

Party Organizational Elites in Norwegian Politics: Representativeness and Party Democracy*

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The question raised is why 'secondary' representativeness of political elites, i.e. the degree of similarity in socio-demographic background between elite and electorate, is considered important in debates on democratic politics. Three answers are considered: to improve long-term 'primary' representativity, i.e. the representation of public *opinions*; to build systemic legitimacy; and to encourage the participation of low-mobilized groups. From this perspective new data on the party organizational elites in Norway are presented: The party elites are socially skewed in terms of present position, but fairly broad based in terms of parental background. They reflect the traditional cleavage structures of Norwegian politics, even though the high shares of women and public employees indicate potentially emerging cleavage structures. Particularly the women in party positions are disproportionately recruited from the lower ranks of the public job market.

In this research note I shall present a picture of Norwegian party organizational elites. We know of course that these elites will not in important respects mirror the general population. All research on political elites shows a social distortion (Putnam 1976). The more interesting question is how large the social gap is and whether the parties in their elite composition still present us with a picture of the major cleavages in Norwegian politics. One aspect of elite representativeness singled out for particular treatment is the influx of women into the party elites. The data presented here were collected through questionnaires to organizational office holders in all parliamentary parties (1981-1985).¹ In September 1984 the members of the elected national party bodies - usually labelled the central committee (7-23 members) and the national committee (16-51 members) - and the salaried political secretaries at the national headquarters and in the county parties received a mail questionnaire with 243 variables. 390 people in the Norwegian Labour Party (DNA), the Conservative Party (H), the Christian People's Party (Kr. F.), the Centre Party (SP), the Socialist Left Party (SV) and the Liberal Party (V) were approached and by November 318 or 82% had answered. The highest return among these 'national party elites' was achieved for the Christian People's Party with 90%; lowest was the Conservative Party with 74%. During the spring of 1985 these parties held important national congresses

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in preparation for the Storting election of September 1985. The delegates – the ‘middle-level elites’ in politics (Cayrol & Reif, eds. 1986) – also received a questionnaire with identical or equivalent questions. Altogether 1252 delegates were approached and 935 or 75% returned the questionnaire. The representativity of the material was – as far as it was possible to check – very good both for the national and the middle-level elites (Heidar 1985a, Heidar 1985b). In the following I shall – if not otherwise explicitly stated – present the total material, that is the national and the ‘mid-elites’ of the party organizations together (n=1253, 76% of the group approached).

Representativity and Party Democracy

Party representativeness is central to interest articulation and legitimacy in liberal democratic polities.² The theory of democratic party government is based on the premiss of party representativeness. The citizens will in periodic elections be asked to choose between party candidates for public offices and between party/candidate programmes. Two requirements distinguish ‘responsible’ parties from other political groups: They put forward candidates for elections and they offer policies for a broad range of issues within the public domain. The party representatives should represent the electorate in the process of government. But ‘representation’ can clearly mean different things (Pitkin 1967, Birch 1971). In democratic theory it is primarily *interests* that are to be represented, or to be more precise, the interests as seen by people themselves, their views and attitudes, or in other words *their opinions*. As for other characteristics – economic position, occupation, sex, place of residence, race, etc. – the literature is more ambivalent in its appetite for representativeness. Most constitutional arrangements, however, include some form of spatial representativeness. Corporate theories advocate occupational representation. The women’s movement asks for sex quotas. Ethnic and other minorities claim special protection in the form of quotas or other constitutional safeguards. The premiss is that these characteristics are seen as politically important in the sense that attitudes, interests, views will (or ought to) follow from them. In addition, educational reasons are voiced: Group representation at the elite level will *encourage* participation of particular sections of the population and mould the democratic potential of the polity as a whole.

But if majority opinions are the official compass course of democratic systems, why do journalists, political scientists and, most important, the politicians themselves draw attention to social representativeness, to the sex bias, to age and *whatever* is considered important within a particular political setting? We can approach an answer by making a distinction between ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ representativity, the first being the representativity of views, the second the representativity of whatever socio-demographic background characteristics are considered politically relevant by being attributed an *impact* on political views –

present or future. This secondary representativeness is seen to be democratically important for three reasons: It may encourage participation from low-mobilized groups, it may improve the primary representativity of the political system, and it may contribute to system legitimacy.

Why should secondary representativeness improve the representation of views? *First*, the choice put before the voters on election day by the parties and candidates is in practice the choice between a few policy packages. Secondary representativeness makes the future representation of priorities and views not in the forefront of the electoral debates more likely. *Second*, only in exceptionally stable political settings will no major new issue arise *during* the electoral term. *Third*, even in a stable political climate, people do change their minds. *Fourth*, even the most single-minded politician cannot be expected to act out all his electoral promises as he will not be able to foresee or control all possible outcomes with a bearing on these issues. The list could be made longer. The point, however, is that (although important) election day choices on the basis of individually perceived interests cannot be a sufficient base to secure the 'primary' representativeness of a political system. One will also need a 'fair' representation of attributes known to or considered highly likely to be associated with the interests of the electorate.

There are two kinds of counter-arguments to this. First, that people's self-perceived interests ought not to prevail, because they simply don't know their best interests. This is the 'elitist' reaction. The argument has taken many forms but dominant in the post-war tradition has been some version of the Schumpeter thesis that the crux of democracy lies in the electoral choice between competing elites. The incumbent elite will know that their actions will be criticized by an opposition and that their record will be put before the voters in the next election, knowledge that will *force* the elite to give 'due weight' to popular feelings and at the same time keep the voters away from a task they are not fit to carry out – the day-to-day business of government.

The second counter-argument holds that even if the electorate is not presented with all possible combinations of views on election day, the *major* interests and general attitudes toward government – present and future – are enclosed in *party ideologies*. Ideologies are more robust and durable criteria for electoral choice than the volatile issues at electoral times and can be expected to produce more 'representative' elite views in future 'new' situations. It is, however, a long way from the election day voice of the people and – we may add – from party ideologies, to the daily business of politics. But there is also of course an equally hazardous relationship between socio-demographic background characteristics and individual politics. Are factors such as residence, sex, occupation, race, etc. so closely connected to elite political attitudes that increased secondary representativeness will improve the long term representation of political views?³ Could it not be the other way around that demands for secondary representativeness actually might diminish rather than improve the representation of

self-perceived interests?²⁴ Claims for secondary representativeness are certainly not based on the assumption that it will replace periodic elections or ideological 'package' politics, but is rather viewed as a supplement to fill in the details of democratic politics.

These are major issues in debates on the *instrumental* task of channelling majority views into government. But political systems are not judged by their channelling capacities alone. Also ability to integrate the public, to produce a feeling of belongingness and participatory spirit – or in other words the *legitimacy* of political systems – is important. One way to create legitimacy is to make the channels of interest representation work, to secure representativeness of views, to make people feel their interests are presented and considered at the highest political level. But instrumental representativity alone will not suffice. In order to produce *acceptance* of political decisions made, it may be equally important that the decision-maker is 'one of us'. That we know him or some of his colleagues, or can identify with the 'groups' he represents.

The Law of Increasing Disproportion

No political elite has ever socially mirrored the people under its rule. And the higher it has reached in the pyramid of power, the more exclusive the elite. This is a general observation which also has been established in the empirical research on Norwegian political elites (Hellevik 1969, Higley et al. 1976, Heidar 1974, Lægried & Olsen 1978), even though the exclusiveness of elites in a fairly egalitarian society like Norway appears to be less than in most other pluralist societies (Olsen 1983).

Table 1 makes the point anew for the party organizational elites of Norway. In terms of education, occupation and income, the party elites are far from representative of their supporters. According to official statistics, 57% of the population (above 16 years) had no more than 7–9 years at school (Statistisk Årbok 1985), while only 2% of the party politicians had no education beyond the primary school. 42% had, however, been to college/university compared to 11% in the general population. Occupational profiles are no less exclusive. 82% of the party elite held white collar positions, a mere 4% were classified as worker/craftsman. And while 66% of all personal taxpayers earned less than 90,000 kroner in 1982, only 22% of the party leaders earned that little 1–2 years later. Less than 6% earned more than 150,000, while 26% of the party leaders had an income exceeding 170,000.

Turning to the figures for the national party elites alone (not presented here), we find very little difference from the party elites as a whole. The reason, however, for this apparent refutation of the 'general law' of increased exclusiveness, is to be found in the formal rules and recruitment practices established by the parties. These top party bodies are to some extent built on corporate representa-

Table 1. Background Characteristics of the Party Elites. Per cent.

	Labour	Cons.	Christ. P.P.	Centre Party	Social- ist LP	Libe- ral P.	All Parties
1. <i>Sex % male</i>	60	68	58	61	54	53	60
2. <i>Main breadwinner's occupation</i>							
Farmer/fisherman	19	18	45	63	15	28	29
Worker/craftsman	49	9	12	11	35	15	23
White collar (private)	4	16	3	3	10	9	8
White collar (public)	12	11	9	3	11	14	10
Leading job (public)	4	7	6	5	6	6	5
Private business	3	24	11	7	9	12	12
Liberal prof.	2	4	1	3	4	4	3
Other	7	11	13	5	10	12	10
3. <i>Formal education*</i>							
Primary (7-9 years)	42	12	20	19	15	12	21
Secondary/plus (9-15 years)	34	42	39	41	27	31	36
College/university	24	45	41	40	57	56	42
*Does not add up to 100 for all parties due to a few respondents misunderstanding the question							
4. <i>Own occupation</i>							
Leading public job	14	14	17	18	16	20	15
Lower public job	36	18	32	17	44	39	31
Liberal profession	6	18	10	17	12	20	13
Manager/white collar (private)	10	23	13	8	5	7	12
Function, in interest org.*	20	12	11	10	3	3	11
(confer. deleg.)	(8)	(4)	(3)	(4)	(1)	(3)	(4)
Farmer/fisherman	4	6	5	23	7	6	8
Worker/craftsman	7	1	2	2	9	1	4
Other/n.a.	3	8	10	5	4	4	6
*Party employed secretaries are included in the national elite. The percentages for the national conference delegates alone are given in parenthesis (n=921).							
5. <i>Income (1983-84)</i>							
Below 90,000	19	18	23	28	21	29	22
90,000-170,000	54	34	47	43	69	49	49
Above 170,000	24	45	26	24	9	21	26
n.a.	3	4	3	5	1	1	3
N.							
(max)	(289)	(278)	(205)	(156)	(158)	(167)	(1253)
(min)	(271)	(267)	(195)	(144)	(155)	(161)	(1193)

tion – the women's and youth's organization will have their share, and different geographical and social considerations are made.

Norwegian political elites are recruited from the higher social strata. However, women make up 40% of the party elites in Norway, which in a comparative perspective is extremely high – at least outside the Scandinavian setting (Cayrol & Reif, eds., 1986, Haavio-Mannila, ed. 1983). Another fact that perhaps is not so surprising, but nevertheless very indicative of Norwegian politics, is the broad recruitment base of party elites. In terms of 'father's occupation' social background was more varied than present status would lead us to think. More than one half grew up with a father occupied in the primary sector or as a worker/craftsman – 38% had their 'roots' in the white collar culture.

Cleavages in Party Recruitment

Stein Rokkan saw six relatively stable 'cleavage lines' in Norwegian politics – one between the geographical centre and the periphery, three cultural (language, religion, and moral) and two economic cleavages (in the labour market and in the consumer market) (Rokkan 1967, 1970, Valen & Rokkan 1974). Although the political trends of the 1970's and 1980's appear to have weakened these structures (Valen & Aardal 1983, Knutsen 1985), one would still expect to trace them in the background of party elites recruited to their party many years ago. Table 1 makes the point vividly. While 49% in the Labour Party had their social origin in the working class, 63% of the agrarian Centre Party experienced a 'primary-sector socialization'. In the Conservative Party, Høyre, 51% grew up with a father in white collar (private)/leading job in civil service/liberal profession or private business and only 9% had a 'worker/craftsman' background. Although less so, there are also differences in the *present* occupation of the various party elites. We find more workers in Labour and the Left Socialist Party than in other parties, and there are more farmers in the Centre Party and managers/white collar (private) employees in Høyre. But in terms of present occupation there is an additional difference. All parties had a sizable portion of their organizational elite in public jobs. SV and the liberal party had the highest share, while fewer are found in the conservative and agrarian parties. This is not very surprising as the public sector occupied 34% of the work-force in 1984 (Knutsen 1986). The pillar of the post-war state, the Labour Party, had 50% of their central office bearers in state employment. And in Labour an additional 20% were employed within the labour movement, but these figures – for *all* parties – are inflated by the fact that party secretaries are included in the definition of the national party elite. Even so, 8% of the national conference delegates are employed within the movement in the Labour Party, which is twice the figure of the next party.

Turning to education we find – not surprisingly (Heidar 1974, Haaversen-Westhassel 1984) – that the Labour elite has less formal education than the

Conservative elite. But we also find that the two parties most closely tied to the 'meritocracy' were the left socialists and the liberals. And the highest salaried elite group was in the Conservative Party. Although the relationship between socio-economic variables and party choice has weakened in the electorate, it is still apparent at the level of the party elites.

Women in Party Politics

40% of the party organizational elites were women, an extraordinary rise from their rather modest presence before 1970. At the Labour congress in 1961 13% of all delegates were women. This change is partly due to changes in party statutes: Three parties have now quotas for party offices (Labour, Left Socialist Party and the Liberals). But also parties without such arrangements now have a much higher share of women at all levels than a decade ago. This formidable entry of a new group into politics has naturally stirred public as well as professional interest – both in terms of 'why?' and 'so what?' (Kirkpatrick 1976, Haavio-Mannila 1983, Hellevik & Skard 1985).

Both the reasons why and the question of consequences, however, depend in part on whether this increased group representation actually changes the composition of the elite on any other dimension than sex. Sex in itself may, of course, carry significant political loadings, but do changing sex ratios also lead to other changes in socio-demographic characteristics? In Table 2 on the background of women in party elites, there are few differences from the picture presented for the elite as a whole. By and large the women's background matches that of the men; they reproduce the social cleavages rather than change them. Labour women have to a greater extent a working class background, the women in the Christian People's Party and the Centre Party come disproportionately from the primary sector. The educational level of the party women is somewhat lower than the men's – fewer are educated at colleges and universities. Most interestingly, however, 48% of the women in party elites had a job in the lower echelons of the public sector – in the schools, the social services, the health sector, etc. In four parties more than half the women worked in this intermediate and lower public sector. Only 20% of the men had a similar job. The men, however, were more likely to hold *leading* jobs in the public sector. Why is the female party elite disproportionately recruited from the public sector? And from a particular level of that sector? Regarding the latter question, different age profiles cannot explain the level at which they are working. In fact the data show that there are virtually no age differences between the groups. The reasons why both men and women are drawn disproportionately from the ranks of the state employed have not been fully elucidated, although the guess that state employment may give better opportunities for political work than most jobs in the private sector is possibly not

Table 2. Background Characteristics of Women in the Party Elites. Per cent.

	Labour	Cons.	Christ. P.P.	Centre Party	Social- ist LP	Libe- ral P.	All Parties
<i>1. Main breadwinner's occupation</i>							
Farmer/fisherman	16	11	44	53	15	28	26
Worker/craftsman	46	13	11	10	31	13	22
White collar (private)	5	16	4	9	7	8	8
White collar (public)	12	6	12	5	14	15	11
Leading job (public)	5	7	5	5	8	8	6
Private business	5	26	10	10	11	11	12
Liberal prof.	2	7	1	3	6	4	4
Other	9	14	13	5	8	13	11
<i>2. Formal education*</i>							
Primary (7-9 years)	40	14	22	27	10	10	22
Secondary/plus (9-15 years)	41	57	45	32	38	35	42
College/university	20	28	33	41	52	54	36
*Does not add up to 100 for all parties due to a few respondents misunderstanding the question							
<i>3. Own occupation</i>							
Leading public job	6	4	3	11	10	7	6
Lower public job	51	29	50	32	63	53	48
Liberal profession	5	11	8	18	4	20	10
Manager/white collar (private)	10	29	6	6	7	8	12
Function. in interest org.*	15	10	8	7	4	3	8
Farmer/fisherman	7	0	1	11	3	0	3
Worker/craftsman	1	0	1	2	1	0	1
Other/n.a.	5	18	23	13	8	9	11
*Party employed secretaries are included in the national elite.							
<i>4. Income (1983-84)</i>							
Below 90,000	37	26	44	40	24	35	34
90,000-170,000	45	39	44	43	71	53	49
Above 170,000	14	26	7	5	4	11	12
n.a.	4	9	5	12	1	1	5
<i>N.</i>							
(max)	(115)	(88)	(86)	(60)	(72)	(79)	(500)
(min)	(106)	(83)	(79)	(55)	(71)	(75)	(469)

far off the mark. As for the very high share of women with this background it may also be that state employment makes it less difficult to combine professional work, political interests and a family. Searching along this line in Table 3, however, there is no great difference in parental obligations. Half the party elites have

Table 3. Party Elite with Children under 18 Years of Age According to Party and Sex. Per cent.

	Labour		Cons.		Christ. P.P.		Centre Party		Social- ist LP		Libe- ral P.		All Parties	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
No children below 18	36	50	49	54	36	51	53	41	38	31	52	41	44	46
Yes, but none below 7	41	36	34	37	35	33	27	45	34	38	27	39	34	37
Yes, at least one below 7	23	14	17	9	29	16	20	14	28	31	21	20	22	17
(n) M	(125)		(137)		(75)		(55)		(65)		(66)		(523)	
(n) F	(95)		(76)		(70)		(42)		(55)		(66)		(404)	

one or more children below 18 years. There are differences between the parties, but not immediately transparent ones. In structural terms, then, only the public-private dimension survives this exploratory effort to find emerging cleavages in the wake of the massive entry of women into party office-holding positions.

Assertions that the 'new' political women are generally young and belong to the educational elite do not hold for the party elites present at the national conferences. But are women as well integrated into party organizational work as their male counterparts? Do they have an easier way to the top than the men? Are they transient party workers or do they plan to stay on? Table 4 suggests that the changing composition of the party organizational elites is not unwarranted. Women spend slightly less time on political work during a 'typical' week – probably due to the fact that they hold fewer public positions than the men. We also find in all parties – although most notably in the Christian People's Party and the Liberal Party – a group of men with conference experience not matched by the women. But considering the rather recent entry of women into the party political elites, there are remarkably few differences in party involvement and activities. As for their plans for future political activity, we also see that women are slightly more inclined to plan an increase in their political involvement. Table 4 also shows a difference between the sexes in their 'involvement profiles'. When asked about whether there were particular political questions that interested them or whether they took an interest in most areas under political discussion, 58% of the men came out as 'generalists', while 58% of the women were self-placed sector-politicians. One can of course debate whether this really is a big difference, but it holds for all parties and fits well an image of 'new-comers' to politics – mobilized through particular issues and not yet(?) generalized through political practice.

Table 4. Party Activities and Interest Profiles of Party Elites According to Party and Sex. Per cent.

	Labour		Cons.		Christ. P.P.		Centre Party		Social-ist LP		Libe-ral P.		All Parties	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1. Time used for political work during a 'typical' week.														
Up to 10 hrs.	31	40	36	38	41	59	44	55	65	74	71	65	45	53
Over 10 hrs.	69	60	64	62	59	41	56	45	35	26	29	35	55	47
2. Delegate to national conference before?*														
Never	52	55	31	34	30	42	48	43	58	66	30	38	40	47
Once	22	31	25	22	21	19	32	27	26	21	19	25	24	24
2-4 times	16	11	16	26	25	32	9	20	11	13	23	26	17	21
More than 4	10	3	28	18	24	7	11	10	5	0	28	11	19	8
*Only data from the delegates survey														
3. Plans for future political activity														
Greater act.	12	18	17	25	10	17	10	17	17	20	8	16	13	19
Same as now	63	62	57	52	64	53	53	55	61	64	61	54	60	57
Reduced act.	25	20	26	23	26	30	37	28	22	16	31	30	27	24
4. Self-placed political generalists or interested in particular policy areas														
Generalists	66	49	56	36	56	35	62	46	52	37	52	45	58	42
Part. areas	34	51	44	64	44	65	38	54	48	63	48	55	42	58

*The n in these tables are for all parties in the combined national and mid-level elites; max (M)=725, min (M)=663 and max(F)=482, min(F)=471. For the delegate table (2) n(M)=520, n(F)=399.

Conclusions

Representativity is essential to a national party democracy. Primarily of course the representation of views, but also representativity in terms of residence, biological and social characteristics are asked for. First, in order to secure a broader and more durable representativity of views – i.e. to improve the representativity produced by electoral choice on the basis of campaign issues. Second, to build political legitimacy and, third, to provide participatory incentives to modestly involved groups.

The empirical analysis of the 'national' and 'middle-level' elites of the party organizations reveals, as expected, that we are also dealing with a *social* elite. The elite as a whole has nevertheless a broad social background as measured by father's occupation. In fact, these different milieus for primary political socialization reflect well traditional cleavages in Norwegian politics. There is, on the other

hand, a comparatively high proportion of women in the Norwegian party elites. A new and obviously important dimension is also present in the private-public distinction. The public sector is heavily represented in the elites of party politics. And perhaps even more interesting is the fact that so many women are found in the lower public category *regardless* of party.

Several questions arise from the growth of women and public employees in the party elites. How will it effect the politicians' ability to reflect majority opinions? What are the effects on political mobilization of different groups in society and on the legitimacy of the political system as a whole? How is the system of corporate interest representation effected? Are sex and public vs. private employment supplements or substitutions to the traditional cleavage lines of Norwegian politics? This focus on 'representative' party democracy highlights the need for more firmly based answers.

NOTES

1. With the exception of the Progress Party - *Fremskrittspartiet* - which held 4 (out of 155) parliamentary seats in the Storting 1981-1985 and in the present term holds 2 (out of 157) seats. The party which is a free market, anti-tax party, ordinarily found to the right of the conservatives, did not wish to take part in the project. The Liberal Party - *Venstre* - which had 2 parliamentarians in the previous Storting (1981-1985) but is now without representation is, however, included.
2. Many works could be referred to at this point. A rather selective list would include King 1969, Rose 1974, Berger 1979, Butler et al. 1981, Pizzorno 1981, von Beyme 1985.
3. There is a large literature on this subject which I shall not go into. It is, however, quite clear that the causal chain between background and political opinions at the elite level is both long and complicated (Eulau & Czudnowski 1976).
4. This has been a central point in much resistance towards quotas. Consider, e.g., the American debate on the Democrat McGovern-Fraser Commission (Kirkpatrick 1976).

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hand, a comparatively high proportion of women in the Norwegian party elites. A new and obviously important dimension is also present in the private-public distinction. The public sector is heavily represented in the elites of party politics. And perhaps even more interesting is the fact that so many women are found in the lower public category *regardless* of party.

Several questions arise from the growth of women and public employees in the party elites. How will it effect the politicians' ability to reflect majority opinions? What are the effects on political mobilization of different groups in society and on the legitimacy of the political system as a whole? How is the system of corporate interest representation effected? Are sex and public vs. private employment supplements or substitutions to the traditional cleavage lines of Norwegian politics? This focus on 'representative' party democracy highlights the need for more firmly based answers.

NOTES

1. With the exception of the Progress Party - *Fremskrittspartiet* - which held 4 (out of 155) parliamentary seats in the Storting 1981-1985 and in the present term holds 2 (out of 157) seats. The party which is a free market, anti-tax party, ordinarily found to the right of the conservatives, did not wish to take part in the project. The Liberal Party - *Venstre* - which had 2 parliamentarians in the previous Storting (1981-1985) but is now without representation is, however, included.
2. Many works could be referred to at this point. A rather selective list would include King 1969, Rose 1974, Berger 1979, Butler et al. 1981, Pizzorno 1981, von Beyme 1985.
3. There is a large literature on this subject which I shall not go into. It is, however, quite clear that the causal chain between background and political opinions at the elite level is both long and complicated (Eulau & Czudnowski 1976).
4. This has been a central point in much resistance towards quotas. Consider, e.g., the American debate on the Democrat McGovern-Fraser Commission (Kirkpatrick 1976).

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