

Referendums and postcoloniality in Greenland: Self-determination and action space as collateral damage of bounding and un-bounding demoi

Rasmus Leander Nielsen
Ilisimatusarfik (University of Greenland)
Nuuk, Greenland
raln@uni.gl

and

Ulrik Pram Gad
Danish Institute for International Studies
Copenhagen, Denmark
ulpg@diis.dk

Abstract: Referendums are used to constitute the ‘will of the people’ at a snapshot in time. At the same time, referendums are sometime constitutive of the self-determination of a people. More specifically, a referendum solidifies a certain bounding of a demos by legitimising a certain demarcation of who are eligible to take part in decision-making. But simultaneously the referendum creates an action space for the people by offering new opportunities in political economy and sometimes foreign policy but also delimiting what kind of affairs are within the bounds of this particular people’s decision-making. This article charts the consecution of referendums – actual and imagined – with a bearing on the (proto-)constitutional expansion and action space of the Greenlandic demos to tease out the empirical dynamics linking referendums at different scales of polity over time. As the article discusses relations within the Kingdom of Denmark and between referendums on European integration (in both Greenland and Denmark proper), Greenlandic decolonisation and expanding autonomy and a hypothetical future version of independence, it sheds new light on the bounded demos problematique in relation to multi-level integration/disintegration dynamics mediated by referendums. In sum, the article analyses how decisions made in one referendum by a demos bounded in one way have bearings on how other demoi are bounded in later referendums, and why this matters to the resulting action spaces for the people’s self-determination being (re-)shaped.

Keywords: action space, bounded demos, decolonisation, Denmark, European integration, Greenland, postcoloniality, referendums

© 2026: Islands and Small States Institute, University of Malta, Malta

Introduction: Referendums in integration and disintegration processes bounding demoi

Referendums are not just used to occasionally consult the ‘will of the people’; they also play an important part in constituting the people eligible to have a will and in regard to what. In domestic and international affairs, integration and disintegration of spatially assorted regions and territories are to the fore in many ballots. Particularly in Europe, referendums have become key nodes when states integrate, as for example, via the European Union (EU) (Nielsen, 2009; Qvortrup, 2024). Similarly, referendums are gradually key nodes when states disintegrate (Radan, 2012; Qvortrup, 2015; 2020). Hence, referendums can make or break up states, provide novel institutional settings for sub-state autonomy, delegate or transfer sovereignty to supranational institutions, and back. Moreover, processes of integration and disintegration, both

mediated by referendums, interact in multifaceted ways. Referendums re-order the location of collective decision-making prerogatives (Tierney, 2009), or the action spaces of agency in foreign affairs (Petersen, 2005; cf. Olsvig, 2022). However, bounding a demos is hardly ever done once and for all. In this article, we discuss some of the less obvious dynamics emanating from the nexus of referendums, self-determination and secession, foreign policy action spaces, and bounded demos; or, more specifically, the plural demoi over time.

Departing from political philosophy, a long tradition has tended to solve the somewhat cumbersome delineations of sovereignty; how to delimit a people as a precondition for it to be able to decide for itself. ‘Bounded demos’ has appeared as a useful label for this discussion of boundary problems of the demarcation of a people (Whelan, 1983; cf. Beckman, 2019; Dahl, 1970; Song, 2012). In furtherance, the concept of bounded demos in relation to referendums refers to the limited group of people recognised to vote on a specific issue in the ballot, typically defined by territorial boundaries. More specifically, a referendum solidifies a bounding of a demos by legitimising a certain demarcation of who are eligible to take part in decision-making. Simultaneously, the referendum creates an action space for the people by offering new opportunities and agency in political economy and foreign policy but also delimiting what kind of affairs are within the bounds of this particular people’s decision-making. Both theoretically and empirically, however, these dynamics are complex and in relation to the self-determination of former European colonies overseas, the constitution of peoples was not a philosophical but a very practical, politico-strategic question. Moreover, in a few cases, this process of bounding a new demos has never been concluded (Baldacchino, 2013). The point of departure for this article is that the debate on ‘bounded demos’ within referendum studies can widen our understanding from such dragged out processes of bounding in which processes of integration and disintegration intersect.

As a case of how consecutive referendums on integration and disintegration bounds and unbounds a demos, this article unfolds the historical role of referendums in the process of decolonisation in Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland). A first section introduces the case and the constitutional oddity of Greenland, a self-governing entity within the Kingdom of Denmark (KoD), neither a sovereign state nor a colony in the way it was a century ago. A second section argues how the ‘bounded demos’ problem, as well as the referendum literature, can benefit from studies of inconclusive processes of unbounding and rebounding. The section moreover explains our approach focusing on the expansion and contraction of the action space, i.e. the room of manoeuvre for a given demos as the product of decisions made in referendums, which on the other hand can lead to exclusions in future votes legitimised by past referendums, and the analytical dynamics connecting them.

Our empirical analysis then follows in three steps. First, it recollects the role of four formative referendums held in Greenland from 1972 to 2008, in terms of fostering a semi-autonomous political system and developing (para-)diplomatic relations in a twin-process. Second, it analyses how a series of referendums, which were *not* held in Greenland but only in Denmark proper, has nevertheless had consequences for Greenland or have been left to diminutive discussions about the ramifications. This includes a couple of referendums of the colonial past in 1916 and 1953, alas, without involving the people of Greenland, and then especially European Community (EC) and European Union (EU) referendums from 1986 to 2022. Finally, the article discusses some future hypothetical referendums in Greenland.

In conclusion, we find that while Greenland has consistently voted in referendums to enhance its room for self-determination, the flip side of the referendum results have been that the ballots have legitimised exclusion from later referendums (in Denmark, particularly on EU integration) effectively deciding important developments also for Greenland. From these cases, initially focusing mainly on votes in Greenland, then reconsidering several votes in Denmark, and then returning to potential future referendums in Greenland, we infer the wider implication that analysing referendums and their longer term effect can tell us important things about both the action space and boundaries of self-determination available to a postcolonial polity and beyond.

The case: The hybridity of Greenland in constitutional and international law

In legal studies and International Relations, sovereignty is often viewed as a dichotomous question: either you are an international actor (typically a state), or you are not. A growing literature has looked at para-diplomacy or other ways of analysing hybrid versions of sovereignty (Gad & Adler-Nissen, 2013; Nielsen, 2025; Gad & Kristensen, 2025). In this article, we study a case of such hybridity and how iterative referendums have formed and altered the bounded demos (or the plural demoi), i.e., by zooming in on the self-governing case of Greenland. In addition, the case-study pays special attention to the temporal dynamics of a sequence of referendums, especially since the 1970s in Greenland, but tracing further back to referendums in 1916 and 1953, and then several EU-referendums in Denmark proper.

Since the Home Rule Act of 1979 and in furtherance the Self Rule act of 2009, Greenland has advanced to a semi-autonomous polity with extended agency, including foreign relations. The 2009 Self-Government Act to a large degree continued the institutions created and developed under Home Rule. In sum, Greenland has developed to be one of the semi-autonomous areas with the widest competences and self-determination in the world, without being formally sovereign (Nielsen et al., 2022). The Self-Government Act acknowledges and redefines the population of Greenland as a people under international law with the right to self-determination.

On the surface, analysing Greenland as a *bounded demos* seems straightforward, as illustrated by the following quote from one of the most seminal figures in the evolution of Greenlandic political history since the early 1970s, Lars Emil Johansen:

It has been of the utmost importance to the recognition of Greenlanders as a people that we have always been in clear majority within a well-defined geographical area – an island – which possesses the further advantage of being located two thousand miles from the country of our former colonial masters. Unlike our fellow Inuit in Canada, the Same in Northern Scandinavia, the Basque and many other indigenous people of this globe, we have never had to deal with the problems of fuzzy demarcation (Johansen, 1992, p. 33).

One could credibly interrogate this quote in several ways: Do East and West Greenlanders, speaking quite different languages, really constitute one people? (Markussen & Ren, 2024). How do Danish ancestry or language affect Greenlandic identity (Gad, 2004)? Who should eventually be eligible to vote about Greenlandic independence? (cf. the penultimate section below). In formal constitutional ways, people living in Greenland are an equal part of a Danish demos (Baldacchino et al., forthcoming). In other respects, noted, for example, by the Inuit Circumpolar Council, Greenlanders share traditional homelands and identity with Inuit across Inuit Nunaat in Nunavut (Canada), Alaska (US), and Chukotka (Russia). In yet another,

as stipulated by the Self Rule Act of 2009, Greenlanders constitute a separate demos in its own right.

The Danish constitution of 1953 formally ended Greenland's status as a colony. The constitution reserves two seats in the Danish parliament *Folketinget* for Greenland. Officially, these MPs have the same rights and count exactly as the remaining 175 MPs elected in Denmark proper and two MPs elected in the Faroe Islands – for example, when one of Denmark's frequent minority governments seek to base itself in a majority as demanded by the Danish constitution. As the two Greenlandic MPs represent roughly 20,000 voters each, the population can certainly be counted as equal parts of the Danish demos, since each 'Danish' MP represents approximately 23,500 electors.

However, evolving since the late 1970s, most legislative and executive powers concerning Greenland rests with the Greenlandic parliament *Inatsisartut*, elected by the voters in Greenland, and the Government of Greenland *Naalakkersuisut*, appointed by the *Inatsisartut*. According to the current interpretation of the Danish constitution only a few core elements of sovereignty cannot be devolved: constitution, citizenship, currency, the Supreme court, foreign, security and defence policy. Concerning the latter, Greenland has nevertheless secured itself a distinct action space and ambitions to pave its own road in a twin-process of domestic and international affairs (Gad, 2020; Olsvig, 2022; Nielsen & Strandsbjerg, 2024), as is detailed later in the article. In sum, on the one hand, the lack of formal sovereignty bars Greenland from certain types of manoeuvres in domestic as well as international politics. On the other hand, the shared history of Denmark keeping Greenland as a colony from 1721 to 1953, severely limits how Denmark can employ its sovereignty over Greenland, in ways that empower Greenland beyond what would possibly have been the case in a counterfactual situation of independence (Gad, 2013).

In what follows, we detail Greenlandic political history with special attention to referendums and how they have bounded the Greenlandic demos and delimited the action space for the Greenlandic polity. Greenland is rarely discussed in the referendum literature and appears only as a minor footnote in much of the EU literature. This is odd, since this case contains one of the few precedents of the integration/disintegration dynamics made clearly relevant by Britain's Brexit vote a decade ago (Gad, 2016b; Nielsen, 2021). Greenland is by no means a new Switzerland nor California in terms of direct democracy, but a handful of referendums have been convened since the early 1970s (Ackrén, 2019). We are mainly interested in the (proto-)constitutional engineering and international action space (re-)shaped by referendums in Greenland. Hence, we leave aside the national 1978 referendum on alcohol prohibition along with several local referendums on the same topic and on municipality division. Nor do we tend to the KoD-wide 2009 referendum on the Act of Succession rescinding preference for males over females, in which voter turn-out was a mere 22%.

Rather, we begin our analysis with four formative referendums: the two in 1972 and 1982 taking Greenland into and out of the EC (i.e. the EU before the Maastricht Treaty); and the votes about Home Rule in 1979 and Self Rule in 2008. We then discuss the implications of a string of referendums in Denmark proper, again not all ballots held, but only the 1916 vote on selling the West Indies (now the US Virgin Islands) to the United States, the referendum on the 1953 Constitution of the KoD, and several on EU integration (1986, 1992, 1993, 1998, 2000, 2014, 2015, and 2022) held only in Denmark proper as a result of Greenland leaving the EC. Finally, we consider some hypothetical referendums that have not yet taken place in Greenland but might occur in the short to medium term, including on independence and uranium mining.

Hence, it must be stressed, our narrative is not chronological, but is framed from, first and foremost, an interest in how referendums in Greenland have provided formative junctures for more than half a century in constituting both a self-determining people of a domestic demos in a post-colonial setting and in relation to its evolving agency in foreign affairs. Second, the Greenlandic votes in isolation do not provide a full picture of the evolution of the ‘bounded demos’ problematique. This is why we revisit earlier and more recent Danish referendums, and their effects on Greenland: the main case under scrutiny in this article. Third, although no tangible plan for a new referendum in Greenland is close to being announced, we address several hypothetical cases that are of both empirical and theoretical interest.

Synthetically, we look for the dynamics connecting the referendums: How one referendum leads to another one being held, but also on the possible ‘unintended consequences’ of earlier votes, i.e. how one referendum leads to another one *not* being held, or even how a referendum has as a consequence that the Greenlandic people abstains from taking part in determining its future with regards to certain issues. Analytically, as is outlined in more detail in the next section, we thus focus on the room for manoeuvre in terms of action spaces available for the Greenlandic people in determining its own future, domestically and in relation to foreign affairs (cf. Olsvig, 2022), and how referendums as temporal focal points can offer novel insights to the concept of bounded demos in relation to multi-level integration/disintegration dynamics.

Theory: Bounding a demos by referendum

Referendums in relation to devolution, secession, and ethno-national issues have been convened for centuries and have recently received comparative, scholarly attention (e.g., Qvortrup, 2015; 2020; 2024; Radan, 2012). Independence and secession questions were, in many ways, the initial cause of several referendums, as far back as the 14th century, with ballots held in present-day France to escape the domination of the Roman Empire. Onwards in for example, the US, Italy and France, votes were held that more closely resemble what we today understand as a referendum, including votes about joining a larger country or by secession from a larger country (Qvortrup, 2020). Hence, referendums have in practice played important roles in defining national boundaries and by defining who is eligible to vote. In other words, referendums in effect co-produce a ‘bounded demos’ – a defined group of people who are considered to constitute the demos (people) of a particular political system.

In 1861, one normative position was established by John Stuart Mill, as he asserted that: “It is in general a necessary condition of free institutions, that the boundaries of governments should coincide in the main with those of nationalities” (quoted in Qvortrup, 2020, p. 1). In 1970, however, Robert Dahl observed that the question of how to demarcate who legitimately make up ‘the people’, and hence are entitled to govern themselves, was almost totally neglected by political philosophers who wrote about democracy (Dahl, 1970, pp. 60–61). As noted by Sarah Song (2012), democracy means rule by the demos, but by what criteria is the demos constituted? The way the boundaries of a people is drawn is crucial for democratic legitimacy and equality, as it determines who has a say in decision-making and who is bound by said decisions.

Thus, the bounded demos literature discusses a non-trivial question: Who are eligible to take part in which decision-making processes? (Whelan, 1983). Although a growing literature has since addressed the bounded demos problem, Political Theorists often assume that the demos is properly defined by national boundaries or by the territorial boundaries of the modern

state. Song (2012), for example, makes the argument for a territorial demarcation of demos. Others have argued for a *de jure* demarcation of the demos including in decision making those subjected to the decision, whereas yet others have preferred a *de facto* demarcation including in decision making all those affected by a referendum or other legal framing (e.g., Beckman, 2008, pp. 350f).

Debates about the boundary problem are often rooted in normative principles rather than practically based on empirical cases. In this article, we are less interested in settling this debate – some argue that it is normatively unsolvable, anyway – rather we want to elucidate how bounding is practically unfolding dynamically over time while zooming in on the role of referendums. Theoretically and empirically these dynamics are complex and in relation to former European colonies overseas, it was hardly just a philosophical but a very practical question, as pinpointed in British imperial educator and constitutional lawyer Ivor Jennings's infamous remark: "On the surface it seemed reasonable: let the people decide. It was in fact ridiculous because the people cannot decide until somebody decides who are the people" (Jenning, 1956, p. 36). Anticolonial movements produced a variety of solutions to this problem of founding and bounding new peoples (Kohn & McBride, 2011). In most cases, the solution involved a rupture constituting a new people distinct from the old metropole (Derrida, 1986; Honig, 1991). Moreover, in a few cases, this process of bounding a new demos was never concluded (Baldacchino, 2013).

As alluded to, we mainly discuss the concept of bounded demos in relation to constitutional referendums. Only slightly simplifying, according to Stephen Tierney (2009), there are four constitutional reasons in which referendums are used: 1) to found new states; 2) to create, amend or radically change constitutions; 3) to establish new models of sub-state autonomy; and 4) to transfer sovereign powers from the state to supranational institutions like the EU.

Each of the constitutional situations sanctioned by a referendum bounds a demos and endows it with an action space: it creates a people with a certain room for manoeuvre established by external and internal opportunities and constraints, as well as ambitions and values of the decision-makers within and beyond dependency (Petersen, 2005; Olsvig, 2025, p. 22). While action spaces redefined via referendums provide one side of the coin, there are potentially policy developments that earlier referendums exclude future demos from; and, in these, path dependency might hold unintended consequences (Nielsen, 2009).

In what follows, our empirical sections show how the bounded demos problem appears on several levels of analyses. It relates to domestic Greenlandic steps towards self-determination with referendums held on the relations to Denmark and EU. We show in more detail how the 'bounded demos' problem of the referendum literature can benefit from studies of inconclusive processes of unbounding and rebounding, i.e. focusing on the expansion and contraction of action spaces for a given demos as the product of decisions made in iterative referendums and the dynamics connecting them.

EC referendums and (proto-)constitutional referendums in Greenland

When Denmark voted to join the EC in October 1972, Greenlanders voted on equal terms with other Danish citizens (Nielsen, 2021). Thus, for the referendum, demos was bounded as that of the KoD, except the Faroese, the third part of the kingdom, were not taking part in the vote, since these islands already in 1948 gained autonomy with a separate 'Home Rule' legislature

and executive (Sølvará, 2018). In Greenland, more than seven out of ten voted ‘No’, but the less than 10,000 ‘No’ votes were lumped together in the overall outcome of the two-thirds majority ‘Yes’ votes in Denmark (Skydsbjerg, 1999). With this pooled demos, the result was Danish membership of the EC also including Greenland, and, thus, against ‘the will of the (Greenlandic) people’. The 1972 vote was not only the first referendum convened in Greenland. It was also one of the critical junctures of modern Greenlandic politics, paving the way for the establishing over time of a polity with a separate agency and action space. In other words, the referendum re-affirmed the bounding of a demos that begged to be unbounded.

The fact that Greenland had to vote on the same date as just another voting district in Denmark, was questioned by the Greenlandic politician Moses Olsen from the Siumut party. From his seat in the Danish Parliament, he argued that both the voting date and the outcome should be separated. In effect, he sought to reconstitute Greenland as its own demos concerning the referendum. To no avail, however, as such a measure was deemed against Danish constitutional law (Nielsen, 2021).

Seeing political power – particularly regarding fishing resources (Harhoff, 1983; Rebhan, 2016) – going south to the technocratic Brussels on top of the former colonial powers in Copenhagen rather than north to the Greenlandic capital of Nuuk (then, Godthåb) provoked what has been termed a ‘Greenlandic youth rebellion’ and a ‘political awakening’ that triggered the process of establishing a separate Greenlandic demos and enhancing its action space. The first referendum in Greenland kick-started a political process that involved establishing the party system still in place today and, by the end of the decade, the Home Rule act. Hence, the 1972-referendum directly triggered a process that led to two new referendums (Gad, 2016a; Nielsen, 2021).

Firstly, shortly after the abovementioned 1972 vote, in January 1973, a committee initially with only Greenlandic representatives was launched to discuss the Home Rule question with the broad mandate to draft a proposal as to how Greenland could gain more influence regarding its future development and administration within the KoD (Ackrén, 2019, Nielsen, 2021). In conclusion, a referendum in January 1979 resulted in a vast majority in favour of Home Rule modelled on the Faroese arrangement from 1948. This involved a wide-ranging catalogue of legislative and executive powers devolved, or ‘taken home’ to Nuuk, including, taxation, fisheries, hunting, education, cultural affairs, social and health services (Skydsbjerg, 1999).

Second, this new political status – Home Rule akin to the Faroese – allowed for a new, separate referendum on EC-membership (Nielsen, 2021). In 1982, Greenland voted for the second time in just ten years about EC membership, which many Greenlanders felt they had been forced into as an appendage to the decision of Denmark. In contrast to the 1972 vote, the outcome was not a pooled demos, but decided solely by the Greenlandic voters, which led to a reconfiguration of the action space still evolving. The 1982 referendum campaign was foremost about what was – and still is – the most important industry in Greenland, namely fisheries (Harhoff, 1983). The argument was that Home Rule was not worth much if Greenland was in a straitjacket from the EC’s Common Fisheries Policy soon to be implemented – combined with what was experienced as an unfair quota competition from European industrial fishermen. Moreover, illegal fishing in offshore Greenland by especially German trawlers played into the arguments for a Greenlandic exit (Rebhan, 2016). The nation-building process of enhanced action space ambitions also played a key factor in the campaign and arguably in the outcome, although no voting behaviour data exist from that time (Nielsen, 2021).

The outcome of the 1982 referendum was much closer than in 1972. Nevertheless, 12,624 Leave votes against 11,174 Remain votes was enough to trigger the withdrawal process. On substance, the voters were divided, but the vote defined another demos than the 1972 predecessor in the sense that Greenland did not share the vote with Denmark; Greenland was now a territorial demos in and of itself also in international affairs.

Three years after the exit referendum, in February 1985, the Greenland Treaty, signed by all member states, came into force, stipulating the negotiated terms of Greenland's exit. Formally, Greenland opted to exchange its part of Denmark's membership for association as an overseas country and territory (OCT), a model for former colonies constitutionally linked to a member state in place since the Treaty of Rome in the 1950s based on a French initiative (Hansen & Jönsson, 2002). OCTs are not part of the EU, and thus not covered by EU regulation (the *acquis*). Rather, OCTs are associated to allow for free mobility of persons and tax-free exports, which was also the main reason for Greenland's joining chiefly in relation to continued fisheries export to Western Europe (Hannibal et al., 2013).

In sum, the 1972 vote triggered a process leading to the 1979 referendum, in which the Greenlandic people initiated a process towards devolution, further leading to the 1982 referendum, which was meant to secure that EC-membership did not hollow out that process. In terms of domestic affairs, the decisions to a large degree had the intended consequences – the Government of Greenland now enjoys *de facto* sovereignty over most affairs.

Moreover, an unintended consequence of voting 'No' to EC membership, and in furtherance subsequently EU membership, has been the facilitation of Greenland taking its semi-autonomous agency vis-à-vis international third parties (in casu: the EU) to a substantial level. Since 1992, Greenland has had its own diplomatic representation in Brussels warranted by a short clause in the Home Rule Act about opening representations abroad (akin to mini-embassies) and made desirable by lessons learned during the exit-negotiations in first half of the 1980s (Gad, 2016a; Nielsen, 2021). Negotiations, both high level-meetings involving politicians and day-to-day business, are increasingly done by Greenlandic representatives with scarce Danish involvement. Paradoxically, in dealings with the EU, Greenland has thus built an action space after the exit that informed much of the evolution of its foreign policy and diplomatic learning, even if its association to the EU via the OCT formally depends on the constitutional link it has to Denmark, as a member state.

After 20 years of home rule, the Greenlandic politicians began discussing what the next step should be for Greenland. In 1999-2000, a Greenlandic commission contemplated six different models: independence, union with another state, free association, federation, enhanced self-government for Indigenous peoples and full integration (Ackrén, 2019). Eventually, a Greenlandic-Danish commission working from 2004 to 2008 settled for 'self-government' – in practice, an enhanced version of home rule – rather than full formal sovereignty (Gad, 2016a). The deal negotiated with Denmark involved a few new elements of devolution – most notably full sovereignty over subsoil minerals and oil, and a formalisation of the foreign policy roles and competencies already in established practice. In the preamble to the Self-Government Act, the Danish parliament explicitly accepted the rebounding of a Greenlandic demos, by recognising Greenlanders as a people with the right to self-determination according to international law (Nielsen et al., 2022). Also, a formal roadmap for independence was outlined.

The new 'self-government' arrangement was confirmed by a wide margin in a referendum in Greenland in 2008. This referendum completed the process starting in the early 1970s, via four formative referendums. As the analysis shows the main effect of the 1972-1979-1982-2008 series of referendums was the bounding of a Greenlandic demos with an expanding action space in both domestic and foreign affairs. The Home Rule act had Greenland defined as a distinct community within the KoD, and the 2009 Self-Government Act recognized Greenlanders as a people with the right to self-determination under international law.

Referendums in Denmark co-defining Greenland

As alluded to in the Introduction, the same series of referendums discussed in the previous section simultaneously legitimises that Nuuk abstains from involvement in a distinct category of 'domestic' issues: those competences *not* devolved from Copenhagen, which are subject to European integration. On the one hand, this predicament seems perfectly fair: You cannot decide to leave the EU and then still insist on having your say on EU-integration. In spite of what Boris Johnson claimed during the Brexit campaign, 'you cannot have your cake and eat it too'. On the other hand, this way of absolving non-sovereign peoples from major decisions affecting their lives evokes memories of a colonial history that most Danes and Greenlanders would prefer to see consigned to the past. To understand why, we need to step back and consider a few earlier referendums, which reconstituted Greenland without its own participation, before turning attention to the EU-referendums in Denmark proper.

Greenland was the implicit subject of several referendums before Greenlanders were deemed eligible to vote. In 1916, the very first referendum was held in Denmark to decide whether the Virgin Islands of St Croix, St Thomas, and St John should be sold by Denmark to the US. In conclusion, the US paid Denmark US\$25 million in gold for the islands and its naval facilities. A little noticed part of the deal was US recognition of Danish sovereignty over *all* of Greenland; attentive to Robert Peary's expeditions to the far North West of the island, Denmark had been weary to explicitly claim sovereignty there (Jacobsen & Olsvig, 2024). The deal prior to the 1916 vote gained a fair amount of attention in 2019 under the first Trump-administration when the US President suggested to buy Greenland, and again from early on during the second Trump-administration when this was reiterated, as a gentlemen's agreement was included in 1916 for the US not to pursue or buy Greenland, although this agreement did not hold very long as the US offered a purchase several times, most notably after the Second World War.

The referendum was held shortly after the 1915 Danish constitution extended suffrage to not only women but also servants and poor people. The referendum did include the Faroe Islands, which was at that time ruled as a county under the Danish constitution. Even though the turnout was very low, a majority in the Faroes voted against selling far away islands (Sølvará, 2018). However, in neither the Virgin Islands nor Greenland did the referendum happen. The Virgin Islands were sold and Danish sovereignty over Greenland affirmed without participation of the population of either of the islands. Nor did Greenlandic voters participate in several other referendums regarding amendments to the constitution, the electoral voting age, or land laws.

When debating the transition to self-government in the early 2000s, as discussed in the previous section, another historical referendum that did not take place sparked political controversy. Extending earlier critical assessments of the post-Second World War decolonisation process, Icelandic law professor Guðmundur Alfredsson argued that Denmark had deprived Greenland of a free and informed choice – in the form of a referendum – when it

was constitutionally integrated as an equal part of the Kingdom in 1953 (Alfredsson, 1982). Hence, Greenlandic politicians claimed that Denmark ‘owed’ Greenland a referendum on independence. Even though Greenland was formally decolonised in 1953, the decolonisation did not lead to the same destination as most of the processes of the era: Rather than appearing as a separate, sovereign state, Greenland was decolonised by being integrated as an ‘equal’ part of Denmark. Administratively, the new status meant that Greenland was no longer a colony but another Danish county – however, the island was still governed from Copenhagen. The political reference for most administrative decisions was the Danish Minister for Greenland and the Greenland Committee of the Danish parliament. An elected advisory assembly, *Landsrådet*, was formed in 1908, however, in contrast to the Faroese Home Rule arrangement, Denmark had delegated no executive or legislative powers to Nuuk. The decision to decolonise-by-integration was confirmed by a constitutional referendum made by a demos bounded to exclude the Greenlanders: only Danish citizens (including those in the Faroe Islands) could vote. And Greenlanders only became citizens after the 1953 constitutional reform. This manoeuvre proved crucial for later debates in Greenland about which referendums should be part of the processes of bounding and unbounding demoi, in order to allow Greenland greater action space. As noted above, this primarily happened slowly from the early 1970s and the two EC-referendums.

A historico-legal inquiry, commissioned by the Danish government at the request of the Greenlandic government, later concluded that, despite a series of questionable Danish actions during the process, the UN General Assembly’s affirmation of Greenland’s new status was by definition conclusive under international law (Beukel et al., 2010). More important for our discussion, however, is how the absence of a referendum fed into the broader narrative of what happened to Greenland after the 1953 integration. A grand social-democratic development scheme brought thousands of Danish short-term migrant workers to literally build and staff the physical and social infrastructure of a welfare state, largely relegating Greenlanders to the role of bystanders in the development of Greenland (Skydsbjerg, 1999).

As soon as Greenland left the EC in 1985, European integration proceeded at faster pace, after years of so-called ‘euro-sclerosis’, beginning with the 1986 Single European Act (SEA) paving the way for the Single Market and the 1992 Maastricht Treaty creating the EU. Notably, integration advanced chiefly in areas in which Copenhagen retained jurisdiction also for the Greenlandic part of the realm, since they had not been (and in some cases, according to constitutional lawyers, could not be) devolved to Nuuk.

In Denmark, this integration process has been mediated by a number of referendums. EU citizens living in Denmark can vote in Danish EU referendums, Danish citizens living abroad for less than two years (or indefinitely if they work for the state or in an international organisation which Denmark is a part of etc.) can vote at their local Danish embassy. But Danish citizens – be they Danes, Faroese or Greenlanders – living in Greenland or the Faroes cannot vote in these referendums. Nevertheless, decisions made in these Danish referendums affect formalities and realities in Greenland. In relation to each referendum, the Danish authorities detailed some of the complex implications for Greenland in the event of a Danish ‘Yes’ (*Folketinget*, various years). But Greenland played next to no part in the Danish public debates leading up to these referendums. Hence, Greenlandic and Faroese politicians as well as Danish EU sceptics have complained that the complications add up to real constitutional dilemmas, which the Danish authorities cover up by only dealing with them in a piecemeal fashion (e.g., Lyng & Broch, 2016).

The 1986 referendum on the SEA introduced what would eventually become the single market, with significant ramifications for Greenlandic trade relations and for further cooperation on foreign policy through the European Political Cooperation (EPC). It also amended the treaties more broadly yet was criticised for failing to address potential issues concerning the Faroe Islands and Greenland, both of which were covered by the SEA despite having clearly indicated that they did not wish to participate in EC cooperation. Moreover, it was considered unfortunate that the Minister for Foreign Affairs had not paid attention to these matters during the SEA negotiations (Til lovforslag nr. L 145. Betænkning afgivet af markedsudvalget den 1. februar 1986 via ft.dk). Prior to the 1992 referendum on the Maastricht Treaty, the Greenlandic politician in the Danish parliament Hans-Pavia Rosing (Siumut) noted about the ramifications:

It is therefore important for Greenland to have a number of issues clarified, if a majority of the Danish population votes in favour of Denmark's accession to the Treaty on European Union. On 17 March 1992, the Government assured the Danish Parliament that there will generally be no fundamental changes in the relations between Denmark and Greenland. The Government also assured that there will be no restrictions on the freedom that Greenland has achieved in the form of home rule [...] It is fundamentally necessary that the effects on Greenland, if Denmark accedes to the Treaty on European Union, are fully clarified. In the areas of the environment, resource management and the labour market, as well as in the areas of monetary policy and foreign policy, Greenland, as part of the Danish realm, will be affected to some degree. Not least in the area of trade policy, it is of paramount importance for Greenland to know the consequences of a possible accession (Til lovforslag nr. L 240. Tillægsbetænkning afgivet af Markedsudvalget den 8. maj 1992, p. 1508 via ft.dk; authors' translation).

Another example of the lack of proper assessment of the ramifications of deeper EU integration by the early 1990s was the uncertainty surrounding which currency Greenland should use after the introduction of the euro. The question was postponed by the 1993 vote and the euro opt-out (Nielsen, 2009), but no clear conclusion was reached before the opt-out was put to another vote in 2000. Similar dynamics can be seen in later EU referendums in Denmark. For example, before the cancelled vote on the Constitutional Treaty in the mid-2000s, Lars Emil Johansen – former Prime Minister of Greenland and then an MP in the Danish Parliament – repeatedly called for an impartial expert assessment of the implications for Greenland, to be conducted by, for instance, DIIS (the Danish Institute for International Studies). This was despite the fact that an earlier DIIS report on the four Danish opt-outs did not even mention Greenland. In the 2015 referendum on converting the opt-out on Justice and Home Affairs into an opt-in, some former Danish politicians argued that voters in Greenland and the Faroe Islands should be consulted, as the referendum in Denmark proper had significant ramifications for the rest of the Kingdom as well, particularly concerning the police and Europol (*Sermitsiaq*, 2015, November 6). While the constitutional review in this case was more comprehensive than in earlier EU referendums, substantial uncertainty remained regarding the broader consequences.

In the 2022 referendum on the defence opt-out, the comments were again very brief and merely stated that the law did not concern Greenland, apart from a short reference to its association with OCT status, with no further elaboration. This meant that no referendum would be held in the Faroe Islands or Greenland on the proposed law regarding Denmark's participation in European cooperation on security and defence. A Faroese MP requested a more detailed assessment of the ramifications, and a Nuuk-based academic expressed puzzlement at the absence of debate concerning Greenland. Moreover, during a hearing in the Danish

Parliament, the People's Movement Against the EU disagreed with the claim that the law did not apply to the Faroe Islands and Greenland, arguing that all Danish citizens – including those in the Faroe Islands and Greenland – should have the right to vote in the referendum, as defence policy is a matter for the KoD as a whole (L 194 – Bilag 1 Europaudvalget via ft.dk).

In effect, the will to decide for themselves demonstrated in the 1972, 1979, 1982, and 2008 referendums meant that – on issues remaining under the jurisdiction of Copenhagen – Greenland could no longer take part in deciding if matters were best handled in Copenhagen or Brussels, nor in the substantive policy choices if an issue was in fact delegated to the EU. The clearest example was the Danish referendum in 2000 on the euro opt-out: had Denmark decided to adopt the euro, the Danish krone would have ceased to exist, leaving Greenland in limbo not only regarding which currency to use but also highlighting the broader lack of shared knowledge about such processes, which has been evident in many votes held since Greenland's withdrawal. In sum, as a side-effect of the way in which the Greenlandic demos was bounded by the 1972–1979–1982–2008 referendums, its political action space was delimited in notable ways.

The referendums in Greenland that have not happened, yet

Hitherto, we have discussed two very different narratives of iterative referendums regarding Greenland's action space, and in closing the analysis, we frontload the future in terms of some potential forthcoming referendums. In contrast to the disempowerment of an evolving Greenlandic demos depicted in the last section, both the 1979 and 2008 referendums on home rule and self-government were embraced as steps towards greater independence. As mentioned, the 2009 act on self-government includes a road map for independence. This roadmap involves at least another referendum; however, recent debates in Greenland suggest that the process may involve more referendums.

The next referendum in Greenland is likely to concern independence (cf. Ackrén, 2019), confirming such an initiative from the Greenlandic parliament before the Greenlandic government may request that the Danish authorities negotiate a settlement on how independence is to be realised. However, the roadmap set out in the Act on Self-Government may be amended to include earlier referendums – either on initiating the negotiation process leading to an agreement with Denmark on the conditions of independence (including possible post-independence arrangements) and/or on the draft constitution for a future independent Greenlandic state. The introduction of the Self-Government Act by referendum, including its roadmap to an independence referendum, has not silenced those who insist that Denmark still owes Greenland a referendum on independence dating back to 1953.

In 2016, the Greenlandic parliament tasked a commission with drafting a constitution. The report prepared by the Government of Greenland to facilitate the work of the commission suggested that two texts were drafted: One constitution to be used in the event of independence, and one to be used as long as Greenland is covered (also) by the Danish constitution (Østergaard et al., 2023). As a reaction to the Faroese constitutional process at the turn of the millennium, the Danish Prime Minister had indicated that adopting a text named a constitution would be acceptable to Denmark, as long as it was consistent with the Danish constitution. However, when discussing in *Folketinget*, the Danish parliament, the Greenlandic endeavours, he insisted that holding a referendum on a post-independence constitution was not acceptable – even if the new constitution thus accepted would not be put into force until a later date. Moreover, he strongly indicated that holding such a referendum would mean the end of Danish subsidies to

Greenland. In several elections in Greenland, particularly the most pro-independent party, Partii Naleraq, was using the prospect of an independence-referendum in its campaign, but no tangible roadmap is offered at the time of writing. Anyway, comparisons to the Brexit-vote surfaced among Danish commentators, in the sense that a referendum without a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis could lead to an accidental exit (e.g. Niels Wang in Krog, 2018).

A draft constitution for an independent Greenlandic state was indeed published (in 2023). Its publication as such was not deemed in violation of Danish constitutional law because of its tentative nature. The text only mentioned referendums vis-à-vis constitutional amendment and ceding sovereignty to intergovernmental organisations or other states. In both cases the parliament, *Inatsisartut* must first adopt the changes by law, which must then be confirmed by a referendum. Concerning ceding sovereignty, the voters must be heard within one year by a simple majority; of those entitled to vote, more than half must have cast a vote. For constitutional amendments, the quorum is even higher, demanding that at least 75% of voters support the bill in the vote. The constitutional draft did not spur a more tangible timeline, let alone what kind of model should eventually be voted on, but discussions about who should be eligible to vote is a recurrent theme, which shows that defining a bounded demos in Greenland is still a work in progress more than half a century after the formative referendums analysed in a previous section.

A final referendum which has not happened (yet), concludes this article: whether to permit uranium mining. Proposals to hold such a referendum have intermittently surfaced for more than a decade from various Greenlandic political parties. The 2009 Act on Self-Government ‘froze’ the size of the annual block grant from Denmark and further stipulated that Greenland must finance the administration of any new policy area it chooses to ‘take home’ from the list of additional competencies that may be devolved. This shift redirected Greenlandic political debate toward new strategies for funding future independence, while maintaining the level of welfare that an overwhelming majority agrees must not be compromised (Gad, 2016a). In this context, extractive industries emerged as an apparent opportunity. Notably, one of the most advanced extractive projects involves, controversially, radioactive uranium located in close proximity to the town of Narsaq in southern Greenland.

In effect, such a hypothetical referendum on uranium mining would be of a ‘constitutional’ character – even if not formally: A driving force behind a ‘yes’ could well be the impetus towards independence. A ‘yes’ would signal that the emergence of Greenland as an independent nation state is more important than the protection of its cultural identity and natural environment to which this identity is closely related through a series of iconic, cultural practices.

Surveys over time from the now defunct Nuuk-based *HS Analyse* indicate a majority of voters are for convening a vote about uranium extraction, but there are ongoing debates about whether it should be a local or Greenland-wide vote (based on several interviews conducted in Southern Greenland, August 2018). Some parties on both sides of the uranium-debate have even indicated they would not honour the outcome from a consultative referendum. The uranium case from the bounded demos notion is also interesting because of the all-affected argument mentioned in the theory section, in the sense that diverse arguments can be made who should vote in such a referendum. Should it only be the citizens of Narsaq and sheep farmers in close proximity to the mine or all of the Greenlandic demos, also including Qaanaaq 1500 km to the north? The bounded demos issue in the Greenlandic case is a tricky problematique, as this article has discussed, being shaped and reshaped over half a century in various ways.

Conclusion: Lessons learned from Greenlandic postcoloniality as defined by referendums

Referendums are frequently convened to consult the voters in regards to integration and disintegration of polities, from intergovernmental entities like the EU to sub-state entities like Scotland and Catalonia. This article has utilised a case study of Greenland to tease out the temporal dynamics linking referendums at different levels of analysis to elucidate how *demoi* are bounded but also excluded from taking part of decision-making processes in other ballot-settings. The analysis shows how choices made in one referendum can provide agency or constraint in later referendums.

Hence, it illustrates how referendums that advance decolonisation by expanding room for manoeuvre in foreign policy simultaneously entail a downside: the exclusion from decisions on, for example, EU reforms that have domestic implications. Analytically, the ‘bounded demos’ problem is not merely a philosophical concern but is particularly pertinent in a postcolonial context. Moreover, the sequence of referendums shaping Greenland’s room for manoeuvre – domestically, within the KoD, and internationally – sheds new light on the dynamics of multi-level integration and disintegration mediated through referendums.

Where do we go from here? Future research should pay closer attention to both the temporal and spatial dimensions of referendums, enabling comparative inquiries into within-case developments over time as well as the identification of similar patterns across states and sub-state polities that shape and reshape the boundaries of the electorate participating in such votes. Not all states or sub-state actors, of course, convene referendums or other forms of direct democracy when critical junctures arise. Yet some of the core tenets of democratic theory come to the fore when combining concepts such as the bounded demos, action spaces, and referendums. Relevant examples include independence referendums in, for instance, New Caledonia, Catalonia, and Puerto Rico; although some were not recognised by either central governments or pro-independence actors, further complicating the picture.

European integration is arguably the subject that has prompted the most referendums since the early 1970s, with member states repeatedly asking their voters to approve accession or ratify EU treaties to enable further integration. In the early 2000s, the lack of a common European *demos* was widely discussed as a democratic deficit. The so-called Laeken process, intended to make the EU more democratic and relevant to its citizens, and later the draft Constitutional Treaty, came to an abrupt halt when the *demoi* in France and the Netherlands rejected it in the mid-2000s (Nielsen, 2009). Only five countries and territories have left the EC/EU – including French Algeria (upon independence), Greenland, and the United Kingdom, the latter two via referendums – but the inconclusive trajectories of European integration and disintegration, in a sense, mirror the inconclusive processes of integration and disintegration within the KoD: both involve an iterative process of un-bounding and re-bounding *demoi*.

From within the KoD, Iceland gained full independence through a 1944 referendum, which passed with a remarkable 99% ‘yes’ vote. However, this marked the culmination of a stepwise secession, as the 1918 Danish–Icelandic Act of Union had already established a personal union between the two states. A few years later, in 1946, the Faroese also held a referendum on independence, but both the narrow majority in favour and the legality of the vote were not acknowledged by Denmark (Sølvara, 2018). Subsequently, as elaborated in this article, a Danish referendum in 1953, followed by Greenlandic referendums in 1979 and 2008,

established Greenland's distinctive position within the Danish constitutional framework, including provisions that envisage possible future independence referendums.

While the Danish constitution is written largely with a unitary state in mind, the quasi-federal features that have developed over time create opportunities for comparative analysis. Referendums, in particular, often play a central role in new state formation at the sub-state level, in the re-constitution of federal entities through the reconfiguration of their constituent parts (e.g., the creation of Nunavut in Canada in 1992), and in supra-national developments (e.g., within the EU from the first enlargement period in the early 1970s), including the Greenlandic case.

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to the organisers of the symposium on *Referendums and Self-determination* at the Gibraltar Garrison Library and the conference on *Referendums in Small States* at Queen Mary University London, United Kingdom, which prompted us, respectively, to begin and to complete this paper.

Disclaimers

The authors declare that this article did not benefit from research funding.

The authors also declare no conflict of interest in writing this article.

The authors also declare that no Generative Artificial Intelligence was used in the crafting of this article.

References

- Ackrén, M. (2019). Referendums in Greenland: From home rule to self-government. *Fédéralisme Régionalisme*, 19, 1-11.
- Alfredsson, G. S. (1982). Greenland and the right to self-determination. *Nordic Journal of International Law*, 51(1), 39-43.
- Baldacchino, G. (2013). The micropolity sovereignty experience: decolonizing, but not disengaging. In R. Adler-Nissen & U. P. Gad (Eds.), *European integration and postcolonial sovereignty games: The EU Overseas Countries and Territories* (pp. 53-76). Routledge.
- Baldacchino, G., Clegg, P., David, C., & Gad, U. P. (2026). Sub-national identity on state passports: Challenging the unitary model of sovereignty. In J. Redmond, M. Geary, B. Scutaru, A. Shalvey & G. Baldacchino (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of identity documentation*. Palgrave. Forthcoming.
- Beckman, L. (2019). Deciding the demos: three conceptions of democratic legitimacy. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 22(4), 412-431.
- Beukel, E., Jensen, F. P., & Rytter, J. E. (2010). *Phasing out the colonial status of Greenland, 1945-54: A historical study*. Museum Tusulanum Press.
- Dahl, R. A. (1970). *After the revolution? Authority in a good society*. Yale University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1986). Declarations of independence. *New Political Science*, 7(1), 7-15.

- Draft Constitution (2023): *Forfatningskommissionens Betænkning*. <https://www.ft.dk/samling/20222/almDEL/GRU/bilag/54/2702267/index.htm>
- Folketinget (*various years*). Cited laws and parliamentary reports. <https://www.ft.dk/>
- Gad, U. P. (2020). Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and Denmark: Unity or community? In P. M. Christiansen, J. Elklit & P. Nedergaard (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of Danish politics* (pp. 28-45). Oxford University Press.
- Gad, U. P. (2019). Grønlandsk identitet og udvikling: danske trusler og muligheder: Sprogdebatten under hjemme- og selvstyre. In O. Høiris, O. Marquardt & G. A. Reimer (Eds.), *Grønlændernes syn på Danmark: Historiske, kulturelle og sproglige perspektiver* (pp. 481-512). Aarhus Universitetsforlag.
- Gad, U. P. (2016a). *National identity politics and postcolonial sovereignty games: Greenland in the margins of Europe*. Museum Tusulanum Publishers.
- Gad, U. P. (2016b). Could a 'reverse Greenland' arrangement keep Scotland and Northern Ireland in the EU? *LSE EuroPP blog*, 22 July. <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/could-a-reverse-greenland-arrangement-keep-scotland-and-northern-ireland-in-the-eu/>
- Gad, U. P. (2013). Greenland projecting sovereignty; Denmark protecting sovereignty away. In R. Adler-Nissen & U. P. Gad (Eds.), *European integration and postcolonial sovereignty games: The EU Overseas Countries and Territories* (pp. 217-234). Routledge.
- Gad, U. P. (2004). Grønlandsk identitet: Sprog, demokrati, velfærd og selvstændighed. *Politica*, 36(3), 271-288.
- Gad, U. P. & Adler-Nissen, R. (2013). Introduction: Postcolonial sovereignty games. In R. Adler-Nissen & U. P. Gad (Eds.), *European integration and postcolonial sovereignty games: The EU Overseas Countries and Territories* (pp. 1-24). Routledge.
- Gad, U. P. & Kristensen, K. S. (2025). Liminal strategies in the margins of international politics: The state-like power of non-state Greenland. *International Political Sociology*, 19(1): olae045 (e-pub ahead of print).
- Hannibal, I., Holst, K., Gad, U. P., & Adler-Nissen, R. (2013). European Union: Facilitating the OCTs in Brussels. In R. Adler-Nissen & U. P. Gad (Eds.), *European integration and postcolonial sovereignty games: The EU Overseas Countries and Territories* (pp. 77-95). Routledge.
- Hansen, P., & Jönsson, S. (2012). Imperial origins of European integration and the case of Eurafrica: a reply to Gary Marks' 'Europe and its Empires'. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 50(6), 1028-1041.
- Harhoff, F. (1983). Greenland's withdrawal from the European Communities. *Common Market Law Review*, 20, 13-33.
- Honig, B. (1991). Declarations of Independence: Arendt and Derrida on the problem of founding a republic. *American Political Science Review*, 85(1), 97-113.
- Jacobsen, M. & Olsvig, S. (2024). From Peary to Pompeo: The history of United States' securitizations of Greenland. In Jacobsen, M., Wæver, O. & Gad, U. P. (Eds.), *Greenland in Arctic security: (De)securitization dynamics under climatic thaw and geopolitical freeze* (pp. 107-148). University of Michigan Press.
- Jennings, I. (1956). *The approach to self-government*. Cambridge University Press.

- Johansen, L. E. (1992). Greenland and the European Community. *Études/Inuit/Studies*, 16(1-2), 33-37.
- Kohn, M. & McBride, K. (2011). *Political theories of decolonization: Postcolonialism and the problem of foundations*. Oxford University Press.
- Krog, A. (2018, May 2). Wang: Grønlandsk løsrivelse kan ske ved et uheld. *Altinget Arktis*.
- Lynge, N. & Broch L. K. (2016, June 29). Rigsfællesskabet er svækket af EU. *Jyllands-Posten*. <https://jyllands-posten.dk/debat/kronik/ECE8808270/rigsfaellesskabet-er-svaekket-af-eu>
- Markussen, U., & Ren, C. (2023). A just destination? Exploring local hopes, fears, and power asymmetries in East Greenlandic (Tunu) tourism development. *Études Inuit Studies*, 47(1-2), 253–273.
- Nielsen, R. L. (2009). *The logic of EU-referendums: Why referendums on European integration are convened by political elites*. Syddansk Universitets Trykkeri.
- Nielsen, R. L. (2021). Global Greenlanders: Evolutionen af en grønlandsk udenrigspolitik i et foranderligt Arktis. In A. Rydstrøm-Poulsen, G. A. Reimer & A. N. Lauritsen (Eds.), *Tro og samfund i 300-året for Hans Egedes ankomst til Grønland* (pp. 315-330). Aarhus Universitetsforlag.
- Nielsen, R. L. (2025). Krisediplomati i Arktisk råd: En komparativ analyse af Grønlands håndtering af henholdsvis covid-19 og Ruslands invasion af Ukraine. *Internasjonal Politikk*, 83(1), 104–119.
- Nielsen, R. L. & Strandsbjerg, J. (2024). “Nothing about us without us”: What we can learn from Greenland’s new ‘Arctic strategy’ 2024-2033. *Arctic Yearbook*, 13, 337-350.
- Nielsen, R. L., Gad, U. P., Lennert, M., Lauritzen, A. N. & Rud, S. (2022). Selvstyret. In N. Koch (Ed). *Trap Grønland* (pp. 245-265). Trap Danmark.
- Østergaard, M., Nielsen, R. L., & Gad, U. P. (2023). *Free Association in a Greenlandic context*. (Nasiffik Working Paper, No 2). Ilisimatusarfik.
- Olsvig, S. (2022). Greenland’s ambiguous action space: testing internal and external limitations between US and Danish Arctic interests. *Polar Journal*, 12(2), 215–239.
- Petersen, N. (2005). Danmark som international aktør 705-2005. *Politica*, 37(1), 44–59.
- Qvortrup, M. (2015). A brief history of self-determination referendums before 1920. *Ethnopolitics*, 14(5), 547-565.
- Qvortrup, M. (2020). Referendums, democracy and separatism. *Review of Nationalities*, 10(1), 1-13.
- Qvortrup, M. (2024). *Referendums around the world*. Springer Nature.
- Radan, P. (2012). Secessionist referenda in international and domestic law. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 18(1), 8-21.
- Rebhan, C. (2016). *North Atlantic Euroscepticism: the rejection of EU membership in the Faroe Islands and Greenland*. Faroe University Press.
- Skydsbjerg, H. (1999). *Grønland 20 år med hjemmestyre*. Atuagkat.
- Sølvará, H. A. (2018). Direct democracy in the Faroe Islands. A comparative study of referendums in a Faroese context. / Beinleiðis fólkaræði í Føroyum. Ein samanberandi rannsókn av fólkaatkvøðum í einum føroyskum høpi. *Fróðskaparrit – Faroese Scientific Journal*, 63, 49-102.

- Song, S. (2012). The boundary problem in democratic theory: why the demos should be bounded by the state. *International Theory*, 4(1), 39–68.
- Tierney, S. (2009). Constitutional referendums: A theoretical enquiry. *Modern Law Review*, 72(3), 360-383.
- Whelan, F. G. (1983). Prologue: Democratic theory and the boundary problem. In J. R. Pennock & J. W. Chapman (Eds). *Liberal democracy* (Nomos, Vol. 25, pp, 13-47). New York University Press.