

## **Chapter 2**

### **Why Minority Governments? Executive-Legislative Relations in the Nordic Countries**

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#### **Introduction**

A parliamentary system is a system of government in which the members of a legislative body determine the formation of the cabinet (the executive) and in which any majority of the legislature at almost any time may vote the cabinet out of office.<sup>1</sup> Thus, in any parliamentary system, legislative majorities have instruments at their disposal (such as no-confidence votes and investiture votes) they may use to control the composition of the government and government policy. Still, majority governments are not always formed. Indeed, nearly one-third of all governments in Western Europe since WWII have lacked majority support in their respective national assembly (Strom 1990; Rasch 2004, 119). No region has experienced minority governments more frequently than Scandinavia. In sharp contrast with Finland and Iceland, the Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Sweden and Norway have had minority governments for more than two-thirds of the post-WWII period. In Denmark, minority governments have been in office for more than four-fifths of that period. Currently, neither Denmark nor

Sweden are governed by a majority coalitions. It is too early to tell whether the move towards majority cabinets in Norway (which occurred in 2005) will be permanent.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss legislative-executive relations in the Nordic region and, in particular, to shed light on the distinctly Scandinavian form of minority governance. Why do minority governments occur so frequently in Scandinavia, while broad majority coalitions seem to be the norm in the two other – apparently quite similar – countries in the region? The terms “presidentialisation” and “deparliamentarisation” have been used to describe the strengthening of executive branches and positions of prime ministers and simultaneously the weakening of parliaments (Poguntke and Webb 2005). I will not go into this debate. From a constitutional perspective, few changes in executive-legislative relations can be observed. The only exception is Finland, which moved from semi-presidentialism to a more genuine form of parliamentarism in 2000 (Nousiainen 2001). Although the prime minister in Finland’s system became more important as a consequence of constitutional reforms, the president actually lost power, so this is hardly a case of presidentialisation.

### **Parliamentarism and Proportional Representation**

The Nordic countries possess a long parliamentary history. Iceland’s *Althingi* operated as a consultative assembly from the year 930 until 1800, when it was abolished. All of the Nordic countries were fully democratised during the first quarter of the twentieth century, as universal suffrage for parliamentary elections was introduced in this period. Additionally, Voting rights were also extended to women. All of these countries have

for many decades operated a parliamentary form of government: Denmark from 1901 and Finland and Sweden from 1917. The other two countries had such systems prior to their independence. Norway's first parliamentary cabinet was formed in 1884, and Iceland's first was formed in 1904. This move to parliamentarism can be seen as a democratisation of executive power, as control over the cabinet shifted from an unelected monarch to an elected parliament.

All of the Nordic parliaments today are unicameral, though until recently (the summer of 2009), the Norwegian *Storting* did partly function in a bicameral manner. After each election, Norwegian legislators divided themselves into two sections – the *Odelsting* and the *Lagting* – to handle non-financial legislation.<sup>2</sup> Iceland had a similar quasi-bicameral system until 1991. Denmark and Sweden abolished their upper houses in 1953 and 1971, respectively.

Proportional representation (PR) also has a long history in the Nordic region (Grofman and Lijphart 2002). The first instance of the use of PR in the region was in Finland in 1906, when the unicameral, partly autonomous *Eduskunta* was established. By 1920, PR had replaced single-member constituency systems in every country but Iceland. The latter, from 1923 to 1959, combined a first-past-the-post system with PR in various ways. Important aspects of the current electoral systems in the region are shown in Table 2.1. We note that the Nordic parliaments use quite similar party-list systems of representation. Only the Finnish PR system has anomalous features. Although Finland has no adjustment seats, the level of proportionality is still only slightly lower than in the other Nordic countries. Part of the reason for this level of proportionality is that the

average multi-member district is quite large (i.e., there is high district magnitude). The electoral system in Finland is also the most candidate-centred with respect to the ballot.

Table 2.1

With respect to proportionality, Sweden and Denmark generally perform well. On some occasions, deviations from proportionality have been extremely low (a least-square index below 1). In most countries, there are significant differences in proportionality between elections, even though the institutional framework is constant.

The size of the Nordic legislatures mainly reflects population figures. Sweden, however, has a much larger parliament than one would expect. This is an inheritance from the bicameral era. The single chamber *Riksdag* has almost as many seats as the previous first and second chambers combined (von Sydow 1991; Stjernquist 1996).<sup>3</sup>

### **Government types in Nordic countries**

In a parliamentary democracy, the cabinet is supported, or at least *tolerated*, by the legislature. The upper part of Table 2.2 shows governments by type and country since parliamentarism was introduced, or since independence in the case of Iceland. To ensure a unique parliamentary basis for each government, we consider it a change of government if (i) the partisan composition of the cabinet changes; (ii) a new prime minister takes office; or (iii) general elections are held (whether or not the same government remains in power). A few short-lived national crisis coalitions in Norway

and Denmark are excluded as well as some caretaker administrations in Finland. The table is based on two dimensions. First, we distinguish between majority and minority governments. Second, governments are coalitions of two or more parliamentary parties or they are one-party cabinets. These dimensions yield four types of governments. Danish and Swedish governments during the time period before legislatures became unicameral were accountable to the popularly-elected lower chamber only.<sup>4</sup> Norwegian (and Icelandic) governments have always been accountable to the entire legislative assembly.

Table 2.2

If we look at the time during which parliamentary systems have been in operation, Denmark, Sweden and Norway have had more minority cabinets than majority cabinets (77, 76 and 62 percent of total governments, respectively). Most of the minority governments in all three countries have been single-party cabinets rather than coalitions. Denmark, however, has also had a substantial number of minority coalitions. Iceland, in contrast to the Scandinavian countries, has a history of majority coalitions; minority governments have been few and short-lived. The pattern in Finland is more mixed. Finland had minority governments before the World War II, but majority coalitions have been the norm since the 1940s. The table also shows the proportion of time each country has been governed by minority cabinets after 1945, and again, Scandinavia differs from Finland and Iceland.

Some variation in government stability between the countries is also indicated in the table. On average, cabinets have been more durable in Iceland and Sweden. Stability in Finland is lower on average, but since the early 1980s, the country has moved towards more stable majority cabinets (Raunio 2004).

The process of government formation may be complex and time-consuming. There are, however, marked differences in this respect between countries with a large number of minority governments (and many one-party cabinets) and those countries where majority cabinets are the norm. It takes time to negotiate platforms for majority coalitions.

#### Figure 2.1

The Scandinavian form of parliamentarism has two distinctive features. The first and most important feature is the prevalence of minority governments. The second feature is the frequent occurrence of one-party governments, which indicates that political parties seem reluctant to enter formal coalitions (Strøm 1986; Sannerstedt 1996). These features become apparent in Figure 2.1, which shows cabinet types in a selection of 18 countries (almost all of them Western European). The British-style democracies are dominated by one-party majority governments. Iceland and Finland have the same governmental experience as countries on the European Continent and to some extent Southern Europe. What is remarkable with Scandinavia, as we already have mentioned, is the large number of minority governments (74 percent in Scandinavian countries

combined) and one-party administrations (61 percent in Scandinavian countries combined).

### **Why minority governments in Scandinavia?**

The literature dealing with minority governments is relatively sparse (but see Strøm 1984, 1986 and 1990). There is no general agreement on why minority governments form, and why they clearly are viable and stable cabinet solutions in some political systems. It is no easy task to explain why minority governments have been dominant in Scandinavia, while majority governments prevail in Finland and Iceland. In many respects, the polities of the Nordic countries are similar, and some of the differences clearly have no influence on government formation. One possible research strategy is to attempt to locate causal factors that are shared by the Scandinavian countries but not by the entire Nordic region. As mentioned earlier, it is also worth noting that some of the countries over time have slid from minority to majority governments (Finland) or *vice versa* (Sweden). Additionally, Norway has had long periods of majority parliamentarism, e.g., from 1945 until 1961 and after the 2005 and 2009 elections. Because constitutional frameworks have been relatively stable over time in all countries, it is difficult to trace the occurrence of minority governments back to differences in constitutional details. Instead, the most likely explanation for the Nordic patterns of government formation is the nature of party systems in the region.

Traditionally, minority governments have been explained as the result of party fragmentation and polarisation. In an early discussion, Janson (1928) pointed to the

gradual development of a multi-party legislature and a reluctance to enter coalitions as the main background for the formation of Swedish minority governments in the 1920s. Some authors suggest that minority cabinets tend to be formed in unstable and highly conflictual political systems, emerging when everything else has failed. In general, these claims have not been substantiated. Herman and Pope (1973) demonstrated that minority governments were more common than previously assumed (constituting 36 percent of governments in their cross-national data set). They also suggested a variety of reasons for this phenomenon. First, a substantial proportion of the minority governments they studied were caretaker administrations. These governments typically came to power as a result of some sort of crisis and were deliberately established for only a short period of time. Second, some minority governments took office because one or more coalition partners withdrew from majority coalitions. Third, a few minority governments came to office because elections that usually provided one party with a legislative majority surprisingly ended with no party winning a majority of seats (and, typically, a new election was held soon thereafter). Fourth, minority cabinets arose because extreme parties on either side of the political spectrum were not credible, reliable, formal coalition partners for parties closer to the centre. Fifth, and probably most interesting in this context, some minority cabinets were formed in situations in which one of the parties fell only a few seats short of a legislative majority. Often in such cases, the dominant party formed a one-party minority government and usually did so with the formal support of one of the smaller parties.

Before we take a closer look at the relevance of the party system in understanding Nordic government formation, we will consider the impact of some institutional factors.

## **Negative parliamentarism**

In countries with a majoritarian electoral system, the process of government formation is relatively simple, at least as long as one party receives a majority of the seats. In multi-party systems, the formation processes may be complicated and lengthy, involving several actors in intense negotiations dragging out over weeks or even months. Typically, a complex set of formal and informal rules regulates government formation. Finland (particularly after 2000) and Sweden have important constitutional provisions, while the other Nordic constitutions – most notably Norway’s – put few specific restrictions on the formation and resignation processes. Still, clear practices and expectations have evolved over time.

Parliamentary rules, be they formal or not, may be *negative* or *positive*. The negative rule implies that the government has to be tolerated by the legislative majority,<sup>5</sup> but it does not need to achieve the active support of the majority. A vote of no confidence (or censure) is the instrument by which it is made apparent whether a cabinet is tolerated. In a system of positive parliamentarism, a government must win a vote of investiture or confidence in the parliament before it can assume power. The government in these systems has to have the active support of a majority of legislators.

Until recently, all of the Nordic countries had negative formation practices. Finland introduced an investiture vote in the mid-1990s. Swedish Prime Ministers also must survive an investiture vote, but the decision rule is rather weak. It says that a proposal

for a Prime Minister is accepted so long as an absolute majority in the *Riksdag* does not reject it. Thus, majority backing is not required, which is equivalent to saying that the government must be tolerated by the majority.

Today, the head of state is not actively involved in the government formation process of any Nordic country. The power of the Finnish president has recently been reduced, and the country has been fully “parliamentarised”. In the former system, which was semi-presidential in nature, “the president was the incontestable executive head of Finland” (Paloheimo 2003, 222). The president often was quite free in selecting the prime minister, especially before the 1980s. Under the current constitutional framework, the parliament nominates the prime minister, and the president is only left with the task of formal appointment. Thus, the president plays a role that is not very different from that of the monarch in Denmark and Norway. In Sweden, however, the new Constitution of 1975 also robbed the king of his formal and symbolic duties related to government formation and resignation (Bergman 2004). Constitutionally, Iceland seems to have a rather strong head of state who is directly elected by the people (Kristjánsson 2004). In practice, Iceland’s political system never has functioned as a truly semi-presidential system, and Icelandic presidents have been considerably weaker than formerly were the Finnish presidents. With respect to government formation, the parliament and the parties in Iceland undoubtedly have the upper hand.

Finland and Iceland have presidents, and at least on paper, they consequently have had dual executive powers. Does this explain the overwhelming predominance of majority cabinets in the two countries? The answer is mainly negative. No one has demonstrated

that majority governments primarily are the result of presidential influence, although strong presidents – such as Finland’s Urho Kekkonen – may have been of help in finding viable governmental solutions (or in blocking weak alternatives).<sup>6</sup> In fact, Finnish presidents also strongly influenced government formation during the earlier decades when minority governments were common. In a semi-presidential system, the executive branch tends to be stronger relative to the legislature than is the case in a purely parliamentary system, which – as we discuss in the next section – may be worth noting.

### **Strong parliaments**

Processes of government formation in minority situations may be complex. Several parties interact, and each tries to attain the best possible outcome given other players’ preferences and actions. Party leaders and their more-or-less fractionalised party groups may be motivated by short-term as well as long-term goals. Governmental office sometimes is an end in itself, but most politicians seek office as a means to affect policy decisions and legislation or to influence their electoral fortunes (Strøm 1990; Laver and Schofield 1990). Naturally, entering government and obtaining government portfolios is the only way to satisfy office-seeking motivations. However, policy-seeking and vote-seeking parties under some circumstances may find that they can achieve as much in opposition as in government. In general, parties will be more inclined to seek office if the net benefits of governing outweigh the net benefits of being in opposition. Government participation almost always increases the policy influence of a party, but the extra influence normally comes with an electoral cost. Incumbent governments tend

to lose support at the polls, which makes governing less attractive than it would be otherwise. Governments in Western Europe have on average lost two and a half percentage points in post-WWII elections (Petersson et al. 2002). These losses have increased decade by decade and reached more than six percentage points during elections in the 1990s. Additionally, in Western Europe, members of majority coalitions tend to lose more votes than parties in minority governments. Countries differ widely in the extent to which governments maintain their strength in the election that follows their term in office. Danish governments perform comparatively well in this regard; i.e., that is, they perform better than the European average (Müller and Strøm 2000, 589). Norway is close to the average, while Finnish and Swedish governments have a poor record: three out of four governments have been punished by the voters.

Given this background, it can be hypothesised that the greater the potential influence of opposition groups in parliament, the fewer the benefits of governing and the less tempting governmental office becomes. Thus, we should expect minority governments to occur more frequently.<sup>7</sup>

If this is a relevant causal factor in the Nordic case, opposition groups should potentially be more influential in Scandinavian legislatures than they are in Finland and Iceland. Influence, of course, is hard to measure, and a comparative judgment based on extensive analyses of actual decision-making is not available.

Nordic parliaments can influence the formulation of policy and legislation in a variety of ways. All of them have been regarded as “working parliaments”, in contrast to the

less influential “debating parliaments” that are also found in Europe (Arter 1999, 211-217). Of particular significance for the character of an assembly are its decision-rules and its internal structure, especially the features of its committee system. Working parliaments have a specialised system of standing committees that broadly correspond to government ministries. They have rules of enactment and deliberation that give priority to committee recommendations, proposals and participation in the final stages of parliamentary decision-making.

Committees can be organised to facilitate the dispersal of policy-making influence, spreading it to opposition groups as well as among members of the government. Influential committees have “invested” in expertise and use their specialised knowledge to control and revise, rather than just rubber-stamp, decisions from the government. In this perspective, potential influence is linked to such things as the existence of a relatively high number of (not very large) committees, restrictions on the number of committee assignments per legislator (to allow MPs to gain expertise), the ability of committees to rewrite government bills and the proportional distribution of committee chairs (which imply that the opposition gets leadership position in parliament). The scholarly classifications of Nordic committee systems according to these factors are ambiguous. Powell (2000, 34) claims that committees in Scandinavian legislatures facilitate opposition influence to a larger degree than do Finnish committees (Iceland is not included in his data set). Mattson and Strøm (1995) distinguish between the drafting authority (e.g., authority to initiate and rewrite bills and to demand documents) and agenda control (e.g., control of timetables and the right to summon witnesses) of standing committees, but Scandinavian committees do not come out consistently ahead

of their Finnish and Icelandic counterparts. For instance, Finnish standing committees are among the strongest with respect to drafting authority but are rather weak when agenda control is considered. Surprisingly, Mattson and Strøm's data indicate that Danish committees are among the weakest in Western Europe when it comes to authority to initiate legislation and rewrite governmental bills. As we have seen, this is also the country with more minority governments than any other. Similarly, Döring (1995) does not consider the overall balance between the government and the standing committees with respect to setting the legislative agenda and passing legislation to vary significantly among the Nordic countries, but he notes that the institutional framework leaves Danish committees with a somewhat less central role than standing committees in the other countries. The last column of Table 2.3 shows figures from Döring (1995, 225) regarding the degree of government control over the plenary agenda of parliaments, and there are virtually no differences among Nordic countries.

In a broader perspective, Damgaard (1994) has noted that Scandinavian parliaments stand out as strong and influential. He observes over time a trend indicating a "decline of governments" or a "resurgence of parliaments" rather than a "decline of parliaments".<sup>8</sup> Kristjánsson (2004, 159), however, notes that the Icelandic *Alþingi* seems to possess the formal means of asserting itself as a principal institution but that parliament has "steadily been losing power" to the executive. The semi-presidential character of the Finnish political system until recently may have generated a different legislative-executive balance than in the other Nordic countries. A slightly stronger executive branch also implies that the policy-making influence of opposition forces might be somewhat weaker. Damgaard (1990, 2000) also observes differences between

Finnish and Scandinavian parliaments with respect to levels of activity and involvement.

Table 2.3

Table 2.3 also illustrates other approaches based on expert opinion. First, Laver and Hunt (1992) asked experts in selected countries to evaluate the influence of politicians in the opposition. Based on these assessments, an index of opposition influence was constructed. As we can see from the table, experts judge the opposition to be stronger in Denmark and Norway than in Finland and Iceland. Sweden ends up in the middle, close to the latter group. This way of measuring influence is, however, clearly disputable, and we cannot take the correlation between opposition influence and frequency of minority governments (shown in Table 2.3) as strong evidence for such a relationship. A second, more genuinely institutional, measure is suggested by Fish and Kroenig (2009). They also rely on an expert survey, but it is comprehensive, containing 32 measures of each legislature's influence over the executive, and its autonomy, specific powers, capacity, and so forth. However, just as in the case of Döring's measure, this parliamentary-powers index does not correlate with the share of minority governments in our selection of countries.

### **Dominant and central parties**

All of the Nordic countries have had multi-party systems at least since the 1920s. Still, there are important differences among the countries in this respect, and marked changes

in the number and relative size of the parties have occurred over time. The number of seats in parliaments is the hard currency of coalition bargaining, obviously making features of the party system relevant in our context. Not surprisingly, the party system variable seems to have resurfaced in recent coalition research (e.g., e.g., Schofield 1993; Laver and Shepsle 2000; van Roozendaal 1992; Crombez 1996 and Skjæveland 2009).

As an indication of the overall party fragmentation after 1945, Figure 2.2 shows the effective number of parties in each of the Nordic parliaments. This index is calculated as follows: one divided by the squares of the party-seat proportions (Laakso and Taagepera 1979). This calculation provides us with the number of equally-sized parties, a sum that reflects the actual level of fractionalisation in the parliament (i.e., the observed seat-shares). For most of the time period we cover, the Finnish *Eduskunta* has had the most fragmented party system. From 1973 to the late 1980s, Danish elections resulted in an equally fragmented parliament. In recent years, Norway has reached the same level. Iceland had a fragmented legislature in the late 1980s, but it has generally had a moderate (effective) number of parties. Sweden has had, on average, the lowest level of fragmentation.

Figure 2.2

Mattila and Raunio (2002, 266) claims that the predominance of majority coalitions in Finland can be explained by a fragmented party system. This claim, at best, is only partly supported by the data in Figure 2.2. More important than the overall level of fragmentation, as measured by the effective number of parties, is the existence of one

strong or dominant party in the midst of the legislature. Even in a fragmented assembly without a majority party, if one party has a far larger share of the seats than any other party, it should occupy a strong bargaining position. In many minority situations, dominant parties will be able to negotiate their way into governmental offices as minority administrations. In fact, Crombez (1996) has argued that as the largest party grows larger and more central, minority governments become more likely. A number of cross-national studies support this hypothesis (e.g., Martin and Stevenson 2001; Volden and Carrubba 2004). Almost all of the minority governments in Schofield's (1993) data set were based on large, centrist parties.

If we take a closer look at the Nordic party systems, the largest party in Finland after 1945 has, with few exceptions, been substantially smaller than the largest party in Scandinavian parliaments. The Scandinavian countries have all had a relatively centrist Labour party as the dominant group. Iceland also mostly has had a dominant party. Here however, the Conservatives have been the largest group in parliament. Data from party manifestos indicate that the Icelandic Conservatives have tended to be less centrist on the left-right scale compared to the other Icelandic parties than are the Scandinavian social democrats in their respective legislatures (Budge et al. 2001). Majority coalitions in Finland and Iceland and minority governments in Scandinavia, then, roughly seem to be in line with expectations from Crombez (1996) and others. If we look at the era of minority governments in Finland, the Social Democrats was the largest party and, after some elections, the dominant force in the legislature (over 30 percent of the seats in most elections from 1919 to 1939).

## Conclusions

This chapter has dealt with government formation in the parliamentary democracies of the Nordic region. We have observed that the Scandinavian countries have a long history of minority cabinets, while Finland and Iceland typically are governed by majority coalitions. In explaining the exceptional pattern of minority parliamentarism in Scandinavia, two factors have been emphasised. First, the Scandinavian countries have strong parliaments, which mean that parties in opposition have considerable decision-making clout. Participation in government is not necessary to gain influence, and, as a result, minority governments become more likely. However, Finland and Iceland also have influential parliaments. Second and more promising in explanatory terms, features of the party system are important for government formation. Minority governments are more likely in systems with one centrally-located, relatively large party. Such a pattern has been visible in the Scandinavian countries for decades but is currently eroding at least in Denmark and Norway.

Why do majority coalitions typically govern in Finland and Iceland? In the Finnish case, a highly-fragmented legislature without a dominant political force in the centre is an important part of the answer. The shift from minority governments to majority coalitions probably was also helped by a strong presidency in the early post-WWII era. In Iceland, the existence of a large non-centrist party seems to be an important factor.

We have not raised the question of policy-making effectiveness. Minority governments often are associated with political instability and ineffective governance. Clearly,

minority governments tend to be less stable than governments that are supported by a legislative majority. It has yet to be demonstrated that Scandinavian minority cabinets in general lack governing capacity (cf. Strom 1990, Green-Pedersen 2001). If minority governments are centrally located and the opposition divided ideologically or in policy terms, the government has more than one way of building majorities behind its proposals. If, however, the opposition is easily united and can confront the cabinet *en bloc*, effective policy-making virtually becomes impossible.

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Table 2.1 Nordic parliaments and electoral systems.

Parliament	Cameral structure and size (seats)	Electoral formulae (percent adjustment seats)	District magnitude <sup>1)</sup>	Deviation from proportionality <sup>2)</sup> (Least Square Index)
Folketinget (Denmark)	Unicameral (since 1953) 179 seats	Modified Sainte-Laguë and LR-Hare (23 % adj. seats)	M = 13,5 <sup>3)</sup>	1998: 0,4 2001: 1,6 2005: 1,8 2007: 0,7
Stortinget (Norway)	Unicameral 169 seats	Modified Sainte-Laguë (11 % adj. seats)	M = 7,9	1997: 3,4 2001: 3,3 2005: 2,7 2009: 3,0
Riksdagen (Sweden)	Unicameral (since 1971) 349 seats	Modified Sainte-Laguë (11 % adj. seats)	M = 10,7	1994: 1,2 1998: 0,9 2002: 1,5 2006: 3,0
Eduskunta (Finland)	Unicameral 200 seats	D'Hondt (No adj. seats)	M = 13,2	1995: 3,8 1999: 3,2 2003: 3,2 2007: 3,2
Alþingi (Iceland)	Unicameral (since 1991) 63 seats	LR Hare and D'Hondt (14 % adj. seats)	M = 9,0	1999: 1,1 2003: 1,9 2007: 3,5 2009: 2,6

<sup>1)</sup> Source: *Inter-parliamentary Union* ([www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org)). M is calculated by taking total number of seats minus adjustment seats, divided by the number of districts or constituencies.

<sup>2)</sup> Most recent elections. The scale runs from 0 to 100, with 0 representing full proportionality. Note that the figures are dependent on how the category “others” (parties or lists without any seats) are treated before calculations are made. Source: Michael Gallagher’s electoral systems web page [http://www.tcd.ie/Political\\_Science/staff/michael\\_gallagher/ElSystems/index.php](http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/staff/michael_gallagher/ElSystems/index.php).

<sup>3)</sup> Refers to Denmark proper (135 district seats). In addition, there are two constituencies (Faroe Islands and Greenland) with four seats.

Table 2.2 Governments in Nordic countries<sup>1)</sup> in percentages (absolute numbers).

Type of Government	Norway 1884-2010	Denmark 1901-2010	Sweden 1917-2010	Finland 1917-2010	Iceland 1944-2010
Majority One-Party	20 (14)	5 (3)	5 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Majority Coalition	18 (12)	18 (10)	19 (8)	66 (43)	87 (26)
Minority One-Party	47 (32)	45 (25)	69 (29)	12 (8)	10 (3)
Minority Coalition	15 (10)	32 (18)	7 (3)	22 (14)	3 (1)
Total Number of Governments (Number of elections)	N=68 (35)	N=56 (43)	N=42 (28)	N=65 (28)	N=30 (20)
Average Government Durability (in Years)	1,86	1,94	2,24	1,45	2,23
Share of Time Governed by Minority Cabinets 1945-99 <sup>2)</sup>	56	83	73	22	3
Average Duration of Government Formation Process (in Days) <sup>3)</sup>	4,2	8,3	5,4	26,9	32,8
Percent Discretionary Termination of Governments 1945-99 <sup>4)</sup>	32	77	20	60	48

<sup>1)</sup> The latest governments included in the table are Stoltenberg 2009 in Norway, Løkke Rasmussen 2009 in Denmark, Reinfeldt 2006 in Sweden, Kiviniemi 2010 in Finland and Sigurðardóttir 2009 in Iceland.

<sup>2)</sup> Source for the percentages: Rasch (2004b:118).

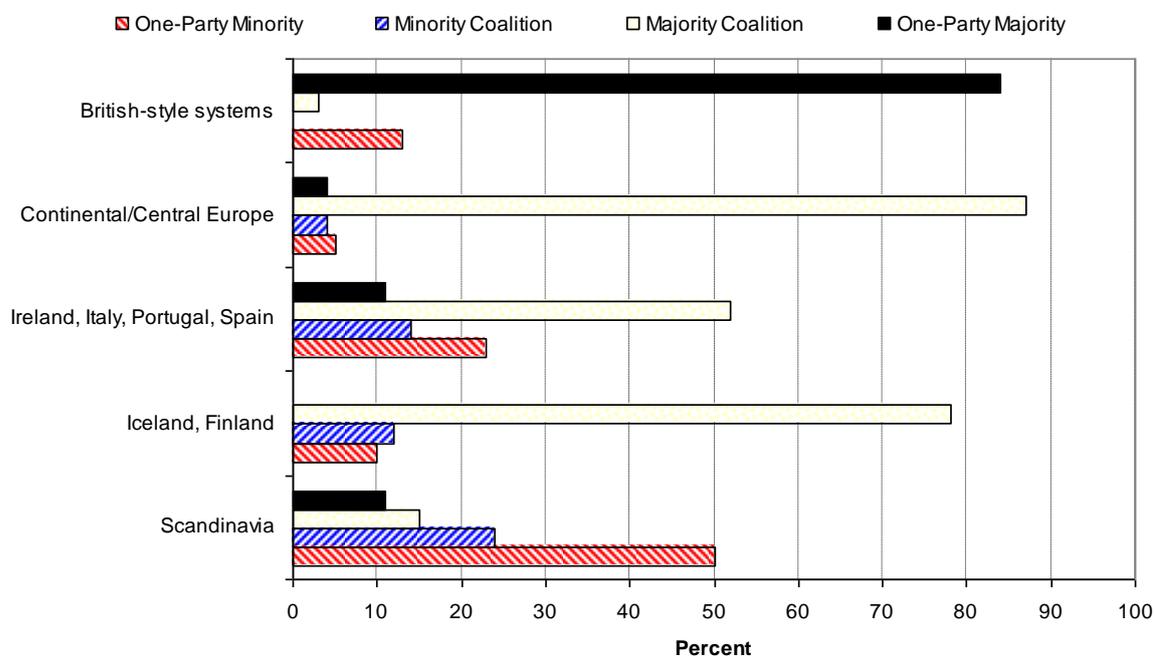
<sup>3)</sup> Source: See Golder (2010).

<sup>4)</sup> Source: Calculations based on Damgaard (2008: 306). Examples of discretionary termination are early elections, cabinet defeat, voluntary cabinet enlargement and (cabinet) party conflicts.

Table 2.3 Share of minority governments in selected countries, and three measures of opposition influence.

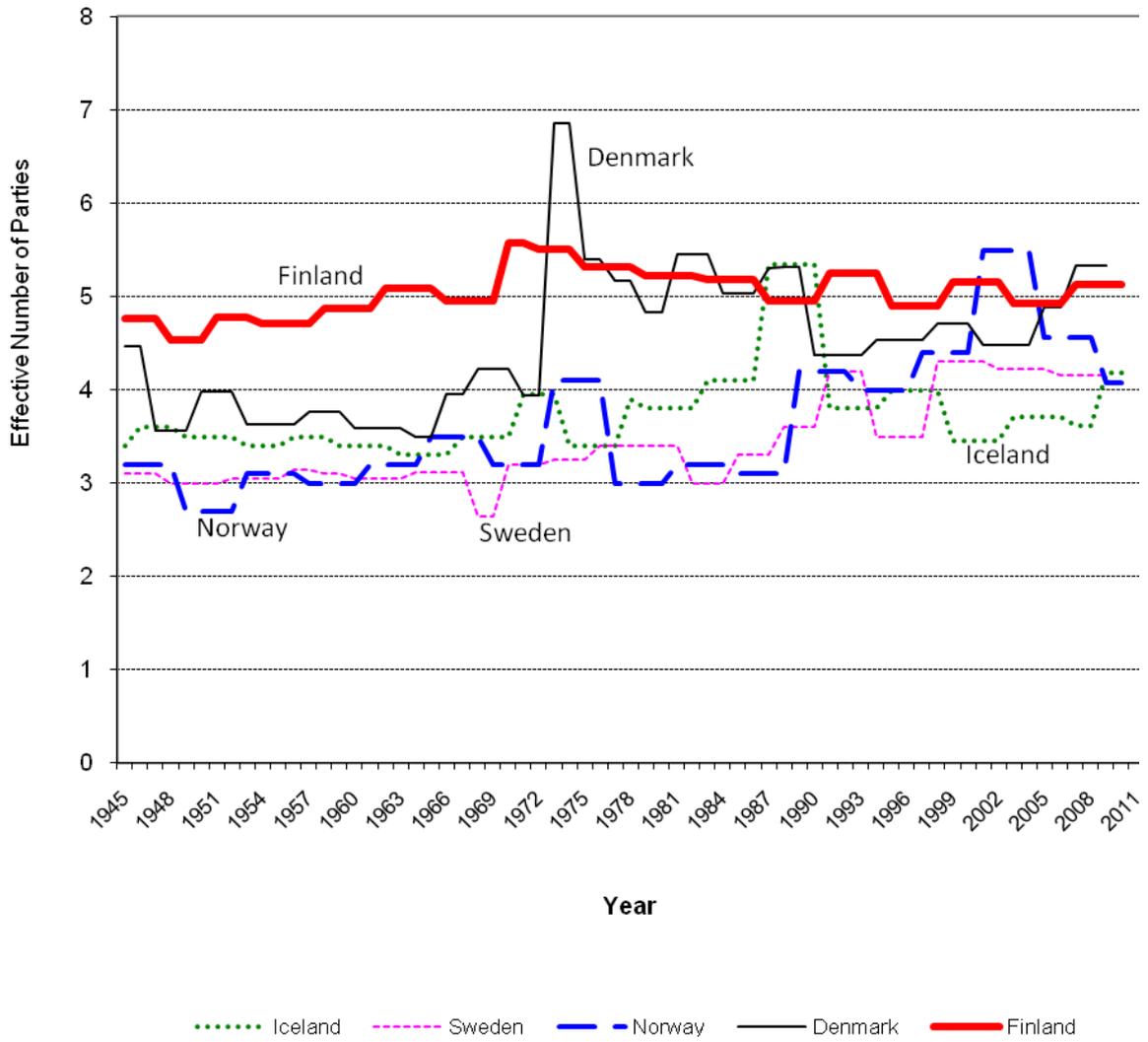
Country	I Share of Minority Governments [Rasch 2004b]	II Expert Assessment of Opposition Influence [Laver and Hunt 1992]	III Parliamentary Powers Index [Fish and Kroenig 2009]	IV Authority to Determine Plenary Agenda [Döring 1995]
<b>Denmark</b>	88	6,5	.78	5
<b>Sweden</b>	68	5,2	.72	5
<b>Norway</b>	63	6,8	.72	4
<b>Finland</b>	24	4,9	.72	5
<b>Iceland</b>	17	4,8	-	5
Austria	4	4,1	.72	4
Belgium	8	2,6	.75	4
France V	17	3,4	.56	2
Ireland	43	4,1	.66	1
Italy	36	7,1	.84	6
Luxembourg	0	4,0	-	3
Netherlands	14	3,6	.78	7
Germany	4	3,5	.84	4
United Kingdom	10	2,0	.78	1
<i>Correlations: Pearson's r Spearman's rho</i>		<i>I and II: r =.51 (.06) rho =.49 (.07)</i>	<i>I and III: r =.01 (.97) rho = -.16 (.62)</i>	<i>I and IV: r =.20 (.50) rho =.37 (.19)</i>

Figure 2.1 Governments in parliamentary countries after 1945<sup>1)</sup>.



<sup>1)</sup> Source: Rasch 2004, 119. Scandinavia includes Denmark, Norway and Sweden. British-style countries include Great Britain, Canada and New Zealand. Continental Europe includes France, Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium, the Netherlands and Austria.

Figure 2.2 Effective number of parties in Nordic parliaments after 1945.



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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is an updated, revised and corrected version of Rasch (2004).

<sup>2</sup> The *Lagting* served during the period from 1814 to 2009 as a kind of upper house, consisting of one-quarter of the *Storting* members. The remaining three-quarters constituted the lower house (the *Odelsting*). Law bills were introduced in the *Odelsting*, but the consent of both sections was needed before a bill became law. Neither the *Odelsting* nor the *Lagting* had its own committee system; each standing committee had members from both sections or “chambers”. The state budget has been decided by the *Storting* as a unicameral assembly since the 1830s.

<sup>3</sup> Larger nations typically have larger legislatures. Empirical evidence suggests that the size of unicameral legislatures or the popularly elected chamber of bicameral systems tend to be close to the cube root of the population. This rule fits the Danish, Norwegian, Finnish and Icelandic legislatures quite well. The Swedish *Riksdag* does, however, have some 140 seats more than the population cube root of the population would indicate (See Taagepera and Shugart 1989, 173-83).

<sup>4</sup> This is the case in most bicameral systems. Upper chambers may influence government formation and duration indirectly (see Druckman and Thies 2002), but the potential effects of this kind are disregarded here.

<sup>5</sup> Or, more precisely, the government must be tolerated by an absolute majority in the legislative assembly.

<sup>6</sup> The last case of a president strongly influencing the process of government formation was in 1987, when President Mauno Koivisto intervened (Raunio 2004, 136).

<sup>7</sup> See Strøm (1986, 1990) for a detailed elaboration and test of this hypothesis.

<sup>8</sup> Damgaard (1994, 86) writes: “At least it is now obvious to competent observers that the parliaments of Scandinavia have not declined in recent decades. On the contrary, they have assumed increased significance.”