk/ligetil/indland/fakta-saadan-maa-du-hjaelpe-flygtninge [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ms Vermund was asked to comment on statements made by people on social media: <http://www.b.dk/nationalt/internetkriger-jeg-ved-godt-at-venligboerne-tror-deres-handlinger-er-gode.-det-tr> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/11341599/Prophet-Muhammad-cartoons-controversy-timeline.html [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. http://www.dst.dk/pukora/epub/Nyt/2006/NR239\_2.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. <http://www.valg.oim.dk/partier-og-kandidater/opstillingsberettigede-partiers-adresser-mv.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. <http://ekstrabladet.dk/opinionen/pernillevermund/Da-jeg-blev-udsat-for-sexisme-og-lod-offerkortet-ligge/6472431> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. <http://ekstrabladet.dk/opinionen/pernillevermund/Omar-Marzouks-hykleri-om-danskhed/6349315> [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10154364839097219&set=a.10150971769367219.424152.740127218&type=3&theater> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. <https://www.mm.dk/pernille-vermunds-vaelgere-er-rige-hvide-maend/> [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. <http://www.bt.dk/politik/thomas-larsen-oproeret-fra-hoejre-ulmer-i-danmark> [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. The current number of signatures from private individuals needed is 20.109, something most political initiatives do not manage to collect from Denmark’s 4.1m eligible voters. Denmark has total population of 5.7m people, and a voter turnout which hovers around 84-87 % <http://nyheder.tv2.dk/2015-06-19-valgdeltagelsen-dykkede-858-procent-stemte> and <http://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/valg/folketingsvalg> [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. [http://www.bt.dk/politik/ny-maaling-seks-procent-overvejer-nye-borgerlige#](http://www.bt.dk/politik/ny-maaling-seks-procent-overvejer-nye-borgerlige)! [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. <http://ekstrabladet.dk/opinionen/pernillevermund/Vestens-sharia-er-flygtningekonventionerne/6315382> [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. <http://www.dr.dk/nyheder/politik/dansk-folkeparti-i-droemmeland-som-landets-stoerste-parti> The Danish People’s Party is the second-largest political party in Parliament and the largest in the liberal-conservative grouping, right of centre. Despite its size, the Party is not in Government. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ms Vermund’s cover photo on her Facebook profile illustrates well the way in which she seeks to position herself in relation to other politicians, with a caricature depicting her kicking in the door on four male politicians (including the Prime Minister and the leader of the Danish People’s party) busy fighting each other: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10153973952467219&set=a.10150585078277219.387470.740127218&type=3&permPage=1> [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. <http://nyheder.tv2.dk/politik/2016-05-23-nyt-dansk-hoejreparti-paa-vej-dansk-folkeparti-er-alt-for-bloedsoedent> [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. http://ekstrabladet.dk/om\_ekstra\_bladet/den\_noedvendige/salg\_og\_markedsfoering/article4393193.ece [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See Danish crime statistics 2015, available as annex. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. More recent sources were not available. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Denmark’s most widely read daily paper is the free MetroXpress print edition which saw nearly 400,000 daily readers in 2013. <http://politiken.dk/kultur/medier/art5482438/Ekstra-Bladet-har-mistet-hver-tredje-l%C3%A6ser-p%C3%A5-et-%C3%A5r> [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. <http://ekstrabladet.dk/om_ekstra_bladet/article4494921.ece> and <http://ekstrabladet.dk/migration_catalog/eb-salg/article4680541.ece/media_binary/L%C3%A6serprofil%202H%202013> [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/kultur/medier/ekstra-bladet-har-faaet-nok-af-nationen> [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. http://ekstrabladet.dk/opinionen/pernillevermund/Kriminelle-dovne-og-illoyale-indvandrere-skal-stoppes/6288606 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See e.g. <https://www.information.dk/debat/2016/09/skingre-hoejrefloej-historiens-taberhold> [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. <http://ekstrabladet.dk/nyheder/politik/danskpolitik/partileder-haenger-ukendte-stenkastere-ud-som-indvandrere/6279432> [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. <http://uim.dk/publikationer/kortlaegning-af-hadforbrydelser-i-danmark> [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. The assessment covers ’hate crimes’ as those committed with a motive of gender, gender identity, age, handicap, sexual orientation, ethnic origin and skin colour, religion and belief, political or other views, social status. Types of crimes included in the assessment cover: a combination of violence and threats, violence, threats, forced acts of a sexual nature, vandalism, harassment, robbery, theft, and extortion. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)