

The Faculty of Humanities



### ***Thesis American Studies***

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The Increasing Scandinavian Influence in  
American Political Discourse

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Center for American Studies  
University of Southern Denmark

By

Mads Sloth Jensen

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## Abstract

Within the later half of the 2010's the Nordic region has experienced a significant increase in American political attention. In several instances this attention has made headlines in the Nordic countries, for instance the proposal from President Trump to buy Greenland from Denmark or the President's comments on wanting more Norwegians in America rather than people from "shithole countries". Likewise, the American left, led by Senator Bernie Sanders drawn attention to the Nordics by using them as inspiration for what America should become. The American attention towards the Nordics has been obvious, yet the degree to which one could measure the presence of the Nordic countries in American political discourse has been questionable. This paper therefore seeks to quantify the role of the Scandinavian countries and the broader Nordic region in multiple aspects of American discourse.

In order to quantify political presence this paper has collected data from the archives of several major American media outlets. These archives provide access to more than a hundred years of headlines and articles. Through the use of search engine tools provided by the archives and a comparative analysis to non-Nordic European countries, this paper finds that the three Scandinavian countries have experienced a major increase in its media coverage within the most recent year relative to other European countries. Likewise, it was found based on the collection of data from the 2016 Democratic presidential primary debates that the Scandinavian region was disproportionately at the center of discussion, and also that the discussion around the Nordics in this settings was focused on policy ideas. Based on external data collection this paper could also provide evidence suggesting a ideological shift in the American population towards majority support of Nordic or European policy solutions such as a national healthcare plan, publicly funded tertiary education and promotion of worker's rights. Based on the data presented in this thesis, one can argue that there is a clearly measurable increase of American interest in the Nordics as political entities and furthermore that this attention is resulting in a Nordic presence in the American political discourse.

Additionally, the purpose of this paper is to discuss the potential benefits of an increased American awareness of the Scandinavian countries. In order to do so, I borrowed inspiration from nation branding theory and the criteria on which such theory measure image branding success. A major focus of nation branding theory is the ability of countries to attract tourists through the creation of an interesting or positive national image. This study therefore incorporated an analysis of American tourism in the two Scandinavian countries Denmark and Sweden within the last decade. The analysis found that both countries experienced high increases in the number of nights spent by American residents in Denmark and Sweden within

the last ten years. This paper argues that 2015, with the launch of Bernie Sanders' presidential bid, is the year in which the Nordics truly came to occupy a significant position in American society. The tourism data found that the rate of increase in American tourism to the Scandinavian countries more than doubled in the years from 2015 to 2019 compared to the five years prior. While, correlation does not necessarily imply causation, this paper provides theoretical and practical evidence for the existence of a causal link between the two occurrences.

Despite the positive economic impact of increased tourism in the Nordics there are also worrisome consequences of the political attention. Due to the relative left leaning political beliefs of the Nordic countries, as seen in comparison to the United States, a recent tendency to describe the Nordics as socialist societies has been observed. This description is not only incorrect but also harmful to the economic and political image of the Nordic countries. Consequently, this paper lays out several recommended approaches to supplement the already existing foreign policy of the Nordics in order to combat any such misconceptions in the U.S. The suggestions made by this paper are centered around the idea of cost efficient utilization of preestablished political social media figures, which are to function as a catalyst for the spread of Nordic political values and initiatives focused around the dispelling of American misconceptions of the Nordic region.

Through the implementation of the recommended actions of this paper, the Nordics could become first movers in the utilization of a new political discourse tool. It could gain a head start by recognizing the untapped potential of new media as a serious political arena and by engaging in it, the Nordics can compensate for their relatively small economies and promote their worldview to an international audience despite a lack of resources.

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## Introduction

The focus of this thesis is to understand and discuss the contemporary relevance of Nordic countries in contemporary American political discourse. The wish to research the state of Scandinavian and American political communication stems from the surprisingly competitive yet unsuccessful 2016 and 2020 presidential bids from Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, in addition to new uprising political initiatives rooted in Scandinavian style social democracy. In both presidential races, Sanders received the second most delegates and secured himself a decent portion of the democratic electorate.

Throughout this thesis there will be an analysis of the current Scandinavian influence on political institutions, political initiatives, candidates and political figures such as commentators. The analysis of these political entities will ultimately be used in order to interpret possible consequences of a Nordic presence in American politics. It is in these entities that this paper will establish the presumptive idea that Americans have increasingly involved Nordic policies into their own discourse, this paper aims to quantify the American fascination in the Nordics. The precursor for investigating any existence of American fascination has been encounters with increased media mentions of Nordic countries in a political setting. Media mentions of Nordic countries include the following headlines from prominent American news outlets such as *"Bernie Sanders' Dream is in Denmark"*<sup>2</sup> from CNN and *"looking for the American Dream? Try Denmark"*<sup>3</sup> by the HuffPost. A major contributor to my interest in understanding the dynamics of American-Scandinavian political discourse was the Danish reaction to the increased American attention and misconception. The primary event triggering a strong Nordic reaction was the misrepresentation of Danish society in a Fox News segment dedicated to the discussion of Danish social and economic structures by Trish Reagan of the FOX Business Network in which she criticized Denmark's tax system, SU (Danish student's Grants and Loans Scheme) and the Danish people unwillingness to work. That Fox Business segment led to official responses from the Danish Radio in which they addressed, what they perceived to be a false narrative about Denmark. Additionally, Dan Jørgensen of the Danish Socialdemokratiet (Social democratic party) also made a response to Trish Reagan which was uploaded to social media and after which Jørgensen had a meeting with Senator Sanders, a meeting that was in parts uploaded to the official Senator Bernie Sanders YouTube channel. The impulsive objection from Danish citizens and officials alike, and the following response

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<sup>2</sup> (Moody and Rosen 2016)

<sup>3</sup> (Trueman 2011)

to Trish Regan triggered my interest in the importance of a national image in a globalizing world, especially with the biggest trade partner outside the European Union. A key element of this thesis is therefore the understanding of what Nordic countries can gain from the increasing political attention from America, and likewise which concerns the Nordic countries must be aware of.

To understand the potential outcome of a newfound, or rather resurgent American interest in the Nordics, Scandinavia specifically, this paper draws from established nation branding theory and Americanization theory. These theories both contain information on the initiation of international influence through non-military means and offer a perspective on the potential benefits following political influence abroad. Applying these theories with collected data, this paper provides a thesis as to why Nordic countries should consider investments into furthering the political cooperation with American political entities. As the focus of this paper is the American interest in Nordic policy arrangements, such as universal healthcare coverage, expanded worker's right and state run higher education and strong unionization, which all fall under the umbrella of the Nordic model, the main aim of this paper will likewise be the possible investments in furthering Nordic political ideas across the Atlantic. However, I will also look into the commercial benefits of strengthening the image of Nordic countries in America, and what increased attention in general means for the influx of American spending. Ultimately, the goal of this paper is to answer the following statement: *"To which degree can the Nordics be labeled politically influential in an American political context? Furthermore, to what extent can such a position be considered beneficial to the Nordics?"* The argument presented in this paper is that the Nordic countries are currently in an extraordinary position to utilize the existing American political attention in the Nordic region, political attention that can be redirected into further political collaboration and economic interaction. Furthermore, this thesis ends with several recommendations as to how Nordic countries can promote Nordic societal structures in the United States. The recommendations will focus on alternative measures of communication as America and the Nordic region is already engaged in traditional diplomacy and cooperation. The goal is to introduce a more direct engagement with citizens of foreign nations, and supplement traditional diplomacy with brand news channels of information, created by a significant shift in media consumption.

A final note going into this thesis is that it is purely focused on the political angle of foreign influence, this means that I will not be included other factors which might have contributed to an American interest in the Nordics. Such factors could be an increased interest in Nordic entertainment media or the resurgence of Nordic history in television shows such as Vikings

from HBO. I have chosen not to introduce these aspects into this thesis firstly because it would blur the focus on political changes and because the limitations of this paper would result in a superficial introduction of non-political factors. Nevertheless, it should be noted that an inclusion of non-political factors would be necessary for a complete understanding of the Nordic-American dynamic.

## Theory

The following segment of this paper will contain the introduction to the theories that will be used throughout the entire thesis. Academic works on Americanization will be introduced and edited in order to help us understand the process of foreign nation influence, adjusting Americanization theory is necessary as minor countries such as the Nordics must out of necessity adopt different tactics than large superpowers such as the United States of America. Theory of nation branding will be introduced in this paper for its ability to explain the underlying causes of international influence as a result of effective image branding as well as its capabilities in explaining the potential benefits of a successful nation brand.

## Nation Branding Theory

The main theme of this paper is the political influence of the Nordic region in American contemporary discourse. In order to understand the ability of a foreign nation to influence political discourse one must look at the international reputation of the influential nation. The academic field of nation branding is centered around the idea of national branding and reputation. It is a field in which theories attempt to explain the economic, cultural and political importance of nation branding in addition to the development of a national brand. This paper will make use of nation branding theory to understand the value of Scandinavian influence in American discourse. Specifically, this paper will make use of nation branding theory as presented by Keith Dinnie in his book "Nation Branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice."<sup>4</sup> In his book Dinnie includes the contributions of several nation branding scholars alongside his own theoretical understanding of nation branding in order to cover the many aspects of which nation branding consists. Nation branding according to theory has several major objectives, attracting tourism, boost inward investments and increase export. These are the three major goals of a national branding effort, however, other potential rewards from nation branding include the attraction of skilled students and labor.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Dinnie argues that nation branding can

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<sup>4</sup> (Dinnie 2008)

<sup>5</sup> (Dinnie 2008, p.17)

*“increase international political influence; stimulate stronger international partnerships and enhance nation building (by nourishing confidence, pride, harmony, ambition, national resolve)”*<sup>6</sup> It is this argument which makes the inclusion of nation branding theory a crucial element in the discussion of Scandinavian influence on American politics. Nation branding can help us explain the rise in American interest in the Nordic region in addition to helping us understand the potential benefits that the Nordic countries can gain by increasing its international reach. This understanding is essential to the discussion about further Nordic investment into the newfound American fascination of Nordic policy. It will allow us to debate the benefits and drawbacks from such an investment while also guiding us in what a successful and sustainable investment would entail. Simon Anholt, a contributor to *“Nation Branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice.”* writes that *“Many governments, consultants and scholars persist in a naïve and superficial interpretation of ‘place branding’ that is nothing more than product promotion, where the product happens to be a country rather than a running shoe.”*<sup>7</sup> Anholt criticizes this perception of nation branding as shallow and inefficient, it is instead his belief that an impactful nation brand is created not through advertisement alone but rather based on legitimate innovation be it an economic, cultural or political innovation. Anholt argues that *“When those innovations prove a few simple truths about the country they come from, reputation starts to move; the place produces a buzz, people pay attention and prepare to change their minds.”*<sup>8</sup> The idea that political innovation and uniqueness will create a “buzz” will be easily testable in the case of Scandinavian branding in the United States as much of the recent attention has been on exactly the social democratic policy ideas common throughout Scandinavia and the wider Nordic region. The nation branding theory as put forth by Anholt would therefore predict that a sustained American interest in Scandinavia would follow, which in turn would according to the general theory of nation branding lead to increased tourism and investment. Making use of nation branding theory we will be able to analyze the underlying conditions that have created an American fascination with the Nordic region that will be documented throughout this paper. Furthermore, we can make use of nation branding theory to predict and understand the consequences of said fascination, it will also allow us to speculate about the potential longevity of the American interest. Additionally, this theory will play an essential role in the discussion of future investment in a “Nordic brand” and which methods should be adopted in the continued effort to retain American interest.

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<sup>6</sup> (Dinnie 2008, p.17)

<sup>7</sup> (Dinnie 2008, p.22)

<sup>8</sup> (Dinnie 2008, p.23)

Nation branding theory also works with the concept of identity versus image. In essence this concept aims to explain the difference what a nation is or is trying to present itself as versus how said nation is perceived by the outside world. The perception of a nation is not universal and will differ based on the perceiving nation, as such a nation state can be successful in matching their identity with their image in Germany while unsuccessful in Japan. It is important for a nation to align the identity with the image, as failing to do so can lead to misinterpretations of political alignments, cultural stereotypes. In fact Keith Dinnie describes it as *“a prime objective of nation branding to identify such prejudices and assist nations to dismantle and oppose the negative forces that might otherwise hold back the nation's economic development and standing in the world.”*<sup>9</sup> Certain scholars have attempted to dissect the components of nation identity and how it manifests itself, two of the elements that influence manifestation that are of interest to this paper are, everyday behavior and advocating an ideology. While the Nordic could be cited as advocating a wide range of ideologies such as human rights and sustainability, the ideology that it encompasses the most, as is most known for, would be social justice. Social justice as understood in its broader meaning, gender equality, worker's rights, disability protection and economic welfare protection etc. In this paper I will be looking at how successful the Nordic nations have been in solidifying its identity with its image in the United States. Furthermore, this paper will analyze the Nordic efforts to achieve an alignment of the identity and image through everyday behavior. Everyday behavior as referenced by Dinnie means political/military behavior, diplomatic initiatives and conducts of international relations.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, I will look at how Nordic political leaders have publicly attempted to correct the American perception of the Nordic nations.

### Theory of Americanization

While Americanization is not in and of itself an academic theory, scholars of Americanization generally agree on the criteria on which American influence overseas is to be evaluated. By borrowing from Americanization scholars such as Mary Nolan, Victoria De Gracia and Reinholdt Wagnleitner one can puzzle together different aspects of society to gain a better understanding of which forces play an influential role. Understanding which criteria is used to quantify the American effect on the world following the Second World War will enable this paper to conduct research on those same criteria and thereby attempt to portray an objective picture of Nordic Influence in America. In her book *“The Transatlantic Century”* Mary Nolan

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<sup>9</sup> (Dinnie 2008, p.42)

<sup>10</sup> (Dinnie 2008, Table 2.1)

on the issue of culture wars during the Cold War discusses the importance of governmental initiatives in the form of student exchange programs and state funding of radio stations that were critical of Soviet communism. Nolan describes radio as *“a principle tool for cultural diplomacy”*.<sup>11</sup> A sentiment to which Wagnleitner adds that *“Control of the channels of information and of the hegemony of knowledge has always been a prerequisite for political power”*. In his work *“Coca-Colonization and the Cold War”* Wagnleitner attributes much of the American influence in post-war Europe to the presence of American media control. It is especially America's ability to reach a large audience of foreign citizens through *“fast media”* (radio, films and news of all kinds) to which Wagnleitner attributes the success of American propaganda. Nolan and Wagnleitner are just two of the many scholars who include media control into their description and discussion of foreign influence. Given the consensus among Americanization scholars of media that media control is an integral part of foreign influence, this paper will borrow from this academic tradition and analyze the Scandinavian and Nordic presence in American political discourse. This will be done through a multitude of ways such as quantitative media mentions, political debate presence and qualitative analysis of several media publications used to determine the role of the Nordics in the political discourse.

### Methodological Considerations

This section will be dedicated to the discussion of methodological approaches and considerations which have gone into the data collection of this paper. The specific use of a given methodological approach will be exemplified in order to demonstrate the usefulness provided by the approach. The methodological approaches which are present within this paper and the ones we will discuss in this section are quantitative, qualitative and deductive reasoning. These research methods all play a major role in the ability of this paper to answer the problem formulation as presented in the introduction of this thesis.

### Quantitative Research

The use of quantitative research used in this paper presents itself in several ways, such as the collection and presentation of nation mentions in Democratic primary debates as seen in Appendix A. In this example the use of the quantitative research methods allow us to break down the presence of country within the Democratic political discourse in the 2016 presidential primary debates. I noted down the mentions of countries in Democratic primary debates by cross reading the transcripts of the debates provided by the hosting news network while

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<sup>11</sup> (Nolan 2012, p.233)

listening to the debate, this ensured that I would either hear or read any inconsistency between the transcripts and audio. The collection of this data through a quantitative method provides an easy observation regarding foreign political presence in American discourse by condensing nine multiple-hour debates into a spreadsheet which can grant insight into the topic at hand. In addition to providing large scale overviews, quantitative research methods have the benefit of providing objective data which in and of itself is not a product of interpretation, this is immensely helpful as it provides a basis of objective reality from which one can analyze and interpret the patterns and trends of the world. Through the use of quantitative research this paper has been able to present objective data arguing for the existence of a Scandinavian impact in American society, quantitative data which ensures that the data collected through qualitative measures are part of a general trend rather than a statistical outlier.

### Qualitative Research

In this paper I have made use of qualitative research methods in my collection and analysis of interviews and quotes. The qualitative method in this paper is exemplified in my email exchanges with John Stark and Tomas Lindh, the director and producer of *The Norden* and *Breaking the Cycle* documentaries which are discussed as cases of Scandinavian influence in America. My methodological consideration going into our exchange was to achieve a better understanding of intent, something which cannot be gathered through quantitative methods. Not only did my exchange with Stark and Lindh provide me with an insight into their objective going into the production of an internationally successful documentary series, it also provided me with the demographic breakdown of their YouTube audience. The same dynamic is true for my interview with Jan-Erik Støstad, general secretary of SAMAK, which was conducted over a phone call. The intent of the interview was to gain an understanding of the thoughts towards Nordic influence in America from one of major social democratic organizations in the Nordic region. The qualitative research methods therefore play a vital role in our understand of what drives the Scandinavization of American politics. In this regard, one could argue that the qualitative method is used in order to analyze and interpret the general trends which have been established through quantitative data collection. By combining quantitative and qualitative research methods this paper ensures that it delivers an analytical description of an objectively verifiable reality.

### Use of Deductive and Inductive Reasoning

The structure of this paper is largely based around the idea of deductive reasoning. Meaning that prior to the writing of this paper I as the author centered my hypothesis around already

established theories such as Americanization traditions and nation branding theory. Following the principle of deductive reasoning this paper aimed to replicate the research of Americanization scholars and thereby trying to confirm the theory of foreign influence as a result of the criteria put forth by academics such as Mary Nolan and Reinholdt Wagnleitner. Similarly, in the case of nation branding theory this paper aims to test the truthfulness of the claims put forth by nation branding theory on the relationship between increased positive coverage and incoming tourism. As such this paper relies heavily on deductive reasoning and already established theories. This has the benefit on relying on theory which has already been tested on proven reliable in its explanatory abilities, this is important as it ensures that the theory which is used can explain generalizations in other instances than just the one present in this paper. On the other hand, this method presents the risk of tunnel visioning on data which confirms the preestablished theory. This risk has been minimized to the possible extent by collecting my own data through interviews and quantitative measures, by collecting my own data I remove the possible bias of a foreign source and can make use of inductive reasoning when analyzing my own data. By combining the two methods I reduce the likelihood of a paper plagued by one-sided bias.

### Defining Scandinavia and the Nordic

For the purpose of this paper I will establish a definition of Scandinavia and the Nordic. The official definition of Scandinavia includes the three countries, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, these countries share centuries of history together and similar language and culture. These three countries are the basis of this paper and will be the most discussed nations throughout the thesis. The term "Nordic" also includes the three Scandinavian countries in addition to Finland and Iceland. Minor nations such as Greenland, the Faroe Islands, Åland Islands and Svalbard are all encompassed under the term Nordic, but are generally perceived in their relation to Denmark, Finland and Norway. These are the two official definitions of the terms and they can by those definitions not be used interchangeably, yet as many sources used during the writing process of this paper establish their own definitions of the terms, an economic paper on the Nordic model for instance exclude Norway and Iceland due to their non-membership of the EU.<sup>12</sup> The terms lose their original meaning and this paper will therefore use the terms Scandinavia and Nordic interchangeably in reference to Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Additionally, this paper makes use of the word "Scandinization," the term itself is not recognized as an official process but has been used several times prior to this thesis, as a term

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<sup>12</sup> (Andersen et al. 2007)

for the Scandinavian influence outside the Nordic region. The word is originally inspired by the term “Americanization,” which is used to describe the imitation of American practices and conditions around the world during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Describing the Nordic Model

Given the aim of this paper is to understand and analyze the influence of Scandinavian ideas in American politics, it is important to define what is considered Scandinavian. To do so one must understand the fundamental principles on which the Nordic countries base their political reality. Throughout several decades a vast number of economic papers have aimed to define what constitutes the Nordic model. A common finding among those papers is that “*the Nordics succeed better than other countries in combining economic efficiency and growth with a peaceful labour market, a fair distribution of income and social cohesion*”.<sup>13</sup> This paragraph from “The Nordic Model” from the Research Institute of the Finnish Economy reveals three key components of the Nordic model, strong workers’ rights, economic equality and social cohesion. The Nordic model achieves these three components through strong collective bargaining resulting from a highly unionized population and through a large public sector driven by high taxation.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, there is general agreement that investments in human capital in the form of public childcare and education help facilitate fair distribution and social cohesion in addition to economic growth.<sup>15</sup> In fact education, child and retirement care alongside healthcare are seen as hallmarks of the Nordic welfare model, it is specifically the universality of the programs that define them as Nordic, though similar programs exist outside the Nordic region.<sup>16</sup> Many other nations around the world grant many of the same services to their populations as does the Nordic, and the differences which separate them are a matter of degree. The practice of nationalized tertiary education is common through the entirety of Europe and classifying the policy as uniquely Scandinavian would be incorrect. The Nordic Scandinavian countries however, also pay their adult students a monthly grant for the entirety of their study. One could therefore argue that it is the extent to which the Nordic countries push progressive ideas that define the Nordic welfare state. To summarize, the Nordic countries are defined by large public sectors financed through high income taxes, which in return provide universal high-quality child, parent, retirement and health care, education and indirectly

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<sup>13</sup> (Andersen et al. 2007)

<sup>14</sup> (Barth, Moene and Willumsen 2014, p.60)

<sup>15</sup> (Andersen et al. 2007, 14)

<sup>16</sup> (Andersen et al. 2007, 64)

secures strong workers' rights. In the upcoming section of this paper I will look at the most commonly discussed policies in contemporary American discourse and how some of them relate to the Nordic model.

### How Does one Measure Influence?

It is extremely difficult to measure one country's influence on another when that influence is not applied through direct means such as military or economic policy. There are however academic traditions on how to measure international influence, by looking at Americanization studies we will find that many academics have attempted to map out multifaceted approaches on how to quantify American influence overseas. Much of the academic work has had its focus on American influence on European society in the interwar period and the post-World War II era. Reinhold Wagnleitner in his work "Coca-Colonization and the Cold War" attempts to outline the American influence in Europe and Latin America through an analysis of American controlled media operations, focusing on radio and television media rather than high culture, slow media such as theater, education and science.<sup>17</sup> I believe like Wagnleitner, that it is essential to the understanding of Scandinavization in America that we must first understand the medium in which the process unfolds. As in Coco-Colonization where Wagnleitner describes the transition of an American foreign policy focus from slow media to fast media, the emphasis of this paper will also be on new media. However, the "fast media" of films, radio and televised news can no longer be considered fast media as of 2020, referral to new or fast media in contemporary society is synonymous with the internet and social media. This paper will therefore analyze new social media outlets in addition to established newspapers and cable news channels in order to discuss the existence and extent of Scandinavization. There does however, arise a great difficulty when using the internet as a microcosm of larger society, this difficulty arises from the fact that there are countless of websites which cater to a subset of internet users and the users within that subset represent a multitude of opinions. This makes it almost impossible to analyze any given website and then assume fair representation of the general population, this thesis will therefore reason for the inclusion of specific social media entities as they are introduced in this paper. In addition to communication of private individuals and organizations this paper will include American official statements and publications which relate to the Nordic region, this will function as an aspect of the multifaceted analysis of Scandinavian influence in America and it will provide a clearer official stance on the

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<sup>17</sup> (Wagnleitner 1991, p.53)

contemporary discourse. Furthermore, this paper will make use of polling data that speaks to the Scandinavian-American relation this is done in order to better the quantification of influence and opinion and will provide statistical support for the claims made by this paper. In addition, this polling data will be included in order to understand the issue of national or cultural likability. Likability is an aspect of international influence of which President Woodrow Wilson has spoken several times. Wilson for instance claimed that “The great barrier in this world is not the barrier of principles, but the barrier of taste”.<sup>18</sup> In the word “taste” Wilson refers to the idea of finding a nation and its peoples respectable or not, in essence whether or not a nationality is liked or disliked. Wilson argued that establishing a tasteful image of one's nation is the most important factor in inspiring change beyond the 12 miles off your coast. This paper shares Wilson's sentiment on the importance of likability on foreign influence and will therefore seek an understanding of American perceptions of the Scandinavian countries and their citizens.

### [Making the Case for Nordic Influence in American Politics](#)

The following chapter of this paper will in multiple ways document the existence of a Nordic influence in American political discourse. It will feature polling data on the public support for Nordic style policy ideas such as government sanctioned universal healthcare, tuition free colleges and universities alongside sick and parental leave. It will contain the disproportionately large role of Scandinavia in the 2016 and 2020 democratic presidential primary debates. Additionally, this chapter will discuss the official stance of the Trump administration towards what it refers to as a resurgence of socialism in America. Furthermore, there will be an inclusion of media use of the Nordic countries as the media often drive public opinion to the same degree as does the government and political figures. The aim of the following chapter is to establish a shared understanding of the role which Scandinavia occupies in American politics. This understanding will then become the basis from which we will analyze the condition and process that ultimately culminated in the current American fascination with the Nordic region.

### [Nordic Favorability in America](#)

We start off by looking at the American perception of a number of countries based on a Gallup news survey, this will grant us an idea of the general American sentiment towards the Nordic

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<sup>18</sup> (De Grazia 2005)

region. According to De Gracia the favorability of a people or nation will directly impact its ability to influence a foreign nation and as such this section will provide insight into the potential impact of the Nordic region in American politics. The survey from Gallup contains the American favorability of more than 40 nations and the historic favorability rating up to several decades depending on the country in question, in this paper I will be using the most recent favorability rating available for each country.<sup>19</sup> Combining very favorable and mostly favorable perceptions, the five countries with the highest favorability ratings are Canada 93%, Great Britain 90%, Australia 88%, Germany 85% and Norway tied for a fifth place alongside France at 84% favorability. This paper has excluded the American perception of the United States as the goal of this paper is to understand foreign influence in the United States of America. Norway is the only Nordic country included in the survey and this paper must therefore assume that other Nordic countries would score a similar rating as Norway. Looking only at very favorable perceptions Norway would rank as the fourth most liked nation by Americans. Even acknowledging that most countries of the world are missing from this survey it is fair to say that Norway, the only Nordic country included, received a very high favorability rating. One should note here that Americans have a more favorable view of Norway than their longtime ally of Israel, a country that they annually support monetarily and military. This favorability is not guaranteed to translate into political or economic cooperation, but it is something that according to academics plays a key role in the ability to influence the world around you.

### Scandinavian Ideas in American Discourse

Having presented the policies that define the Nordic model, this following section will analyze the extent to which universal healthcare, parental leave and state funded tertiary education is supported by the American population. This analysis will be based around a large selection of survey and polling data from established polling organizations. The analysis will provide a great indication of the popularity of the discussed social democratic ideas and will alongside the media and policy discussion presented later in this paper, provide a strong basis for the discussion of Nordic influence in American politics.

### Universal Healthcare

First and foremost, I will be looking at the American perception of a universal healthcare

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<sup>19</sup> (Country Ratings, GALLUP)

system, this will be presented first as the topic of healthcare is repeatedly polling as the single most important issue among U.S. voters.<sup>20</sup>

Currently, the American healthcare system is hard to define as healthcare in the U.S. is provided by many private and public organizations, and the most common definition of the systems is its contrast to a universal healthcare system like those in the Nordic countries. Yet while the government does not guarantee universal coverage, state and federal governments finance the majority of healthcare spending in America.<sup>21</sup> However, unlike the universal programs around the world, the American system is also funded through employer-based health insurance, private insurance and out-of-pocket private expenses, it is therefore a multi-payer system rather than a single-payer. Universal health care systems began to appear around the world during the second world war, New Zealand being the first country to finalize its transition to universal coverage in 1941, though the most common example of a first mover for universal healthcare is the United Kingdom which created the National Healthcare Service (NHS) in 1948. Following the U.K., it was the five Nordic countries that established their nationalized systems next. While, the U.S. does not have similar system, it has been a topic of discussion since the 1930's as seen in the proposed National Health Act of 1939 by New York senator Robert F. Wagner.<sup>22</sup> The bill did not intend to make universal coverage mandatory but rather gave the individual states the authority to create universal programs within their respective state. In the 1940's Harry Truman voiced his support for a truly universal health care program similar to the one that the British government would later create with the NHS, Truman's support would likely have fallen flat given the high levels of skepticism towards anything that could be deemed socialistic during the early cold war period.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, John F. Kennedy would voice his support for universal healthcare in the 1960's claiming that the United States was far behind most European countries in the matter of medical care for the American citizens, citing that the British had achieved what he was proposing thirty years earlier.<sup>24</sup> In recent years the idea has gained increased traction among the American population and has become a central topic of discussion in news media and political campaigns. Surveys from the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) show that a national healthcare plan has garnered increased support since the late 1990's and in 2016 gained majority support.<sup>25</sup> KFF eludes to the idea that the increased

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<sup>20</sup> (Zach 2020)

<sup>21</sup> (Himmelstein and Woolhandler 2016)

<sup>22</sup> (Establishing a National Health Program 1939)

<sup>23</sup> (PNHP, A Brief History: Universal Health Care Efforts in the US.)

<sup>24</sup> (Tong Zou 2009)

<sup>25</sup> (Public Opinion on Single-Payer, National Health Plans, and Expanding Access to Medicare Coverage, 2020)

support can be a result of senator Bernie Sanders's campaign for president which revolved around a Medicare-for-all plan.<sup>26</sup> The term Medicare-for-all has since the 2016 presidential campaigns become interchangeable with universal healthcare, a misleading trend as Medicare in its current state includes out of pocket expenses in the form of deductibles and coinsurance, whereas the Medicare-for-all proposal from Sanders would establish a universal, free at the point of service healthcare program. Nevertheless, Medicare-for-all has become the perhaps most common term in America for universal healthcare as well as one of the most popular terminologies for a national healthcare plan. Polling from April 11-16, 2019 show that 63% have a positive term towards the term Medicare-for-all, making it tied for with universal health coverage, the least popular term is socialized medicine at only 46% positive reactions.<sup>27</sup> In addition to the historical increase in support for universal healthcare documented by the Kaiser Family Foundation, other respectable polling companies keep track on the monthly changes related to political issues, including healthcare. A Morning Consult survey showed that in late March 2019, 55% of U.S. voters supported the Medicare-for-all program as proposed by senator Sanders. The survey also showed that the net support of the proposition had risen from 11 in February to 20 percentage point in March, a significant surge which to a large degree can be contributed to the events unfolding as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is similar to the findings of a Business Insider poll in which 48% of the participants supported a national health insurance program and only 29% were in disagreement with such a proposal. The increased support for universal healthcare is clearly in line with the idea that social democratic idea similar to those of the Nordic countries are on the rise in America, polling data alone cannot provide certainty that the rise of a national healthcare plan is the result of Nordic influence rather than say British or French influence. The connection between social democratic ideas in America and the Nordic countries will be established later in this paper through media and discourse analysis. Nevertheless, given the importance voters ascribe to the issue of healthcare and the now majority support Medicare-for-all has garnered it is safe to say that the American public has moved significantly to the left on this issue in recent decades, and the possibility of passing a Nordic style program has become a reality.

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<sup>26</sup> (Public Opinion on Single-Payer, National Health Plans, and Expanding Access to Medicare Coverage, 2020)

<sup>27</sup> (Public Opinion on Single-Payer, National Health Plans, and Expanding Access to Medicare Coverage, 2020)

## Worker's Rights

As discussed, a key pillar of the Nordic model is its high levels of worker's rights, rights in the form of work hour limitations, safety regulation and generous rules for paid time off, sick leave and parental leave. In the Nordic model, many of these benefits are mostly paid for by the government with a low amount of employer copay. This system of state-run universal programs has created a common national experience for workers, increasing the social cohesion of the Nordic countries while also promoting a flexible workforce that is independent from employer benefits and regardless of income. The American worker on the other hand is much more reliant on the grace of his or her employer as a result of a federal government with a hands-off approach. In the realm of paid parental leave, the United States government is the only nation in the OECD and EU that does not guarantee any national paid time off by law.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, only around 14% of the American population has access to paid family leave, resulting in many women returning to work soon after giving birth in extreme contrast to the mothers of other industrialized nations. In the U.S. 1 in 4 new mothers return to work within 10 days of childbirth, while Estonian mothers have the possibility of receiving their full salary for 85 weeks following childbirth.<sup>29</sup> By not having a federally mandated number of either maternal or parental leave weeks, the United States has functionally made quality time between parents and their new born babies a luxury good rather than a basic human rights. Not only can this be seen as an example of poor worker's rights in the U.S., but research also shows that intimate contact between child and parent in the earliest days of life is essential to the growth and development of the baby, and the lack of worker's rights can therefore impact the next generation in unpredictable ways.<sup>30</sup> Unlike the U.S. the Nordic countries of Sweden, Norway and Iceland occupy the top three places of national family-friendly policies within the OECD and EU nations.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the United States is also an anomaly among wealthy countries in that it does not provide any national paid sick leave system and the American workers are therefore once again reliant on their contract with their employer.<sup>32</sup> Given the disparity between American and Scandinavian policy in this area of paid parental and sick leave, this paper will be analyzing the role which the Nordic countries play in the promotion of social democratic policy changes in this narrow aspect of worker's rights. Additionally, the analysis will also deal

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<sup>28</sup> (Chzhen, Gromada and Gwyther 2019)

<sup>29</sup> (Chzhen, Gromada and Gwyther 2019)

<sup>30</sup> (Ben-Joseph 2018)

<sup>31</sup> (Chzhen, Gromada and Gwyther 2019)

<sup>32</sup> (Heymann et al. 2009)

with any encountered American criticism of the Nordic system, this can contribute to an understanding of what certain American political forces dislike about Nordic politics and the growing role of Scandinavia in American discourse.

### Tuition Free Tertiary Education

The third highly discussed political issue in America that has been linked to a Scandinavian background is the issue of tertiary education financing. The American model is that education beyond high school level should be self-financed and at most subsidized by the state. The Nordic countries have gone with a more generous system, creating entirely free tuition cost on most educations, certain educations such as pilot education are self-financed in Denmark. Additionally, Nordic students can receive a student grant of up to some 900 US dollars depending on parental income and country. Contemporary polling suggest that Americans are very open to a tuition free college program like the one common in the Nordic countries and Europe at large. A survey from PEW research center conducted in January of 2020 shows that 63% of all adult Americans either somewhat or strongly favor making public colleges and universities free for all American students, whereas only 36% either somewhat or strongly oppose the idea.<sup>33</sup> In terms of overall support the survey is consistent with a 2018 Harvard poll which found that 62% of likely voters would support a proposal making college tuition free for families making less than 125.00 US dollars.<sup>34</sup> The polling from PEW research center also reveals that many of the survey participants who strongly favored the idea were supporters of either Elizabeth Warren or Bernie Sanders during the 2020 democratic presidential primary.<sup>35</sup> This is especially of interest as voters who strongly support a proposal are the most likely to be the volunteers and organizers who advocate and push for the promotion of any given idea. Additionally, it is reasonable to assume that the strong support for tuition free college among the supporters of Warren and Sanders is not only a result of further left leaning voters gravitating towards those two candidates but also that Warren and Sanders have made the case for the policy idea successfully. As such it is therefore of interest for me to analyze the role of the Scandinavian countries in making that case, I will thus include this in the discourse analysis section of this thesis.

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<sup>33</sup> (Hartig 2020)

<sup>34</sup> (Fall 2018 National Youth Poll)

<sup>35</sup> (Hartig 2020)

## Political Debates and Their Significance

One of the ways in which I attempt to prove the importance of Scandinavian countries in the American political discourse is through the use of Democratic presidential primary debates. Political debates are the perhaps easiest exemplified medium of political discourse, they have a large outreach and can make or break a political candidacy, one need not look further than the sitting president to see the importance of debates. Furthermore, the outreach of the debates in terms of viewers means the candidates must address citizens who might be otherwise apolitical and the references they make must therefore not be too obscure. There are many examples of presidential or presidential primary debates moments that defined a political campaign and helped seal the outcome of the election. One such example can be found in the presidential debate of October 21, 1984 in which Ronald Reagan, the oldest president ever ran for reelection against Walter Mondale, and said that *"I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience"*<sup>36</sup> The joke from Reagan is not only one of the most famous presidential lines of all time, it also allowed the incumbent president to dismantle the critique of his ability to serve at his age. Allegedly Mondale has later commented that he realized it was that moment he had lost the presidential election. The line would be replayed on television and the newspapers would write about it the following morning.<sup>37</sup> Contrarily, Al Gore in the 2000 presidential election set himself up for satire when on October 3<sup>rd</sup> he debated then Governor George W. Bush for the first time and managed to use the word lockbox multiple times, which not only sounded overly rehearsed but also rather silly. Following the debate Saturday Night Live would turn Al Gore's debate performance into a sketch mocking him for his usage of the word "lockbox". Due to the importance of the debates and how thoughtfully the candidates approach them it is valid to make use of debates as a microcosm of the greater political discourse. Based on this reasoning this paper has gone through each democratic primary debate which has been officially sanctioned by the Democratic National Committee (DNC) during the 2016 presidential election cycle and noted down every reference to a country from either the candidates, moderators or audience questioners. By going through the democratic primary debates, we will be able to observe which countries play a large role in the current political discourse and therefore determine what countries candidates' distance themselves from and which countries they praise and draw inspiration from.

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<sup>36</sup> (Stephey, M.J. Top 10 Memorable Debate Moments)

<sup>37</sup> (Raines 1984)

In noting down the mentions of countries in the democratic primary debates I set up some rules for what would be categorized as a “mention” in order to assure the most objective representation of the content of the debates. The following paragraph will establish the rules for mentions that have been used in the data collection.

In this document mentions of a country will be counted once for each mention of country, people or capitol. A country will only be counted once each statement, meaning that a country can only be counted once per commentator question or candidate answer. Examples of what will count towards mention in this instance France: France, the French, Paris. Each of these will be seen as a direct mention of France as a country, though it cannot be counted more than once in a question by moderators or in an answer from a candidate. This has been done in order to avoid disproportional counting based on heavy repetition and because one reference to a country will often have the same effect as three mentions in the same sentence. Any reference to the United States of America will not be noted down as it tells us nothing about the importance of foreign countries in American discourse. Additionally, though I was torn on the idea of counting Benghazi as a mention of Libya, despite it not being the capital, it has been decided that any mention of Benghazi in the democratic debates, while at times used in reference to Libya will not be counted towards mentions as it most often references a critique of Hillary Clinton and her actions as Secretary of State.

2015-2016	Chafee	Clinton	O'Malley	Sanders	Webb	Moderator	Total
Afghanistan		8	3	4		6	21
Australia						1	1
Bermuda				1			1
Canada				5			5
Cambodia		1		1			2
Cayman Islands				5			5
Chile				2			2
China		10		14	3	1	28
Cuba		2		6		2	10
Denmark		2		1		2	5
Egypt		3					3
El Salvador			1				1
France		7	1	13		3	24

Germany				2			2
Greece		1					1
Guatemala			1	1			2
Honduras			1	3			4
India		3			1		4
Iran	1	18	2	11	2	6	40
Iraq	3	14	5	19	2	12	55
Israel		8		3	1	2	14
Japan				1			1
Jordan		3		4			7
Kenya		2					2
Kosovo				2			2
Kuwait				1			1
Lebanon		6					6
Libya		10	3	6	2	5	26
Mexico		2	1	7		1	11
Nicaragua				1		2	3
North Korea		1		1		1	3
Norway				1			1
Palestine		3		3		1	7
Philippines				1			1
Poland				3			3
Puerto Rico		1	1	1		1	4
Qatar				4			4
Russia		14	3	8	1	6	32
Saudi Arabia		2		5			7
Somalia			1				1
Soviet Union				1		1	2
Sweden				1			1
Syria	2	25	7	13	1	17	65
Tanzania		2					2
Tunisia		1					1

Turkey		6		2			8
Ukraine		2		3		1	6
United Kingdom		1		11			12
Vietnam				4	4	2	10
Yemen		1		1			2

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The table above lists the number of mentions of every country referred to during the DNC sanctioned democratic debate of the 2016 presidential campaigns. The list provides an overview of the mentions made by each candidate as well as the combined mentions from moderators, audience questions and other non-candidate mentions. The table does not show the individual moderator and commentator mentions as the speaking time of any given moderator is relatively low and the comments of the moderator is often a response or follow up question based on an answer provided by any given candidate. Starting by looking at the total number of mentions we break down which regions and countries take up the most space in the American political discourse.

In total there have been 440 references to foreign countries during the nine presidential debates. The single most mentioned country in the 2016 debates is Syria. The importance of Syria during the debates can easily be explained by the 2014 emerge of Islamic State in Syria and Iraq alongside its successful terror attacks throughout Europe, North America and the Middle East. Furthermore, in 2014 the United States initiated an American-led coalition in Syria and the country naturally became an important topic of the presidential hopefuls. Additionally, Syria is also to be seen within a larger theme of a Middle Eastern focus, as the Arab countries that America has or is currently militarily engaged with make up a very large portion of the debate focus. Looking at the ten most mentioned countries of Syria, Iraq, Iran, Russia, China, Libya, France, Afghanistan, Israel and United Kingdom we see that the top three most mentioned are all Arab countries in the Middle East and countries which the U.S. are in active hostility with. Furthermore, though the region only account for around 400 million people, six Middle Eastern countries are within the top ten most mentioned nations. While this paper is focused on the Scandinavian role in American political discourse, it should as everything be seen in context and as demonstrated here, the Middle East takes up a large part of the discussion. Turning to the Nordic role in the democratic debates we see that with a total

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<sup>38</sup> (Appendix B) The numbers depicted in the spreadsheet of country mentions are a reflection of the criteria and data collection presented in Appendix B.

of five mentions Denmark actually managed to be the fourth or fifth most discussed European country based either on the inclusion or exclusion of Russia as a European country. The European countries that surpass Denmark in mentions are Russia, France and United Kingdom that all have much greater geopolitical importance, larger population and clearly defined relationships with the United States of America, than does Denmark. While it may not sound impressive that Denmark is fourth or fifth in mentions among the European nations with only 4 total mentions, one should note that Denmark has either the 21<sup>st</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup> largest population in Europe depending once again on the inclusion of transcontinental countries. Furthermore, it also means that in terms of the 2016 presidential political discourse that Denmark has played a larger narrative role than countries such as Germany, Italy, Spain, Poland, the Netherlands or Greece. Some of these countries have populations ten times the size of Denmark.

Norway and Sweden are each mentioned once in the debates, which in and of itself is not impressive and does not facilitate any sort of trend in the political discourse. The reason why Sweden and Norway are still of interest is their role as a stand-in for “Scandinavia” or “Nordic country”, in this regard Norway, Denmark and Sweden should be seen as a collective image for social democratic ideals of welfare, equality and inclusivity. Thinking of the individual countries of Scandinavia as a part of a larger Nordic region we can interpret and discuss the influence and role of Scandinavia in America. This paper will reference the specific moments in which candidates and moderators use the Nordic countries in order to understand the role they play in their political discourse, by doing so this paper will be able to analyze the comments in direct relation to the foreign influence theories that have been introduced earlier in this thesis.

The first Democratic debate on October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015 was responsible for the majority of the Scandinavian mentions of the entire election cycle. This is of significant importance when taking into account that the first debate was by far the most watched debate with a viewership of 15.3 million people, which more than doubles any other debate of the democratic primary. This also means that each mention made during the debate carries a significantly larger impact on the general population's understanding of the political discourse. Additionally, the first three countries referenced in the debate were Denmark, Sweden and Norway by Senator Sanders. In response to a question from Anderson Cooper about Sanders' self-identification as a democratic socialist, Sanders says the following.

*“Well, we're gonna win because first, we're gonna explain what democratic socialism is.*

*And what democratic socialism is about is saying that it is immoral and wrong that the top one-tenth of 1 percent in this country own almost 90 percent — almost — own almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent. That it is wrong, today, in a rigged economy, that 57 percent of all new income is going to the top 1 percent.*

*That when you look around the world, you see every other major country providing health care to all people as a right, except the United States. You see every other major country saying to moms that, when you have a baby, we're not gonna separate you from your newborn baby, because we are going to have — we are gonna have medical and family paid leave, like every other country on Earth.*

*Those are some of the principles that I believe in, and I think we should look to countries like Denmark, like Sweden and Norway, and learn from what they have accomplished for their working people.”<sup>39</sup>*

In his remarks Sanders made it clear that he is in favor of politically moving towards a societal structure similar to that of the Nordic countries. He furthermore, by mentioning these three countries following a critique of economic inequality, lack of accessible healthcare, lack of maternity leave, lack of medical and family paid leave, Bernie Sanders indirectly implied that the Nordic countries have found a better way of handling these issues. There is little doubt that in his first democratic primary debate Sanders effectively praises the Nordic model to a national audience of 15.3 million Americans. Additionally, this use of especially Denmark as the very first country helped cement the idea of Denmark being the ideal country of the Sanders ideology, a notion which can be found in countless articles and political videos from a vast variety of American news outlets.

Take for instance Chris Moody and Alexander Rosen of CNN who wrote an article titled “Bernie Sanders’ American Dream is in Denmark”.<sup>40</sup> The article goes into multiple facets of the Danish way of life and society, from interest in American politics to marginal tax rates. The article is accompanied by a video of Chris Moody visiting Denmark. The investigation into Denmark by CNN represents an American political need to both understand and criticize the foreign nation presented as a goal to aim for by a prominent political figure in one of the two major political parties. Sanders’ reference to the Nordic countries was not perceived as an off the cuff comment but rather as a major political influence of the Sanders policy platform. The

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<sup>39</sup> (CNN Democratic Debate – Full Transcript, 2015)

<sup>40</sup> (Moody and Rosen 2016)

reaction to Sanders's reference can arguably be seen in the reporting from CNN as well, the comments presented in the article by Moody and Rosen as Sanders' fascination with Denmark are the comments from the October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015 Democratic primary debate. However, the article was not published until February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016 and within the time difference of the debate and article, Hillary Clinton's lead over Sanders fell from 18.2% on October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015 to 5.6% on February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016. It is therefore fair to assume that by the time of the publication of the article Sanders was perceived as a serious contender to the Democratic nomination which increased Bernie's influence on the political discourse, resulting in a broader American interest into the Nordic countries that Sanders had pointed to for guidance.

The comments from Bernie Sanders clearly function as a leftwing American endorsement of the Nordic welfare system and it portrays the Scandinavian societies in a positive light. Naturally, one could dismiss the impact of these comments as Sanders, who is consistently positioned to the left of mainstream American politics, would per definition always praise systems that embody a further left ideology. However, Hillary Clinton in the very same debate actually managed to endorse Denmark while also distancing herself from Nordic societal structure. In her comments on capitalism Clinton said that:

*"I don't think we should confuse what we have to do every so often in America, which is save capitalism from itself. And I think what Senator Sanders is saying certainly makes sense in the terms of the inequality that we have.*

*But we are not Denmark. I love Denmark. We are the United States of America. And it's our job to rein in the excesses of capitalism so that it doesn't run amok and doesn't cause the kind of inequities we're seeing in our economic system."*<sup>41</sup>

Clinton starts out her response to the answer given by Senator Sanders by acknowledging that Sanders has a point in so far as his critique of American capitalism is that it creates too much inequality. Clinton then goes on to say that "we are not Denmark." This is the part in which she distances herself from Bernie Sanders and the Danish model, effectively saying that she is sympathetic to the critique that Sanders lays out, but disagrees with his Scandinavian solution. This is in fact a mild way of expressing disagreement and is only watered down even further when she exclaims that "I love Denmark." In saying that she loves Denmark, Clinton effectively furthers Nordic social democratic ideas in the USA, embracing a country to the length of saying that you "love" that country is to shield it against future criticism.

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<sup>41</sup> (CNN Democratic Debate – Full Transcript, 2015)

In *Irresistible Empire* by Victoria De Gracia in which she puts forth the process of Americanization from the first world war and onwards. In it De Gracia argues that conflict between cultures arise not from ideology or politics but out of the mutual distasteful perception of differences in manners of living.<sup>42</sup> America was successful in the interwar years and post-World War II era in breaking down cultural conflicts and effectively created an image of the American life that resonated among large swaths of the European populations. De Gracia argues that by breaking down those barriers America was able to become an empire by invitation or empire by consensus.<sup>43</sup> In this paper I do not argue that the Scandinavian influence in America in any way resembles the intensity of an empire or the influence America has had economically or culturally on Europe the last 70 years. I argue instead that a similar dynamic is at play in terms of intercultural likeability, Scandinavian countries have managed to position themselves as nations and people that the American public can identify themselves with and of whom they have a positive perception. As De Gracia argues this is a crucial element for the process of foreign influence, without likeability the domestic population will reject the foreign culture and politics. In the Democratic debates we can observe the American likeability towards the Nordic countries in the response given by Hillary Clinton. Clinton in the 2016 Democratic primary in many ways become the centrist in comparison to Bernie Sanders the leftist, that being the case Clinton would position herself in opposition to the social democratic policies put forth by Sanders. Yet, Clinton decides not to criticize Denmark, Norway or Sweden, the countries Sanders eludes to as his inspiration for said policies. Clinton instead proclaims that she loves Denmark, a country she apparently is in political opposition to, this heavily indicates a strong American likeability towards the Nordic region when opponents avoid confrontational language.

In the 2020 Democratic primary debates we can see an example of what happens when a country which is not well liked in America is brought up in an ever so slightly positive manner. During a Democratic primary debate Bernie Sanders was asked about his past comments on Cuba and Nicaragua. In the Democratic debate held on February 25, 2020 the moderator Margaret Brennan asked Bernie Sanders *“You also have a track record of expressing sympathy for socialist governments in Cuba and in Nicaragua. Can Americans trust that a Democratic socialist president will not give authoritarians a free pass?”* The question referenced comments in which Bernie Sanders had made in a 60 minutes interview with Anderson Cooper

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<sup>42</sup> (De Gracia 2005, p.2)

<sup>43</sup> De Gracia 2005, p.6)

where Sanders said that the literacy program that Fidel Castro had initiated. The question by Brennan sparked sharp criticism of Bernie Sanders by the other candidates on the stage. Looking to the official transcript released by CBS News we see that the audience immediately booed when Sanders defended his positive comments about a very narrow aspect of the Castro regime in Cuba.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, Pete Buttigieg quickly jumped in to criticize Sanders' comparison between his own comments and those made by Barack Obama while he was president. Joe Biden and Amy Klobuchar also entered the fray to criticize Bernie Sanders and distance themselves from Cuba. What this example shows is that length to which Bernie Sanders is able to explicitly proclaim support of the Scandinavian countries and their political agenda without being attacked on that basis. Sanders in the 2016 presidential primary and a lesser degree in 2020 presidential primary declared that he wanted to import and implement Scandinavian ideas to America, not just a few policies but a broad swath of social democratic ideas and the biggest attack Hillary Clinton launched on Sanders based on his position was that she loved Denmark but didn't necessarily believe America should imitate Denmark. On the other hand, Sanders made comments about a specific Cuban literacy program that successfully increased the ability to read and write within the Cuban population driving the illiteracy rate down from 23.6% in 1959 to 3.9% by 1961 and was heavily criticized and questioned for his comments by both debate commentators and other presidential candidates.<sup>45</sup> The difference in which people reacted to Sanders' comments on Scandinavia and Cuba reveals the importance of nation branding when it comes to foreign influence.

While none of the other candidates support imitating Scandinavian policy in the same way Sanders does, none of them criticize him directly for bringing up the Nordic countries but all attack him for a slightly positive comment about a specific program in Cuba. We know this because Bernie Sanders did indeed bring mention of Denmark during the ninth Democratic primary debate in the 2020 presidential cycle, Sanders argued that Denmark is the country in which most people achieve the American Dream. The comment on Denmark was not addressed in any way on the debate stage. What the debates reveal is that there is a genuine presence of the Nordic countries but also that praise of the Nordic is countered not by direct attacks but rather by explanations of incompatible policy beliefs.

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<sup>44</sup> (Read the Full Transcript of the South Carolina Democratic Debate. 2020)

<sup>45</sup> (Greenberg 2020)

## The Trump Administration – The Opportunity Costs of Socialism

Having looked at the Nordic interest in Democratic primary debates I will in the following section of this paper look at the official stance of the Trump administration towards the emergence of social democratic/democratic socialist policies in contemporary American discourse. In October 2018 The Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) released a report on “The Opportunity Costs of Socialism” which contains an analysis of the current policies being pushed by the progressive American left.<sup>46</sup> According to the report itself, the objective is that *“this report discusses socialism’s historic visions and intents, its economic features, its impact on economic performance, and its relationship with recent policy proposals in the United States.”*<sup>47</sup> The report itself is undoubtedly in opposition to the influence of what it refers to as socialism or democratic socialism and aims to present the superiority of a further right leaning economy in line with current American policy.

The report is in some ways split into two branches, one that is focused on historic authoritarian socialism or communism such as Maoist China, Cuba or the Soviet Union, the reports refers to these as “highly socialist countries”.<sup>48</sup> The second branch of the report is focused on “Nordic socialism” which the report claims that people incorrectly refer to as the “more relevant socialist success stories”.<sup>49</sup> Given that the focus of this paper is the influence of Nordic countries in American politics we are naturally going to focus on the branch of The Opportunity Costs of Socialism report which centers around the Nordic countries. In the following section of this paper I will analyze some of the report’s attempts to discredit “Nordic socialism” and to what extent it credits the Nordic countries for the rise of socialist policies such as universal healthcare and tuition free college. To get a sense of how much attention is given to the Nordic countries in the CEA report one can simply look at the amount of mentions of the region, the word “Nordic” can be found 146 times in the 72 page long document, Denmark, Norway and Sweden can be found 20, 25 and 25 times respectively. References to Europe as a whole on the other hand can only be found 24 times.<sup>50</sup> The amount of mentions provide an indication about which countries the CEA believe play the largest role in furthering left leaning policy ideas in America. The CEA of the Trump administration is clearly interested in stopping left wing economic policy and that makes it interesting to see which countries they include in their reporting and also how they attempt to discredit those countries. In referring to

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<sup>46</sup> (The Opportunity Costs of Socialism 2018)

<sup>47</sup> (The Opportunity Costs of Socialism 2018, p.1)

<sup>48</sup> (The Opportunity Costs of Socialism 2018, p.1)

<sup>49</sup> (The Opportunity Costs of Socialism 2018, p.2)

<sup>50</sup> (The Opportunity Costs of Socialism 2018)

the Nordic region more than 200 times within a 72 page paper the CEA reveals the importance which they believe the Scandinavian countries play in the American discourse, the report itself proclaims that the region is used by the American left as a place of inspiration.<sup>51</sup> Beyond the importance which the CEA acknowledges that the Nordic countries pose it is also interesting to analyze the criticism made of Denmark, Norway and Sweden within the report, Finland and Iceland are also included in the CEA report as Nordic countries but this paper will not discuss their role within the report. Unlike the criticism within the report concerning the highly socialistic countries Cuba, China and USSR, the attacks levied against Scandinavian countries are balanced with a certain amount of positive credit. In a sense one could describe the position of the American perception of the Nordic countries as being in limbo, in so far that the policy positions are referred to as being both more centralized and liberalized at the same time. It can be hard to spot the duality in which the Nordic region is described by the American right. The duality arises in attempts to explain why socialist policies are hurting the Nordic region while also explaining why the region is performing as well as it is. To illustrate this point one can look at the CEA report's discussion of the Nordic taxation policies compared the U.S. in the introduction to Nordic countries which says that *"We find that today, the Nordic countries' marginal tax rates on labor income are not in fact far above those in the U.S., once implicit employment and income taxes are considered. Nordic country living standards are still at least 15 percent lower than in the U.S."*<sup>52</sup> In this introduction an implication is being made, that having higher marginal tax rates have led to lower living standards in the Nordic countries and it is an implication which is supported in the following paragraphs; *"The Nordic countries themselves recognized the economic harm of high tax rates in terms of creating and retaining businesses and motivating work effort, which is why their marginal tax rates on personal and corporate income have fallen 20 or 30 points, or more, from their peaks in the 1970s and 1980s"*<sup>53</sup>. It should first of all be noted that the measurements by which living standards are determined is not defined within the report. Secondly, the report is bordering on contradiction when it then continues to provide several examples of the U.S. taxing a similar or at times higher rate than the Nordic average. Looking at table 2. on tax policies in the U.S. and Nordic countries one can see that the statutory corporate tax rate in the U.S. is 4 percentage points higher than the Nordic average, the top estate tax rate is 35 percentage points higher. Additionally, according to table 2 the American tax system is also far more progressive in its

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<sup>51</sup> (The Opportunity Costs of Socialism 2018, p.26)

<sup>52</sup> (The Opportunity Costs of Socialism 2018, p.26)

<sup>53</sup> (The Opportunity Costs of Socialism 2018, p.26)

taxation than the Nordic countries.<sup>54</sup> The criticism is inconsistent in that it first presents the Nordic countries as having rightfully realized that having high marginal tax rates were demotivating work effort and creation, the report then links that high marginal tax rate to the 15% lower living standards. However, the report goes on to then explain why in fact the Nordic countries are not as progressive as the American left present it as, providing evidence as to why the American system is in fact more progressive, which in turn would make it more distributive of resources. This according to the CEA report should hurt the U.S. economy as it directly promotes the idea that redistribution limits economic growth.<sup>55</sup> It is inconsistent to argue that redistribution leads to lower living standards and incomes in Scandinavia than in the U.S. while arguing that America has a more progressive and therefore redistributive tax system.

I argue that the reason behind the American right's inconsistent attack on Nordic policy is that there is an attempt to say that even the Nordic countries do not differ too much from American capitalism. And that this is why they are perceived as successful countries while at the same time arguing that the extent to which Nordic countries are more socialistic is the reason behind their 15% lower living standards, which again have not been defined within the report. It should be noted that according to the World Economic Forum that five Nordic countries, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland rank in the top ten countries in the world based on standard of living conditions, whereas the United States of America does not place within the top ten.<sup>56</sup> Whether or not the report is factual in its description of the Nordic countries the point of interest is that an official body of the United States government allocated time and resources into a report that is overwhelmingly aimed at responding to an increasing influence of Scandinavian policy. Additionally, one could also draw parallels between the discussions of the Nordic countries in the CEA report and the findings of the debate analysis. This parallel can be seen in so far that there is a caution from both the CEA and debate candidates to criticize the Nordic region in general, criticism is instead presented in conjunction with acknowledgement of achievement. Acknowledgement in this situation to be understood as a reference to relative success, in the CEA report it can be observed in the numerous times in which the report describe the Nordic nations as more like the U.S. than the highly socialist countries, scoring nearly as high on the freedom scale as America.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> (The Opportunity Costs of Socialism 2018, p.28)

<sup>55</sup> (The Opportunity Costs of Socialism 2018)

<sup>56</sup> (Smith 2016)

<sup>57</sup> (The Opportunity Costs of Socialism 2018, p.24)

### Scandinavia in American Media

It is not only political figures that use Scandinavia in their frame of reference. Many political media outlets use Nordic countries and cities as go to examples of overseas differences or similarities. This section will aim to provide a general understanding of the extent to which the Nordic countries are present within American media productions. This task is especially difficult to quantify as there is no one database that contains all mainstream American media publications and this paper must therefore instead make use of individual articles and stories from a variety of news outlets in order to argue for the existence of Scandinavian influence. Additionally, this paper will make use of individual databases provided by the respective media outlet where such a database allows for the search of specific terms and words, such is the case of The New York Times. The NYT database allows one to scan the entirety of the NYT archives for certain words that can be filtered by time period and section, this enables us to gain an overview of mentions of certain countries. Through the use of a comparative analysis this paper provides evidence indicating an increasing interest in the Nordic countries compared to other European nations in recent years. By comparing the mentions from the entirety of the archives from 1851 to present day and the mentions within the last year, one can showcase the comparative increase in Nordic interest. From 1851 to present day Denmark and Germany had 43,952 and 820,968 respectively, meaning Denmark had 5.35% of Germany's mentions.<sup>58</sup> In the past year Denmark was mentioned 742 and Germany 5,040 meaning Denmark had 14.72% of Germany's mentions, nearly tripling the historic comparative mention ratio between Denmark and Germany. It should be noted that the mentions included here cover all topics and issues and we can therefore not conclude that there is necessarily an increased political interest from The New York Times, but rather that a general interest in Denmark has been sparked. Comparing Norway and France we see that they have had 133,596 and 1,016,765 mentions respectively resulting in Norway having received 13.14% of France's mentions since 1851. Within the last year France has been mentioned 7,206 times and Norway 1,495 times, meaning that Norway has received 20.75% of the French mentions, a 63% comparative increase. In the case of the last Scandinavian country Sweden with Italy we find that Sweden has gone from a historic mention rate of 26.64% to a 26.56% mention rate, a minor drop in comparative media mentions at the NYT. While the use of the NYT database cannot grant a detailed description of policy discussion in American media, it can provide some insight into the progress of

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<sup>58</sup> (New York Times Article Archive 1851-present. The New York Times) Search period: 04/30/2019 – 04/30/2020

American overall interest in the Scandinavian countries. What it does show is that within the last years the Scandinavian region has in a historic perspective received a high level of media interest in relation to larger European nations. Denmark and Norway vastly improving their mention rate with Germany and France, respectively. Sweden on the other hand saw a slight drop in its mention rate compared to Italy, this trend should be seen in perspective of the recent COVID-19 crisis which has heavily shaped the American narrative about the critically hit Italian healthcare system. From 01/30/2020 to 04/30/2020 Italy was mentioned a total of 2,153 times, a three-month period making up for almost half of the one-year mentions. The impact of the Corona virus disaster in Italy must be considered when considering the slight drop-in mention rate that Sweden has been the subject of. The NYT archives have revealed that there is an increased Scandinavian existence in American media, and though it cannot be contributed to political interest alone, it does serve as an indication that the United States of America has become more aware of the small north European countries than it has historically. The recent interest makes it even more important to understand and analyze the ways in which American media interact with Scandinavia as the stories they cover might themselves reveal the reason behind the increased coverage of the Nordic region.

Having looked at the overall increase in Scandinavian mentions this following section will be looking into some of the specific articles that discuss Scandinavia in relation to America, the articles chosen in this paper will be centered around political topics although political interest in Scandinavia only makes up a part of the general American interest. For articles used in this section will be from well-known established news outlets as these outlets are more likely to represent a mainstream opinion as opposed to smaller outlets that cater to a specific sub ideology. There are multiple examples of established newspapers referring to Danish, Norwegian or Swedish conditions as an alternative to the American model, something which can be observed as recently as during the ongoing COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. In a New York Times article by Matt Apuzzo and Monika Pronczuk, about the economic hardship resulting from the COVID-19 lockdown, they provide the example of Jose Luis who lost both of his jobs as a waiter in two Manhattan restaurants due to the pandemic.<sup>59</sup> Workers like Jose in the United States are uncertain of their economic future and fear the possibility of losing their homes, contrarily, the article provides the example of Sebastian Lassen, a coffee shop manager in Copenhagen who at no point in time feared the possibility of his government leaving him out to dry. Additionally, the article says that “countries like Denmark have

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<sup>59</sup> (Apuzzo and Pronczuk 2020)

famously robust safety nets”<sup>60</sup> This article not only portrays Denmark as a capable nation besting the US in its response to COVID-19 but also refers to Denmark as something which readers are already familiar with. What the article showcases is that the writers have some assumption that Denmark is a known political entity to their readers which is in and of itself interesting given the size of the Nordic country. Furthermore, we see proof of how American media reference Denmark for one of the trademark pillars of the Nordic model in the article's acknowledgement of Denmark's strong safety net and collaboration with business. In general, the impression gained from reading the article is that the Danish government among other nations has managed the Coronavirus more competently than the American counterpart, resulting in a positive portrayal of Denmark as a whole. An older article from The Washington Post published in January of 2018 discusses the controversy around President Trump's comments on “shithole countries” and Norway.<sup>61</sup> The article is written by Andrew Van Dam and it is centered around Trump's comments that he doesn't want more immigrants from “shithole countries” and America should instead bring in more people from countries such as Norway. The comment itself from the President reveals the perception of Norway as a successful country in opposition to what Trump would consider a shithole, though there have also been allegations that the reason for Trump's positive comment towards Norway is the overwhelmingly white population of the Nordic country. Anyhow, the article goes on to explain that Norway for much of its history was what many would consider a shithole country, with a low standard of living compared to the rest of Europe and didn't start to improve its conditions until after the second world war. The article goes on to explain how the living standards in Norway have improved so dramatically that the median Norwegian is better off than the median American and that very few people from Norway decide to move to America, in fact Norwegian-born people living in America is the third smallest group measurable in raw numbers by the census bureau. This article is an interesting case as it reveals both the President's admiration for Norway as a successful country as well as the article making the argument as to why Norway should be considered a successful nation. Based on a 2016 healthcare rankings report Susan Scutti of CNN wrote an article in 2017 about the best performing countries in terms of achieving United Nations health goals.<sup>62</sup> The article is titled “*Singapore, Nordic countries outrank US in achieving UN health goals*”. The report on which the article is centered placed Singapore as the number one country among 188 UN membership

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<sup>60</sup> (Apuzzo and Pronczuk 2020)

<sup>61</sup> (Van Dam 2018)

<sup>62</sup> (Scutti 2017)

countries hence the inclusion of Singapore in the title. The interesting part about the title of the article for its use in this paper is the inclusion of the term “Nordic” in the title. The Nordic countries do indeed perform above the United States as the title suggest but so do eleven other European countries. Yet, instead of highlighting the fact that many European nations beat the United States in terms of healthcare progress, the author specifies the Nordic region. While the decision to focus on the Nordic region can be contributed to a number of factors, it supports a media narrative that provides positive policy coverage of the Nordic region.

In this section I have observed that The Washington Post has significantly increased its coverage of the Scandinavian countries compared to other European nations. Additionally, three of the major American news outlets, CNN, The Washington Post and The New York Times have positively covered the political outcomes that the Scandinavian countries have achieved. The ability of the Nordic countries to attract increased interest and positive perceptions from American media is undoubtedly a key factor in any successful strategy to promote the Nordic model.

### Summary of the Nordics Presence in American Discourse

The aim of this chapter has been to document the presence of the Nordic countries in contemporary American political discourse. In an attempt to provide a broad and multifaceted approach to the understanding of presence and influence this paper looked firstly at the general attitude of the American people towards foreign nations. In doing so I found that Norway as the sole representation of the Nordic region was among the liked foreign countries according to the American population. Secondly, I looked at the American public support for the major policy ideas which constitute a large part of the Nordic model. Nationalized healthcare, tuition free tertiary education and expanded workers' rights. In the case of a national healthcare program multiple polling organizations found that a clear plurality of the surveyed Americans is in favor of a Nordic style universal healthcare system and some surveys found outright majority support for such a proposal. Likewise, it was found that a large percentage of Americans support a program that makes colleges and universities tuition free for students. Noting down debate mentions I found that during the 2016 Democratic presidential primary the Scandinavian countries played a disproportionate role compared to other larger European nations. Similarly, Bernie Sanders drew attention to Denmark once again during the 2020 Democratic debate in Las Vegas. Additionally, an important take away from the debate analysis was that the Nordic region was used mainly as an example of what America should aspire to

be. This argument was most prominently pushed by Senator Bernie Sanders, but equally important was it that his presidential primary opponents refrained from criticizing Sanders' wish to imitate Scandinavia. This provided evidence of Scandinavia as a force in American political discourse that even candidates in opposition to Scandinavian imitation would criticize with caution. Furthermore, this chapter discussed the presence of Scandinavia in the American media and in official White House documentation. All in all, this chapter has provided evidence from several aspects of what one might call the political discourse, and, in each aspect, it can be argued that the Nordic region plays a significant role. The observations conducted in this chapter consistently suggest that Americans are becoming more accepting of Nordic policy proposals, a progression which has occurred simultaneously with an increased media interest and coverage of the Nordic region. Undoubtedly, much of this newfound interest can be contributed to Senator Bernie Sanders who pushed the Nordic countries into the debates, in addition to bringing the attention of the media upon them. In so far that this paper has established the existence of Scandinavian influence in America, the following chapters of this thesis will focus around the Scandinavian possibilities in furthering the American interest. In doing so we will be looking at the current collaboration between Scandinavian and American organizations, the shortcomings of that collaboration and how Scandinavia might best utilize the current situation.

### Consequences of Scandinavian Presence in American Political Discourse

Having concluded that American interest in Scandinavian politics has increased significantly within the most recent years and in varies measurable ways, the following chapter of this paper will contain an analysis of how Scandinavian-American relations have changed within the same time period. Furthermore, I will discuss the extent to which any change in the relationship can be attributed to the documented policy interest. This discussion will draw heavily from nation branding theory in order to clarify how American political interest in Scandinavia can lead not only to political influence, but also economic benefits. Understanding the impact of the Nordic image in America will not only help us explain the academic interest in the Scandinavian-American relationship, but in fact also provide an explanation as to why the Nordic countries should cease the golden opportunity which the newly blossomed fascination presents. To summarize the findings in the previous chapter, Americans had an overwhelmingly positive perception of the Nordic countries when survey, Democratic politicians used the Nordics as an example of success, White House officials aimed to counter the success narrative and the media referenced the Nordics as a place of competence and high

living standards. This is the story of Scandinavia that is most prominent in the American political discourse and this is the national brand of the Nordic countries in America. To analyze the extent to which this branding has been beneficial for the Nordic countries in their relationship with the United States you must look at what constitutes successful results according to scholars of nation branding. I will focus on the most common indicators of a successful branding campaign according to Dinnie as presented in *Nation Branding: Concepts, Issues, Practice*. The most common aims of nation branding are to excite potential tourists, investors, students and workers.<sup>63</sup> Looking at tourism can provide a good indication of authentic engagement and interest from the general public, and we can therefore use tourism statistic to analyze the effectiveness of Scandinavian nation branding reaching the general public.

#### The Nordics as a Newfound Tourist Attraction

The focus of this paper is naturally the national political brand which the Nordic countries have developed in the United States and I will therefore discuss to which degree we can contribute any positive tourism development to the increased political attention. Fortunately for this paper, the Nordic countries have well established governmental organizations which are responsible for the creation of statistics about their respective nations. All three Scandinavian countries provide access to the national trends on tourism and provide the ability to filter the data by the origin of the guest's country. The databases made public by the Scandinavian countries will allow us to easily gain an overview of tourism trends from America to the Nordic region. First of all, we should look at the importance of the tourist industry in the Nordic countries as it will grant us an ability to understand the how many resources should be invested into the potential gains of increased tourism. Economists generally categorize foreign tourist spending as export or and the importance of tourism is therefore calculated as a percentage of overall export or as percentage of GNP. Looking at the Nordic countries, tourism spending accounts for 4.3% of Norway's GNP, 2.8% in Sweden and 2.4% in Denmark.<sup>64</sup> These three countries combined have more than 500,000 people working within the tourism industry, included in these figures are the domestic tourists who generally account for two thirds of overall tourism, consequently, foreign tourists employ some 170,000 people in Scandinavia. This means that the Nordic

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<sup>63</sup> (Dinnie 2008)

<sup>64</sup> (Holst 2019)

economies employ a significant amount of its citizen in tourism while not having their economies centered around tourism as other nations such as the Maldives (66% of GDP).<sup>65</sup>

In this next section I will compare the historic tourist trends of several nationalities into the Scandinavian countries, this will allow me to not only observe any potential peaks and drops in tourism but also separate out countries which stand out from the general trend. This is extremely important for our ability to analyze the impact of the spike in American political interest in the Nordic countries as a determining factor. This can be done as national branding from the Nordic countries should, in theory, attract tourists from around the globe, outliers from the international trend should therefore be analyzed in order to understand the conditions led to an unsuspected drop or rise.

Firstly, I will be looking at the progression of tourism into Sweden from the following three countries the United States of America, China and the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom has been chosen as it is a country that has experienced stable and steady economic growth and has a long friendly relationship with the Scandinavian countries. Based on those two facts one would expect the United Kingdom to have a steadily increasing number of tourists to Denmark, Norway and Sweden without too many fluctuations. As such the United Kingdom is in this paper representative of a nation which simply continues status quo. China on the other hand has experienced extreme economic growth, which has greatly increased the number of Chinese citizens with the financial funds to travel abroad, additionally, China's diplomatic relations with the western hemisphere are still fairly new. As such China would be a nation which is predicted to have increased its numbers of tourists to most of the world including Scandinavia, this would be consistent with the general trend of Chinese tourists globally.<sup>66</sup> The United States is naturally included as it is the main focus of this thesis and by comparing the U.S. to the United Kingdom and China I will be able to determine whether the American tourism pattern more in line with a predicable U.K. protectory or a booming tourism trend like that of China. The databases of each Scandinavian nation functions differently, vary in the available timeframe and calculate the raw number of nights by tourists slightly differently. Fortunately, for the purpose of this paper we are looking at the relative development within each country and not making a comparative analysis between the Scandinavian nations. To enhance my ability to detect the impact of the American political interest on tourism I divide the tourism trends into before and after the year 2015 as this year is recognized as the time when the Nordic

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<sup>65</sup> (Contribution of travel and tourism to GDP as a share of GDP, 2018)

<sup>66</sup> (Smith 2019. The Unstoppable rose of the Chinese traveller – where are they going and what does it mean for overtourism?)

countries gained increased traction in U.S. Media and political discourse. Figure 1.1 visually depicts the progression of Chinese, British and American tourism at Swedish hotels in the five years prior to 2015 and the five years from 2015 to 2019. This following section will be a breakdown of the numbers depicted in figure 1.1 and contains a discussion of the findings.

The Swedish database has tracked tourism since 1978 in which people with residence in the United Kingdom spent a total of 230,943 nights at hotels in Sweden.<sup>67</sup> I will only include hotel stays as camping and commercial renting were not introduced into the statistics until 2003 and 2008, their inclusion would therefore skew the observation. In 2009, UK residents spent 514,538 nights in Sweden.<sup>68</sup> By 2014, this is the year before Senator Bernie Sanders announced his first presidential campaign and highlighted the Nordic countries which is why this year is used as a reference year, the total number of nights spent in Sweden by U.K residents was 575,156.<sup>69</sup> This means that in the five years between 2009 and 2014 U.K tourism in Sweden increased by 12%. In 2019 U.K residents spent a total of 775,945 nights in Sweden, a 35% increase from 2014. As we can see the percentage increased in the five years following 2014 almost tripled the increase which occurred during the five years prior to 2015. This would suggest an increased hype around Sweden in the United Kingdom, the increase can be attributed to any number of factors, however we must compare these findings with other data in order to establish whether this a result of a general increase of British tourism or a narrow increase in Sweden specifically. Moving on to the Chinese tourists in Sweden we see that while the overall amount of nights spend by the Chinese is much lower than the British, Chinese overnight visits in Sweden are increasing rapidly. From 2009 to 2014 the number increased by 113% and from 2014 to 2019 it increased by 114%, this more than triples the rate of the United Kingdom's already relatively high rate of 35%. Interestingly, the Chinese rate has been steady for the last decade compared to the British that spiked within the last half of the 2010's. The extremely high increase in Chinese visitors is commonly attributed to the large expansion of the Chinese economy and the ongoing process of opening up China to the world,<sup>70</sup> as such it is no surprise that the rate of increased tourism from China far outpaces that of the U.K. However, it is surprising that the numbers visualized in figure 1.1 reveal that the amount of American tourism in Sweden has increased by 119% within the last five years and thereby surpassing the Chinese increase of 114%. Additionally, we can also observe that this extreme boom in American

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<sup>67</sup> (Nights spent by country of residence and type of establishment. Year 1978-2019. Statistics Sweden)

<sup>68</sup> (Nights spent by country of residence and type of establishment. Year 1978-2019. Statistics Sweden)

<sup>69</sup> (Nights spent by country of residence and type of establishment. Year 1978-2019. Statistics Sweden)

<sup>70</sup> (China Tourism. 2019. TravelChinaGuide)

tourism to the Nordic countries only took place within the last five years, as the increase from 2009 to 2014 was at 38% which is still high compared to the British but only a fraction of the 113% Chinese increase in the same time period. There is not one solitary factor to which one can fully contribute the skyrocketing of American tourism in Sweden and as such one must be careful in analyzing data such as this. Nevertheless, we know based on the information assembled in this paper that Scandinavian countries have played an increasing role in the American political discourse, a development that is observable in political debates, news outlets and official White House publications. We know that much of this attention is the result of the emphasis that Bernie Sanders has put on the Nordic countries during the presidential campaigns which began in 2015. Additionally, I am able to document a decisive spike in the rate at which American tourism in Sweden has increased in the five years following 2015 compared to the five years prior. Putting these observations into a context of nation branding theory it is quite clear that it is consistent with theory predictions. Indeed, according to Simon Anholt “*what really seems to make a difference to the images of countries is when they become dedicated to developing new ideas, policies, laws, products, services, companies, buildings, art and science*”.<sup>71</sup> It is Anholt’s belief that the development of idea, policies and laws is what makes “people pay attention” and helps create a buzz. Scandinavian ideas, policies and laws are all things which, as documented in this paper, have received an undeniable uptick in media attention. This political attention has the possibility of being transformed into a general awareness of the Nordic region which in turn would help contribute to the massive boom in American tourism. Based on observable data and established theory it is reasonable to argue that political interest in the Nordic countries, Sweden included, has had a positive impact on American tourism trends in Sweden within the most recent years. The extent to which one can credit the political awareness on the other hand is open for debates as there are other circumstances which have likely impacted the pattern too, see for instance the increased direct flight destination between the Nordic region and the United States.<sup>72</sup>

In the case of tourism in Denmark we find a similar pattern in which the American rate of increased tourism has accelerated within the last five years compared to the five years prior to 2015, this development is visualized in figure 1.2. From 2009 to 2014 American tourism to Denmark saw the smallest percentage increase at 28% compared to 46% and 193% from the United Kingdom and China respectively. From 2014 to 2019 however, the rate of increase from

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<sup>71</sup> (Dinnie 2008, p.23)

<sup>72</sup> (Mange flere turister fra USA. 2018)

the U.K. dropped to 22% and China dropped to 63% whereas the American rate increased to 69% thereby becoming the country of our sample with the highest increase rate as was the case in Sweden. Furthermore, in the case of Denmark we are able to see that the increase and large acceleration of American visits to Denmark occurred between 2014 and 2015. From 2013 to 2014 the amount of nights spent in Denmark by American tourists increased by only 13,600, and from 2014 to 2015 it increased 84,082 and then by 31,832 the following year. In the case of Norway, the governmental StatBank publishes data differently from Sweden and Denmark in that it releases monthly datapoints dating back only one year. This does not allow us to perform a comparative analysis and in consideration to the COVID-19 virus the numbers from 2019 and 2020 provide us no useable knowledge. Finally, we will look at the market share of American tourism going to the Nordic countries, we will use the entirety of Europe as a benchmark and compare the most recent data from 2018 to 2014 statistics for the same reasons discussed earlier. In 2014, Europe accounted for 35.1% of outbound American tourism, this increased to 39.3% in 2018 and increase of 12%. By comparing the percentage increase of the Nordic countries in the same time period we will be able to determine if the market share of the Nordic countries has increased at a slower or faster pace than Europe as a whole. Starting out with the Scandinavian countries, Denmark increased its market share from 0.7% to 0.9% a 29% increase. Norway increased its share by 60% from 0.5% to 0.8%, Sweden saw the lowest increase from 0.8% to 0.9% market share, an increase of 12%. Including the Nordic countries of Iceland and Finland we see that Iceland has increased its market share from 0.4% to 1.5% a staggering 275% increase, Finland more modestly went from 0.3% to 0.4%, a 33% increase. By combining the data from the Danish and Swedish databases with statistics from the National Travel and Tourism Office I can conclude that the Sweden and Denmark have been successful, in expanding the increase of American tourists visiting at a faster pace than even the rate at which Chinese tourism is expanding. Additionally, I can also conclude that all the Nordic nations have either matched or surpassed the rest of Europe in their ability to increase the market share of American tourism in their respective countries. In fact, the Nordic countries account for 43% of the increase that Europe as a whole has gained in its market share from 2014 to 2018, even though only 3.6% of Europe's population lives within the Nordic countries. It is undeniable that the Nordic countries have increased their presence in American society, and it is hard to argue that the Nordic countries have not benefitted from that development when looking at American tourism patterns in recent years. It is impossible to pinpoint the exact length to which this benefit is derived from the increased political presence but it is hard to argue that the fact that increased American tourism has correlated with increased political

Scandinavian influence in America. Furthermore, I have established theory which predicts that such a correlation is indeed indicative of a direct causal link between the two observations.

Figure 1.1

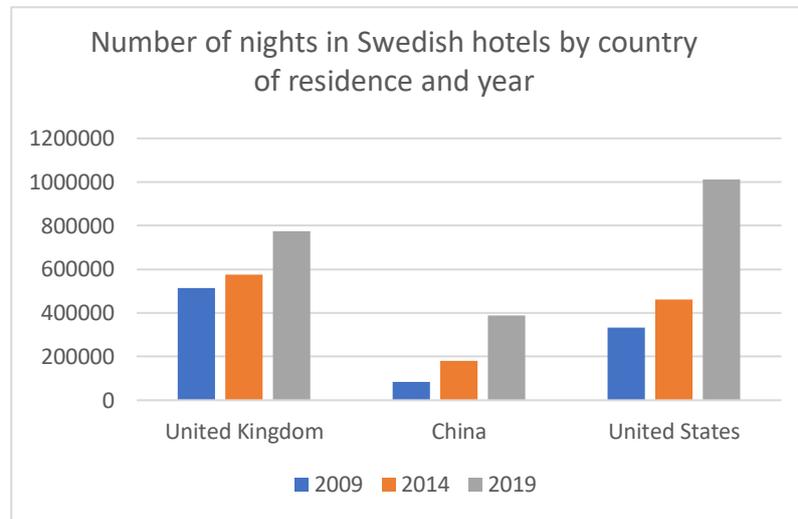
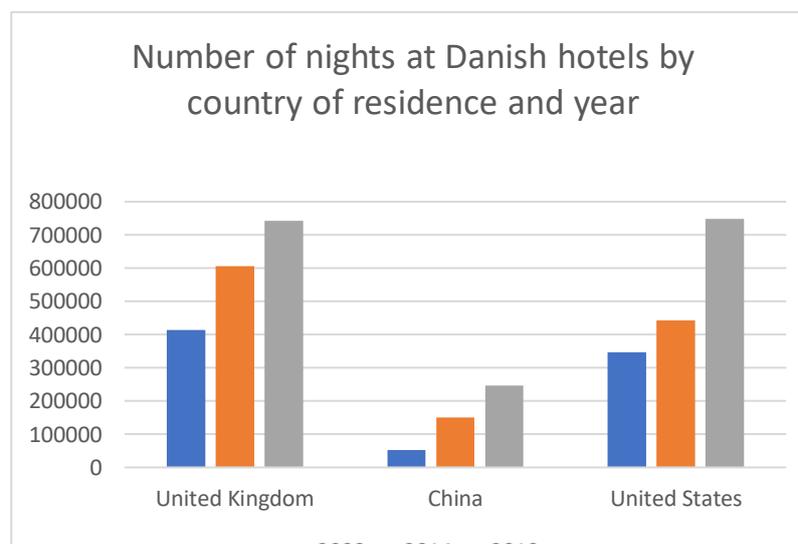


Figure 1.2



### Scandinavia's Socialist Image Problem in America

Having in many ways praised the Nordic countries for their success in gathering disproportionate coverage of which most is positive, there are certain shortcomings which this paper will try to address. We have seen the Nordic countries being used as examples of economic fairness and security, as a more just financial system. We have seen it used as the benchmarks for a functional healthcare system, we have also discussed how this has benefitted the Nordic countries economically and politically. However, despite this success, Scandinavia

has also suffered from misinterpretations. The American misconception is that these welfare goods that the Nordic population benefit from are the result of a socialist society, which it certainly is not. This is ultimately an image problem which the Nordic nations struggle with in the United States as very few European nations would perceive the Nordics as socialist. In order to understand why this is an American issue one must first understand dynamics of American politics at large. The Overton window, meaning the spectrum of political thought that is considered acceptable is much further to the right economically compared to its European counterparts. Consequently, the furthest left one can go within the spectrum of debate is a figure such as Bernie Sanders, who would in most European countries be categorized as a social democrat who in the Nordic countries is considered the center-left party. The result of a right leaning Overton window is that left-wing economic proposals will often be classified as socialist simply because they break with the established window of respectability. Socialist in an American context very rarely refers to a policy that promotes post-capitalism which is actual socialism.

Unfortunately, a side effect of the American use of the term socialism is that Nordic policies are often perceived as too far left of the American Overton window and the Nordics are therefore labeled as socialist societies, which they naturally are not. Besides being incorrect in the case of the Nordics, there are a number of reasons why a nation does not wish to be imaged as socialist, first being popularity, less than 40% of the American public has a positive perception of socialism.<sup>73</sup> Secondly, socialism is perceived as hostile to private business and it will therefore likely deter investments. The misconceptions about the Nordic economics systems is in fact a common theme in American political discourse, see for instance a Forbes' article by Jeffrey Dorfman titled "Sorry Bernie Bros But Nordic Countries Are Not Socialist"<sup>74</sup> or "McDonald's Workers in Denmark Pity Us"<sup>75</sup> in the New York Times by Nicholas Kristof. Both these articles deal with the American perception of Scandinavia as examples of socialism, attempting to explain why Nordic countries should not be labeled as socialist. Kristof correctly notes that "*Americans on both left and right often think of Scandinavia as quasi-socialist*" the American right wrongfully depicts Scandinavia as socialist in order to smear Nordic welfare programs, whereas the American left wrongfully use Nordic countries as success stories of socialism because they either favor traditional socialism or don't understand actual socialism. Nevertheless, the image of the Nordics as socialist is a persistent

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<sup>73</sup> (Jones and Saad 2019)

<sup>74</sup> (Dorfman 2018)

<sup>75</sup> (Kristof 2020)

problem for the Nordic, the article by Kristof was published in early May of 2020 a full four-year period after Sanders initiated his first presidential bid. That means the Nordic countries have been in the public limelight for four years without being able to dismiss the unfortunate notion, this is despite several Nordic attempts do exactly that. As early as October 2015 the Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen responded to the new American perception of association between the Nordics and socialism by stating that *“I would like to make one thing clear. Denmark is far from a socialist planned economy. Denmark is a market economy”*<sup>76</sup> Rasmussen made these comments during a speech at the Kennedy School of Government as part of an official visit to the United States as Prime Minister and as such these comments should be analyzed as official state diplomacy. Rasmussen clearly attempted to correct the inconsistency in the Danish identity and the American image of Denmark. Rasmussen is not alone in his attempt to correct the record, Otto Brons-Petersen, from the Center for Political Studies at the University of Copenhagen and former director of the treasury, participated in a video by PragerU on YouTube in which he discussed the large role of the free market within the Danish economy.<sup>77</sup> This video has since received over eight million views which means it most certainly has had an impact on the perception of Danish society. In a similar video, Swedish historian Johan Norberg in a ReasonTV YouTube video explain why Sweden is far from a socialist country and how it in fact has moved significantly away from its semi-socialist past.<sup>78</sup> However, despite these attempts one must acknowledge that association between the Nordics and socialism is still being debated as recently as May 9<sup>th</sup> in The New York Times. The stickiness of this association reveals a fundamental failure from the Nordic countries to align their own national identity with the American perception of their societies, something that can hurt its ability to further Nordic political and economic interest in the U.S. It is therefore imperative that Nordic countries consider the possibilities to correct any American misconceptions. During my writings on Scandinavian and Nordic influence in America I came into contact with Jan-Erik Støstad. Jan-Erik Støstad is the Secretary General of SAMAK, a collective organization for the Nordic Social Democratic parties and Nordic trade union LOs. The American misconceptions of the Nordics played a major theme in my talk with Jan-Erik Støstad, in which Støstad uttered his concern about the American conception that Nordic countries are “anti-industry” when there is in fact strong collaboration with private enterprise. Having agreed that Americans hold certain misconceptions of Nordic society, we discussed

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<sup>76</sup> (Yglesias 2015)

<sup>77</sup> (PragerU. 2019. Is Denmark Socialist?)

<sup>78</sup> (ReasonTV. 2018. Stossel: Sweden is Not a Socialist Success)

SAMAK's involvement in American-Nordic engagement. In this regard Støstad made it clear that "SAMAK doesn't have any partnership with American counterparts" but he also claimed that this was a result of lacking resources rather than a lack of interest. While, SAMAK does not have direct initiatives in America they have attempted to increase the knowledge of the Nordics politically, an example hereof is "The Nordic Model for Dummies – All You Need to Know in 6 Minutes" pamphlet available on SAMAK's website.<sup>79</sup> The aim of the pamphlet is to introduce the Nordic model of welfare, organized work and economic governance. The pamphlet is an excellent example of a Nordic desire to spread awareness of social democratic ideas, sadly a desire which SAMAK according to Støstad is not able to fulfill in the case of America due to limited resources. Based on the descriptions of the Nordics in American media and my conversation with Støstad there seems to be a real issue in the identity of the Nordics and their perceived image in America. Consequently, the following section of this paper I will discuss how the Nordics with their available resources can best influence the American perceptions about the Nordic region.

### The Future of Nordics Politics in The United States

When America began to truly solidify its overarching influence in the post-World War II era, that influence came as a result of huge financial and military investments into the European nations following their destruction. The most obvious example of American investment is the European Recovery Program (ERP), also known as the Marshall Plan. Throughout its four year existence the ERP provided the European nations with more than 13 billion US dollars, which at the time amounted to 2.6 percent of the economic output of the European nations.<sup>80</sup> For contrast if the United States were to contribute 2.6 percent of the European Union GDP in 2019 it would cost around 450 billion dollars, almost as much as the 2008 financial bailouts.<sup>81</sup> This contrast illuminates the scale of which the American government was able to economically support the European nations. In exchange for the financial aid the Americans were able to gain political influence in Europe, it was made clear that American aid would not be going to communist governments and as such the European public was deterred from electing communist officials. The structure of the ERP was so that it donated American currency to the European governments whom, for the most part, had spent their entire foreign

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<sup>79</sup> (The Nordic Model for Dummies. 2016)

<sup>80</sup> (Bayer 2020)

<sup>81</sup> (Harbert 2019)

exchange reserves and therefore had no way of importing goods from abroad. Through this structure, America ensured that most of the ERP contributions would be redirected back into the American economy, additionally by promoting American goods in such a way, a dependency on American companies became the norm and the infrastructure for economic exchange was established. In addition, the ERP also included a so-called Technical Assistance Program that consisted of overseas business exchanges meant to promote American innovations in Europe which only furthered the establishment of economic interdependency of the two continents, through personal and commercial relationships created by the TAP. It is often described that the main aim of the ERP was the promotion of European economic integration,<sup>82</sup> that goal was quickly realized with the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community established in 1951. The American wish for a joint Europe can be found in statements from the Secretary of State George Marshall after which the Marshall Plan was nicknamed. In a speech the Secretary said that “the program should be a joint one” and The News York Times headlined an article saying, “Marshall pleads for European Unity”.<sup>83</sup> Whether or not the establishment of European integration would have taken place without the interference of the United States is uncertain, though there is a broad consensus among academics that America play a key role in its use of political and economic influence to successfully promote what was an American interest in the European continent. The ERP is therefore not online perceived as morally just in the eyes of history but also as successful foreign policy. Additionally, America also employed thousands of foreign cultural personnel for anti-communist propaganda in programs which cost millions of dollars.<sup>84</sup> Some of these programs would continue throughout most of the cold war and played a significant role in the political war against the eastern bloc. There is little doubt that the political decisions made in 21<sup>st</sup> century America were successful in consolidating much of the world around American ideas and ideals. Therefore, one might argue that Scandinavia should look to Americanization history for examples of successful foreign influence tactics. However, there are many factors which impact the available tools a nation can make use of when trying to influence a foreign country. When we look at the methods that America utilized during the Americanization of Europe in post-world war two, we can quite easily see that they required vast amounts of human personnel and an even larger amount of monetary backing. These methods could only be sustained through the sheer size of the U.S. economy and the economic growth it experienced

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<sup>82</sup> (Nolan 2012, p.186)

<sup>83</sup> (Rappaport 1981, p.125)

<sup>84</sup> (Wagnleitner 1991)

during the golden age of economic expansion.

The economic conditions of the Nordic countries simply dictate that the Nordics cannot employ the same methods in its attempt to further Scandinavization. Nor does the Nordics find themselves in a cold war with a hostile ideology against which they are willing to sacrifice enormous amounts of resources. Given that this is the case, any methods that I discuss in the following section will be grounded in the idea that the Nordics must utilize the current momentum of American interest. Any reasonable method must be cost efficient and centered around the idea that Nordic countries are not equipped with the necessary resources to wage large scale propaganda campaign in America. In fact, workable ideas should be based on the assumption that any new initiative by the Nordics must be doable by a single person or small team of employees. These are the considerations I will be taking when attempting to put forth a number of ways I believe, Scandinavia can improve its political alliance with the U.S. while also ensuring a better understanding of what Nordic society looks like. The recommended paths forward will be inspired by successful examples of Americanization but modified in consideration of the available resources to the Nordic countries.

#### Reinforcement of Successful Trends

When we consider the many hurdles a region of roughly 20 million people face when aiming to correct the misconceptions of a country of 300 million citizens, it is the position of this paper that the correct approach to is to reinforce strengths rather than cover for weaknesses. The Scandinavian political ideas which have been discussed in this thesis are overwhelmingly popular with the younger generations of America. They make up the majority of progressive voters, the young demographics need no positive spin on Scandinavian politics as they already support it. It is for this exact reason this paper argues that young Americans should be the main target for increased Nordic investment. Young Americans are already susceptible to the Nordic ideals that create the possibility to inform them further on the details of the Nordic model. By focusing on the younger demographic, the Nordics can allocate resources into expanding the understanding of the Nordic model rather than attempting to introduce it to a dismissive audience. Furthermore, by focusing efforts on the young citizens, there is a chance to build upon a genuine enthusiasm rather than creating an unsustainable promotional campaign. As argued by Simon Anholt, new ideas, policies and laws are among the things that establish a reputation and creates a buzz, and as documented in this paper, Scandinavia has done a great job of creating a buzz.<sup>85</sup> Anholt goes on to say that, "*Governments should never do things*

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<sup>85</sup> (Dinnie 2008, p. 23)

*purely for brand-related reasons; no action should be dedicated to image management alone. But there should be something unmistakable about these innovations, the style of their conception and delivery and their alignment with each other, which will gradually drive the country from the image it has inherited towards the one it needs and deserves.*"<sup>86</sup> Anholt clearly states in the paragraph that he believes image management alone is inefficient use of resources, which makes perfect sense, any product or innovations should provide a use to the inventor before it can be exported through branding. In fact, this is perfectly in line with the process of Scandinavization, no Nordic country is advocating universal healthcare or sick leave based on image management, each country is internally advocating these ideas because of the domestic usefulness. Furthermore, there is little evidence that suggests that Nordic governments have attempted to force these ideas overseas. Interestingly enough, Anholt goes on to argue that the innovation and its delivery must align, this is where image management and promotion comes into play and it is also where the Nordic countries have been unsuccessful. The delivery of social democratic ideas has often been understood as socialist agenda and consequently, the Nordic countries have not ensured "*the image that they need and deserve*". Expanding the Nordic focus on image management is therefore not just some superficial promotional campaign but instead a much needed information campaign that goes along with inherently beneficial ideas.

#### Nordic avenues to young Americans

Having put forth my rationale for aiming at the younger demographics among the adult American population, this section will introduce the avenues available to the Nordic countries. Multiple surveys conducted within recent years have found that the media through which Americans consume news varies greatly by age. Older Americans are much more likely to keep up with the news by reading print media and watching television compared to younger Americans who prefer online news sources.<sup>87</sup> Interestingly, for the purpose of this paper it is that online news sources according to a 2016 PEW Research survey rank as the most common media among Americans between 18 and 49 years of age, and in the age group 18 to 29 Americans are more likely to get their news from online sources than from TV, radio and print media combined.<sup>88</sup> Given the recent trends it is likely that online sources have gained an even greater favorability among the youngest adults since 2016.

Given these demographic realities, there is little doubt that the Nordics should focus their

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<sup>86</sup> (Dinnie 2008, p. 23)

<sup>87</sup> (Barthel et al. 2016)

<sup>88</sup> (Barthel et al. 2016)

limited resources by investing into online news sources if they wish to influence young Americans most efficiently. These investments, however, can be take place in different ways, commercials for the Nordics, the creation of documentaries, online pamphlets and informative websites or establishment of partnerships with online figures. I believe multiple of these options would be within the capabilities of the Nordics countries either in a joint program or by the individual nations. I wish to look at the last option first in this paper as usage of political figures and organization can function as a catalyst for all the other Nordic initiatives. This is the case because already established online figures have the reach of millions of people and many thousands of loyal and dedicated followers, by focusing our attention here we will to a greater degree ensure a natural distribution of Nordic information. In terms of political figures, this paper will focus on YouTube creators. Despite the main attraction of YouTube being entertainment, in the form of music and funny videos, YouTube hosts a quite vibrant political platform with some influence political commentators. Political YouTubers span much of the ideological spectrum present in the contemporary American political system, as such Nordic countries will have good opportunity to either strengthen ties with leftwing media outlets or engage in debates with less likeminded figures. To exemplify the diversity of political thought on YouTube I will give a short introduction to some prominent figures. On the economic right you will find political figures such as Ben Shapiro. His most popular YouTube channel, simply titled "Ben Shapiro" has 1.18 million subscribers at the time of writing, the channel has more than 98 million views when combining all his videos.<sup>89</sup> Ben Shapiro himself is a political conservative and an economic libertarian, through his YouTube success he has broadened his reach and become a stable contributor at Fox News and is a NYT bestselling author. In addition to this, Shapiro has made headline news as a result of his speeches at college campuses which have led to political protests from left leaning college students. On the economic left we find channels such as "The Majority Report w/Sam Seder" with more than 800.000 subscribers and a combined view total of more than 330 million.<sup>90</sup> The Majority Report hosts figures such as Michael Brooks who hold post-capitalist ideas and as such on certain issues is to the left of mainstream Nordic ideology. While these channels will not necessarily be focus of this paper, they do illustrate the spectrum of political opinion which garners massive amounts of views. Our focus will be on political YouTube channels which already hold sympathetic views towards Nordic policies in an American contexts, policies such as universal healthcare, tuition

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<sup>89</sup> (Ben Shapiro. Description)

<sup>90</sup> (The Majority Report w/Sam Seder. Description)

free college, paid sick leave, parental leave, green energy investments, lower prison sentencing, increased social security among many other issues which one could point to. The reason for focusing on these channels is the same as for why the Nordic nations should invest in young Americans, investments in an already interested audience is more likely to resonate. Additionally, the channels which already favor Scandinavian policies are also among the political figures which reference the Nordics the most already and are therefore the most likely to be the initiators of misconceptions. By investing in these channels there is a good chance dispelling some of the wrongfully held beliefs among the most prominent social democratic forces in American political discourse.

The first YouTube channel named “Secular Talk” which I will now discuss in terms of its reach, political significance, Nordic referral, and possibility of Nordic cooperation. The channel is run by Kyle Kulinski, a registered democrat from New York and a self-described populist and social democrat, Secular Talk has 840,000 subscribers and a total of over 700 million views on YouTube making it one of the biggest American political channels on YouTube. Kyle Kulinski has a long history of covering political news coming out of the Nordic countries and often refers to Nordic policies as a benchmark of what America should compare itself to. Looking at Secular Talk we will also be able to observe how Nordic documentary and informative media is interacted with in American political news. Let us start out by talking about the reach of Secular Talk. It can be difficult to compare the reach of a YouTube channel to more traditional news outlets because certain videos can go viral and receive ten times the audience of an average video, so should we count the most viewed publications or base reach on the average audience, to capture both the probable and potential scenario I will be including looking at both the average video and the successful outliers. In discussing the reach of Secular Talk I will try to compare the viewership of an average publication with Danish television publication viewership. This will provide us a perception of how many people one could expect to reach should the Nordics engage in a type of collaboration. Furthermore, we will also look at the most successful publications from Secular Talk which include any mention of the Nordics as this gives us insight into the potential of a partnership. First of all it is necessary to discuss the influential position which Kyle Kulinski occupies in the promotion of social democratic policies in American politics. While basically unknown in mainstream media, Kulinski actually wields enormous influence over American political discourse at large. I am not the first to discuss the underestimation of Kulinski's role in American politics, as recently as March the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 Connor Kilpatrick wrote the first political profile of Kyle Kulinski in

Jacobin.<sup>91</sup> A very notable detail about Kyle Kulinski is that he was a co-founder of Justice Democrats, the group which recruited Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez to run for congress. Kulinski in fact wrote the original platform on which the recruited candidates would endorse, while Kulinski is no longer affiliated with the group, his former status in the organization means that he has contact and therefore an indirect influence. Kulinski has also done an interview with Bernie Sanders in September of 2019,<sup>92</sup> additionally, Kulinski has appeared multiple times on Fox News and The Joe Rogan Experience, the latter being the biggest podcast in America, the episodes in which Kyle features have a combined view total of over seven million. Furthermore, it was Kulinski who, according to Joe Rogan, set up the interview between Bernie Sanders and Joe Rogan. Joe Rogan has on multiple occasions proclaimed that he gets his political news from Secular Talk and other YouTube figures who belong to the same sphere of progressive America such as Jimmy Dore, David Pakman and Krystal Ball and Saagar Enjeti on TheHill TV.<sup>93</sup> These facts give credence to the political influence which Kulinski holds and his capability to contact people with even greater societal influence such as Joe Rogan and Bernie Sanders. While Kulinski's own show Secular Talk is naturally his most influential tool, the ability to reach far beyond his own loyal following is massive as a result of his political and personal connections. In this following section I will look at the ways in which Kulinski has interacted and framed information coming from the Nordic countries. This will give us an idea of his stance towards the Scandinavian countries but also reveal the extent to which he has been able to distribute information about the Nordics. Furthermore, I will look into the ways in which Kulinski has presented misinformation as a result of misconceptions about the Nordic model, this is important as it allows us to discuss how and why Nordic countries can gain from investing in an informative partnership with political characters such as Kyle Kulinski.

With a total of 14,000 video uploads and 700,000,000 views Secular Talk has a view average of around 50,000 views per video. However, this number is skewed due to fact that videos uploaded in the first years of the channel's lifespan will have a significantly lower viewing average as no subscription base has been established at that point. Given this fact, we would expect videos uploaded within the last year to have a higher average. For instance, the 20 videos published between May 13<sup>th</sup> and May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020 had an average of 78,741 views as of May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020. If we take that 78 thousand views and compare it to the viewership of the most popular programs on DR2, the third most watched television channel in Denmark. In week 20

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<sup>91</sup> (Kilpatrick, Kyle Kulinski Speaks, the Bernie Bros Listen)

<sup>92</sup> (Secular Talk. 2019. Kyle Kulinski Interviews Bernie Sanders)

<sup>93</sup> (Enjeti, Twitter post. 08/04/2020)

(May 11-17, 2020) DR2's tenth most popular program had ratings of 94,000 viewers, that is only some 16,000 people more than the average video on Secular talk.<sup>94</sup> Comparing the program with the highest rating and the video with the highest number of views in the same time periods, we see that "Overløberen" on DR2 had 164,000 people watching whereas the most popular video within the time period from May 11 to May 17 on secular talk titled "Stacey Abrams Brutally Rejected on Live TV For VP Spot" had a total of 206,000 viewers.<sup>95</sup> We of course have to be careful when comparing ratings to views on YouTube as ratings reflect people watching live, and views on YouTube can accumulate over the duration of the selected time period, nevertheless, the most views videos on Secular Talk had a broader reach than the most viewed program on DR2. An interesting note is that DR2 had an annual budget of 479 million DKK as of 2015,<sup>96</sup> whereas Secular Talk is funded through YouTube advertisement revenue and Patreon contributions, the monthly Patreon contributions to Secular Talk is currently at 14,543 USD.<sup>97</sup> That means that the reach of Secular Talk is a lot more cost efficient, this is something the Nordic countries can benefit from when investing in political nation branding. This fact is only solidified when looking at the most popular Secular Talk video that contains information about the Nordic region. The video "Georgia Pastor's Mind Blown By European Atheists"<sup>98</sup> borrow footage from a Nordic documentary called "The Norden". The video was published on November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2014 and has 890,000 views. This means that a video in which Kyle Kulinski reacts to a section of a Nordic documentary has been seen by as many people as the most watched episode of the third most watched TV series on Danish television in 2019<sup>99</sup> This speaks to the incredible potential of internet figures, being able to reach thousands of people with nothing more than a camera and them talking. In the actual video, Kulinski reacts to the episode on religion in "The Norden" documentary in which an American pastor from Georgia visits the Nordics states to experience the stark differences. In the clip from the Nordic documentary the issue of same sex marriage is discussed, and Kulinski goes on to discuss the stance of the Danish government that dictates that all churches and priests must accept same sex marriages no matter their personal convictions. Kulinski defends same sex marriages saying that, "*If we marry people, we have to marry all people including gay people.*"<sup>100</sup> In fact the entire reaction from Kulinski is an endorsement of the Nordic

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<sup>94</sup> (Top 20 mest sete programmer – Seertal uge 20. Seerundersøgelsen)

<sup>95</sup> (Secular Talk. 2020. Stacey Abrams Brutally Rejected On Live TV For VP Spot)

<sup>96</sup> (Thiis 2016)

<sup>97</sup> (Secular Talk with Kyle Kulinski. Patreon. As of 20/05/2020)

<sup>98</sup> (Secular Talk. 2014. Georgia Pastor's Mind Blown by European Atheists)

<sup>99</sup> (Hansen 2019)

<sup>100</sup> (Secular Talk. 2014. Georgia Pastor's Mind Blown by European Atheists) 4:18-4:21

perspective of religion, in that religion is taking a backseat to political and human rights. Later in the video, Kulinski broadens his comments on the Nordic societies and says that the likely take away for the pastor is that despite the separation of church and politics, the Nordics have “*a great educational system, healthcare system and great jobs et cetera et cetera, happy people.*”<sup>101</sup> Any national promoter from the Nordic countries, be they political or commercial in nature should find a video such as this by Secular Talk to be an absolute win for Nordic society. It is important to note that the American interest in this documentary is a result of authentic American interest in Nordic society as the producers of the series themselves proclaim the following in an email exchange I had with them “*The series was produced by us while working for the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE, which is non-commercial public service – just like DR in Denmark. Therefore our primary audience is Finnish people, and to be specific, Swedish-speaking Finns, which is the minority Tomas and I belong to.*”<sup>102</sup> In their words, they knew that their product would have an international appeal and as such they uploaded the video to YouTube and made it available on Netflix for a while. Having provided me with the demographic breakdown of their viewership on their videos from The Norden, I can observe that on the four uploaded videos, American viewers make up a plurality of the viewers on all four. This simply supports the idea that Americans are hungry for information about the Nordic nations. The interaction between the Nordic produced The Norden and the online American video by Secular Talk as a perfect example of how Nordic interests can be furthered abroad despite limited resources, through social media channels. Given that the Secular Talk video was exposed to as many viewers as the third most popular program in all of 2019 in Denmark, there is a good chance that the international audience, which according to John Stark and Tomas Lindh is the third priority of the documentary, consists of more people than the primary audience of Finnish citizens. Additionally, that international response is the result of authentic interest as there has been no promotion of the documentary in America. Despite the interest Kulinski of Secular Talk holds for the Nordic region and the politics which define that Nordics, there are examples of Kulinski being misinformed or unaware of a political dynamic of the Nordics. Such an example can be found in Kulinski's answer to my question on his preferred policy of raising the American minimum wage or to embrace a Danish model of collective bargaining. My question was framed as the following during a Secular talk super chat stream on YouTube, the premise of a super chat is that viewers can ask questions they

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<sup>101</sup> (Secular Talk. 2014. Georgia Pastor's Mind Blown by European Atheists) 5:55-6:02

<sup>102</sup> (Appendix A – Screenshot 1.1)

wish to be discussed and by donating money alongside the question it highlights your specific question. Unfortunately, since the question was asked during a live stream there, is no video documentation of the exchange, but to paraphrase his answer Kulinski argued that he was in favor of both raising the minimum wage and for collective bargaining rights. The answer did not necessarily push a misconception of the Nordic model but it did indicate an unawareness of the fact that in the Nordics the Social Democratic parties are in opposition to a minimum wage as it would weaken the importance of labor union and thereby weaken the worker's ability to bargain collectively.

To illustrate that The Norden documentary is not a standalone example of Nordic initiatives being incorporated into an American discourse we will now be looking at the American response to a YouTube video uploaded by the official YouTube channel of Socialdemokratiet in Denmark. The video in question is titled "Something is rotten at Fox News" uploaded on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018.<sup>103</sup> The basic premise of the video is that Dan Jørgensen attempts to correct the perceived misinformation about Denmark in a Fox Business section hosted by Trish Regan.<sup>104</sup> At the time of writing "Something is rotten at Fox News" has 7,634 views, which is a low number of views in the grand scheme of things. Given that a large percentage of those views are likely from Danish citizens, the aim of reaching and informing an American audience, which is the assumed goal of the video as it is shot in English, has likely failed. However, in progressive American news outlets the video by Jørgensen made some noise. The channel "The Humanist Report" did an eight minute video on the incident which has over 650,000 views,<sup>105</sup> and Secular Talk likewise did a 4 minute video in which he made use of Jørgensen's original video, this video has over 100,000 views.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, the YouTube channel "NowThisNews" reedited the original response video by Jørgensen, and their video has received more than 1.4 million views.<sup>107</sup> This means that a video uploaded to the channel of the Danish social democratic party which went nearly unnoticed with only 7,000 views sparked the interest of other content creators and potentially, if assuming no overlap of viewership, the information put out by Dan Jørgensen has by now reached more than two million people, primarily American citizens. This is a huge achievement, especially because the topics that Jørgensen discusses are in fact in line with many of the concerns which Jan Erik

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<sup>103</sup> (Socialdemokratiet. 2018. Something is rotten at Fox News)

<sup>104</sup> (Fox Business. 2018. Everyone in Denmark is working for the government: Trish Regan)

<sup>105</sup> (The Humanist Report. 2018. Danish Politician CRUSHES Fox Host Who Compared Denmark to Venezuela)

<sup>106</sup> (Secular Talk. 2018. Fox Business Host's Horrifically Stupid Rant About Denmark Fact Checked)

<sup>107</sup> (NowThis News. Fox News Tried Going After Denmark. Big Mistake | NowThis)

Støstad brought out in my conversation with him. Nordic initiatives like the one by Dan Jørgensen provide an excellent example of how the autonomy of the YouTube political scene can promote the distribution of information from the Nordics without huge time or resource investments. This is exactly why the Nordics have the potential to benefit from engaging in communication with these political entities, to either promote new political news out of the Nordic region, or to correct a common misconception. By investing in these partnerships, Nordic countries have the possibility to unlock a pathway by which the already established nation branding initiatives can travel to a huge audience, an audience which would by any other medium be either impossible to reach or extremely expensive to reach.

### Practical Possibilities for Transatlantic Communication

This following section will contain ideas that can be implemented in the future to ensure a more desirable portrayal of Nordic society in America. The proposals will be rooted in the analysis and discussion that has been presented throughout this entire paper, the ideas will be heavily based on historic examples of successful Americanization or Scandinavization. Naturally, the ideas presented in this section will be modified versions of formerly implemented ideas, this is necessary and historic examples are a product of their time and one must introduce new ideas to cope with the changing ideologies, mediums and politics.

The most obvious way in which the Nordic countries could establish contact with new media content creators is simply to engage in direct communication. Such engagement could come in the form of behind the scenes dialogue where Nordic countries could attempt to explain any misconceptions that a given content creator might have of Nordic policies. This proposal would require one to one communication between American figures and a Nordic representant, as such it will be a slow correction of a larger political discourse but at the same time one needs to remember that any one political figure can reach millions of American citizens. However, direct communication with political figures can also take different shapes in the form of overseas invitations or even Nordic appearances on content creator's media shows. Overseas invitations to larger political figures could become a great investment in creating new content about the Nordic countries, political and otherwise. This proposal draws inspiration from ERP and the technical assistance program.<sup>108</sup> The original American version of the program consisted of around 1500 study tours of more than 24,000 Europeans.<sup>109</sup> The idea was in its essence extremely simple, to show the European workers and captains of industry the vastly

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<sup>108</sup> (Silberman et al. 1996)

<sup>109</sup> (Silberman et al. 1996, p.445)

superior American production and distribution of goods. A common example of what the Europeans brought back home was the self-service stores which were extremely rare in most European nations, this for instance was the case in Denmark.<sup>110</sup> The tours to America were successful because they provided a greater overview of what made up the American free market. Likewise, such tours to Scandinavia would provide Americans greater insight into Nordic society than what could be communicated in a pamphlet. However, bringing in thousands of Americans to experience the Nordic way of life would be a massive investment, which is why this paper advises that such tours be limited to political figures with a certain threshold of supporters. Hereby, Nordic countries could invite content creators insight into Nordic healthcare, education, childcare, arrange meetings with Nordic political figures, union leaders, industry representatives and let the American content creators broadcast to their large fanbase. A huge benefit to Nordic countries in this regard is that while online media has greatly improved in production quality, much of the political content on YouTube simply consists of a stationary camera recording a given conversation. This greatly reduced the cost of production compared to more traditional political studio settings that require multiple employees. Additionally, we know that American political figures have an inherent interest in Nordic conditions as a result of their prior coverage of the Nordics, see *The David Pakman Show*,<sup>111</sup> and *Secular Talk*.<sup>112</sup> A positive side effect of an overseas visit would be the likely exposure of Nordic society outside the political sphere, exposure to tourist attractions and natural scenery could promote tourism further, assuming this exposure is distributed to social media followers.

Another path towards increasing the American youth's exposure to Nordics is to simply increase the amount of content about the Nordic countries in circulation by producing new series about the Nordic that could be of interest to the American public. This is naturally a more expensive approach as it demands a production cost and likely some sort of promotional costs. However, there are multiple examples of media production about the Nordics received a high amount of American interest. The best example, *The Norden* I already covered earlier in this paper but in order to fully understand the successfulness of *The Norden* documentary, I believe we should look at the consequences which we can directly contribute to the creation of *The Norden*. One of the episodes from the series was concerned with difference in the Nordic and American prison systems. In the episode, James Conway from the Attica Correctional Facility in the state of New York visits the maximum-security prison Halden in Norway, a

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<sup>110</sup> (Supermarkeder. 2010)

<sup>111</sup> (David Pakman Show. 2011. Norway Prison Sentences Too Short? Prisons Too Comfortable?)

<sup>112</sup> (Secular Talk. 2017. Man Charged With Blasphemy In Denmark)

facility which has been called the most humane prison on earth. While the original reaction from Conway was skeptical, we know that the interactions made during the production of the 2014 documentary led Jan Strømnes, Deputy Warden of Halden Prison to visit Attice prison in New York to present his Nordic vision of a rehabilitative system to the staff<sup>113</sup> and as part of a 2017 documentary called “Breaking the Cycle”<sup>114</sup> also produced by Tomas Lindh and John Stark. It is important to note the three-year gap between the two documentaries because it indicates the minimum time period in which the Nordic and American correctional facilities have been in communication. Such communication is important to the Nordics as it present a direct pathway for Nordic ideals, in this case ideals for humane treatment and rehabilitation over revenge. Furthermore, producer John Stark and director Tomas Lindh from the Norden and Breaking the Cycle documentaries are currently working on a follow-up to Breaking the Cycle, a series centered around the attempt to reform the prison system of Pennsylvania into something more Nordic than its current iteration.<sup>115</sup> According to Tomas Lindh their Breaking the Cycle was part of the inspiration to reform the Pennsylvania correction facilities.<sup>116</sup> The documentaries from John Stark and Tomas Lindh are perhaps the best posterchild for nordic documantaries as they have not only managed to inform hundreds of thousands of American about different segments of nordic society as they did in The Norden, but also managed to promote nordic ideals and policy ideas in America through the direct communication which was established as part of their documentary production.

A cheaper alternative to creating new content about the nordics would be to simply provide increased access to preproduced movies, series and documentaries to American educational and political actors. This can be done by providing subtitles for nordic media of interest in the desired language, this simply allows for a larger international audience and it also provides international content creators the ability to react and comment to more nordic content. Once again, the Norden is a great example of such translation because the documentary itself was published on Netflix an international platform and therefore required translation into a number of languages.

The proposals above can be collected and distributed through a Nordic center for foreign interest, a type of digital information center for foreign citizens who aim to know more about the Nordic countries. There are already websites that aim to provide such services, see for

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<sup>113</sup> (John Stark. 2017. The humane prison system of Norway presented to staff at Attica Prison)

<sup>114</sup> (Fra Halden til Attica. 2017)

<sup>115</sup> (Paddison 2019)

<sup>116</sup> (Appendix A – Screenshot 1.2)

instance thenordics.com and thenorden.com. thenordics.com is a website which primary goal is to position the Nordics within the context of a larger international community, attempting to provide examples of how Nordics ideas have taken hold throughout the world. Norden.org on the other hand is the official website of the Nordic council of ministers, which consists of members of parliament from their respective Nordic nation. This website is dedicated to providing information on current Nordic initiatives, describing Nordic conditions and international co-operation, effectively covering much of Nordic society. These websites may well be fitting for facilitating the distribution of translated and new documentaries about the Nordic that could be of interest to the world and which the Nordic would have an interest in sharing. The norden.org website is already available in English, as such it would not require much for it to facility new content. The website does however have some major flaws as a redistribution platform for international. The first issue is the lacking popularity of the website itself, according to SimilarWeb, an online service that tracks engagement on websites, norden.org had an estimated 141,000 visits during April 2020.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, the average duration of a visit on norden.org is 1 minute and 23 seconds which means that a large percentage of the visitors leave the website before gaining any substantive information about the Nordics. On top of that, the country, outside of the Nordics, from which the website gains the most visitors is the United States which make up around five percent of the total visitors, meaning that only around 8,000 Americans visited the website in the month of April. Note that these numbers are all estimates and that the most accurate estimates can only be obtained through the server provide of norden.org. Nevertheless, assuming the numbers stated by SimilarWeb are within the ballpark of the actual numbers, the popularity of the website is extremely low. Another issue with the website is the fact that most of the information one can access on the norden.org is uploaded as either articles or academic reports, which is a great way of packing informative research but a lackluster way of distributing it. I believe the Nordic council indirectly acknowledges this as they also host podcast, a more up-to-date medium, on their website. Unfortunately, even the podcasts seem to attract little attention, despite the fact they host some very influential people inside and outside governance. A good illustration is a series of five episodes in which the Nordic council teamed up with The Foreign Desk podcast, the episode called “The Foreign Desk: The threats to democracy” is the most highlighted

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<sup>117</sup> (Norden.org April 2020 overview. SimilarWeb)

podcast episode on norden.org even though the episode is from October 26th, 2019.<sup>118</sup> The episode hosts the following guests:

- Margrethe Vestager, European Commissioner for Competition at the EU Commission
- Robert Strand, Sustainability Professor at University of California, Berkeley
- Christine Sørensen, Public Policy and Government Relations Manager at Google
- Katrín Jakobsdóttir, Iceland's Prime Minister
- Natascha Linn Feli, Chair of the Board at Denmark's Transparency International
- Jessica Aro, Journalist from Finland

Despite, this impressive lineup of guests, the episode only has a total of 18.4 thousand plays more than six months after its upload.<sup>119</sup> 18 thousand people are still a lot of people, but considering the fact that the podcast had a Prime Minister and a European Commissioner as guests, the podcast should be able to attract more listeners. Comparing these 18 thousand plays to some of the channels and videos I have discussed earlier in this paper, it is hard not to think that these guests would all be able to attract a much larger audience by inviting themselves on the air of established political figures. I am naturally assuming in this argument that people with the political influence and clout as Margrethe Vestager and Katrín Jakobsdóttir would be able to establish an interview with a number of content creators. A presumption made in this argument is that the intention of a podcast is to reach the public, an assumption I find reasonable based on the fact that the guests agreed to participate a podcast rather than a private discussion board, it is therefore reasonable to assume that intention was to spread the information exchanged during the podcast. This paper would argue that the resources and time of these guests could be spent more efficiently by leeching of larger independent political figures on YouTube, Vestager for instance had made an international name for herself as one of the toughest regulators of large tech companies as a result of the multi-billion dollar fine she pushed as EU Competition Commissioner. Vestager's position as Competition Commissioner would likely make her a very attractive guest at Secular Talk, as Kulinski on multiple occasions have broadcasted his thoughts on social media and tech company regulation and their function as a public square due to their enormous market shares.<sup>120</sup> Now why would this be efficient spending of Vestager's time? Well, it is almost a guarantee that her appearance on Secular Talk would generate a larger audience than her appearance on The Foreign Desk pod cast.

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<sup>118</sup> (The Foreign Desk: The threats to democracy. 2019)

<sup>119</sup> (The Foreign Desk – The threats to democracy. 2019. Soundcloud)

<sup>120</sup> (Secular Talk. 2018. Should Free Speech Apply On Giant Social Media Platforms?)

Additionally, arguments and ideas presented by Kulinski himself would have a very real chance of reaching even more influential political figures such as members of Justice Democrat leadership or be brought up on the Joe Rogan Experience by Kulinski himself.

Despite, the lack of engagement on Norden.org the Nordic Council as an organization could play a vital role in the creation of increased communication as they have large political clout and access to influential political figures in the entire Nordic region. It would therefore be beneficial to have the Nordic Council be the facilitator of international engagement with Nordic ideals. The ability of the Nordic Council to arrange influential people is already evidenced in the collaboration with The Foreign Desk podcast, and it could therefore also be extended to include communication with an ever growing online political presence of independent voices.

By including the approaches to new media that have been laid out in this chapter, the Nordic countries would be among the first nations in the world to recognize the political potential of social media. We have already discussed the large reach and insider influence, which some of these political commentators possess, yet despite this, there is very little recognition among traditional media and mainstream politics of their relevance in the political discourse. It is easy to not take an independent voice on YouTube seriously as he broadcasts his or hers unfiltered opinions from their living room, but it important that we do not miss an opportunity to reach the millions of potential citizens, voters and consumers who make up their audience. This is exactly the reason why it is my recommendation that the Nordics invest resources into potential partnerships with politically influential figures which have their origin in social media. Based on the available data presented in this paper, it is reasonable to argue that social media distribution of information is the most cost efficient pathway for smaller nation states which do not have the necessary resources to launch large scale campaigns. The recommendations presented are naturally dependent on a continuation ongoing traditional diplomacy, as function rather as an additional pathway and catalyst for already established strategies.

## Conclusion

In the beginning of my research for this paper I set out to answer the following questions “*To which degree can the Nordics be labeled politically influential in an American political context? Furthermore, to what extent can such a position be considered beneficial to the Nordics?*” To answer the first question on Nordic political influence in America I used a multifaceted approach to the collection of data from multiple aspects of the American political discourse. This paper has looked at American perceptions of the Nordics, policy alignments, media presence of the Scandinavian countries, presence of Nordic countries in Democratic

presidential primary debates and subsequent discourse analysis of said presence, lastly this paper included the presence of Scandinavian countries in official White House publications under the Trump administration. In each of these instances I found that the Nordics occupy a measurable and often times increasing presence within the American political discourse. In the case of media presence, this paper provided proof that showed that certain American news outlets had significantly increased the coverage of Nordic countries compared to other European nation within the last year relative to the historic coverage of the same countries. The analysis within this paper shows that media coverage of Norway relative to the coverage of France in The New York Times has increased by 64% within the last year compared to the historic trends, dating back to 1851. Denmark almost tripled its relative coverage in the NYT compared to Germany and Swedish coverage remained almost unchanged compared to Italian coverage despite the fact that Italy saw a massive increase in coverage resulting from the early days of the COVID-19 crisis which hit Italy disproportionately hard. Diving in to several example of the mentions of the Nordic countries, I found that in the case of a New York Times article Denmark was being used as an example of a country which based on its strong welfare programs had been able to handle the economic consequences much more effectively than the United States, additionally, the article revealed that references to Denmark as a welfare state is common within America, citing that Denmark has “famously strong safety nets.” Additional analysis of a Washington Post article from 2018 discussed President Trump’s comments on “Shithole countries” and Norway, this article embraces Norway, in a similar fashion to the NYT description of Denmark, Norway as a competent country which in many ways has faired better than the United States of America. The increased coverage and positive discussion of Nordic countries in U.S. media is clearly supportive of the claim that the Nordic play an influential role in American political discourse, especially the fact that American interest, according to the collected data, is rising is indicative of an increasing influence. In alignment with these findings is the data collected through the nine Democratic primary debates from the 2016 presidential election cycle. This paper illustrated that Nordic countries had an equal or larger role in the debate discussions compared to other European nations such as Germany, Italy, Spain and Poland among many others. This is a very significant data point as the paper argues that political debates are to be perceived as the purest form of the political discourse, due to its immense reach of audience and electoral importance. The data which I collected also proved that while the Nordics occupy a disproportionately large presence in American, there are nations which occupy a significantly larger role, such as Russia, China, France and the United Kingdom in addition to the most mentioned countries, the middle eastern nations in

which the United States is militarily engaged. Nevertheless, function of the Scandinavian countries in the Democratic debates is one of interest as the three Nordic countries were the only nations which were referred to solely as something which the United States could find political solutions. The discussion which surrounded the Nordic, and especially Denmark, was whether or not American should imitate Danish society, a stance which Bernie Sanders was in favor of and one which Hillary Clinton rejected. The discussion highlights the specific role of the Nordics as countries which are introduced into the political discourse for their policy ideas rather than their cultural importance in America society or due to a major event occurring, as for instance France with a major terror attack in Paris. Based on the increased coverage, Democratic debate presence and specific policy focus on Nordic countries, this paper based on its collected data argues that the Nordic can indeed be labeled as an influential political entity in American society. The significant presence of Scandinavia in America is remarkable due to the large disparity in population and economy size between the countries in question and while evidence illustrate that other larger countries may impact the U.S. more, there is little doubt that the Nordics are punching above their weight in terms of foreign influence.

In terms of the benefits which the Nordics gain from being an influential force in American political discourse one can divide them into two categories, the first being political and the second being economic. If we start out by looking at the political benefits, this paper found that Americans in recent years have been increasingly supportive of policy changes which is in alignment with a more social democratic worldview, and therefore also in alignment with a Nordic worldview. This in and of itself is a beneficial evolution to the Nordic countries as it is indicative of successful branding of Nordic ideals, in reality this translates to an America that is more likely to provide the same human rights, worker's rights and welfare programs which the people of the Nordics believe in. Furthermore, being in the spotlight also positions the Nordics in a stronger position diplomatically which in turn can be beneficial in future economic or political dealings. While the political impact of the Nordic presence in American discourse should be considered the main achievement of Scandinavian influence, data presented in this thesis also suggests that there is an economic upside the American interest in Scandinavia. This economic gain can be observed in the data on American tourism which clearly shows a large influx of nights spend in both Denmark and Sweden by American citizens following the year 2015. The increase in American tourism in Denmark and Sweden in the time period 2015-2019 is in fact so significant that the rate at which Americans visit the two Scandinavian countries outpace the increase of Chinese visitors. While none of the Nordic countries rely on tourism as their primary industries, the foreign investment which American tourism represents is not an

insignificant benefit to the Nordic tourism industries. Based on the changes in American support for social democratic ideas, the overwhelmingly high favorability ratings of Norway and the increase in American visitors to the Nordics is reasonable to argue that based on the data presented in this thesis that the Nordic region has in several ways benefitted from the increased political attention in the United States of America. However, I also argue that the increased coverage has led to increased misconceptions of what defines that Nordic societies, this especially is true for misinterpretation that the Nordics are socialist societies, a label which can be very harmful to the image of a country. Jan-Erik Støstad from SAMAK similarly worried about the misconceptions of the Nordic model and expressed a wish to correct the record.

Due to the danger of American misconceptions, this thesis set out to develop new political pathways for influencing the American political discourse, by directly inserting the Nordics into the political dialogue. The recommendations which I put forth in this paper are meant as supplementary diplomatic tools, which support the traditional diplomatic practices. It is my argument that smaller countries such as Denmark, Norway and Sweden must necessarily conduct foreign influence in a different manner than larger nations such as the United States. The Nordics do not have the economic or military capabilities to influence large scale changes within larger foreign nations, they should therefore make use of direct diplomacy to the citizens and inspire change through the popularization of Nordic ideas. I argue in this paper that social media represents an untapped potential for spreading Nordic political values and ideals. This is especially the case for smaller nations as social media is defined by its low cost of content production coupled with a large organic audience. These two things enable social media to be the medium through which small economies can promote their ideals, systems, and programs. By employing a national or regional foreign policy which includes the use already established social media content creators, it is my belief that the Nordics can accelerate the promotion on Nordic ideas in America while also dispelling the misconceptions of socialist society.

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