Norway

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National election results

Many political commentators described the 2001 election as a political earthquake. They were particularly referring to the disastrous result for the Labour Party. With only 24.3 per cent of the votes it was clear that what used to be the one large party in Norwegian politics had been reduced to a medium-sized party. Labour had lost one-third of its votes since the previous election in 1997, which in itself, was considered a bad election for the Labour Party. The 2001 result was also the lowest percentage of the vote Labour had received in a general election since 1924.

The signals had been there from the start of the election campaign, but both the Labour Party and the political commentators expected that Labour would pull more voters as it got closer to the election. Traditionally, Labour gains more votes from the ‘undecideds’ (Aardal et al. 1999: 38) and, prior to the 2001 election, the group of ‘undecideds’ was particularly numerous. Moreover, what was unusual this year was that more people became more uncertain about their choice as it got closer to Election Day. Labour voters showed a low degree of loyalty to their party in 2001. Only 56 per cent of those who had voted Labour in 1997 gave their vote to Labour four years later. As a comparison, 77 per cent of the party’s 1993 voters remained loyal in 1997. The overall level of volatility, however, was at the same level as the two previous elections (44 per cent) (Aardal 2002).

Another major event was related to the fate of the Centre Alliance (Christian People’s Party, Centre Party and Liberals), who formed a coalition government after the 1997 election and represented a clear alternative to the Labour Government. None of the parties had done particularly well during the election campaign, and this was particularly the case for the Liberals and Centre Party. When the election results became known on the night of the election, Mr Bondevik – the leader of the Christian People’s Party and the
Table 1. Election to the national parliament (Stortinget)

Date of election: 10 September  
Total number of seats: 165  
Electorate: 3,358,856  
Total votes cast: 2,537,041 (75.5 per cent)  
Valid votes cast: 2,521,781 (99.4 per cent)  
Turnout: 75.1 per cent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Number of votes</th>
<th>Percentage of votes</th>
<th>Percentage change since 1997</th>
<th>Number of seats</th>
<th>Percentage of seats</th>
<th>Percentage change since 1997</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Rød Valgallianse – Red Election Alliance (RV)</td>
<td>29,963</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>−0.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sosialistisk Venstreparti – Socialistic Left (SV)</td>
<td>316,407</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>+6.5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>+14</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Det Norske Arbeiderparti – Labour (DNA)</td>
<td>612,847</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>−10.7</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>−22</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Venstre – Liberal (V)</td>
<td>98,605</td>
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<td>−0.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>−4</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Kristelig Folkeparti – Christian People’s Party (KRF)</td>
<td>312,743</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>−1.3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>−3</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Senterpartiet – Centre Party (SP)</td>
<td>140,327</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>−2.4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>−1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Høyre – Conservative (H)</td>
<td>534,747</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>+6.9</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>+15</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Fremskrittspartiet – Progress Party (FRP)</td>
<td>369,116</td>
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<td>−0.7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>+1</td>
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<td>Kystpartiet – Costal Party (KYST)</td>
<td>44,011</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>+1.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Cabinet composition of Stoltenberg I

For the composition of Stoltenberg 1 on 1 January 2001, see Political Data Yearbook 2000: 376–377.

Table 3. Cabinet composition of Bondevik II

A. The party composition of Bondevik II:
Date of investiture: 19 October 2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Number &amp; percentage of parliamentary seats</th>
<th>Number &amp; percentage of cabinet posts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Kristelig Folkeparti – Christian People’s Party (KRF)</td>
<td>22 (13.3)</td>
<td>6 (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Høyre – Conservative (H)</td>
<td>38 (23.0)</td>
<td>10 (53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Venstre – Liberal Party (V)</td>
<td>2 (1.2)</td>
<td>3 (16)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Cabinet members of Bondevik II:
Prime Minister/Statsminister: Kjell Magne Bondevik (male 1947, KRF)
Foreign Affairs/Utenriksminister: Jan Petersen (male 1946, H)
Trade & Industry/Handels- og Næringminister: Ansgar Gabrielsen (male 1955, H)
International Development (under Foreign Affairs)/Utviklingsminister: Hilde Frafjord Johnson (female 1963, KRF)
Defence/Forsvarsminister: Kristin Krohn Devold (female 1961, H)
Agriculture/Landbruksminister: Lars Sponheim (male 1957, V)
Finance/Finansminister: Per Kristian Foss (male 1950, H)
Culture & Church Affairs/Kirke og kulturminister: Valgerd Svarstad Haugland (female 1956, KRF)
Fisheries/Fiskeriminister: Svein Ludvigsen (male 1946, H)
Environmental Affairs/Miljøvernminister: Børge Brende (male 1965, H)
Communications & Transport/Samferdselsminister: Torild Skogsholm (female 1959, V)
Social Affairs/Sosiale saker i Sosial- og Helsedepartementet: Ingrid Schou (female 1955, H)
Health Affairs/Helsesaker i Sosial- og Helsedepartementet: Dagfinn Høybråten (male 1957, KRF)
Education & Research Affairs/Utdanning og forskningsminister: Kristin Clemet (female 1957, H)
Justice & the Police/Justisminister: Odd Einar Dørum (male 1943, V)
Children & Family Affairs/Barne- og familieminister: Laila Dåvøy (female 1948, KRF)
Labour & Government Administration/Arbeids- og administrasjonsminister: Victor Danielsen Norman (male 1946, H)
Petroleum & Energy/Olje- og energiminister: Einar Steensnæs (male 1942, KRF)

1 Also responsible for coordination of information technology. 2 Responsible for national and long-term planning.
Centre Alliance prime ministerial candidate – declared the Alliance dead. The Liberals had not managed to win enough votes to exceed the 4 per cent threshold, and only gained 2 seats in the new Storting. The vote for the Centre Party and the Christian People’s Party was also reduced. Together, the Centre Alliance parties lost 8 seats and, with a total of 34 Members of Parliament, their group would be even smaller than the Conservatives.

The Conservative Party was declared to be one of two winners of the 2001 election. They achieved an excellent result, with a large increase since the previous election. However, the party did not do quite as well as many had expected earlier in the year. Something happened during the election campaign and the major change seemed to occur in August, when the Conservatives started to suffer in the polls. In this final stage of the campaign, the Socialist Left Party surged forward in the polls and ended up as the biggest winner of the election, doubling the number of seats they held in the Storting. Young people and women, in particular, flocked to the Socialist Left Party as the election campaign entered its final days. In addition to having the most loyal voters (73 per cent of 1997 voters voted for the party in 2001 compared to only 33 per cent from 1993 to 1997), they also attracted most of those who did not care to vote in 1997 (13 per cent) (Aardal 2002).

Finally, the Progress Party remained at approximately the same level as in the 1997 election, which in itself, was a minor victory considering all the trouble the party had undergone in the 12 months prior to the election. The Progress Party’s attractiveness to voters had fallen dramatically from the record high polls of September 2000 (see Political Data Yearbook 2000: 379). Moreover, the party’s position in the new Storting remained strong, as the new conservative-centrist government would have to depend on their support in order to get a parliamentarian majority.

Taxes and education were the most important issues in the election campaign, which was particularly favourable for the Conservatives and the Socialist Left Party. To reduce the level of taxes is one of the core issues for the Conservatives and, for a long period, the party was left in peace with its message to voters that enough was enough and that the time was right for substantial tax cuts. However, after a while the Conservatives were put on the defensive. They were attacked by the other parties for not being clear about where the money should be taken from and, after the first half of the election campaign, the voters seemed to grow tired of the unceasing focus on taxes. The Conservatives argued that, amongst other things, they wanted to cut sick pay expenditures as well as cut back on foreign aid to developing countries. The first suggestion primarily provoked the Labour Party and the trade unions, as well as making health and sick pay important issues in the election campaign. Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg (Labour)
argued that the Conservatives’ tax cuts would be eaten up after only a few days of being off sick and the Conservatives’ decline in the polls started. Labour was not able to take advantage of the situation as it came to the fore that the Labour Government also had been working to cut sick pay benefits.

The Conservatives’ other suggestion, to cut back on aid to developing countries, provoked opposition from most parties and the Conservatives, as well the Progressive Party, were accused of being heartless. The Christian People’s Party and prime ministerial candidate Kjell Magne Bondevik were particularly upset and warned that the Conservatives could forget cutbacks in development assistance if they wanted to form a coalition with the Christian People’s Party.

The debate over government alternatives was one of the major issues in the election campaign. Overall, the focus was very much directed towards what the Christian People’s Party would do. Basically Mr Bondevik had three options. The Centre Alliance was their preferred ‘Plan A’. In July, Mr Bondevik gave an interview on the radio in which he said that the Christian People’s Party’s role in a future cabinet should not be dependent on how the Centre Party or the Liberals performed in the election. Both the Centre Party and the Liberals had been doing very poorly during the electoral campaign and fell under the 4 per cent threshold in several opinion polls, hence Bondevik considered it to be too risky for his party to tie himself to only one coalition alternative. It was clear that he was considering a centre-right government with the Conservatives as the so-called ‘Plan B’. The party leaders of the two other Centre Alliance parties were not happy and said that Bondevik’s statement undermined their alliance. The Conservatives, on the other hand, were happy and argued that the country needed a non-socialist alternative to the Stoltenberg Government. Due to good polls, the Conservatives declared that such an alternative had to include themselves, but the three Centre Alliance parties were hesitant about cooperating with the Conservatives since they had voted against the Bondevik I Government and thereby forced them to resign (see Political Data Yearbook 2000: 378). A third ‘Plan C’ – a coalition with the Labour Party – was also discussed, but was considered to be a rather unlikely alternative.

In the final week before the election, education policy and the state of the country’s schools rose to the top of the political agenda once again. This had also been the most important question before the election campaign started. The changed focus away from taxes was among the things that helped the Socialist Left Party increase its support. Party leader Kristin Halvorsen is a good communicator and argued strongly for the party’s key policies, particularly in the area of education and schools. Furthermore, Ms Halvorsen had
the advantage of not being attacked by other parties, since the three prime ministerial candidates, Stoltenberg, Bondevik and Petersen, were largely concentrated on attacking each other.

What is normally the most controversial issue in Norwegian politics, European Union membership, did not become an issue prior to the 2001 election. Foot and Mouth Disease did create some debate over European Union-related issues early in the Spring, but the Centre Party did not manage to exploit this and pursue the debate into the campaign.

The new cabinet

The worst terrorist attack the world had ever seen took place in the United States the day after the Norwegian election and, even if the election results were quite dramatic, all post-election discussions were paused. Both politicians and the media agreed that it seemed pointless to discuss the election results in the circumstances. When discussions did arise again, it was clear that a majority in the new Parliament was in favour of a change of government. However, the composition of the new Storting made the situation rather confusing and the Labour Government indicated that it would not resign before the composition of an alternative government has been announced. Conservative Party Chairman Jan Petersen hastened to invite the Christian People’s Party, the Liberals and the Progress Party to talks on the issue of forming a new government. The hope was that the Christian People’s Party and the Liberals would want to join a coalition, and they would need the support of the Progress Party. There were, however, many issues that separated the parties and many political demands that needed to be met before they could come to an agreement. One controversy related to the division of ministerial posts, but the Conservatives also had a quite different political platform on at least five particularly important issues: Norwegian European Union policy, environmental matters (gas-fired power stations), development aid, regional policies and how much taxes should be reduced.

From the beginning, the question of who would become prime minister seemed to be a test of just how willing the Conservatives were to negotiate. The Christian People’s Party referred to Mr Bondevik’s long experience, while the Conservatives argued that the prime minister should represent the largest party in the coalition. Eventually, on 25 September, negotiations to form a coalition between the Christian People’s Party, Conservatives and Liberals broke down. Representatives from the Christian People’s Party and...
the Liberals said that the Conservatives had been ‘unwilling to meet them half-way’ and that a pure Conservative government now would be the most probable solution. The day after the breakdown, the leader of the Conservatives, Mr Petersen, asked the Progress Party’s all-powerful chairman, Carl I. Hagen, if he would support a one-party Conservative Government. Hagen declined and Petersen was forced to abandon the formation of such a government and the office of prime minister, and make a plea to the Christian People’s Party to resume negotiations. The centre parties agreed to resume talks, with the result that the Christian People’s Party got the prime ministership, whereas the Conservatives got the Foreign and Finance ministries.

The new centre-right coalition did not represent a majority in the Storting, and would be dependent on support from the Progress Party to assume office. This was a situation that the Progress Party wanted to exploit. They demanded that their leader, Carl I. Hagen, be elected President of the Storting. However, the President of the Storting must be above the cut and thrust of party politics and, with his extreme views, Mr Hagen would not be a sufficiently ‘unifying’ figure and hence was not thought fit to hold a position which ranks second only to the reigning monarch. The three coalition parties said they wanted Labour’s Jørgen Kosmo to become the new President of the Storting, rather then the leader of the right-wing protest party. Hagen declared that he felt personally humiliated because it had always been his dream to be elected president. Many feared that this decision would insult and therefore provoke the Progress Party into scuppering the change of government altogether. However, Hagen did not want Labour to continue in office and, by forcing Bondevik to give the Progress Party other prestigious positions in the Storting, the coalition parties and the Progressive Party came to an agreement. Siv Jensen, one of the Progress Party’s deputy chairmen, took over the chair of the Finance Committee, with responsibilities that would include leading the national budget negotiations. The Party’s other deputy chairman, John Alvheim, took over the chair of the Social Affairs Committee. This satisfied the Progress Party enough for them to agree that they would support the new government. For the Conservatives, however, the question of relying on support from this party was related to how predictable Hagen and the Progress Party were going to be. The Conservatives had painful memories of 1986 when Mr Hagen, after having been reckoned as part of the Conservative Government’s parliamentary base, suddenly preferred a Labour Government led by Gro Harlem Brundtland. Still, after a long decade without political influence during the 1990s, the Conservatives recognised that government office was tied to making certain concessions to Mr Hagen and the Progress Party. On
19 October, the new Government, which called themselves ‘the Cooperation Government’, was appointed.

**Issues in national politics**

Naturally, most of the political debate this year was related to the general election that took place on 10 September, but there were also a few other matters worth mentioning.

During the first few months of 2001 the question of biodiversity arose as a controversial issue. The environmental movement stood strongly against agricultural interests and the Government on the issue of maintaining a Norwegian wolf population. Farmers complained that predators were killing their sheep and the Government appointed a group of hunters to exterminate wolves in a certain part of Norway. Anti-hunt activists did everything they could to prevent the hunters (who used helicopters) from accomplishing their mission, but the hunters succeeded and after a while the issue fell off the agenda.

Another matter that dominated the beginning of the year was the continuous internal trouble of the Progress Party. Giving a speech to a regional branch of the Party on 10 February, a female member declared that a central representative of the Party had raped her. Immediately after this speech, another young member came forward with additional sexual allegations, this time against deputy chairman Terje Søviknes. Apparently Mr Søviknes had had sex with a drunken 16-year-old girl at the annual conference of the Party’s youth wing in January 2000. The allegation was true and the scandal grew even bigger when it became clear that Progress Party chairman Carl I. Hagen had pressed hard to make sure Mr Søviknes would get into the Storting at the next general election despite knowing about the event. However, the Progress Party’s parliamentary group and constituency party leaders supported Mr Hagen’s handling of the Søviknes scandal. They blamed Terje Søviknes himself for the current mess, and not the party leadership, although every outsider strongly criticised the way the leadership handled the case. Hagen’s role as party leader was not threatened, however, because the Progress Party had no real alternative leader. His position is so supreme that the Party had nothing to gain if he resigned. Still, support among the public dropped dramatically. From having had over 30 per cent support in the polls less then six months before, support for the party in February 2001 dropped below 20 per cent.

In addition to the sex scandal, the Party also had to struggle with the internal fight that started in the Autumn of 2000. Another set of members whom
the leadership considered as troublemakers was excluded. This resulted in the fear that many alternative lists would be drawn up for the election and hence that the Progress Party would lose many votes. The reason for ‘cleaning up the party’ was said to be that the party chairman, Carl I. Hagen, had not abandoned his dream of joining a post-election government.

Focus was also on the Progress Party when, for the first time in history, the national budget needed to be pushed through on a vote of confidence in the Government. Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik had trouble securing a parliamentary majority for his budget proposal and, following the breakdown of negotiations with the Progress Party, a vote of confidence was needed just 40 days after the new Government took office. Once again it became clear that the new ‘Cooperation government’ was weak and forced to govern at the mercy of the right-wing protest party.

Another issue that became prominent during 2001 was the foreign acquisition of shares in Norwegian companies. Many politicians, particularly those affiliated with the Left, wanted to maintain strong financial institutions under Norwegian ownership, and were strongly opposed to Finnish and Russian interests trying to buy up two of Norway’s largest companies – Storebrand and Kvaerner. Critics said that the government and the Storting had not done much to prevent these things from happening and blamed Norway’s fiscal policy. Others criticised the Government for not going in with higher bids for the company in order to maintain ‘the little that is left of state ownership of Norwegian industry’.

It is also worth mentioning that a commission of inquiry that was formed to investigate circumstances relating to the new Gardemoen Airport suggested that former Minister of Transportation Lars Gunnar Lie (KRF) of the centre-conservative Syse Government (1989–1990) should be impeached. The commission said that, because the former Transport Minister was opposed to investigating alternative sites to Gardermoen, he ‘failed to make the Government and the Storting aware that there were good grounds for a parallel investigation into the suitability of at least one alternative site for a new main airport’. According to the commission, this may have affected the final location of the airport. There has not been an impeachment trial in Norway since 1926, and the suggestion from the commission provoked some debate over whether or not impeachment as a judicial instrument should end.

Finally, the issue that should characterise the final days of 2001 was another outbreak of a leadership dispute in Labour (see Political Data Yearbook 2000: 378). Many members felt that the Party’s split leadership (between Thorbjørn Jagland and Jens Stoltenberg) was a problem. The question of leadership became even more relevant when the more controversial of the two, Labour Party chairman Thorbjørn Jagland, said he wished to stand for re-
election next Autumn and revealed his intention to fight openly for the party leadership.

**Sources and further information**

*Aftenposten* (major Norwegian broadsheet newspaper, available online with search facilities at: www.aftenposten.no/english).
ODIN (the central information base of the Norwegian government administration, available online at: http://odin.dep.no).
Stortinget (the Norwegian Parliament’s official web site: www.stortinget.no/english/index.html).