Political Parties in Norway

40 Years Later

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Abstract:
Henry Valen and Daniel Katz’s *Political Parties in Norway* deals with the Norwegian party system and party organizations. Their analysis took place in the context of the 1957 Storting election, which turned out to be the last general election in the post-war period in which one party obtained a majority of seats in parliament. In this article we describe the study and its findings before discussing the major changes in the parties as organizations during the 40 years that have followed. Primarily, we address changes in leadership, organizational structure, and membership. Parties have changed substantially in the way the leaders operate, in the process of decision-making, and in the level of party membership. Still, we argue that a “time traveler” would recognize the trust of the “old” parties’ interest profiles even today. In a comparative perspective, Norwegian parties are conservative in trying out new organizational methods and they still have a relatively high level of membership. We argue that Norwegian parties are likely to change more in the next 40 years than they have done in the period since the Valen and Katz book was published.

Keywords: party system, party organization, political participation, political leadership
Henry Valen and Daniel Katz’s *Political Parties in Norway* (1964/1966) introduced not only electoral research, but also the study of party organizations, political leadership, and electoral mobilization to Norwegian political science. Previously, it had been the study of political ideology and institutional approaches, along with studies of particular historical cases, that had been the academic standard for political research in Norway, just as it had been elsewhere. “Political Parties” was part of a new academic approach, a “behavioral revolution”, strongly marked by close ties with American research centers. The “new”, American approach was perhaps most noted at the time for its theoretical and comparative ambitions, the quantification and emphasis on systematic, cumulative research. Today, we can also note the influence of “Old Europe” on the book, pointing to the importance of historic embeddedness, of institutions and political culture. For instance, in the analysis of the nomination process, the United States’ “modernization theory” was balanced by a focus on traditional cleavages; behavioral elements were balanced with the incentives of institutions, quantitative date with historical narrative, science revolution with academic continuity. Most importantly, the book set the agenda for electoral and party research for decades, with the principle author today still actively entangled in research on voters, nominations, and leadership.

**Norwegian Parties in the 1950s**

The Valen and Katz study of political parties deals with the Norwegian party system as well as with the party organizations. Their analysis took place in the context of the 1957 *Storting* election, which turned out to be the last general election in the post-war period in which one party obtained a majority of seats in parliament. It was also the last election in which the party system emanating from the previous decades of political mobilization – Communist, Labor, Liberals, Agrarians, Christian People’s Party and Conservatives – monopolized representation in the Storting. The party system of the 1950s conformed to what Sartori later (1976) characterized as a “predominant party system with moderate polarization” (pp. 174–177). It was predominant because of Labor’s electoral performance. From 1945 until 1957 the party had obtained a majority of the seats in parliament, although never a majority of the votes. Its parliamentary majority was “manufactured” by the electoral
system (Aardal 2002). On its right, Labor faced four non-socialist parties, ranging in size from the Conservatives, averaging 18 percent of the vote between 1945 and 1957, and the three smaller non-socialist parties situated ideologically in the span between Labor and the Conservatives (See also Table 1). On its left, Labor faced a Communist Party that enjoyed considerable support in the first post-war election, but rapidly declined in the wake of the Cold War.

The label “moderate polarization” derived from the consensus orientation of the parties – underlined by Valen and Katz (1964/1966) in their introductory chapter on the Norwegian political system and the development of the party system. The Communist Party obviously represented a radically different economic program from the others, and in foreign policy it opposed Norway’s integration within NATO, but its decline signaled the waning influence of radical leftist ideology. On the opposite side of the ideological spectrum, the far right in Norwegian politics had

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<td>79.1</td>
<td>83.8</td>
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enjoyed only marginal appeal in the 1930s, with the Conservative Party early rejecting any association with it (Lindstrøm 1985: 144–153). Despite the limited ideological polarization along the left–right axis the non-socialist parties were nevertheless prevented from acting together on many issues because of the multiple cleavages underpinning the party system (Rokkan 1967, Valen 1981). The multiparty system was thus maintained by the ability of parties to mobilize support around specific issues, “issue ownership”, as Narud and Valen would later term it (2001), helped by a proportional electoral system.

However, the qualities of this multiparty system were not to last, something Valen and Katz predicted would happen. But developments did not take the course they anticipated: “An analysis of general societal forces in Norway would suggest that the present multi-party system will be replaced by a two-party system” (p. 40). The proportional electoral system would delay the impact of social forces on the party system, they argued. A two-party system would not therefore develop in the short term: “Nonetheless, the larger forces in societal development are likely to prevail over time, and the long-run prediction is that the smaller parties in Norway will decline or coalesce to offer the voters the alternatives of center-left and center-right as in Britain and the United States” (ibid.). Rather than a two-party system, the Norwegian party system has become increasingly fragmented and volatile. There are of course many factors that may have caused this development. Valen and Katz (pp. 36–37) argued that parties on the center-right could not coalesce because: the parties themselves perceived their ideological differences to be greater than outsiders believed; historical traditions would limit the desire for cooperation; parties in the center could cooperate to the left as well as to the right; Labor’s loss of parliamentary majority in 1961 would potentially increase the importance of smaller parties and, finally, within smaller political parties the leadership would oppose “organizational suicide” because they would be relegated to second-rate positions in a merged party. All of these factors point towards an explanation of party system development that emphasizes the independent effect of the parties themselves: party as an actor shaping the party system, rather than as a captive of environmental forces beyond its control. As it turned out, such organizational and strategic factors proved to be significant counterweights to the impact of “general societal forces”.

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What did Norwegian political parties look like in terms of organizations in the 1950s? At that time, political science did not pay much attention to the organizational qualities of parties. The advance of the behavioral orientation in political science, coupled with a strong influence from sociology, placed voters at the center of research on parties. In this respect Political Parties in Norway was an innovative approach aimed at studying the impact of party activity on the attitudes, perceptions, and voting behavior of the electorate. Two theoretical perspectives dominated the political science view of party organizations at the time: Robert Michel's thesis about the impact of leadership on party organizations (1962 (1911)), and Duverger's comparative study of the linkage between party ideology and the structure of party organizations (1954). The former thesis argued for similarity between parties, summarized in the well-known formulation: “who says organization, says oligarchy”. The latter thesis emphasized the contrasts between parties at the time of origin, i.e. parties on the left with a more developed party organization, emphasizing member mobilization and exerting control over its members of parliament, in contrast to the more loosely organized parties on the right. Duverger’s study also contained an important prediction: parties on the right would gradually adopt the organizational style of leftist parties, as this model would prove to be electorally successful. Thus, across time, the persistence of leadership domination and the “contagion from the left” would lead to greater similarities between political parties. These theoretical perspectives were reflected in Valen and Katz’s description of Norwegian party organizations in the 1950s.

Four aspects of the parties were emphasized: the significance of leadership, the organizational apparatus, the inclusion of organizations affiliated to the party, and the mobilization of party members. In the view of the authors, the national leaders had a solid grip on the party organization, but did not imply that this amounted to “oligarchy”. Nevertheless, the fact was that “in general, party chairmen are re-elected several times. Frequently, they hold office for a period of 15–25 years, and we find the same tendency in all parties” (p. 53). The authors emphasized that the leadership’s position in the parties was largely the result of a two-way process. Leaders had to obtain and renew their mandate from delegates to the national congress and had to keep within the boundaries of the party program. Their ability to direct the party organization was delim-
ited by the autonomy of lower levels in the nomination process and by the fact that party leaders were not able to control communication completely, despite the widespread party affiliated press. They concluded that: “The political process within the party structure is of the character of rubber rather than of iron” (p. 98).

The structure of the party organizations contained similarities across parties in the sense that all parties had the same hierarchical levels and almost the same auxiliary organizations, for women, youth, and educational purposes. Although the autonomy of the organizational units and auxiliary organizations varied across parties, on one point similarities dominated: the importance of the party press: “Norwegian newspapers […] are constantly defending their respective parties, both during campaigns and between campaigns” (p. 55). In the case of the Labor Party the close ties with the unions were noted.

Great contrasts between parties were also identified with respect to membership mobilization (Table 2). As could be expected, the size of the membership reflected the variations in electoral support, but the correlation was far from perfect. Measured against the number of voters for each party, the Center Party (Agrarians) seemed to have the strongest membership base, with more than a third of its voters as members, followed by the Conservatives. Labor, despite its reputation as the best organized party, had less than a fifth of its voters as members. As for internal party activity, Valen and Katz’s data from the Stavanger area indicated significant variations between the parties (Table 3).

**Table 2. Number of party members and members in percent of votes for the parties, 1957**

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<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>In percent of votes for party</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communists</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>10.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Labor Party</td>
<td>153,981</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual members</td>
<td>64,073</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collectively aff.</td>
<td>89,908</td>
<td>11.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liberal Party</td>
<td>28,000</td>
<td>16.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christian People’s Party</td>
<td>29,000</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agrarian Party</td>
<td>64,000</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative Party</td>
<td>95,976</td>
<td>28.3</td>
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*Replicated from Valen and Katz (1964: 70), table 3.4.*
Information about membership attendance and activity was dependent on the party secretary estimates. According to these, more than half of Labor’s members usually attended party meetings, while only 11 percent of Center Party members did so, with the other three non-socialist parties somewhere in between. Members of the Christian People’s Party and the Liberal Party were the most active in the 1957 campaign, 21 and 20 percent, and Center Party members the least active (6 percent), with Labor and Conservative members between these extremes.3

The Norwegian party system has changed dramatically since the 1950s – a fact that has been extensively analyzed by Henry Valen and his associates (Valen 1981, Aardal and Valen 1997). But the parties have also changed within themselves, partly adapting to changes in their environment, partly proving to be resilient to the impact of “general social forces”. It is these party organizational changes that are our primary concern in the following. First, let us look more closely at the book itself and, in particular, at its findings on organizational issues.

POLITICAL PARTIES IN NORWAY: DESIGN AND FINDINGS

Although the title of the book indicates a focus on national parties, the empirical material is largely restricted to community studies, where the national level serves as a backdrop against which to understand the empirical findings. Two urban and two rural municipalities situated in an area of rapid change were selected to provide for variations between the units of analysis. The analysis seeks to capture the dynamics between party organizations and voters. Party officials were selected from three different organizational levels: the province, the municipality, and the ward within the municipality. Political Parties in Norway therefore provides us with a picture of parties on the ground.

The parties’ electoral strategy revealed significant contrasts between them, with Labor and the Agrarian Party targeting specific groups of vot-
ers more than the other parties. Nevertheless, party leaders at various levels had a tendency to see their own party more as a “people’s party” than voters did. The analysis also showed significant ideological differences between parties, and the higher an official was in the party hierarchy, the closer the adherence to the party platform. The party leaders were recruited from the main social groups comprising the party, but in all parties the recruitment process led to a skewness in the composition of party leaders as we moved up the party hierarchy. It was mostly men who were recruited as party leaders and the middle class was over-represented among the leaders, even in the Labor Party. Recruitment was also strongly related to the political traditions in the leaders’ families. Thus, family background and party organizations both acted to socialize the individual into a political role. Party leaders, more than voters, tended to belong to several voluntary associations. However, this does not mean that parties and organizations were strongly linked. This was so in only one case, namely the Labor Party and the unions. Other organizations stressed their non-partisan nature, but informally there were overlaps between the leadership and membership groups of religious organizations and the Christian People’s Party, between the farmers’ organizations and the Agrarians and to some extent between business organizations and the Conservative Party.

Thus party organizations in Norway were characterized by the strong socialization effects of family background and organizational routines that attracted a party-specific leadership group. At the same time, the selection process benefited men before women and the middle class before the working class. The historical background of the Labor Party set it apart from other Norwegian parties in the close formal relationship to an interest organization, the Trade Union movement.

The richness of the empirical findings is nevertheless limited by three aspects of the research design. First, as a community study, the findings are valid for that area only, as the authors note themselves. At the time of the empirical investigation, Norwegian political parties were still strongly affected by regional variations (Rokkan and Valen 1964). Excepting the Labor Party, most other parties did not have a party branch in every municipality, and in the Labor Party itself the collectively affiliated membership of the trade unions was almost completely absent in Northern Norway. Second, comparisons with other countries and
their parties are sometimes alluded to, particularly in the early chapters, but the design as such is not comparatively orientated. The most frequently mentioned comparative cases are the American parties, reflecting both the cross-national authorship and the dominance of the American methodological approach at the time. Thus, we do not know whether Norwegian parties were significantly different from or similar to political parties elsewhere at the time. And finally, the study provides a snap-shot of the parties in time. Most studies are snap-shots and it may have been the only option at the time. Most importantly, this was the first major empirical study of Norwegian parties and their electorate. The time dimension could hardly have been included in the study design. But, in addition, the study was conducted at a time of great stability in the Norwegian party system. “Volatility” was still a term to be invented in party research. One could not, of course, foresee the dramatic changes that were to come, such as the introduction of television, which would completely alter the information flow to voters – already at the next general election in 1961, or the Kings Bay (coal mine) disaster that opened a window of opportunity for the first non-socialist coalition government in 1963.

**PARTY ORGANIZATIONS IN NORWAY:**
**MORE THAN 40 YEARS LATER**

In the year 2000, every eight party members were also members when Valen and Katz did their research in the late 1950s. They were hardly likely to have been as active as in the old days, but they could still give a strong indication of organizational continuity. No doubt the “old-timers” could tell today’s party members “how much better things used to be”.

To what extent does the picture Valen and Katz painted of the local Stavanger area parties fit in with what we know about national parties today? Can we pinpoint areas suggesting change – again keeping in mind the differences in the local v. national approach? With the exception of the (almost) extinct Communist Party, all the parties of the “old” party system have survived in spite of the challenges brought about by social change, new issues, new technologies and – most importantly – new parties. Although two new parties – the Left Socialist Party since the 1960s and the Progress Party since the 1970s – have succeeded in winning seats
and over time establishing themselves as medium-sized parties in parliament, national executive power has so far alternated between the “old” parties – the Labor government on the one hand and various types of non-socialist, coalition governments on the other.\textsuperscript{6} Valen and Katz’s observation that the proportional system would prolong the multiparty system has certainly been accurate, but the survivability of the parties also indicates their ability to adapt to changing circumstances – sometimes by changing their environment, for example with the introduction of public subsidies for parties. We therefore ask to what extent the leadership, organizational, and membership qualities observed by Valen and Katz still apply to contemporary parties?

\textbf{The party leadership} The gender-neutral label of “leader” has now replaced the former term “chairman”.\textsuperscript{7} Since the Liberals elected the first female leader in 1974 there have been several women leaders, most significantly Gro Harlem Brundtland in the Labor Party (1981–1992). Looking first at leadership stability, it is not possible to argue that this persists at the old level. Present party leaders cannot expect to be re-elected for the time-span customary in the 1950s and 1960s (Heidar 1997). Current leaders are more exposed to forces similar to those that football coaches have to face: Job security hinges on results and, in addition, personal competence and liabilities are subject to extensive media exposure. Leadership qualifications as perceived in the public debate are an integral part of success or failure. Of course (internal) leadership struggles could be vicious in the old parties. The legendary Labor secretary (1945–1969) Haakon Lie famously described the Labor Party as “no Sunday School”. Still, since the 1980s there has been turbulence and an increasing number of leadership changes in the parties. For example, the 1980s was a time of disorder for the Conservatives, who had five different leaders during the period – dubbed by the media as the years of “leader cannibalism”. The recent bitter leadership struggle in the Labor Party – in the making since Gro Harlem Brundtland resigned (voluntarily) in 1992 – ended with the election of a new leader in 2002 after the old leader had been dethroned as the party’s candidate for Prime Minister two years previously. One major exception modifying this picture of increased leadership circulation is the chairman of the Progress Party, Carl Ivar Hagen, who was first elected in 1978 and still holds this position today. The Pro-
gress Party experienced electoral ups and downs in the 1970s and 1980s, but since the 1989 parliamentary election the general trend has been upwards. In 1994 and again in 2000 the Progress Party experienced schisms that were effectively handled by the established leader (the opposition was expelled or silenced). This long chairmanship reflects the nature of the Progress Party, a populist party dependent on its charismatic leader to catch votes (Harmel and Svåsand 1993, Svåsand 2003). In public debates and in the eyes of the electorate Hagen is the party – according to media commentators he is a “party owner”.

The new role of a more “volatile” party leadership is also reflected in the internal decision-making process – not in the sense that there is any need to revise the “rubber-law” that leaders exercise substantial influence but no dictatorship. Party leadership (even in the Progress Party) is limited by the internal organizational structure. New party programs emerge in all parties from a thorough internal party process with ample opportunities for middle-level elites and even rank-and-file members to have a say. Of course the leadership can have a decisive impact on the final Congress vote, particularly if united, and on the parliamentary “interpretation” of the decision afterwards. The nomination process is still decentralized, however, and by and large beyond the reach of the national leadership (Valen et al. 2002). Parliamentary candidates are given their position by the county parties, although their electoral chances depend on the local as well as the national swing.

There is one substantial change that increases the leader’s power and one that decreases it, however. Party leadership in an era of strong independent media puts pressure much more on the leader and the national leadership milieu (Skjeie 1999). The leader has to face the journalists and their questions, and must answer or comment on the spot. The leader will bind the party politically before a broad “party process” can be carried out or even started. Obviously this means more power to the leader and sometimes massive responsibilities (which is one reason leaders don’t last too long). Simultaneously, however, the leader can lose power through some of the same media changes that increased it in the first place. The party leadership can lose control over the policy-making process within the party and in the presentation of it. Valen and Katz discussed the importance of the “party press”. Today, this is obsolete, unless we redefine it to mean internal party journals, the party web and
e-mail communication systems. In the 1950s and 1960s, however, most newspapers were either owned by the parties (like Labor) or they had declared party affinities. These ties disappeared during the 1970s and 1980s (Østbye 1997: 220–222). The party leadership lost their (mostly) loyal microphone carriers. The new guardians of the “public interest” intercepted – and took a skeptical view of – the party messages. In the process the parties also lost (some of) their agenda-setting abilities, although they responded by engaging professional communication agencies. Additionally, the party leaders lost some control over the internal party communication. The media could not wait for slow party processes and turned directly not only to party leaders but also to the intermediate level with their questions (Heidar and Rolland 1989). The journalists sounded out office-holders on issues to be discussed at upcoming party meetings, summing up the result even before the relevant party committee had met. The party leadership could also be “outed” on sensitive party issues, only to be undermined the next day by the contradictory views of fellow party colleagues at various organizational levels. This is of course reflected in standard internal party debates, where the various “factions” can go public with their views and their dissatisfaction, putting pressure on the party leadership and hoping for a friendly compromise. Party loyalty and control of party communication no longer help the party leadership, but again the leadership benefits from the new media situation. Whether these contradictory tendencies amount to more or less leadership power is hard to say. What is clear is that they lead to a different kind of party leadership from that observed in the 1950s.

What happened to the social profile of the leadership in the latter part of the twentieth century? Are there still core groups in the parties? Are men and the middle classes still dominant? Have “general societal forces” made the parties a homogeneous lot, hardly distinguishable one from the other? No doubt general forces have been at work – and the great harmonizer is of course education – but social distinctions are still noticeable. We return to the women’s revolution below. In terms of distinctions, we find these primarily in the social biography of the party members and elites, although educational levels and present occupation still characterize the various parties (Heidar and Saglie 2002). The different historical origins of the parties are noticeable in that Labor members
disproportionately have a working-class background, although they are not necessarily working class themselves. The conservatives have a higher middle class background and the Center Party cadre have more often grown up on the farm. The Christian People’s Party mobilized relatively more members along the south and west coasts. Recent research concludes that “the well-known territorial and economic cleavages from Rokkan’s and Valen’s models are still reflected in the party personnel” (Heidar and Saglie 2002: 106). However, there are also clear signs that the differences, the core groups, are less predominant than they used to be.

THE PARTY ORGANIZATION Today’s party organizations are surprisingly similar compared to those of the 1950s. The formal branch, county and national level organization is still very much like Duverger described it in his “mass party model”. The two newcomers – the Progress and the Left Socialist parties – opted for different structures in periods, but in the process have adjusted to the common organizational norm. The general trend has been toward “standardization” of the organizational structure (Svåsand 1994). This standardization has also implied some general changes compared to the way parties operated in the early post-war period. Three changes in formal arrangements or institutional surroundings are noticeable: First, the decline in “organizational support”, meaning weaker auxiliary organizations (youth and women), weaker ties to friendly interest organizations, and the end of the party press; second, the introduction of gender quotas for party positions in the 1970s and 1980s; and, third, the introduction of public financing of the national parties.

All parties still have a youth organization, but member and activity levels have clearly declined. For the party women’s organizations the picture is varied, but reduced importance is a general trait. Either the women’s formal organization has declined (Christian People’s Party is closest to having the old model intact) or has been scaled down to a “women’s secretariat” with no autonomous organizational structure (Labor and Conservative). The Progress Party has no formal structure. Linkages to interest organizations varied among the old parties, with the Labor–trade union ties being the closest. During the 1990s, the “collective” union membership ended, although the close cooperation continues in party-union committees (Allern and Heidar 2001). The national
employers’ association ended its finance of non-socialist parties. Informally, however, there are still ties between some interest organizations and particular parties (e.g. in the agrarian, Christian, employer and green political circles; see Heidar and Saglie 2002). Finally, the “party press” has practically ceased to exist. When politicians or journalists expect favors, it is on a personal working relationship, not on a party political level.

The introduction of gender quotas in the 1970s, when the Liberal and Socialist Left parties adopted this policy, changed the parties significantly. Today, only the Conservatives and the Progress parties do not have formal quotas, but they argue that they pursue gender equality by other means. The quota arrangement basically means that all formal bodies in the party (and their electoral lists) should be composed of at least 40 percent of either gender. This led women into party decision-making positions to a degree unheard of previously, as well as in other countries (excepting the Icelandic “Women’s List”). But gender equality has not been reached, although female party leadership is no novelty today. In 2000, 41 percent of all party members were women, among the Congress delegates the figure was 44 percent. Two parties (Christian People’s and the Left Socialists) had female majorities at membership level.

The third major change in party surroundings has been the gradual increase in public financing of the parties. The parties’ ability to survive has also undoubtedly been assisted by the introduction of state subsidies for party groups in parliament (1961), for national party organizations (1970), and its extension to provincial and local party organizations (1975) and to youth branches (1978). The introduction – and later extensions – of public subsidies for parties was initiated and managed by the parties themselves. A state subsidy for parties is part of what Katz and Mair (1995) call the “cartel party”, a party model in which the boundaries between the state and the party system are blurred. Parties were supposed to be voluntary organizations supported by their membership, but the introduction of public subsidies has replaced the membership, with the state as the most important financial contributor. According to the parties’ own financial report to the Storting, state contributions range from almost 90 percent of total income in the Progress Party to 59 percent for the Christian People’s Party (Svåsand 2001).
Changes in membership

Developments in membership figures as reported by the parties themselves from 1950 to 2000 are presented in Figure 1. These show a substantial decline, and during the 1990s are close to halved. The decline is significant also when reported in polls – from 16–17 percent of the vote up until 1981 declining to 8 percent in 2001 (Aardal 2003: 261). In particular, the two old and largest parties, Labor and the Conservatives, have lost members, but also the Center Party and the Christians are strongly affected. The “new” parties – the Left Socialists and the Progress parties – are the least hit, being the two parties that started out at a lower level from the beginning. Parties are affected in three ways by the decline in membership: supply of money, supply of activists, and loss of legitimacy. The money from membership fees has more than been compensated by public subsidies – although that is not to say that the parties cannot make good use of extra money, for example to be saved for election years (public money cannot be transferred to another year). As for activists, we have no reliable data going back to the 1950s or 1960s, but the estimates of party secretaries in the Stavanger area are much higher than found during the 1990s. We know

Figure 1. Party membership 1950–2001. Source: Heidar and Saglie 2002
from member surveys that attendance at party meetings remained fairly stable during the 1990s (Heidar and Saglie 2002). Roughly one in every five members attended party arrangements at least four times a year. Whether this is a high or low level of party member activism is debatable, but at least it shows that a minority of members link up with their party to the extent needed to stay informed and to have a voice if they so wished. If we also consider the fact that the number of members declined significantly during the 1990s, the number of remaining party activists – to keep up the party organization and to promote the party among the voters – has declined significantly. Party life in the old parties is not as lively as it used to be.

**Time travel comparisons** What would be the reactions of a “time-traveler” moving directly from the parties of 1957 to those of 2004? From inside the parties the first reaction would most likely be to ask about branch meetings and where the members had gone. The organizational structures of the old “mass parties” would be familiar, although new tendencies might be visible. The meaning of party loyalty would have changed. In party decision-making not only the top leadership but also middle-level elites would be pursuing more actively the building of networks. Even if the formal structure was much the same, the processes that filled it would have changed (Heidar and Saglie 2002). Secondly, the “time-traveler” would wonder about the declining segmentation in organizational life as well as in public debates. The presence of “us” and “them”, the political camps that structured arenas and debate is much less noticeable than it used to be. The traveler would note that the political debate had turned less confrontational and that the political differences between parties had become less apparent. Still, there would have been little difficulty in recognizing the “old” parties in terms of their values (Bilstad 1994, Saglie 1994). The ideologies might be less clearly spelled out and less clearly fought over in the public arena. The debate would be more about “means” than about “value”, but our traveler would quickly have recognized that the traditional cleavages between employers and employees, between center and periphery, between Christian and secular forces, still guided party attitudes, party policies, and party networks (Heidar and Saglie 2002).
NORWEGIAN PARTY DEVELOPMENT
IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

How alike – or different – are current Norwegian parties compared to their counterparts in other democracies? We have already argued in this chapter for a harmonization of parties across time. Is a similar trend detectable across countries?

PARTY LEADERS We have argued that party leadership has become a much less safe position compared to earlier times, save for the Progress Party. Insecurity in office correlates in time with increased voter volatility. This would seem to indicate that party leaders are more important for the party’s performance. However, research has provided little solid evidence for this linkage: “only very occasionally do personal factors … turn out in fact to be decisive” (King 2002: 217). This summing up is echoed in Aardal and Narud’s finding for Norway: “There is no tendency in our material that the leaders’ importance for voting increases over time” (2003: 240). In this sense, Norwegian party leaders do not stand out from others, but although they may be more vulnerable to internal challenges, just like their European counterparts, they have so far successfully resisted attempts to tamper with the way they emerge as leaders. Those responsible for making decisions in Norwegian parties have almost always been delegates selected by lower units in the party organizations, whether the function has been election of party leaders, decisions about the party program, or nominations of candidates. This decision-making model has also dominated in other European parties. However, several European political parties, of all denominations, have introduced various decision-making procedures that have modified or replaced this method by introducing membership ballots. Danish and Icelandic parties have long applied forms of primaries or membership endorsement in candidate nominations (Pederesen 2002, Kristjansson 2002), while parties as different as the German Social Democratic Party, the Union for a Popular Movement (the former R P R), and the British Conservative Party all involve the members at some stage in the selection of the party leader or the party’s candidate for the position of Prime Minister. True, recent statute changes in Norwegian parties have opened up for membership ballots on issues, but none have yet been held and within the political parties there does not appear to be a strong demand for it (Heidar and Saglie 2002).
New political parties, Katz and Mair (2002) argue, are even more leadership dominated than older parties, which still have to pay at least lip-service to the mass organization. In Norway, the Progress Party would fit the case of leadership domination, and perhaps also the small Coastal Party. But the stability of the Norwegian party system has prevented the emergence of parties emanating from major party system collapses, e.g. Berlusconi in Italy. Even in a stable party system, as in Britain and Germany, one talks of the “presidentialization of politics” (Poguntke and Webb forthcoming 2004), exemplified by the concentration of power in the prime minister’s office. There is little to indicate a similar tendency in Norway. This is most likely caused by the frequent use of minority governments, accentuated in the case of coalition governments. Some trends in Norwegian politics seem to increase the importance of the central levels of the party organization, and by implication also the party leadership. The province level of the governing structure is being emptied of functions and may be abandoned altogether in the future if more tasks are transferred to the national level. Increases in national legislation providing rights to citizens, and to be implemented by the municipal governments, work in the same direction, as does the prominent role of national party leaders in local election campaigns.

**Party Organization**

Increasing international activity could potentially lead to diffusion of organizational ideas, but in terms of organizational structure the main explanatory variable for a party is the electoral system. This shapes the types of party units that a party will have and this variable creates contrasts between ideologically similar parties in different countries. Some factors beyond the control of parties impose change in party organization. Technological developments, such as e-mail and the Internet, force parties to introduce new mechanisms for communication, party propaganda and organization, but the impact of these techniques on the functioning of the party organization is too early to assess. Up until now, Norwegian parties have not been able to use television for advertising, but this may be about to change and could lead to an escalation of the parties need for finances as well as furthering a trend towards professionalization of electoral campaigns. Although Norwegian parties – as elsewhere – have turned to the state for financial contributions, Norwegian parties have been more successful in this endeavor than parties in
most other countries (Pierre et al. 2000). The Norwegian Labor Party’s decoupling of linkages between the social democratic party and the union is similar to that in Sweden and in Britain.

Norwegian parties have become more involved in international party alliances, but the fact that Norway remains outside the European Union (EU) also limits the extent to which the international dimension can be a feature of the party organization, in contrast to the parties in the member states and particularly for parties represented in the European Parliament (Hix and Lord 1997). So far, the international involvement seems restricted to the leadership level. Many Norwegian parties are at odds with “their” party family on the issue of European integration. Both the Christian People’s Party and the Liberals are as parties opposed to Norwegian EU membership, but their European party federations, EPP and ELDRP, respectively, contain many of the most integrationist parties in Europe (Johansson 1997, Sandstrøm 2003). The Socialist Left Party has fewer organized relationships with similar European parties, but is also a deviant case in not favoring European integration. Only the Conservative Party seems to feel wholeheartedly comfortable with its international affiliation, and although Labor has the longest tradition and in many ways the most extensive international cooperation, there have been divisions within the party on the EU membership issue (Heidar and Svåsand 1998). Collectively, Norwegian parties have also resisted a more frequent use of referenda as a decision-making procedure in the political system, either as replacement for, or supplementary to, the parliamentary system. The Progress Party has been calling for reforms in this direction and to some extent the Socialist Left and Liberal parties are sympathetic to the idea. Contrary to similar reforms in Germany (Scarrow 1997), the initiative practiced in Italy and the increasing use of referenda in Britain, the demand for more referenda in the Norwegian debate is weak.8 In this sense, Norwegian parties retain closer control of the political agenda than some of their sister parties in other countries.

**Membership** The fall in party membership took place in Norway later than in many other countries. Up until the mid-1980s total party membership remained remarkably stable at around 15 percent of the electorate. This figure concealed significant variations between the parties. While Labor declined in members, the Conservatives expanded. How-
ever, from 1980 until 1997 the number of party members declined by almost 50 percent. Still, Norwegian parties stand out as stronger membership organizations than those in most other countries (Mair and van Biezen 2001: 12). Only Austria and Finland have a higher proportion of the electorate as party members (Mair and van Biezen 2001: 9).

**Forces of party change and stability** Valen and Katz pointed to two crucial factors in determining how parties operated: “general societal forces” and institutional structure. Both are still necessary to understand party stability and change. Party stability is supported through state organization and the electoral system. The old political cleavages of Norwegian society have been weakened, but they still generate lines of conflict and keep party profiles distinct. As societal interest structures change, new challenges are forcing parties to change – like in environmental politics and the debate over European integration. Affluence and education have transformed the citizens, making fewer party members and changing membership expectations. To enhance our understanding of parties, we have to add the role of parties as strategic actors attempting to shape their future environment to their own advantage. This has kept old parties alive through increased proportionality of electoral systems and extensive public support schemes, but also opened up for new competitors reaping the benefits of “small-party friendly” surroundings.

Simultaneously, the parties cannot control changes in international relations, in the media, or in technology. These are probably the crucial challenges to parties in the future. So far, web technology has not effected much change in Norwegian parties beyond the fact that it offers quicker postal services and gives the secretariat a direct channel to the party faithful. It would be surprising, however, if this did not change the parties significantly during the next 40 years. In the media sector there could be an opening for political advertising in television which will change politics at least to the same degree that the media revolution has done after the end of the party press. Lastly, the international connection – particularly through the EU network, especially given a future Norwegian membership – will create institutional changes and linkages that will allow for fundamental changes not only in the way parties operate, but also in the way the party system is constituted. Our prediction for the next 40 years is not necessarily the emergence of a two-party system,
but that the next decades will bring more changes to the Norwegian parties than we have seen since 1957.

Notes
1. Two of these parties, however, had stronger affinities to agrarian and Christian values than to the left–right dimension.
2. The consensual nature of Norwegian politics is perhaps a term that has been applied with the benefit of hindsight, blurring many intense political battles, such as the Lex Tagaard, proposed emergency laws, the school issue, and the foreign policy issues. (See contributions in Bergh (1977).)
3. The information on membership activity, as an indication of general party activism of the time, is fraught with two problems: it is based on estimates and it is restricted to the area where the empirical data were collected. Thus, the attendance data may reflect inaccuracies because they are estimates and, as the authors point out, the Stavanger-area is not representative for the country as a whole which may impact the generalisability of the data on party organisation (Valen and Katz 1964: 11).
4. 13 % according to unpublished figures from the 2000 membership survey, see Heidar and Saglie 2002. Two of the 2000 parties were founded after 1960, however. For Labour the figure was 17 %.
6. In addition, a minority Conservative party government held office between 1981 and 1983.
7. Progress party excepted.
8. The Progress Party is a strong advocate of referenda, but the issue has not become salient in the political debate

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