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Norway: Political Developments and Data in 2020

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Introduction

As in most countries, 2020 in Norway was dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Besides the pandemic, the most important political event was that the right-wing populist party, the Progress Party/*Fremskrittspartiet* (Frp), left government. The party entered government for the first time in 2013 in a coalition led by the Conservative Party/*Høyre* (H) Erna Solberg, and left government after seven years in 2020 due to a disagreement about bringing home a so-called Islamic State (IS) woman and her two children.

Election report

There was no election in Norway in 2020

Cabinet report

In January 2020, Norway's Cabinet consisted of a coalition of four political parties that together had a majority in *Stortinget* (Parliament). The coalition was led by Prime Minister Erna Solberg of the Conservatives, and it included the right-wing populist Progress Party, as well as two centrist parties: the Liberal Party/*Venstre* (V) and the Christian Democratic Party/*Kristelig Folkeparti* (Krf). On 24 January, the Progress Party decided to withdraw from the governing coalition (see below), and PM Solberg formed a new government consisting of the three remaining coalition partners.

Parliament report

There were some minor changes in the composition of Parliament in 2020, mainly due to MPs from the Progress Party returning to Parliament. The gender balance increased somewhat, from 41 per cent to 44 per cent, due to the Progress Party returning female ministers to the *Stortinget* at the expense of male temporary deputies, but also changes in the three other governing parties increased the proportion of women in the *Stortinget*.

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Political party report

Liberal Party leader Trine Skei Grande resigned and was replaced by new leader Guri Melby. The Green Party/*Miljøpartiet De Grønne* (MGD) changed its leadership from having two 'spokespeople' to having an actual party leader, like the rest of Norway's major political parties. Une Bastholm became leader in 2020.

Institutional change report

There were no major institutional changes in 2020.

Issues in national politics

At the beginning of 2020, Norway's Cabinet consisted of four political parties that together had a majority in the *Stortinget* (Parliament). The governing coalition was led by Prime Minister Erna Solberg of the Conservatives, and it included the right-wing populist Progress Party, as well as two centrist parties: the Liberals and the Christian Democrats. The centre-right gained a majority in Parliament in 2013 and retained a slimmer majority in the 2017 election. After two different constellations of minority governments, it was not until January of 2019 that all four parties were included in a coalition. Tensions in the coalition were obvious throughout 2019 (Bergh and Karlsen 2020), especially between the two centrist parties, on the one hand, and the Progress Party, on the other.

Immigration policy is one issue where the strains within the coalition were particularly stark. It is a defining issue for the Progress Party, which consistently advocates for a stricter immigration policy, whereas the two centrist parties hold more liberal views. In January 2020, the government faced a decision over whether to bring home a woman who had been a part of the so-called Islamic State (IS) in Syria. The woman, a Norwegian national of Pakistani origin, was charged with terrorism offenses by the Norwegian authorities. She had her children with her in the refugee camp, one of whom was said to be in need of healthcare. A decision was made to bring the woman and her children to Norway, over the dissent of the Progress Party. As a result of that decision, and internal deliberations within the party, the Progress Party decided to withdraw from the governing coalition.

On 24 January, Prime Minister Solberg formed a new government of the three remaining coalition partners. This was a unique event in Norwegian parliamentary history: that a party withdrew from a governing coalition, but the remainder of the coalition continued to govern. This unique circumstance was made possible by the fact that the Progress Party was unwilling to support a centre-left government. By default, therefore, Solberg's government had the backing of a majority in Parliament.[1] The three-party minority government retained power throughout 2020, and was soon faced with handling the Covid-19 pandemic.

As the pandemic spread around the world, and cases were also discovered in Norway, the government implemented unprecedented lockdown measures on 12 March. As in most countries, the rest of the political year was dominated by the pandemic. The swift lockdown and the population's broad adherence to measures, such as social distancing and working

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from home, led to a rapid decline in infections. Support for the sitting government, and Prime Minister Solberg rose according to public opinion polls at the time.

The first few months of the pandemic saw limited political debate in Norway. The government was in charge of both the handling of the pandemic and various economic stimulus packages. There was some discussion and involvement of Parliament in the passing of economic stimuli. Due to Norway's large oil revenues and the 'oil fund' (The Government Pension Fund Global), the government has ample resources to stimulate the economy and to support businesses that were harmed by lockdown, without any deficit spending.

While Norway was hit with a second wave of infections in the fall, and lockdown measures were lifted, reinstated and adjusted countless times in 2020, the general consensus was that the country was successful at weathering the storm. The numbers of infections, hospitalizations and deaths were lower than in most European countries. Voters generally gave the government a positive evaluation of the handling of the pandemic, according to surveys.

Most other political issues received far less attention in 2020 than they would in an ordinary year. There were anti-racism demonstrations in June as part of the global Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. There was some debate in September about bringing refugees to Norway from the refugee camp on the Greek island of Lesbos. Support for the Center Party rose substantially in the polls toward the end of the year. The party, which traditionally represents rural interests, was successful in criticizing the government for various reforms that were seen as taking power and services away from local communities. These arguments seemed to have some sway over voters even during the pandemic.

Note

1. There is no explicit parliamentary vote of confidence when a new government is formed. This is sometimes referred to as 'negative parliamentarianism'; governments are not 'voted in', but they can be voted out by a majority in Parliament.

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Table 1. Cabinet composition of Solberg III in Norway in 2020

Duration of Cabinet	Inception	22 January 2019	Dissolution	24 January 2020
Period covered by table	From	1 January 2020	Until	24 January 2020
Type of Cabinet	Minimum Winning Coalition			

A.	Party/gender composition on 1 January 2020			Seats in Cabinet		Seats held by women		Seats in Parliament	
				N	%	*N*	% of party	*N*	%
	Conservative Party	*Høyre*	(H)	9	40.9%	4	44.4%	45	26.6%
	Progress Party	*Fremskrittspartiet*	(Frp)	7	31.8%	3	42.9%	27	16.0%
	Liberal Party	*Venstre*	(V)	3	13.6%	2	66.7%	8	4.7%
	Christian Democratic Party	*Kristelig Folkeparti*	(Krf)	3	13.6%	1	33.3%	8	4.7%
	Totals			22	99.9%	10	45.5%	88	52.0%

B.	Composition of Solberg III Cabinet on 1 January 2020
	See previous editions of the *Political Data Yearbook* for Norway or http://politicaldatayearbook.com

C.	Changes in composition of Solberg III Cabinet during 2020	Outgoing minister	Outgoing date	Incoming minister	Comments
	Ministerial title				
	None				

D.	Party/gender composition on 24 January 2020			Seats in Cabinet		Seats held by women		Seats in Parliament	
				N	%	*N*	% of party	*N*	%
	Conservative Party	*Høyre*	(H)	9	40.9%	4	44.4%	45	26.6%
	Progress Party	*Fremskrittspartiet*	(Frp)	7	31.8%	3	42.9%	27	16.0%
	Liberal Party	*Venstre*	(V)	3	13.6%	2	66.7%	8	4.7%
	Christian Democratic Party	*Kristelig Folkeparti*	(Krf)	3	13.6%	1	33.3%	8	4.7%
	Totals			22	99.9%	10	45.5%	88	52.0%

Source: regjeringen.no, Norwegian government's website, 2021.

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Table 2. Cabinet composition of Solberg IV in Norway in 2020

Duration of Cabinet	Inception	24 January 2020	Dissolution	Still in office at the end of the year
Period covered by table	From	24 January 2020	Until	31 December 2020
Type of Cabinet	Minority Coalition			

A. Party/gender composition on 24 January 2020

			Seats in Cabinet		Seats held by women		Seats in Parliament	
			N	%	*N*	% of party	*N*	%
Conservative Party	*Høyre*	(H)	12	60.0%	5	41.7%	45	26.6%
Liberal Party	*Venstre*	(V)	4	20.0%	2	50.0%	8	4.7%
Christian Democratic Party	*Kristelig Folkeparti*	(Krf)	4	20.0%	1	25.0%	8	4.7%
Totals			20	100.0%	8	40.00%	61	36.00%

B. Composition of Solberg IV Cabinet on Cabinet inception date 24 January 2020

Ministerial Title		Minister				
Prime Minister	*Statsministerens kontor*	Erna	Solberg	1961	Female	H
Minister of Finance	*Finansdepartementet*	Jan Tore	Sanner	1965	Male	H
Minister of Culture and Equality	*Kulturdepartementet*	Abid	Raja	1975	Male	V
Minister of Education and Integration	*Kunnskapsdepartementet*	Trine Skei	Grande	1969	Female	V
Minister of Agriculture and Food	*Landbruks- og matdepartmentet*	Olaug	Bollestad	1961	Female	Krf
Minister of Local Government and Modernisation	*Kommunal- og moderniseringsdepartementet*	Nikolai	Astrup	1978	Male	H
Minister of Health and Care Services	*Helse- og omsorgsdepartementet*	Bent	Høie	1971	Male	H
Minister of Foreign Affairs	*Utenriksdepartementet*	Ine Eriksen	Søreide	1976	Female	H
Minister of Justice and Public Security	*Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet*	Monica	Mæland	1968	Female	H
Minister of Trade and Industry	*Nærings- og fiskeridepartementet*	Iselin	Nybø	1981	Female	V
Minister of Fisheries and Seafood	*Nærings- og fiskeridepartementet*	Geir-Inge	Sivertsen	1965	Male	H
Minister of Labour and Social Affairs	*Arbeids- og sosialdepartementet*	Torbjørn Røe	Isaksen	1978	Male	H

Minister of Defence	*Forsvarsdepartementet*	Frank	Bakke-Jensen	1965	Male	H
Minister of Children and Families	*Barne- og familiedepartementet*	Kjell Ingolf	Ropstad	1985	Male	Krf
Minister of Transport	*Samferdselsdepartementet*	Knut Arild	Hareide	1972	Male	Krf
Minister of Petroleum and Energy	*Olje- og energidepartementet*	Tina	Bruu	1986	Female	H
Minister of Climate and Environment	*Klima- og miljødepartementet*	Sveinung	Rotevatn	1987	Male	V
Minister of Regional Development and Digitalisation	*Kommunal- og moderniseringsdepartementet*	Linda Hofstad	Helleland	1977	Female	H
Minister of Research and Higher Education	*Kunnskapsdepartementet*	Henrik	Asheim	1983	Male	H
Minister of International Development	*Utenriksdepartementet*	Dag-Inge	Ulstein	1980	Male	Krf

C. Changes in composition of Solberg IV Cabinet during 2020

Ministerial title	Outgoing minister					Outgoing date	Incoming minister					Comments
Minister of Fisheries and Seafood	*Nærings- og fiskeridepartementet*	Geir-Inge	Sivertsen	1965	Male H	2 March 2020	Odd Emil	Ingebrigtsen	1964	Male	H	Resignation. Incoming date: 13 March 2020
Minister of Education and Integration	*Kunnskapsdepartementet*	Trine Skei	Grande	1969	Female V	13 March 2020	Guri	Melby	1981	Female	V	Resignation

D.

Party/gender composition on 31 December 2020			Seats in Cabinet		Seats held by women		Seats in Parliament	
			N	%	*N*	% of party	*N*	%
Conservative Party	*Høyre*	(H)	12	60.0%	5	41.7%	45	26.6%
Liberal Party	*Venstre*	(V)	4	20.0%	2	50.0%	8	4.7%
Christian Democratic Party	*Kristelig Folkeparti*	(Krf)	4	20.0%	1	25.0%	8	4.7%
Totals			20	100.0%	8	40.0%	61	0.0%

Source: regjeringen.no, Norwegian government's website, 2021.

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Table 3. Party and gender composition of *Stortinget* in Norway in 2020

			1 January 2020				31 December 2020			
			All		Women		All		Women	
Party			*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
The Red Party	*Rødt*	(R)	1	0.6%	0	0.0%	1	0.6%	0	0.0%
Socialist Red Party	*Sosialistisk Venstreparti*	(SV)	11	6.5%	4	36.4%	11	6.5%	4	36.4%
Labour Party	*Arbeiderpartiet*	(Ap)	49	29.0%	24	49.0%	49	29.0%	24	49.0%
Centre Party	*Senterpartiet*	(Sp)	19	11.2%	10	52.6%	19	11.2%	10	52.6%
Christian Democratic Party	*Kristelig Folkeparti*	(KrF)	8	4.7%	2	25.0%	8	4.7%	3	37.5%
Liberal Party	*Venstre*	(V)	8	4.7%	1	12.5%	8	4.7%	2	25.0%
Conservative Party	*Høyre*	(H)	45	26.6%	23	51.1%	45	26.6%	24	53.3%
Progress Party	*Fremskrittspartiet*	(FrP)	27	16.0%	5	18.5%	27	16.0%	7	25.9%
Green Party	*Miljøpartiet De Grønne*	(MDG)	1	0.6%	1	100.0%	1	0.6%	1	100.0%
Totals			169	100.0%	70	41.4%	169	100.0%	75	44.4%

Notes: The gender balance was slightly higher at the end of 2020 as a result of the insertion of Solberg IV as well as changes in the composition of Solberg IV. One of the Progress Party's male representatives, Ulf Leirstein, resigned from the party in 2019 and now sits as an independent. The Progress Party's parliamentary group therefore consists only of 26 representatives.
Source: www.stortinget.no, Norwegian Parliament's website, 2021.

Table 4. Changes in political parties in Norway in 2020

A.	Party institutional changes in 2020														
	Partiet Sentrum		became an officially registered political party on 14 October		under the leadership of		Geir	Lippestad	1964	Male	The party was started by former Christian Democratic politicians, as well as Geir Lippestad, a former Oslo Vice Mayor of the Labour Party				
B.	Party leadership changes in 2020														
	Green Party	MDG	Spokesperson	Arild	Hermstad	1966	male	After switching its leadership model from two spokespersons to one party leader, former spokesperson Une Bastholm was elected party leader, while former spokesperson Arild Hermstad was elected deputy party leader	25 April 2020	replaced by Une	Bastholm	1986	female	MDG	
	Liberal Party	V	Party leader	Trine Skei	Grande	1969	female	Resigned	26 September 2020	replaced by Guri	Melby	1981	female	V	

Note: The Green Party switched its leadership model at the same time of the party leader election. One of the two former spokespersons, Une Bastholm. was elected party leader.
Sources: The Brønnøysund Register Centre, and the Green Party's and the Liberal Party's websites. 2020.

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