

Norway: the Local Elections of September 1975*

For two reasons the elections of September 14–15, 1975, were an important event in Norwegian politics. An institutional reform was introduced at this election: for the first time members of the provincial assemblies (*fylkesting*) were directly elected together with members of the local councils. Previously, members for the fylkesting had been appointed by the municipal councils. Second, the elections of 1975 produced significant changes in the distribution of party strength as compared with preceding elections. Since 1970 Norwegian politics has been characterized by fragmentation and great volatility in the electorate.¹ The last election marks a trend toward 'normalization' i.e. a return to the distribution of party strength which existed before 1970.

The elections of 1975 occurred in a situation in which political constellations in national politics were not very clear. A minority Labour government had been in office since the autumn of 1973, despite the fact that this party had suffered severe losses in the 1973 Storting election. The Labour Party together with the left-socialists (SV) held a slight majority in the Storting (78 out of 155 seats). In this marginal situation the non-socialist parties, which had formed a coalition government from 1965 to 1971, could not challenge Labour. Apart from the fact that they did not have a majority in the Storting, they were severely split after the EEC dispute, and the idea of forming a non-socialist alliance as an alternative to Labour was not seriously considered until the spring of 1975.

The political situation during 1973–75 was characterized by controversies not only between parties, but also within parties. Thus in most of the parties the established leadership was challenged by a new generation of potential leaders. Most dramatically, the internal struggles of the Socialist Election Alliance were brought to the attention of the public. The Alliance which in the spring of 1975 had tried to merge into a united left-socialist party, was badly torn throughout the election campaign. After the election the old Stalinist wing of the Communist Party deserted the new party.

This initial analysis of the 1975 elections will focus upon two major topics: (1) The significance of the introduction of direct elections for the *fylkesting*, and (2) the magnitude and character of the electoral changes that took place. Special attention will be paid to changes in the strength of the socialist and non-socialist parties, which seem to form the major political groupings in the present situation.

1. The *fylkesting*

The province (*fylke*), which constitutes a set of institutions between national state authorities on the one hand, and local government on the other one, serves a two-fold function in the political system. For one thing, the *fylke* is required to fulfil a number of administrative and executive tasks on behalf of national government. Second, the *fylke* initiates and develops policies of its own with regard to several areas. Thus the *fylke* is responsible for developing hospitals and secondary schools within its boundaries.

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The province (*fylke*), which constitutes a set of institutions between national state authorities on the one hand, and local government on the other one, serves a two-fold function in the political system. For one thing, the *fylke* is required to fulfil a number of administrative and executive tasks on behalf of national government. Second, the *fylke* initiates and develops policies of its own with regard to several areas. Thus the *fylke* is responsible for developing hospitals and secondary schools within its boundaries.

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In other areas the *fylke* may initiate new programmes either alone or in cooperation with some communes, e.g. with regard to road construction and regional development.

Reforms during recent years have gradually changed the character of the *fylke*. The executive function which used to be dominant has declined in relative significance. Until 1964 the governor (*fylkesmann*), a high-ranking civil servant appointed by the government, was indeed a powerful figure. Besides being in charge of the executive functions, he served as chairman of the *fylkesting*, which consisted of the mayors of the communes in the province. Actually the *fylkesting* had more or less the character of a council for the *fylkesmann*.

The purpose of the reform of 1964 was to enable the *fylke* to play a more active policy-making role, and strengthen the position of elected offices. From then on members of the *fylkesting* were elected by the local councils in a number varying with the size of the communes, and the assembly elected its own leader, the provincial mayor (*fylkesordfører*). Thus the reform contributed to separating the executive and policy-making functions: the *fylkesmann* and his staff are still in charge of the former activities, while the *fylkesting* has become more of a policy-making body. This development was clearly manifest in the most recent reform, which introduced direct elections to the *fylkesting*. In this regard the electoral system is of great significance.

By and large, the system introduced at *fylkesting* elections is similar to national elections, but different from local elections. As at national elections, the constituency is the entire province (*fylke*). Nomination meetings held by the separate parties present lists with a number of candidates corresponding to the entire number of seats in the *fylkesting*, as well as a few reserve candidates. As at national elections, the members of the *fylkesting* are elected according to a modified version of the Sainte-Laguë method of proportional representation.² This system is most favourable for large and middle-sized parties, while the PR method applied at local elections is most favourable for small parties.

Lists presented by the nationally registered parties are more or less automatically accepted at *fylkesting* elections. As at national elections, provisions of the election law make it difficult for groups outside the established parties to run separate lists.³ At local elections, on the other hand, it is quite easy for a variety of groups to present separate lists. Traditionally, a number of non-partisan and local lists appear at local elections, particularly in small communes. Furthermore, several parties tend to run joint lists in local politics. Consequently, frontiers between political parties are far less clear in local than in national politics.

Another important difference between local and national elections concerns the choice offered to the individual voter. At national elections, parties rank the candidates on the lists in the order they wish to see them elected, whereas a similar ranking-order is not permitted at local elections.⁴ Thus at national elections the individual voter only has a choice between different list alternatives, whereas at local elections he can choose both between different lists and between different candidates on the list of his choice. The former system, which gives political parties almost exclusive control over the recruitment of political leaders, has also been adopted at *fylkesting* elections.

In general, it may be concluded that the alternatives facing the electorate at the *fylkesting* elections are likely to be similar to those at national elections, but different from local elections. The new reform is likely to strengthen the prestige of the *fylkesting* and its role in the political decision-making process. Presumably, political parties will provide the major alternatives on the province level, and it may be expected that these alternatives will coincide with political dividing lines in national politics.

Finally, the outcome of the first *fylkesting* elections may be described in terms of the distribution of seats. The country is divided into 18 provinces (*fylker*), which do not include the city of Oslo. The number of members of the *fylkesting* varies with the size of the population.

Table I. The Composition of the Fylkesting According to the Elections of 1975

Fylke:	Parties									Total number of seats
	SV Left- soc.	LAB	V	DNF	CHR	CP (AGR)	CONS	ALP	Other	
Østfold	3	25	1	1	7	5	11	—	—	53
Akershus	5	31	3	2	6	8	28	2	—	85
Hedmark	5	31	1	—	3	9	6	—	—	55
Buskerud	3	26	1	—	5	7	13	—	—	55
Vestfold	2	16	2	1	5	4	14	1	—	45
Telemark	4	24	3	2	9	5	7	1	—	55
Aust-Agder	1	11	1	2	7	4	7	2	—	35
Vest-Agder	1	11	3	3	11	4	10	1	1	45
Rogaland	3	21	2	4	15	8	15	3	—	71
Hordaland	4	26	3	5	15	8	22	2	—	85
Sogn og Fjordane	2	8	2	2	5	7	6	—	5	37
Møre og Romsdal	2	19	7	2	15	13	9	—	4	71
Sør-Trøndelag	5	28	3	2	8	11	14	—	—	71
Nord-Trøndelag	2	18	4	2	4	11	4	—	—	45
Nordland	5	30	4	1	8	10	12	1	—	71
Troms	3	18	2	1	6	6	9	—	—	45
Finnmark	4	18	1	—	3	2	6	—	1	35
Total seats in percent (Oslo excluded)	5.6	38.6	4.3	3.0	13.5	13.1	19.5	1.3	1.1	100%
Distribution of votes in percent (Oslo excluded)	5.6	38.2	4.1	3.2	13.0	12.7	19.9	1.7	1.6	100%

2. Electoral Changes

The elections of 1975 constitute an excellent basis for measuring political changes over the last few years. Because of similarities in electoral alternatives the results of the 1975 *fylkesting* elections are comparable with preceding *Storting* elections. However, local elections, which are different in character, should most properly be compared with previous local elections. Table II indicates the changes in the overall distribution of the vote between the elections of 1975 and the preceding local and *Storting* elections respectively.

The local elections of 1971, which occurred in the middle of the EEC dispute, indicated a clear trend in favour of the anti-EEC parties, while Labour and the Conservatives lost strength. This trend accelerated at the *Storting* election two years later, when Labour was hit by a landslide.⁵

The elections of 1975 reversed this trend. Labour and the Conservatives reappeared as the main antagonists in the campaign over such issues as taxation, control of private ownership, and public control of commercial banks. Both parties enjoyed substantial gains at the polls. The Conservative Party improved its position compared with both previous elections. In fact, we have to go back to 1936 in order to find a similar level of Conservative support. The Labour Party enjoyed a net gain compared to the 1973 *Storting* election, but the party was not restored to its position of 1971, and it still lies more than eight percent below its 1969 level.

The extreme parties on the left and right – the Socialist Left-Party (SV) and the Anders Lange Party (against taxes and public expenditures) – suffered severe losses. Both parties had gained spectacular support in 1973, in the wake of the EEC dispute. In 1975 the proportion voting SV dropped by about 50 percent as compared to the 1973 election, while more than two out of three former ALP-voters changed position.

Table II. Overall Distribution of Party Strength at the Local and Fylkesting Elections of 1975, Compared with the Local Elections of 1971 and the 1973 Storting Elections

Party	1971	1973-1975	Percent of votes cast				
			1971	1975	Difference	1973	1975
Marxist-Leninists	-		.4	+ 4	.4	.4	-
CP	.7						
SP	4.0						
Joint left-socialist	1.8						
SV			5.5	- 1.0	11.2	5.7	- 5.5
LAB	41.7		38.0	- 3.7	35.2	38.1	+ 2.8
V	8.5		3.7	- 2.3	3.5	3.8	+ .3
V			2.5		3.4	2.9	- .5
DNF							
CHR	8.7		11.5	+ 2.8	12.2	12.3	+ .1
AGR	11.5		10.7	- .8	11.1	11.2	+ .1
CONS	17.9		21.8	+ 3.9	17.4	22.6	+ 5.2
ALP	-		.8	+ .8	5.0	1.4	- 3.6
Local non-partisan Joint Bourgeois lists	4.6		3.7	- .9			
Other	.6		1.4	+ .8		.2	+ .2
					.5	1.4	+ .9
Total number of valid votes	1,907,424	1,928,772			2,152,204	1,915,173	
Turnout	73.0	71.4a		- 1.6	80.2	71.4a	- 8.8
Total Socialist Votes	48.2	43.9		- 4.3	46.9	44.2	- 2.7

a On the basis of valid ballots, participation was 70.8 percent at the local elections and 70.4 at the fylkesting elections.

The support for the middle parties, which changed drastically at the end of the EEC dispute, remained stable between 1973 and 75. Venstre and the New Peoples' Party, the offshoots of the old Left Party (Venstre), which split after the referendum in 1972, did not manage to return as a significant force at the centre of the system. The decline of the Liberals coincided with a strongly improved position for the Christian People's Party. Thus recent elections seem to suggest a development towards a system with four major parties: Labour, Conservatives, Agrarians, and Christians.

Another spectacular trend at recent elections is a consistent decline in the total socialist vote. At all elections during the 1945-69 period, the socialist parties jointly won a slight majority of the votes (51-52 percent). In 1971 the total socialist proportion declined to 48 percent, in 1973 to 47 percent and in 1975 to 44 percent. Since the idea of a new bourgeois coalition is presently being considered, the balance between socialist and non-socialist parties is a topic of great importance in the study of recent electoral changes.

Table II indicates that the proportion of invalid ballots was unusually high at the 1975 elections. Apparently, a lot of confusion was created because the voters were asked, for the first time, to vote for two separate tickets, one for the local councils and another one for the fylkesting.

Another interesting aspect is the low turnout level at this election: only 71.4 percent of the electorate went to the polls. Although the turnout level tends to be lower at local than at national elections, the present level is exceptionally low. One may speculate

about the reasons for this low interest in the election. Consistent with a general finding from electoral research, lack of clear alternatives might be suggested as a possible explanation.⁶ It might be objected, however, that although alternatives with reference to national politics were not very clear in 1975, they were hardly more visible at the local elections of 1971, when the participation level was two percentage points higher. It is more reasonable to explain the lack of political interest in 1975 as a delayed effect of the EEC dispute. The turnout level, which was relatively low at the EEC referendum of 1972 (77 percent), also dropped at the local elections of 1971 and the *Storting* elections of 1973 compared to the preceding elections of 1967 and 1969 respectively. This general decline in turnout has been interpreted as a result of conflicting pressures to which a substantial proportion of the electorate had been exposed during the EEC dispute.⁷ Cross-pressures which originated during the EEC dispute can hardly account for the fact that the turnout level continued to decline after the dispute had ended. However, the unusual conflict patterns which led to cross-pressures during the beginning of the 1970's also destroyed a great many long-standing political loyalties. Consequently, a large number of voters shifted party preference between 1969 and 1973.⁸ In 1975 Norwegian politics was in a stage of transition. The political debate was gradually returning to the pattern which existed until 1970, and the political constellations from the EEC dispute were in a process of being dissolved. One may conjecture that many voters who had shifted party allegiance during the preceding years became disappointed with their new party, while, at the same time, confidence in the traditional parties was not yet fully restored. Presumably, a great number of voters abstained from voting in 1975 due to a feeling of frustration created by political changes and disappointed expectations during the preceding years.

The interesting problem of why electoral turnout declined lies beyond the scope of the present paper, but I will be concerned with a related problem: how did the decline in turnout affect the distribution of party strength at the last election? The question is whether some parties suffered more than others from the tendency for active voters at previous elections to abstain from voting in 1975.

In the subsequent pages an attempt will be made to study changes in electoral preferences among groups of voters. The focus will be upon changes between the 1975 *fylkesting* elections and the preceding *Storting* elections. The analysis will be based partly upon aggregate data from the public electoral statistics, partly upon survey data.

3. Political Change and Social Structure

One characteristic feature of Norwegian politics is the great variation in the support for various parties according to region and according to the social structure of the local community. A map (Fig. 1) showing the support for the biggest party, Labour, will illustrate this point. The map, which is based upon public electoral statistics, shows the Labour Party's proportion of the total votes cast at the *fylkesting* elections of 1975 in each of the 445 communes.

The map clearly indicates that the party has its strongest support in the Interior East, but it is also strong in the central area around the Oslofjord, in the Trøndelag and in the North, while it is relatively weak along the southern and western coasts. Within each region substantial variations are evident between individual communes. Such variations are to some extent related to the degree of urbanization and industrialization: Labour tends to be stronger in industrialized communes than in rural ones.

By and large, variations in geographical support follow the same pattern for left-socialist parties as for Labour. The centre parties have their strongholds in the South and West, particularly in rural areas, and the Conservative Party is most popular in the Oslofjord area and urban areas of other regions.⁹

Figure 1. The fylkesting election of 1975. Labour strength in percent of the votes cast. (Source: Norwegian Social Science Data Service)



Legend:

50-70 percent



40-50 >



30-40 >



20-30 >



less than 20 percent



Although the distribution reflected in Fig. 1 may represent a rather stable pattern, one may wonder to what extent changes in party support over the last few years are related to social and geographical structure. In Table III communes have been classified according to a simple typology of urbanization: sparsely populated fishery communes represent the most rural communities, while cities, towns and suburbs constitute the other extreme.¹⁰ The distribution of party strength has been compared for the 1975 *fylkesting* elections and the *Storting* elections of 1973.

Table III. Party Distributions at the 1975 Fylkesting Elections as Percentage of Votes Cast: by Types of Community. (Figures in Parentheses Indicate Changes from 1973-75)

PARTY:	Fishery communes, sparsely populated	Other sparsely populated communes	Densely populated communes	Cities, towns, suburbs
AKP (Marxist-Leninists)	.4 (+ .1)	.2 (0)	.4 (- .1)	.7 (+ .2)
SV	4.6 (- 4.0)	4.7 (- 3.8)	7.8 (- 6.7)	6.1 (- 6.5)
Lab.	30.4 (+ 3.4)	38.0 (+ 1.6)	45.3 (+ 4.0)	37.9 (+ 3.4)
Lib.	6.9 (- 1.2)	3.9 (- .1)	3.6 (+ .6)	3.5 (+ .1)
DNF	1.8 (+ .1)	2.6 (+ .1)	2.8 (+ .3)	3.2 (- 1.1)
Chr.	20.4 (- 3.4)	13.7 (- 0.2)	11.8 (+ .2)	10.7 (+ .5)
Centre	16.5 (- 1.0)	21.1 (+ 0.6)	10.4 (+ .3)	4.8 (- .4)
Cons.	14.4 (+ 5.9)	13.1 (+ 3.4)	15.1 (+ 2.8)	30.0 (+ 6.6)
ALP	1.2 (- 2.4)	2.4 (- 3.0)	1.3 (- 2.6)	1.9 (- 4.1)
Others	3.4 (+ 2.9)	1.3 (+ .8)	1.4 (+ 1.0)	1.2 (+ .7)
Number of communes	66	271	42	66
Total Socialist vote	35.4 (- 0.5)	42.9 (- 2.3)	53.5 (- 2.7)	44.6 (- 3.2)
Turnout	67.1 (- 6.0)	71.3 (- 8.6)	59.3 (-10.1)	71.1 (- 9.9)

Table III describes the character of the various parties with regard to their urban-rural support. The Conservatives are the most typical urban party, while the Agrarian Centre obtains an overwhelming share of its votes in rural areas. Both the Liberals and the Christians tend to lean in a rural direction, while the Labour Party and even more the Left-Socialists (SV) tend to draw more strength from urban than from rural communes.

Concerning changes between 1973-75, it is surprising how similar tendencies are from one type of community to another. Thus the stability of the middle parties, Christians, Liberals and the Agrarian Centre, is evident in all kinds of communes, with only minor deviations. SV provides another illuminating example. It can be seen (Table II) that across the whole nation the party lost about half of its support between 1973 and 1975. Table III indicates that the party's share of the votes declined by approximately the same magnitude in all categories of communes. In a similar way the Conservatives made the most spectacular gains in urban communes where the party is traditionally strongest. However, a notable exception to this general trend is found in fishery communes, where the Conservatives nearly doubled their support. The explanation is that in 1973 the two 'yes-parties', the Conservatives and the Labour Party, suffered their most severe losses in fishery communes, where opposition against EEC membership was particularly strong. Two years later the Conservatives restored their old position along the coast, and so did Labour - to some extent. The latter party also enjoyed relatively large gains in industrialized and urbanized communes, while it did less well in sparsely populated agricultural areas. Traditionally, a sizeable group of floating voters has existed in the borderland between Labour and various left-

socialist parties. It is evident that a great number of people who defected from the SV in 1975 did not go to Labor. As a result, some interesting changes occurred in the partisan distribution of the vote within different kinds of communities. Two main tendencies emerge from Table III:

- (1) The socialist share of the total votes cast declined least in fishery communes, and the decline increases with increasing urbanization.
- (2) The decline in turnout between 1973-75 is more marked in urban than in rural communes.

Although aggregate data of this kind do not reveal how individual voters changed parties and shifted from voting to abstention from 1973 to 1975, one may assume that the tendencies described are to some extent related to one another. In particular, it is tempting to speculate about a relationship between the parallel tendencies of decline in turnout and the decline in the socialist vote. Conceivably, socialist parties have suffered a relative loss because their supporters were more inclined than bourgeois voters to abstain from voting in 1975. I will return to this hypothesis when survey data are presented.

The tendencies described in Table II can be further explored by comparing the partisan distribution of the vote at the two elections by type of commune within the various regions. In order to have a sufficient number of communes in each cell a dichotomy will be applied: *rural* communes, i.e. fishery communes and other sparsely populated communes, and *urbanized* communes, i.e. densely populated rural communes and cities, towns and suburbs. Again it should be observed that electoral changes are surprisingly similar throughout the nation. Thus the Conservative Party made substantial gains both in rural and urbanized communes of all regions. The results for the Labour Party show more variation: the party made its greatest inroads (more than 5 percent of the votes cast) in urbanized communes of the Interior East and in both categories of communes in the Northern region. On the other hand, the party suffered minor losses (around 0.5 percent) in the South. It is more interesting, however, to consider changes in the total socialist vote in various parts of the country:

Table IV. Support for Socialist Parties in 1975 expressed as Percentage of Total Votes Cast (Figures in Parentheses Indicate Changes since the Starting Elections of 1973)

	Oslofjord Area	Interior East	South	West	Middle (Trøndelag)	North
Rural	33.8 (- 2.8)	59.3 (- 1.0)	30.4 (- 3.0)	25.7 (- 2.5)	41.3 (- 3.2)	48.3 (- .1)
Urbanized	46.5 (- 2.6)	56.5 (- 2.6)	30.5 (- 4.3)	38.6 (- 3.3)	50.2 (- 4.9)	54.1 (- 2.0)

Two tendencies are evident in Table IV:

(1) Consistent with a previously observed pattern (Table III), the socialists suffered greater losses in urbanized than in rural communes. This pattern is clear and consistent for all regions, except for the Oslofjord area. The fact that the latter region is the most industrialized part of the country may account for this slight deviation from the general pattern. It should be noted that there is no corresponding pattern in the decline of the turnout level. In fact, turnout declined most in rural communes in three of the regions, South, Middle and North, while the trend was the reverse in other regions.

(2) Considering their previous strength, the Socialist parties maintained their position best in the Interior East and in the North, while they suffered a substantial setback

in the South and West. Thus, as regards the Socialist vote, the election of 1975 resulted in a slight increase in the contrasts between the regions.

If we recall that the socialist vote has declined at all elections since 1969, it may be worthwhile to present this difference in socialist support for 1969–75. In other words, the figures include the change both from 1969 to 1973 and from 1973 to 1975.

Table V. Decline in Socialist Vote between 1969 and 1975: by Region and Type of Commune

	Oslofjord Area	Interior East	South	West	Middle	North
Rural	- 6.6	- 3.1	- 8.4	- 6.2	- 6.1	- 11.7
Urbanized	- 6.2	- 5.2	- 9.3	- 6.4	- 5.7	- 9.4

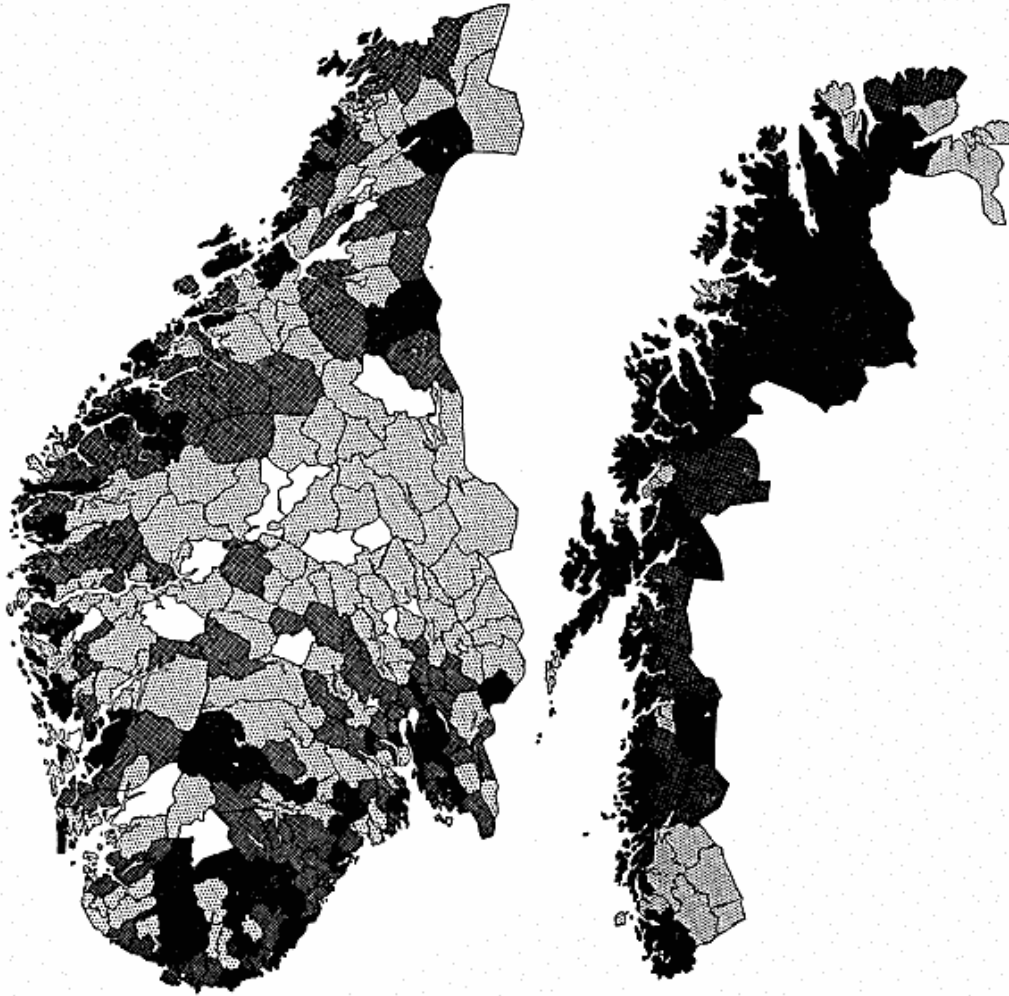
By comparing Tables IV and V, it can easily be seen that the tendency to greater regional variations in the socialist vote can be traced back to 1969. The support for the socialist parties declined sharply in the South and West where they have always been relatively weak. On the other hand, it is remarkable how well they maintained their position in the Interior East, their old stronghold. However, they have been less successful in another stronghold, the Northern region. It may be inferred from the data that most of the defections in the North occurred between 1969 and 1973: 11.6 percent and 6.6 percent for rural and urbanized communes respectively. Opposition to EEC membership was particularly strong in this region. The Labour Party, which was in favour of joining the Community, suffered serious defections throughout the country, but more in the North than in other regions. However, the crucial question is: how many of the defectors from Labour went to the left-socialists? In general, the urban population seems to have been strongly inclined to move from Labour to SV, but in rural areas defectors from Labour were more attracted by the Centre and Christian People's Parties.¹¹ In the Northern region, which is the least industrialized part of Norway, the proportion of the population employed in farming and fishery is relatively large. Despite longstanding socialist loyalties, a large number of former labourites preferred the centrist parties rather than the left-socialists. In particular, this was the pattern in rural areas.

While the decline in socialist support between 1973 and 1975 tended to be greater in urbanized than in rural communes, a similar trend is not evident for the total period 1969–75. In fact, Table V shows only minor differences between the two kinds of communes, and the direction of these differences is not consistent from one region to another. From these trends it may be inferred that during 1969–1973 the socialist lost most heavily in rural areas. By 1975 the total amount of decline in socialist support did not differ much between urban and rural communes, although variations between regions are substantial. These changes have been described in a map showing differences in the socialist vote between 1969 and 1975.





Aside from a few pockets in the Northern region, the socialists have suffered their most serious setback in the South, where they are traditionally weak. And they have maintained their position best in the Interior East, their old stronghold. Thus the map confirms the impression of increased regional contrasts in socialist strength.

The data presented so far indicate that changes in socialist strength during recent years are related to social and geographical structure. The next question is: where did the people who turned away from the socialist parties go? – Did they support some specific non-socialist parties, or did they simply abstain from voting? Since aggregate statistics give no answer to questions about individual level changes in the electorate, an attempt will be made to study the problem by using survey data. This will be the topic of the next section.

Figure 2. Difference in total socialist strength between the *Storting* elections of 1969 and the fylkesting elections of 1975. (Source: Norwegian Social Science Data Services)



Legend:

Stability or gains	
Decline 0–5.2 percent	
Decline 5.2–8.7 percent	
Decline 8.7–30.0 percent	

4. Individual Changes

A nationwide probability sample, consisting originally of 2000 voters, was interviewed at three subsequent *Storting* elections, 1965, 1969 and 1973. At the 1969 elections the sample was supplemented by an additional sample of people who had reached voting age between 1965–1969, but a similar supplement for first-time voters was not made in 1973.¹² Immediately after the 1975 elections the respondents were asked by a mail

questionnaire if they voted that year, and if so, which party they preferred. Altogether some 1100 respondents or 92 percent of the active sample, returned the questionnaire.¹³ Space does not permit a detailed analysis of the panel data, but a transition matrix for voting in 1973 and 1975 will illustrate some important patterns of individual changes.

The panel obviously overrepresents the active voters: the proportion of non-voters should have been around 20 percent in 1973 and 29 percent two years later. However, the panel reflects quite well the shift from voting to non-voting between the two elections: the proportion of non-voters has increased by about eight percent. If non-voters are excluded, the sample distribution of party strength fits the actual distribution of electoral strength reasonably well. For most parties deviations are within sampling error. Considering differences in the distribution of party strength (marginals) between the two elections, the fit is very good for individual parties, both concerning direction and magnitude of change. Consequently, one may assume that the transition matrix reflects the shifts in the electorate reasonably well.

Respondents who fall in the marked cells along the diagonal of Table VI, altogether 66.5 percent of the sample, have been stable in their preference between 1973-75. In other words, one out of three voters has changed position between the two elections, which is about the same amount of change as occurred between 1969-73.

Some major tendencies emerge from Table VI:

(1) The data suggest that the decline in turnout from 1973-75 must have contributed greatly to the changes in the vote distribution. Parties were affected in a most variable way by shifts between voting and non-voting. The Conservative Party is the only one which remained approximately stable in the proportions of previous stay-at-homes, who were mobilized in 1975, and previous supporters who turned into non-voters. Previous research indicates that quite a few Conservatives who voted "No" to EEC, abstained from voting in 1973.¹⁴ The present data suggest that in 1975 these defectors tended to return to the polls. A similar tendency is evident for the Labour Party. Nonetheless, in all parties except the Conservatives, the number of supporters who abstained from voting is greater than the number of previous stay-at-homes who were mobilized. SV and ALP have the most negative balance: in both parties approximately one out of four of their 1973 supporters became non-voters, while they did not manage to mobilize a single respondent who indicated previous non-voting. Obviously, the balance in shifts between voting and non-voting was a major factor in determining the outcome of the 1975 election. Indirectly, the Conservatives have profited from the decline in turnout, SV and ALP have suffered the most severe losses, while some of the other parties were affected to a lesser extent.

In studying shifts among respondents who indicated voting both in 1973 and in 1975, three parties are of particular interest: the Left-Socialist, Labour and the Conservatives.

(2) Defectors from SV went largely in two directions: either they turned into non-voters or they voted Labour. This tendency is consistent with an old pattern: Leftists tend to see Labour as their closest neighbour in the party system, and they very seldom shift to any non-socialist party.

(3) Labourites, who are located more in the centre of the party system, tend to shift allegiances both in a left and a right direction. In 1975 most of the Labour defectors went to the bourgeois parties, in particular to the Conservatives. Normally, shifts between Labour and Conservatives have been rare indeed. Traditionally, the Liberal Party served as a buffer between these two major parties, who used to lose votes to or gain votes from the Liberal Party and tended to see it as a close neighbour in the party system. The decline of the Liberals as a serious political alternative may have produced a new pattern of political shifts. As might be expected, Labourites who shifted preference in 1975 largely belonged to the moderate wing of the party.¹⁵

(4) The Conservative Party largely gained the support of defectors from three other parties: Labour, the Agrarian Centre, and ALP. The latter party, whose founder and

Table VI. Transition Matrix of Votes between 1973-1975

1973: 1975:

	SV	LAB.	LIB.	CHR.	CENTRE	CONS.	DNF	ALP	OTHERS	Did not vote	TOTAL
SV	3.6	2.3	.0	.1	.0	.3	.1	.2	.1	2.1	8.9
LAB.	.5	27.6	.0	.2	.3	1.2	.5	.1	.1	4.3	34.7
LIB.	.0	.3	1.2	.1	.4	.4	.2	.0	.0	.4	2.9
CHR.	.0	.2	.2	8.0	.7	.8	.3	.0	0.	1.9	12.0
CENTRE	.0	.3	.6	.7	9.8	1.2	.1	.0	.2	1.5	14.3
CONS.	.0	.2	.5	.3	.5	9.9	.2	.1	.1	1.1	12.8
DNF	.0	.1	.0	.0	.2	.5	1.8	.0	.0	.6	3.1
ALP	.2	.1	.1	.1	.1	1.0	.0	.3	.0	.6	2.4
Did not vote	.0	2.2	.2	.5	.6	.9	.1	.0	.2	4.3	9.0
Total	4.3	33.3	2.7	9.9	12.4	16.2	3.2	.7	.7	16.7	100.0

- Respondents who failed to indicate party preference at one or both elections are excluded from the table.

leader, Anders Lange, died in 1974, has been suffering from internal struggles. It is not unreasonable that defectors from this right wing party tended to prefer the Conservatives. The gains of the Conservatives from the Agrarians and to a less extent the Christians, is a reversal of a trend at the 1973 election. Conservatives who disliked the EEC tended to shift to these other parties.¹⁶ The data suggest that in 1975 they tended to return to the Conservative camp.

It should, finally, be observed that in addition to shifts between parties from one election to another, and between voting and abstention, the renewal of the electorate may contribute strongly to changes in party strength. Table VI does not give any information about this third factor since people who arrived at voting age after 1969 have not been included in the panel. However, re-analysis of Gallup data from recent years suggests that the Conservatives and SV are relatively most popular among the younger age cohorts, while Labour, on the other hand, indirectly lost support because of its weak position among first-time voters.

By calculating from Table VI it can be established that at the 1975 elections 3.2 percent of the sample shifted from socialist to non-socialist parties, while only 1.4 percent moved in the opposite direction. Furthermore, the socialist parties were harmed slightly more than the non-socialists by abstention from voting: 6.4 percent of the respondents indicate that they voted socialist in 1973 but did not vote in 1975, while 2.2 percent indicate that they were stay-at-homes in 1973, but voted socialist in 1975; the corresponding figures for the non-socialist parties are 6.1 percent and 2.5 percent respectively. Thus the data indicate that both shifts between parties and shifts between voting and non-voting contributed to the decline in the total socialist vote between 1973 and 1975, but apparently the former component contributed relatively more than the latter one.

Our panel data permit a similar analysis of changes in socialist strength over the longer time span from 1969 to 1975. During this period the socialist vote declined by some seven percent for the entire nation. The simplified transition matrix presented in Table VII describes individual shifts on the basis of panel data. Table VII indicates differences in marginal distributions which are indeed similar to the actual changes between the two elections.¹⁷ Consequently, one may assume that individual shifts described by the data fit reasonably well with the main patterns of change in the electorate.

Table VII. Transition Matrix of Votes between 1969-75: Socialist versus Non-Socialist Parties

1969	1975:			Total
	Socialist	Non-socialist	Non-voters	
Socialist	34.5	5.0	8.3	47.8
Non-socialist	1.9	39.0	5.5	46.4
Non-voters	1.0	1.8	3.1	5.9
Total	37.4	45.7	16.9	100.0%

Table VII indicates a substantial net shift from socialist to non-socialist parties: five percent of the respondents are previous socialist voters who report having moved to some non-socialist party, while only two percent have switched in the opposite direction. At the same time, socialists have been far more inclined than bourgeois voters to join the ranks of the stay-at-homes: the net swing between 1969-75 from voting to non-voting is 3.7 percent for the non-socialists, while it is double, or 7.3 percent, for the socialists. Thus the patterns of change described for the most recent period (1973-75) are consistent with tendencies during the longer time span of 1969-75. In both cases the socialist parties have lost ground, partly because socialists have been more inclined than bourgeois supporters to shift allegiance to the opposite camp, partly because the

socialists have lost more than the bourgeois parties from shifts between voting and abstention. Table VII indicates that the latter component has contributed greatly to the socialist decline during the period 1969-75.

One may expect that losses due to a declining turnout level are not going to be of lasting importance. As political competition returns to more 'normal' patterns, a large part of previous voters who preferred to stay home at the last few elections are likely to return to the polls to support their old parties - at least in terms of the major socialist vs. non-socialist alternative.

Shifts which have occurred between parties are of more crucial importance for the future political balance. Of course, it is highly uncertain how permanent these changes are. But part of the answer can be obtained by studying the question of the extent to which shifts between parties fit in with long-term trends in the electorate, and to what extent they have been triggered by recent events. These questions will be the topic of the final section of the present paper. Data on voting at elections from 1957 to 1975 will be presented for some selected groups of voters.¹⁸

5. Long-Term Changes and Occupational Status

Traditionally, socialist parties in Norway have obtained most of their electoral support within three occupational groups: Manual workers, white collar workers (i.e. sales and clerical personnel) and smallholders and fishermen in the rural communities. These groups will be the foci of the subsequent analysis. Middle class groups, like higher salaried employees, professionals and independents in business, will be excluded, partly because the socialists have never been very strong within these strata, and partly be-

Table VIII. Reported Voting and Occupation: Elections from 1957 to 1975 (Non-voters excluded)

	Manual workers				
	1957	1965	1969	1973	1975
Left-socialist	2	8	6	14	7
Labour	75	69	69	54	58
Bourgeois	23	23	25	32	35
Total percent	100	100	100	100	100
N	612	632	638	484	391
	Farmers & Fishermen				
	1957	1965	1969	1973	1975
Left-socialist	0	1	1	1	0
Labour	32	23	18	12	13
Bourgeois	68	76	81	87	87
Total percent	100	100	100	100	100
N	199	272	184	150	134
	White collar workers (Sales & Clerical personnel)				
	1957	1965	1969	1973	1975
Left-socialist	2	8	5	12	6
Labour	51	46	49	34	34
Bourgeois	47	46	46	54	60
Total percent	100	100	100	100	100
N	104	176	251	148	125

cause the available data indicate no consistent trend over time with regard to socialist support. For the present purpose, the parties have been classified in three categories: (1) Left-socialists, (2) Labour, and (3) Bourgeois.

Table VIII indicates a clear long-term trend with regard to farmers and fishermen: the support for Labour declined gradually from 32 percent in 1957 to 13 percent in 1975. The defectors went almost exclusively to the bourgeois parties, particularly the Agrarian Centre and the Christian People's Party. The defections from Labour after 1969 are not surprising taking into account that the rural population was strongly inclined to oppose EEC membership. But even though motivations for leaving Labour may have changed, shifts during recent years fit in with a trend which apparently started in the 1950's. Basically, this trend is related to social change in the rural community: a large number of small farms have been abandoned, and during the entire post-war period an increasing number of young people have migrated from the countryside into industrial and urban centres. Underdogs of the rural community, i.e. potential supporters of Labour, seem to have been most inclined to leave. But even traditional Labourites who remained on the farms tended to shift in a bourgeois direction. The latter trend may be accounted for by structural changes in agriculture: farming has gradually become the sole occupation even for small farmers, who earlier tended to be part-time workers in forestry or on larger farms. One may conjecture that today smallholders and fishermen experience more commonality of interests with the farm population in general, and less with the working class population.

Thus the long-term trend of the rural population runs counter to the socialists, but this trend is hardly going to upset the political balance, since the number of farmers and fishermen is rapidly declining. According to the census of 1970 they constitute only some 10 percent of the labour force.

Political trends within the two other groups, which are being considered, are of more critical significance for the fortunes of the socialist parties. Table VIII indicates that both manual workers and white collar workers were remarkably stable in their socialist sympathies until 1969. In 1973 both left-socialists and bourgeois parties made great inroads into Labour support, and two years later the bourgeois parties improved their position further. For the first time, one out of three manual workers and nearly two out of three white collar workers voted bourgeois. The new trend, whose origin coincides with the EEC dispute, may just reflect the greater volatility in the electorate during recent years. But conceivably, it may signal growing moderate sentiments among employees whose standard of living has been increasing quite rapidly. If the latter explanation is correct, shifts from socialist to bourgeois voting described above represent a significant pattern which is likely to persist at future elections.

6. Concluding Remarks

An institutional reform was introduced at the local elections of September 1975: for the first time members of the provincial assemblies (*fylkesting*) were directly elected together with members of the local councils. The alternatives facing the voters at the *fylkesting* elections are very similar to those at national elections. The main focus of this initial analysis is a comparison between the 1975 *fylkesting* elections and the *Storting* elections of 1973 and 1969.

After several years of great volatility in the Norwegian electorate the elections of 1975 marked a trend in the direction of a 'normal' distribution of party strength. The two largest parties, Labour and the Conservatives, reappeared as the main antagonists in the campaign, and they both made substantial gains, while the extreme parties on the left and right, the Left Socialists and Anders Langes Party respectively, suffered severe losses. Two other tendencies at the 1975 elections are of particular interest:

(1) the turnout level of about 71 percent was unusually low; and (2) the socialist proportion of the total votes cast kept declining.

An analysis based on aggregate electoral data for individual communes indicates that the socialist parties have maintained their position best in their old stronghold, the region of the Interior East, while they have lost relatively most in the South and the West, i.e. in the regions where their previous support was lowest. Thus recent elections have contributed to greater regional contrasts, as far as socialist strength is concerned. Between 1973 and 1975 the socialist vote as well as the turnout level declined more in urbanized than in rural communes. This tendency suggests that previous socialists were more inclined than bourgeois voters to abstain from voting in 1975. An analysis of panel data based on interviews with a nationwide sample at the last four elections supports this hypothesis. However, the analysis indicates that the decline of the socialist vote did not result exclusively from changes between voting and non-voting. The socialists were also more inclined than bourgeois voters to shift to the opposite camp. These tendencies are particularly clear when the 1975 elections are compared with the 1969 *Storting* election, which was the last 'normal' election before the very intense EEC dispute started. Part of the change is due to a long-term trend in the electorate: since the 1950's socialist support has gradually declined among people in rural occupations. However, a shift in a bourgeois direction after 1969 among manual workers and people in sales and clerical positions has contributed most strongly to the change. At this point it is uncertain whether this latter tendency reflects a new long-term trend or is simply a result of short-term forces which have been at work during recent years.

In the present situation all political attention is focused upon the forthcoming *Storting* election of 1977. If the bourgeois parties succeed in re-establishing a joint platform, the electoral alternatives are likely to be rather similar to those of the 1960's. With the present balance in party strength between socialist and non-socialist parties, the outcome of the 1977 election would seem to be given in advance.¹⁹ But several factors of uncertainty should be taken into account. For one thing, it can safely be predicted that the turnout level will increase considerably by 1977. It will be recalled that even with the very unclear alternatives of 1973, turnout reached 80 percent at that election. The data presented in this paper suggest that a relatively large proportion of people who abstained from voting at the last elections were former socialist voters. The question is whether they will return to the socialist camp or move in a bourgeois direction. Second, it is an open question whether recent shifts from socialist to non-socialist parties reflect a new long-term trend, or whether they are due to short-term forces. Finally, the position of first-time voters may be a decisive element. It is well known that young people are most volatile and unstable in their partisan choice. At recent elections the Labour Party has suffered from unusually low support from the youngest generation. If this trend is going to continue, one may expect that the socialist vote will keep declining at future elections. The question is whether Labour, which is apparently in a process of recovering from the wounds of the EEC-battle, will regain its old popularity among young voters.

Henry Valen
University of Oslo

NOTES

1. For accounts of recent elections, see the review articles in *Scandinavian Political Studies* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget): S. Rokkan and H. Valen 'The Election to the Norwegian Storting in September 1969', Vol. 5, 1970, pp. 287-300; H. Valen, 'Norway: Local Elections in the Shadow of the Common Market', Vol. 7, 1972, pp. 272-282; H. Valen, 'Norway: "No" to EEC', Vol. 8, 1973, pp. 214-226; and H. Valen and S. Rokkan, 'Norway: the Elections to the Storting in September 1973', Vol. 9, 1974, pp. 205-218.
2. According to this method the number of votes for a given party is divided first by 1.4, then by 3, 5, 7 --- etc. for each seat obtained by the party. For an elaborate discussion of electoral systems, see S. Rokkan, *Citizens, Elections, Parties* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1969), pp. 147-168.
3. The law relating to the election of *fylkesting* (§ 14,d) requires that a proposal for a list must be signed by at least 100 persons with the right to vote in the *fylke* unless the proposal comes from one of the nationally registered parties.
4. However, at local elections parties may favour specific candidates by 'cumulating' them, i.e. list them several times.
5. See H. Valen, 'Local Elections in the Shadow of the Common Market', *op.cit.*, and Valen & Rokkan, 'Norway: the Elections to the Storting in September 1973', *op.cit.*
6. Angus Campbell, 'Surge and Decline' in A. Campbell, P. E. Converse, D. E. Stokes, W. E. Miller, *Elections and the Political Order* (New York: Wiley, 1966), pp. 40-62.
7. See H. Valen, 'Norway: "No" to EEC', *op.cit.*
8. Valen & Rokkan, 'Norway: The Elections to the Storting in September of 1969', *op.cit.*, pp. 211-213.
9. For a more detailed account of geographical variations, see S. Rokkan and H. Valen, 'Regional Contrasts in Norwegian Politics', in E. Allardt and S. Rokkan (eds.) *Mass Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1970) pp. 190-241.
10. The typology, which was originally developed by the Census Bureau (Statistisk Sentralbyrå) is based upon a combination of occupational distribution and density of population. 'Densely populated' means that at least 50 percent of the population lives in agglomerations. In 'fishery communes' at least 25 percent of the work force are fishermen.
11. See Valen & Rokkan, 'Norway: The Elections to the Storting in September 1973', *op.cit.*, p. 213.
12. This panel study is part of a programme of electoral research which was started in 1957 by Stein Rokkan and Henry Valen at the Institute of Social Research in Oslo. For more on this programme see Valen & Rokkan, 'Norway: The Election to the Storting in September 1973', *op.cit.*, note 10, p. 218.
13. 'Active' sample is defined as the number of 1973 respondents who in 1975 were still members of the electorate.
14. Tables available at the Institute for Social Research in Oslo.
15. This tendency is evident when voters are classified according to an index of radicalism-conservatism. The index is based on responses to three items concerning equalization of wealth and the need for public control with the economy. Respondents classified as 'left' who voted Labour in 1973, were strongly inclined to remain stable in their vote preference two years later, while quite a few moderate Labourites switched to some bourgeois party, particularly to the Conservatives.
16. Valen & Rokkan, 'Norway: The Storting Elections of September 1973', *op.cit.*, p. 213.
17. Although voters who went to the polls are overrepresented in the panel study at both elections, the sharp increase in reported non-voting (11 percent) corresponds rather well with the actual decline in turnout level (about 13 percent) between 1969 and 1975. If non-voters are excluded, the socialist proportion of the total votes cast was some 51 percent in 1969 and 45 percent in 1975, while the corresponding figures from electoral statistics are 51 percent and 44 percent respectively.
18. With the exception of the election of 1961, all *Storting* elections from 1957 to 1973 have been studied within our programme of electoral research.
19. According to Gallup polls substantial changes in favour of the Labour Party have occurred after the elections of September 1975. By April 1976 43.3 percent of the respondents indicated support for Labour, while a total of 47.9 percent supported some socialist party.