

From Data to Democracy: Supporting Objective Election Coverage through Statistics Denmark

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Abstract.

Statistics Denmark collaborated with the Constructive Institute, an independent centre for constructive journalism, during the 2025 Danish municipal elections, contributing to a project aimed at – among other things – improving media coverage of the elections through fact-based, objective reporting.

As part of this initiative, Statistics Denmark participated in several workshops for journalists and communicators, providing expertise on how to source and use reliable data from us. Additionally, a quiz was created to engage the public in testing their knowledge about Denmark, reinforcing the importance of data literacy in understanding political issues. This paper outlines how Statistics Denmark not only showcased its diverse data – from GDP and healthcare statistics to paternity leave figures – but also helped journalists cover the elections with trustworthy, fact-based information.

The workshops revealed that many journalists were unaware of what Statistics Denmark had to offer them as the media as well as the extent of our statistical coverage, so through the workshops we reached journalists who may not otherwise have thought about using figures from Statistics Denmark in their coverage of the elections.

The key outcomes were:

The journalists participating in the workshops became aware of how they could improve their election coverage with reliable figures from Statistics Denmark.

We enhanced the data literacy among journalists by helping them interpret statistical data.

Many media outlets chose to feature our quiz which means that we likely reached a large share of the public.

Keywords: Dissemination, data literacy, election coverage, constructive journalism

1. Introduction

In Denmark, we have municipal elections every four years whereas our parliamentary elections are called *within* four years of the last elections. That gives the government

the mandate to call elections when it considers it most advantageous (source: Grundloven (The Constitutional Act of the Kingdom of Denmark), §32). This is not the case for municipal elections which are to be held on the third Tuesday in November every four years (source: Bekendtgørelse af lov om kommunale og regionale valg (Local and Regional Government Elections Act), §6). This gives politicians, the media and voters time to prepare for the elections. In 2025, these elections were held on Tuesday the 18th of November.

Because preparation is an option, the independent centre for constructive journalism, Constructive Institute, based in Aarhus in the Western part of Denmark had organised a series of workshops for journalists and communicators approximately 10-12 weeks prior to the elections. The workshops were one of many parts of a big campaign called *Dit valg. Vores Danmark* (Your vote. Our Denmark). For these workshops, Constructive Institute had, amongst others, invited Statistics Denmark to support and inspire a fact-driven election coverage as well as to strengthen data literacy among the participants. We were also asked to prepare a quiz, which the media could share with their readers in their election coverage. The idea was to inform voters about their respective municipalities in a fun way through quizzing. In this way, they could learn about, for instance, the number of electric cars, children per adult in kindergartens and inhabitants per doctor in their municipality. The aim was for the voters to gain more knowledge on their own municipality prior to election day.

2. A tour of Denmark

In total, Constructive Institute had arranged eight workshops spread across the small country of Denmark in a sort of tour of media outlets, who were hosting the workshops. The tour took me from the island of Bornholm in South-eastern Denmark on the other side of Sweden, to the very north of Jutland. The first workshop was on the 1st of September 2025, and the last workshop was on the 11th of September. I was our representative for six of the workshops, and our Head of Press represented us at the remaining two.

The aim of the workshops was to counter fake news and misinformation and provide the journalists with knowledge and inspiration on where to find facts and figures for the coverage of the upcoming elections.

Apart from us, a number of other speakers were invited to the workshops. At the beginning of each workshop some local citizens and politicians were invited to talk about what was most important to them in the upcoming elections.

Then, an – at least in the journalistic field – well-known journalist Kurt Strand was invited to talk about maintaining a constructive dialogue and the importance of keeping the debate respectful in a modern democracy and particularly during elections.

One of Denmark's largest market research companies known best for conducting political polls, Epinion, was invited to talk about an upcoming survey about voter opinions. It is the largest survey of its kind ever conducted in Denmark to date. In total about 400,000 Danish citizens were invited to participate.

Gravercentret was invited to talk about an offer of free research packages where journalists could search, for instance, on their own municipality and see comparisons on a number of data such as population size, number of libraries and reported burglaries and thefts per 1,000 inhabitants based, among other sources, on our data.

Finally, Statistics Denmark was invited to talk about a quiz we made specifically for Constructive Institute's campaign as well as the importance of facts and trustworthy statistics in a modern democracy and how independent statistics can support accurate reporting on society.

3. Our input to the workshop

The Head of Press and I had put together a presentation of 45 minutes. At first, we gave the participants an introduction to Statistics Denmark with some insights into how we operate and where our figures generally come from. Then, we gave some tips on how to use statistics and figures from us.

To finish it off, we quizzed the participants in their knowledge about their municipality.

For our part of the workshop, the most important task for us, whenever we meet journalists, students, the public etc. is to break down any barrier between "us" and "them". For instance, a colleague and I teach journalism students every semester and a lot of them are surprised to learn that they too are allowed to call and ask for help. In fact, one of my most important tasks on any given day at the office is to help journalists

and journalism students. Therefore, this was also the key takeaway from our presentation: When in doubt, call or email us.

4. Quizzing with Statistics Denmark

As mentioned earlier, we also made a quiz with 20 questions, of which 19 were chosen by Constructive Institute. The quiz was named “Faktatesten” (the fact test) by Constructive Institute and contained questions on a lot of everyday situations from paternity leave to public expenditure on, for instance, schools and elderly care in the Denmark’s 98 municipalities.

The quiz was free for media outlets to share on their website, so anyone could share it, and anyone could answer the questions regardless of whether they had a subscription to a media outlet or not.

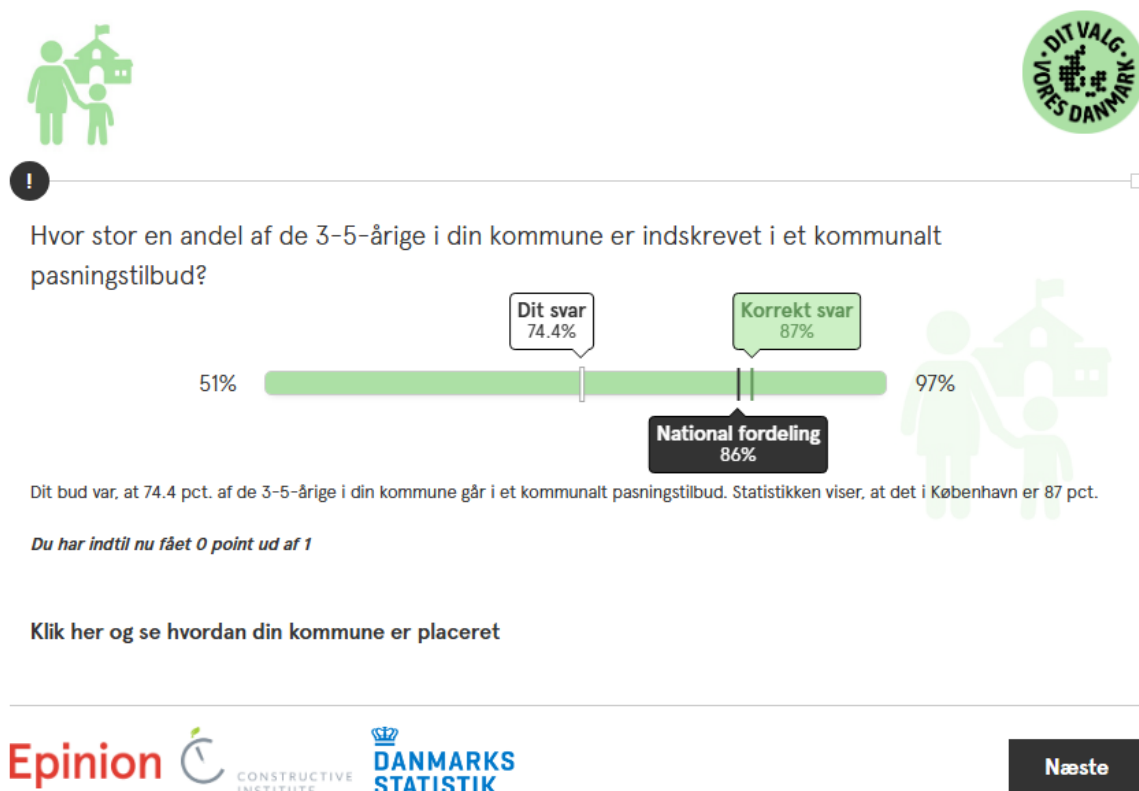
I helped pick the questions based on popular knowledge in the media and during previous elections as well as simply which figures we had available. Once we had selected a variety of questions, and Constructive Institute had approved them, my colleague spent about a week gathering and checking the figures and providing documentation for each question. It was for instance quite relevant, what year she had based the question on, as some tables were updated with newer figures during the election period.

Before starting the test, you were to answer which municipality you live in, and then all subsequent questions were based on your own municipality to make it relevant for you.

For each answer you were shown how close your answer was to the correct one, as well as the national average, so you in this way could compare your municipality to others.

In the example below, I have answered (*Dit svar, 74.4%*) – and been very wrong – about a question on the share of 3-5-year-olds that are enrolled in a public kindergarten in Copenhagen. The correct answer is marked *Korrekt svar, 87%* whereas *National fordeling, 86%* is the national average. In conclusion, Copenhagen is very average or slightly over the national average in this specific example.

Figure 1: Example of a question from the quiz



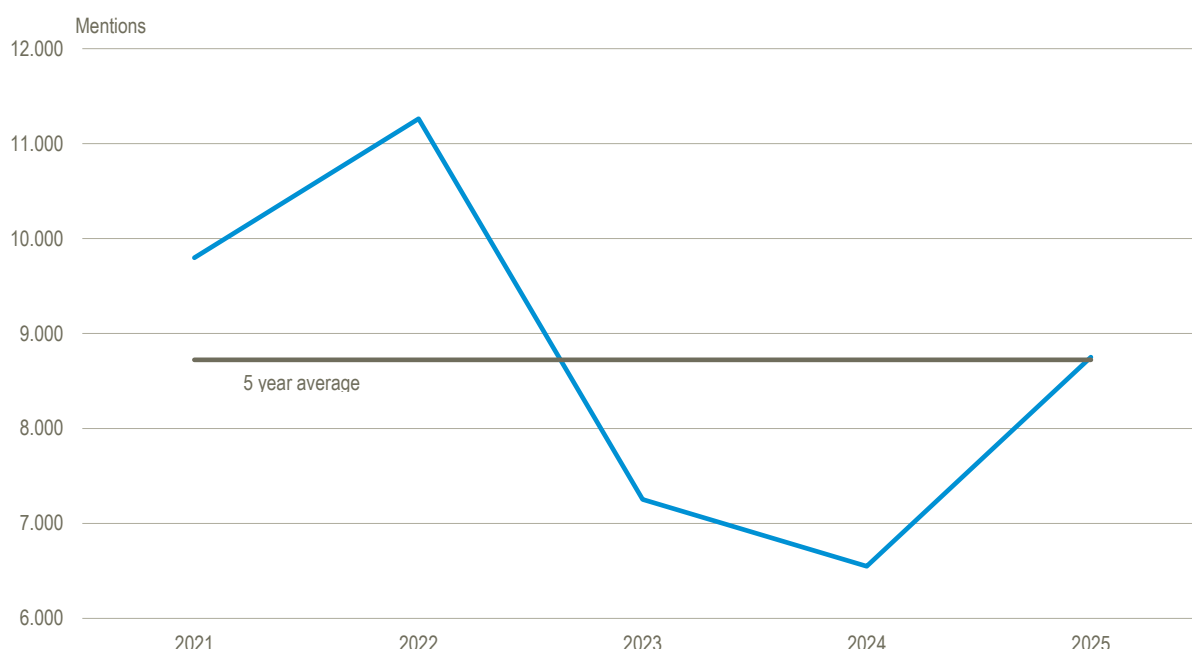
Note: Question: What percentage of the 3 to 5-year-olds in your municipality are enrolled in a public child care service?

5. The talk of town

From 1st of September 2025, when the workshops began, until the end of November (elections were held on the 18th), Statistics Denmark received 8,752 mentions in the press. In comparison, we received 6,549 mentions during the same three-month period in 2024. It is, however, difficult to compare directly, because many other factors may influence the number of press mentions we receive. Over a five-year period, it was, however, just above the average of 8,723 mentions during these three months which include years in which COVID-19 and rising inflation generated more media attention than usual.

Because of this, I think it is fair to conclude that we received a substantial number of mentions during the election period.

Figure 2: Press mentions September-November, 2021-2025



6. Conclusion

It's difficult to measure the exact output of our participation in the workshops, but the workshops revealed that many journalists were not aware of what Statistics Denmark had to offer the media as well as the extent of our statistical coverage. Through the workshops, we reached journalists who may not otherwise have thought about using figures from Statistics Denmark in their coverage of the elections.

We also managed to increase data literacy among the participants in the workshops and, as with any other successful communication initiative, we can only hope that they shared what they learned with colleagues, friends and family.

On top of this, we saw that many media outlets chose to feature the quiz – free of charge – on their websites, so hopefully we had a much larger reach than we are able to measure.

Apart from my personal benefit of seeing many sunrises and sunsets across Denmark, our participation has hopefully been a step towards our ongoing goal of improving data literacy and increasing awareness on where to find reliable statistics about the country.

List of references

Bekendtgørelse af lov om kommunale og regionale valg (Local and Regional Government Elections Act).

Grundloven (The Constitutional Act of the Kingdom of Denmark).