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Contents

Abstract.....	5
1. Breaking records.....	7
2. Volatile voters.....	11
3. Turnout	15
4. From minority to majority government	17
5. The election campaign.....	19
6. The role of political leaders	23
7. Changes in the electoral system.....	25
8. Concluding remarks.....	29
References.....	31

Abstract

This report examines the recent parliamentary election in Norway. In view of the fact that the Norwegian economy is booming, not least due to the revenues from the oil industry, common wisdom would imply that the ruling center-right government should have won the election easily. However, a new center-left coalition won by a narrow margin – establishing the first majority government in Norway in twenty years. The paradox was that the campaign did not focus on economic success, but rather on unsolved social problems related to care for the elderly, health institutions and education. In itself this may not be a sign of increasing dissatisfaction, but rather continuous widespread support for a universalistic welfare system based on social equality. However, previous studies indicate that the contrast between unsolved problems and the increasing pile of money in the state owned oil fund generates political distrust. Thus, the electoral success of the populist Progress Party may be indicative of challenges every Norwegian government will have to face in the years to come. The article also outlines major changes in the electoral system introduced in the 2005 election.

Breaking records

How was it possible for the center-right coalition government of the Conservative Party (*Høyre*), the Christian People's Party (*Kristelig Folkeparti*) and the Liberal Party (*Venstre*) to lose the September 12th election? The state owned oil fund – based on revenues from the oil industry – had increased to more than 1200 billion Norwegian kroner (over 150 billion Euros), taxes had decreased by more than 20 billion kroner (2.5 billion Euros), the average monthly wages had increased by 20 percent in the last four years, and unemployment was below 5 percent. No wonder the United Nations had pointed to Norway as the best country in the world to live in. The favorable state of the economy – at the private as well as at the national level – would in most countries have guaranteed a clear victory for the incumbent parties. How then, could they lose the election? In this article I will give an overview and an initial analysis of the 2005 election, using data from official election statistics and opinion polls.¹

Several of the last elections in Norway have been characterized as exceptional (Valen 2003; Aardal 1998). This applies to the 2005 election as well. Two of the government parties, the Conservatives and the Christian People's Party, hit rock bottom and received their lowest share of the votes ever. The only successful government partner was the tiny Liberal Party. In 2001 the Liberals had failed to reach the 4 percent electoral threshold for adjustment seats, but won two seats in Parliament and three seats in the cabinet! Before the 2005 election, they appealed to government supporters to help the party cross the threshold. The Liberals succeeded and got 5.9 percent, increasing their representation from 2 to 10 seats.

1. I would like to thank Elisabeth Bakke, Rune Karlsen and Guro Stavn for most useful comments on earlier drafts. More extensive data from the Norwegian Election Studies will be available later.

See http://www.socialresearch.no/page/Research/Menu_research_fields/7981/8066.

Official election results are found at

<http://odin.dep.no/krd/html/valgresultat2005/frameset.html>.

The Progress Party (*Fremskrittspartiet*) reached an all time high, receiving 22.1 percent of the votes and 38 seats in Parliament. For a populist party in Western Europe this is a fairly high level of support. It seems that the best way to win an election is to lose the previous one – and vice versa. For instance, in the 2001 election Labor (*Arbeiderpartiet*) reached its lowest level since the 1920s, but appeared as one of the winners of the 2005 election.² The Conservatives lost heavily in 1997, gained in 2001 and lost again in 2005. Table 1 and Table 2 show the results of the 2005 election in percent and number of seats.

Table 1. Starting Elections 1989-2005. Support in percent

	1989	1993	1997	2001	2005	Average
Red Election Alliance	0.8	1.1	1.7	1.2	1.2	1.2
Socialist Left	10.1	7.9	6.0	12.5	8.8	9.1
Labor	34.3	36.9	35.0	24.3	32.7	32.6
Liberal	3.2	3.6	4.5	3.9	5.9	4.2
Christian	8.5	7.9	13.7	12.4	6.8	9.9
Center	6.5	16.7	7.9	5.6	6.5	8.6
Conservative	22.2	17.0	14.3	21.2	14.1	17.8
Progress	13.0	6.3	15.3	14.6	22.1	14.3
Coastal Party			0.4	1.7	0.8	1.0
Others	1.4	2.6	1.2	2.6	1.1	1.8
Turnout	83.2	75.8	78.3	75.5	77.4	78.0

Table 2. Starting Elections 1989-2005. Allocation of Seats

	1989	1993	1997	2001	2005	Average
Red Election Alliance	0	1	0	0	0	0.2
Socialist Left	17	13	9	23	15	15.4
Labor	63	67	65	43	61	59.8
Liberal	0	1	6	2	10	3.8
Christian	14	13	25	22	11	17.0
Center	11	32	11	10	11	15.0
Conservative	37	28	23	38	23	29.8
Progress	22	10	25	26	38	24.2
Coastal Party	-	-	1	1	0	0.4
Others	1	-	-	-	-	0.2
Total	165	165	165	165	169	

The three incumbent parties, the Conservatives, the Christian People's Party and the Liberals jointly won 26.8 percent of the votes and 44 seats of a total of

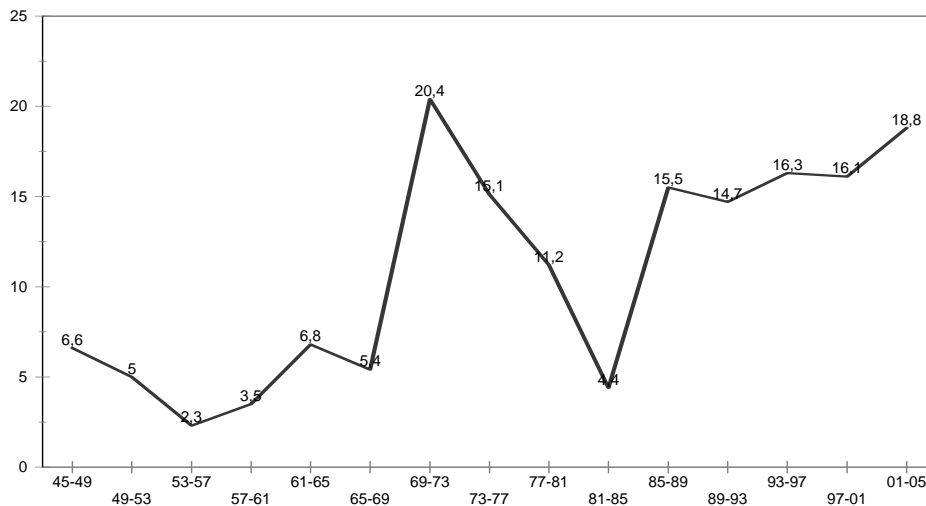
2. However, although the 2005 result represented an increase of more than 8 percentage points from the previous election, it was Labor's second worst result since 1930.

169, compared to 37.5 percent and 62 of 165 seats in the 2001 election. Their minority government therefore had to step down, and was replaced by a majority government consisting of Labor, the Socialist Left Party (*Sosialistisk Venstreparti*) and the Center Party (*Senterpartiet*). The red-green alliance won 48 percent of the votes and 87 seats, and was the first majority government to take office in twenty years.

Volatile voters

High volatility has been a distinguishing mark of Norwegian politics since the mid 1980s. Figure 1 shows the aggregate volatility since World War II, using the well known Pedersen index (Pedersen 1979). The 1973 election was an earthquake, following in the wake of the disruptive EEC-referendum in 1972. From a record high aggregate volatility of 20.4 percent in 1973, the system returned to “normal” in 1985 with only 4.4 percent volatility. However, the volatility has since then increased. The 2005 level of 18.8 percent almost rivals the 1973 record.

Figure 1. Aggregate volatility in Norwegian parliamentary elections 1945-2005



Panel data confirm the pattern at the individual level. From 20 percent volatility in 1985, there was an increase to 30 percent in 1989 and 37 percent in 2001 (Aardal 2003).³ Opinion polls, using recall data, indicate even higher individual volatility in 2005.⁴ Hence, there is no doubt that Norwegian voters have “begun to choose” (Rose & McAllister 1986), but they are not necessarily making erratic or accidental choices. Previous research shows that Norwegians are to a large extent influenced by underlying ideological orientations and even position in the social structure when they decide which party to vote for, or which party to switch to (Aardal 2003; Aardal & Waldahl 2004; Aardal & Van Wijnen 2005).

Let us take a closer look at the direction of changing party preferences. Even though the respective party leaders claimed that the center-right coalition was a success, and that the relationship between the parties was amicable, there were signs of political strain, in particular between the Christian People’s Party and the Conservatives. The transition matrices from the MMI polls show that the Christian People’s Party lost quite a few voters to Labor and to the Center Party. This indicates that some Christian voters may have felt that the party had moved too much to the right during the companionship with the Conservatives. The latter party, on the other hand, lost heavily to the Progress Party, indicating that Conservative voters may have been dissatisfied with the compromises imposed on the Conservative Party by its coalition partners. Thus, Conservative and Christian voters seem to have moved in opposite directions. This is not surprising, taking the political landscape immediately before the 2001 government formation into account.

Despite the fact that the Conservatives and the Christian People’s Party had been government partners several times, the two parties started to drift apart in the early 1990s. Election studies both in 1997 and 2001 showed that the Conservatives and the Christians diverged on a number of ideological dimensions (Aardal 2003; Aardal et al. 1999). Moreover, the Center Party and the Liberals were the Christian People’s Party’s preferred coalition partners in 2001. These three parties had formed a minority government after the 1997 election, when Prime Minister Thorbjørn Jagland declared that the Labor election result of 35 percent was “insufficient” for his government to stay in office. However, the centrist coalition had to step down in March 2000 after a vote of no confidence in Parliament. In the 2001 election the three centrist

3. This includes only shifts between parties. If we include shifts to and from vote abstention, the corresponding figures are 29, 38 and 44. These data are based on panels from the Norwegian Election Studies.

4. Polls from the MMI institute indicate that 48 percent changed preferences from 2001 to 2005, including non-voters in one or both elections. In Norway, we do not have ordinary exit polls. In stead, relatively large cross-section samples are recruited before the election, and then re-interviewed on Election Day, after they have voted.

parties again ran as a coalition, but the parties put together lost more than 4 percent of the votes and 8 seats in Parliament. Two of the parties then resorted to the so-called "plan B", resulting in the formation of a center-right coalition consisting of the Liberals, the Christian People's Party and the Conservatives.

The situation for the Liberals merits some additional comments. Opinion polls had shown that the Liberals' prospects in the upcoming election were dismal. The main obstacle was to cross the 4 percent threshold for national adjustment seats. In the last few weeks of the campaign the Liberals consistently appealed to "bourgeois-minded" voters to vote for them in order to save the center-right government. The appeal was successful in so far as the party passed the threshold, but the downside for the coalition partners was that a considerable share of the new Liberal voters came from the Conservatives and the Christian People's Party. MMI's election day poll shows that almost 40 percent of the Liberal Party's voters in 2005 had voted Conservative or Christian in 2001.

In sum, the Conservatives and the Christian People's Party lost voters to the competing government alternative on the center-left, to the nearby, but non-supporting Progress Party on the right, as well as to the "cannibalistic" ally – the Liberal Party.

Turnout

Declining turnout has recently become a concern even in established democracies. In Norway it came on the agenda of politicians and political scientists alike in 1993, when turnout dropped 7.4 percentage points compared to the 1989 election, reaching the lowest level that had been recorded in Norwegian parliamentary elections since the 1920s (Aardal & Valen 1995). Although a 75.8 percent turnout (in 1993) is relatively high compared to most Western democracies, declining turnout is often interpreted as a democratic decline. For instance, when turnout dropped by 5 percentage points to 81.4 percent in Sweden in 1998, it was characterized as a “disaster” (Bennulf & Hedberg 1999). In Norway, turnout has stabilized around 75+ percent after 1993. A major explanation of the drop in turnout in the early 1990s was the lack of clear government alternatives (Narud & Valen 1996). This was also the case in 2001 when turnout dropped to 75.5 percent (Narud 2003). However, government alternatives were clearer before the 2005 election than in previous elections (see below). Moreover, monthly opinion polls indicated a close race. The red-green opposition parties had taken an early lead, but the non-socialist parties were right behind. Clear alternatives and a close race are both classic predictors for high turnout (Blais & Dobrzynska 1998). However, because of uncertainty about the role of the Progress Party on the non-socialist side and the unproven nature of the red-green alliance on the other, nobody dared to make any precise predictions about the turnout level. The precautions turned out to be warranted. As Table 3 shows, turnout did increase, but only by 1.9 percentage points – to 77.4 percent.

Table 3. Turnout in Parliamentary elections in Norway 1973-2005.

1973	1977	1981	1985	1989	1993	1997	2001	2005
80,2	82,9	83,2	84,0	83,2	75,8	78,3	75,5	77,4

Data from the MMI Election Day polls seem to indicate a mobilization of former non-voters and new voters, but only for some parties. Labor, for in-

stance, seems to have renewed the contract with former sympathizers who did not vote in the 2001 election, as well as to have increased its appeal among first-time voters.⁵ The Progress Party on the other hand mobilized even more young voters (33 percent of the 18-24 year-olds voted for the party), but had a net loss among former non-voters. In comparison, the Conservatives dropped from 28 percent to 9 percent among first-time voters. Thus, one reason why the overall turnout did not increase more than it did may be the fact that many voters were convinced neither of the clarity of the government alternatives, nor of their viability.

5. According to the MMI polls Labor received 24 percent of the vote among first-time voters (age 18-24). In 2001 The Election Studies showed only 11 percent for Labor in the same age group.

From minority to majority government

Minority governments have been more the rule than the exception in Norwegian politics since the late 1800s.⁶ The center-right government of the Conservatives, the Christian People's Party and the Liberals took over in 2001, but controlled only 62 of 165 seats (37.6 percent) in the *Storting*. The Progress Party proclaimed support for this government over a Labor led government, and was regarded as a part of the government's parliamentary basis. However, the Progress Party did not enter any formal agreement and did not admit particular responsibility for the government. The role of the Progress Party vis-à-vis the three governing parties would prove fatal in the election campaign.

On the other side of the political spectrum, Labor tried to heal its wounds after the disastrous 2001 election. One step toward the aim of returning to power was to enter into an alliance with the Socialist Left Party and the Center Party. This was no minor step for any of the three parties. Labor had never been part of a coalition government before, the Socialist Left Party had not been part of any government, and the Center Party had never been in government with "socialist" parties.⁷ Nevertheless, the center-left alliance declared that they would join forces in a red-green government if they won a majority in the election. Despite the extremely favorable economic tides which would presumably benefit the incumbent government parties, the red-green alliance did win the election, although by a very narrow margin. Not surprisingly the election campaign focused strongly on the two opposing government alternatives, and not the least the two candidates for Prime Minister, the present PM Kjell Magne Bondevik (Christian People's Party) and his would-be successor Jens Stoltenberg (Labor). The campaign strategy of both camps was clearly to emphasize and strengthen the differences between two ideologically distinct

6. Two thirds of the governments have been minority governments since 1884.

7. The only exception was an extraordinary coalition of all parliamentary parties that lasted only a few months in 1945.

alternatives. But then the Progress Party leader Carl I. Hagen suddenly changed the rules of the game.

The election campaign

Election campaigns in Norway can be divided in two: the *long* campaign, starting up to a year before the election and the *short* campaign, starting about a month before the election (Karlsen & Narud 2004). The long campaign had started out as expected, concentrating on the two government alternatives. Just before the *Storting* closed the spring session about two months before the election, Carl I. Hagen called upon fellow “bourgeois” politicians to speak nicely about each other during the campaign, in order to create a good political climate for further cooperation. But just a few days later Mr. Hagen lashed out against Prime Minister Bondevik, accusing him of being a hindrance for a broad non-socialist coalition that would include the Progress Party. Despite the fact that the Progress Party had been instrumental in the formation of Mr. Bondevik’s government, the government parties did not want to form closer ties with the party. The Progress Party has always been regarded as “too far out” by other Norwegian parties, partly because of the party’s anti-immigration policy, and partly because of the party’s populist character. Now, Mr. Hagen shot back and declared that his party would not support a non-socialist government after the election if it were to be led by Mr. Bondevik. Instead of being shoved into the background by the two contending government alternatives – excluding the Progress Party, Mr. Hagen managed to shift the focus away from Bondevik onto himself. All summer and until mid-August, the Progress Party’s role vis-à-vis the non-socialist government played a prominent role in the media coverage.⁸ Jens Stoltenberg immediately seized the opportunity and used Mr. Hagen’s statement as “proof” of the deficiencies of Mr. Bondevik’s alternative. Carl I. Hagen’s attack had a disruptive effect on the campaign strategy of the center-right incumbent parties, and made it difficult for them to talk about the achievements of the government during its reign of power.

8. This is confirmed by detailed studies conducted by the media analysis institute Observer Norge.

The doubt about the viability of the non-socialist alternative was not the only problem facing the center-right parties in the campaign. Potentially even more harmful was the mismatch between their agenda and the issues the voters regarded as important. In a series of polls made by the MMI institute in August and September, voters were asked what they perceived to be the most important campaign issues. Table 4 reports the results. In order to make more sense of these figures we need to compare them with the voters' priorities in the 2001 election. Unfortunately we cannot make direct comparisons, due to different coding and wording. The most interesting difference is nevertheless the salience of the tax issue. In 2001 one third of the voters regarded this as the most important issue, making it the most important issue over all. In 2005, however, the tax issue scored a meager 14 percent and ended in 7th place.⁹ Moreover, the issue ownership to the tax issue had changed considerably. In 2001 the Conservative party had unchallenged ownership of the tax issue. In 2005, however, the Conservative party's ownership decreased, while Labor's ownership increased considerably.¹⁰ Hence, although the center-right government put considerable emphasis on the tax issue in the 2005 campaign, promising even more tax cuts in the next four years, this did not create the same enthusiasm as it did four years earlier.

Table 4 . Most important issues. Average of MMI polls. Aug. 15-Sept.9. 2005. N=4802

	Pct.
Education/Schools	32
Care for the elderly/nursing homes	25
Economy, industry, employment	21
Children and family policy	16
Health/social policy	15
Taxes, tariffs	14
Immigration/asylum seekers	7
Environmental protection	5
EU/Europe	3
Foreign policy	3

9. For 2001 we are referring to data from the Norwegian Election Studies (Aardal 2003). Bjørklund (2005) has used a different classification of the same data, and reports that 10 percent mentioned taxes as the most important issue in 2005, compared to 21 percent in 2001.

10. A comparison of the 2001 Election Study and the 2005 MMI polls indicate a decrease from 41 to 22 percent for the Conservative party and a 16 to 21 percent increase for Labor among the voter population at large. Among those that regarded taxes as the most important issue, the ownership of the tax issue dropped from 64 to 41 percent for the Conservatives, and increased from 7 to 14 percent for Labor.

On the contrary, the tax debate took a new turn in 2005. The Labor leader, Mr. Stoltenberg, repeatedly claimed that the incumbent parties had given priority to private prosperity at the expense of public welfare like care for the elderly and health care institutions. These accusations particularly hurt the Christian People's Party which has traditionally enjoyed high credibility on social issues. Consequently, Labor (as well as the Socialist Left Party) increased their ownership to the "care for the elderly"-issue, while the issue ownership of the Christian People's Party decreased.¹¹ Even though education and schools remained one of the most important issues, the MMI polls indicate an interesting change in issue ownership between 2001 and 2005. The former issue owners, the Conservatives and the Socialist Left Party, have lost ownership, while Labor has increased its ownership to education.

An interesting pattern can be discerned; albeit not one that fits a clear-cut divide between the government parties and the opposition. The leading opposition party, Labor, has made an impressive turnaround since the 2001 election, when Labor performed poorly at the polls, and did not own any particular issue (Aardal 2003). In 2005 Labor not only gained more than 8 percentage points in the election, but also reclaimed its ownership to a number of vital issues. Moreover, the incumbent parties did not manage to hold on to their ownership to the two top issues in 2005, namely education/schools and care for the elderly. On top of this, the salience of the tax issue had dropped considerably.

A seeming paradox was that despite unquestionable good economic prospects, the campaign focused on unsolved social problems rather than on economic success – and not only on care for the elderly and health care in general, but also on poverty. Prime Minister Bondevik publicly admitted that he – and his government – could have done more to help the poor. The emphasis on welfare issues and public responsibility to alleviate social problems is not in itself surprising in a country where social equality is a cherished value. However, the explanation of the paradox lies to a large extent in the contrast between unsolved problems on the one hand and an over-affluent society on the other. The enormous and highly visible build-up of wealth in the state oil fund makes it difficult for many voters to understand that we cannot "afford" to remedy social ills of almost any kind. Moreover, this attitude is widespread. The 2001 Election Study showed that 40 percent of Norwegians believed that it was possible to decrease taxes "considerably" and at the same time spend

11. Among all voters Labor's ownership increase from 19 percent in 2001 to 26 percent in 2005, for the Socialist Left Party it increased from 1 to 9 percent, while it decreased for the Christian People's Party from 17 to 7 percent. Bjørklund's (2005) classification shows an increase from 16 to 29 percent for Labor, from 7 to 10 percent for The Socialist Left Party and a decrease from 13 to 7 percent for the Christian People's Party. For the latter party he shows that 32 percent regarded it as the owner of this issue in 1997.

“substantially” more money from the oil fund to solve current social problems (Aardal 2003). Interestingly, this belief was clearly linked to political distrust (Listhaug 2005; Aardal 2003:222). Those who wanted to have it “both ways,” expressed lower trust in politicians than those who did not want to use more oil money or reduce taxes. Norwegian governments are already spending a considerable part of the oil revenue, but in order to protect the economy from overheating there is general agreement on a fiscal rule not to spend more than 4 percent of the annual interest from the oil fund.¹² The most prominent exception is the Progress Party, which wants to use more of the oil revenue to alleviate social problems *and* at the same time cut taxes. Moreover, voters’ support for this view is a more important explanation for the party’s recent success at the polls than its anti-immigration policy. As demonstrated in table 4, only 7 percent of the voters mentioned immigration as the most important issue. However, anti-immigration attitudes are nevertheless still prevalent among Progress Party voters.¹³

12. In Norwegian it is called “handlingsregelen.”

13. According to the MMI polls, more than 90 percent of those who mentioned immigration as the most important issue in 2005 said that the Progress Party had the best policy on this issue.

The role of political leaders

The media often explain parties' success and failures in elections in terms of the party leaders' performance. Labor's Stoltenberg could then in the context of the 2005 election be portrayed as a strong and popular leader; conversely, Prime Minister Bondevik would appear as a weak and unpopular leader. However, even if this description of the two leaders is fairly accurate, the causal explanation is not necessarily correct. Previous studies have demonstrated that sympathy for a leader goes hand in hand with sympathy for the leader's party. Thus it is difficult to disentangle the importance of party and party leader in explaining the vote. Moreover, sympathy for a leader is consistently less important than sympathy for the party (Aardal & Narud 2003). Norwegian findings are supported by studies in a number of countries (Aarts et al. forthcoming). We do find that Mr. Bondevik's popularity decreased considerably from 2001 to 2005, while Mr. Stoltenberg's popularity increased. But this change may have more to do with political realities than the personal qualities of the contenders. Let us take Labor as an example. After the 2001 fiasco the party needed a new strategy and new friends before it could even think of returning to office. The new friends were the Socialist Left Party and the Center Party, the new strategy was to form a majority government in order to reverse the "turn to the right." The red-green parties' perception of Mr. Bondevik's center-right government was that it had changed Norwegian policies in a more right-wing, market oriented direction. True or not, this strategy helped re-establish a left-right polarization which had been less clear after the 1980s. Moreover, the left-right imprint was enhanced by the incumbent parties' description of the red-green alliance as the "red menace."

Changes in the electoral system

Before the 2005 election there had been a major overhaul of the Norwegian election law. The most important changes were related to the geographical distribution of the Parliamentary seats and to an increase in political proportionality, i.e. an improvement of the correspondence between the parties' share of the votes and their share of the seats. Ever since the first Norwegian constitution in 1814 it has been a tradition not to distribute seats according to the size of the population alone, but also according to the electoral districts' "remoteness" from the national capital. Thus, some peripheral districts have received more seats than their share of the population would imply. However, the geographical overrepresentation has been implemented in a rather unsystematic way. Moreover, there have been no provisions for revising the geographical distribution according to population changes. In order to strike a balance between the "one vote – one value" principle and the center-periphery divide which is a highly salient cleavage even in contemporary Norwegian politics, the Parliament adopted a new law where seats are distributed according to a formula where population and area are weighed. Each inhabitant counts as 1, while each square kilometer counts as 1.8.¹⁴ The 1.8 factor was based on a pragmatic choice of a parameter which fit the geographical distribution in the early 1950's when the present electoral system was established.¹⁵ In addition to linking the geographical distribution to a fixed formula, it was decided to adjust the seat distribution every 8th year. Hence, the distribution of seats has become both systematic and dynamic.

The other major change had to do with the balance between seats allocated in each electoral district and adjustment seats allocated on the national level. Before the 1989 election 8 adjustment seats were introduced in Norway for the first time. Only parties that got at least 4 percent of the national vote could compete for adjustment seats, but a party that won district seats got to keep

14. The distribution is then determined by the pure Sainte Lagüe method, with 1.0 as the first divisor.

15. Area proved to give a closer fit than distance from the capital.

them even if it received less than 4 percent nationwide.¹⁶ However, 8 adjustment seats proved to be too few to improve proportionality substantially. Several of the parties therefore wanted to increase the number of adjustment seats, but without increasing the total number of seats too much. A compromise was reached, which led to the reduction of the number of seats allocated to the 19 election districts from 157 to 150, while the number of adjustment seats was increased from 8 to 19. The last seat in each district is an adjustment seat. Thus, the overall number of seats increased from 165 to 169, while the number of seats in each constituency is fixed.¹⁷ Moreover, the electoral threshold for adjustment seats is still 4 percent of the nationwide vote. The seat allocation is determined by the modified Sainte Lagüe method, using 1.4 as the first divisor. After the 19 adjustment seats have been allocated to the parties, the seats are distributed to the electoral districts by using the parties' remaining share of votes (quota) divided by the average number of votes per seat in each district.¹⁸

The point of increasing the number of adjustment seats was to increase the political proportionality of the system. Figure 2 shows the long term trend with respect to proportionality.

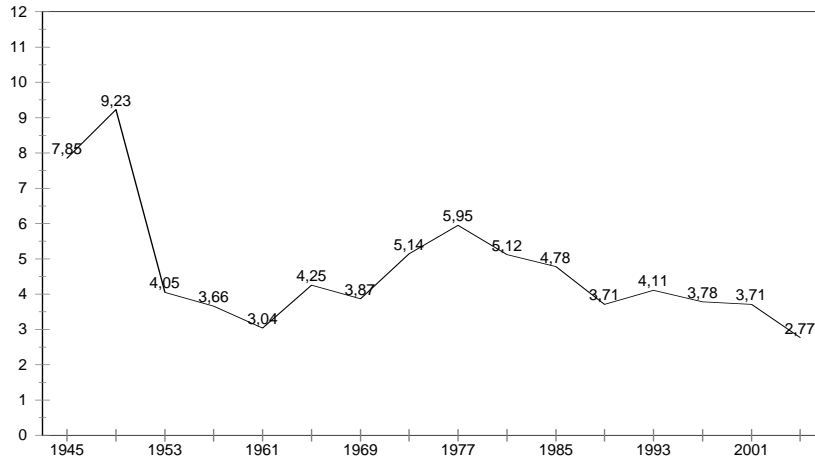
The Gallagher least square disproportionality index (Lijphart 1994) has been calculated for all elections since 1945 (Aardal 2002). The introduction of 8 adjustment seats prior to the 1989 election clearly reduced the disproportionality of the system. The increase from 8 to 19 adjustment seats in 2005 has increased proportionality further. Although the change from 2001 to 2005 may seem modest, it amounts to almost 28 percent compared to the 1989-2001 average. Hence, the stated goal of improving the overall proportionality was achieved.

16. This happened in all elections between 1989 and 2001.

17. Between 1989 and 2001 the number of seats in each district varied from one election to the next, because one district could win more than one adjustment seat.

18. Suppose that district A has 10 seats, and 150 000 voters cast their vote in this district. The average number of votes per seat then is 15 000. Party X received 7500 votes but no seat. This means that the remaining quota of party X is $7500/15000=0.50$. In this calculation we use the pure Sainte Lagüe method. All the quotas for the parties winning adjustment seats are then calculated and sorted. The 19 adjustment seats are won in successive order, depending on the size of the parties' adjusted quotas.

Figure 2. Gallagher's least square index. Norway 1945-2005



Taking into account the close race between the two government alternatives in the 2005 election, an interesting question is to what extent the substantial change of the electoral law affected the outcome of the election. A simulation of the 2005 election, using the old electoral system, shows that the change in the election system did not affect the balance between the red-green and the center-right alternatives. But there are two mechanisms that would have affected the balance. First of all, a geographical redistribution of seats based on population size alone, would have tipped the balance in favor of the center-right government.¹⁹ Secondly, a change of the first divisor of the Sainte Lagüe method (from 1.4 to 1.0) would also have tipped the balance in the same direction, because the modified first divisor favors larger parties.²⁰ While the first mechanism has been controversial, the last has not been questioned to the

19. Labor would have lost three seats, while the Christian People's Party would have gained one seat, and the Conservative Party two seats.

20. Labor profited the most, and would have lost four seats with the unmodified Sainte Lagüe method.

same extent, and was not changed before the 2005 election.²¹ All in all, electoral system design clearly matters, but not in a way that will be easy to redesign. The legitimacy of the electoral system in the peripheral areas would clearly have been negatively affected if the old tradition of “remoteness bonus” had been abolished before the last election.

21. The Conservative Party – which does not enjoy widespread support in the peripheral areas, wanted to abolish the overrepresentation of these areas.

Concluding remarks

The 2005 election in Norway was historic in a number of ways. Several parties achieved their worst result ever, while others reached an all time high. Volatility – both aggregate and individual – is still very high. The center-right minority government had to step down and let a red-green majority government take over. Norwegian politics has to some extent taken a step to the left. The eagerness to privatize public services will be less pronounced, but we will probably not see a return of traditional “socialist” policies. However, welfare seems to be a common denominator for an otherwise shifting agenda in the last elections. Care for the elderly, the quality of health institutions and the educational system have consistently been high on the voters’ list of priorities (Bjørklund 2005; Bjørklund & Saglie 2002; Aardal 2003). Despite a booming economy and private prosperity, not least due to oil revenues, Norwegian voters tend to be more concerned about the deficiencies of the welfare state than with the economic success. These factors are obviously interrelated. The rapidly increasing “pile” of money concentrated in the state oil fund tends to be the measuring stick for all unsolved social problems. In itself this is not a threatening situation; it may merely suggest that the universalistic, consensus based welfare system of the Nordic countries still enjoys widespread support (Bjørklund 2005). However, the link between rising expectations and political distrust may represent a permanent challenge for Norwegian governments in the years to come, whether it is left- or right-leaning. The challenge even has a name: the Progress Party. This party has not only been willing to use more oil money than other parties, but is also the only party in Parliament that has not been held responsible for unpopular decisions as part of a government. Moreover, the Progress Party has for many years been the preferred choice of distrustful voters. However, the establishment of a majority government may significantly reduce the freedom of action enjoyed by powerful opposition parties, not the least the Progress Party.

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Rapport 2006:6

<i>Forfatter/Author</i> Bernt Aardal
<i>Tittel/Title</i> How to lose a walk-over election?
<i>Sammendrag</i> I denne rapporten foretas en foreløpig analyse av stortingsvalget i 2005, basert på data fra MMIs valgdagundersøkelse og offentlig valgstatistikk. I tillegg beskrives de viktigste endringer i valgordningen som ble gjort gjeldende ved dette valget. Bakgrunnen for analysen er det paradoks at den sittende regjering tapte valget, til tross for at norsk økonomi blomstrer. Til tross for gode økonomiske tider ble det i valgkampen ikke fokuserte på dette, men på uløste sosiale problemer i eldreomsorg, helsevesen og utdanningssystemet. I seg selv behøver ikke dette være tegn på økende mistillit, men heller støtte til et universalistisk velferdssystem basert på sosial likhet. Imidlertid tyder tidligere undersøkelser på at kontrasten mellom uløste problemer og det stadig voksende statlige oljefondet bidrar til å generere politisk mistillit. Slik sett kan Fremskrittspartiets gode valgresultat være et tegn på utfordringer som enhver norsk regjering vil bli utsatt for i tiden fremover.
<i>Emneord</i> valg, valgforskning, stortingsvalg, valgordning
<i>Summary</i> This report examines the 2005 parliamentary election in Norway. In view of the fact that the Norwegian economy is booming, not least due to the revenues from the oil industry, common wisdom would imply that the ruling center-right government should have won the election easily. However, a new center-left coalition won by a narrow margin – establishing the first majority government in Norway in twenty years. The paradox was that the campaign did not focus on economic success, but rather on unsolved social problems related to care for the elderly, health institutions and education. In itself this may not be a sign of increasing dissatisfaction, but rather continuous widespread support for a universalistic welfare system based on social equality. However, previous studies indicate that the contrast between unsolved problems and the increasing pile of money in the state owned oil fund generates political distrust. Thus, the electoral success of the populist Progress Party may be indicative of challenges every Norwegian government will have to face in the years to come. The report also outlines major changes in the electoral system introduced in the 2005 election.
<i>Index terms</i> Elections, electoral research, Storting election, election law