

COPENHAGEN  
INSTITUTE  
FOR FUTURES  
STUDIES



2025

# FUTURES BAROMETER

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FOR FUTURES  
STUDIES



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*November 2025*



# Introduction

What do Danes think about when they imagine the future?

The *Futures Barometer 2025* provides insights into Danes' expectations, hopes, and concerns about the future – both on a personal and collective level – and examines their views on the connection between political decision-making and foresight.

The Barometer is based on a survey developed by the Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies (*Instituttet for Fremtidsforskning*) in collaboration with Epinion.

Mapping the public's views of the future is not merely an academic exercise. Ideas about the future can both reflect societal change and reveal why we act as we do today. Optimism and pessimism about the future, for example, can arise both as reactions to broader societal developments (demographic, economic, or otherwise) and shape change themselves. Pessimism – the belief that society is moving in the wrong direction and that our descendants' lives will be worse than our own – can lead to apathy and risks undermining social cohesion and the effectiveness of the political system. Conversely, optimism and a sense of agency – the belief that we can to some extent shape the future – can function as motivating and productive forces, both individually and collectively.

Beliefs about the future thus act as a mirror of our times and signal of times ahead. They reveal the potential interplay between how we experience the world around us and the actions that will shape the future. Understanding how Danes view the future is also about understanding the narratives, emotions, and expectations that motivate us as individuals and as a community.

The *Futures Barometer* is divided into two parts. The first part examines Danes' hopes, concerns, and expectations for the future. Perhaps the most striking result is that optimism about the future – understood as the belief that our descendants' lives will be better than our own – is shared only by a minority of Danes in 2025. Most are either pessimistic on behalf of future generations or believe that life will be neither worse nor better for them. We also ask about Danes' sense of responsibility toward future generations and take a closer look at which visions of the future fuel hope and fear.

In the second part of the Barometer, we delve into the interaction between political decision-making and foresight. Here, we examine Danes' opinions on whether today's political decisions take sufficient account of the long term and whether the political system is equipped to handle the challenges of the future. We also gauge public support for initiatives that could strengthen the connection between political decision-making and future-oriented methods.



The survey builds on the first edition of the *Futures Barometer* from 2023 but has been updated where relevant and expanded with new questions. The report therefore also highlights developments in Danes' attitudes where data from both 2023 and 2025 exist.

The 2025 dataset consists of 1,003 responses that are nationally representative in terms of gender, age, and region. The data was collected by Epinion via a web panel between July 18 and August 4, 2025.

The Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies would like to thank the Finnish innovation fund Sitra, whose *Futures Barometer* inspired us to develop a Danish version in 2023.

The Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies is an independent, non-profit think-tank founded in 1969. By building the capabilities necessary to address potential futures we help create a society fit to meet the challenges and grasp the opportunities we face.

As a part of the *Danish Coalition for Future Generations*, a gathering point for relevant actors across sectors, we work to promote the wellbeing of future generations.

# SUMMARY

## *of Results*

- **Danes are divided between hope and concern for the future, with a slight preponderance for hopefulness. Half (52%) are hopeful, while a slightly smaller share (43%) primarily view the future with concern.**
- **Half of Danes (52%) feel a strong sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of their descendants, while only 10% do not feel any responsibility.**
- **Optimism about the future – understood as the belief that our descendants' lives will be better than our own – is shared by only a minority of Danes in 2025. A quarter (24%) expect a better life for their descendants while a third (32%) expect life will be worse or much worse for them.**



- **War and peace are significant sources of concern and hope.**
- **Most Danes (64%) believe that political decisions in Denmark are often characterised by short-term thinking rather than efforts to create sustainable solutions for the next 10–20 years.**
- **Danes are calling for more vision in politics – something 55% believe is lacking in the political debate. Few Danes (14%) have a high level of confidence in the political system's ability to handle long-term challenges.**
- **Danes have a positive view of initiatives aimed at creating a closer connection between political decision-making and foresight.**

The background is a complex abstract composition. It features overlapping circles in shades of blue, orange, and green. White wavy lines and concentric circles are scattered across the scene. In the lower-left quadrant, there is a stylized illustration of a hand in blue and green tones, reaching upwards. The text 'Part I' is centered in a large, black, italicized serif font.

# *Part I*



# DANES AND THE FUTURE

**In the first part of the Futures Barometer, we take a closer look at Danes' hopes, concerns and expectations for the future – and the differences between them. We place the results in an international context and compare them with similar studies conducted in other countries. Finally, we examine the themes that characterise the hopes and concerns of Danes for the next 10-20 years.**

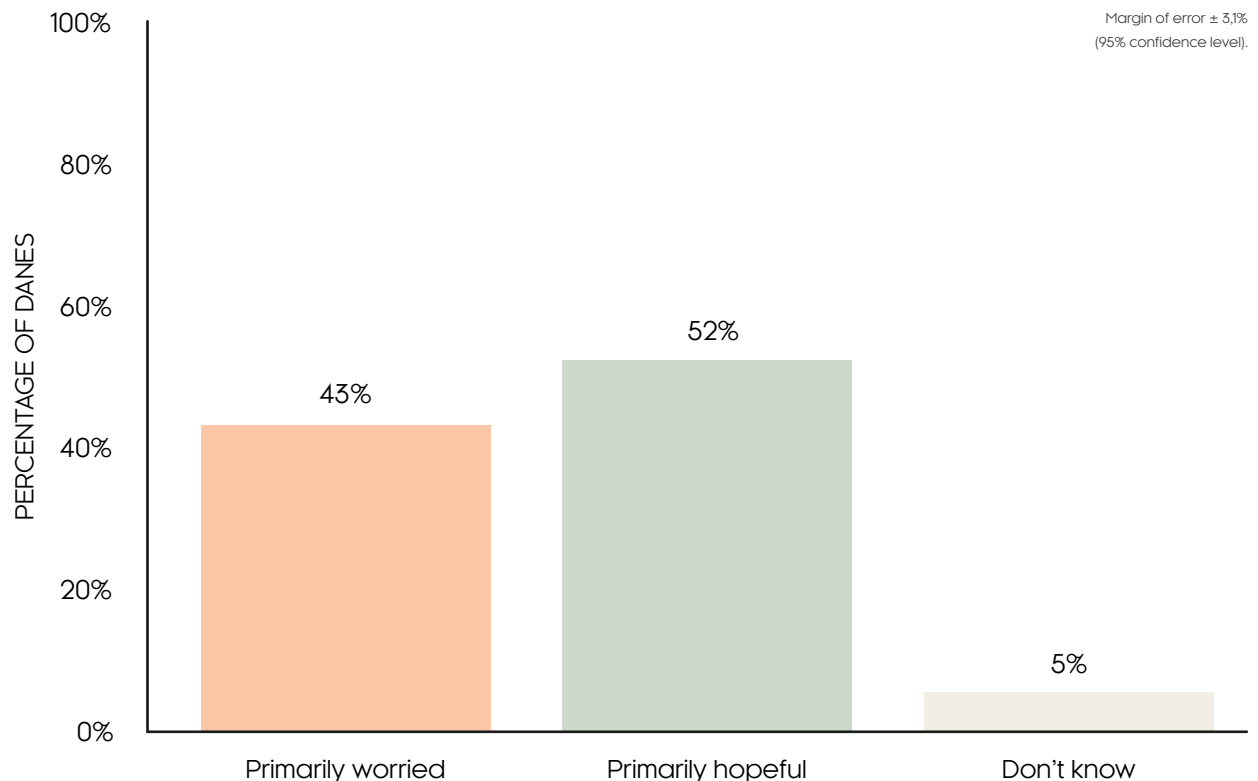


# Hope and responsibility, yes – but not faith in the future

The future means something different to each of us. For some, it arouses curiosity and hope, for others, anxiety and doubt. So how do Danes view the future as a whole? In the first part of the survey, we asked Danes to answer how they view the future, both for themselves and for society.

Just over half (52%) are hopeful, while a slightly smaller proportion (43%) are primarily concerned about the future.

## QUESTION: HOW DO YOU PERSONALLY VIEW THE FUTURE OVER THE NEXT 10–20 YEARS?



However, there are significant differences lying behind these figures. Men are generally more hopeful (56%), while women are almost equally divided between hope and concern (47% and 48% respectively). The youngest generations are more hopeful about the future – among 18-30-year-olds, 56% are hopeful – with concern increasing with age. Only 44% of those over 65 describe themselves as hopeful about the future.

Income and political affiliation also play a role. Lower household income is correlated with being more concerned about the future. The higher the household income, the more hopeful Danes are. Similarly, the further out on the political spectrum we look, the stronger the feelings of hope or concern tend to be – with greater hopefulness on the right and greater concern on the left.

Whereas hope and concern often reflect more immediate, emotional moods, a different picture emerges when we look at Danes' expectations for the future – specifically when it comes to the lives of their descendants.

Just over half of Danes (52%) feel a strong or very strong sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of their descendants – with significant differences across groups. Only 10% do not feel any responsibility. However, there is one particular trait that unites Danes across age, gender, income and political affiliation: a widespread expectation that future generations will not be better off than themselves. Only a quarter (24%) expect a better life for their descendants, while 32% believe that life will be worse or much worse for them. In other words, we hope for a better future and feel responsible for bringing it about, but we do not necessarily have faith in it.



# *Faith in progress has lost its footing*

Since the post-war period, it has been central to our social and cultural self-understanding that each generation would be better off than the one before. That faith in progress now appears to have been shaken.

Today, only a quarter of Danes believe their descendants will have a better life than their own, while a third expect it to be worse – in other words, optimism about the future is a view shared by only a minority of Danes in 2025.

**QUESTION: HOW DO YOU THINK YOUR DESCENDANTS' LIVES WILL BE IN THE FUTURE COMPARED TO YOUR LIFE TODAY?**



**24%**  
BETTER

Margin of error  $\pm 3,1\%$   
(95% confidence level).



**32%**  
WORSE

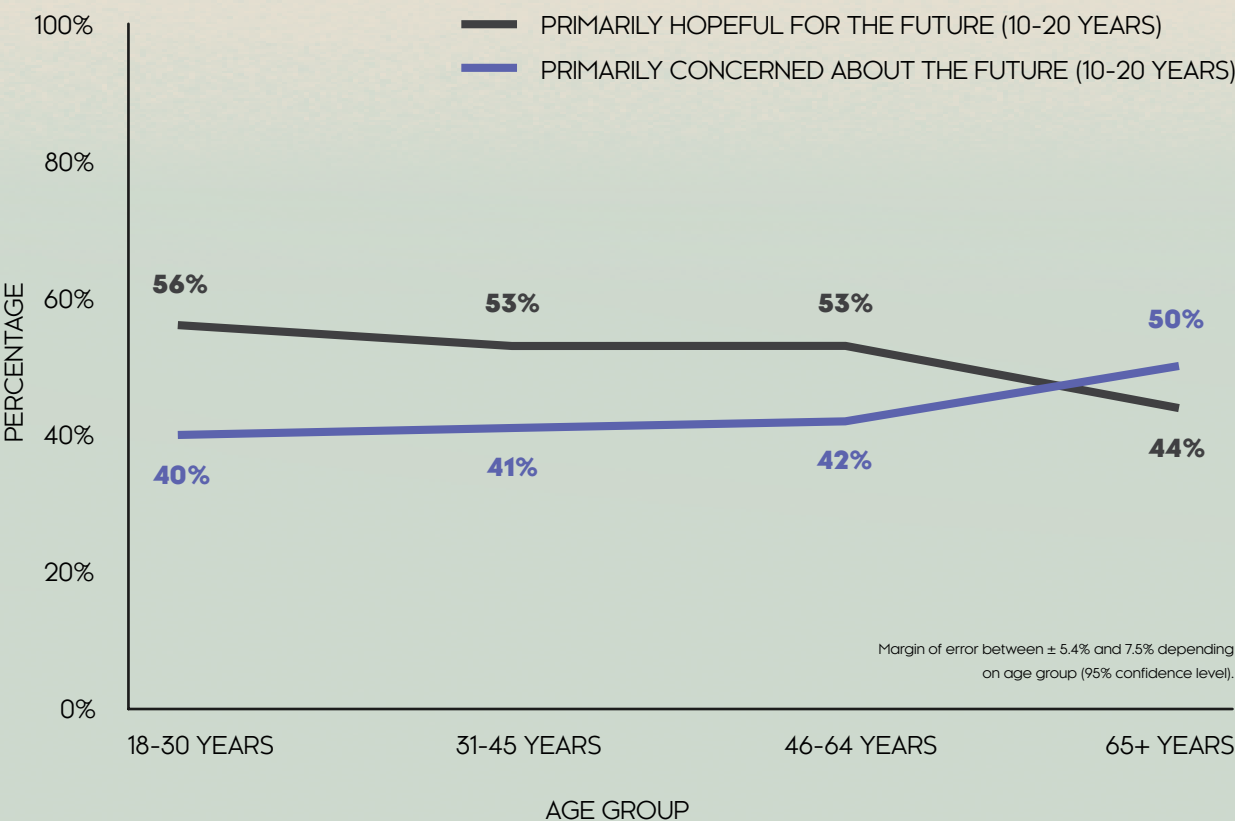


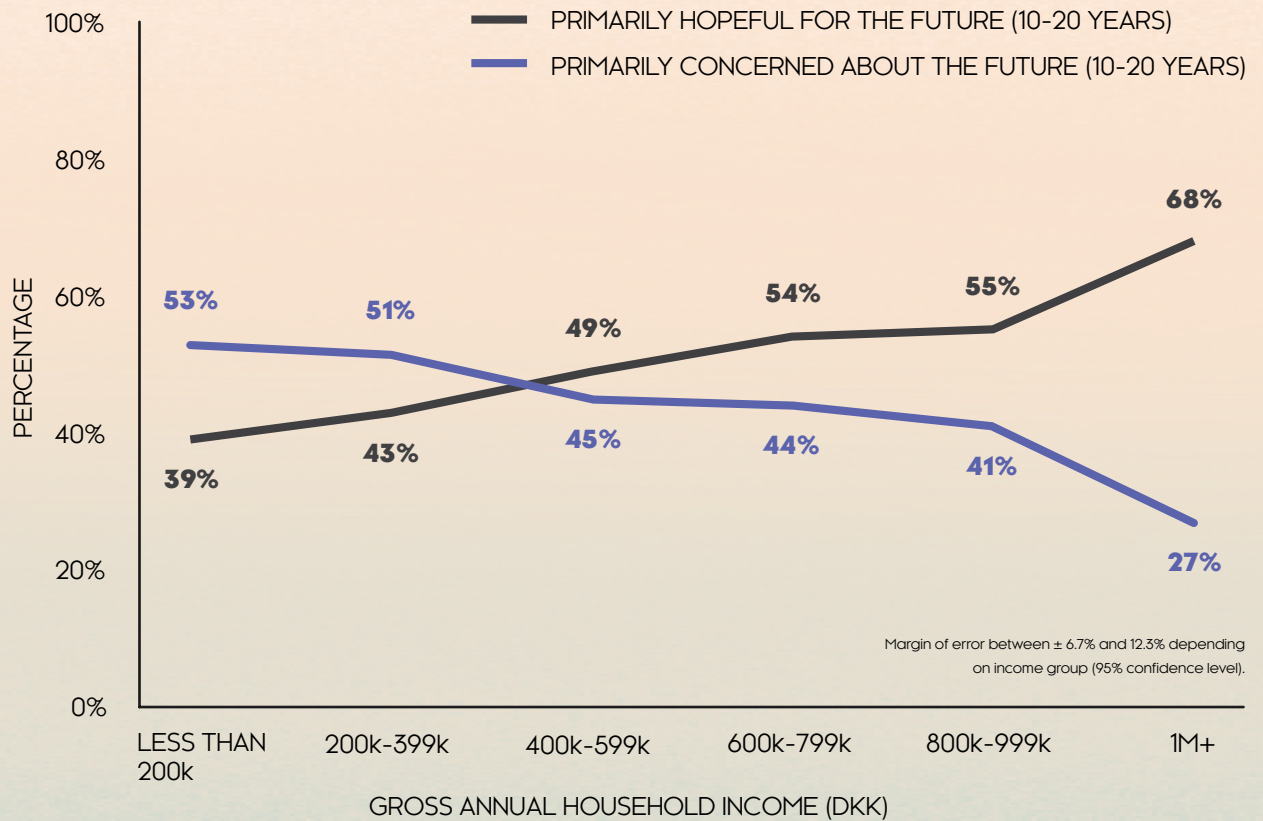
**36%**  
NEITHER  
BETTER  
N O R  
W O R S E

# WHO IS MORE HOPEFUL FOR THE FUTURE?

Danes find themselves somewhere between hope and concern when looking toward the future. Age and income are two examples of factors that can influence which side we lean toward.

The results in Denmark reflect a general trend also seen in other countries: younger people tend to pull the average toward hopefulness, while older people tend to pull it toward concern.





Income is — perhaps unsurprisingly — closely linked to whether Danes view the future with hope or concern. Hopefulness is most pronounced among those with the highest household incomes, where two-thirds describe themselves as primarily hopeful.

## We have faith in our own future, yet doubt that of the collective

Many Danes manage to remain hopeful even when expectations for the future are low – and there may be several reasons for this. Hope can be linked both to a general, collective future – society, the world, and the planet – and to a more personal and immediate future – one's own life situation. The tendency to view our own future with optimism while doubting that of the collective is well documented and known under terms such as the *optimism gap* and the *future personal exemption fallacy*.<sup>1</sup>

Take the following illustrative example: over a period of about 20 years, Eurobarometer measured Europeans' expectations for the future – both in relation to their own job situation and to the economy at large. Europeans' expectations for their own situation remained remarkably stable over two decades: around 60% believed that their circumstances would remain unchanged, while 20% expected improvements. However, the same respondents' expectations for the state of the economy fluctuated in line with economic cycles. Recessions such as those that followed the dot-com bubble and the financial crisis had a clear negative impact on assessments of the general economic situation, but even under more gloomy conditions, confidence in one's own circumstances remained stable.<sup>2</sup>

Among Danes, we see a correlation between hopefulness and income, which supports this interpretation: our personal economic circumstances – and the degree of security this provides – influence our general outlook in a positive or negative direction.

So perhaps the contrast is not so strange. Whereas questions of hope and fear tell us something about an emotional baseline that relates both to the collective and the personal future – and may therefore also reflect an *optimism gap* – the question of expectations for the circumstances of future generations invites a more analytical or concrete reflection on whether our descendants will be better or worse off than ourselves. It is here – in expectations for the well-being of our descendants – that we can see signs of a pronounced future pessimism among Danes.

## In an age of future pessimism

The declining confidence in the future captured by the *Futures Barometer* is not surprising. On the contrary, we seem to encounter this pessimism everywhere. The worsening climate crisis, trade wars, geopolitical and economic uncertainty, a

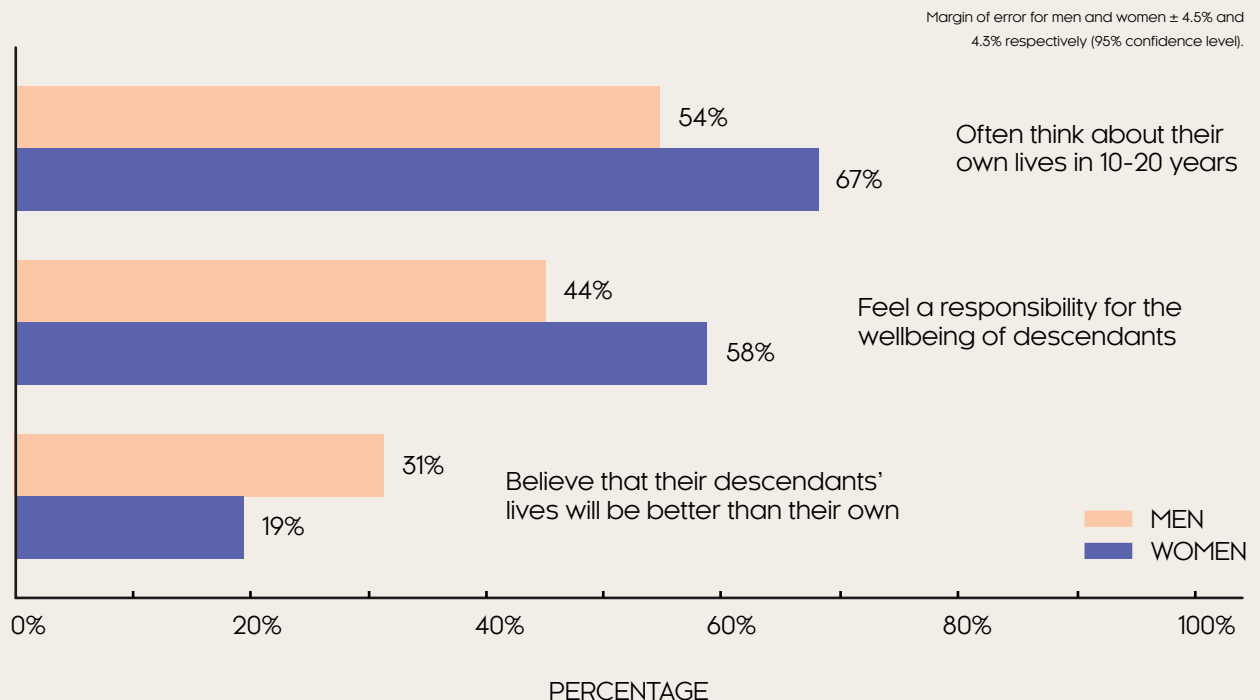


# *Why do men and women view the future differently?*

Women generally think more about their own future than men do. They also feel a stronger sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of their descendants than men, and fewer women than men believe that their descendants' lives will be better than their own.

Why do such clear differences exist? Are they a result of socialisation and ingrained gender roles – including differences in attitudes to risk, responsibility, and change, and who feels obligated to future generations? Or do they stem from more material factors such as income, or perhaps from biological differences?

There are likely several factors at play. What is clear, however, is that to truly understand our view of the future, we must also understand the conditions that shape our outlook.



protracted war in Europe, rising inequality and global democratic backsliding are all issues with consequences that extend far into the future. The atomic bomb was once the great, imminent threat. Today, new existential risks – most recently artificial intelligence – have joined it in fuelling widespread concern about the future.

Other studies have documented similar patterns of future pessimism across countries, especially in relation to the economy. In a 2025 *Pew Research Center* survey of 36 nations, the median response showed that 57% believe their descendants will be worse off than their parents, while 34% expect them to be better off. Economic inequality seems to play a key role in shaping these expectations for the future.<sup>3</sup>

Low expectations for the future are most pronounced in high-income countries such as the United States, Canada, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Sweden. Across these affluent societies, substantial portions of the population now believe that children will be worse off financially than their parents, that the best times are behind us, and that we must prepare for a future with more modest prosperity and fewer economic opportunities.

Economics is, of course, only one piece of the puzzle. A more general pessimism about the future can also be traced across large parts of the world. This was underscored by a March 2025 survey by Ipsos which measured the future expectations of the population in 29 countries. Participants were asked to assess whether their country was heading in the right or wrong direction. In this survey, too, high-income countries with ageing populations were at the more pessimistic end of the scale – including France, South Korea, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands and Sweden.

The pessimism about the future observed in Denmark is therefore part of a wider global narrative and reflects not just individual attitudes toward life, but also deeper demographic, political, and economic shifts.

## **Faith in the future shifts in accordance with the world's demographic centre of gravity**

Although pessimism is widespread, it's far from universal. In low- and middle-income economies with relatively young populations – countries such as Singapore,

Malaysia, Indonesia and India – a more optimistic outlook prevails. Another Ipsos survey – this one from 2018 – highlighted the contrast: as many as 8 out of 10 young people (79%) between the ages of 12 and 24 from low- and middle-income countries responded that they were optimistic about the future, while only about half of young people in high-income countries felt the same way.<sup>4</sup>

When the Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies interviewed Ipsos CEO Darrell Bricker for FARSIGHT magazine in 2024, he expressed his view that the demographic imbalance between larger, older generations and smaller, younger generations could be one reason why pessimism about the future is rife in parts of the world with significant ageing populations:

“I think in developed countries, it’s young people comparing themselves to what their parents achieved, while in the developing ones, it’s to what their parents simply didn’t have [...] Generational tensions will be driven by the fact that you’ve got this group of young people – which is not as big or young as a lot of people assume that it is – feeling that they’ve been left out. Even if they are innovative or expanding their skillset, opportunities are not going to come as easily as they did to their parents or grandparents.”<sup>5</sup>

If Danes are predominantly pessimistic about the future, what characterises their concerns – and conversely, what gives them hope for the future?

## **War and peace are significant sources of fear and hope**

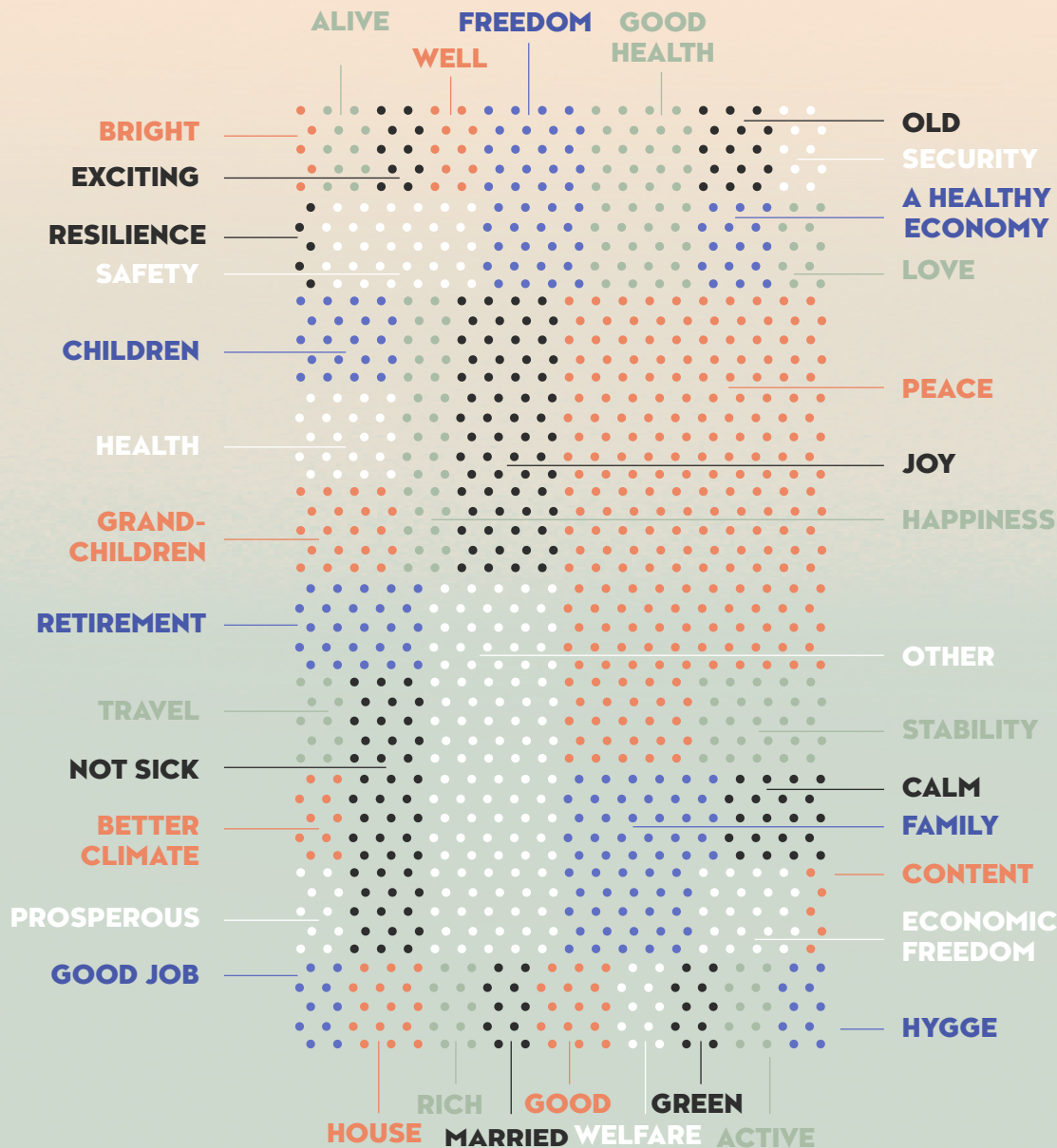
We asked Danes to write three words describing what the future looks like in 2040 if it has turned out as they both feared and hoped for. The answers relate both to personal themes – the respondents' own lives – and to the general state of the world in the future. We compiled the open responses in a model representing how often similar words and themes recur (see page 20).

On a personal level, loneliness, illness, poverty and death are the main fears. Hope, on the other hand, is fuelled by family, freedom, security, physical health and wellbeing. When it comes to perceptions of the world as a whole, fear of war and hope for peace most clearly dominate responses.

The result is thought-provoking, but perhaps not surprising. In the fourth year of the Russia-Ukraine war, the prospect of a lasting peace still seems distant. The world is not necessarily a more conflict-ridden place today than in the past, but a

# WAR AND PEACE LOOM LARGEST

THE YEAR IS 2040, AND THE FUTURE HAS TURNED OUT AS DANES HAD HOPED...

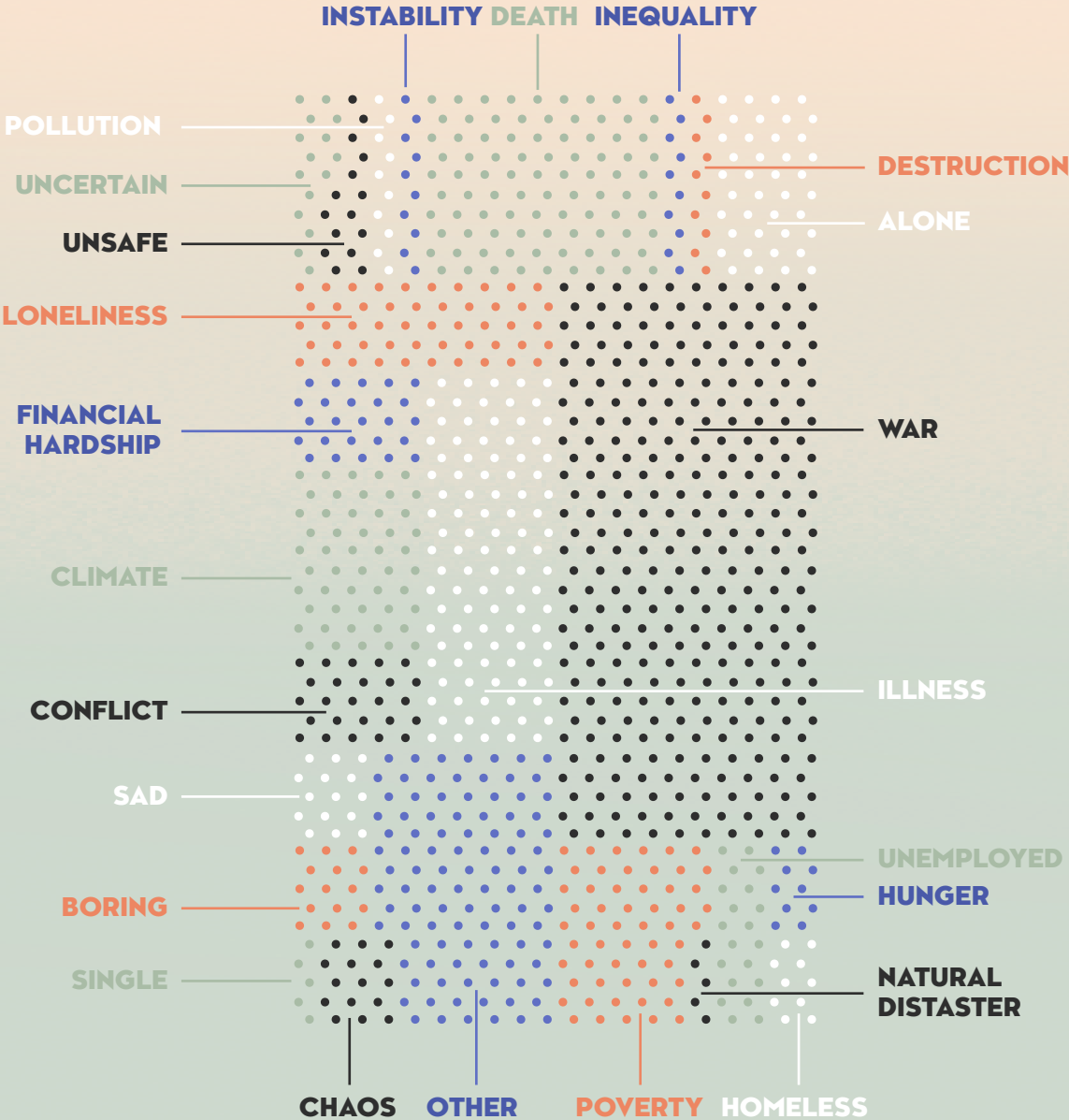


● Represents one (1) response



NOTE: The models are based on respondents' descriptive words about the future. Each respondent has provided up to three words. Words with similar meanings have been recoded under a shared label – for example, "climate change" has been coded as "climate." Question wording: "Imagine that it is 2040, and the future has turned out as you hoped/feared. What does your life and the world look like? Choose three descriptive words." Each dataset is visualised as a field of 1,000 dots, with each dot representing one response. To make the visualisation more readable, the dots are grouped in units of five, and the number of responses are rounded up or down to the nearest group. Thus, only complete groups (five, ten, fifteen, etc.) are shown – never partial groups, such as four or six dots.

THE YEAR IS 2040, AND THE FUTURE HAS TURNED OUT AS DANES HAD FEARED...



# WHAT WORRIES THE DANES?

"War across the world – perhaps a third world war."

**Woman** 61 years old

"There is too much talk and too little action in politics in general, along with a growing number of civil servants in the central administration. [...] They have become a kind of "new nobility," steering politicians with the help of spin doctors."

**Man** 71 years old

"I worry because of all the political unrest around the world at the moment."

**Man** 44 years old

"Not enough is being done to address the climate crisis."

**Woman** 77 years old

"In my view, many young people are making really poor choices [...] laziness, immigration and religion, snus, drugs – and then the way they present themselves: what they care about and, for some, what they identify as, which everyone else is expected to accommodate."

**Woman** 57 years old

"Whether I can make ends meet – you can neither live nor die on a state pension."

**Woman** 64 years old

# ... AND WHAT GIVES THEM HOPE FOR THE FUTURE?

"I'm well and have lovely children – and plenty of grandchildren."

**Man** 75 years old

"We're financially secure right now, and certain private loans and investments will pay out in the future."

**Man** 56 years old

"There is a growing emphasis on community and social responsibility."

**Man** 23 years old

"I think we'll see many technological advances that will help drive the green transition."

**Man** 25 years old

"Politicians and dictators don't live forever."

**Woman** 60 years

"I always try to maintain a positive view of the future."

**Woman** 56 years old

Question wording: "Why are you primarily hopeful or concerned about the future? Please provide examples or reasons for your choice."

conflict on the European continent on this scale has not been seen since the Second World War. Moreover, the war has featured prominently in both the media and political debate, and Denmark is among one of the countries that has provided the most financial support to Ukraine since 2022. Yet it isn't just a local phenomenon: the same picture applies across Europe and is reflected in other studies. A Eurobarometer opinion poll published in the summer of 2024 showed that half of Europeans consider the war in Ukraine to be the biggest challenge facing the EU.<sup>6</sup>

The threat from the United States regarding Greenland may also contribute to fuelling fears of conflict, just as other global uncertainties may help explain the trend: NATO's future is up for debate, the multilateral system is under pressure, and national self-interest seems to play an increasingly important role in international politics. For the first time since the Cold War, rearmament and military preparedness have become central political themes in Denmark, attracting massive investments and setting new political paths for the future. Denmark has appointed a Minister for Resilience and Preparedness, and the authorities are now urging citizens to prepare for crisis situations, including by having enough cash, food and water in their households to last for three days.

That war and peace feature prominently in Danes' visions of the future is confirmed elsewhere in the survey. Defence is the only policy area where half of the population expect future improvements – a marked increase since we first measured it in 2023. By comparison, the corresponding shares for other areas all remain below 40%.

## **The future is also about the present**

If we had asked Danes five years ago, in 2020, what their hopes and fears about the future were, the picture would likely have looked different. At that time, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine had not yet developed into an actual war. NATO, rearmament and preparedness were only minor topics in the media and political debate. Other threats and risks would probably have featured more prominently in the responses – perhaps future pandemics, which were at the forefront of everyone's minds at the time. Today, however, the conversation about future pandemics has largely fallen silent, and the topic does not feature significantly in Danes' perceptions of the future. The climate crisis may also have featured more prominently in the responses at that time – the year after the so-called "climate election" in 2019, when the climate featured more prominently in the political and public debate.<sup>7</sup>

Had we asked Danes another ten years earlier, in 2010, the financial crisis and its



aftermath might well have influenced their responses. Economic uncertainty might then have been a dominant theme in concerns about the future.

Of course, this is speculative – but it is well established that our ideas about the future are deeply intertwined with the present. The themes that dominate today’s media, politics, and public debate also tend to shape the way we imagine tomorrow. It is difficult – perhaps impossible – to disentangle the two.

The psychologist and behavioural economist Daniel Kahneman describes this as a result of the so-called *availability heuristic*: we assess the future based on the images and experiences that come most easily to mind. War today easily becomes fear of more war tomorrow – even though it is far from certain that this particular situation will endure.


The CEO of the Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies, Daria Krivonos, adds the following comments to the results:

“During the Covid crisis, the reported perceived risk of future pandemics increased, even though it was technically the same as before the pandemic in 2020 or perhaps even reduced due to the strengthened preparedness.”

“On the other hand, in 2025 we seem to be seeing a decline in concern about the impacts of climate change, which may seem irrational considering how our global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are only increasing. It is natural for our concerns to shift in response to what feels most pressing in the present. Yet it is crucial to remember that the choices we make today – how we vote, what we invest in, and where we direct public funds, including the current focus on defence – will have far-reaching consequences for a future in which our priorities may look very different.”

“Calling our expectations for the future self-fulfilling prophecies would probably be too deterministic, but it would not be wrong to say that in many ways, they will influence the future we are heading towards, even after our attention has shifted to entirely different things.”

The future is shaped by both the personal and political decisions we make in the present. In the second part of the *Futures Barometer*, we examine Danes’ views on the relationship between futures thinking and political decision-making.

The background is a complex abstract composition. It features two hands, one in a light blue/teal color and another in a darker blue, positioned as if they are about to clasp or are gently holding each other. The hands are set against a backdrop of large, flowing organic shapes in shades of orange, yellow, and green. Overlaid on these are several thin, white, concentric circular lines that create a sense of depth and movement. In the upper right corner, there are stylized, four-pointed star or leaf-like shapes in a muted blue color. The overall aesthetic is modern and artistic, with a focus on color and form.

# *Part 2*

# THE FUTURE AND POLITICS

**The second part of the Futures Barometer examines how Danes perceive the relationship between politics and futures thinking. We explore how the population perceives the long-term orientation of political decisions, the political system's ability to address future challenges, and the level of public support for initiatives that seek to strengthen the link between political decision-making and future-oriented thinking and tools (foresight).**

# Most Danes want more long-term thinking in politics

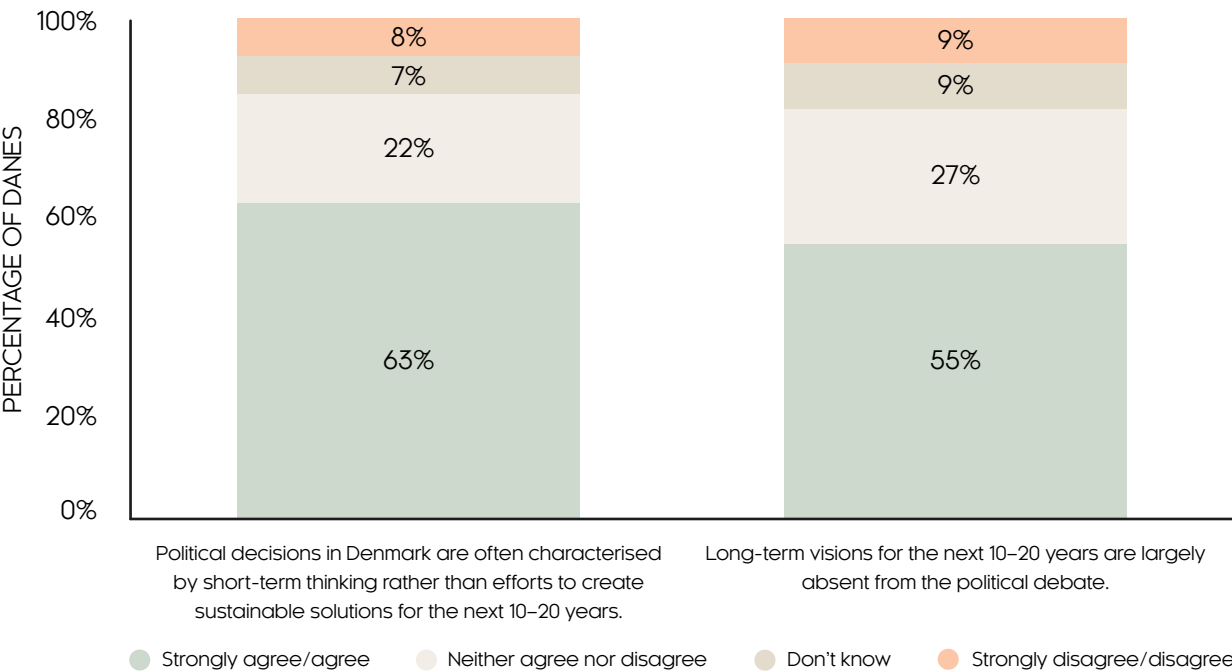
Politics is about the future – whether it concerns educational reforms, climate measures, immigration, fiscal policy, or any other area of political decision making.

But do Danes believe that the political decisions being made today take sufficient account of the long term? In this part of the Barometer, we focus on trust in political and institutional actors – and on people’s expectations of their ability to manage the challenges of the future.

63% of Danes believe that political decisions in Denmark are often characterised by short-term thinking, rather than efforts to create sustainable solutions for the next 10-20 years. This view is shared across the political spectrum – although, perhaps unsurprisingly, it is more strongly expressed among voters outside governing parties. Among Danes on each political wing, this applies to 69% (left-of-centre opposition) and 72% (right-of-centre opposition). But even among voters who would vote for a governing party, more than half (54%) agree.

## HOW DANES VIEW POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING AND THE POLITICAL DEBATE

Margin of error ± 3,1%  
(95% confidence level).

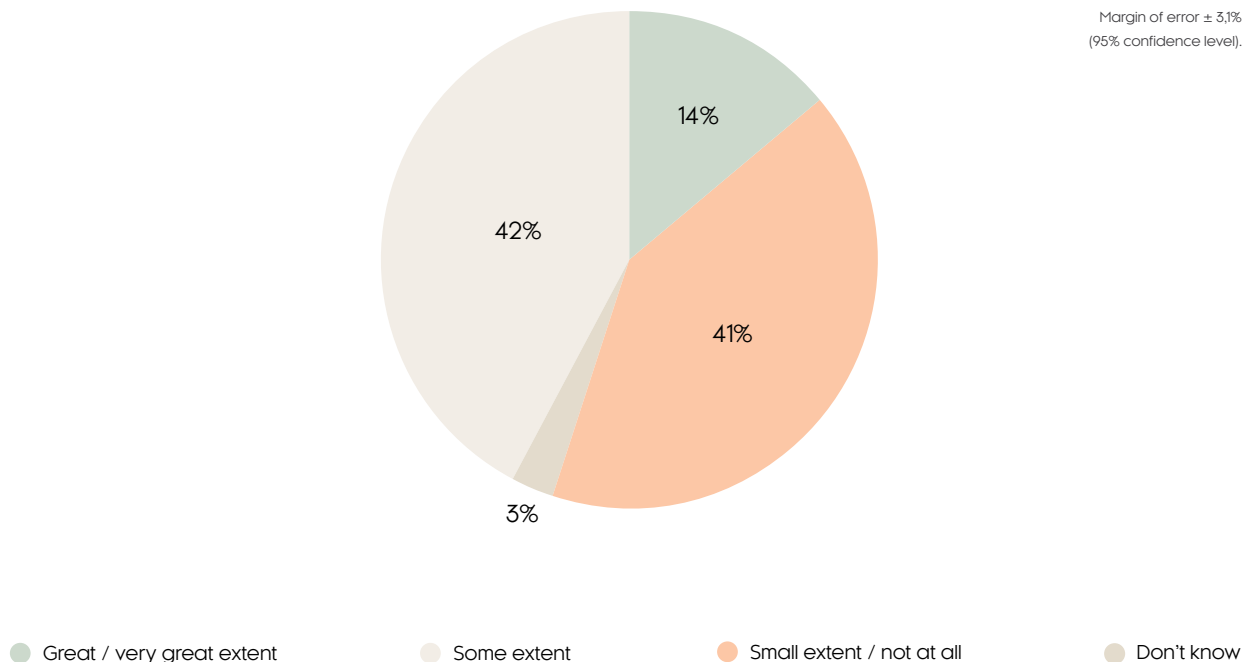


It's one thing to assess people's views on the political decisions being made here and now – decisions that can be tied to specific individuals or parties and may shift quickly. It's another to evaluate confidence in the political system's underlying ability to handle long-term challenges. Here, too, Danes show limited trust: 41% express low or very low confidence, while only 14% have high confidence.

Here, too, differences exist across the political spectrum, but among no groups is confidence in the ability to effectively address long-term issues particularly convincing. Only 12% of Danes who would vote for a party in left-of-centre opposition and 9% who would vote for a party in the right-of-centre opposition trust the current political system's ability to handle society's long-term challenges to a great or very great extent. This applies to 27% of those who would vote for one of the governing parties.

Alongside this low level of confidence, we see that Danes see a lack of long-term visions – something that 55% believe is lacking in the political debate. In the last part of the *Futures Barometer*, we asked Danes about their attitudes to specific measures that could introduce new tools for futures-thinking and long-term political decision-making.

**QUESTION: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU TRUST THAT  
THE CURRENT POLITICAL SYSTEM CAN HANDLE  
SOCIETY'S LONG-TERM CHALLENGES?**



## **Danes support measures to integrate foresight into political decision-making processes**

Any political decision-maker would claim that political measures such as raising the retirement age or developing infrastructure plans to meet future needs are forward-looking – and with good reason. However, it is important to distinguish between, on the one hand, projecting future outcomes based on the logic of the present, versus on the other hand, exploring plausible futures that break with today's logic on key points. Developing truly future-oriented policies requires mastering and balancing both approaches.

Over the past decade, several countries have developed foresight capabilities within their systems of political governance and public administration – though with widely varying levels of ambition and purpose. In countries such as Wales, Scotland, and New Zealand, the approach has been value-driven and grounded in the principles of the wellbeing economy, sustainability, and intergenerational justice. Here, the focus has often been on identifying which outcomes are most important for achieving these goals over the long term.

In other countries, such as Finland, Singapore and Spain, efforts have focused more on developing foresight competencies in governments and civil services with the ambition of shaping how – and on what knowledge base – future-oriented decisions are made.

In Denmark, there is potential to learn from these examples and strengthen political decision-making processes with tools that can help politicians and civil servants think about the future in a more long-term, explorative, and systematic way. However, such approaches have yet to be tested in practice. To gauge public support for a such an initiative in Denmark, we asked Danes about their attitudes towards two specific measures – one hypothetical initiative at the national level and one existing initiative within the EU. In both cases, Danes responded positively.

We began by looking at attitudes toward a potential national initiative. Based on the example of Wales, Danes were asked whether they would support introducing a stronger focus on the wellbeing of future generations in policymaking – specifically by appointing a Commissioner for Future Generations in Denmark.

Since 2015, Wales' Commissioner for Future Generations has been responsible for advising its current government and civil society on ensuring that future generations – people who are not yet born – have their needs met and can live

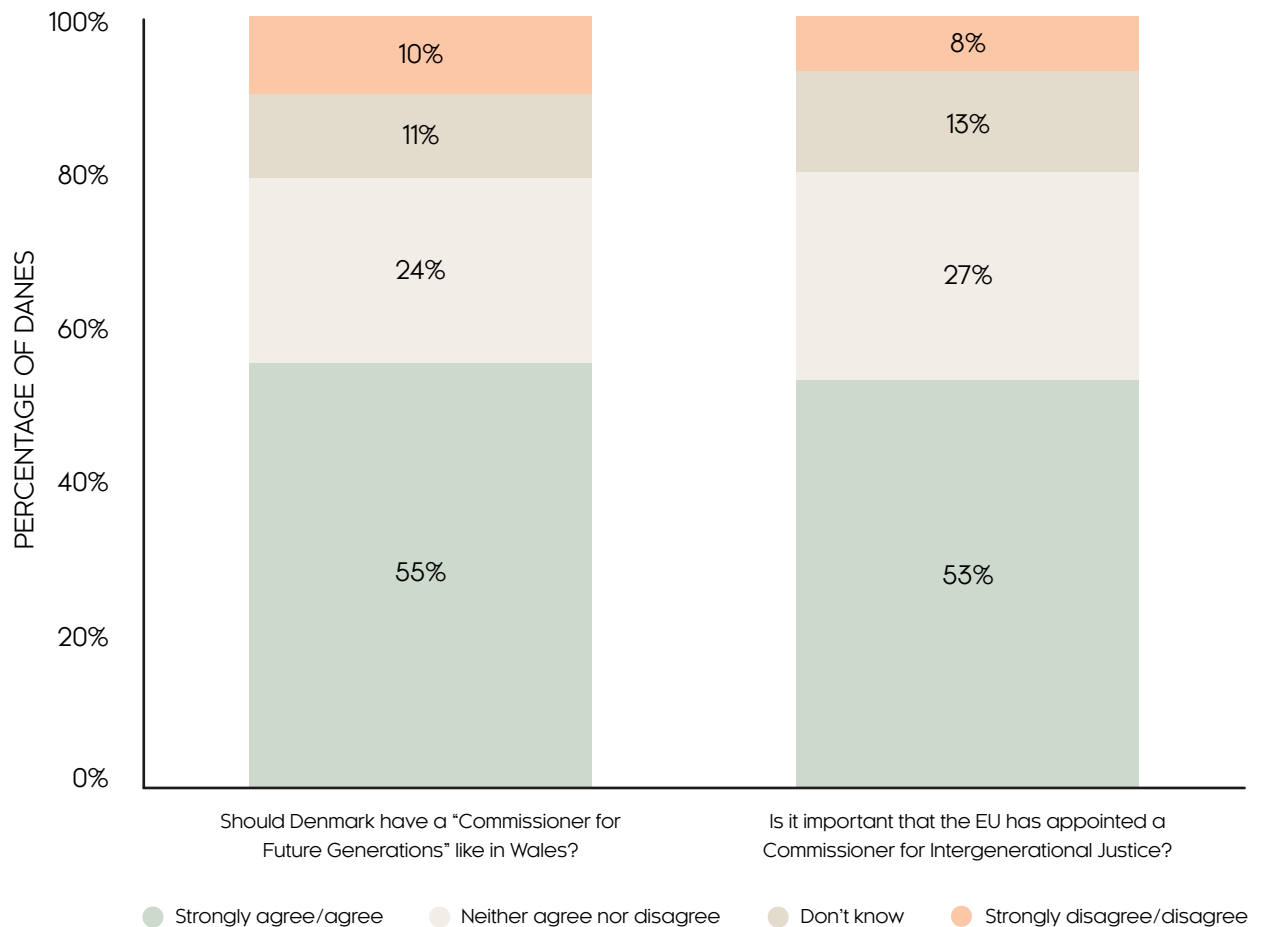


good, healthy, and safe lives. In addition, it is the Commissioner's task – based on *foresight* methods and tools – to encourage public institutions and politicians to examine the long-term consequences of their decisions.

In 2023, we asked whether Danes support a similar initiative in Denmark. 56% agreed or strongly agreed then, and support remains high today. In 2025, 55% of Danes agree or strongly agree that a similar function should be introduced in Denmark, while only 10% disagree or strongly disagree (the same share as in 2023).

### PUBLIC SUPPORT IN DENMARK FOR A COMMISSIONER FOR THE FUTURE AT THE NATIONAL AND EU LEVELS

Margin of error  $\pm 3.1\%$   
(95% confidence level).



Danes also view initiatives that promote long-term political decision-making processes and wellbeing for future generations at the EU level positively. Here, we asked to what extent they support an existing initiative in the EU.

In 2024, the European Commission appointed its first Commissioner for Inter-generational Fairness. The Commissioner is responsible for ensuring that the interests of both current and future generations are respected in all political decision-making and legislation. In addition, the Commissioner is tasked with assessing how research, technological developments, and other societal changes affect future generations.

We asked Danes to what extent they agree that it is important that the EU has introduced these initiatives. Just over half (53%) agreed or strongly agreed, while only 8% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the importance of the measure.

The results give us an indication of the level of support among Danes – a more accurate assessment would, of course, also include a weighing up of the initiatives' costs. However, the suggested support we see among Danes calls for further investigation into what a similar initiative might look like in Denmark.

Closer integration between foresight and policy is not only something that the population supports – it is also something that Denmark has committed itself to.

In 2024, the UN member states adopted a *Pact for the Future* in the General Assembly, building on the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals. One of the annexes to the pact – the supplementary texts – is the so-called *Declaration on Future Generations*, which commits member states to making use of *foresight, anticipatory governance* and *futures literacy* – methods and competencies that are specifically designed to strengthen the long-term decision-making.

Combining these approaches with policy development remains a relatively new idea in Denmark. However, in light of the general support among Danes and Denmark's multilateral commitments under the *Pact for the Future*, there is a clear opportunity to explore and develop new initiatives that promote the integration of futures thinking into national policymaking. This creates the possibility to build on international experience and shape a distinctly Danish approach to futures thinking in politics and policy development.

As a member of the *Danish Coalition for Future Generations*, the Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies works to support the ambitious political implementation of the principles of the Declaration, independently of party politics. We invite all parties interested in hearing more to reach out to us.

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# "Futures thinking doesn't come naturally..."

– Jukka Vahti, Senior Lead, Sitra

*it's something you have to practise"*



SANNA REKOLA, FORESIGHT SPECIALIST &  
JUKKA VAHTI, SENIOR LEAD, SITRA

We cannot understand the future without also knowing the hopes, fears, expectations, and aspirations that both shape our outlook and impact our decisions. It may seem like a banal point, but it remains crucial one – because we still know very little about what images of the future that circulate among the public.

To begin filling in these blanks, the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra launched the first edition of its *Futures Barometer* in 2019, revealing what sparks hope, what causes fear, and what inspires people across Finland. In 2023, CIFS followed suit with a Danish survey, taking inspiration from Sitra's effort. Now, in 2025, both organisations have released their latest versions. So how do the results from these two Nordic countries compare?

One clear similarity is also a sobering one. Just as Danes exhibit a pessimism about the future, the confidence of Finns in the future of their municipality, Finland, and especially humanity is faltering. What's behind the decline in optimism, and what gives Finns cause for hope despite it?

To explore these questions, CIFS Head of Research & Publications Casper Skovgaard Petersen spoke with Senior Lead Jukka Vahti and Foresight Specialist Sanna Rekola from Sitra.

**Casper:** *You started the Futures Barometer at Sitra in 2019. Why did you think surveying the Finnish public about the future was a valuable and important thing to start doing?*

**Jukka:** Many different surveys and barometers are done on a variety of different topics – most are trying to gather citizens' views on what is currently taking place or what has already happened. Our barometer is the only one that tries to understand how the Finns and Finnish decision-makers perceive and orient themselves towards the future in the long term, meaning in 15-20 years.

**Sanna:** Most often, in the public debate, the future is talked about among specialists and experts. So, the Barometer is a way to understand what kinds of futures ordinary people think about – and which futures they would prefer. At Sitra we talk about who has the power to define futures, and we work to democratise it. Our Barometer is a part of that discussion and effort.

**Casper:** *Finland is often highlighted as a model case for integrating foresight into governance and politics to promote more long-term thinking. What role does the Barometer play in this?*

**Jukka:** I would start by challenging the assumption that foresight is deeply rooted in governance in Finland. While it's true that the meaning and possibilities of strategic foresight is broadly acknowledged on different levels of the government, there is still plenty of work to be done in connecting the foresight work and data to decision making processes. We're not there yet.

When it comes to the role of the Barometer, we hope that policy makers and decision makers in different regions find its results useful and that it helps them integrate futures thinking and foresight into regional strategic work. We know that some have already done that, and we have received a lot of good feedback across Finland, especially at the county level.

On a more general population level, our findings show that the Finns do think about the future quite a lot and that they feel they have a say and can have an impact on their future. So that's positive – and in that sense I do think that Finland can be described as a futures-oriented nation.

**Casper:** *What are some of the difficulties you've encountered when asking people to imagine the future 10 or 20 years from now? There are inherent difficulties in doing this in a survey format. Some of them can be overcome by asking questions in the right way. But we are still limited in what level of futures literacy we can expect from people. What kind of discussions have you had about this?*



**Jukka:** This is true – and I would add that the difficulty exists for the public and futurists alike. You must keep reminding the participants that this is about *the future* – you’re supposed to think 10-20 years ahead. One of our main goals is to enhance futures thinking among the Finnish public and decision makers. But as you said it’s not easy for people to detach themselves from the present. It supports one of our main messages: this is something you can and need to practice – it doesn’t come naturally.

What people are *actually* answering to when you ask them something is also a crucial question. Even though the Barometer doesn’t allow us to look behind the answers, it would be an interesting topic for further study. What we did do was acquire additional expertise in data analysis to make sure the questions were at least asked (and the answers given) in a logical way. This means, for example, that the respondent used a reasonable amount of time answering and did not just choose the extreme alternatives in multiple choice questions.

**Casper:** *You asked the Finns about what future threats worry them. What kind of answers did you get?*

**Sanna:** Finns are generally concerned about wars and security issues. The threat from Russia specifically, and international instability generally. Other concerns were climate change and environmental problems, biodiversity loss, economic uncertainty, and rising prices. On the more personal side, health, ageing, and welfare services were big topics – so, really a mix of things.

**Casper:** *War and political instability were also prevalent topics in the responses from Danes. Although we expected these themes to be represented, we were nonetheless surprised at how dominant they were, since war and security are such volatile topics subject to constant change. It tells us how strongly present-day worries tend to be reflected when we think about the future. Civil preparedness has become a mainstream topic in Denmark in a way that it hasn’t been since the end of the Cold War. I’m sure the situation looks different in Finland, given the country’s historical relationship with Russia.*

**Jukka:** These are also big topics here. Finland has joined NATO. War and security are more topical than they used to be – but not overwhelmingly so. The consensus around the need for being prepared for whatever Russia might do is so ingrained here that it’s more ‘business as usual’. The ‘jump’, so to speak, hasn’t been as high as what you’re describing in Denmark.

**Casper:** *Since you surveyed both the public and political decision makers, are there any interesting contrasts you’d highlight between the two groups?*

**Sanna:** Decision makers are more optimistic about the future than citizens in general. It makes sense – they have more agency regarding the future.

Whereas citizens view Finland's weak economic development as a significant issue, decision makers (perhaps unsurprisingly) were more concerned about the public's declining trust in them. Decision makers also view AI more positively than citizens, who were generally more concerned about technological developments.

We also saw a divide in questions related to immigration and multiculturalism. A clear majority of decision makers believe these things are positive – relating to the fact that population is declining – where citizens were much more polarised on this issue.

So, in some key policy areas, decision makers see possibilities where citizens tend to see threats.

**Casper:** *When it comes to pessimism and optimism about the future, we saw clear differences based on income, politics, education, gender, and age. What findings would highlight from Finland?*

**Sanna:** The old-young divide is worth highlighting, I think. Young people tend to be more enthusiastic about the future, and they see more opportunities ahead. They also believe we can influence the future more strongly than older people.

Yet the optimism of young people is declining as well. In fact, there's been a dramatic drop in the optimism of young people in recent years.

**Casper:** *Another standout finding for us was that Danes exhibit low trust in the ability of the political system to handle long-term challenges. Many also believe political decisions are characterised by short-sightedness. My guess is that this would look similar in many other countries – complaining about politicians and politics is something we all love to do – but the low degree of trust still stood out. I know you've asked the Finns similar questions. What kind of results did you get?*

**Sanna:** Quite similar ones. We asked about whether people think our decision makers adequately consider the long-term impacts of their decisions, and whether they have inspiring visions for the future. Both questions yielded negative results on the regional level. Only 11% of Finns on the regional level are satisfied with the level of political visions. Even the decision makers themselves – we also surveyed them – tended to agree, which was interesting. For us, this really highlighted the need for foresight and long-term thinking.

**Casper:** *You would expect demand for visionary thinking to be lower on the local, municipality level where politics tends to be much more pragmatic. Why do you think there is such a demand for long-term visions in local politics?*

**Sanna:** It's a place where you need to formulate very concrete visions about the future. We know that there are many challenges ahead – one major issue is rural depopulation. So, visionary thinking becomes essential in coming up with solutions for how municipalities outside big cities can become attractive places for young people to stay in the future.

**Jukka:** There is a desperate need for these communities to create visions for what they want to be in the future with much fewer children, many more older people and, eventually, much fewer people in general. So, for municipalities, the question 'what is the good life in 2040?' becomes very concrete and pressing.

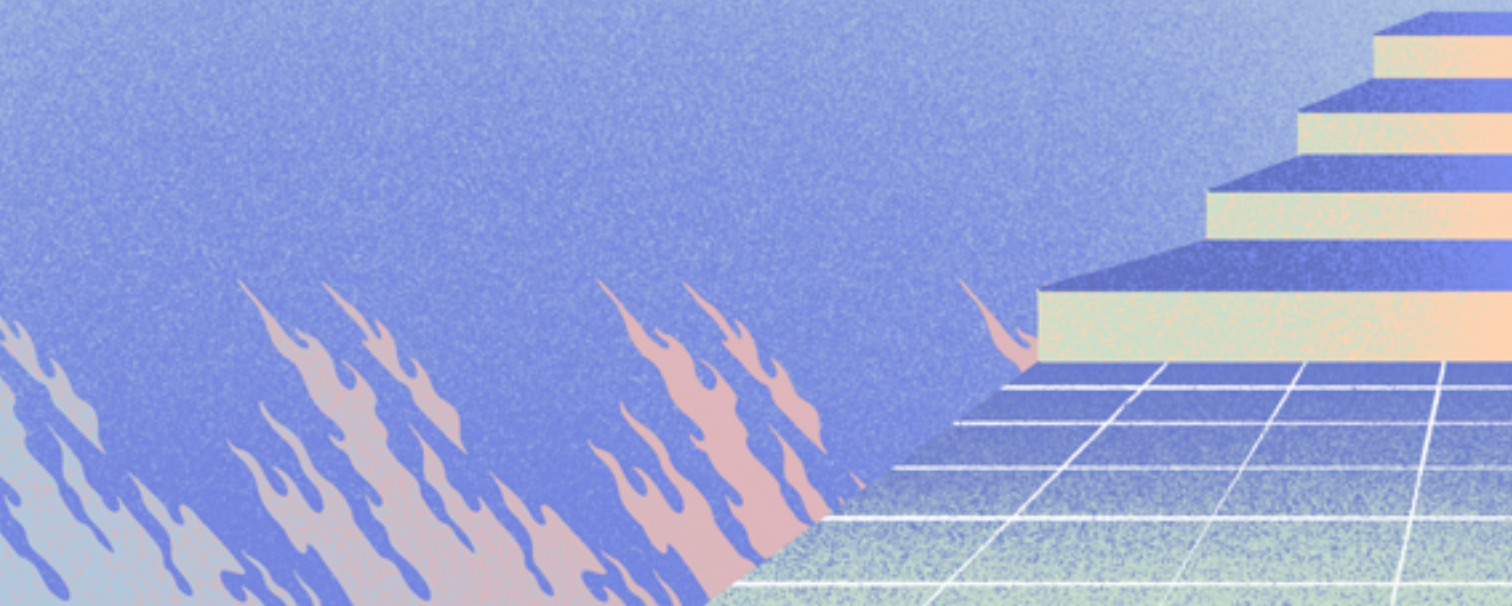
The sentiment among Finns is that they do not feel that they have an impact on affecting change at the municipality level, which is worrying – only 15% of Finns think they are able to influence the future of the municipality they live in.

It's a crucial challenge that underlines the need for democracy to renew itself. It can't just be elections every four years – we need to have other means to participate and have a say.



*Sitra's Futures Barometer is published every two years, and the latest edition is the fourth since 2019. The results are available in English on Sitra's website.*

*We have examined how Danes view the future — now we want to broaden our perspective to the rest of the world. The Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies is seeking partners who wish to help develop the Futures Barometer into an international survey that maps hope, fears, and expectations across countries and cultures.*





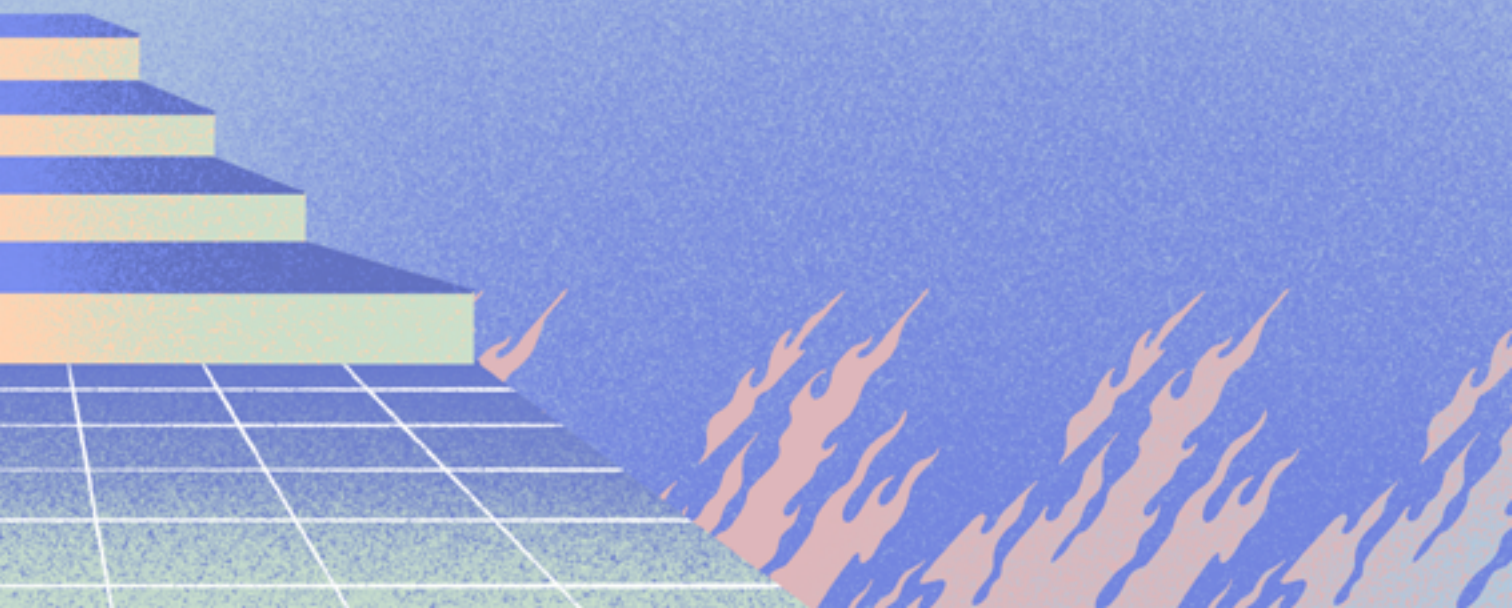
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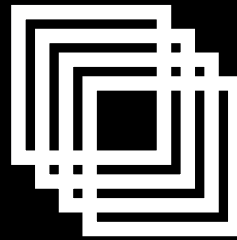
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