

## NORWAY: THE LOCAL ELECTIONS OF 1967.

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Although local elections are greatly concerned with communal issues, they are of considerable interest for national politics as well. The significance of the 1967 local election has to be evaluated on the background of the situation in national politics.

At the 1965 Storting election the Labor Party, which had been in power almost uninterruptedly for thirty years, was defeated, and a coalition government of the four bourgeois parties took over.<sup>1</sup> The 1967 local election was the first electoral confrontation between the coalition and the three opposition parties, Labor, Communists and the Socialist People's Party.

Despite the concern with local issues, the campaign was dominated by a discussion of government policies. The opposition parties charged the government with inactivity, and it was argued that the coalition parties in spite of their electoral promises two years earlier, had largely carried on the policies of the former Labor government. The parties in power argued in return that the opposition, and particularly the Labor Party, had offered no realistic alternatives in major policy areas. On the national level the campaign was carried on in rather vague and general terms. No single issue emerged as particularly important. Although it was largely a campaign for and against the bourgeois coalition government, it did not present the voters with any clear cut policy alternatives. The campaign was rather dull and apparently, did not stir up any great excitement among the voters. This was demonstrated in a decline in the turnout level as compared to previous elections: 77 percent of the eligible voters went to the polls in 1967, whereas the percentage was 81 at the preceding local elections (in 1963) and 85,4 percent at the 1965 Storting election.

Fluctuations in turnout level have to be taken into account in the study of partisan changes between elections. The question is: to what extent are changes in vote distributions due to movements between the parties, and to what extent do they result from changes between voting and non-voting? -

For an analysis of the 1967 local election the most proper comparison is the preceding local elections. However, in order to evaluate the 1967 election as a test of the popularity of the coalition government a comparison with the 1965 Storting election is also desirable.

*Table 1* presents the vote distribution at the 1967 local election compared with the two preceding elections.

By Norwegian standards the changes between 1963-67 were sizeable, whereas only minor changes occurred between 1965-67. The main tendencies may be briefly summarized:

- (1) The Communist and Conservative Parties lost in proportion of the total vote whether we compare with 1963 or 1967.
- (2) Labor lost two percent of the total vote compared to 1963, when the party enjoyed a victory. In 1965 the party was defeated, but in 1967 it partly restored its former position.
- (3) The Socialist People's Party almost doubled its vote compared to 1963, but lost compared to the 1965 Storting election. The party which was founded in 1961, has not yet firmly established itself in local politics. In 1967 it only run lists in 47 percent of the communes. Although the party made great progress from 1963-67, it seems to be largely perceived as a national party, and the result might have been quite different for this party if the 1967 election had been a national one.
- (4) The Liberal, Center (Agrarian) and Christian People's Parties improved their position between 1963-67, but their proportion of the total vote was reduced between 1965-67.

The comparison between local and Storting elections is problematic. For one thing, the list alternatives offered to the voters in their local communes are not exactly identical. Thus at the 1965 Storting election some of the parties did not run independent lists in all the 20 constituencies (provinces).<sup>2</sup> More important is the fact that in a local election a party may

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Table 1. Party distribution at the local elections of 1967 compared with the local elections of 1963 and the Storting election of 1965

Party:

	1967 election	1963/67	1965/67
Labor	43.8	-2.0	+ .6
Conservative	19.3	- .5	-1.8
Communist	1.2	- .7	- .2
Christian People's Party	7.1	+ .3	-1.0
Center Party	9.3	+1.1	- .6
Socialist People's Party	5.1	+2.3	- .9
Liberal	9.8	+1.4	- .5
Joint bourgeois lists	.7	- .5	(+ .7)
Non-partisan lists	3.7	-1.4	(+3.7)
	100 %		

abstain from running lists in some of the communes. It has never happened that any party has run lists in all communes.

The number of communes covered by party lists varies greatly from one party to another. The Labor Party which has always been most inclined to offer party lists in local politics, has for a number of elections run lists in more than 90 percent of the communes covering more than 95 percent of the electorate. The corresponding figures have been much lower for the non-Socialist Parties. However, a strong trend toward increasing politicization of local politics has been apparent since the beginning of the century.<sup>3</sup> Between 1963-67 this tendency was particularly marked. In the latter election the Communists covered 51 percent of the total electorate with partisan lists, the corresponding figure for the Socialist People's Party was 79 percent, and for the other five parties the figures varied between 90 and 99 percent.

Thus we may conclude that in the 1967 local elections an overwhelming majority of the electorate had an opportunity to vote for the party of their choice, with an exception for substantial proportions of the voters for the Communist and Socialist People's Parties.

When a party does not run a list for local election in a given commune, four alternatives may be open to people who tend to support this party at national elections:

(a) abstain from voting; (b) vote for some other party; (c) vote for some joint bourgeois ticket; and (d) vote for some nonpartisan ticket. The three last options may or may not be available depending upon the list alternatives in the various communes.

The number of joint bourgeois and nonpartisan lists have been strongly decreasing in recent years, but still quite a few are left. These lists present another problem when we are going to compare local and national elections: how should votes cast for joint bourgeois and nonpartisan lists at local elections be distributed among the parties? - For the 1967 election an attempt has been made to estimate this distribution. In a Gallup poll immediately after the election a nationwide sample was asked about actual voting in 1967 and in 1965, and how they would have voted in case a national election should be arranged the next day (national intention 1967).

On the basis of a comparison between the 1967 actual vote and reported national intention 1967 we are able to allocate the joint bourgeois and nonpartisan votes to the various parties. The estimated party distribution of the 1967 election has been presented in Table 2.

By and large, the tendencies in Table 2 are consistent with data from electoral statistics when we study the changes in communes in which the voters were faced with the same list alternatives both in 1965 and in 1967. Analysis of the electoral statistics suggests, however, that the

Table 2. Estimated party distribution at the 1967 local election. (Joint bourgeois and non-partisan votes allocated to the parties on the basis of Gallup poll).

	Comm.	Soc. People's Party	Labor	Liberal	Christian	Center	Conser- vation
Proportion of the vote	1.2	5.2	44.5	11.1	7.3	10.3	20.4
Changes 1965-67	-.2	-.8	+1.3	+.8	-.8	+.4	-.7

Liberal Party may have received a somewhat too high proportion of the non-partisan vote and that the share of the Christian People's Party should have been slightly higher.

First, let us consider the balance between the Socialist Parties versus the bourgeois coalition parties. For a long period this balance has been remarkably stable.

The Socialist proportion of the total vote was at the 1957 Storting election 51.7 percent, in 1961 52.1 percent, 1965 50.5 percent, and in 1967 50.9 percent.

After two years in power the coalition parties in 1967 lost .4 percent in popular support, and this change would not be enough to threaten their parliamentary majority.

Of the four coalition parties, Liberals and Center improved their position, whereas the Christians and Conservatives suffered a slight setback.

Now we may turn to the question of how these changes in party distributions should be explained. Gallup poll data suggest great stability in voting between 1965 and 67. The only clear tendency in these data, is that a substantial proportion of people who voted for the Socialist People's Party in 1965 moved over to Labor in 1967. Gallup data do not explain the changes in partisan strength among the four non-Socialist parties.

Our second question is: *how* did the reduced turnout level affect the vote distribution? - At the 1965 Storting election a nationwide voter survey was undertaken by the Institute for Social Research in Oslo and the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Bergen.<sup>4</sup> For this sample it has been possible to obtain information from the public electoral registers as to whether or not people voted at the 1967 local elections.<sup>5</sup> In Table 3 changes between voting and non-voting have been related to the party identification of the respondents.<sup>6</sup>

Nonpartisans (independent voters) tend to move between parties as well as in and out of the active electorate. Party identifiers constitute the stable core of the electorate; they are the people who are most likely to vote for their respective parties at any given election.<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, party identifiers who abstain from voting contribute indirectly to the weakening of their party. Table 3 suggests that the declining turnout level between 1965-67 hit all parties about equally, but we observe some minor party differences which correspond to the changes in party distributions. The proportions of party identifiers who abstained from voting in 1967 were lowest in the Labor, Liberal and Center Parties, i.e., the parties which improved their position. The Conservatives and the Christians who were the losers on the non-Socialist side, show the highest proportions of supporters who went into non-voting. The data suggest that the declining turnout level did indeed affect the vote distribution, and that the Conservative and Christian People's Parties suffered most from this fact.

It would be of interest to know which types of supporters of the various parties tended to stay home. An unsuccessful attempt has been made to study this problem. It was hypothesized that the relatively low participation level of Christians and Conservatives was due to disappointment within these parties with the policies of the coalition government. For example, it was expected that people belonging to the right wing of the Conservative Party would be more inclined than left wing supporters to stay home. But the hypothesis was not supported by the

Table 3. *Vote participation at the 1965 Storting election and the 1967 local election: by party identification. In percent.*

Party identification	1 Voted both 1965 and 1967	2 Voted 1965 not 1967	3 Voted 1967 not 1965	2-3 Net deficit from changes in vote par- ticipation	N*
Communist and Socialist					
People's Party**	82.8	14.3	2.9	11.4	35
Labor	85.5	12.3	2.2	10.1	616
Liberal	86.7	11.3	2.0	9.3	97
Christian	83.2	15.4	1.4	14.0	72
Center	88.4	10.8	.8	10.0	120
Conservative	84.8	15.2	.0	15.2	171
Nonpartisan	76.3	18.0	5.7	13.3	420
A-political	78.8	17.7	3.5	14.2	57
Total	81.7	15.4	2.9	12.5	1587

\*) Respondents who have never voted, those who are dead or have emigrated between 1965-67, and those who were not found in the register in 1967, are excluded from the table.

\*\*\*) These parties had to be combined because of the low number of respondents.

data. In a similar way it was expected that workers who support the Christian People's Party would be particularly inclined to abstain from voting, but again the hypothesis had to be rejected. The tendencies observed in *Table 3* seem to be about equally strong among various subgroups of the respective parties.

Still it is tempting to see the party differences in turnout level as a response to the coalition government. This cabinet has to formulate policies upon which all the four parties can agree, and each individual party has to give up some parts of their own program. Because of their character as middle parties the Center and the Liberals seem to have been most successful in materializing their own ideas in the policies of the government, whereas Conservatives and Christians have had to sacrifice relatively more. Supporters of the latter parties may be disappointed with the coalition, and their low turnout level in 1967 may reflect this frustration.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> An analysis of the 1965 Storting election has been presented by Stein Rokkan and Torstein Hjellum, "The Storting election of September 1965", in *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. I, 1966, pp. 237-246.

Jan Henrik Nyheim has dealt with the establishment of the coalition government, "The Cooperation of Four Parties", *Scandinavian Political Studies*, vol. II, 1967, pp. 257-262.

<sup>2</sup> See Rokkan & Hjellem, *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> The problem of politicization of local politics in Norway has been dealt with by S. Rokkan & H. Valen, "The Mobilization of the Periphery", in S. Rokkan (ed.) *Approaches to the Study of Political Participation*, Bergen, Chr. Michelsen Institute, 1962, and T. Hjellem, "The Politicization of Local Government", *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. II, pp. 69-93.

<sup>4</sup> This study, which is part of the Norwegian program of electoral research, was directed by Henry Valen and Stein Rokkan. On this program, see H. Valen and S. Rokkan, "The Norwegian Program of Electoral Research", *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. II, pp. 294-305.

<sup>5</sup> Information on vote participation was obtained for 96 percent of the sample.

<sup>6</sup> The respondents were asked, "Do you in general consider yourself a Conservative, a Liberal, a Laborite, etc. or don't you feel particularly attached to any of the parties?" Those who indicated some party, were classified as identifiers.

<sup>7</sup> See A. Campbell, P. E. Converse, D. E. Stokes, and W. E. Miller, *The American Voter*, New York, Wiley 1960, pp. 120-145; and A. Campbell and H. Valen, "Party Identification in Norway and the United States", in A. Campbell et al., *Elections and the Political Order*, New York, Wiley 1966, pp. 245-268.