

Chapter 5

Media and politics in Norway

Eli Skogerbø & Rune Karlsen

Abstract

This chapter discusses the development of the Norwegian political and media systems. Norway is a small, stable, established welfare democracy characterised by a constitutional monarchy, unitary structure, parliamentary government, proportional representation election system, multiparty politics, and coalition governments. The main characteristics of the media system are that it is digital and “hybrid”, as literally all legacy media (television, broadcasting, newspapers – national, regional, and local) are produced, distributed, and consumed on multiple platforms. In this chapter, we discuss Norwegian political communication research, emphasising the dominating theoretical strands that can be singled out for this particular national research community: election communication, social media and politics, political journalism, public-sphere studies, and studies of political rhetoric. In conclusion, we discuss some future challenges related to developments in the political sphere and media environment, highlighting disruptive changes in the media and new political issues.

Keywords: Norway, political system, media system, political communication, Nordic countries

Introduction

In 2020, Norway can be described as a digital society. News media, public administration, and civic organisations have implemented digital services that are available on the Internet and on mobile platforms and used by a large majority of the citizens. Political actors such as parties, organisations, media, and journalists are seasoned users and producers of digital political news and social media, well versed in the still existing media logics, and exploit the options of the hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2017).

This chapter takes these observations as a starting point and introduces the structures and factors of Norwegian political communications by covering four main features. First, we describe the main features of the political and

media systems. Then we discuss the different aspects of Norwegian political communication research, and finally we address future challenges related to developments in the political sphere and media environment.

We start by outlining the main institutions and actors within the Norwegian political system, pointing to the increasing number of political parties that have gained representation in parliament and the growing amount of political actors that influence agenda-setting and policy-making. Then the media system is outlined and discussed. Norway is a clear example of a public media system with a strong public service institution: the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK). NRK has maintained its position into the digital age in combination with other privately owned and funded local and nationwide broadcasters and newspapers, most of which have grown into multiplatform news providers. We see major shifts in the distribution and consumption patterns of all types of media content, creating clearer sociodemographic divides in audiences than were the case some decades ago. Further, we outline what we regard as some main strands of theories that have been applied in political communication research (Ihlen et al., 2015), most importantly institutional perspectives on media and politics. Among these are the mediatisation perspective (Lundby, 2009) and its forerunners (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Asp, 1986; Hernes, 1977). Other, and related, perspectives are those tied to election research, political journalism, lobbying, and rhetoric. Within these fields we find studies from several different disciplines, such as media studies, political science, sociology, social anthropology, history, and rhetoric. Throughout the chapter, we point to practices and research that distinguish Norway from Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, and Finland.

The political system

Norway is a small, stable, established welfare democracy, characterised by a constitutional monarchy, unitary structure, parliamentary government, proportional representation election system, multiparty politics, and coalition governments (Lijphart, 2013). Like Iceland and Finland, Norway has a colonial past and a rather short history as an independent state. Independence dates from 1905, when the union with Sweden was peacefully dissolved, but a separate constitution was already in place from 1814, written in a short interlude after the Napoleonic wars when Norway was transferred from Denmark to Sweden. The Swedish king recognised most parts of the constitution and allowed for extensive and increasing Norwegian self-governance, parliamentary government (from 1884), and a comparatively strong system of local governance to be set up prior to independence (Myhre, 2015).

In terms of political communication, a rather interesting point is that the Constitution Day, 17 May, has grown into a world-famous folk festival and

media event. The 17 May celebrations attract hundreds of thousands of locals and tourists all over the country who watch the children's parades and listen to speeches about the value of democratic government, rule of law, and freedom of speech. As a media event, 17 May is on all channels, from NRK's multichannel broadcasts that cover both the capital and smaller municipalities throughout the entire country, to social media posts and local and hyperlocal newspaper coverage. Within the Nordic countries, this massive celebration of the democratic political system is unique to Norway, and in Anderson's (2006) now famous phrase, a specific marking of the "imagined community" that the Norwegian polity rests on. The Norwegian population is – historically and currently – multilingual and multiethnic, with a dominant Norwegian-speaking majority, a small indigenous population (the Sámi), and, like the other Nordic countries, several other small "national" minorities. Over the past five decades, immigration from non-Nordic countries has increased, and thereby also the number of cultural and religious minorities, creating a diverse, multilingual, and multicultural society.

Economically and industrially, Norway stands out from the other Nordic countries as a major producer of oil and gas. The petroleum industry employs – directly and indirectly – around 170,000 people. The main political impact of the oil industry, however, can be found in the Government Pension Fund Act, which manages the popularly termed "Oil Fund", which ensures long-term management of the petroleum industry's public revenues for future generations. The Oil Fund was established in 1996 and rested on a long-term political consensus that the oil industry should be regulated to secure Norwegian interests in the resources and revenues. In 2019, the fund reached a value of NOK10 billion (Norges Bank, 2020), and is a major asset for Norwegian governments for securing and financing the welfare state, mitigating crises, and for international investment. Increasingly and expectedly the policies and investments in the petroleum industry are causing political conflicts, as it contributes to emissions from fossil fuels and climate problems.

Governance and representative systems

Unlike Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, Norway is not a member of the European Union. Nevertheless, it is, together with Iceland (and Liechtenstein) included in the European Single Market through the European Economic Area Agreement, meaning that European legislation and regulation concerning all matters – including free movement of goods, services, labour, and capital – are either directly or indirectly included in Norwegian law and regulation. In the media and communications sector, this includes regulations concerning audiovisual services, e-commerce, telecommunications, privacy, and many other related areas. Like the other Nordic countries, Norway is a member of the

European Council and has implemented the European Convention on Human Rights into their constitution.

The parliament, the Storting, has 169 members, elected for four-year periods. The electoral system is based on proportional representation, a closed-list system, and a modified Sainte-Laguë formula that has been in use since the 1950s. The 19 constituencies were, until 2017, identical to the country regions, and district magnitude (the number of seats from a district) ranges from 4 to 20. Despite recent regional reforms, the constituencies will be kept as they were in 2017 until 2025 (Regjeringen, 2020).

Over the second half of the twentieth century, a series of electoral reforms, aimed at greater proportionality in representation, were implemented. A pool of national second-tier seats were introduced, and from the 2005 election, the number of adjustment seats was 19, equalling the number of county constituencies. Parties must obtain 4 per cent of the national vote to be eligible for adjustment seats. The overall partisan proportionality has been enhanced since the introduction of the adjustment seats (Aardal, 2011).

In national parliamentary elections, which take place on a Monday in September every four years, it is in practice not possible for voters to change the ranking of the candidates on the party list, as it requires a high share of voters making the exact same changes. Moreover, political parties recruit candidates for parliament through nomination processes in which local branch delegates meet at county nomination conventions to finalise the list. Recently, however, there has been a tendency for some county party branches to open their nomination process to allow greater participation by registered party members (Narud, 2008). Still, decentralised decision-making remains the norm in Norway, making the county party branches the decisive arena for parliamentary nominations (Valen et al., 2002). Hence, candidate selection procedures – in combination with the absence of preferential voting – leave parties with considerable control over parliamentary nominations. The Norwegian case may thus be regarded as more party-controlled than its Nordic neighbours (Narud et al., 2002; see also Hopmann & Karlsen, Chapter 11).

Local and regional elections also take place every four years between parliamentary elections and return representatives to the (from 2020) 356 municipal and 10 regional councils. In practice, this arrangement means that Norwegian voters experience election campaigns in September every two years. Voters choose between parties listing pre-ranked candidates. In local and regional elections, the regulation allows for preference voting and to some extent results in changes in the ranking of candidates. Election campaign periods are in practice divided into long-term (6–12 months before an election) and the intense short-term (the last four weeks before election day) election campaign periods, for both national and local elections (Aardal et al., 2004).

From 1989, the Sámi Parliament, the representative body for the Sámi population, is elected on the same day as the national parliament. It has 39 members representing seven constituencies covering the entire country. The Sámi Parliament was established by constitutional amendments and has consultative powers and may consider any issue it considers relevant (Josefsen et al., 2017; see also Josefsen & Skogerbø, Chapter 10).

The parties

The multiparty system originates from what Rokkan (1967) called cross-cutting social and political cleavages in Norwegian society. As in Denmark and Finland, the Nordic five-party model yielded to a more fragmented party system long ago. Placed from the political left to the political right, nine parties were represented in parliament in 2020: the Red Party (R), the Socialist Left Party (SV), the Labour Party (A), the Green Party (MDG), the Centre Party (Sp), the Christian Democrats (KrF), the Liberal Party (V), the Conservative Party (H), and the Progress Party (FrP).

Norway's first two political parties, the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, were formed in 1884. They grew out of the territorial and cultural cleavages between the centre and the periphery. The Conservative Party eventually became the party for the growing group of industrial leaders and other business people and has always balanced conservative values against liberal business values (Heidar & Saglie, 2002). The Labour Party, founded in 1887, was based in the labour movement and became increasingly central to Norwegian democratic politics throughout the twentieth century. The party sat with a majority in the Storting from 1945 to 1961 and was central to the development of the welfare state. The Christian Democrats was founded in 1933 and has its roots in lay Christianity, a movement that to some degree was in opposition to the state church, whereas the party in recent decades considers itself a general Christian democratic party (Heidar & Saglie, 2002). The Centre Party was formed in 1921 under the name of the Farmer Party and has particularly defended primary and district interests in Norwegian politics (Heidar & Saglie, 2002). The Socialist Left Party (first as the Socialist People's Party) was formed in 1958 based on a major disagreement within the Labour Party regarding the NATO issue. The party is to the left of the Labour Party (E. Allern et al., 2016), and obtained issue ownership on the environmental issue (Heidar & Saglie, 2002). The Red Party has its roots in old Norwegian communist parties and was formed in 2007 through a merger of the Workers' Communist Party and the Red Electoral Alliance. The Progress Party was formed in 1973 on the basis of a protest movement against high taxes and fees. The party is considered a populist right party and has since the 1980s profiled itself as a party opposing immigration. Recently, the environmental Green Party finally had its parliamentary breakthrough and

added to the plethora of Norwegian parties. Table 5.1 gives an overview of the electoral success of the political parties since 2005.

Table 5.1 Election results and voter turnout (per cent), and governments, 2005–2017

	2005	2009	2013	2017
Red Party (Red Electoral Alliance) ^a	1.2	1.3	1.1	2.4
Socialist Left Party	8.8	6.2	4.1	6.0
Labour Party	32.7	35.4	30.8	27.4
Centre Party	6.5	6.2	5.5	10.3
Green Party	– ^b	0.3	2.8	3.2
Christian Democrats	6.8	5.5	5.6	4.2
Liberal Party	5.9	3.9	5.2	4.4
Conservative Party	14.1	17.2	26.8	25.0
Progress Party	22.1	22.9	16.3	15.2
Others	1.9	0.9	1.6	1.8
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Voter turnout	77.1	76.0	78.2	78.3
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Parties in government	Labour+ Centre+ Socialist Left	Labour+ Centre+ Socialist Left	Conservative+ Progress	Conservative+ Progress+ Liberal+ Christian Democratic ^c

^a The Red Electoral Alliance dissolved in 2007 and was reorganised into the Red Party in the same year.

^b The Green Party is included in Others.

^c The Liberal Party joined in January 2018 and the Christian Democratic Party in January 2019. The Progress Party left in January 2020.

Source: Valgresultat.no, 2018; Bjørklund, 2005

Turnout in Norwegian national elections dropped somewhat in the late 1980s, but on average, more than three-fourths (about 77%) of the Norwegian electorate participate in parliamentary elections. As discussed in Chapter 11 (Hopmann & Karlsen), this is a comparatively high turnout level, but still somewhat lower than Sweden and Denmark.

The traditional left-right conflicts, such as jobs, taxation, welfare issues, health, and education, continue to be important in each election (Bergh & Karlsen, 2019), but other issues have been instrumental in changing the party system. These changes reflect both sociodemographic changes in the electorate as well as changing conflict patterns. As mentioned above, increased importance of climate and environmental issues has opened for the Green Party. Issues concerning immigration or refugee and asylum politics have been returning

to the political agenda since the 1980s, despite the fact that Norway has had strict immigration laws and, compared to Sweden, received a relatively small number of refugees over the past decades. Neither are there any foreseeable changes concerning immigration policies, as there is a broad alliance in parliament supporting the current policies. Nevertheless, the issue continues to have mobilising potentials both for the Progress Party and for splitting other parties, such as the Labour Party.

Parliamentary government entails that governments are formed based on support in parliament. In Norway, a majority is not needed to form a government, but the government must resign if a majority expresses no confidence. This is labelled negative parliamentarism. Minority governments have been the norm in much of the postwar period, meaning that the parties forming the Cabinet have to negotiate political outcomes with the opposition in parliament. Majority governments were less frequent until 2005, when the Labour Party, for the first time, led a coalition including the Socialist Left Party and the Centre Party. The coalition remained in power until 2013, when the Red-Green majority lost the election. From 2013 until 2020, the Conservative Party led shifting coalitions, for the first time involving the Progress Party, and from 2019 to 2020, a majority government. The successful cooperation by the non-socialist parties in government was long regarded as the breakthrough of bloc politics until the Progress Party left the coalition in January 2020.

Coalition-building and compromise-formation – rather than consensus – are as typical traits of Norwegian governments as they are of the other Nordic countries (see Chapters 2, 3, 4, & 6). The foundation of the welfare state relies on the corporatist structure that involves concerned interests in policy formation (Pedersen & Kuhnle, 2017). Collaboration, negotiations, and agreements between industry, trade unions, and the state form main pillars of the welfare state and secure high employment rates among both women and men. Although the current importance and strength of the corporatist system is disputed – as Rommetvedt (2017) argues in a recent analysis of corporatism in the Nordic countries – Norwegian politics in 2020 still show many signs of corporate negotiations. A recent example can be found in the report preceding the 2019 white paper on media policy (Meld. St. 17 [2018–2019]), prepared by a committee which involved all main-sector interests (Mediemangfoldsutvalget, 2017). Over the past few decades and in line with developments in other Nordic countries, lobbying has become more important, both as a channel of influence and as a profitable industry. A discussion has ensued regarding the relationship between the lobbying channel and the corporatist channel (see Ihlen et al., Chapter 15).

The media system

On any ranking of freedom of expression, transparency, and journalistic autonomy, Norway and the other Nordic countries rank high (Nielsen et al., 2019). These features are anchored in the constitution (§100) which states that it is a state responsibility to secure means for societal dialogue and information provision for citizens. A number of legislative and regulatory measures have been implemented to secure this along with integration of international conventions into the media legislation. As discussed in Chapter 1, Norway was placed, with the other Nordic countries, as a democratic corporatist type in the now seminal book on comparing media systems by Hallin and Mancini (2004). Further, media and communications policies have clear traits of being set up within the framework of the welfare state – as particularly Syvertsen and colleagues (2014) have argued – and with characteristics shared with the other Nordic countries (Ohlsson, 2015; Skogerbø et al., Chapter 1). In 2020, the main characteristics of the media system are that it is digital and “hybrid”, as literally all legacy media (television, broadcasting, newspapers – national, regional, and local) are produced, distributed, and consumed on multiple platforms. Whereas most newspapers may be found in print versions, digital subscriptions have increased steeply, in contrast to most other countries (Newman et al., 2019). The broadcasters operate traditional radio and television channels, but their offerings are available online and on mobile apps, too. Within this hybrid system, NRK has retained – and, it can be argued, strengthened – its role as a producer of national and regional news as well as of traditional and innovative media content in all genres. Although the traditional role as a nation-building institution no longer means standardisation of language and culture, the remit of NRK states that the institution has the responsibility to provide programmes for the entire population, with specific responsibilities for producing programmes in Norwegian and Sámi as well as catering to other linguistic, ethnic, and cultural minorities. These demands are met in different ways: by maintaining a continuous presence and production of news in all regions of the country; by producing shows and entertainment that address the diversity of the Norwegian population (e.g., the web-series *Skam* [*Shame*] and the music competition show *Stjernekamp* [*Star fight*]); and by producing content that is distributed and streamed on several platforms (e.g., Sakte-TV [Slow-TV] productions and the television series *Exit*).

The funding and subsidy system and the public service media with “arm’s length” distance to the state are among the fundamental pillars of the welfare state system. Media subsidies in the form of various support mechanisms make up the second main tool for maintaining the media infrastructure. The largest subsidies are exemptions from value added tax for print and online newspapers (which is an indirect subsidy), and the direct subsidies – before 2020, licence

fees, and from 2020 onwards, taxes – that fund NRK. Less in volume but attracting more public attention are the direct subsidies that are allocated to media, mainly newspapers that have secondary positions in competitive markets and small local newspapers or newspapers that serve minority groups (e.g., linguistic, ethnic, cultural, or religious).

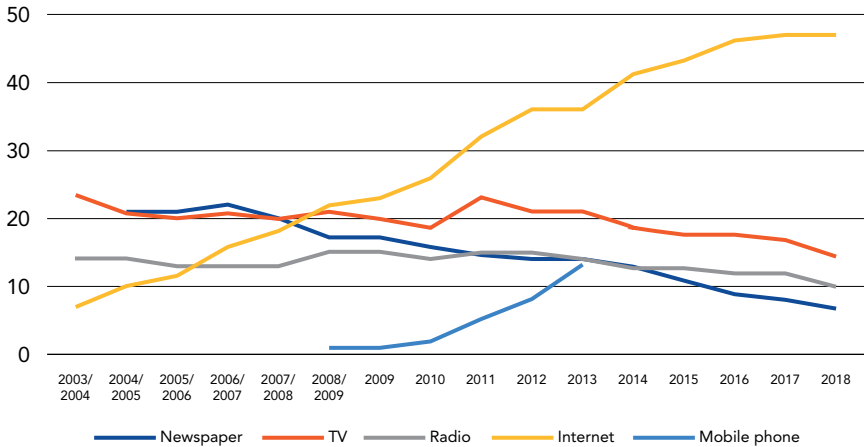
Localism and decentralisation make up a considerable part of Norwegian political and media history (see also Lindén et al., Chapter 8). Understanding the history of local media means understanding the rise and growth of three central elements in the formation of Norwegian society: how the media, which initially only encompassed local newspapers, have voiced diverse political, economic, and cultural interests (Mathisen & Morlandstø, 2019); how the welfare state has shaped the communication structures and to some extent vice versa (Ahva et al., 2017); and how local media and local journalism have been instrumental to two conflicting lines of development, namely standardisation and assimilation, and diversity and localism (Skogerbø, 2020). Local media structures have remained remarkably stable in spite of the technological and economic shifts that have seriously altered media production, distribution, and consumption. More than 25 years have passed since the Internet was commercialised, during which local journalism practices and local media have met with disruptive innovations that they have had to adapt to and incorporate (Olsen & Solvoll, 2018a, 2018b). What needs explanation then is not the changes, but the apparent stability of the structure. Decentralisation has not only remained, it has increased, both in newspaper titles, in the increasing support to regionalisation of NRK's programme, and in the stability of independent local broadcasting. These trends have appeared parallel to the disruptions of market models, consumption habits, and format changes in the media business, and indicate that localism, one of the deep structures of Norwegian society, may indeed be a characteristic of the Norwegian media structure in the foreseeable future (Skogerbø, 2020).

Social media, such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, are partly substituting for, partly adding to, the legacy media as channels for production, distribution, and consumption of both legacy media and user-generated content. Further, a range of new service providers, such as the most well-known streaming services Spotify, Tidal, Netflix, HBO, and many more, have entered the media market over the past decades. Concurrently – as in the other Nordic countries except Iceland – immigration has, over the past decades, become a recurring political issue that has mobilised populist politics and fed into a new type of media: the alt right “alternative media” (see Herkman & Jungar, Chapter 12; Ihlebæk & Nygaard, Chapter 13).

Media users

As in the other Nordic countries, media habits and consumption patterns have to a large degree shifted to digital platforms (See Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 News sources, 2003–2018 (per cent)



Comments: The figure shows the results of a survey asking the participants what their most important news source is. Mobile phones were only included in the survey between 2008/2009–2013. With regard to newspapers, the figures refer to print copies.

Source: Medienorge, 2019a

Figure 5.1 shows that the Internet has become the overall most important source for news consumption, a pattern that is common to all Nordic countries. The figure shows those who agree as to what news source is their most important one as well as changes over time. The decline in importance is sharpest for newspapers and least dramatic for radio. The Internet has undoubtedly taken over as the most important source. From the figures in Figure 5.1, we cannot differentiate between the websites of news media, social media, and other Internet sources; nevertheless, Figure 5.1 clearly illustrates the major shifts in consumption patterns that have taken place after 2000. When looking at age differences, statistics show that Internet sources are the most important for those under 40. These groups are also less likely to read local newspapers, watch television, or listen to radio news (Medienorge, 2019a, 2019b).

Research strands in Norwegian political communication

Political communication researchers in Norway have been and still are located at different institutions and tied to many different disciplines, such as media

studies, media sociology, political science, rhetoric, law, and more (Ihlen et al., 2015). In the following, we outline some strands of research that have been prominent in the past decades.

Election studies

One strand stems from election studies, with the very early study of voters' preferences for newspapers in the 1957 parliamentary election as its first example (Rokkan & Torsvik, 1960). This early publication revealed that voters of different party affiliations with access to newspapers did not necessarily read their own party outlet, but they selected their newspapers for more reasons than party preference. Neither did this first study – inspired by and yielding results in line with Paul Lazarsfeld's two-step hypothesis (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948) – provide much support for strong media effects on voting behaviour. It was suggested that the news media had few direct effects on political behaviour, a finding corroborated by many international studies, and a period of theorising later termed “the phase of powerless media” by Swedish media researcher Kent Asp (1986). This line of continued studies of individual media effects has also permanently been included in the election studies surveys in the form of questions about information sources for voters (e.g., Karlsen & Aalberg, 2015). More recently, the election study project also fields a separate campaign panel study emphasising media use and changes during the campaign (Haugsgjerd et al., 2019). More sporadically, studies of election reporting have been added to the election studies (Aardal et al., 2004; S. Allern, 2011) thereby adding insights and theories from agenda-setting studies, framing, and political journalism to election studies (Thorbjørnsrud, 2009). Since 2009, election studies have also included surveys of the candidates running for parliamentary elections, and the research focus has been on candidate campaigning, particularly their communicative efforts (Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016; Karlsen & Skogerbø, 2015). In recent years, the professionalisation of political communication and political parties has also begun to receive scholarly attention (Karlsen, 2010, 2019). The involvement of communication professionals in party politics and campaigning is clearly a relevant topic for future research, not only in Norway, but in the other Nordic democracies, too (see Chapters 2, 3, 4, & 6).

Social media and politics

Over the past decade, election studies have included a range of studies on how social media have been implemented in political communication in general, and in election campaign communication in particular (Kalsnes et al., 2017), which is the second strand of research in Norwegian political communication. In particular, Twitter, and to some extent Facebook – new channels for politi-

cal actors to mobilise members, followers, and voters – have attracted much scholarly attention. Quite early, methods were developed to collect and analyse Twitter data that gave room for comparative studies across elections and countries (Larsson & Moe, 2012, 2014; Moe & Larsson, 2013). Enli and Skogerbø (2013) noted that social media such as Facebook and Twitter rapidly became campaigning tools for parties and individual candidates, seemingly reinforcing the image of “celebrity politicians” and extending the room for personal campaigning in a party-centred system. Other studies show a variety of interactive social media practices among politicians and parties (Larsson, 2014; Larsson & Skogerbø, 2016); between and within political systems (Enli & Moe, 2015); and between politicians representing small and large parties, to mention some of the aspects that have been addressed. One line of research is the series of studies on how political actors use social media to interact with voters (Enli, 2015; Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016). Karlsen and colleagues have, in a number of publications, discussed how social media influence and shape political debates. Among other issues, they have studied the echo chamber hypothesis, that is, whether the fragmentation of the media leads to formation of closed rooms, echo chambers (Sunstein, 2007), or filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011). In line with international findings (Bruno, 2019), there is little evidence in the Norwegian studies that social media lead to fragmentation to the degree that these theories suggest (Karlsen, 2015; Karlsen et al., 2017). In sum, these studies show that social media have extended the political space for interaction between politicians and other societal groups. This is true not only in a quantitative sense – by adding to the sheer number of places where communication takes place – but is also valid in qualitative terms, as this plethora of services all feature different affordances allowing for various types of staging, interaction, and performances.

Media distortion, mediatisation, and political journalism

A third strand that has been important for decades started with an article by Norwegian sociologist and co-leader of the first Power Project, Gudmund Hernes (1977). Hernes argued – in line with the thesis on limited media effects on political attitudes – that the media may have little influence on attitudes and direct decision-making, but considerable power in “distorting” the way politics is mediated and communicated. This distortion took place by way of the media adapting political messages to media formats as well as pressure groups adapting their messages to fit with journalistic criteria. The concept was developed in later publications (Eide & Hernes, 1987) and has remained a major theory in Norwegian studies of media power (Sæbø & Slaatta, 1997). The early publications foreran the later concepts of “media logic” (Altheide, 2013; Altheide & Snow, 1979) and “mediatisation”, first formulated by Asp (1986) and later developed by Knut Lundby (2009), Jesper Strömbäck (Esser & Strömbäck,

2014; Strömbäck, 2008), Stig Hjarvard (2013), and many others inside and outside the Nordic countries. The influence of the early conceptualisation of media influence as having a distorting influence on politics remained a theme in Norwegian political communication (Aalberg & Curran, 2012; Aalberg & Jensen, 2007), and the international debate on mediatisation contributed to its development without removing the importance of the early contributions. In other words, the observation that political actors, politicians, as well as grassroots movements use the media logic to draw attention to their causes was incorporated early in Norwegian political communication research and developed further in studies of power, politics, and journalism (S. Allern, 1997; Knudsen, 2016). Norwegian researchers have also extended the study of mediatisation to other parts of the political system, namely public bureaucracies (Figenschou et al., 2017; Thorbjørnsrud et al., 2014).

Today, Norwegian studies of political journalism cover many themes and partly overlap with other fields (S. Allern, 2011, 2015; Thorbjørnsrud, 2009; see also Allern et al., Chapter 7). Local political journalism has been studied for decades and has recently regained much attention (Mathisen & Morlandstø, 2019). Political journalism on different platforms (Rogstad, 2015), the relationship between sources and journalists (S. Allern, 1992, 1997; Skogerbø & Moe, 2015), scandals (S. Allern & Pollack, 2012), and political journalism in minority media (Ijäs, 2012; Skogerbø et al., 2019) are among the themes that may be subsumed under political communication.

The public sphere and rhetoric

A fourth group of perspectives that has attracted much attention in political communication is studies of public speeches, rhetoric, and the public sphere. Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) was translated into Norwegian (Habermas, 1971) nearly 20 years before its English version and had major impact on studies of political and democratic communication. Partly overlapping with the other strands that we have singled out, the public sphere perspective has been discussed and applied as a framework for assessing media performance and political journalism (Eide, 1984), as a theoretical and normative framework for analysing political communication (Aalberg et al., 2015), and for assessing the growth and transformation of the Norwegian public sphere (Gripsrud, 2017). Another, partly linked, tradition – the study of political rhetoric – is becoming increasingly vocal in political communication studies (Kjeldsen, 2015; Kjeldsen et al., Chapter 18). Norwegian scholars have looked at, for instance, the credibility of political orators (Johansen, 2002) and visual political rhetoric (Krogstad, 2015). To date, Johansen's book (2019) on the emergence, growth, and distribution of rhetorical power in political communication in pre-democratic Norway is the most comprehensive study

in the field. This strand of research and the integration of rhetoric and visual political rhetoric also represent the interdisciplinarity of Norwegian political communication in the sense that we find research grounded in the humanities, the social sciences, and to some extent other disciplines.

These four main lines of research amount to substantial, but not exhaustive, categories of Norwegian political communication research. The field is fast developing, quantitatively and qualitatively. Researchers from diverse disciplines extend the numbers of themes, methods, and data sources that can be subsumed under the umbrella of political communication practically as we speak, and thereby also questions and challenges for the future.

Future challenges

There are at least two major challenges for future political communication research as we see it. First, the changing media: Much attention has, over the past decade, been given to the growth, application, and impact of social media for political communication, which in many different ways have changed the conditions for communication between parties, politicians, and voters, in Norway and elsewhere (see, e.g., Kalsnes et al., 2017; Larsson & Skogerbø, 2016). Mediatisation – in the version of a theory describing the distorting effects that journalism seemingly has on political practices (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007) – may have lost some of its descriptive and explanatory power (Nygren & Niemikari, 2019; see also Strandberg & Carlson, Chapter 4) as digital media provide so many ways for “dodging the gatekeepers” (Skovsgaard & van Dalen, 2013). Parties and politicians have increased their power as sources by having access to many alternative platforms for publishing news, such as producing their own messages and content, publishing on their own channels, and being able to negotiate the conditions on which they appear in the news media (Brands et al., 2018; Maurer & Beiler, 2018). Simultaneously, the legacy news media no longer have the same hold on audiences that they once had, in Norway probably the strongest in the 1980s and 1990s as media consumption rose to unprecedented figures both in time and spending (Skogerbø & Syvertsen, 2004). Still, mediatisation is a useful term for describing macro-processes of social and political change (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014; Hjarvard, 2013). So far, much less attention has been given to the fact that the environments in which journalism is produced are undergoing fundamental changes. Key to future research is thus to theorise and reconceptualise the political communication process in a constantly changing media system.

Second, the changing politics: Over the past decade, political communication research in Norway has, as mentioned above, studied new themes, such as social media’s impact on election campaigns, populism, political journalism,

lobbyism, and alternative media. All these include important topics, approaches, and perspectives, yet it remains to be seen whether any of them are adequate for analysing the challenges created by the climate crisis, on the one hand, and the major challenges to privacy created by increasingly sophisticated technologies for surveillance and monitoring of social and political phenomena, on the other. What new constellations of political actors – if any – do the increasingly pressing effects of climate and environment issues give rise to? The 2017 election sent shockwaves through established parties that were hit by the strength of the toll-road protests, and similar protests may emerge on other issues. In this perspective, there may be unpredicted and unexpected challenges to political communication practices and research that we do not overview at this point in time.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have outlined the main aspects of Norwegian political communication and the political and media systems in which political communication takes place. Norway can be described as a constitutional monarchy and an affluent, small, stable welfare democracy. The revenues and management of the petroleum industry act as a financial backbone, but they are also vulnerable in light of the climate crisis. Norway is a multiparty political system where governments are created on the basis of negative parliamentarism: a cabinet does not need to be supported by a majority in parliament (the Storting), but it must resign if a majority votes against it. The electoral system is proportional representation and consists of four-year electoral terms (national and local).

The Norwegian media system, along with the other Nordic systems, is what Hallin and Mancini (2004) categorised as democratic corporatist, a categorisation still open to debate (Enli & Syvertsen, 2020; Syvertsen et al., 2014). Over the past decade, the media industry has transformed into a digital and hybrid sector in which journalism is produced, distributed, and consumed on a variety of digital and social media platforms, most notably smartphones and other portable devices. These changes have caused major challenges to business models and consumption patterns, but there are also clear signs of continuity. The public broadcaster NRK and its commercial counterpart, TV2, have adapted to the digital environment. Media policy-making, funding, and the media subsidy system have been changed but upheld, and the local media structures, in particular local newspapers, were until 2020 surprisingly stable. Accordingly, political communication in the 2020s takes place on a large number of arenas: the traditional news media, many kinds of digital and social media, and offline. As always, it takes many different forms, expressions, and messages, and there is a marked shift to Internet and social media platforms as main sources for the youngest generations.

Following this description, we outlined four strands of political communication research in Norway. First, we outlined election studies, which have a long history and theoretically span the phase of powerless media to agenda-setting and framing and contemporary discussions of professionalisation, populism, and election communication on social and digital media. Second, we outlined social media and politics, partly overlapping with the former, which have over the past decade generated a host of studies on the use, implementation, and impact that social media and new media forms have on political campaigns, political influence, and political debate and discussion. Third, we emphasised mediatisation and political journalism, which are also long-term interests of Norwegian researchers. How media logics and journalistic practices influence political communication have been explored for decades and from many angles and perspectives and have recently been employed to analyse new problems and actors, such as bureaucracies and Twitter communication. Fourth, we outlined studies on the public sphere and rhetoric. Over the years, a host of studies on the development of political speeches and on the conditions for public sphere developments have been published (e.g., Gripsrud, 2017; Johansen 2019).

Lastly, we identified two future challenges for Norwegian political communication research. The first is simply that the media are changing and digital media open up for a host of new practices of both producing and consuming political communication. We pointed to the increased possibilities of sources for “dodging the gatekeepers”, legacy media losing its hold on its audience, but there are many other examples. The second challenge is that politics are changing and will create new forms of communication; the recurrent and permanent crises, such as pandemics and the climate crisis, are some of the issues that will demand much attention in the years to come. Other factors are security issues raised by the increased opportunities for surveillance and the pressures on privacy. These and many other issues will demand research into the conditions for sustaining democratically viable political communication practices.

In conclusion, we will nevertheless point to two main characteristics following our discussion. First, Norwegian democracy stands out as being stable despite the several global crises over the past decade and some turbulence in the Norwegian government. The large picture shows a resilient and stable welfare state. Simultaneously, the media industries and the political communication structures have been disrupted and changed by digitisation and hybridisation, yet, there are also clear signs that the large media houses adapt and transform their editorial and journalistic performance to the new conditions, but other political actors do as well.

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