
Denmark's Move Toward Gender Neutral Conscription



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Abstract

Although Denmark has long promoted and been praised for its gender equality, its military conscription system has remained legally unequal, with compulsory service for men, but voluntary enlistment for women. In 2024, the Danish government announced plans to extend conscription obligations to women, aligning itself with neighbouring countries Norway and Sweden, and marking a significant step in eliminating the last formal gender disparity in national service.

This thesis examines the policy process behind this decision through the lens of John W. Kingdon's Multiple Streams Theory, and the societal conditions that paved the way for the decision through Mady W. Segal's Theory of Women's Participation in the Armed Forces. It shows how problem recognition, policy viability, and political alignment converged to create a window of opportunity for reform.

A thematic analysis of political speeches and statements reveals that the policy shift was driven by a combination of concerns, including the pursuit of gender equality and the need to enhance military readiness and modernisation. This thesis argues that the alignment of evolving societal values, political opportunity, and practical defense needs not only facilitated the reform but also marked an evolution in the role of women in the Danish military.

The study also traces the historical progression of women's roles in the Danish armed forces, showing how gradual inclusion - from support roles to full professional equality - has laid the groundwork for this reform. Comparative insights from Norway and Sweden underscore that Denmark's decision reflects a broader Nordic trend where gender equality norms increasingly shape military policy.

This research contributes to the fields of military studies, gender equality, and policy analysis, offering insights into how gender reforms can emerge in traditionally male-dominated institutions.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Chapter 1. Introduction.....	4
Chapter 2. Historical Context and Background.....	6
2.1. The Military as a Masculine Institution.....	6
2.2. Conscription.....	7
2.3. Gender Neutral Conscription in Sweden and Norway.....	9
2.4. History of Women's Participation in the Armed Forces in Denmark.....	13
2.5. Conscription in Denmark.....	15
Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework.....	17
3.1. Kingdon's Multiple Streams Theory.....	17
3.2. Theory of Women's Participation in the Armed Forces.....	19
Chapter 4. Methodology.....	23
4.1. Material and Data.....	23
4.2. Thematic analysis.....	24
4.3. Use of AI.....	27
Chapter 5: Thematic Analysis of Politicians Statements.....	27
5.1 National Security.....	27
5.2. Optimised Armed Forces.....	32
5.3. Modern values.....	33
5.4. Gender Differences.....	37
5.5. International Influence.....	39
Chapter 6. Discussion.....	41
6.1 Problem Stream.....	41
6.2 Policy Stream.....	42
6.3 Political Stream.....	42
6.4 The Opening of the Policy Window.....	43
6.5 Why Now?.....	44
6.6. Segals Theory Applied.....	44
6.7. Broader Implications.....	46
Chapter 7. Conclusion.....	47
Bibliography.....	49
Appendix.....	53

Chapter 1. Introduction

The military is one of the most masculine institutions in society, with a pronounced gender disparity in its ranks. Men significantly outnumber women in military service, and there are deeply ingrained gendered norms surrounding the ideal soldier. However, this dominance is increasingly being challenged as more women are integrated into armed forces worldwide.

In Denmark, the military is today, at least formally, a gender-equal institution - with one major exception: conscription. Men are legally obligated to serve if called upon, while women have the right to volunteer under similar conditions but can stop at will with a month's warning.

In March 2024, the Danish coalition government announced a proposal to extend compulsory military service to women, aligning Denmark with neighboring countries Norway and Sweden, which introduced gender-neutral conscription in 2015 and 2018, respectively.

A broad majority in parliament supported the changes, but two parties exercised their veto power, delaying the proposal from becoming law until after the next general election. However, with one of those parties reversing its position in March 2025, the bill is set to be implemented on 1st July 2025.

This thesis seeks to explore the process that led to the shift in policy towards gender neutral conscription. To achieve this, the thesis will employ John W. Kingdon's Multiple Streams Theory, which will help identify the problems deemed critical by policymakers, the perceived viability of gender-neutral conscription as a solution, and the political context that facilitated the policy shift.

The central research question of the thesis will thus be: *"How did the convergence of problem, policy, and political streams lead to the decision to implement gender neutral conscription in Denmark?"*

The Theory of Women's Participation in the Armed Forces by Mady W. Segal will complement Kingdon's model by offering an insight into the factors which influence women's participation in the military on a broader societal level.

The public statements and speeches by Danish policymakers advocating for and against this change will be analysed using thematic analysis, with the intention being to uncover their rationale for the policy shift. The study will also trace the historical evolution of women's participation in the Danish Armed Forces, from the Second World War to the present day, to contextualise the contemporary move towards full gender equality in military service.

Furthermore, a comparative dimension will be introduced by examining the experiences of Sweden and Norway, assessing whether parallels exist between their adoption of gender-neutral conscription and Denmark's current trajectory.

The decision to extend conscription to women raises significant questions about gender, military policy, and societal expectations. It challenges long-standing assumptions about military service as an almost exclusively male domain and reflects broader shifts in how gender roles are

conceptualised within national security contexts. By examining this policy change, the thesis contributes to the existing literature on military conscription, gender studies, and defense policy.

This study is particularly relevant to scholars in the fields of International Relations, Defense Studies, and Gender Studies. It may also inform policymakers in defense and equality sectors and contribute to ongoing debates in other countries considering similar reforms. Furthermore, the findings may be of interest to institutions such as the Danish Ministry of Defense, UN Women, and international security organisations examining the intersection of gender and military policy.

The structure of the paper is as follows:

The upcoming chapter provides the necessary background by examining the gendered nature of military institutions, the history and evolution of conscription practices, the historical integration of women into the Danish military, and the policy developments in Sweden and Norway. This chapter establishes the broader context within which Denmark's decision emerged.

Chapter Three outlines the theoretical frameworks guiding the analysis. It presents Kingdon's Multiple Streams Theory, explaining how it will be applied to understand the policy process, and discusses Segal's Theory of Women's Participation in the Armed Forces to shed light on societal conditions that may have paved the way for expanded female involvement in the Danish military.

Chapter Four goes on to describe the research design and methodology. It justifies the choice of thematic analysis as the method of data analysis and explains how the sources - predominantly political speeches and statements - were selected and examined. Within this chapter there will also be a discussion of the limitations of the data and thematic analysis, and how AI was used within the research.

Chapter Five constitutes the main analysis section, where thematic analysis is applied to the data to identify key themes in the political discourse that reflect the convergence of problem, policy, and political streams, leading to the policy shift.

Chapter Six then engages in a broader discussion, linking further the findings of the thematic analysis and background information to the theoretical frameworks, and reflecting on why the change took place now, and on the broader significance of Denmark's decision for increased gender equality.

Chapter Seven concludes the thesis by summarising the main findings, and suggesting areas for future research.

Chapter 2. Historical Context and Background

2.1. The Military as a Masculine Institution

The military is one of the most masculine of institutions that can be found in our society, being overwhelmingly composed of men and strongly shaped by gendered cultural norms. The idealised soldier embodies hegemonic masculinity - aggressive, brave, rational, and willing to sacrifice his life for the nation.

Militarism has long been based on a binary gendered framework, where men are protectors and women are seen as needing to be protected. As men are assumed to have an inherent predisposition towards warfare, military service is tied to masculinity and the duty to do one's part to defend the nation. Women on the other hand have traditionally been relegated to the domestic sphere, with womanhood often being defined through motherhood, not military involvement. (Kronsell and Svedberg, 2001; Lahav, 2020).

Although throughout history there have been many examples of women also participating in warfare, they have largely been excluded from state militaries, and it is only in recent decades that they have begun to be integrated on a formal level. World War II for example, saw many women taking on support roles due to manpower shortages, but their contributions were minimised post-conflict and they were pushed from the military, reaffirming traditional gender roles. The post-Cold War era saw an acceleration in efforts towards gender integration, particularly within NATO countries, but women still face many stereotypes and barriers in military service. (Segal, 1995).

Women's exclusion from the military (or merely from combat tasks) has often been justified by assumptions that they are physically and emotionally unsuitable for it - with the argument being that their bodies and minds are too fragile and weak. It has furthermore been argued that their presence would disrupt unit cohesion by interfering with the male bonding experience. (Dandeker and Segal, 1996).

Despite gradual improvements in the acceptance of women into the military, gender inequality still clearly persists. Even in countries like Israel, where women have been conscripted into the military since 1948, their roles in the military remain highly gendered, with women usually relegated to non-combat tasks that carry less prestige than combat positions. (Shalev et al. 2017)

In peacekeeping missions, women are often assigned to roles considered "feminine," such as conducting interviews with survivors of sexual violence or mentoring women cadets, while men are more often given leadership roles in strategy and operations. (Wittwer, 2024)

Across both peacekeeping missions and general military service, women face other significant challenges, including sexual harassment, abuse, discrimination, and inadequate equipment tailored to their needs (Wittwer, 2024). Studies conducted in 2021 and 2022, estimated that 33% of American, 36.7% of French, and 44.6% of Canadian women in their armed forces faced

some form of Military Sexual Trauma in the 12 months prior to the studies. (Fossey & Herriott, 2024).

Female soldiers also come up against tokenism, isolation, and pressure to excel due to the increased scrutiny they face. (Kummel, 2015). To be accepted into this hyper-masculine environment, women often feel the need to hide their femininity in order to fit in and become “one of the boys” (King, 2016).

Nevertheless, as armed forces increasingly adopt diversity management strategies, prioritise individual competencies over gender differences, and take concrete steps to address the systemic issues affecting female personnel, there is potential for meaningful progress (Carreiras, 2017; King, 2016). Between 2014 and 2022, most NATO member and partner countries saw a rise in the proportion of women in their militaries, with the highest representation being found in Sweden (22.0%), the USA (20.7%), Hungary (20.1%), and New Zealand (18.5%). (Epthinktank, 2025).

While the military has long been a male-dominated institution, these trends suggest that its traditional gender boundaries are gradually being redrawn.

2.2. Conscription

Military conscription refers to the compulsory enlistment of citizens into the armed forces. This practice has a long history, with the conscription of men to fight in wars dating back millennia. In ancient times, it was often the poorest members of society who were conscripted, such as during the feudal system where lords provided servicemen for a limited period of time. The first instance of universal (male) military conscription occurred in post-revolutionary France, where single, childless men aged 20-25 were drafted through a lottery, with some exceptions for essential workers and clergy. (Simon & Abdel-Moneim, 2011).

Historically, the use of conscription has been influenced by various factors. Asal et al. (2017) found that countries with a history of opposition to conscription, like former British colonies, tend to avoid it, while countries in interstate rivalries are more likely to employ it. Democratic nations are generally less inclined to use conscripts, while conscription is more common in nations facing immediate threats.

Additionally, conscription has been used not only as a means to raise manpower but was seen as a way to foster national spirit, build social cohesion, and maintain civil-military relations. It played an important role in forming notions of the nation state, and was seen as a rite of passage where the boy became a man and a citizen of the state. (Strand, 2023; Besch & Westgaard, 2024; Simon & Abdel-Moneim, 2011). By restricting conscription to men, these practices have historically reinforced the gendered belief that military service - and by extension, warfare - is both the responsibility and the domain of men.

Besch & Westgaard (2024) identify three main models of military conscription:

1. **Mandatory Service:** All eligible individuals must serve for a set period. Finland and Estonia, for example, follow this model, where all men must serve, and women can volunteer. With this system, Finland maintains one of the largest reserve forces in Europe, and is able to mobilize 285,000 troops in wartime.
2. **Lottery-Driven Service:** Countries like Denmark, Latvia, and Lithuania use a lottery system to select individuals for conscription. Eligible candidates are randomly assigned a "winning" or "losing" number, with those selected required to serve.
3. **Selective Compulsory Service:** This model is found in countries like Norway and Sweden, where candidates are chosen based on motivation, health, and qualifications. Sweden, for example, calls up around a quarter of the 100,000 youths who are screened per year and from this number, a selection of them will be called up for enrollment.

Following the end of the Cold War the perceived threat to national sovereignty diminished, and there arose different threats of terrorism and armed insurgencies. Furthermore, as militaries became more professionalised and the need for large conscript forces decreased, many countries gradually moved away from conscription. (Besch & Westgaard, 2024, Simon & Abdel-Moneim, 2011)

The 1990s saw a shift towards volunteer armies, as conscription was viewed as outdated, inefficient, and undemocratic. Volunteer forces were seen as more professional and cost-effective, and the financial burden of training and supporting conscripts was considered too great in times of less severe threats. The rise of neoliberal ideas also meant that the military was seen as a public institution that should compete for labour and resources just like every other institution. The involuntary nature of conscription became increasingly controversial, conscription was challenged by it being seen to disproportionately affect marginalised people as they were less likely to get exemption, and the military faced criticism for its exclusionary practices, particularly against the LGBT community and women. (Stastnikova, 2023; Strand, 2023).

Despite the decline of conscription, some European countries - particularly those bordering Russia, have maintained or revived conscription in recent years - commonly due to security concerns. Since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, countries including Germany and the United Kingdom, facing recruitment shortages, have also revisited the idea of reintroducing conscription. In countries like France conscription is portrayed as a potential unifying force for the nation (Strand, 2023).

For countries considering reintroducing conscription, public opinion often presents a significant hurdle. Reintroducing conscription remains an unpopular idea among the populations of many Western and Central European countries. In the UK, a third of respondents stated they would refuse service, citing reasons like lack of patriotism and ideological opposition. (Besch & Westgaard, 2024)

Successful models of conscription often incorporate elements of volunteerism, and offer incentives such as financial benefits, educational opportunities, and post-service career support and by framing conscription as a path to personal growth rather than a duty or sacrifice. To make conscription more legitimate in the eyes of the public, countries may need to move away from traditional discriminatory practices and adopt more inclusive policies. By offering modern incentives and appealing to values of individualism, conscription could be made more attractive and viable in the contemporary context. (Strand, 2023)

In countries including Sweden, conscription has managed to be revived by altering the myths surrounding its national importance. Conversely, France has struggled to convince citizens of its value, highlighting the influence of national narratives on conscription policies. Today, all Baltic and Nordic NATO members have some form of mandatory service, with Norway and Sweden now including women in their conscription systems on an equal basis as men. (Besch & Westgaard, 2024; Strand, 2023).

2.3. Gender Neutral Conscription in Sweden and Norway

In Norway and Sweden, gender neutral conscription has been a historic policy development and implemented as part of broader gender equality and defense strategies. Both countries have implemented policies that require all citizens, regardless of gender, to serve in the military if called upon. This approach challenges the traditionally masculine framing of military service, symbolically redefining national defense as a shared civic responsibility rather than an inherently male domain.

Norway

In Norway, 8-10,000 people are called up to participate in military service per annum. All who are eligible to serve must answer a questionnaire about their health, motivation, interests and wishes, and from this questionnaire a select group is invited to the session where they are tested physically, theoretically, and medically. (Forsvaret, 2025).

In 2023, 9138 were selected to serve out of 26034 who were invited for the session. Typically they serve for one year, and may be called in to serve an additional 7 months at a future point for further training.

Conscription has become a popular choice for young people in Norway and every year there are more volunteers than who can serve. So despite there being an aspect of compulsion to serve, in reality all people who serve do so voluntarily - with the conscripts often stating that they do it to further their own careers and better themselves. (Rusi, 2013)

In 2015, the Norwegian government implemented conscription for both genders, becoming the first country in the world to implement a fully gender-neutral conscription system. While Norway already had conscription for men since the 19th century, prior to 2015, women could voluntarily enlist in the Norwegian Armed Forces, but they were not required to serve.

The decision to make conscription gender-neutral was according to Norway's political leadership, part of a larger commitment to gender equality. They saw this change as a logical step in reinforcing the country's values of fairness, equity, and inclusivity. It was also a recognition that gender should not be a limiting factor in any aspect of public service, including the military. Norway's Defence Minister Ine Eriksen Søreide stated that *"Male-only conscription is out of sync with the rest of society. All citizens shall have the same rights and obligations, regardless of sex"*. (Håland, 2020).

Norway has long been at the forefront of gender policy in the military, with them being in 1985 the first NATO nation to allow women to serve in combat positions. (Rusi, 2013). To equalise conscription, and thus removing the last point of difference in their military, could be seen as the logical next step for a country that wishes to be seen as a leading nation on equality matters.

The new policy has been embraced in Norway not only as a matter of gender equality but also as a strategic decision for maximising operational capability. Norway's defense strategy has evolved over time, with the understanding that modern warfare requires a diverse and inclusive workforce. By making conscription gender-neutral, Norway ensured that it could draw from the full pool of potential talent, ensuring military preparedness in case of national emergencies or defense needs. (Rusi, 2013) This is highlighted in Eriksen Søreides statement that *"In order to secure our operational capabilities in the future we need to recruit the best, and we need diversity. Therefore we cannot limit our recruitment to the male half of the population"*. The Chief of Defence, Haakon Bruun-Hanssen, further stated that *"Now we have twice as many people to choose from. This will make it easier to direct motivated personnel and the right expertise to our different tasks and positions"* (Håland, 2020).

While the statements from the Norwegian politicians and military have emphasised that the move to gender neutral conscription was done as a way to increase gender equality and maximise operation capacities, Norway has also decided to expand the number of conscripts to 13,500 by 2036, and increase the time that the conscripts will serve (Besch & Westgaard, 2024) - indicating that there may be an aspect of addressing a changing security landscape with their decision.

Sweden

All male conscription was introduced in the 1800s in Sweden - every man was expected to do their duty to protect the state by learning military skills and fighting if called upon. Women also could be called up to serve in public and private sectors in the event of war, but they were not expected to do military service. They could however enlist with voluntary defence organisations from the 1920s, and from the 1980s could conduct military training alongside conscripted men.

Following the end of the Cold War, the draft system was demobilised and the needs of the military were considered year by year when deciding how many men were needed to be conscripted, and the personal profiles of the men were taken into account. Conscription was then abolished in 2010 in favour of an all volunteer system, but at the same time it was decided that the draft legislation should be made gender neutral. (Strand, 2023)

The bill for demobilising the draft was called “Modern recruitment for a utilizable defence” - a gender neutral voluntary system was seen as more modern than the forced conscription of just men.

However, this new system consistently failed to attract enough soldiers to fill the defence needs of Sweden. Conscription was reactivated in 2017, for both men and women, without much public or political attention. (Strand, 2023; Stachowitsch & Strand, 2023)

Similar to Norway there are forms sent out to every 18 year old where they state their level of education, health, and interest in the military. Of those who complete the forms, only around a quarter are called up for muster and from this a selection are chosen for enrollment. It is almost only those who indicate they have a high willingness to serve who are called up. (Besch and Westgaard, 2024). The conscripts participate in basic training for three months and then have additional training for up to 12 months. The number of conscripts is set to increase to 10,000 per year by 2030. (Government of Sweden, 2025).

Security concerns seemed to be the driving factor behind the decision, as with the voluntary system failing to bring in required numbers of recruits and Russia invading Ukraine, Sweden's national security was put at risk. (Strand, 2023; Persson & Sundevall, 2019)

However another factor that seems to have influenced the decision was the wish from the political and defence officials to have a more modernised system. To have equality between the sexes is seen as modern and progressive, whereas excluding women is seen as backwards. In a statement by the Government of Sweden in 2016 they stated that “*it is an unrealistic and unmodern idea that sex [...] should be the factor determining who is best suited for each [military] position*”. Instead of conscription being a way for boys to become men, it is turned into a way for competitive men and women to get an edge on the labour market. (Strand, 2023)

The Swedish Armed Forces (SAF) are now trying to portray themselves as being progressive and inclusive, and as part of this they are trying to encourage more women to join. Their marketing campaign serves as a way to reimagine the ‘leaky’ female body into one which is acceptable for war.

Menstruation has typically been seen as a problem in the military as hormonal fluctuations are seen as affecting women's ability to perform missions, however the Swedish marketing campaign while highlighting the difference from the ideal soldiering body, offers solutions which will overcome their biology, and through mastery of their body they can also be transformed into a battle ready body. (Stern & Strand, 2022).

The discourse behind conscription in Sweden has been altered in order to make it fit with a modern, liberal, society, and thus been reimaged as fitting in with ideas of individual freedom and market competition, as well as feminist understandings of the state, public sector and who are ideal citizens. (Strand, 2023)

This reimagination was needed to keep conscription as a legitimate option and make it palatable for the public. There was a push to market it as primarily voluntary instead of as a duty, not forced but done out of a will and motivation to serve - with politicians arguing that it would only be forced if the voluntary system was not enough to ensure the security of the nation by attracting enough volunteers. Military service was also marketed as a way to improve the participants as individuals, that it would improve their CV and distinguish themselves on the labour market. With the gender aspect removed, there was the new idea of military service being for competitive individuals who are best suited to it regardless of sex. (Strand, 2023)

Overall, the Swedish decision to implement gender-neutral conscription reflects both security and social considerations. From a defense standpoint, Sweden recognised that its military forces needed to be more adaptable and capable of responding to modern challenges. By expanding conscription to women, Sweden sought to tap into a broader talent pool and ensure that its military was diverse, inclusive, and fully representative of society. This move was also aligned with Sweden's commitment to gender equality in all sectors, emphasising that women and men should have equal opportunities and responsibilities in both civilian and military life.

The Scandinavian Model of Conscription

Stastnikova (2023) describes the conscription model found in Norway and Sweden as 'The Scandinavian Model' - which is based on selectivity and gender neutrality. She argues they created this version of conscription in order to deal with the geopolitical situation and to fit in with society's ideals - ensuring themselves both recruits and legitimacy in the process.

In both countries there is only a small number of spots available to receive military training, and they only take in those who show the greater motivation to serve and perform well in the mental and physical examinations. This selective process, and framing of military service as an opportunity for self-improvement and career advancement mirrors neoliberal gender discourses, where empowerment is tied to individual competitiveness and self optimisation. Gender neutrality allows Norway and Sweden to present their militaries as inclusive and modern institutions. This stands in contrast to countries like Finland and South Korea, where conscription remains universal and male-only, and Israel, which conscripts women but under different terms than men.

As it is not universal conscription in either country it is less problematic to have equal conscription as very few are conscripted against their will. This is particularly important when it comes to women, as there is still somewhat of a taboo against forcing women into military service, but as the vast majority of those who serve are volunteers then few will have to do it if they do not want to. (Stastnikova 2023; Ahlbäck, Sundevall, and Hjertquist, 2024).

As well as showing that they as countries are gender equal and their militaries gain legitimacy in the eyes of the population, by allowing female conscripts they have access to a greater pool of potential recruits. By doing this they can better ensure that only the most qualified and motivated people are selected for military service. This was especially relevant for Sweden, who was particularly struggling to recruit enough qualified people.

The model of conscription found in Norway and Sweden may serve as a model for other countries. It represents a form of modernised conscription - one that balances military necessity with values such as inclusion, gender equality, and institutional legitimacy. Military chiefs in countries including the United Kingdom, The Netherlands, and Germany have issued statements that indicate they admire the Scandinavian model of conscription and would consider implementing similar systems. (Stachowitsch & Strand, 2023).

In a country such as Denmark which is very similar culturally to Norway and Sweden and has developed similar military policies to their neighbours over the years, the development of this model of conscription may have played an influence in Denmark's own policy shift. The model would be less suitable for places such as the Baltic countries as gender equality is not yet such an imperative there. (Stastnikova, 2023)

2.4. History of Women's Participation in the Armed Forces in Denmark

Second World War until 1960s

The onset of the Second World War marked the initial entry of women into the Danish armed forces. In 1940, the *Danish Women's Emergency Service* was established, comprising volunteers trained in tasks deemed appropriate for women at the time, such as mass catering, nursing the sick and wounded during emergencies, and performing office work. Between 1940 and 1945, approximately 40,000 women volunteered for this service. Due to Denmark's occupation during the war, there was no large-scale recruitment of women as seen in other European countries. However, women served as a reserve labour force, taking on roles that allowed more men to be redirected to other military duties (Forsvarshistorien, 2025). Their participation during this time could be framed as reinforcing traditional caregiving roles, even as they worked within a military context.

After the war, women's corps - known as *Lotte corps* - were established within all branches of the Armed Forces.. Although women were still barred from combat roles, their voluntary contributions expanded to include advanced military tasks such as maritime surveillance and air traffic control (Rovsing, Jensen & Frøling, 2006; Sløk-Andersen, 2014). These early efforts paved the way for the broader inclusion of women in the Danish military in the decades that followed (Ahlbäck, Sundevall & Hjertquist, 2024).

From the 1960s onwards, women's participation in the labour market and politics in Denmark grew rapidly. This was driven in part by an economic boom and widespread labour shortages, which created a pressing need for women to enter the workforce - including the military. The first steps toward formal military integration were motivated primarily by these practical concerns. In 1962, Minister of Defence Poul Hansen argued that women were already contributing across a range of military functions and should therefore be allowed formal employment. As a result, women were officially permitted to serve not only in civilian roles, such as secretarial positions, but also in previously voluntary military capacities, including communications and intelligence.

Importantly, the push to integrate women into the military was driven not by a commitment to gender equality, but by recruitment needs and the positive wartime experiences with female personnel (Sløk-Andersen, 2014; Ahlbäck, Sundevall & Hjertquist, 2024).

1970s and 1980s

The 1970s and 1980s marked a period of significant change for women in Denmark, both in the labour market and the armed forces. As more women entered paid employment, their participation in the military also increased. A key turning point came in 1971, when a bill permitted women to hold salaried positions in low-ranking military roles. While men continued to be trained through conscription, women were enrolled in separate, women-only basic training programmes.

Once women were allowed into the military in official capacities, many began seeking both horizontal and vertical advancement. In response, the armed forces opened military academies to women, allowing them to pursue officer training. In 1974, the first women were granted officer rank - an internal decision made by the armed forces rather than by parliament (Sløk-Andersen, 2014; Schlüter, 1986).

During the 1970s, the Scandinavian countries actively promoted themselves as pioneers in gender equality, particularly in the labour market. This ideological shift gradually influenced the military, transforming the question of women's inclusion from a matter of recruitment necessity to one of gender equality. However, this reframing also prompted resistance. The armed forces, once open to reform for pragmatic reasons, became more hesitant when integration was linked to equality ideals - especially when it concerned roles previously off-limits to women.

In 1978, following the passage of a national law on equal treatment in the labour market, the Danish armed forces requested a temporary exemption that would allow them to continue barring women from combat positions. This exemption was granted on the condition that they conduct trials with women in combat roles across all three branches of the military (Sløk-Andersen, 2014).

After several years of trials, the conclusion was clear: there were no valid grounds to exclude women from combat. In 1988, the exemption from the equal treatment law was lifted, and the Minister of Defence formally declared that women had the right to serve in combat positions.

Throughout this period, gender equality policies increasingly became the primary driver of reform. New labour market legislation on women's rights had a ripple effect on the military, and internal pressure from women already serving helped push the agenda further. Their presence and advocacy were crucial to advancing integration. Ongoing recruitment challenges also made the inclusion of women more acceptable to the military (Ahlbäck, Sundevall & Hjertquist, 2024).

By the late 1970s, gender equality had become a widely supported goal among the major Danish political parties - particularly the socialist ones. The strongest resistance to women's

increased participation in the military came from parts of the left with antimilitarist leanings, women's rights groups, and the peace movement (Ahlbäck, 2022; Orsten, 1999).

1990s to Present

One of the last legal barriers to full equality was a ban on women serving in fighter jets, justified by concerns about their reproductive health; this restriction was lifted in 1992. In 1998, a new basic training program was introduced for women under conscription-like terms, further aligning the roles of men and women in the military. This development also led to the gradual replacement of women-only units with mixed-gender units.

Since these reforms, women have increasingly taken on roles as captains, fighter pilots, generals, and members of special forces units. By 2021, women comprised 8.1% of the Army, 10.1% of the Air Force, and 8.5% of the Navy. The only remaining formal distinction is that military conscription continues to apply only to men, while women may choose to volunteer for service (Sløk-Andersen, 2014; Forsvarsudvalget, 1995).

Despite significant policy advances, gender inequality persists in practice. Women in the Danish armed forces remain underrepresented in combat and leadership roles, often concentrated in support positions and facing informal barriers to advancement. Additionally, issues of sexual harassment and abuse remain widespread. According to a 2023 report by the Ministry of Defence, 43.8% of women in the Army reported experiencing at least one instance of unwanted sexual attention in the previous year (Forsvarsministeriet, 2023).

2.5. Conscription in Denmark

In Denmark, military conscription is (potentially) mandatory for men, while women have the option to serve voluntarily. This requirement is enshrined in the Danish constitution, which states: *"Every man capable of arms is obliged to contribute with his person to the defence of the fatherland according to the detailed provisions prescribed by law"* (Constitution of the Kingdom of Denmark, 1849).

Unlike many European countries, Denmark retained conscription after the Cold War. In 2009 there was a parliamentary vote on whether to abolish conscription, but it was decided to keep the system in place. All political parties, except for Enhedslisten, who opposed militarism, supported its retention. A 2008 poll revealed that 54% of the Danish population wanted to maintain conscription, while 40% favored an exclusively volunteer-based defense¹. Socialdemokratiet (SD) proposed changing conscription from a duty to a right to serve, with support from Radikale Venstre (R), Socialistiske Folkeparti (SF), and Liberal Alliance (LA), but the centre-right parties voted to maintain the status quo. (Andersen, 2009).

At the age of 18, Danish men must attend Armed Forces Day (Forsvarets Dag), where they are evaluated for military service eligibility. They are assessed on physical and mental health, and

¹ <https://www.information.dk/indland/2009/03/vaernepligten-daarlig-forretning>

through a written test. Those deemed eligible or partially eligible draw a lottery number: "free," "maybe," or "compulsory" (the latter is not currently used). If there are insufficient voluntary conscripts, those with a "maybe" number are conscripted into military training, which lasts between 4 to 12 months, depending on the role. In practice, few men are forcibly conscripted; for the past decade, over 95% of recruits have volunteered, and in 2022-2023, the number reached 100%. Most conscripts are enlisted in the army (4,339), with smaller numbers joining the Navy (212) and Air Force (166). (Forsvaret, 2025)

Women, on the other hand, have had the option to serve as conscripts since 1998, but it is not compulsory. They can also drop out with a month's notice without any consequences, whereas men must meet physical or mental health criteria to exit. In 2023, women made up 25% of new conscripts. (Andersen, 2024; Muhr & Sløk-Andersen, 2017). However, this flexibility may also contribute to unequal treatment. Sløk-Andersen (2018) argues that because women can more easily exit service, they are often subtly or explicitly encouraged to leave when injured or struggling to adapt, rather than being supported through challenges. As a result, the structural differences may inadvertently reinforce gendered expectations about suitability for military life.

In June 2023, a broad majority in the Danish Parliament agreed that conscription should be strengthened by increasing the number of conscripts, promoting greater equality, and extending the duration of service. On March 13, 2024, the Danish coalition government proposed the changes to include the introduction of a fully gender-neutral conscription system. Under this proposal, women would be called up for *Forsvarets Dag* and serve on equal terms with men. Their proposal also included extending military service to 11 months, with 5 months of basic training followed by 6 months of operational service - and increasing the annual number of conscripts by 5,000.

While most political parties supported the reforms, Liberal Alliance and Danmarksdemokraterne opposed the gender-neutral element and exercised their veto. As a result, the government was required to form a separate agreement with the remaining parties, which meant that gender neutral conscription could first come into effect from 1 January 2027.

However, in March 2025, Liberal Alliance withdrew its veto and joined the agreement, bringing forward the implementation of full gender equality in conscription to 1 July 2025.

Women turning 18 after this date will be called up for *Forsvarets Dag* in 2026. From then on, they will participate in the lottery system on the same terms as men and may be required to serve if volunteer numbers are insufficient (Forsvarsministeriet, 2025).

Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework

The thesis will be guided by two theories - the 'Multiple Streams Theory' which will be used as a framework for analysing the policy process behind the decision to implement gender neutral conscription, and the 'Theory of Women's Participation in the Armed Forces' which will be used to reflect on the societal conditions present in Denmark which allowed for this decision to be made. By blending the theoretical insights from these two theories, the thesis intends to provide a comprehensive analysis of how the decision to implement gender neutral conscription came to be.

3.1. Kingdon's Multiple Streams Theory

The Multiple Streams Theory (MST), developed by John W. Kingdon in his book 'Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies' (1984), provides a framework for understanding how issues come to the forefront of political agendas and how policy change occurs.

Kingdon's theory draws on the idea that political decision-making is not always a linear or rational process, but is instead shaped by a complex interaction of various factors.

Key Concepts of MST

Central to MST is the idea of "streams" that represent different aspects of the policymaking process: problems, policies, and politics. Policy change occurs when the three streams align (are 'coupled') and form a "window of opportunity." Each of the streams operates largely independently but can influence each other. Each stream is defined as follows:

Problem Stream: This stream refers to the recognition and framing of issues as problems requiring governmental intervention. Problems can be brought to the forefront through crises, changes in public opinion, or attention from the media. Importantly, not all problems get on the policy agenda - only those that gain enough attention and are framed in a way that resonates with key policymakers or the public and are recognised as something that needs to be dealt with. Problems can fade from view if the government believes the problem to be solved already, and at times without them doing anything if public attention shifts elsewhere.

Policy Stream: The policy stream encompasses the range of possible solutions to address a problem. These alternatives are often developed by experts, policy entrepreneurs, or think tanks, and are subject to political and technical feasibility. While multiple solutions may exist, not all are viable or likely to be adopted. The process of policy entrepreneurship, where individuals or groups champion particular solutions, plays a critical role in this stream.

Politics Stream: This stream is concerned with the political environment surrounding policymaking. It includes factors such as changes in government leadership, shifts in public opinion, political parties' agendas, and lobbying by interest groups. Political factors often

determine whether policymakers are willing to address an issue, as well as the likelihood that a policy proposal will be implemented.

The Window of Opportunity

According to MST, policy change occurs when the three streams - problems, policies, and politics - align during a "window of opportunity." These windows are typically opened by political events, such as elections, changes in government, or shifts in public opinion, and may close quickly if the conditions that opened them disappear again. Kingdon emphasised that these windows are fleeting, and the ability to take advantage of them often depends on the actions of policy entrepreneurs - individuals or groups in or out of government who advocate for specific issues and solutions.

The Role of Policy Entrepreneurs

A crucial element of Kingdon's theory is the concept of policy entrepreneurs, who are individuals or groups that actively seek to bring attention to certain issues and push specific solutions. These actors play an essential role in bridging the gaps between the different streams. They use their expertise, networks, and resources to create opportunities for policy change. Policy entrepreneurs can be found in various sectors, including government, advocacy groups, think tanks, and the media. They are often driven by personal or ideological commitments to a cause and are adept at navigating the complexities of the political environment to influence policy making.

Implications for Policy Making

Kingdon's Multiple Streams Theory suggests that policy decisions are not solely the result of careful deliberation and analysis of alternatives, but instead the role of timing, political context, and the efforts of policy entrepreneurs in shaping the policymaking process is also important. The theory is valuable in explaining why some issues receive attention and result in policy changes, while others fail to result in change.

By understanding the interdependent nature of the three streams and the importance of windows of opportunity, one can gain insights into the complex and often unpredictable dynamics of policy formulation.

Although it was first developed in an American policy making context, in practice, the theory has been widely applied to studies of public policy in areas such as health policy, environmental policy, and education policy across a range of national contexts. The framework has also been effectively adapted to parliamentary democracies, such as those in the Nordic region. In these systems, the dynamics of political consensus-building, coalition governance, and party discipline influence how the problem, policy, and politics streams converge. Additionally, the role of parliamentary committees and ministerial leadership becomes significant in opening policy windows, shaping when and how policy change occurs.

Application

In this thesis, Kingdon's Multiple Streams Theory (MST) will be applied as a framework for thematically analysing political speeches and statements concerning the implementation of gender-neutral conscription in Denmark. The goal is to understand how the issue entered the policy agenda and how it was framed and discussed by key political actors.

The speeches and statements will be analysed to identify how political actors articulate the problems to be solved, what policy alternatives are being proposed, and how the political context shapes the feasibility and urgency of these discussions.

In addition, the role of policy entrepreneurs will be assessed by identifying individuals who actively advocated for gender-neutral conscription and linked the three streams to facilitate policy change.

Through this application, MST provides a structured approach for understanding how gender-neutral conscription was framed, discussed, and advanced within Danish policy discourse, and why it gained traction at this particular moment. The period from when the government announced their policy intentions to when they set a date for implementation will be the timeframe that is focused on.

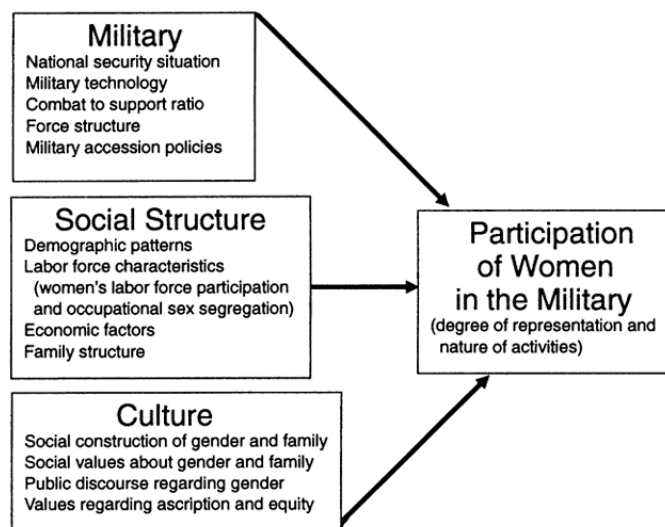
While MST helps unpack the process by which gender-neutral conscription entered the policy agenda, it does not fully explain the societal and cultural factors that made this reform politically and socially acceptable. For this reason, the thesis also draws on the Theory of Women's Participation in the Armed Forces, which addresses how broader gender norms, labour market structures, and civil-military relations shape women's integration into military institutions.

3.2. Theory of Women's Participation in the Armed Forces

Mady Wechsler Segal (1995) wrote a theory of what affects the degree and nature of women's participation in the armed forces throughout history. According to her theory, there are three broad explanatory variables for women's participation in the military, with them all being interconnected - military, social structure and culture.

The military variable includes the characteristics of the nation's security situation, technology, and aspects of military organisations that affect women's roles. The social structure refers to women's civilian roles, demographic factors, and the general civilian social structural variables. Lastly, under culture falls the social construction of gender and family roles in a given context.

The Military Variables



National Security Situation

According to Segal (1995) the more the nation is under threat, the more that nations are likely to increase women's military participation. She highlights WW2 as being one case where there were large numbers of women involved in the war effort (formally they were to be outside of combat situations). Likewise, there are many women who have taken part in guerilla operations throughout history, but when the threat is over then women have returned to civilian life and the military returns to being the domain overwhelmingly made up of men.

However, the importance of this factor seems to depend on how well the country supports gender equality. Even when there is a low threat to the country, women may still be present in higher numbers if it is more acceptable for women to take part in military operations.

The type of military operation is also a factor in how much women are involved in the war effort - where there is a lot of ground combat or medium-high probability of military action on their soil, then there will be less women involved, but in cases of imminent destruction or peacekeeping operations then women's involvement would increase.

Military Technology

The second aspect of the 'Military' variable that she discusses is the amount of military technology that is available. She argues that technological developments allow for more women to participate as tasks that formerly required high levels of bodily strength can now be replaced with brain power. Such technological changes include the decrease in size of weapons, the development of air power, and nuclear technology.

Technical skills are now relatively more important than mere strength in military jobs which are increasingly specialised. However, the specialisations in the military will continue to follow the general trends in how interested men and women are in specific things in broader society - Segal illustrates this with the example of men being generally more interested in electronics and computers and so jobs which require this skill will be filled more by men than women.

Combat to Support Ratio

Similar to the type of military operation as previously mentioned, this aspect describes how the nature of the operations will affect the gender balance in the military.

Combat has historically been seen as a man's activity - with many militaries still excluding women from combat tasks today. In countries where women may serve in combat positions this variable is less important, however even in these countries women are still more likely to be in support positions than in combat. So if there are more support positions available, there will be a greater proportion of women involved in the military.

The aforementioned technological change has created a shift in most militaries and military operations, in that there are now far more support positions available than there once were - previously the vast majority of positions were direct combat positions. Whether the operations are taking place abroad or at home is also a factor here, as if it is abroad then they need to take their supporting positions with them whereas at home the military can rely on their own civilian infrastructure.

Force Structure

This aspect is on whether there are more active soldiers or reserves. If the support functions are mainly in the reserve forces then there will be more women, however if the military relies on the reserves then women's participation may decline. This is due to the reserves generally being made up of older people who have families. If women with families are not considered deployable then there will be less involvement of women.

Military Accession Policies

Where there are voluntary accession systems, then women's military participation tends to increase. This is because in places with voluntary systems of recruitment, there tends to be greater energy directed towards marketing the armed forces as a workplace that includes women. The crucial factor is whether there are enough men to fill the military roles - where there are less men then there will be more women, but what roles they play are determined by elements such as cultural values.

Social Structure

Demographic Patterns

The demographic changes within a population is also argued to have an impact on women's military participation. If fewer children are born within a population, then there will be less available (male) soldiers, and unless there is also less military demand, then women will be drawn into service to fill the gap.

This could be seen in the US, where when facing a shortage of enlistments in the US, they expanded the number of female recruits instead of lowering the standards for male recruits.

Labour Force Characteristics

It is also argued that if less men are available for labour jobs then more women are needed to fill these roles, and women's greater involvement in the workplace leads to structural and cultural changes in society which makes it possible for women to also enter the military.

Similarly, the degree of gender segregation in the civilian structure is said to affect how many women will be involved in military jobs. In countries where there is greater gender integration in

the job market, there is more likely to be greater gender equality in general and so women will be better accepted in military roles.

Economic Factors

In general, there is a trend that in times of economic expansion, there are more women in the workforce, whereas in periods of contraction, women leave the workforce. Likewise, when there are high numbers of unemployed men, there are more men to serve in the armed forces. In times where there are low levels of male unemployment then this leads to better opportunities for women in the armed forces. This could be seen in the US where during the late 70s when there was low levels of unemployment, then more women joined the military, but during the 80s when unemployment rose, then the numbers of women joining ceased to rise (Segal and Segal, 1983).

Family Structure

Women's roles are generally linked to family values and norms, and the nature of military activity is socially constructed as negatively related to family roles (Segal, 1986; 1989).

If a society places high levels of family responsibilities onto the average woman, then this will lead to less women's representation in the armed forces.

However, later age at first marriage, later age of first child, and fewer children is positively associated with more military involvement of women. Having children later in life is an important factor as entering the military is associated with younger personnel.

Culture

Social Construction of Gender and Social Values about Gender

The degree to which roles are attributed to each gender is socially determined (Lorber, 1993). If there are certain jobs for which sex based attributes are important then a gendered division of labour may be functional, however, technology has diminished the importance of physically based traits such as physical strength and reproduction.

If there is a large importance placed on gender differences then one gender is more likely to do one thing or the other. It is society which determines whether there is emphasis on gender differences or individual differences - when there is an emphasis on gender differences then women will be less likely to be seen as suitable for the military.

In general, if there is more gender equality in a society then women will be greater represented in the military. With the increasing rate of laws which ban gender discrimination, then women are likely to be found in greater numbers in the world's militaries. An opposing factor is religious fundamentalists and conservatism which aims to preserve traditional gender roles - the higher

the percentage of people with these beliefs in a country, then the lower the amount of women in the military.

Social Construction of Family and Social Values about Family

Women have traditionally been associated with reproduction and child rearing, and the extent to which the family remains the primary responsibility of the women will affect military roles.

“The greater the movement away from traditional family forms, especially those based on the nuclear family, the greater the representation of women in the military” (Segal, 1995, p770).

Government sponsored parental leave or child care or large extended families can make it easier for women to be involved in military activities as it lifts some of the responsibility for child rearing off of women’s shoulders.

Application

Segal’s model offers a useful lens for interpreting the preconditions that made such a policy politically viable and socially acceptable. By applying this theory, the thesis aims to link the policy decision on conscription to deeper social transformations. In doing so, it provides a complementary perspective to Kingdon’s Multiple Streams Theory by grounding policy change within long-term cultural and structural shifts.

Chapter 4. Methodology

4.1. Material and Data.

This study is based on qualitative data, collected from official press releases, media statements, and speeches made by members of the Danish Parliament.

Political speeches were sourced from the ‘Danish Speeches’ website, which archives both historical and contemporary political speeches for public access. Additional political statements were obtained from official Danish government websites, including the Ministry of Defence and the Prime Minister’s Office, both of which provide transcripts of the press conferences, and public statements related to the topics of female conscription and the broader strengthening of the Armed Forces.

Media statements and interviews were collected from four Danish news outlets: DR Nyheder, Avisen, Berlingske, and Jyllands-Posten. These outlets were selected for a mix of perspectives, representing differing political orientations, as well as a mix between tabloid and broadsheets.

Data collection involved keyword searches on the archives of each media outlet and governmental platform. The timeframe for inclusion spanned from the government’s announcement of its intention to implement gender-neutral conscription to April 2025, when this thesis was being written.

For instance, on the Berlingske website, a search using the terms “værnepligt” (conscription) and “kvinde” (woman) initially yielded 659 results. These were then filtered by publication date and relevance - excluding articles unrelated to Denmark or those that lacked statements from political figures.

Limitation

One limitation of the data concerns the selection of media sources. Three of the media sources lean toward the centre-right end of the political spectrum. As a result, parties such as Liberal Alliance and Danmarks Demokraterne may have received disproportionately high visibility in the dataset. However, this potential bias was mitigated somewhat by including other sources, and statements and speeches from across the political spectrum, to help ensure that a broad range of political voices were represented in the analysis. Therefore, while media coverage may have skewed toward certain actors, the overall conclusions of the study were not significantly affected. In future research, the inclusion of a newspaper like Politiken, which is known for its left-leaning editorial stance, would however help to ensure a more balanced representation.

4.2. Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis was selected for this study because it offers a flexible framework for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning across qualitative data. Given the focus on political discourse within speeches, statements, and media interviews, this method allows for a nuanced exploration of how political actors frame gender-neutral conscription.

The analysis in this thesis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stage process for thematic analysis.

Table 1 Phases of thematic analysis

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Step One. Familiarisation with the Data

The first phase of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis involves a thorough immersion in the dataset to develop a deep understanding of its content. This process began with the systematic

downloading and organisation of the data into folders, followed by multiple readings to become closely acquainted with the material. Once initial familiarity was established, the data was reviewed again and summarised in a single document. This document provided an overview of each article or speech, including the publication (e.g. specific newspapers), the author, the central ideas and arguments presented, and any relevant contextual or initial insights. These summaries served as the foundation for deeper analysis in the subsequent phases.

Step Two. Generating Initial Codes

Following familiarisation, initial codes were developed by going through each text and identifying and highlighting segments of them that were relevant to the research question.

At this stage, the following codes were generated: modernity, gender equality, strengthening the armed forces, task optimisation, recruitment, national security, NATO expectations, Nordic examples, uncivilised, liberal values, and gender differences.

The coded statements were compiled into an overview document. Under each code, there was listed the content of the statement, who said it, their political affiliation, and a link to the source material.

For example, under “Modern values” there was the statement “*We also largely lack a diverse, up-to-date and modern defense when we look at gender composition*” - Troels Lund Poulsen, V, and a link to the Ministry of Defence page where the chronicle he wrote was found.

Step Three. Searching for Themes

Once a list of codes had been established, the process shifted to theme generation. This involved identifying broader patterns of meaning by grouping related codes. While codes captured specific data points, themes were developed to reflect larger patterns within the whole group of material. Emerging themes included concerns related to national security, gender inequality, ideological divisions, and outside influences.

Step Four. Reviewing Themes

The initial ideas for themes were then reviewed and refined. Each coded extract was revisited to ensure its alignment with the theme it was assigned to. Themes were assessed for internal coherence and distinctiveness in relation to the overall dataset. During this step, some themes were divided into sub-themes or merged with others.

Step Five. Defining and Naming Themes

After reviewing, each theme was given a name that captured its core essence.

The themes created were 1. National Security (sub-themes: ‘Denmark under Threat’ ‘Recruitment’ and ‘Ideological Differences’, 2. Optimised Armed Forces 3. Modern Values

(sub-themes: 'Gender Equality' and 'Liberal Values') 4. Gender Differences and 5. International Influence.

Step Six. Producing the Report

The final phase involved integrating the themes into an analytic narrative. Each theme was presented in turn in Chapter Five, supported by relevant data excerpts, such as direct quotations. The themes were interpreted through the theoretical framework of Kingdon's Multiple Streams Theory and the lens of the research question "*How did the convergence of problem, policy, and political streams lead to the decision to implement gender neutral conscription in Denmark?*"

Limitations

While thematic analysis is a flexible and widely used method for identifying patterns and meaning in qualitative data, its application in this thesis comes with several limitations that must be acknowledged.

First, thematic analysis is interpretive. It relies on the researcher's own judgment to identify themes, which introduces the possibility of subjective bias. While there has been effort made to approach the material systematically and transparently, different researchers might identify different themes or place emphasis on different aspects of the data. This method therefore does not provide a definitive explanation but rather an interpretation of the discourse.

Thematic analysis moreover cannot uncover the full scope of motivations or decision-making processes behind a policy change. Political decisions are often the result of negotiations, informal conversations, institutional pressures, and personal values that may not be publicly disclosed. Public speeches and statements - while valuable - are often strategic and curated. Therefore, the analysis can only offer an informed approximation of the factors influencing the move toward gender-neutral conscription, rather than a complete account of the internal decision-making process.

Another potential limitation in the research relates to language proficiency. While I have a solid understanding of Danish, I am not a native speaker. Although care was taken to ensure accurate understanding, and translations were approached with attention to context, there is a possibility that some nuances or culturally embedded meanings may have been overlooked which may have influenced the interpretation of themes.

Lastly, the policy under study - gender-neutral conscription in Denmark- has not yet been implemented. As such, the analysis is based on discourse surrounding an upcoming policy rather than a completed change. This introduces a degree of uncertainty, as the eventual outcome could still diverge from what is currently being planned. There is still the possibility that political support could erode, public opinion could shift, or implementation could be delayed or cancelled altogether.

Together, these limitations underscore that the findings presented in this thesis should be understood as a contextual and interpretive account of current political and societal discourses, rather than a definitive explanation of causality or policy outcomes.

4.3. Use of AI

Within this paper, ChatGPT was used as a brainstorming tool in the initial stages to generate ideas, and for tasks such as offering suggestions to improve sentence structure and making the reference list uniform.

Chapter 5: Thematic Analysis of Politicians Statements

The following thematic analysis investigates the political discourse surrounding the Danish government's decision to implement gender-neutral conscription, with the aim of identifying the key factors that drove the policy shift. By analysing statements from Danish politicians, the intention is to explore how various arguments and narratives came together to justify the reform. The analysis is framed by Kingdon's Multiple Streams Theory, which conceptualises policy change as the result of the convergence of problem recognition, viable policy solutions, and favourable political conditions. The five thematic categories identified - 'National Security', 'Optimised Armed Forces', 'Modern Values', 'Ideological Differences' and 'International Influence' highlight the multifaceted nature of the debate. This analysis reveals how domestic and international pressures combined with evolving societal values have created a window of opportunity for the adoption of gender-neutral conscription.

Included in brackets after direct quotations will be the party the politician belongs to, and the date the statement was publicised.

5.1 National Security

The most pervasive theme that is found through the data, is that of national security. In almost every interview, speech and statement that relates to the changes to conscription, the threat to Denmark, Europe, and/or Danish/Western values, is mentioned as a reason for why the conscription system needs revision (and in a few cases for why it should remain as it is).

Applying Kingdon's framework, the problem stream involves a growing awareness of security challenges, particularly the threat posed by Russia, which has heightened the urgency for Denmark to strengthen its defense capabilities. The policy stream is reflected in the proposed changes to conscription policy, with the idea of gender-neutral conscription emerging as a potential solution to address the increasing need for military personnel. Lastly, the political stream is captured in the political dynamics among Danish political parties as they respond to security concerns.

Denmark under Threat

"We face massive challenges when it comes to security policy. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has definitively killed the dream that Denmark can enjoy itself in secret while the storm rages in other parts of the world. Now the war has come to Europe" - Troels Lund Poulsen (V, 10 May 2024).²

The backdrop of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and rising global tensions has created a sense of urgency to bolster Denmark's defense capabilities. From Kingdon's perspective, this constitutes a problem within the problem stream - the growing threat to Denmark's security and stability has created a pressing issue that demands attention. The recognition that security conditions are changing, with the potential for military conflict escalating in Europe, shapes the context within which conscription reform is being debated.

Most of the major political parties, including the government parties of Socialdemokratiet, Venstre and Moderaterne, present the geopolitical reality as being fundamentally changed. Mette Frederiksen (SD, 13 March 2024) warns that Europe is now facing *"a significantly more serious and complex threat picture"*, and stresses that *"we must no longer take peace and freedom for granted."* The Russian war effort, according to her, has ushered in a new era of realism, where military readiness and allied cooperation are essential. *"We must fight and stand up for the ideals and values we believe in,"*³ she states, placing the building up of the defence as necessary not only to fight for survival and sovereignty, but to preserve the Danish way of life. The problem stream can be seen to become more visible as a result of international instability, pushing defense issues to the forefront of policy discussions.

This sense of threat is echoed across party lines. Poulsen (V, 10 May 2024) asserts that *"Russia's saber rattling and willingness to use hybrid attacks against NATO countries show that we must make the Danish Defence stronger,"* with the changes to conscription playing *"a crucial role"* in this.⁴ Mona Juul (K, 8 March 2025) similarly emphasises the need to give the Chief of Defence the *"best and most optimal conditions possible."* as *"the world order has gotten worse."*⁵ And Engel-Schmidt (M) reminds that *"we as a country are facing a significant threat"*⁶ that demands a military capable of both national defense and international cooperation. These comments reflect a change in the politics stream, wherein national security becomes a central issue that politicians from various parties must respond to.

A number of other politicians link the changes to conscription directly to the worsening security situation. Peter Have (M, 29 March 2024) states *"today's situation with Russia's pressure on Europe and our values"* requires a renewed societal commitment: *"That's why we need more conscripts."*⁷ Torsten Schack Pedersen (V, 21 March 2024) also ties the strengthening of conscription to the ongoing war in Ukraine - *"Putin is waging war in Europe and warning of World*

² <https://www.fmn.dk/da/ministeriet/forsvarsministeren/ministeren/indlag/ny-varnepligt-giver-nodvendig-robusthed2/>

³ <https://www.dansketaler.dk/tale/mette-frederiksens-tale-om-styrkelse-af-forsvaret>

⁴ <https://www.fmn.dk/da/ministeriet/forsvarsministeren/ministeren/indlag/ny-varnepligt-giver-nodvendig-robusthed2/>

⁵ <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/konservative-vil-fremrykke-den-kvindelige-vaernepligt-med-et-aar>

⁶ <https://jyllands-posten.dk/debat/breve/ECE17025954/kvinder-er-lige-saa-gode-soldater-som-maend/>

⁷ <https://avisend danmark.dk/debat/moderaterne-vi-har-brug-for-flere-som-vil-vaerne-om-danmark>

*War III. Therefore, the government wants - as stated in the current defense agreement - to strengthen conscription".*⁸

There is also a forward-looking aspect to some of the arguments. Troels Lund Poulsen & Peter Juel-Jensen (V, April 2024) in a joint statement, claim that the reforms, including equal conscription, will ensure that *"future generations can enjoy the same safe upbringing that we have had."*⁹ This look toward the future may seek to legitimise military reform not only in response to present threats but also as a long-term safeguard for peace and stability.

Several politicians from Liberal Alliance highlight the threat to Denmark as the reason for them retracting their veto against gender neutral conscription. Sólbjörg Jakobsen (LA, March 2025) for example issued the statement: *"we were in a different situation last year,"* and the current situation *"requires that we parties stand together and that we make the right decisions for something as crucial as our defense right now"*.¹⁰

Despite political disagreement on some aspects of the conscription debate, security is the unifying rationale across all the parties for why changes need to be made to the defence . Whether from the left, right, or center, the consensus is that Denmark must adapt its military infrastructure to meet the demands of an increasingly unstable world.

Recruitment

The sub-theme of recruitment emerges as a crucial concern under the broader theme of national security. Across the political spectrum, there is a recognition of the need to expand the Armed Forces' personnel base to meet current and future defense needs. This section explores how different politicians frame recruitment challenges and the role gender-neutral conscription may play in meeting (or hindering) Denmark's defense needs.

Under Kingdon's framework, the policy stream contains the solution of gender-neutral conscription, which is being discussed as a direct response to the problem of manpower shortages in the Danish military.

Peter Have (M, 29 March 2024) points out that *"by opening up conscription to women, the recruitment base is expanded,"* which not only increases intake but also helps to attract and retain *"the best and most suitable candidates."*¹¹ Even Carsten Bach (LA, 1 April 2024) who is against the policy change, believes that it would *"strengthen recruitment to the permanent structure of the armed forces"* if more women undertook military service.¹²

⁸ <https://jyllands-posten.dk/debat/breve/ECE16955704/hvorfor-i-alverden-kan-kvinder-ikke-vaere-soldater/>

⁹ <https://www.venstre.dk/nyheder/ny-aftale-styrker-dansk-forsvar-med-investeringer-for-95-mia-kr>

¹⁰ <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/la-sloejfer-veto-mod-kvindelig-vaernepligt-efter-tvivl>

¹¹ <https://avisendanmark.dk/debat/moderaterne-vi-har-brug-for-flere-som-vil-vaerne-om-danmark>

¹²

<https://avisendanmark.dk/debat/la-vaernepligten-kan-baade-styrkes-og-ligestilles-uden-at-fratage-kvinderne-deres-frihed-og-ret-til-selv-at-bestemme>

This line of reasoning positions women's inclusion as strategically advantageous. The argument is that a broader and more inclusive approach to conscription will lead to better recruitment outcomes and ultimately support the operational readiness of the Armed Forces.

Troels Lund Poulsen (V, 12 March 2025) reinforces this view, stating that *"the Armed Forces need to have a larger base to recruit from,"* and that diversity in representation - including gender diversity - has a *"positive effect on recruitment and retention."*¹³ He also stresses the importance of role models for potential recruits, suggesting that seeing both women and men in military roles can help normalise participation across genders and inspire future generations to enlist. Kristian Pihl Lorentzen (V, 9 April 2024) also asserts that *"there has been broad agreement that conscription is an essential part of the answer"* to Denmark's ongoing manpower challenges.¹⁴

However, not all political voices are aligned on this approach. A counterargument is that the current system is already functioning well in attracting enough voluntary recruits, so the changes to include women are not needed and may do more harm than good. Bach (LA, 2 April 2024) shows this by stating: *"the voluntary level among conscripts is at an all-time high."*¹⁵ According to him, better working conditions - not compulsory service - are the key to sustainable recruitment.

Similarly, Lise Bech (DD, 8 March 2025) argues that the focus should be on *"quickly recruiting more voluntary conscripts,"*¹⁶ while Vanopslagh (LA, 19 March 2024) warns that compulsory female conscription could backfire and *"weaken the Armed Forces' recruitment base overall."*¹⁷ This is due to fewer of the female conscripts going on to become professional soldiers - if a higher percentage of the conscripts will be women in the future then his argument is that there is a risk of there being even less of the overall recruits carrying on with a military career. However, this argument is on the assumption that the number of recruits will stay the same, and ignores the fact that far more men currently voluntarily undergo military service than women do - a trend which is likely to continue.

Despite these differences, there is a clear shared interest in increasing women's participation in the Armed Forces. Even Støjberg (DD, 19 March 2024), who is critical of the conscription reform, asserts: *"None of us are against more women in the Armed Forces. Quite the opposite."*

¹⁸ The dispute centers less on the goal and more on the means - whether inclusion should be achieved through structural reform or voluntary pathways.

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<https://www.fmn.dk/da/ministeriet/forsvarsministeren/ministeren/indlag/flere-kvinder-i-forsvaret-skaber-et-bedre-forsvar/>

¹⁴ <https://avisend danmark.dk/debat/venstre-om-vaernepligt-for-kvinder-en-aergerlig-symbolpolitik-fra-liberal-alliance>

¹⁵ <https://www.berlingske.dk/kommentatorer/liberal-alliance-gaar-i-rette-med-troels-lund-poulsen-her-er-tre>

¹⁶ <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/konservative-vil-fremrykke-den-kvindelige-vaernepligt-med-et-aar>

¹⁷ <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/vanopslagh-og-stoejberg-med-markant-melding-vil-blokere-for-kvindelig>

¹⁸ <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/vanopslagh-og-stoejberg-med-markant-melding-vil-blokere-for-kvindelig>

Ultimately, recruitment is used both as a rationale for expanding conscription and as a point of caution. For supporters, gender-neutral conscription is a strategy to widen the military's appeal and secure future personnel needs. For skeptics, it represents a potential risk to an already challenged system. Yet in both cases, the debate underscores a shared concern: that Denmark's defense must remain attractive, sustainable, and capable of drawing from a broad range of talent.

Ideological Differences

The sub-theme of 'Ideological Differences' highlights the tension between defense policy and political ideologies in relation to gender-neutral conscription. Those who are against the reform argue that introducing gender-neutral conscription risks turning defense policy into a symbolic gesture, driven by ideological commitments to a specific interpretation of gender equality rather than military necessity. Others emphasise that, in times of heightened security threats, it is essential to put aside ideological differences and focus on pragmatic solutions for national defense problems.

While the party line in Liberal Alliance has since changed, skepticism of the policy reform is captured in Vanopslagh's statement: *"The defense should not be made the subject of an equality experiment in the midst of a deeply serious time."*¹⁹ (4 May, 2024).

This positions gender-neutral conscription as a symbolic or ideological gesture rather than a military necessity. His framing implies that equality efforts may weaken the functionality of the defense during crises.

Similarly, Støjberg (DD, 19 March 2024) frames the shift in conscription policy as a deviation from rational defense planning: *"It is strange to say that now defense policy is no longer about ensuring the strongest defense, but about waving the flag of equality."*²⁰ In this critique, ideological commitments to gender equality are portrayed as incompatible with strategic defense policy. The implicit message is that equality-driven reforms may dilute or distract from national security priorities.

Despite these ideological divisions, other politicians emphasise the need to set aside political barriers in favor of addressing immediate security threats. Sólbjørg Jakobsen (LA, 12 March 2025) articulates the shift in their party line with: *"The time has passed for ideological struggle. Ideological barriers in peacetime should not stand in the way of politics in times of conflict."*²¹ This statement signals a re-prioritisation where existential threats override ideological commitments, particularly liberal resistance to state intervention in personal liberty, such as mandatory military service.

Poulsen (V, 12 March 2025) echoes this with: *"LA will no longer let ideological opposition to female conscription create unnecessary bureaucracy in a difficult time."*²² Here, ideology is

¹⁹ <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/med-bastante-udtalelser-talte-alex-vanopslagh-imod-kvindelig-vaernepligt>

²⁰ <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/vanopslagh-og-stoejberg-med-markant-melding-vil-blokere-for-kvindelig>

²¹ <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/la-vender-paa-en-tallerken-klar-til-kvindelig-vaernepligt>

²² <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/la-vender-paa-en-tallerken-klar-til-kvindelig-vaernepligt>

portrayed as producing inefficiency in this period of national urgency. This reflects the politics stream moving toward a more unified position, where national security concerns outweigh ideological commitments in the face of an escalating global threat.

Liberal Alliance in particular has moved to a stance that frames conscription reform as a necessary, if uncomfortable, compromise due to heightened security threats.

As the threat level rises, ideological opposition gives way to a more utilitarian approach. Liberal Alliance's politicians navigate this shift by redefining their positions, not as ideological surrender - as they still desire a voluntary system - but as necessary adaptability in service of the greater national good.

5.2. Optimised Armed Forces

This theme is tied closely with national security, in that the Danish armed forces as it stands now is seen as insufficient for defending against potential threats. However, even when it is not directly linked to national security nor societal values, more women in the defence is argued to be beneficial as it will mean bringing in people who have different skills and experience which will be good for the operational capacities of the defence.

Politicians from various parties express a shared concern: that the Danish defense needs to expand, professionalise, and modernise in order to meet current geopolitical and operational challenges. Within this context, gender inclusion is framed as a resource.

Several politicians explicitly link diversity - particularly gender diversity - with concrete improvements in operational outcomes. Troels Lund Poulsen (V, 8 March 2024) states that *“Diversity creates a fertile ground for stronger teams and better decisions,”* and *“Diversity has a positive effect on task solving.”*²³ Similarly, Inger Støjberg (DD, 26 January 2024), concedes that mixed-gender workplaces have measurable benefits: *“both men and women in a workplace make a positive difference.”*²⁴

This rhetoric reflects a broader belief that diverse teams outperform homogeneous ones. Equality and military strength are thus positioned as mutually reinforcing: *“Equal opportunities and equality - also when it comes to military service - is central, because it will provide better defense”*²⁵ (Kristian Pihl Lorentzen, V, 9 April 2024). The implication is that drawing from the full talent pool - including women - is strategically sound. This framing increases the chances of the new policy receiving and maintaining support because it appeals to both practical concerns and shared values within the politics stream.

However, politicians from Liberal Alliance show concerns that forced conscription might damage morale and effectiveness which would lead to a further weakened defense.

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<https://www.fmn.dk/da/ministeriet/forsvarsministeren/ministeren/indlag/flere-kvinder-i-forsvaret-skaber-et-bedre-forsvar/>

²⁴ <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/inger-stoejberg-staar-i-vejen-for-kvindelig-vaernepligt-der-er-forskel-paa>

²⁵ <https://avisendanmark.dk/debat/venstre-om-vaernepligt-for-kvinder-en-aergerlig-symbolpolitik-fra-liberal-alliance>

“If the Armed Forces' volunteer rate falls further, it will inevitably also lead to an inferior military.”
“We only have a real chance of [having a well-functioning and professional defense] if the Armed Forces employees are motivated to contribute to Denmark's security because they are employed voluntarily and not because of government coercion.” - Carsten Bach (LA, 2 April 2024).²⁶

Similarly, Alex Vanopslagh (LA, 19 March 2024) criticises conscription reform as ineffective: *“We do not believe that this gives us the best defense.”*²⁷

These counterpoints highlight a distinction between two different visions of how to optimise the Armed Forces: one side sees gender-neutral conscription as a way to enhance capacity by guiding more women into military service and thus ensuring there is greater range of talents. The other side, while they agree that more women in the defence would be beneficial, argues that compulsory service risks undermining motivation and effectiveness, preferring voluntary participation instead.

This shows that the politics stream contains multiple viewpoints - different political players have their own values and preferences, which affect whether a policy can gain support.

In this case, while some of the politicians see structural reform as potentially undermining the professionalism they believe is vital for an effective defense, the broader consensus is that structural reform is necessary to optimise task performance. Poulsen and Juel-Jensen (V, 30 April, 2024) encapsulate this logic by stating: *“Conscription will apply to both genders because overall, the tasks are best solved... if we can draw on all qualified young people.”*²⁸

Their argument directly aligns the problem (insufficient operational capacity), the policy solution (gender-neutral conscription), and the political moment (a willingness among many parties for reform) in a way that opens a policy window for action.

5.3. Modern values

When discussing gender neutral conscription, politicians often bring up modern values as a justification for the policy change, with the reform often being framed as necessary and progressive. Often these modern values refer to the expectation that people will receive the same opportunities and responsibilities as each other regardless of sex, and people's right to self determination.

Gender Equality

Gender equality is a value that Denmark takes pride in, and to achieve a greater degree of gender equality is said to be a way through which workplaces - including the armed forces - can become more modern. Across party lines, modernisation of the defence is presented as a moral

²⁶ <https://www.berlingske.dk/kommentatorer/liberal-alliance-gaar-i-rette-med-troels-lund-poulsen-her-er-tre>

²⁷ <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/vanopslagh-og-stoejberg-med-markant-melding-vil-blokere-for-kvindelig>

²⁸ <https://www.venstre.dk/nyheder/ny-aftale-styrker-dansk-forsvar-med-investeringer-for-95-mia-kr>

imperative and in the process national defence is linked with societal values of equality, inclusion and diversity. Within the problem stream, the mismatch between Denmark's professed commitment to equality and its gendered conscription system is seen as a pressing issue requiring correction. Here, equality is often interpreted to mean equal rights, equal duties, and equal treatment under the law - though, as the debate shows, not all political actors agree on how these principles should be enacted.

A core narrative expressed by politicians like Troels Lund Poulsen (V, 8 March 2024), is that the current structure of the Danish Armed Forces is outdated and misaligned with contemporary Danish society. Poulsen underscores that Denmark *"largely lacks a diverse, up-to-date and modern defense when considering gender composition"*. He also criticises the slow pace of change as a barrier to progress: *"The long and tough journey of making the Danish Armed Forces a more modern workplace... is going too slowly"*.²⁹ This suggests that he considers it a problem that the defence is failing to reflect gender demographics and that something should be done to fix the issue.

Equality is framed as a necessity for maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of national defense. Statements like *"equality will create a more modern and more diverse defence, which reflects the times we live in"*³⁰ (Mette Frederiksen, SD, 13 March 2024) directly connects modernisation with the pursuit of gender equality, portraying reform as a reflection of Denmark's progress into the 21st century. Jakob Engel-Schmidt (M, 20 April 2024) reinforces this by deriding outdated perspectives, declaring *"we are not living in the past... it's 2024, not 1950."* With this he is indicating that resistance to gender-neutral conscription is out of step with contemporary values. He goes on to say exactly what is expected in today's Denmark: *"We must have equal opportunities, equal conditions and equal responsibility. This naturally also applies to Denmark's defense."*³¹

Mette Frederiksen (SD, 13 March 2024) stated *"We like to boast that we have an equal Denmark, but for example, only Danish men are obliged to attend Armed Forces Day. Women have the opportunity to register themselves and subsequently become conscripts, but here too there are differences in the conditions"*.³² So despite Denmark priding itself on equality, there are still areas of contradiction to be found in the conscription system, which may tarnish Denmark's reputation as a gender equal society.

All of the politicians claim they are pro-gender equality, but how they see equality being achieved differs. Gender equality arguments are used by both those in favour of the policy change and those against it.

²⁹

<https://www.fmn.dk/da/ministeriet/forsvarsministeren/ministeren/indlag/flere-kvinder-i-forsvaret-skaber-et-bedre-forsvar/>

³⁰ <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/regeringen-vil-indfoere-kvindelig-vaernepligt-paa-lige-fod-med-maend>

³¹ <https://jyllands-posten.dk/debat/breve/ECE17025954/kvinder-er-lige-saa-gode-soldater-som-maend/>

³² <https://www.dansketales.dk/tale/mette-frederiksens-tale-om-styrkelse-af-forsvaret>

Opponents warn of unintended consequences which will lead to a worsening of equality, whereas for advocates, gender neutral conscription is portrayed as the next step toward full equality in Danish society, as well as being beneficial operationally for the defence.

Both men and women are now expected to do their duty to protect the nation, and be given equal opportunities. Jakob Engel-Schmidt (M, 20 April 2024) stated *“Our security is a shared responsibility. Of course, women must also contribute to this in a modern country with gender equality”*.³³ Peter Have (M, 29 March 2024) likewise argues for getting more women in the defence - *“the inclusion of women in the military is another step towards gender equality. It sends a strong signal that both men and women have a responsibility to defend their country and contribute to the security of society. By integrating women into the military, we create a more diverse and inclusive defense”*.³⁴

However, opposition voices, most notably from Inger Støjberg and Alex Vanopslagh, challenge this interpretation of equality. Their arguments often center on practical differences in men’s and women’s societal roles - particularly around childbearing and income. Støjberg (DD, 24 January 2024) emphasizes that *“we are not equal by nature”* and argues that military service would unfairly burden women, who already experience income loss due to maternity leave. She warns that compulsory conscription would *“exacerbate the challenge of a lack of equal pay and gender inequality when it comes to the size of pension savings.”*³⁵ By forcing them now into military service it would mean they have even less time on the job market and will fall even further behind men.

She states that she thinks women in the defence would be a good thing, that she is pro-gender equality and that women should be able to volunteer if they want to, but that there should not be the element of force when it comes to women’s participation.

This introduces a paradox in which equality in conscription is portrayed as potentially deepening existing inequalities elsewhere - especially in the labour market. Vanopslagh (LA, 19 March 2024) reinforces this view by questioning whether full equality in defense is even possible: *“There will never be total equality in the defense of the country.”*³⁶ These perspectives suggest that gender equality should be pursued through alternative means, ones that do not risk adding burdens to women who are already disadvantaged.

These critiques highlight divisions within the politics stream: although there is consensus on the value of equality, there is no consensus on how best to achieve it without unintended negative consequences.

Nonetheless, the broader political consensus appears to favor equality of conscription as a matter of principle. Politicians such as Pia Olsen Dyhr (SF) and Martin Lidegaard (RV) support full equality in conscription, with Dyhr emphasizing the importance of non-discriminatory conditions for women and Lidegaard calling it a “flagship issue” that will benefit the defense in the long term. Torsten Schack Pedersen (V, 21 March 2024) succinctly sums up this position: *“In*

³³ <https://jyllands-posten.dk/debat/breve/ECE17025954/kvinder-er-lige-saa-gode-soldater-som-maend/>

³⁴ <https://avisendanmark.dk/debat/moderaterne-vi-har-brug-for-flere-som-vil-vaerne-om-danmark>

³⁵ <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/inger-stoejberg-staar-i-vejen-for-kvindelig-vaernepligt-der-er-forskel-paa>

³⁶ <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/vanopslagh-og-stoejberg-med-markant-melding-vil-blokere-for-kvindelig>

*modern times, women and men are equally good... that is why I am a strong advocate that we now equalize military service.”*³⁷

The three interacting streams of Kingdon's framework can be identified in these discussions: in the problem stream is the inconsistencies between Denmark's self-image as an egalitarian society and its unequal conscription practices; in the policy stream is gender-neutral conscription as a way to align military service with contemporary ideals; and in the politics stream is the widespread embrace of equality as a political goal, as well as divisions over how to realise these values.

Liberal Values

Another line of argument that calls to modern values emerges from a liberal perspective, which places a high value on individual freedom and personal autonomy. For opponents to the policy change, most often within the party 'Liberal Alliance', the issue is not necessarily about gender but about the principle of coercion itself. They assert that the state should not force individuals into military service, regardless of gender, and so are against the policy change because it would potentially force even more people into the military against their will. Liberal Alliance's official position is to promote both gender equality and greater female participation in the military - but strictly on a voluntary basis. This vision places freedom from state coercion at the heart of modern values.

Carsten Bach (LA, 1 April 2024) provides a clear expression of this argument: *"It is not the state's job to deprive Danes of either freedom or responsibility."*³⁸ Similarly, Alex Vanopslagh (LA, 9 April 2024) explains the party's opposition to female conscription, framing it as part of a broader rejection of compulsory service *"When we are against female conscription, it is because we are against forcing people into the army."*³⁹

Sólbjørg Jakobsen (LA, 12 March 2025) furthermore states, the goal should be to have *"both more women and men in the armed forces,"* but only on a voluntary basis.⁴⁰

For Bach (2 April 2024), a more liberal form of equality would involve: *"an equal right to military service"*, thereby ensuring equality through choice, not coercion.

The central tenet of this argument is the individual's right to choose freely. Bach further argues: *"We should not force people to be soldiers if they do not want to. Regardless of whether it affects men or women."*⁴¹

³⁷ <https://jyllands-posten.dk/debat/breve/ECE16955704/hvorfor-i-alverden-kan-kvinder-ikke-vaere-soldater/>

³⁸ <https://avisend danmark.dk/debat/la-vaernepligten-kan-baade-styrkes-og-ligestilles-uden-at-fratage-kvinderne-deres-frihed-og-ret-til-selv-at-bestemme>

³⁹ <https://avisend danmark.dk/politik/alex-vanopslagh-fortryder-sine-ord-om-kvinder-i-forsvaret-det-er-endt-med-at-forplumre-debatten>

⁴⁰ <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/la-vender-paa-en-tallerken-klar-til-kvindelig-vaernepligt>

⁴¹ <https://www.berlingske.dk/kommentatorer/liberal-alliance-gaar-i-rette-med-troels-lund-poulsen-her-er-tre>

This presents an alternative policy proposal: rather than extending conscription to women in the name of equality, Liberal Alliance proposes abolishing conscription altogether. Thus, the politics stream involves a tension between egalitarianism, which supports equal responsibilities for everyone, and liberalism, which emphasises equal rights and personal freedom without force.

5.4. Gender Differences

Another component of the debate surrounding conscription revolves around gender differences, particularly physical attributes and how these differences impact the eligibility of women for military service.

Inger Støjberg (DD, 29 April 2024) heavily emphasises the biological differences between men and women, particularly with regard to muscle mass and physical strength. According to her: *“Military service is okay for men, but not all women are physically fit for it.”* She adds: *“There are differences between women and men. There are differences in our muscle mass and how strong we are. Then there are some women - many women - who can train themselves, and that is good. But from there and to say that we are completely built the same - we are not.”*⁴² From her point of view, the problem is that the Armed Forces would be weakened if women, who are generally less physically strong, were integrated under the same conditions as men.

This argument underscores a traditional view that physical fitness - specifically strength - is the most important characteristic for a soldier, one that women, according to this stance, cannot equally meet. For Støjberg, physical ability is of top priority, and the military cannot afford to *“compromise on the physiological aspect in relation to the Armed Forces. You have to be able to pass the same tests.”* (26 January 2024)⁴³

However, others challenge this view, especially in the context of modern warfare. With the increasing importance of technology in military operations, the argument is made that physical strength is no longer the sole determining factor in a soldier's effectiveness.

Pedersen (V, 21 March 2024) counters Støjberg's argument by stating *“The days when wars were fought with armor and lances, and where physicality was paramount, are gone. Today, defense is a high-tech discipline, where intelligence and ingenuity can be as valuable as brute strength. And that is why women can play a crucial role in Danish defense.”*⁴⁴

This positions technological and cognitive abilities as crucial in the modern military, making room for both men and women who may possess different kinds of strength - such as having intellectual and technological skills rather than physical prowess. For example, roles in cyber

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<https://avisendanmark.dk/politik/partier-er-uenige-minister-regner-med-model-for-kvindelig-vaernepligt-efter-naeste-valg>

⁴³ <https://www.berlingske.dk/politik/inger-stoejberg-staar-i-vejen-for-kvindelig-vaernepligt-der-er-forskel-paa>

⁴⁴ <https://jyllands-posten.dk/debat/breve/ECE16955704/hvorfor-i-alverden-kan-kvinder-ikke-vaere-soldater/>

operations, drone piloting, and intelligence analysis rely more on strategic thinking and digital proficiency than on physical endurance.

Among the critiques of gender-neutral conscription, there is also an argument that paints the idea of sending women into war as fundamentally uncivilised. This argument is grounded not only in gender norms but in societal beliefs about what constitutes a “civilised” society.

Alex Vanopslagh (LA, 17 March 2024), in a tweet (that was later widely criticised) stated: *“Imagine that enemy troops were standing at the Danish border now - and we were to mobilize masses of citizens (some against their will) to go to war, fight and die for the fatherland. Would you rather send your daughters or your sons?”*

His conclusion is clear: *“Of course [we] would send the men because that's the most civilized thing to do as a society.”*⁴⁵

By positioning the exclusion of women from conscription as a marker of civilisation, the argument constructs gender-neutral conscription as morally uncivilised.

Members of Liberal Alliance have also been criticised for statements that are said to reduce women's roles to biological functions or stereotype their capabilities. Political advisor for Liberal Alliance, Mads Strange, stated that if we want to maintain population levels then it is better to send men to war, because if a woman gets pregnant, it takes 9 months before she can be pregnant again, whereas men can impregnate a woman again immediately. *“So women's eggs are, so to speak, worth more than men's sperm”.*

Strange furthermore argues that men are both better at activities that require physical strength as well as mental strength as they are more diligent. Because of the physical differences he says: *“it does not make sense to hope for a 50-50 representation between the genders, regardless of whether it is in sports or in the Armed Forces or business.”* (31st March 2024).

In response to the statements by Strange, Jakob Engel-Schmidt (M, 20 April 2024) issued a sharp condemnation, stating that the recent discourse portrays women as mere “birth machines” and inherently less capable than men - a characterisation he denounced as both “misogynistic” and deeply out of step with modern societal values.⁴⁶

Venstres vice-chairman, Stephanie Lose (9 April 2024), likewise criticised LA for their stereotypical view of men and women in the armed forces, and stated that *“I think these are strange arguments that it is not civilized, that we should take care of our birth rate, or that women cannot carry men away from the battlefield.”* She goes on to say that if these are the

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<https://avisendanmark.dk/politik/alex-vanopslagh-fortryder-sine-ord-om-kvinder-i-forsvaret-det-er-endt-med-at-forplumre-debatten>

⁴⁶ <https://jyllands-posten.dk/debat/breve/ECE17025954/kvinder-er-lige-saa-gode-soldater-som-maend/>

arguments that LA uses, then they should say that they do not want women in the Armed Forces at all.⁴⁷

Alex Vanopslagh (LA, 9 April 2024) subsequently publicly regretted the focus from his party on gender differences, as he believed that this focus had clouded the debate, *“Because even though the differences are indeed there, both men and women can still participate in a modern defense.”*⁴⁸

These exchanges reveal a clash between different narratives about gender and societal roles. On one side, there is the viewpoint that differences between men and women are still an important factor for deciding who should be obliged to take on military roles, on the other, there is a push to challenge these views as outdated and harmful.

Kingdon’s model helps to show how different policy solutions (gender-neutral conscription versus abolition), and clashing political values (conservatism, liberalism and egalitarianism) converged - or collided - as Denmark’s policy makers considered reform. Whether the policy change would be accepted thus depended on whether ideas of modernity and evolving societal values could override more traditionalist, biologically anchored perspectives.

Overall, gender differences have been brought up in debate by both proponents and opponents of gender neutral conscription. Some, like Inger Støjberg, argue that physical strength is essential to serve in the Armed Forces, and that women, due to biological differences, may not meet the same standards as men. Others push back by emphasising the evolving nature of warfare, where intelligence and technological skills are increasingly vital, making gender less relevant. Arguments from figures like Alex Vanopslagh and Mads Strange, furthermore frame conscripting women as uncivilised or biologically impractical - views that have sparked strong backlash and been labeled as misogynistic, and which have led to a degree of backtracking from the party.

5.5. International Influence

Denmark’s move toward gender-neutral conscription is not only grounded in domestic concerns but is also shaped by international expectations and comparisons. Two primary international frames come up in the political discourse: Denmark’s obligations to NATO and the example set by neighbouring Nordic countries. Together, these create the narrative that reforming conscription is needed not only for internal preparedness and fairness, but also for maintaining international credibility and learning from best practices abroad.

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<https://avisendanmark.dk/politik/en-saetning-fra-vanopslagh-fik-stephanie-lose-op-i-det-roede-felt-helt-ude-af-trit-med-virkeligheden?teaser-referral=4dee837f-74b5-4b80-b217-a371ff59fc9d-10>

⁴⁸

<https://avisendanmark.dk/politik/alex-vanopslagh-fortryder-sine-ord-om-kvinder-i-forsvaret-det-er-endt-med-at-forplum-re-debatten>

Starting with Denmark's commitment to the NATO alliance; Mette Frederiksen and Troels Lund Poulsen repeatedly point to Denmark's lagging defense capabilities in comparison to alliance expectations. In the problem stream, this underperformance is seen as an issue that requires action. As Poulsen (V, 30 March 2024) emphasises, Denmark must now meet "*a long series of NATO force goals*", including establishing a heavy brigade and improving air defense. These are not aspirational goals but concrete things Denmark must deliver upon, he stresses: "*That is NATO's clear expectation of us.*"⁴⁹

Meeting NATO's requirements is framed as a national responsibility. Poulsen (V, 10 May 2024) underscores this when he states, "*It is absolutely crucial for Denmark to deliver what NATO and our allies can rightly expect from us.*"⁵⁰ Frederiksen (SD, 13 March 2024), adds that Denmark must be able to "*deploy a brigade at short notice - up to 6,000 soldiers,*" and that this necessitates faster rearmament and expanded conscription. When problems are linked to external demands, they often gain urgency and visibility, which helps push them higher onto the agenda.

The symbolic value of reform is also highlighted. According to Frederiksen (13 March 2024), the new defense agreement sends "*a clear signal*" to allies that Denmark is prepared to shoulder its burden in NATO.⁵¹ This discourse positions conscription reform not just as a means to strengthen Denmark's internal defense but as a show of credibility and solidarity within the alliance.

In addition to NATO expectations, Peter Have (M) and Torsten Schack Pedersen (V) bring up the experiences of neighbouring Nordic countries as models for successful integration of women into military service. This comparison adds legitimacy to the policy by demonstrating that gender-neutral conscription has already proven effective elsewhere in similar contexts.

Peter Have (M, 29 March 2024) explicitly references the strategic advantages observed in the Nordic region as a result of their gender neutral conscription, stating that these countries "*have experienced an improvement in defense readiness as well as increased recruitment and diversity.*"⁵² He frames the Nordic model not only as an achievement in gender equality but also as a pragmatic success in defense policy. The implication is that if Denmark's neighbours can make it work - and benefit from it - then so can Denmark.

This idea is echoed by Torsten Schack Pedersen (V), who suggests that Denmark's move toward gender neutral conscription brings it into alignment with Sweden and Norway.⁵³

Together, these references to the Nordic model serve to normalise the idea of gender-neutral conscription, casting it not as a radical experiment but as a logical step in line with regional

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<https://www.fmn.dk/da/ministeriet/forsvarsministeren/ministeren/indlag/troels-lund-poulsen-en-fuldt-ligestillet-varnepligt-er-vigtig-for-forsvaret/>

⁵⁰ <https://www.fmn.dk/da/ministeriet/forsvarsministeren/ministeren/indlag/ny-varnepligt-giver-nodvendig-robusthed2/>

⁵¹ <https://www.dansketaaler.dk/tale/mette-frederiksens-tale-om-styrkelse-af-forsvaret>

⁵² <https://avisendanmark.dk/debat/moderaterne-vi-har-brug-for-flere-som-vil-vaerne-om-danmark>

⁵³ <https://jyllands-posten.dk/debat/breve/ECE16955704/hvorfor-i-alverden-kan-kvinder-ikke-vaere-soldater/>

norms and successful precedents. The Nordic examples demonstrate that gender integration is operationally effective, offering a ready-made policy template that fits Denmark's cultural and military context. In Kingdon's terms, this enhances the "technical feasibility" and "value acceptability" of the reform, which are two key factors in making a policy more appealing to policymakers.

In the politics stream, international credibility becomes a driving force. Maintaining strong ties to NATO and keeping pace with Nordic neighbors are framed as essential for Denmark's global standing. Defense reform, including gender-neutral conscription, is thus not only about internal needs but also about projecting reliability and modernity externally. The symbolism of moving in step with regional allies bolsters the political momentum for reform.

Thus, the convergence of the streams - external problem pressure (NATO), available policy models (Nordic neighbours), and political incentives (maintaining credibility) - creates a favourable environment for the opening of a policy window.

In sum, international influences play a dual role in legitimising the reform of Danish conscription. NATO demands immediate and measurable improvements in Denmark's defense capability, while the Nordic neighbours show that gender neutrality in conscription is both possible and beneficial. The convergence of the two, positions gender-neutral conscription as not just a domestic choice, but a strategic alignment with Denmark's international obligations and regional values.

Chapter 6. Discussion

This discussion combines insights from the analysis and wider literature to explain how problem recognition, policy solutions, and political factors came together to create a window of opportunity for reform.

6.1 Problem Stream

In Kingdon's model, the problem stream refers to the identification and framing of issues requiring governmental action. In the case of Danish conscription, multiple intersecting problems created mounting pressure for change. First, the conscription system being obligatory only for men, was seen as incompatible with Denmark's national self-image as a modern, gender-equal society. This misalignment, which was made visible through public debate and political discourse, reframed the existing conscription model not merely as outdated but as unjust.

Simultaneously, a worsening security situation following Russia's invasion of Ukraine highlighted the perceived vulnerabilities of Denmark's armed forces. Recruitment challenges, underperformance, and inability to meet NATO requirements were cited as threats to the national defense.

Thus, Denmark's existing conscription model was problematised both through the lens of equality, and through the lens of national security.

6.2 Policy Stream

Kingdon's policy stream highlights the availability and viability of policy solutions. In Denmark's case, gender-neutral conscription emerged as an attractive reform for several reasons. Firstly, the existence of successful models in Norway and Sweden provided a tested and culturally similar example of how equal conscription could be implemented. These international precedents showed that gender neutral conscription as a solution was both feasible and logical, as it reduced some of the risk and uncertainty that comes with policy change.

Secondly, the solution aligned strongly with domestic values. Advocates framed gender-neutral conscription as an expression of equality - a move that would reinforce Denmark's identity as a progressive, egalitarian nation.

Moreover, shifts in military technology and the changing nature of warfare - with less emphasis on physical strength and greater need for technical and cognitive skills - makes the inclusion of women in military roles increasingly practical.

An alternative policy proposal came from Liberal Alliance, who advocated for the abolition of conscription and its replacement with a fully voluntary system of military training. This aligns with the party's ideological stance that prioritises individual freedom and minimal state coercion. However, this policy option failed to gain support. Public opinion in Denmark has remained generally supportive of conscription, and a strong political majority favoured not only retaining the system but expanding it to include women. Furthermore, in light of the worsening security environment and growing recruitment needs, the government's proposal for gender-neutral conscription was seen as a superior solution. By March 2025, Liberal Alliance acknowledged the need to implement a solution quickly and expressed reluctant support for the reform, which marked an even greater convergence around gender-neutral conscription as the most feasible policy option.

However, looking back to 2009, Socialdemokratiet, Socialistiske Folkeparti, and Radikale Venstre also indicated that they desired a move to a purely voluntary system. If the security situation had been different then this may have been the policy solution that would have been chosen to deal with the unequal system of conscription.

6.3 Political Stream

The political stream in Kingdon's model reflects the role of political actors, public opinion, and institutional forces. In Denmark, broad political consensus supported the policy shift. Despite some resistance from parties like Liberal Alliance and Danmarksdemokraterne, there was general cross-party agreement that national security challenges required urgent action, and that gender-neutral conscription offered a pragmatic solution.

Key political entrepreneurs played an important role. Jakob Ellemann-Jensen (V), as early as 2022, advocated publicly for equality in conscription, positioning himself as a catalyst for reform within the political landscape. His efforts, combined with the broader coalition government's championing of the issue, ensured that the idea gained traction across ideological lines.

Public opinion also likely played a role in the policy reform being accepted. A survey carried out shortly following the government's announcement showed that over half of the population (53,2%) agreed that conscription should be reformed to include women. Meanwhile, only 32,6% were against the proposal, and a further 14,2% voted 'don't know'.⁵⁴ This public support for conscription equality could provide political cover for reform advocates.

External pressure from NATO expectations and comparisons to Nordic neighbours further reinforced the political momentum. Thus, the political climate was primed for reform.

A turning point in the political stream was the decision by Liberal Alliance to withdraw their veto against the proposal for gender-neutral conscription. As the defence agreement in 2023 stipulated that it requires two parties to veto proposals, this reversal will enable the government to implement the policy far earlier than initially anticipated. While opposition to conscription aligns with Liberal Alliance's ideological stance, their change in position may reflect the increasing political costs of opposing the reform. The party faced public backlash after comments from its members were criticised as misogynistic, contributing to them receiving disappointing European Parliament results in 2024. Given that Liberal Alliance's voter base tends to be younger - and that younger voters are generally more supportive of gender equality - the party may have calculated that continued resistance to the gender neutral aspect of the changes while supporting lengthening the time conscripts would serve and increasing the amount of them, risked alienating their supporters. Furthermore, survey data indicated that men, who make up a larger share of the party's supporters, are more supportive of gender-neutral conscription than women are, making opposition potentially more politically damaging than beneficial. In this context, aligning with the broader parliamentary consensus may have appeared the safer strategic choice, especially in light of pressing national security concerns.

In contrast, Danmarksdemokraterne continued to oppose the policy but faced fewer political risks in doing so. Their older, more conservative voter base is less likely to penalise the party for resisting changes framed as progressive. After LA withdrew its veto, DD's continued resistance no longer posed a practical barrier to the policy's implementation. Instead, their opposition may now position them as the only clear alternative for voters who are strongly against gender-neutral conscription.

6.4 The Opening of the Policy Window

The convergence of the problem, policy, and political streams in Denmark has thus created a moment for reform - a policy window that policymakers are able to exploit to introduce gender-neutral conscription. Denmark's self-image as a gender-equal society was increasingly

⁵⁴ <https://voxbmeter.dk/fire-ud-af-ti-kvinder-afviser-lige-vaernepligt/>

seen as incompatible with a conscription model that imposed obligations solely on men. This mismatch between national values and institutional practices was rendered more visible by external shocks and by comparisons to Denmark's Nordic neighbours, where gender-neutral conscription has already been implemented. The invasion of Ukraine served as a focusing event that sharpened public and political attention, accelerating the convergence of streams and helping to open the policy window for reform.

Jakob Ellemann-Jensen, and members of the coalition government, played an important role as policy entrepreneurs: by framing the discussion early and consistently linking gender-neutral conscription to modern values and national defense, they helped bring attention to the issues and advocate for policy change as a way to solve these issues. This dual framing helped minimise potential backlash and maximise cross-party and public support.

6.5 Why Now?

While Danish society has long valued gender equality, compared to Norway and Sweden, Denmark historically exhibited slightly more traditional attitudes toward gender roles, with greater skepticism towards further gender equality initiatives. (Andersen & Shamshiri-Petersen, 2016). This may have previously prevented such a policy from gaining traction.

The political configuration also matters: the formation of a coalition government brought together voices more supportive of strengthening conscription through greater inclusion of women. With an increasingly vocal civil society advocating for gender equality, politicians also faced greater reputational risks for maintaining a male-only conscription model than for changing it.

Furthermore, external threats heightened the sense of urgency in a way that previous periods of relative security had not.

In short, the crossroads of problem perception, policy feasibility, and political will necessary for reform only materialised recently. This alignment underscores Kingdon's insight that timing and coupling, rather than gradual persuasion alone, are central to policy shifts.

The shift can also be understood as part of a wider trajectory of steady change within the Danish military. Over recent decades, women have been increasingly integrated into various military roles. Gender-neutral conscription can thus be seen as a logical next step - formalising a process of inclusion that had been gradually taking place since the second world war.

Moreover, applying Segal's theory deepens the understanding of why this shift occurred at this particular time.

6.6. Segals Theory Applied

Segal's Theory of Women's Participation in the Armed Forces (1995) provides a useful lens for analysing the structural, cultural, and institutional conditions that made gender-neutral conscription a viable policy in Denmark.

A key insight from Segal is the relationship between security threats and women's military participation. According to Segal, heightened national threat levels often prompt an expansion of women's roles in the military. This dynamic is evident in the current Danish context, where the deteriorating security situation in Europe has placed new demands on the Danish armed forces. In this context, the inclusion of women through gender-neutral conscription reflects a pragmatic response to increased personnel needs in a time of rising threat.

In terms of social structure, Denmark exhibits several features that facilitate women's participation in the military. These include high levels of gender equality in the labour market, low fertility rates, and widespread access to childcare and parental leave. Such conditions lower the structural barriers to women's involvement in both civilian and military sectors.

On the cultural front, Denmark is characterised by progressive gender norms, strong support for egalitarian values, and relatively low influence of religious conservatism - factors Segal identifies as crucial in legitimising women's presence in traditionally male-dominated institutions. The policy shift toward gender-neutral conscription can therefore be seen as an expression of - and a contributor to - broader cultural trends that de-emphasise traditional gender roles.

Segal's Variable	Explanation	Danish Context
Security Threat Level	Higher threats → more female participation	Denmark faces increased regional insecurity due to Russian aggression; this has elevated the perceived need to strengthen military readiness, including expanding conscription pools.
Military Technology	Advanced technology reduces physical strength as a barrier	Denmark's military is technologically advanced; there is greater emphasis on intelligence, cyber, and technical capabilities rather than physical strength.
Demographic Trends	Low fertility → reduced male pool, more demand for female recruits	Denmark has persistently low birth rates, shrinking the pool of eligible young men, thus increasing reliance on broader demographic recruitment.
Labour Market Gender Integration	High integration → greater female military inclusion	Denmark scores high on gender equality indices; civilian gender integration is

		well-established, facilitating military inclusion.
Economic Trends & Male Employment	Low male unemployment → more military opportunities for women	With low male unemployment, the armed forces must attract a broader range of recruits, including women.
Family Structure & Childbearing Age	Fewer children, later parenthood → increased eligibility for women	Danish women tend to have children later, reducing immediate family-related constraints during conscription age
Gender Norms	More egalitarian gender values → greater military participation for women	Danish society is known for progressive norms that support women's active participation in the job market
Religious Conservatism	Higher conservatism → lower female military participation	Denmark is a secular society with low levels of religious conservatism, reducing ideological opposition to women in uniform.
Government Childcare/Parental Support	More support reduces family–career conflict for women	The state provides extensive childcare and generous parental leave, enabling women to engage in demanding careers, including military service.

Overall, Segal's theory complements Kingdon's Multiple Streams Theory by illuminating the deeper social preconditions that shaped the acceptability of this policy reform. It highlights how demographic pressures, shifting security conditions, and changes in military structure converged to create a context in which extending conscription to women was both feasible and politically and culturally acceptable.

6.7. Broader Implications

This reform may have implications beyond conscription policy alone. It symbolises a deepening integration of gender equality principles into the core of Danish national identity. By tying the defense of the nation - traditionally a highly masculinised domain - to principles of equality and

fairness, Denmark is sending a broader message about the meaning of obligation and belonging in the 21st century.

It also raises questions about how similar processes may unfold in other countries facing comparable pressures. As demographic challenges, security threats, and changing gender norms interact in complex ways, Denmark's policy change may offer a template for military reforms elsewhere.

At the same time, the implementation of gender-neutral conscription will likely generate new challenges, including ensuring genuine gender integration within military culture, addressing potential disparities in treatment or expectations, and continuously adapting conscription policies to maintain fairness and effectiveness. Future research should monitor these aspects closely.

In sum, Denmark's decision to implement gender-neutral conscription can be understood as the result of the alignment of multiple forces: a changing security environment, a long-standing commitment to gender equality, the availability of a credible policy solution, and a political climate responsive to both pragmatic and normative imperatives. Kingdon's Multiple Streams Theory offers an explanation for how these factors converged to open a policy window, while Segal's Theory of Women's Participation in the Armed Forces provides a deeper understanding of the broader social, cultural, and military shifts that enabled the change. Together, these frameworks show how both external influences and internal values shaped the policy reform.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

This thesis investigated how the convergence of problem, policy, and political streams, as conceptualised by John W. Kingdon's Multiple Streams Theory, precipitated Denmark's decision to implement gender-neutral conscription. Through a thematic analysis of politicians' public speeches and statements, the research illuminated the dynamics driving this policy shift.

The analysis revealed that the unequal system of conscription has come to be seen as incompatible with contemporary Danish society that prizes gender equality. Inside the problem stream, it was shown that policymakers framed the existing system - where men are subject to mandatory service while women are not - as outdated and inconsistent with Denmark's commitment to equality and fairness. The analysis also demonstrated that the policy shift was motivated by concerns regarding military capacity and national security, which is seen to be under threat. Arguments based on operational needs - such as the requirement for a larger, more diverse pool of conscripts - were intertwined with arguments about equal rights and responsibilities.

Turning to the policy stream, gender-neutral conscription has emerged as a viable and actionable solution, especially as neighbouring countries Norway and Sweden provided successful examples of similar reforms. Meanwhile, the political stream is characterised by a broad alignment of political will and public favour, which has created an opportunity for enacting change.

A look back on the history of women in the Danish armed forces also illustrated the fact that the inclusion of women in the military has been a gradual process, shaped by both internal societal changes and external pressures. From support roles during the Second World War to today's equal rights in the professional military, the trajectory has been one of steady progress towards full equality. The move towards gender-neutral conscription represents the culmination of these decades-long efforts, where finally the last point of (legal) inequality will be removed.

The comparative perspective with Sweden and Norway added further depth to the analysis, highlighting that Denmark's decision fits within a broader Nordic trend where gender equality principles are increasingly extended into domains traditionally dominated by men. Similar drivers - concerns about defense readiness, demographic shifts, and evolving gender norms - have propelled these changes across the region.

Overall, this thesis finds that the decision to implement gender-neutral conscription was not the product of a single factor, but rather the outcome of an interplay between societal values, external pressures, and political opportunity. The convergence of these streams created a policy window through which reform can be realised.

This thesis contributes to the scholarship on military conscription, gender studies, and national security policy by offering a detailed case study of how gender equality ideals can intersect with pragmatic defense needs to produce meaningful policy change. It also highlights the value of Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework in understanding complex policy processes, and of Segal's theory in appreciating the sociocultural dimensions of women's military participation.

Future research could explore the long-term impacts of gender-neutral conscription in Denmark, including its effects on military culture, recruitment, and retention patterns, as well as its broader societal implications. Comparative studies between Nordic countries may also yield further insights into how similar policies unfold across different countries.

Looking forward, the implementation of gender-neutral conscription in Denmark has the potential to reshape not only the composition of the military but also broader societal understandings of citizenship, duty, and gender roles. However, while the legal framework may soon mandate equal service obligations, true equality in the lived experience of military service will depend on continued efforts to address cultural, structural, and operational barriers within the armed forces.

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Appendix

Data for Thematic Analysis

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