

Cabinet Decision-making and Concentration of Power

A study of the Norwegian executive centre

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PhD dissertation

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PREFACE

The idea for this PhD dissertation grew out of my work experience as a budget bureaucrat in the Ministry of Education and Research in the period 2005–2008. The initial curiosity that sparked the project concerned the unknown role of the cabinet subcommittee in the budgetary process in Norway. Early autumn 2006 was an exciting period in Norwegian ministries. The newly elected coalition cabinet had started working with its first state budget. Based on the cabinet's majority and the comprehensive coalition agreement, expectations were high among civil servants about what could be achieved. In the research section in the Ministry of Education and Research, new and ambitious policy proposals were prepared. From a broad spectrum of feasible proposals, the challenge was to find and present proposals that would attract the political leadership and ensure funding to 'our' sector. First, the minister had to be convinced, and then the minister would have to convince the party leaders in the subcommittee at the budgetary conferences.

For an inexperienced bureaucrat this exercise raised several questions: Were political considerations more important than professional considerations for the civil servants in the budgetary process? How were conflicting issues decided at the cabinet meetings? And what was this subcommittee actually, as it was hardly ever mentioned in the textbooks in public administration and political science, read by the young, newly educated bureaucrat.

Seven years later, more is known about the processes in the Norwegian executive centre. At least the subcommittee seems to have become an integrated part of the vocabulary of political journalists.¹ The present dissertation answers questions about how and why cabinet decision-making in Norway has changed, although the focus of this final product deviates from the initial curiosity that sparked the process. The various research questions in this dissertation are treated in four empirical articles:

- Article 1, "Presidentialisation in the executive sphere? Evidence from Norwegian cabinets", was published in *Scandinavian Political Studies* in 2012.
- Article 2, "Presidentialisation and cabinet decision-making: Exploring the importance of coalition partners", was sent to *International Political Science Review* in April 2013, and in June 2013 the journal invited a revised version.

¹ In eight Norwegian newspapers (*Aftenposten*, *Dagbladet*, *Dagsavisen*, *Dagens Næringsliv*, *Klassekampen*, *Nationen*, *VG*, *Vårt Land*), the term 'underutvalget' was used 78 times in the four years 2002–2005. In the next four years (2006–2009), the term was used 694 times.

- Article 3, “Strengthening of the executive centre: Looking beyond NPM as the explanation for change”, was first sent to *International Review of Administrative Sciences* in February 2013; a second version was submitted in June 2013.
- Article 4, “Concentration of power in cabinets: Exploring the importance of the party political context”, was first sent in to *Acta Politica* in February 2013; a second version was submitted in June 2013.

The dissertation would not have been possible to write without help and guidance from several people.

First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Dag Ingvar Jacobsen, for his priceless help. Without his support, critique, and positive feedback, this dissertation would not have come to a successful completion within the prescribed time. I would also like to express my huge gratitude to my co-supervisor, Professor Tom Christensen, for constructive comments throughout the writing process.

At the Department of Political Science, several people have helped this dissertation come to life. Rune Karlsen, Øivind Bratberg, Elin Allern, Jostein Askim, and Anders Jupskås have all read various article drafts, and contributed with constructive and thoughtful comments.

The dissertation rests partly on interviews, and I would like to thank all the former ministers, chiefs of staff, and secretaries general for participating in the study. Without their open and positive approach, my research project would have been much more difficult. The restricted cabinet material would also have been inaccessible without the present party leaders’ positive attitude. The Prime Minister’s Office and the Ministry of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs also deserve thanks for providing me with data.

My mother and father have helped the completion of this dissertation, through babysitting services and other contributions in our family life with Mads, Anna, and Lars. My parents-in-law have also contributed hugely to make our little family function.

Finally, I would like to thank my wonderful wife, Heidi. Without her smile, patience, and supportive attitude, it would certainly have been impossible to complete this work.

Oslo, 15 June 2013

Kristoffer Kolltveit

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² There is some overlap of tables (for instance tab. 3.1, a1.1, a2.1, and a3.1)

Part 1: Introduction to articles

Cabinet decision-making and concentration of power: Exploring and explaining developments in the Norwegian executive centre

Abstract

Centralisation of authority and concentration of decision-making power in cabinets are well-studied topics in political science literature. This dissertation deals with how and why such changes appear in a country that traditionally has been characterised by collegiality and consensus in the executive centre. The introductory part first presents the presidentialisation thesis as a theoretical point of departure, and elaborates concrete expectations regarding the Norwegian case based on supplementary literature. The decision-making system in Norway is then presented. The methods and data used to investigate changes in the executive centre in Norway are presented and discussed. The introductory part provides a short summary of the findings from the four empirical articles. Finally, the implications of the findings are discussed and future research is briefly suggested.

Acknowledgements: A draft version of this introductory part was presented at a seminar at the Department of Political Science, University of Oslo, April 2013. I would like to thank Øivind Bratberg, Tom Christensen, Dag Ingvar Jacobsen, Anders Jupskås, and Rune Karlsen for valuable comments.

1. INTRODUCTION

Decision-making in cabinet lies at the heart of the policymaking process in parliamentary democracies. It has been widely claimed that cabinets over the last decades have come under pressure from different directions. Decision-making power has been delegated upwards to supranational organisations, and tasks have been moved out of ministries to underlying directorates and single-purpose organisations (Pierre 2000; Rhodes 1994, 1996). Several strains of research deal with how the various societal developments have changed decision-making in cabinets. In recent years, ‘presidentialisation’ has become a catchword to describe changes in parliamentary democracies in Western Europe (Helms 2005). The multifaceted concept has been used to denote both the personalisation of parliamentary election campaigns (Mughan 2000) and the empowerment of prime ministers in relation to party and cabinet (Poguntke & Webb 2005). Prime ministerial empowerment and presidentialisation are long-standing questions in political science. Recently, Poguntke and Webb’s conceptualisation (2005) has provided a framework for comparative analysis. According to the presidentialisation thesis, parliamentary democracies are moving from their different starting points towards a presidentialised form of government. This development is apparent in different parts of society, and the intra-executive presidentialisation implies a concentration of decision-making power in cabinet (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 11–12). Poguntke and Webb’s framework provides several indicators of change in cabinet decision-making. Based on their conceptualisation of the presidentialisation thesis, one would empirically expect weaker ministers, impaired collegial decision-making arenas, and stronger prime ministers with increased resources. These changes would enable prime ministers to decide more policy issues at the expense of the full cabinet.

Based on the evidence from the various country studies in their volume, Webb and Poguntke conclude that it is reasonable to talk of a presidentialisation of contemporary democracy (2005: 347). Some signs of presidentialisation are even found in countries like Denmark, Sweden, The Netherlands, and Belgium (Aylott 2005; Fiers & Krouwel 2005; Pedersen & Knudsen 2005). However, scrutinizing changes in the executive sphere, the picture is more mixed. In Sweden, for instance, there are signs of increased power for the prime minister, although the picture is ambiguous (Bergman & Bolin 2011: 273; Bäck et al. 2011; Premfors & Sundström 2007; Sundström 2009). In Denmark, prime ministerial power is ‘still kept in check by consensus politics (Pedersen & Knudsen 2005: 174).

In the Scandinavian parliamentary systems, coalitions have been common, there has been a high degree of collegiality within cabinets, and prime ministers have traditionally had limited influence over other ministers (King 1994; O'Malley 2007), although the prime minister might be considered a dominant political figure (Arter 2004).³ In countries with collegial traditions and frequent coalition cabinets, a process of presidentialisation in cabinet decision-making would seem to defy central characteristics (Persson & Wiberg 2011: 19). Given the ambiguous empirical picture, a need still exists to investigate how and why decision-making in such parliamentary democracies has been changed.

Two general research questions thus overarch this PhD dissertation: *Does presidentialisation happen in countries with collegial traditions and frequent coalition cabinets?* And further: *What explains the possible changes in cabinet decision-making?* These overarching research questions are answered by a case study of developments in Norwegian cabinets over the last 30 years. Although Poguntke and Webb's conceptualisation might have helped somewhat remove the general vagueness characterising the former debate on prime ministerial empowerment (Helms 2005), there are still ambiguous areas. The present dissertation thus draws on other strains of research when inferring concrete expectations about the Norwegian case. For instance, the broad literature on public sector reforms is utilized when investigating how developments in society have contributed to changes in the executive centre. Coalition governance literature is applied to underline the argument that features of cabinet, such as the number of parties and the parliamentary basis of cabinet, might have affected the degree and form of power concentration in the executive centre.

Overall, this dissertation investigates if changes in cabinet actors and decision-making processes can be explained by broad societal developments and changes in the party political context. These four main assumptions are treated in four empirical articles. Changes in actors in the executive centre, such as the background of cabinet ministers and resources devoted to the prime minister, are treated in article 1. Change in the actual decision-making behaviour of these actors is treated in article 2. The impact of societal changes is scrutinized in article 3. How changes in the party political context contribute to concentration of power is investigated in article 4.

Drawing on various cabinet documents and interviews with politicians and senior officials, this dissertation finds solid evidence for change in cabinet decision-making over the last three

³ The Swedish and Danish prime ministers have been somewhat more than firsts among equals (Damgaard 2004; Larsson 1994).

decades in Norway. However, not entirely as expected from the presidentialisation thesis. Over the last 30 years, Norwegian ministers have not become weaker, nor have they been more frequently reshuffled. Nor has the number of cabinet meetings fallen dramatically, although the number of cabinet meetings has declined over the studied period. However, there has been change in the collegial nature of Norwegian cabinets. In the last four cabinets, inner circles have become increasingly important in cabinet decision-making, and have been increasingly formalised. The Prime Minister's Office has been strengthened with administrative and political personnel, and from 2009 with a coordination minister. Although presidentialisation does not seem to be a fitting description of such changes, an important conclusion from this dissertation is that there has been a concentration of power in Norwegian cabinets.

Looking more broadly at various efforts to strengthen the Norwegian executive centre, there seem to be several explanations. Some of the changes, such as the strengthening of the Prime Minister's Office, can indirectly be seen as reactions to the increased sectorisation in the central government apparatus. Other changes could be explained as improvements in the decision-making system, since the cabinet's workload has increased. The findings from the dissertation also suggest that the recent concentration of power in Norwegian cabinets has happened because various features of cabinet have increased the need for political coordination.

This PhD dissertation contributes to the existing literature on decision-making in Norwegian cabinets. Generally, and more important, the dissertation's findings supplement the understanding of how and why cabinet decision-making has changed in parliamentary democracies with collegial traditions and frequent coalition cabinets.

This first part of the dissertation is divided into five main parts. After the introduction, the next section provides a description of the Norwegian decision-making system, as the object of study. The third section presents the presidentialisation thesis, as a theoretical point of departure, and elaborates the overall research questions. The fourth section outlines the methodological choices made in the efforts to answer the research questions. The fifth section provides a summary of the findings, and discusses possible implications.

In the second part of the dissertation, the four empirical articles are presented in full detail. A summary of the interview questions and an overview of informants and respondents are listed in the appendix.

2. THE DECISION-MAKING SYSTEM IN NORWAY⁴

Conceptualising decision-making and the executive centre in Norway

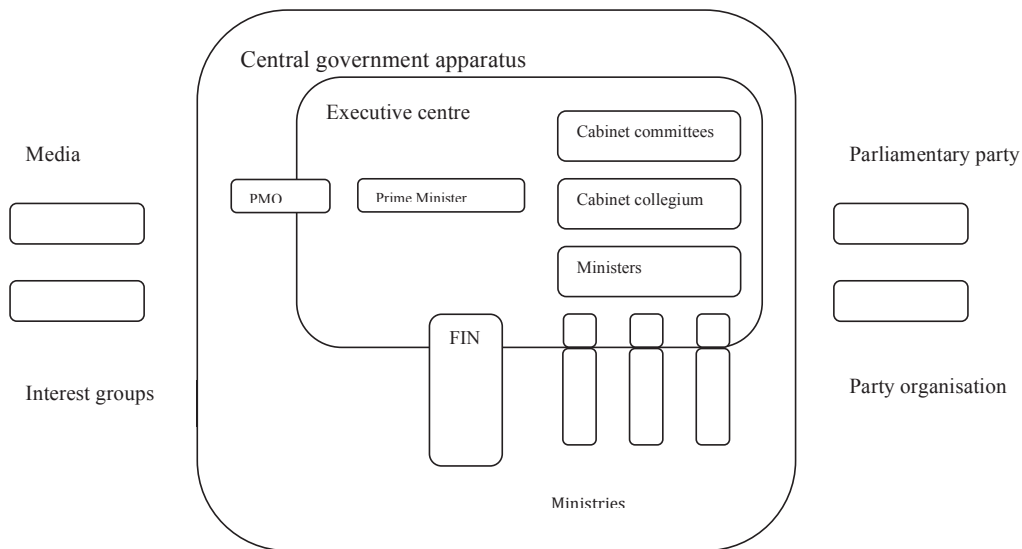
Decision-making in cabinet is part of the more extensive concept of political steering: efforts to make and implement collective decisions (Olsen 1988). Looking at the phenomenon as a policy cycle consisting of distinct stages or phases (Lasswell 1956: 2; Mintzberg et al. 1976), political steering can be said to consist of the setting of political priorities and agendas, decision-making and coordination, implementation, and finally control and learning. The focus of the present PhD dissertation is limited to the process of decision-making and coordination in cabinet. How political priorities and agendas are set, how policies are implemented, and how results and experience from the initiated efforts are reported back to politicians, are all stages in the policy process outside the focus of this dissertation.

In focusing on the process of decision-making and coordination in Norway, several actors and arenas are relevant, and the dissertation can thus be said to stand in the core executive tradition. The core executive concept was introduced two decades ago in the scientific debate about British central government (Elgie 2011). The perspective underlines how the ‘heart of the machinery’ consists of different institutions, interorganizational networks, and informal practice all contributing to coordination (Rhodes 1995: 12). Rhodes defines ‘core executive’ as ‘a complex web of institutions, networks, and practices surrounding the prime minister, cabinet, cabinet committees and their official counterparts, less formalized ministerial clubs or meetings, bilateral negotiations and inter-departmental committees’ (1995: 12). Rhodes’ concept of core executive has later been further conceptualised and applied in several studies, both in different parts of Europe, and outside of Europe (Elgie 2011). However, the core executive concept has also been criticised for underestimating the importance and continued power of the central government (Kjær 2011: 107). In the present PhD dissertation, the term ‘executive centre’ is utilised.⁵ The term serves as a neutral analytical point of departure, guiding attention to certain actors and decision-making arenas inside the central government apparatus.

⁴ Parts of this section draw on the Norwegian article ‘Maktkonsentrasjon og politisk kontekst’ (Kolltveit 2012), first published in *Norsk Statsvitenskapelig Tidsskrift*. The article was named best article of the year 2012, and a translated version will appear in *World Political Science Review*. After lengthy considerations, the article was not included in the thesis mainly because of overlap with especially article 2 and article 4.

⁵ In the literature, the term ‘executive centre’ has recently also been used to describe EU institutions like the Commission and EU-level agencies (Curtin & Egeberg 2008; Egeberg & Trondal 2011). Here, the executive centre is seen as consisting of several entities.

Figure 2.1: Illustration of the Norwegian political system



Decision-making in cabinet relates to the concept of power, and in the executive centre, there are various power relations between the various actors (Elgie 1997; Goetz 2006).⁶ As pointed out by Goetz (2006), it is possible to distinguish between at least five relevant power relations: the relations between the executive centre and actors outside, like the legislature, the governing parties, and the administration.⁷ In addition, there is a power relation between the different actors in the executive centre, and finally a relation between the actors at the core of the executive centre, such as the prime minister, cabinet collegium, cabinet ministers, and cabinet committees. According to the presidentialisation thesis, there have been changes in some these power relations in recent decades. This assumption is elaborated in the next section, after the characteristics of the Norwegian system are presented.

Decision-making in the Norwegian system

Norway is a country with strong collegial traditions in cabinet decision-making. In the Norwegian system, the prime minister formally has no authority over cabinet members.

⁶ There are several definitions of the multifaceted concept of power. Here, a Weberian definition is applied, and power is understood as the ability to achieve desired outcomes even against resistance (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 7).

⁷ Based on figure 2.1, one might also add the relations with media actors and interest groups.

However, the Government Instructions from 1909 declare that the prime minister is the chairperson of the Council of State (statsråd) and may demand all the information on a given case (Statsministerens kontor 1969). Comparatively, Norwegian prime ministers have traditionally been weak compared to prime ministers in other parliamentary democracies (King 1994; O'Malley 2007). As a 'primus inter pares', the prime minister has been called a political organizer, but no superstar (Olsen 1983: 81).⁸ In Norway, the cabinet has traditionally been seen as a strong 'collegium', with equal ministers, and has been characterised by consensus in the decision-making process (Fimreite & Læg Reid 2005). The cabinet's strong position has been explained by the prime minister's lack of formal authority over other ministers, and by the collegial working form of Norwegian cabinets (Christensen & Læg Reid 2002; Skjeie 2001).

In Norway, the full cabinet and individual ministers have been the most important actors in cabinet decision-making processes. The working mode in the 1960s, 70s and 80s has thus been characterized as a hybrid of ministerial and cabinet government (Eriksen 2003: 84). According to the constitution, cabinet decisions are formally taken only in the Council of State which is led by the king, or in the ministries. In reality, however, cabinet meetings have been the most important arena for coordinating and deciding cabinet policy (Christensen & Læg Reid 2002: 66). Norwegian cabinets have traditionally had two cabinet meetings weekly, besides the ritual Council of State, and these meetings have been called the pillar of the cabinet's collegial working form (Skjeie 2001: 182). As a rule, all important issues in the ministries should be discussed at the cabinet meetings. Important issues are cases with significant economical and administrative consequences, cases that are politically difficult, and cases where two or more ministers disagree (Statsministerens kontor 2010: 9). Cases discussed at the cabinet meetings are presented in government notes on 2–3 pages. The government notes are submitted to other ministers prior to the meetings, and comments are incorporated in the notes. In the cabinet meetings up to 30 cases might be discussed, making Norwegian cabinets a central body that often just approve decisions taken in the ministries (Olsen 1983: 104). Controversies between ministerial areas or between parties are either resolved at the cabinet meetings, or discussed further and solved by smaller groups of ministers, often the prime minister, finance minister, and relevant line ministers (Skjeie 2001:

⁸ Recent Norwegian prime ministers have almost never been accused of being 'presidential' by the media or by other politicians, although Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg was called 'president-like' after a questioning of the prime minister candidates in the 2009 election campaign (Amundsen 2009). The 'president' term was also briefly mentioned after 2009 elections in relation to the appointment of Karl Eirik Schjøtt-Pedersen as coordination minister at the Prime Minister's Office (Fiske 2009).

184; Olsen 1983: 103). In coalition cabinets, inner circles have traditionally consisted of coalition party leaders managing the most difficult controversies in cabinet (Narud & Strøm 2000a: 179). However, scholars seem to disagree about whether these inner circles should be called inner cabinets (Solstad 1969: 165). An inner circle was institutionalised when Willoch's single-party cabinet was expanded to a three-party coalition in 1983. The subcommittee consisted of the prime minister, the two other party leaders, and the finance minister (Rommetvedt 1994: 251). According to Willoch, issues had to be thoroughly prepared, in addition to the bureaucratic preparations, to be able to reach decisions in the full cabinet.⁹ Although this inner cabinet also was used to solve conflicts, ministers seldom felt that decisions were made without their involvement (Eriksen 2003: 132). The reliance on the subcommittee to discuss and sometime solve difficult issues has also been seen in later coalition cabinets (Narud & Strøm 2003: 179).

Internal cabinet committees, like the security committee and the research committee, have been part of most cabinets in the post-war period. Other cabinets have also had committees for employment, petroleum, and foreign policy (Bloch 1963; Eriksen 2003; Solstad 1969). However, the different committees have mainly been used to discuss issues before cabinet meetings, and committees' decisions have not been considered politically binding for the cabinet.¹⁰ The full cabinet has thus been labelled the most important 'committee' (Rommetvedt 1994).

In Norway, the principle of ministerial responsibility applies, meaning ministers are constitutionally responsible to parliament for all activities in their ministries' subordinate bodies (Nordby 2000). This has been mentioned as an important reason for why Norway has strong line ministries while the ministries with coordination responsibilities are relatively weak (Fimreite & Lægveid, 2005: 180).¹¹ In Norway, the Prime Minister's Office is both a secretariat for the prime minister and support for the cabinet as a whole. The office works as a broker in clarifying disagreements, and to prepare the cabinet agenda. It is not formally superior to other ministries, and has been labelled a *primus inter pares* (Statskonsult 2007). The Norwegian Prime Minister's Office has traditionally been comparatively small, which

⁹ Interview with author, 12 December 2011.

¹⁰ Olsen (1980) notes how the cabinet committees became less rather than more crucial in the 70s and 80s.

Willoch's coalition cabinet (1983–1986), however, used these committees somewhat more (Rommetvedt 1994).

¹¹ The Prime Minister's Office is not the only ministry with coordination responsibilities. The Ministry of Finance has such responsibilities through the budgetary process, and by the fact that all cases discussed in cabinet shall be presented to the Ministry of Finance (Statsministerens kontor 2010). Other ministries like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, and the Ministry of Education and Research also have some coordination responsibilities.

might explain why the role as facilitator has been most important (Christensen & Læg Reid 2002).

3. LITERATUR REVIEW AND ELABORATION OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Introduction

Two general research questions overarch this PhD dissertation: Does presidentialisation happen in countries with collegial traditions and frequent coalition cabinets? Moreover, what explains the possible changes in cabinet decision-making in such countries? The first research question is descriptive in nature, focusing on how the executive centre has changed. The dissertation scrutinizes changes related both to the actors and to the decision-making process. The second research question is explanatory, aiming to understand the observed changes. The dissertation scrutinizes explanations connected to societal developments, and related to features of cabinet, such as the number of parties and the cabinet's parliamentary basis.

The research questions are answered by a case study of Norway. The rationale behind this choice and methodological considerations are discussed in the next section, on methods and data. This section aims to elaborate the general research questions further. The presidentialisation thesis is first presented as a theoretical point of departure. Alternative strains of research are then used as supplements to elaborate concrete, empirical expectations about changes in and explanations of cabinet decision-making.

The presidentialisation thesis

Scholars have given different names to observed changes in cabinet decision-making, for instance, prime ministerial predominance (Heffernan 2003), prime ministerial governance (Paloheimo 2003), chief executive empowerment (Johansson & Tallberg 2010), and intra-executive presidentialisation (Poguntke & Webb 2005). Behind these labels are developments where collegial decision-making has been reduced, and where there has been a centralisation of authority, or concentration of power, around chief executives (Peters et al. 2000). The concept of presidentialisation has been used in political science for several decades (Courtney 1984; Foley 1993, 2000; Hart 1991; Mughan 1993, 2000; Simeon 1991). More recently, the presidentialisation thesis has been conceptualised, providing an analytical framework for studying some of these changes.

The presidentialisation thesis outlined

According to Poguntke and Webb's thesis, parliamentary democracies are moving from their different starting points towards a presidentialised form of government (2005). In presidential regimes, the heads of government have superior executive power resources, and enjoy

considerable autonomy from their own party, as they are elected directly and are not responsible to parliament. The process of presidentialisation of parliamentary democracies can thus be understood as being characterised by ‘increasing leadership power resources and autonomy within party and the political executive’, and ‘increasingly leadership-centred electoral processes’ (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 5).

The process of presidentialisation entails changes in the actual practice of but not necessarily in the formal and constitutional structures of parliamentary democracy. Poguntke and Webb distinguish between three ‘faces of presidentialisation’. The first relates to political parties and whether party leaders have gained more autonomy from the dominant coalitions of power within the party. The second, the electoral face, concerns whether media coverage and election campaigns to a greater extent focus on leaders, and how leader effects also manifest themselves in voting behaviour. The third face, which the present PhD dissertation focuses upon, concerns the executive branch (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 9). The intra-executive presidentialisation implies a concentration of power, where state leaders increasingly decide policy issues more unilaterally or bilaterally with involved ministers, at the expense of the full cabinet (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 11–12). This concentration of decision-making power is enabled by greater zones of autonomy, or increased capacity to overcome resistance. The increased leadership power of state leaders thus ‘flows from the combined effect of growing autonomy and enhanced power resources’ (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 8).

Poguntke and Webb identify various indicators of the presidentialisation process in the executive.¹² Prime ministers’ ability to achieve desired outcomes is restrained by other ministers’ ability to interfere. To make it easier to dominate these veto players, prime ministers increasingly prefer to appoint non-party technocrats or promote politicians without a distinct party power base, since such ministers are weaker and more controllable (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 19). Further, prime ministers increasingly make reshuffles in cabinet, in order to increase their autonomy and reduce the veto players’ ability to interfere in policymaking (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 19). The cabinet collective has been weakened through reduced frequency or length of cabinet meetings, challenging the opportunities for collegial decision-making (Webb & Poguntke 2005: 340). Prime ministers, on the other hand, have been strengthened with increased resources at the Prime Minister’s Office. Increasingly, state leaders have therefor been capable to decide more cabinet issues either alone or bilaterally with involved ministers, at the expense of the full cabinet (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 11–12).

¹² However, they do not present a fixed list. The present description thus contains elements from various parts of their book.

According to the presidentialisation thesis, the power shift in the executive has been accompanied by growing autonomy, and prime ministers have become increasingly independent of direct interference from parties in cabinet decision-making. While party government implies governing through parties, presidentialisation implies an increasing tendency to govern past parties (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 8–9).

In their thesis, Poguntke and Webb highlight various structural explanations for the different faces of presidentialisation. According to them, internationalization and ‘growth of the state’ are the most important explanations for intra-executive presidentialisation since they most directly affect decision-making in cabinet (2005: 16).

The growth of the state is in part caused by the increased fragmentation and differentiation of the public sector. According to the thesis, the growing complexity and competence of the state have led to centralisation of power as an attempt to better coordinate the fragmented institutional structures. Furthermore, the trend towards sectorized policymaking has brought more contact between relevant line ministers and the head of state (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 14). Poguntke and Webb see these processes in relation to other initiatives to restructure the state, such as devolution to agencies and the process of privatisation. ‘The core executive attempts to reduce the scope of its direct responsibility for government, while enhancing its coordination power in the domain which it continues to regard as strategically critical’ (2005: 14).

According to Poguntke and Webb’s thesis, internationalisation is another underlying structural cause of intra-executive presidentialisation. Internationalisation has transferred important decisions to the international arena, and issues on such arenas are mainly dealt with in inter-governmental negotiations between state leaders, leaving cabinets and parliaments mainly to ratify the decisions (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 13–14).

Poguntke and Webb also list changed mass communication as a structural cause of intra-executive presidentialisation. The mediatisation of politics implies a stronger focus on personality instead of on issues and programs. Adapting to media as a channel for political communication, governmental leaders can bypass other executive actors in setting the political agenda (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 15).

Recent critiques of the thesis

Although the concept of presidentialisation remains popular with political scientists (Helms 2005), the presidentialisation thesis has also been extensively critiqued. Dowding, for instance, claims that the thesis should be ‘expunged from political science vocabulary’

(2012). Looking beyond such formulations, the criticism can be said to have both a conceptual and an empirical dimension.

The conceptual debate has primarily emerged from scholars discussing developments in the United Kingdom. A main question has been whether parliamentary democracies like the UK can become presidential. Dowding (2012) claims that the empowerment of prime ministers in fact makes parliamentary and presidential systems less alike, since prime ministers already have more power than presidents do. Heffernan (2005) notes how systemic differences distinguish presidents and prime ministers, with the cabinet being a decisive constraint on prime ministers' power. The conceptual critique also has a semantic side, with scholars questioning the most appropriate name for the observed developments.¹³

The presidentialisation thesis has also received empirical criticism, especially from Karvonen (2010).¹⁴ Based on the evidence from the various country studies in their volume, Webb and Poguntke generally conclude that it is reasonable to talk of a presidentialisation of contemporary democracy (2005: 347). In his reassessment of the empirical support for the notion of presidentialisation of parliamentary democracies, Karvonen concludes that:

[C]onsiderable expertise seems to believe that there has been a growth over time in the influence of the prime minister in the institutional setting of parliamentary democracy. Systematic empirical evidence suggests that this has indeed occurred in a large number of countries, but it would be exaggerated to speak of a pervasive and linear development across the universe of parliamentary democracy (2010: 34–35).

Investigating concentration of power in cabinets

As an answer to the conceptual critique, Poguntke et al. have underlined that although the constitutional differences remain, the operating logic of the presidential system increasingly seems to be applied also to parliamentary systems (2011: 2). Without going further into the criticism and the answer from Poguntke et al. here, the presidentialisation thesis is taken as a theoretical point of departure. Looking more closely at changes in the executive centre in the Scandinavian countries, however, the ambiguous empirical picture is substantiated.

¹³ Dowding (2012), for instance, suggests *prime ministerialisation*, while Heffernan prefers *prime ministerial predominance* (2003, 2012).

¹⁴ The distinction between conceptual and empirical criticism might seem artificial, as Dowding (2012) and Heffernan (2012), for instance, also question the empirical foundations of the British case.

Empirical expectations of change in cabinet actors and arenas

The strengthening of the central cabinet offices supporting the prime has been called one of the clearest developments in the executive centre in several countries (Peters et al. 2000: 11). Prime ministers have been strengthened both with increased economic resources and by the growth in administrative and political personnel (Peters et al. 2000). Such changes have also been seen in the Scandinavian countries. In Sweden, for instance, there was a clear rise in personnel in 2005 when EU affairs were transferred to the Prime Minister's Office from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Bäck et al. 2007: 36). Also in Denmark the Prime Minister's Office has been transformed and strengthened over the recent decades (Knudsen 2000a, 2000b; Pedersen & Knudsen 2005).

Cabinet meetings seem to have become less important even in countries with traditionally strong collegial features. In Sweden, for instance, the formal cabinet meetings have become less important as forums for collegial decision-making (Sundström 2009), and the number of formal decisions has been clearly reduced (Larsson 2004: 60; Premfors & Sundström 2007). In Denmark, the cabinet meetings' importance is said to have decreased (Pedersen & Knudsen 2005: 163).

Scrutinizing change in the background of ministers, the picture is less clear. In Sweden, there has been a slight tendency from the 1950s for fewer ministers to have a parliamentary background (Bäck et al. 2009). However, the evidence for the presidentialisation thesis is mixed since more ministers have backgrounds such as leading party offices or have been elected to elective offices at local and regional levels (Beckman 2007; Bäck et al. 2007, 2011: 263; Bergman & Bolin 2011: 273). In Denmark, the traditionally high share of ministers with experience from parliament has in fact increased steadily (Damgaard 2011: 92; Knudsen 2000b: 105).

Looking at the number of reshuffles the picture is also ambiguous. In Sweden, there are no trends of increasing reshuffles in cabinet (Bäck et al. 2011; Sundström 2009). In Denmark, on the other hand, the average duration of ministers' terms in office has decreased (Kirk & Knudsen 1996). The increased turnover has not applied to the minister of finance and the minister of foreign affairs, leading to centralisation in cabinet around the prime minister and these core ministers (Pedersen & Knudsen 2005: 161).

Based on the presidentialisation thesis, several expectations can be formulated, although former contributions show that the empirical picture from the Scandinavian countries is mixed. If there has been a presidentialisation of cabinet decision-making in Norway, we would expect:

- *that more ministers with limited experience from parliament and party would have been appointed.*
- *that more reshuffles would have been made in cabinet.*
- *that the number of cabinet meetings would have been reduced.*
- *that the prime minister would have more resources.*

Empirical expectations of change in cabinet decision-making

According to the presidentialisation thesis, the above-mentioned changes in cabinet actors and arenas, should enable prime ministers to decide more cabinet issues at the expense of the full cabinet. However, a move towards more unilateral decision-making seems less likely in countries with collegial traditions and frequent coalition cabinets. It is a central argument in this dissertation that core cabinet members, such as coalition partners, also might be empowered in cabinet decision-making, because prime ministers share decision-making power in order to keep coalitions together. This empirical expectation, derived from coalition literature, is elaborated below.

The strengthening of prime ministers and the weakening of the full cabinet, as hypothesised by the presidentialisation thesis, imply that collegiality in cabinet has changed. However, the degree of collegiality in cabinet decision-making should be seen as a continuum (Andeweg 1993, 1997). Between cabinet government on the one side and prime ministerial government on the other, are the examples of smaller groups of ministers dominating the decision-making process.¹⁵ Such oligarchic groups might include the prime minister and ministers like the foreign minister and the finance minister. For instance, it is well known that no other minister is involved in all the aspects of cabinet life as the finance minister is (Elgie 1997; Larsson 1993). Empirically, concentration of power around prime ministers in several parliamentary democracies has also included such core ministers (Heffernan & Webb 2005; Pedersen & Knudsen 2005; Sundström 2009).¹⁶

Other core actors in cabinet decision-making might be coalition partners. Well known is that prime ministers in single-party cabinets have more power over cabinet affairs than do

¹⁵ Full collegiality is an ideal model, as ministers seldom participate in all discussions in cabinet (Blondel 1988; Andeweg 2000). Nor are all cabinet cases discussed in the plenary sessions.

¹⁶ Change in collegiality implies that decision-making in cabinet might be either fragmented or concentrated. Fragmentation would imply that single ministers make decisions on their own, without being influenced by colleagues; concentration would imply that a power centre will be manifested in cabinet (Eriksen 1992: 71)

prime ministers in cabinets with coalition partners from different parties (Jones 1991). The presence of coalition partners curbs the prime minister's ability to decide more unilaterally in cabinet, and a move towards more unilateral decision-making thus seems more difficult in coalitions.¹⁷

In their presidentialisation thesis, Poguntke and Webb partly acknowledge this, and distinguish between majoritarian and consensual systems. In majoritarian systems, chief executives have more immediate power at their disposal. In consensual systems, exemplified by minority governments or broad coalitions, state leaders must dominate veto players, such as coalition partners, to enhance their zones of autonomy and power (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 11–12). However, oligarchic structures involving core ministers or coalition partners are not necessarily just an instrument to reinforce the role of the prime minister (Andeweg 1993: 28). Core ministers and coalition partners might in fact be empowered, and gain an increasingly important role in cabined decision-making. In multi-party cabinets, the functional equivalent of the powerful prime minister is a strong collective coalition leadership (Andeweg 2000: 383). The prime minister thus functions as a 'primus of the primi' (Frogner 1997: 92). Although concentration of power implies weakened collegiality in cabinet, the ending point might not be prime ministerial government, but even oligarchic forms of government where coalition partners and core ministers are empowered.

Although the empowerment of such inner circles seems less documented than prime ministerial empowerment is, some contributions have touched upon their growing importance. In Belgium for instance, the prime minister has assumed a more dominant role in policy development and coordination (Fiers & Krouwel 2005: 132). However, decision-making has also been centralised, which is reflected by the growing use in Belgium of the 'kern cabinet', consisting of prime minister and vice premiers of all coalition parties. According to Fiers and Krouwel, the 'kern cabinet' has been increasingly used since the mid 1970s, and has developed into a forum for both conflict prevention and conflict resolution (2005: 134; Frogner 1997).

In Denmark, the coordination committee has occasionally functioned as an inner cabinet made up of coalition party leaders and high-ranking members of cabinet (Knudsen 2000a). The committee has been more formalised since the mid 1990s and became an important

¹⁷ For instance, as Clements (1994) notes concerning the German case, even Chancellor Kohl had to function as a moderator between coalition parties. For a more recent account on the effect of coalition partners, see Bennister and Heffernan (2012) concerning the British case.

instrument in the 2000s (Knudsen 2007). While the Committee for Economic Affairs, chaired by the finance minister, was the central coordination arena in the 1990s, from 2001 there was a displacement of power to the Coordination Committee chaired by the prime minister and consisting of party leaders in cabinet and core ministers (Jensen 2003: 200; Jensen 2008).¹⁸

Concentration of power around core actors in cabinet seems plausible in the Norwegian case, given the limited traditions for strong, dominating prime ministers, and given the collegial nature of cabinet decision-making. As an elaboration of the presidentialisation thesis, an empirical expectation can thus be formulated. If there has been concentration of power in cabinet decision-making in Norway, we would expect the following:

- *Decision-making power to have been concentrated around the prime minister and core actors such as the finance minister and coalition party leaders.*

According to Poguntke and Webb, the process of intra-executive presidentialisation also implies that prime ministers experience increased autonomy from their parties (2005: 8–9). They hypothesise less direct interference from the governing parties in the ‘business of the executive’ (Poguntke et al. 2011). The autonomy dimension is not listed amongst the various indicators of intra-executive presidentialisation labelled ‘particularly relevant’. However, this assumption is based on a rich literature describing the decline in political parties’ policy-shaping role. Mair (2008), for instance, points out that party government might be waning because public policy is no longer decided by the party, or is no longer under its direct control. However, party actors are still involved in various stages of the policymaking process (Blondel & Cotta 2000). Party actors are crucial in negotiations on coalition agreements and are often represented in the mechanisms for conflict management in coalitions (Müller & Strøm 2000). In several countries, the transition from mass parties seems to have made the party leadership more important than the organs of the extra-parliamentary party organization (Müller 2000), and the party leadership now often occupy the most attractive government offices and parliamentary positions (Goetz 2006). Increasing autonomy from party, as hypothesised by the presidentialisation thesis, should thus also imply decreased interference from leading party actors. If there has been a process of presidentialisation in cabinet decision-making in Norway, we would expect the following:

¹⁸ In Sweden, inner cabinets have not been common (Larsson 1994), although informal ad hoc groups were organized in Göran Persson’s cabinet to prepare discussions in cabinet (Persson 2003).

- *The direct involvement of leading party actors in cabinet decision-making to have been decreased.*

Explaining concentration of power in cabinets

The second overarching research question in this PhD dissertation concerns explanations for change in the executive centre. Again, the presidentialisation thesis is taken as a point of departure, and supplementary literature is used to sketch out concrete expectations.

Societal developments as explanation

The process of Europeanization has often been used to explain changes in the executive. Several contributions have shown how decision-making in the European Union has resulted in a transfer of authority and resources to chief executives to enhance intra-governmental coordination (Damgaard 2000; Goetz & Meyer-Sahling 2008; Johansson & Tallberg 2010). The impact of the internationalisation of decision-making is also underlined by several of the country experts in Poguntke and Webb's volume (Webb & Poguntke 2005: 350). In their volume, the explanation is also mainly related to membership in the European Union, although one non-EU case also finds some support for the argument.¹⁹ Given that Norway is outside the EU, special emphasis has been placed on other societal developments believed to lead to changes in cabinet decision-making.²⁰

Summing up the support for the growth of the state explanation, Poguntke and Webb conclude that there is 'more equivocation about this as a cause of executive presidentialisation among our country experts' (2005: 351). Some of this lack of support might stem from the fact that the thesis is somewhat unclear about exactly how these public sector changes actually lead to the changes in the executive centre. The next parts of this section thus try to clarify the presidentialisation thesis regarding how public sector changes might have contributed to change, using supplementary literature.

The term 'growth of the state' can be traced to the literature on New Public Management (NPM) reforms. The NPM reforms' focus on devolution and horizontal specialisation led to the evolvement of single-purpose organisations and stronger vertical silos in the public sector (Christensen & Lægrevid 2007a). In the executive centre, NPM reforms meant that decisions

¹⁹ Globalisation is briefly mentioned as a factor slightly intensifying 'presidentialist characteristics' in Canada (Bakvis & Wolinetz 2005: 218).

²⁰ This is not to say that the process of Europeanization has been without influence in Norway. Several scholars have shown how the EEA agreement has affected Norwegian ministries, for instance Trondal (2005) and Narud and Strøm (2000b).

were moved out; and prime ministers, individual ministers, and the administrative leadership were deprived of some of their ability to formulate and to control cabinet policy (Dahlström et al. 2011b; Christensen et al. 2007). The literatures on post-NPM (Christensen & Læg Reid 2007a), whole-of-government (Christensen & Læg Reid 2007b), and joined-up government (Bogdanor 2005; Pollitt 2003) have shown how this development led to new focus on integrated organizational structures and various efforts to improve coherence and coordination in cabinet (Christensen & Læg Reid 2012).

Besides institutional fragmentation, the sectorization process is important to understand why the executive centre has changed. As devolution moved out regulatory and service-producing agencies, ministries have become more policy oriented and sectorized. Although NPM reforms mainly are decentralising, there are controlling elements through management-by-objectives-and-results (MBOR). The increased focus on MBOR has given the parent ministries the possibility to control the subordinate agencies, increasing vertical coordination inside the sector (Christensen & Læg Reid 2008). However, horizontal challenges between sectors remain. The increased sectorization of the central government apparatus has worsened coordination problems and weakened the collegial decision-making in cabinet (Peters et al. 2000: 9). NPM has thus indirectly affected the need for centralisation of authority.

Some have argued that the scope of recentring efforts mirrors the scope of former NPM reforms. The different measures to strengthen the centre have been strongest in the Anglo-American countries, where NPM reforms were most comprehensive. The recentring efforts have not been so strong in Scandinavia and in continental European countries, where NPM reforms were less comprehensive (Dahlström et al. 2011a: 264). According to Dahlström et al., the reform patterns thus 'seem to suggest that recentring processes are first and foremost a reaction on earlier decentring' (2011a: 270).

However, the societal developments leading to changes in the executive centre are probably not related solely to NPM. The need to centralise of power happens not only because NPM reforms have left the public sector more fragmented, but also because the public sector's ambit has grown. As governmental activity has increased, budgets and politicians' sectoral responsibilities have increased correspondingly (Peters et al. 2000: 8). Cabinets are involved in more issues and ministries must produce more material, which in turn creates pressure on cabinet decision-making. The pressure and complexity grow, and the full cabinet is no longer the decision-making body it once was (Foster 2005: 135). The expansion of state functions might thus create a need for changes in the executive centre in order to increase efficiency and to improve the cabinet decision-making process.

As an elaboration of the presidentialisation thesis, we would expect changes in the Norwegian executive centre to happen because of broad societal developments such as sectorisation and the increase in government activity. This phenomenon can be formulated as two concrete expectations:

- *Changes in the executive centre should appear to be a reaction to former NPM reforms.*
- *Changes in the executive centre should appear to be measures to improve cabinet decision-making.*

Changes in the party political context as explanation

In their thesis, Poguntke and Webb refer to enduring developments as ‘structural presidentialization’. ‘Contingent presidentialization’ of the executive on the other hand, is the leader’s domination of the political executive through the impact of short-term factors (2005: 340). Poguntke and Webb are mainly concerned about the underlying structural changes as explanations for presidentialisation. However, they acknowledge that the personality of state leaders and the ‘political context’ might constrain and shape executive leadership (Webb & Poguntke 2005: 337). ‘[E]ven a “presidential” prime minister in a majority system like the UK’s can be hauled back by countervailing forces of cabinet and parliamentary party’ (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 346).

In some of the country studies in Poguntke and Webb’s book, short-term changes seem to be of importance. For instance, Van Biezen and Hopkin (2005) mention how electoral strength, personal appeal, and inter-party dynamics have been important in explaining the variation in presidentialisation tendencies in Spain. However, the presidentialisation thesis does not offer an exhaustive overview of the elements of the ‘political context’, or discuss how the relevant elements actually can affect the concentration of power in cabinets. It is a central argument in this dissertation that features of cabinet are an important part of what will be called the cabinet’s party political context, and changes here might in fact contribute to the concentration of power in cabinet decision-making. To elaborate this argument, the literature on coalition governance is utilised.

Traditionally, the coalition literature has focused on how coalitions are made and terminated. In recent years, however, increased emphasis has been put on how coalitions operate. In other words, on all of a coalition’s life cycle (Müller et al. 2008). Drawing on the

coalition governance literature, it is possible to hypothesise how the party political context might affect concentration of power in cabinets.

All political systems have country-specific, historical conditions affecting decision-making processes in cabinet, like the role of bureaucracy, the number of parties, institutional rights of the prime minister, and administrative characteristics of the Prime Minister's Office (Bergman et al. 2006; Blondel 1988; Müller-Rommel 1993). Focusing on features of cabinet, three different elements are elaborated in this dissertation: the number of parties, the coalition's fragility, and cabinet's parliamentary basis.²¹

First, the number of parties in cabinet might affect both the degree and the form of power concentration. In single-party cabinets, departments constitute a 'centrifugal force', creating conflicts in cabinet (Andeweg 1988). In coalitions, however, parties are additional 'centrifugal forces'. Rivalry between coalition partners is a constant source of conflict, and policymaking is thus more conflictual in coalitions than in single-party cabinets (Andeweg & Timmermans 2008: 269; Frogner 1993). In addition, conflicts in coalitions are often also graver, since disagreements are more serious along party lines than along department lines (Andeweg 1997: 65). The need to concentrate decision-making power in fewer hands is thus greater in coalitions than it is in single-party cabinets. It also seems plausible that the number of parties in cabinet affects which actors are empowered, in other words the form of power concentration. To constrain departmental heterogeneity, single-party cabinets usually have different mechanisms such as a strong prime minister, a specially empowered finance minister, inner cabinet of overlords, or special cabinet committees (Andeweg 1988: 129). To limit political heterogeneity, coalition cabinets often have inner cabinets composed of leading ministers from all factions or parties, or a coalition committee with actors internal and external to the cabinet (Andeweg 1997; Andeweg & Timmermans 2008). While various societal developments might have increased the need for a stronger prime minister, the presence of coalition partners will not necessarily curb prime minister empowerment, but might instead lead to a concentration of power around inner circles, like inner cabinets or coalition committees (Blondel 1988).

Second, concentration of power might also be affected by the cabinet's fragility. In coalitions, fragility depends on the basic political differences between the participating parties and on the thoroughness of the political preparations, often evident through the extent of the negotiated coalition agreement. The cabinet's fragility also depends on how portfolios are

²¹ Features of cabinet might resemble what Laver and Schofield call coalition attributes (1990).

allocated (Müller & Strøm 2008). When ministries are distributed based on the parties' core policy concerns, the party disagreements might intensify the underlying disagreements along department lines. The fragility of a coalition will affect the decision-making process in the executive centre. In robust coalitions, individual ministers can largely decide issues within their department's purview. In fragile coalitions, on the other hand, more issues are potentially damaging to the coalition, making it more important to 'keep tabs' on the coalition partners (Andeweg & Timmermans 2008: 277; Martin & Vanberg 2004; Thies 2001). In the words of Strøm et al., the 'more fragile the coalition, the greater the need for coalition partners to monitor and control each other's behaviour' (2010: 521). Inner cabinets or special cabinet committees are decisive monitoring devices in fragile coalitions. Such inner circles play an important role in solving the most difficult cabinet cases in order to ensure the coalition's survival. Going from a stable to a more fragile coalition might thus increase the need to use inner cabinets. The fragility might also affect the type of inner circle. Based on large-n analysis, Andeweg and Timmermans (2008) find that fragile coalitions without written coalition agreements are likely to use external arenas involving parliamentary leaders to solve the most serious conflicts.²²

Third, concentration of power might be affected by the parliamentary basis of cabinet. Prime ministers leading majority cabinets often have powerful positions, and majority cabinets are thus more likely to dominate domestic politics than are minority cabinets (Johansen & Tallberg 2010: 211). Minority cabinets are dependent on support from other parties to get a majority for their policy proposals. Indeed, majority cabinets might lose parliamentary votes if party discipline breaks down, for example, as when the executive and legislative elements of the parties have different preferences (Laver 1999). However, political differences are presumably smaller inside parties than between parties, making it easier for majority cabinets to get their proposals through parliament. This has bearing not only for the ability to dominate domestic politics, but also on the decision-making processes in cabinet. Decisions taken in majority cabinets are more definitive, making the decision-making process inside cabinet more important and potentially conflictual. When the most important decisions are taken inside cabinet, rather than in parliament, there might be a greater need for mitigating mechanisms such as inner cabinets or coalition committees.

²² Andeweg and Timmermans (2008) operate with three categories: internal, such as inner cabinets or committees; mixed, bringing together the coalition leaders both outside and inside cabinet in coalition committees; and external, such as committees of parliamentary leaders.

Overall, the number of parties in cabinet, the coalition's fragility, and the cabinet's parliamentary basis are all parts of what has here been called the party political context, potentially affecting the concentration of power inside cabinet. If concentration of power has happened in the Norwegian executive centre, we would expect the following:

- *Changes in the executive centre would be explainable by change in the features of cabinet, such as the number of parties, the political fragility, and parliamentary basis.*

Bergman et al. (2006) promotes a similar argument with the focus on how the power of prime ministers depends both on their institutional rights and on what they call 'party politics'. Based on the party system and the cohesion of parties, as the two aspects of party politics, they assign points of prime ministerial powers across various parliamentary democracies (Bergman et al. 2006: 181–194). The concept of 'party politics' captures the number of parties and partly captures the parliamentary basis of cabinets as elaborated above.²³ However, when investigating the impact of short-term changes within a certain party system, the focus on features of cabinet seems more appropriate.

PhD dissertation's conceptual model

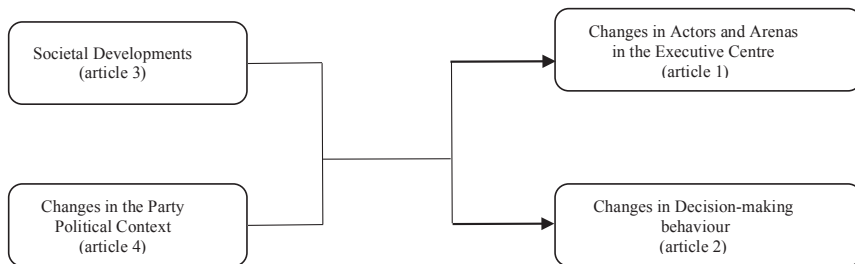
In this thesis, the impact from the 'changing structure of mass communication' has not been thoroughly investigated (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 16). Speaking of the broader concept of personalization of politics, McAllister claims that the 'international trends in political communications have become so uniform and pervasive that they dwarf all other explanations' (2007). As underlined by Karvonen (2010: 106), however, changes in the media sphere do not necessarily manifest themselves in the political sphere and in the behaviour of political actors. Mediatization of politics implies that the media's agenda-setting power has grown and that the political system has adjusted to the new demands of mass media (Asp 1986). The increased pressure from media might lead directly to larger communication units both in the ministries and at the Prime Minister's Office. How mediatization affects decision-making in the executive centre more indirectly has not been scrutinized in the present thesis. Nor has the importance of leadership style been investigated systematically.²⁴

²³ Bergman et al. (2006) differentiate within the various party systems based on the cohesion of parties. The fragility of cabinet utilised in this article, however, would resemble what Strøm elsewhere calls 'cabinet cohesion' or 'coalitional cohesion' (2006: 75).

²⁴ As will be mentioned also in the methods section, the interview guide contained a single question about leadership style, but it was difficult to get answers.

The various expectations elaborated above can be placed in a conceptual model illustrating how they are dealt with in the present PhD thesis.

Figure 3.1: PhD dissertation's conceptual model



The figure should not be seen as a causal model. Although it does contain arrows, it does not fully show the anticipated relationships between the various changes. For instance, weaker ministers, a stronger prime minister, and fewer cabinet meetings are believed to enable prime ministers to decide more issues at the expense of the full cabinet. The changes in actual decision-making behaviour could thus be seen as a result of changes in actors and arenas as intermediate variables.

Nor does the figure capture the anticipated relationship between the possible explanatory factors. In the presidentialisation thesis, the party political context is seen as a 'contingent cause', affecting whether state leaders are able to fully realize the potential for strong leadership, a potential caused by structural changes (Webb & Poguntke 2005: 340).²⁵

It is also difficult to illustrate the importance of the various explanations in a single causal model. As will be elaborated in the methods section, there might be weaker forces pushing Norway towards a more presidential working mode. In other words, the effect of the various explanations might generally not be so strong in the Norwegian case. Furthermore, the various theoretical frameworks seem to be based on different understandings of the causal relationship. The presidentialisation thesis and the literature on post-NPM efforts are far from formal theory. To interpret these theoretical starting points on a higher level of abstraction, one might say that both strains of research rest on a casual model assumption that action leads

²⁵ There is also a causal link between developments in society and the party political context, or in other words societal fragmentation and political fragmentation. For instance, new parties might emerge to capture new cleavages and conflicts in society.

to reaction, stimulus leads to response (Bouckert et al. 2010; Verhoest et al. 2007). For instance, the link between NPM and post-NPM rests on what Verhoest et al. (2007) call ‘a basic assertion of organization theory’, namely that specialization and differentiation increase the need for coordination (Mintzberg 1979). However, when elaborating how developments in the public sector actually might lead to changes in the executive centre, this dissertation also argues for a slightly different understanding of the causal chain. The underlying argument is that concentration of power in the executive centre only indirectly happens because of NPM reforms, and the casual chain from former reforms to centralised political decision-making in fact might be long and the relationship quite vague.

Instead of a causal model, figure 3.1 should therefore be seen as a pragmatic conceptual model showing how the various expectations about change and explanations are treated in the PhD dissertation. The questions of changes in actors in the executive centre, such as the background of cabinet ministers, and resources devoted to the prime minister, are treated in article 1. Changes in the actual decision-making behaviour of these actors in the executive centre are treated in article 2. The various societal changes as explanations are investigated in article 3. How features of cabinet might explain developments in the executive centre is shown in article 4. It is worth noting, however, that this brief summary gives only a rough indication. For instance, article 3 also sheds important light on changes in actors and arenas in the executive centre. Furthermore, article 4 empirically elaborates some of the changes in the decision-making process in the studied cabinets. The articles can therefore be said to touch upon several elements in the conceptual model.

4. SELECTION OF CASE, METHODS, AND DATA

Cabinets normally operate with little openness, and cabinet decisions can be said to be cloaked in a veil of secrecy.²⁶ The secrecy surrounding cabinets places them amongst the organs in the political system that are most difficult to research. This section shows how the ‘black box’ of cabinet decision-making in the Norwegian executive centre has been opened.

The section first discusses why the Norwegian case is suited for seeking an answer to the research questions, and then elaborates which methods and data are utilised to investigate changes in the executive centre in Norway. Finally, the section discusses the overall quality of the chosen methods and data in the PhD project.

Selection of case

In the present dissertation, a case study of Norway has been chosen to answer the overarching research questions. Given the generality of these questions, large-n studies might seem more appropriate. However, because of the ambiguities of the presidentialisation thesis and the mixed empirical support, there is still a need for analysis of greater depth (Persson & Wiberg 2011). In general, case studies are valuable in investigating if and how a variable affects certain developments, rather than in establishing how much it affects them (George & Bennett 2005: 25). The main purpose of this project is to explore and explain developments in the inner parts of cabinet decision-making. A case study thus seems appropriate. There are several reasons for why a case study of Norwegian cabinets has been chosen. Three reasons might be sketched out, the first concerning the relevance of findings, the second concerning the availability of data, and the third concerning the specific context of this study.

Relevance of findings

First, findings from the Norwegian case should be relevant beyond the particular case. In the methodological literature, scholars have disputed the use of case studies for testing and elaborating theories (George & Bennett 2011: 5). The relevance of findings, however, depends of the type of case. In the literature, there are several ways to classify the different types of cases (Eckstein 1975; Levy 2008; Seawright & Gerring 2008; Yin 2003).²⁷ The least likely cases are variants of crucial cases (Eckstein 1975). In least likely cases, observed

²⁶ Laver and Shepsle (1994: 8) note how the doctrine of collective cabinet responsibility ‘cloaks cabinet disagreement in a veil of secrecy’. However, a veil also lies over general decision-making in cabinets with ministerial responsibility.

²⁷ As Levy (2008:3) notes, however, empirical studies often combine different types of cases.

changes in line with predictions from theory would offer support to the theory because the case lies at the borders of where the theory is thought to be valid. In Gerring's words: 'A least-likely case is one that, on all dimensions except the dimension of theoretical interest, is predicted not to achieve a certain outcome and yet does so. It is confirmatory' (2007: 232).

A typical case is another type, defined as a case belonging to a larger group of countries with certain features (George & Bennett 2005: 251; Seawright & Gerring 2008).

Norway might be conceived as some sort of least likely case of power concentration and prime ministerial empowerment. The main point of the presidentialisation thesis is that Western European democracies have moved from their different starting points and towards a presidentialised form of government. However, the political culture and egalitarian tradition in Norway makes presidentialisation in cabinet decision-making seem unlikely. In Norway, there is no formal hierarchy between ministers, and cabinet decision-making has traditionally been collegial (Christensen 2003). There have been some strong prime ministers in Norway, but Norwegian prime ministers have traditionally been weak compared to prime ministers in other parliamentary democracies (King 1994; O'Malley 2007).

Besides the constraints of political culture and tradition, there might be weaker forces pushing Norway towards a more presidential working mode. One could argue that being outside of the European Union would contribute to Norway's being a least likely case of presidentialisation, as Europeanization has been found to be one of the more important factors of intra-executive presidentialisation in several countries (Poguntke & Webb 2005). Norway does participate in several international arenas where national policies are coordinated, leaving Norwegian prime ministers with important decisions, perhaps at the expense of other cabinet ministers. The internalisation of Norwegian politics through Norway's membership in other international organisations might thus have affected the balance of power within the executive. However, Norway has probably not been as strongly influenced by internationalisation as have other comparable countries like Sweden and Denmark, which are EU members.²⁸

Nor has Norway been a forerunner in the NPM movement such as countries like Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom have been. Norway has been called a reluctant reformer where NPM reforms started late and were less extensive than elsewhere (Christensen & Læg Reid 2001; Olsen 1996: 189).

²⁸ Trondal (1999, 2005) claims that the EU Commission's sectoral organisation has contributed to strengthening of the lower levels in the Norwegian ministries, and in fact has weakened central coordinating instances like the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

However, strictly crucial cases do not commonly occur (Eckstein 1975: 118). Nor should Norway be conceived as a genuine least likely case, as there are societal changes making changes in the executive centre plausible. Over the last three decades, the pace of NPM reforms has picked up, and Norway has been described as a latecomer to the NPM movement (Christensen & Læg Reid 2004). The central government apparatus has been increasingly fragmented and differentiated as authority over the last decades has been transferred from the political-administrative level to regulatory agencies, service-producing agencies, and state-owned companies (Christensen & Læg Reid 2001). Changes in the executive centre can thus be expected even in the Norwegian case.

Overall, one might say that Norway is on the periphery of the group of European parliamentary democracies where one might expect concentration of power and prime ministerial empowerment. This situation should make the findings from Norway relevant beyond the particular case.

Availability of relevant data

Case studies can be valuable even when theories are well developed and concepts seem quite clear. Rich data from case studies might produce valuable knowledge and point to overlooked variables (George & Bennett 2005: 254). An in-depth study of Norway is thus valuable to shed light on the concepts and explanations introduced in the presidentialisation thesis, if such rich and relevant data is available.

Many of the empirical contributions investigating the presidentialisation thesis have looked at manifest expressions such as the backgrounds of ministers and reshuffles in cabinet. However, these changes might be ambiguous indicators of prime ministerial empowerment. For instance, cabinet reshuffles might happen because prime ministers want to get rid of weak ministers, weakened either through scandals or because they are politically unsuccessful. Several reshuffles might therefore in fact make the cabinet collective stronger. It thus seems valuable to look for data where the intentions or purposes are less ambiguous.

Several contributions supporting the presidentialisation thesis have been criticised for their reliance on secondary sources and the ‘gut impressions’ of country experts (Karvonen 2010: 20). In the Norwegian case, however, it has been possible to carry out a more intensive study. In this PhD dissertation, it has been possible to get access to restricted material and to conduct interviews with relevant sources with first-hand knowledge. To answer the general research questions, the present dissertation can therefore draw on unique material from internal cabinet documents and interviews with ministers, chiefs of staff, and secretaries general. The rich

availability of key decision-makers, at both political and administrative levels, seems to make Norway particularly suited as an object of study. However, as further elaborated below, to get the actual interviews with these important insiders can be time consuming even in the Norwegian system.

Explorative nature of the study

A final reason for choosing Norway as a case is that some of the recent developments are not very well documented.²⁹ Parts of the Norwegian executive centre have been thoroughly described before. The growth in the number of politicians in the ministries over the last 40 years is well documented (Eriksen 1988; Statskonsult 2007). Concerning the working mode of Norwegian cabinets, much emphasis has been put on cabinets in the post-war period up to the 1980s (Eriksen 1992, 2003; Olsen 1980; Rommetvedt 1994), and there are some important contributions focusing on later cabinets (Christensen & Lægveid 2002; Skjeie 2001). However, several developments have not been thoroughly investigated. In recent years, there have been accusations of power concentration in cabinet, and claims that the prime minister and coalition party leaders in the cabinet subcommittee are the ones that in fact are ‘governing Norway’ (Clemet 2010; Spence 2008). The term ‘president’ was briefly actualised in 2009 when the new coordination minister was appointed at the Prime Minister’s Office. Opposition and media commentators discussed the new role, and one party leader questioned whether the new minister would do all the ‘dirty work’, while Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg would turn into a president (Fiske 2009). Although ‘presidentialisation’ has become a catchword in comparative political science, virtually no contributions have investigated the Norwegian case.³⁰ The need for further exploration has thus been an important reason for choosing Norway as a case of study.

Empirical focus and choice of studied cabinets

A main point in this dissertation is that features of cabinet, such as the number of parties, the cabinet’s fragility, and the parliamentary basis, might affect the concentration of power in cabinet decision-making. It is thus imperative to study cabinets that vary on these dimensions. The empirical focus of the PhD project is the 30 years from 1983 to 2012.

²⁹ Although labelled here a ‘final reason’, this motivation should not be underestimated, as it was imperative in inspiring the entire PhD project.

³⁰ An exception is Saxi’s (2011) investigating presidentialisation at the sub-national level in Norway.

Table 4.1: Norwegian cabinets 1983–2013

Name	Tenure	Parties	Parliamentary basis
Kåre Willoch II	1983–86	Centre Party, Christian Democratic Party Conservative Party	Majority
Gro Harlem Brundtland II	1986–89	Labour Party	Minority
Jan P. Syse	1989–90	Centre Party, Christian Democratic Party Conservative Party	Minority
Gro Harlem Brundtland III	1990–96	Labour Party	Minority
Torbjørn Jagland	1996–97	Labour Party	Minority
Kjell Magne Bondevik I	1997–2000	Centre Party, Christian Democratic Party, Liberal Party	Minority
Jens Stoltenberg I	2000–01	Labour Party	Minority
Kjell Magne Bondevik II	2001–05	Christian Democratic Party, Conservative Party, Liberal Party	Minority
Jens Stoltenberg II	2005–13	Centre Party, Labour Party, Socialist Left Party	Majority

Willoch II, Brundtland III, and Stoltenberg II are all considered as single cabinets, although there were elections in 1985, 1993, and 2005.
Source: Norwegian Social Science Data Service

The nine cabinets in the studied period vary concerning central theoretical dimensions on some of the independent variables. The dissertation's empirical focus thus allows within-case comparison (Mahoney 2000: 409). In the comparative volume of Poguntke and Webb, country experts have taken the 1960s as a starting point. Although a longer time perspective also might have been taken in this dissertation, there is little reason to expect that the possible developments towards a presidentialised working mode in Norway started long before the 1980s. For instance, the increased fragmentation of public sector, which according to the presidentialisation thesis has been an important driver behind developments, has been most apparent in Norway in the last 30–40 years (Christensen 2003: 164–165). When using archive and document data, it has been possible to stretch the analysis back to 1983. When depending on interviews, however, only the last 15 years have been covered. As further elaborated below, it is time consuming to get access to informants and to conduct elite interviews. In two of the four articles, it has thus been necessary to limit the scope of investigation to the latter four cabinets. Although limiting the scope of the investigation, this approach to studying these cabinets still enables important within-case comparison.

A brief note on causality

The theoretical section elaborated explanations for change in cabinet decision-making. However, the empirical material used in this dissertation make it difficult to establish exactly how these changes have affected decision-making. The overall analysis in the dissertation employs a method that is close to the congruence method or pattern matching, where theories are utilised to create expectations about a dependent variable within a case (Mahoney 2000:

409–410). It is then investigated whether the observed empirical variations in the dependent variable coincide with the predicted variations derived from the theories (George & Bennett 2005: 181–184). The dissertation tries to reveal how various societal developments and changes in the party political context might lead to changes in the executive centre. However, the dissertation does not aim to reveal the causal mechanisms in every step through process tracing (Collier 2011; George & Bennett 2005), as such an attempt would have demanded huge amounts of information (Checkel 2008).

Methods and data

Decision-making in cabinet is a complex process, and it is thus sensible to use various data sources to shed light on developments. There are several biographies available from ministers and other relevant actors with experience from the cabinets under study. However, these publications give only glimpses of the cabinet’s working form (Hernes 2012).³¹

To answer the research questions, the project relies mostly on primary sources. The data utilised can broadly be defined in three categories: register and archive data, document data, and interview data. Table 3.1 provides an overview of all the sources utilised in the various articles. The methods of collecting these data are discussed in more detail below.

Table 4.2: Overview of data in the PhD dissertation

Register and archive data	Document data	Interview data
Background of ministers	State secretary committees	Ministers
Reshuffles in cabinet	Cabinet meetings	Chiefs of staff
Administrative personnel at the PMO	Cabinet issues	Secretaries general
Political personnel at the PMO		
Article 1	Article 3	Articles 2, 3, and 4

Register and archive data

To evaluate the hypothesised change in ministers’ background, information about cabinet members was collected from the official home page of the Norwegian Parliament. The dataset was coded by the author, utilising categories from former contributions (Bäck et al. 2011).³² The dataset contains information on the experience from parliament, party organisation, local and regional politics, former cabinet position, and age.

³¹ In recent years, some accounts have shed light on the cabinet’s budgetary process, for instance Clemet (2007). Hernes (2012) also gives a rare insight into cabinet decision-making.

³² During the study, the database from the ‘Madisonian Turn’ project was made available. However, it was not utilized, since the coding was already carried out by the author.

Reshuffles in cabinet were collected from the cabinet's official web site, and the Norwegian Social Science Data Service. The coding is not directly comparable to that in former contributions such as Sundström (2009), as changes in cabinet in this present project include internal rotations, direct replacements, and replacements that involve the rotation of other ministers. Changes due to death or serious illness were not included in the dataset.

The Ministry of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs provided the number of administrative employees at the Prime Minister's Office upon request. Data concerning the growth of political appointees in the ministries and in the Prime Minister's Office was collected from open sources, such as the Norwegian Social Science Data Service and Statskonsult (1999).

Document data

The document data utilised here mainly comes from internal cabinet documents. These documents show the number of state secretary committees, cabinet meetings, and cabinet cases. The number of state secretary committees in early cabinets has been possible to collect from open sources.³³ For the more recent cabinets, internal documents showing the number of committees were supplied after a meeting with senior officials at the Prime Minister's Office.³⁴

In Norway, access to internal cabinet documents is in principle restricted for 25 years (Statsministerens kontor 2010). However, access can be given either by the prime minister from the specific cabinet or by the present party leaders (Statsministerens kontor 2010: 44). It has been a time-consuming process to get access to the documents showing the number of cabinet meetings and the number of cabinet issues. An informal request was first made in the second interview with former Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik in September 2011. A formal application was sent in November 2011, and a letter of authorization was received later the same month. Bondevik's positive attitude was then explicitly mentioned in the subsequent applications to the party leaders in the Conservative Party (Erna Solberg), the Centre Party (Liv Signe Navarsete), the Christian Democratic Party (Knut Arild Hareide), and the Labour Party (Jens Stoltenberg). The last letter of authorization was received April 2012, six months after the first formal request was sent. Having authorization letters from Prime Minister Bondevik and present party leaders, meeting agendas from the period 1984–2004

³³ Statskonsult (1999) has provided important information.

³⁴ Deputy Secretary to the government Arne Spildo (29.06.2011).

could be collected from the National Archives and analysed.³⁵ Based on meeting agendas the number of cabinet issues and the number of cabinet meetings were assessed.³⁶

Overviews of cabinet issues and cabinet meetings have seldom been made in Norway. Some overviews exist for the years 1974 and 1978, made in connection with the first power study project. Based on statistics from the Prime Minister's Office the different issues treated at the cabinet conferences were broken down into single decision, regulations, international conferences, and preparatory council of state (Bratbak et al. 1982). Otherwise, no overviews of cabinet meetings and issues have been made. Because the overviews were completed late in the PhD project, however, I was unable to utilize them in the first articles. Articles 1 and 2 thus only mention the difficulties collecting such data.

Elite interviews in the PhD dissertation

Although overviews of cabinet meetings, number of internal committees, and political appointees are important, they are not in themselves enough to assess how decision-making in Norwegian cabinets has changed. These data have thus been supplemented with interview data. The dissertation depends heavily on interview material, and much emphasis in this section is therefore placed on these interviews.

Using the so-called soaking and poking approach through numerous interviews might be valuable to explore issues in depth or to reveal otherwise unavailable details (Fenno 1978: 884). In most PhD projects, however, the number of interviews often has to be restricted because time and resources are limited. It is thus imperative to get access to the most important actors. Elite interviewing makes it possible to reveal aspects of political decision-making that could not be learned from official documents or media accounts (Lilleker 2003). In Tansey's words, "Elite interviews can shed light on the hidden elements of political action that are not clear from an analysis of political outcomes or other primary sources" (2007: 767).

Because of the explorative nature of this PhD-project, some background interviews were conducted early to help orient the subsequent research process. Interviews were conducted with a state secretary at the Ministry of Education and Research, and with two civil servants at the Finance Ministry, and concerned decision-making in the cabinet in general, and the

³⁵ Unfortunately, Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg would not provide access to meeting agendas from his own cabinets, only from former Labour Party cabinets.

³⁶ Access was granted on the condition that the content of the cabinet meetings not be mentioned.

budgetary conferences in particular. Initially, the ambition was to interview all parliamentary leaders, all leaders of the Finance committee, and several bureaucrats in the Ministry of Finance. Some of these actors were therefore interviewed early in the process. Because of capacity limitations, however, focus was later restricted to ministers, chiefs of staff and secretaries general. The interviews already conducted with other actors functioned as valuable background information, but was not used explicitly in the empirical articles (see appendix 2 for a full overview of informants and respondents).

Research strategy for getting access to interviewees

It might be difficult to get access to sources like ministers, chiefs of staff, and secretaries general. According to Goldstein, to get access to elite sources is more of an art than a science, and it is often subject to a ‘bit of luck’ (2002: 669–671). The literature on case study research is nevertheless full of practical advice on how to get access to elite sources (Aberbach & Rockman 2002; Goldstein 2002; Lilleker 2003; Silverman 2005). Aberbach and Rockman, for instance, mention that in requesting interviews it useful to use official stationery to show affiliation with a recognized institution (2002: 673–674). My lack of academic experience and reputation made it especially important to show my institutional affiliation in this project. I quickly learned that it was never wise to ask for an interview of a full hour at a certain date.³⁷ With very busy people, it was much wiser to ask for a short talk at some time in the near future. The disadvantage with this approach, however, was that the interviews were stretched out over a long period. Therefore, to get all the interviews took much longer than expected.

The interview material has been used to investigate changes in decision-making in the last four Norwegian cabinets (Bondevik I, Stoltenberg I, Bondevik II, and Stoltenberg II). In the PhD project, I focused on getting informants from the last two cabinets. Several of them have had participated in the first two cabinets (see table 4.3 for an overview of the number of respondents with experience from the cabinets under study). To evaluate decision-making in the first two cabinets, I supplemented the interview material with secondary sources from former interview studies.

A first round of emails was sent in early July 2010, and the first couple of interviews were conducted the following month. Unfortunately, some from the Labour Party either did not want to participate or failed to answer the invitation. Therefore, at the end of August follow-up emails were sent. This time it was explained that several ministers from other parties

³⁷ It is well known from methodological literature that asking prospective interviewees for too much time might lead to refusals (Harvey 2011: 436).

already had been interviewed or had accepted the invitation, and it was emphasised that it would be a biased sample if no one from the Labour Party participated. Although some prospective interviewees initially might have been reluctant given my lack of ‘professorial weight’, they eventually granted me interviews, perhaps because they became aware that their colleagues already had. Mentioning already performed interviews thus gave the project important legitimacy, and the number of respondents eventually grew like a rolling snowball.³⁸ A more accurate name might be cumulative data collection, where ministers were used to get access to other ministers, and the number of respondents increased after successive additions. Of a total of 37 requests, 18 were accepted and 19 were declined. Some ministers gave no explanation, some referred to lack of time, and some stressed that the events and processes were still too fresh.

Table 4.3: Number of respondents with experience from the cabinets under study

Cabinet	Ministers	Chiefs of staff	Secretaries general
Kjell Magne Bondevik I	6	1	5
Jens Stoltenberg I	3	0	5
Kjell Magne Bondevik II	10	1	5
Jens Stoltenberg II	9	2	6

The cumulative strategy was used even more explicitly to get a satisfactory selection of secretaries general. Here, requests were sent out one by one, and the list of informants already interviewed could therefore be explicitly mentioned in the invitations.

In total, there have been three rounds of interviews. A first with ministers (summer 2010), a second with follow-up interviews with ministers and chiefs of staff (summer 2011), and a third round involving secretaries general (spring 2012). Overall, 34 respondents were interviewed to this PhD project.

All informants interviewed have been found with non-probability sampling techniques. The obvious pitfall with this approach is that one might end up with only a certain group or type of people. However, the main aim has not been to get a statistically representative sample, rather to get a selection of informants who can shed light on the political processes being studied (Tansey 2007: 768). In this project, it was especially important to get ministers

³⁸ Snowball as a sampling method, refers to how new respondents are found with help from already known respondents. This method is often used when the full population is unknown, or when knowledge about the themes might be hidden (Tansey 2007). In this PhD project, the sampling of ministers was not quite the snowball method, as the population is very well known.

from all participating parties, and with different types of experience from cabinet, experience such as that of a party leader in cabinet, as prime minister, and as rank-and-file minister. Regarding the secretaries general, finding respondents with long tenure was emphasised in order to get assessments of developments over time. The interviewed secretaries general also covered important areas like health, research and education, transport, justice, and finance.

Type of interviews and type of questions

The aspects of political decision-making that are possible to reveal depend not only on type of sources, but also the type of interviews and the type of questions asked.

Here, the format of the interviews lies somewhere between conversational and active interviews (Andersen 2006). In conversational interviews, the questions are open-ended, and the interviewer is passive and listening (Andersen 2006: 279–280). The answers guide the interview, and hypotheses are developed and tested during the interview. In active interviews, on the other hand, the scientist is more in control, and gives the interview an analytical structure by trying out hypotheses and prior expectations (Andersen 2006: 287).

To get valid data from elite interviews, it is important that the questions be open-ended. Using open-ended questions gives the informants the possibility to formulate answers within their own ‘framework’, an approach which is advantageous in studies having an exploratory character (Aberbach & Rockman 2002: 674). In elite interviewing, it is important not only to formulate good questions, but also to be able to ask follow-up questions and thus keep the conversation going (Barry 2002: 679). Prior knowledge is important both to formulate precise questions and to ask relevant follow-up questions (Leech 2002). Here, the author’s inside knowledge of the Norwegian system and the background interviews with informants helped in the interview process.

The interviews covered both open-ended questions and more closed, concrete questions (see appendix for a summary of all questions and themes in the three interview rounds). It was important to include concrete questions given the limited time to speak with the interviewees (Harvey 2011: 434). The questions and themes were sent to interviewees in advance, usually a couple days before the interview. The questions structured the interviews, but very often the respondents went beyond the planned questions and the interviews became more conversational.

The first interview round with ministers focused on decision-making in cabinet, the budgetary process, the role of ministers, and the anchoring of budgetary priorities in party. The second interview round with ministers and chiefs of staff was narrower in scope, and

more concrete concerning explanations for change. The third round also focused greatly on explanations, this time with special emphasis on coordination in cabinet, and from the viewpoints of secretaries general. Not every informant received the exact same questions, as knowledge about the internal processes in cabinet was built up during the research process. Some questions were also individual-specific (Lilleker 2003). The answers have thus not been quantified, as would have made possible had a more standardised survey format been used.

Overall, 34 respondent interviews have been conducted and transcribed by the author. They lasted 23–75 minutes, an average of 52 minutes.³⁹

The answers were later reinterpreted by the author. For instance, ministers were not invited to rate the degree of collegiality in cabinet decision-making. This aspect was interpreted by the author based on questions concerning how issues were dealt with in the plenary sessions, how disagreements were solved, etc. This approach might resemble one that employs what have been called A and B questions, as suggested by Barzelay et al. (2003). B questions inquire about developments in the particular episodes and cases, and A questions are broader, with a higher level of generality (Barzelay et al. 2003: 28). Here, however, the aim has not been to develop narratives, events, and episodes, but rather to use concrete questions about cabinet decision-making to infer more generally about developments from cabinet to cabinet in the executive centre. The interviewees seldom referred to particular decision-making episodes, except for illustrative purposes. It was often not applicable to go into details, because these processes often were too fresh, and sometimes even ongoing.⁴⁰

The strong dependence on ministerial interviews puts the dissertation in a behavioural approach tradition (Blondel & Müller-Rommel 1993; Heady 1974), where the unit of observation is each cabinet minister (Müller et al. 2008: 32). Although this dissertation stands in such a tradition, it should not be viewed as a behavioural study in a strict sense. The aim has not been to enlighten the decision-making behaviour of individual ministers, but to investigate changes in cabinet decision-making drawing on various sources of data. Questions were also less structured and answers less systemised than is typically the case in such studies.

³⁹ The five informant interviews are not included.

⁴⁰ This closeness probably also affected the answers about personality. The second interview round contained a question about the importance of leadership style, but very often, the interviewees avoided the question.

Methodological considerations

The remainder of this section discusses whether the gathered data can be trusted and used to answer the research questions raised.

Reliability of data

The question of the accuracy of the archive and document data seems straightforward. These data concern the background of ministers, number of changes in cabinet, administrative growth at the Prime Minister's Office, the number of cabinet meetings, the number of cabinet committees, and the number of state secretary committees. All these data originate from official websites, ministries, and official documents, so there is little reason to question their authenticity. However, counting and coding errors might have occurred. The coding of ministerial background and the reshuffles in cabinet was done twice to minimize the risk of miscoding. The meeting agendas, on the other hand, were not given a second check. Given the vast number of cabinet meetings in the studied years (about 1,300 cabinet meetings and 11,400 issues), these agendas were examined only once. However, only general trends are inferred from the meeting agendas, and small differences, possibly from miscounting, are not emphasised.

Whether we can trust data gained from interviews is less straightforward. In this project, such data stem from interviews with ministers, chiefs of staff, and secretaries general. The interviewees can either remember wrongly or answer strategically. It is well known that politicians might try to 'rewrite history' (Lilleker 2003); try to exaggerate or understate their own importance, depending on whether political capital is to be won or lost (Barry 2002; Tansey 2007). The readiness to answer strategically might be even stronger if respondents are promised anonymity.

Such challenges have also been present in this PhD project. However, the interviewees were never promised anonymity. Furthermore, several sources were interviewed about the same processes.⁴¹ It has thus been possible to critically review the informants' statements. Questions were also seldom related to the ministers' individual performance, making it less relevant for the informants to exaggerate or understate their own importance.

The reliability of interview data might also be challenged because informants might differ in their assessments of developments. To help in establishing an empirical account of decision-making in cabinet, the most central actors were sought, and triangulation in the type

⁴¹ Although the interviewees were never promised anonymity, they are seldom identified in the articles. They are identified only when they might be identified through the citations.

of interview sources was strived for. The use of a voice recorder and the full transcription of the interviews also help in strengthening the reliability of the data (Silverman 2005: 221). In this dissertation, however, the use of concrete questions to infer about general developments involves a degree of evaluation by the author, and thus a potential source of error. The second and third interview rounds gave an opportunity to solve potential misunderstanding and correct wrong impressions. For instance, several of the interviewed secretaries general had read the Norwegian article “Maktkonsentrasjon and politisk kontekst” and expressed support for its description of the most recent developments.⁴² The reliability was also ensured by triangulation of data. For instance, the oral accounts of an increased workload of Norwegian cabinets were later substantiated by scrutinizing cabinet meeting agendas.

Validity of data

The question of data’s relevance has several aspects. The first aspect concerns which indicators should be used to measure changes in the Norwegian executive centre. Karvonen has criticised the contributions in Poguntke and Webb’s volume for not being comparable in scope and focus (2010: 10). With reference to Van Deth (1998), Poguntke et al. underline that ‘certain measures do not travel well from one case to another, and will therefore not be appropriate indicators of the underlying concept in which one is interested’ (2012: 83). Their presidentialisation thesis does not come with a fixed list of indicators, but the various contributors have used indicators that are ‘functionally equivalent’ (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 18). The formalities related to cabinet life make it reasonable to expect changes in cabinet actors and arenas in Norway based on the same indicators used in other country studies. For instance, Norwegian ministers do not need a seat in parliament in order to be appointed to cabinet, and it is thus possible to investigate the tendency concerning the appointment of an increasing number of ministers who had limited parliamentary background. As acknowledged in article 1, however, prime ministers in Norwegian coalitions traditionally have had less opportunity to select or dismiss members representing other parties than have prime ministers in single-party cabinets.

Another aspect concerns whether the chosen indicators are appropriate to measure the underlying concepts of power concentration and intra-executive presidentialisation. In the first article, the background of ministers and reshuffles in cabinet are seen as indicators of

⁴² There is of course always the danger that their reading the article might have biased their answers. As Morris notes, scholars seem to differ in their recommendations concerning how much to cite and reveal from former interviews (2009: 213).

change in cabinet decision-making. However, whether weaker ministers and more frequent reshuffles in fact lead to more unilateral decision-making remains an empirical question. Taken alone, these indicators do not tell the whole story of cabinet decision-making, and are only partly relevant to answering the overall research questions. These indicators have therefore been supplemented to evaluate how decision-making has changed. The elite interviews have made it possible to get information about change that otherwise would have been almost impossible to extract from the other data. The triangulation of methods and data has made it possible to paint a broader picture of developments, and has thus helped increase the overall validity.

The validity of data in some of the articles is worth commenting further. In article 2, the direct involvement of leading party actors is investigated based on the involvement of parliamentary leaders and financial spokespersons in the budgetary process. However, the state budget is just one of several decision-making processes in cabinet. Formal and informal consultations take place between party leadership, parliamentary groups, and cabinet members at several stages and in several arenas (Rommetvedt 1994), underlining that the overall autonomy from party actors could have been investigated by other measures.⁴³ In article 3, the increase in cabinet issues is seen as an indicator of the increased workload in cabinet decision-making. Such data are highly relevant as they help paint a picture of how cabinet decision-making has developed. However, used as the only indicator of the increased workload in cabinet, it might be a bit narrow.

Some ministers' reluctance to participate in the study could potentially bias the sample of ministers, and thus challenge the data's validity. Before ministers from the Labour Party finally decided to participate, that was a genuine problem in the PhD project. Eventually, however, the sample came to contain ministers from all parties, and with different types of experience from cabinet, such as the party leaders in cabinet, the prime minister, and the rank-and-file ministers. Although there are more respondents from the two latest cabinets, the overall selection of respondents is deemed satisfactory.

The wish to investigate understudied developments in the Norwegian executive centre has been important in this PhD project. This approach's explorative nature has also entailed some challenges, however. It was challenging to ask the right questions, because of the stepwise build-up of knowledge. For instance, the precise role and importance of the cabinet

⁴³ In Labour party cabinets, the trade union has also been involved through the cooperation committee (Allern et al. 2007; Christensen & Lægreid 2002; Skjeie 2001).

subcommittee became apparent during the interviews. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility, but also meant that not all interviewed ministers received exactly the same questions.

5. FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The four empirical articles in the dissertation answer in different ways the questions of how and why cabinet decision-making has changed in Norway, a country that traditionally has been characterised by collegiality and consensus in the executive centre. The following section provides a summary of the findings from the four empirical articles.⁴⁴ The implications of the findings are then discussed and future research is suggested.

Has presidentialisation taken place in Norway?

The descriptive research questions in this dissertation concerns change in actors, arenas and the decision-making processes in the Norwegian executive centre.

Change in cabinet actors and arenas

The findings related to actors and arenas in cabinet decision-making supplement former contributions from the other Scandinavian countries. However, regarding the background of ministers, reshuffles in cabinet, and the number of cabinet meetings, the findings are not in accordance with the expectations derived from the presidentialisation thesis.

The thesis finds little evidence of a growing tendency by Norwegian prime ministers to appoint weak ministers with limited experience from parliament or party organisation. Instead of a uniform growth over time, there are huge differences between the studied cabinets from 1983–2009, differences that seem to suggest that other explanations than a growing wish to appoint weak ministers are responsible. Nor has there been a trend in Norwegian cabinets to appoint technocrats in cabinet. There is, however, a slight tendency towards younger ministers in the studied period. This tendency might be interpreted as a move towards weaker and more controllable ministers. However, the differences in average age are small, and the age of prime ministers has also gone down over the last decades.

Nor does the dissertation find a general trend of increased reshuffles in cabinet. Again, there is great variation between the studied cabinets, and alternative reasons seem to be responsible. For instance, there is a slight tendency of prime ministers in single-party cabinets to make more reshuffles than do prime ministers leading coalitions.

⁴⁴ The findings in the subsections follow the four articles, apart from those findings concerning the developments in cabinet meetings.

Looking at the cabinet meetings, there is no evidence that the number of meetings has been reduced dramatically. In Norway, the number of cabinet meetings has been reduced over the last 30 years. However, Norwegian cabinets still meet quite often, with over 70 meetings in the latest year under study (2004). Still, there is evidence that the cabinet meetings have lost influence as a decision-making arena in Norway.

The presidentialisation thesis seems to get more support regarding the expected strengthening of the Prime Minister's Office. The dissertation finds that the number of state secretaries and administrative employees has more than doubled over the studied period.⁴⁵ The growth of administrative and political personnel suggests that the capacity to coordinate cabinet policy has been clearly strengthened in Norway. This interpretation is also supported when scrutinizing how the actual work of the Prime Ministers's Office has changed.

Change in cabinet decision-making

The dissertation also finds support for the expected concentration of power around the prime minister and coalition partners. Scrutinizing cabinet decision-making in the last four cabinets (Bondevik I, Stoltenberg I, Bondevik II, Stoltenberg II), I find that the collegial nature of Norwegian cabinets has been challenged. The Norwegian cabinet collective has been weakened by the increased importance and formalisation of the cabinet subcommittee. In the Bondevik I cabinet (1997–2000), the subcommittee was primarily an informal arena for discussing issues before cabinet meetings, although it in reality sometimes became a decision-making organ by resolving issues the cabinet collective failed to agree upon. In the Bondevik II cabinet (2001–2005), the subcommittee met more regularly and played a more important role than in Bondevik I, although the informal status and discussion style continued. In the Stoltenberg II cabinet (2005–2009), the ministerial interviews reveal that the subcommittee became absolutely essential in cabinet decision-making, and the work of the subcommittee was also formalised with own meeting documents. In Stoltenberg II, a division of labour evolved between the cabinet subcommittee and the new coordination minister at the Prime Minister's Office to solve cabinet disagreements.

A possible conclusion is that coalition party leaders together with the prime minister have been empowered through the cabinet subcommittee. The growing importance of the cabinet subcommittee represents a weakening of the traditional collegial working form of Norwegian

⁴⁵ Looking at the general growth in personnel in all ministries, administrative leadership excluded, the number of civil servants has grown less than the number of state secretaries over the last two decades in Norway (1986–2006).

cabinets, although not to the point seen in countries like Sweden and Denmark. Although the finance ministers have been represented in most of the subcommittees and have played important roles there, the party leaders have been the most important participants because the subcommittee has served as their primary forum for clarifying contentious issues within cabinet.

However, scrutinizing the involvement in cabinet budgetary processes, I find little support for the hypothesised decrease in direct involvement by leading party actors. The involvement of party actors in the budgetary process has varied between the four studied cabinets, but in all studied cabinets, leading party actors have been involved to some degree. It thus seems like prime ministers and coalition partners still govern *with* parties in Norway, and not *past* parties as hypothesised by the presidentialisation thesis (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 9).

What can explain changes in Norwegian executive centre?

The explanatory research questions in this dissertation concern the impact of societal developments and changes in the party political context.

Societal developments as an explanation for change in the executive centre

Concerning how societal developments might have affected the executive centre, the work of the Prime Minister's Office, the new role of the coordination minister, and the cabinet subcommittee are scrutinized further.

According to the interviewed secretaries general, the growth in administrative and political personnel of the Prime Minister's Office has contributed to strengthen coordination in cabinet. This development can thus indirectly be said to counter the negative effects of sectorisation from former NPM reforms.

However, neither the appointment of a coordination minister at the Prime Minister's Office nor the increased importance of the cabinet subcommittee should be seen as direct responses to former NPM reforms. Drawing on the number of cabinet meetings and issues, the dissertation shows how the workload of Norwegian cabinets has increased. According to the interviewed secretaries general, the coordination minister and the increased use of the cabinet subcommittee should be seen in relation to how cabinet decision-making has developed over the last three decades. The need for alternative decision-making arenas, however, has also been affected by the number of parties in cabinet.

The dissertation briefly also looks into the work of the state secretaries in the Norwegian ministries. Over the last 30 years, the number of state secretaries has grown as part of the

strengthening of the Norwegian executive centre.⁴⁶ The dissertation finds that the growth of political appointees has been most important to relieve the ministers in their daily work, rather than to solve political disagreements in permanent committees.

Changes in the political context as an explanation for change in the executive centre

The dissertation tries to unpack the party political context by investigating how the number of parties, the political fragility, and parliamentary basis, have affected changes in the Norwegian executive centre. The dissertation does find support for the assumption that such features of cabinets have affected the concentration of power. The number of parties in cabinet has affected the use of the cabinet collective and the institutionalisation of inner circles. In the single-party cabinet of Stoltenberg I, more issues could be decided either in ministries or in the full cabinet. In the studied coalitions, however, party considerations made cabinet decision-making more conflicted, and the cabinet subcommittee increased in importance. However, the number of parties cannot explain differences between the studied coalitions.

In the Norwegian case, the political differences between participating parties, political preparations, and allocation of portfolios seem to have affected the concentration of decision-making power. For instance, the political differences between parties and lack of a thorough political platform in the Bondevik II cabinet increased the need for the subcommittee to solve cabinet conflicts. The concentration of power has also been affected by the cabinet's parliamentary basis. In Stoltenberg II, the majority situation created expectations and pressure inside cabinet, which in turn increased the need for smaller decision-making arenas than the full cabinet.

However, given this study's design, it is difficult to distinguish the impact of the various features of cabinet, for instance the cabinet's fragility and the cabinet's parliamentary basis. It has also been difficult to separate the impact from long-term changes like fragmentation of the public sector, and from short-term changes like features of cabinet.

⁴⁶ In the empirical articles, the term 'politicisation' is used to denote the growth of political appointees. However, politicisation might also imply that politicians have more control over civil servants (Peters & Pierre 2004), or that political parties increasingly are involved in public sector appointments (Kopecky et al. 2012).

Concentration of power, but not quite presidentialisation

The PhD dissertation aims to answer the two general research questions: Does presidentialisation happen in countries with collegial traditions and frequent coalition cabinets? And further: What can explain the possible changes in cabinet decision-making?

The presidentialisation thesis gets only mixed support in the Norwegian case. Over the last 30 years, there is no tendency of weaker ministers, although Norwegian prime ministers seem to have become much better equipped to coordinate cabinet policy. The empirical analysis of the last four cabinets suggests that decision-making power has been centralised in Norway, although the involvement of leading party actors has not decreased. Although presidentialisation does not seem to be a fitting description, an important conclusion from this dissertation is that there has been a concentration of power in recent Norwegian cabinets.

There are some implications of the findings from this dissertation. One is that some of the studied cabinets should not be seen as so collegial as they were seen before, and that the full cabinet should not be seen as the most important ‘committee’ (Rommetvedt 1994). The extensive research project on Power and Democracy in Norway concluded that the parliamentary chain of government was challenged by several fragmenting forces. Coordinating bodies like the cabinet collective could barely counter this fragmentation (Østerud & Selle 2006). According to Rommetvedt (2002: 131), the Norwegian Power Study diagnosed Norwegian society, but focused less on the medicine already prescribed, namely increased coordination. This dissertation documents important developments in how the coordination ability and decision-making authority in recent years have moved from the cabinet meetings and have been further centralised around the prime minister and the cabinet subcommittee, increasing coordination in cabinet.

The Scandinavian countries have been said to stand ‘at a crossroads’, perhaps heading away from the traditions of collegiality and consensual decision-making (Persson & Wiberg 2011). Others have shown how the region has experienced a ‘madisonian turn’, with more separation-of-powers features (Strøm & Bergman 2011: 28). Focusing less on the executive-legislative relations and the relations to other societal actors, this dissertation has scrutinized changes inside the executive branch of government in Norway. The majoritarian aspects of Scandinavian parliamentary democracies are not just seen through the contract parliamentarism and the use of supporting block majorities (Bale & Bergman 2006; Christensen & Damgaard 2008; Persson & Wiberg 2011: 22). Majoritarian aspects are also seen in the work of government. Although there still are collegial elements in cabinet decision-making in Norway, developments in recent coalitions point to a weakening of

collegiality in cabinet and to the growing importance of inner circles. As this dissertation has pointed out, there are both societal and party political explanations for this development.

The Norwegian Prime Minister's Office has traditionally been called comparatively weak. Such a description might still be correct compared to the cabinet office in countries like the UK. However, this dissertation shows how the Prime Minister's Office in Norway plays an increasingly important role in coordinating cabinet policy. After the growth in personnel, it might no longer be correct to say that Norway only has strong sectoral ministries and weak overarching structures. With the new coordination minister, Norway seems to have gotten the chief executive officer, as earlier called for in Britain, a deputy prime minister who gets his authority from the prime minister who 'could have done the job if not so overloaded' (Foster 2005: 135). However, how permanent these various changes in the Norwegian executive centre are remains a central question.

There are also some implications more closely related to the theoretical framework utilised in the dissertation. Because the dissertation is based on a single case, it is in a strict sense impossible to answer the general research question of whether presidentialisation happens in countries with collegial traditions and frequent coalition cabinets. However, seen as a least likely case, or at least seen on the periphery of the group of countries where one might expect concentration of power, the Norwegian case could nevertheless bolster the presidentialisation thesis. In its present form, the presidentialisation thesis only gets minimal support in Norway. However, the concentration of power around prime ministers and coalition partners, and the process of intra-executive presidentialisation might both be seen as efforts to strengthen the executive centre and to centralise decision-making. The Norwegian case thus offers some support for the assumption that centralising tendencies will happen also in countries with collegial traditions and frequent coalition cabinets.

This dissertation adds to the contributions describing empowerment of inner circles in coalition cabinets (Fiers & Krouwel 2005; Jensen 2003, 2008; Knudsen 2007). However, given the limited time perspective of the empirical analysis in this thesis, there still seems to be a need for further research on how the presence of coalition partners affects the process of intra-executive presidentialisation.

The observed changes in Norway should perhaps not be called presidentialisation. Rather it seems most pertinent to call these developments in the executive centre *a concentration of decision-making power*. This dissertation thus adds to the literature questioning the most appropriate name for the observed developments (Dowding 2012; Heffernan 2003, 2012).

As Dowding has warned, to bundle centralisation of power and personalisation of politics

might obscure rather than illuminate (2012: 16). In their answer, Webb and Poguntke claim that it is the intricate dialectic between increased power and autonomy that justifies the label ‘presidentialisation’ (2012: 5–6). The empirical analysis of developments in Norway at least suggests that it is possible to have concentration of decision-making power, without increased autonomy from leading party actors, and presidentialisation thus seems like an inappropriate description in the Norwegian case.

Whether prime ministers dominate veto players in cabinet decision-making as expected from the presidentialisation thesis, or whether coalition partners also might be empowered as argued in this dissertation, might still be viewed as a strictly empirical question from case to case. The present dissertation, however, does raise some questions about the conceptualisation of the thesis of intra-executive presidentialisation. As this dissertation has shown, there are various features of cabinet affecting concentration of power, and thus perhaps worth including. The advantage of elaborating existing theories, or even of merging and synthesising them into new theories, is that validity and realism might increase (Rones 2009). On the other hand, extended theories might become less clear and less parsimonious. There will of course always be country-specific peculiarities inappropriate to implement in a general model. I agree with Poguntke and Webb that a theoretical model can focus on structural changes enhancing the underlying capacity for personal domination of the executive, rather than focusing on the formal rules and conventions in each country (Poguntke et al. 2011: 2). However, features of cabinet such as the number of parties, the coalition’s fragility, and the cabinet’s parliamentary basis should at least be included in an analytical framework when studying changes in cabinet decision-making in countries with frequent coalition cabinets.

There is also a methodological reason for including the party political context when studying such changes. Poguntke and Webb underline that they primarily are interested in structural presidentialisation and ‘long term developments, which enhance the potential of the chief executive office for strong leadership’ (2005: 340). However, it seems difficult to separate the impact of long-term and short-term changes, as they often affect the same indicators utilised when studying prime ministerial empowerment and concentration of power.

The road ahead: future research on cabinet decision-making

The limited focus of the empirical articles in this PhD dissertation restricts the attention devoted to normative and judicial questions. From a judicial point of view, Smith (1995: 293–

295) has pointed to how the frequent use of the cabinet meetings as de facto decision-making organs in Norway can blur the responsibility and the legal control of ministerial decisions, and make it difficult for actors on the outside to find out which considerations have decided an issue. It seems to be a similar challenge if an inner cabinet that is not mentioned in the Norwegian constitution de facto makes decisions in cabinet. Although cabinet decisions seldom are strictly collegial (Andeweg 2000; Blondel 1988), it might also challenge the legitimacy of cabinet decisions if an inner circle increasingly makes the most important decisions. Such judicial and normative considerations have not been part of this dissertation, but should be part of future discussions on how cabinet decision-making in Norway has developed.

More generally, the mixed empirical support of the presidentialisation thesis suggests that there is room for more research. New studies might include other least likely cases, such as the Scandinavian countries, where the collegial elements of cabinet decision-making traditionally have been strong. Such studies should also rely on sources with first-hand knowledge, but preferably should use a less explorative approach than was used in this dissertation.

Given the ambiguities of the presidentialisation thesis there also seems to be a need to develop a tighter analytical framework to investigate the impact of the party political context, and to establish how various features of cabinet might affect concentration of power. The actual relationship between developments on the societal level and changes in the party political context, in other words the relative interaction between the explanatory variables suggested in this dissertation, should also be scrutinized in future research.

‘Presidentialisation’ is an intriguing concept and will probably remain a catchword for political scientists even in the future. The presidentialisation thesis will thus not likely be ‘expunged’ from the political science vocabulary, as called for by Dowding (2012). As underlined by other scholars, there is still a need for more research to understand the exact nature of such developments in parliamentary democracies over time (Karvonen 2010; Persson & Wiberg 2011). However, this dissertation leaves a strong argument for also studying single cases over shorter periods, as there are short-term variations in the concentration of decision-making power in cabinets worth scrutinizing.

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Part 2: Empirical articles

Presidentialisation and cabinet decision-making: Exploring the importance of coalition partners

Abstract

In recent years, several scholars have found support for presidentialisation thesis, which claims that electoral processes in parliamentary democracies have become more candidate-centred and that state leaders have become more powerful and autonomous within their party and in cabinet. Some need for clarification remains, however, in order to account for changes in the actual decision-making processes in countries with frequent coalitions. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with former and present ministers, this article finds that the full cabinet has been weakened in Norway over last 15 years, and the so-called cabinet subcommittee, consisting of prime minister and coalition party leaders, has developed into a multi-party centre of cabinet. The Norwegian case thus suggests that concentration of decision-making power in cabinets also might include coalition partners, and not only empowerment of prime ministers as expected from the presidentialisation thesis.

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Introduction

‘Presidentialisation’ has become a catchword to describe changes in Western European parliamentary democracies (Helms 2005). It has been used to denote both the personalisation of election campaigns and how prime ministers have become more powerful and autonomous within their party and in cabinet (Foley 1993; Mughan 2000). Poguntke and Webb’s volume (2005) has provided the most comprehensive conceptualisation and a framework for comparative analysis. Based on various country studies, they conclude ‘that it is reasonable to talk of the presidentialization of contemporary democracy’ (Webb & Poguntke 2005: 347).

The empowerment of state leaders has been the subject of a lively debate. On a conceptual note, scholars discussing developments in the United Kingdom have questioned whether parliamentary democracies can become presidential at all. As Heffernan notes (2005), systemic differences distinguish presidents and prime ministers, with the cabinet being a decisive constraint on prime ministers’ power. Dowding claims that the empowerment of prime ministers in fact makes parliamentary and presidential systems less alike, since prime ministers already have more power than presidents do (2012). As emphasised by Poguntke et al., the constitutional differences remain, although the operating logic of the presidential system increasingly seems to be applied also to parliamentary systems (2011: 2).

Empirically, much emphasis has been placed on the presidentialisation of electoral processes, while changes inside the executive have received less attention (Poguntke et al. 2011: 31). Consequently, a need still exists to explore the scope and extent of prime ministerial empowerment in the executive sphere. According to the presidentialisation thesis, prime ministers have been empowered at the expense of the full cabinet. This overall shift in intra-executive power has been accompanied by growing autonomy from party, and state leaders have become increasingly independent of direct interference from party actors in the cabinet decision-making process (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 7–9). The intra-executive presidentialisation thus entails changes in both power and autonomy.

In consensual systems, chief executives must dominate veto players, such as coalition partners, to increase their power and autonomy (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 11). Although some signs of presidentialisation also have been found in countries like Denmark, Sweden, Netherland and Belgium (Aylott 2005; Fiers & Krouwel 2005; Pedersen & Knudsen 2005), there is still a need to investigate how the presence of coalition partners actually affects changes in cabinet.¹ In light of the presidentialisation thesis, the research question discussed in this article is therefore how decision-making processes have changed in coalition cabinets.

Behind this descriptive research question lies a theoretical expectation that coalition partners not only hinder prime ministerial empowerment. Together with prime ministers, coalition partners might in fact be empowered in cabinet decision-making.

The research question is answered by a case study of Norwegian cabinets. The studied cabinets vary concerning the number of parties, and the Norwegian case provides an opportunity to explore how the presence of coalition partners has affected the move towards more unilateral decision-making. What makes Norway further suited for answering the research question, is the availability of central political actors. Some of the quantitative indicators often used to assess presidentialisation in the executive sphere, do not necessarily capture whether decision-making in cabinet has become less collegial and increasingly unilateral. Focusing on such changes, informants with first-hand knowledge are preferable, although it might be difficult to get access to politicians. This article is based on semi-structured interviews with 19 ministers from former and present Norwegian cabinets. The rich availability of decision-makers makes it possible to answer the research question, without having to rely on secondary sources (Karvonen 2010).² The present article can thus shed light on the process of intra-executive presidentialisation, through insights from the inner workings of cabinets.

The article continues in five parts. With the presidentialisation thesis as a point of departure, the theoretical section elaborates how the number of parties might affect changes in cabinet decision-making. After some methodological considerations comes a short description of the relevant characteristics of Norwegian cabinets as the objects of study. The empirical section then examines changes in power and autonomy in the last four Norwegian cabinets. Finally, presidentialisation in the executive sphere is discussed in light of the Norwegian case.

Studying intra-executive presidentialisation

The main point of Poguntke and Webb's presidentialisation thesis is that parliamentary democracies are moving from their different starting points towards a presidentialised form of government. This development is apparent in different parts of society, and the so-called intra-executive presidentialisation entails a concentration of power, where state leaders increasingly decide policy issues more unilaterally at the expense of the full cabinet (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 11–12).

Poguntke and Webb (2005) suggest several indicators of intra-executive presidentialisation. To limit other ministers' ability to interfere in decision-making, prime ministers will increasingly appoint non-party technocrats or politicians lacking distinctive

party power bases. To remove strong opponents or to create insecurity among other ministers, prime ministers will make frequent reshuffles in cabinets (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 19). In addition, fewer or shorter cabinet meetings will weaken the collective decision-making in cabinets, making prime ministers with increased resources at their disposal, able to decide cabinet policy more unilaterally, or bilaterally with involved ministers, at the expense of the full cabinet (Webb & Poguntke 2005: 340).

Intra-executive presidentialisation might be seen as a move towards prime ministerial government. In the comparative literature, there are various taxonomies arranging models of decision-making and executive politics (for an overview see Elgie 1997). As Andeweg (1993; 1997) has underlined, the degree of collegiality in cabinet decision-making should be seen as a continuum.³ In between cabinet government and prime ministerial government, are examples where a small group of ministers dominate the decision-making process.⁴ For instance, no other minister is involved in all the aspects of cabinet life like the finance minister (Larsson 1993). In several parliamentary democracies, the increased concentration of power around prime minister has thus also included finance minister and other core ministers (Heffernan & Webb 2005; Pedersen & Knudsen 2005; Sundström 2009). In some countries, this concentration of power has been semi-institutionalised through the deputy prime ministers from coalition parties (e.g. UK and Belgium).

The research question raised in this article, concerns how changes in the decision-making have been affected by presence of coalition partners in cabinet; in other words if presidentialisation depends on type of cabinet. In their thesis, Poguntke and Webb distinguish between majoritarian and consensual systems. In majoritarian systems, chief executives have more immediate power at their disposal. In consensual systems, exemplified in their volume by minority governments and broad coalitions, state leaders must dominate veto players, such as cabinet coalition partners, to enhance their zones of autonomy and power (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 11–12).

It is well known that prime ministers in single-party cabinets have more power over cabinet affairs than do prime ministers in cabinets with coalition partners from different parties (Jones 1991). The presence of coalition partners in cabinet might curb the prime minister's ability to decide more unilaterally in cabinet, and prime ministers must share decision-making power in order to keep coalitions together. A move towards more unilateral decision-making thus seems more difficult in coalitions.

However, some of the forces that push democracies toward a more presidential working

mode might create a need for greater centralisation of power also in coalitions. Fragmentation of the public sector has been seen as one of the most important explanations for intra-executive presidentialisation, because it most directly affects government decision-making (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 16).⁵ In multi-party cabinets, the functional equivalent of the powerful prime minister is a strong collective coalition leadership (Andeweg 2000: 383–84). Fragmentation and differentiation in the public sector might have created a greater need for concentration of decision-making power around prime minister and leaders of the coalition parties.

Although the empowerment of such inner circles seems less documented than presidentialisation, some contributions have touched upon coalition committees' growing importance. In Belgium for instance, the prime minister has assumed a more dominant role in policy development and coordination (Fiers & Krouwel 2005: 132). However, decision-making has also been centralised, which is reflected by the growing use in Belgium of the 'kern cabinet' consisting of prime minister and vice premiers of all coalition parties. According to Fiers and Krouwel, the 'kern cabinet' has been increasingly used since the mid-1970s, and has developed into a forum for both conflict prevention and conflict resolution (2005: 134; Frogner 1997). Based on the above, one can hypothesise that the process of intra-executive presidentialisation in coalitions in fact can entail a concentration of power around prime minister and coalition party leaders.

According to the presidentialisation thesis, the shift in intra-executive power has been accompanied by growing autonomy, and prime ministers have become increasingly independent of direct interference from parties in cabinet decision-making. While party government implies governing through parties, presidentialisation implies a tendency to govern increasingly past parties (Poguntke & Webb 2005: 8–9). Poguntke and Webb's reasoning is in line with the general claim that political parties' policy-shaping role has declined. That policymaking is being done within parties is a condition of Katz' ideal model of party government (1986). As Mair points out (2008), party government might be waning because public policy is no longer decided by the party, or is no longer under its direct control. Although parties no longer dictate policies, they are still involved in various stages of the policy-making process (Blondel & Cotta 2000). Parties head negotiations leading to formal coalition agreements, and are often represented in mechanisms for conflict management in coalitions (Müller & Strøm 2000). However, this engagement mainly involves leading party actors. In several countries, the transition from mass parties seems to have made the party leadership more important than the organs of the extra-parliamentary party

organization (Müller 2000), and the party leadership now often occupy the most attractive government offices and parliamentary positions (Goetz 2006).

According to the presidentialisation thesis, there is a tendency that party actors are less involved in cabinet decision-making. In coalition cabinets, following the same logic as above, one can hypothesise that both prime ministers and coalition party leaders gain increasing autonomy from their respective parties.

Indicators, methods, and expectations

The focus on changes in the decision-making processes in cabinet has implications for the type of indicators and sources chosen. While indicators such as cabinet ministers' backgrounds, the number of reshuffles, and growth in personnel at the Prime Minister's Office might be readily accessible, they do not necessarily capture whether decision-making has become less collegial and increasingly unilateral. Some studies have used ministers' backgrounds and the number of reshuffles to say something about the level of hierarchy and of collegial decision-making in cabinets (Bäck et al. 2011: 253–54). To avoid that important changes fly under the scientific radar, such indicators should be supplemented with indicators more directly related to cabinet decision-making. The number of cabinet meetings and cabinet issues might give important indications of change (Sundström 2009), although these indicators say little about how decisions actually are made in cabinet. To evaluate the hypothesised changes in power and autonomy in cabinet, two empirical elements of cabinet decision-making are suggested.

- *Collegiality in cabinet decision-making*; assesses how decisions are made in cabinet, i.e. the role of the full cabinet, inner circles, and prime minister.
- *Involvement of party actors*; assesses how party actors outside cabinet are involved in the decision-making in cabinet.

An increased use of voting in cabinet could be an indicator of decreasing collegiality. In Norway, however, no constitutional rules exist for cabinet decision-making (Narud and Strøm 2011), and formal voting almost never take place in cabinet. Changes in the collegiality in decision-making and the involvement of party actors have instead been evaluated based on interviews.

Although informants with first-hand knowledge are preferable when analysing decision-making processes in cabinets, they may differ in their assessments of developments. As Mughan notes on the British case, for every insider assertion that prime ministerial government has arrived, 'it is possible to find the counter-assertion that cabinet government remains the order of the day' (2000: 134). To get the assessments of the most important insiders, the present article is based on semi-structured interviews with ministers. Well known is that politicians might exaggerate or understate their own importance, depending on whether political capital is to be won or lost (Barry 2002; Tansey 2007). Here, however, questions were not related to ministers' individual performance.

Collegiality in cabinet decision-making has been evaluated on basis of the ministers' narratives on how decisions in general were made in the cabinet meetings, and on how disagreements and conflicts were solved by inner circles and prime minister. Questions were open-ended and the responses were later re-interpreted by the author.

Regarding the involvement of party actors, it is worth noting that cabinet ministers also act on behalf of their party, and that prime minister and coalition leaders interact with representatives both from other parties and from own parties. The presidentialisation thesis thus predicts autonomy from leading party actors from own party. To assess changes in the involvement of such party actors, the present article puts special emphasis on the budgetary process in cabinet. Although Norway is not a typical example of the party government ideal (Katz 1986), political parties have traditionally played an important part in the recruitment to parliament and cabinet, and in the decision-making process in cabinet (Strøm & Narud 2006). Formal and informal consultations take place between party leadership, parliamentary groups, and cabinet members at several stages of the policy process (Rommetvedt 1994). The budgetary process in Norway is especially important, since all the cabinet's economic priorities are set there. Party actors' involvement in the budgetary process would thus imply that parties are involved in some of the most important parts of cabinet decision-making. The involvement of party actors has been evaluated on basis of specific questions on how leading party actors, such as parliamentary leaders and finance spokespersons, were involved in the actual budgetary process in cabinet.

This paper focuses on changes in the collegiality in cabinet decision-making and the involvement of party actors in the last four Norwegian cabinets, led by Kjell Magne Bondevik (Christian Democratic Party) or Jens Stoltenberg (Labour Party).

Table a2.1: Norwegian cabinets 1997–2013

Cabinet	Tenure	Parties in cabinet	Share of seats in parliament (%)
Bondevik I	1997–2000	Christian Democratic Party, Centre Party, Liberal Party	25.5
Stoltenberg I	2000–2001	Labour Party	39.4
Bondevik II	2001–2005	Conservative Party, Christian Democratic Party, Liberal Party	37.6
Stoltenberg II	2005–2013	Labour Party, Centre Party, Socialist Left Party	51.5 ^a

^a The coalition kept its majority after 2009 elections with 50,9 percent of the seats in Parliament. However, the Labour Party was strengthened somewhat at the expense of Socialist Left Party.

To answer the research question of how decision-making processes have changed in coalition cabinets, ideally, emphasis should have been placed over a longer period. In the comparative volume of Poguntke and Webb, country experts have taken the 1960s as a starting point. However, intensive studies based on interviews with ministers, are difficult to conduct with multiple cabinets, covering changes over several decades. In this article, the trade-off has been to investigate a fairly small number of cabinets at a greater depth than would be possible if more cabinets were investigated.

What then, can be expected in the Norwegian case? Surely, Norway has also experienced some of the same societal developments believed to cause changes in the executive.⁶ However, few developments have yet indicated a process of presidentialisation (Narud and Strøm 2011: 232; Kolltveit 2012). Former contributions have shown how the Norwegian Prime Minister's Office gradually has been expanded to increase horizontal coordination (Christensen & Lægreid 2002: 121), because increased sectorization in the central government apparatus meant that coordination between ministries often was pushed upwards to cabinet level.⁷ The challenge of sectorization and fragmentation in the public sector has not disappeared over the last two decades. Overall, it is plausible that signs of presidentialisation and concentration of power have appeared also after 1997. Regarding the empirical elements chosen in this article, one would thus expect weakened collegiality in cabinet decision-making, and increased autonomy from party actors.

In the studied period, there have been one single-party cabinet and three coalitions in Norway. This opens up for within-case comparison, although the limited number of single-party cabinets also makes it important to scrutinize the studied coalitions to find out whether coalition partners have been empowered in the decision-making process. Specific expectations might also be derived from the type of cabinet. Stoltenberg I and both of Bondevik's coalitions were minority cabinets, relying on support from opposition parties to

get cabinet policies through parliament. Stoltenberg II, on the other hand, was the first majority coalition in Norway since the mid-eighties. It is reasonable that the cabinet's parliamentary basis also will affect the dynamics of cabinet decision-making. According to Webb and Poguntke, large parties in countries with fragmented party systems will experience stronger presidentialisation tendencies than small parties will (2005: 344). Transferred to cabinet decision-making and the Norwegian case, one could expect a stronger concentration of power around prime minister and coalition leaders in Stoltenberg's majority cabinet.

In total, 19 ministers from the four cabinets were interviewed by the author. The list contains party leaders in cabinet, prime minister, and rank-and-file ministers (see appendix). Getting informants from the last two cabinets was emphasized, since little research has been conducted on them, although incumbent ministers was more difficult to get access to. For the first two cabinets analyzed, the interview material has been supplemented with secondary sources based on former interviews. The 19 interviews lasted 30–75 minutes, an average of 52 minutes. Follow-up interviews were conducted with seven of the ministers.

Characteristics of cabinet decision-making in Norway

Traditionally, Norwegian prime ministers have been comparatively weak (King 1994; O'Malley 2007). The full cabinet and individual ministers have been the most important actors in cabinet decision-making processes, and Norwegian cabinets' working mode in the 1960s, 70s and 80s has thus been characterized as a hybrid between ministerial and cabinet government (Eriksen 2003: 84).

Formally, cabinet decisions are taken only in the Council of State led by the King, or in the ministries. In reality, however, cabinet meetings have been the most important arena for coordinating government policy (Christensen & Lægreid 2002: 66), and have been called the pillar of the cabinet's collegial working form (Skjeie 2001: 182). Comparatively, Norwegian cabinets have met often, with two cabinet meetings weekly, besides the ritual Council of State. Traditionally, controversies between ministerial areas or between parties have been resolved in these cabinet meetings, or discussed further and solved by smaller groups of ministers, often the prime minister, finance minister, and relevant line minister (Skjeie 2001: 184; Olsen 1983: 103). In former coalition cabinets, inner circles have consisted of coalition party leaders. This was institutionalised in Willoch's three-party coalition in 1983 in the so-called subcommittee, consisting of the prime minister, the two other party leaders, and the finance minister (Rommetvedt 1994: 251). Internal cabinet committees, like the security committee and the research committee, have been part of most cabinets in the post-war

period; other cabinets have also had committees for employment, petroleum, and foreign policy (Eriksen 2003). However, the different committees have only been used to discuss issues before cabinet meetings, and committees' decisions have not been considered politically binding for the cabinet. The full cabinet has thus been labelled the most important 'committee' (Rommetvedt 1994).

Unlike cabinets in several other democracies, the full cabinet also plays an important part in the budgetary process in Norway. Before 1996, bilateral budget negotiations were held between the Ministry of Finance and individual ministries. Subsequently, the state budget has been decided in special cabinet conferences. Based on estimates from the finance minister and priority proposals from individual ministers, the full cabinet meet in March to decide the overall budgetary frames, and to decide which priority proposals shall compete in the next budgetary conference. At the August budgetary conference, ministers present their priority proposals and fight for funding. To reach agreement, the prime minister and a smaller group typically withdraw to find a solution (Finansdepartementet 2006: 13–14).

Examining decision-making in four Norwegian cabinets

The following section presents the empirical analysis of changes in cabinet decision-making processes in the last four Norwegian cabinets.

According to the presidentialisation thesis, state leaders have gained increased power and autonomy to decide cabinet policy more unilaterally. Based on the elaborations above, we might expect that coalition partners affects this prime ministerial empowerment, and that smaller groups consisting of coalition party leaders also might be strengthened in the decision-making processes. Further, we might expect that both prime ministers and coalition party leaders increasingly gain autonomy from their respective parties. The analysis is organised from the two empirical elements previously suggested, collegiality and autonomy.

Collegiality in cabinet decision-making

Decision-making in the Stoltenberg I cabinet (2000–2001), in most respects resembled decision-making in former Norwegian cabinets. In Stoltenberg I, the cabinet meeting was the primary arena for deciding cabinet issues, although the prime minister, finance minister, and the relevant minister sometimes had to find solutions when disagreements were not solved at these meetings. In Stoltenberg's single-party cabinet, disagreements mostly concerned allocation of money between different sectors. Most ministers in Stoltenberg I opposed an

extended use of cabinet committees and informal groups, fearing that cabinet subcultures would develop (Skjeie 2001). However, as in former Norwegian cabinets, an inner circle occasionally made important decisions in cabinet. According to a minister,

The Labour Party is in itself a coalition, and also in single-party cabinets, someone eventually has to sit down and “cut through”, based on signals from the cabinet.

In Stoltenberg I, this inner circle consisted of prime minister, finance minister, party secretary, and party leader, since Labour had a dual leadership arrangement with Stoltenberg as prime minister, and foreign minister Thorbjørn Jagland as party leader.

In the studied coalitions, the inner circles in cabinet have been institutionalised in the so-called cabinet subcommittee. This informal cabinet committee has become increasingly important and formalised in the studied period.

In Bondevik I (1997–2000), the subcommittee consisted of the prime minister and the three party leaders, and was established to manage potential conflicts between coalition parties. However, cabinet conflicts were more often between ministerial interests than between the parties, and the finance minister was therefore quickly included as a permanent member. Prime Minister Bondevik used the subcommittee both to discuss cases before handling in the full cabinet, and to resolve issues that the cabinet collective failed to agree upon, making the subcommittee a dampener of cabinet tensions (Christensen & Læg Reid 2002: 74). Subcommittee discussions were informal, without meeting papers and minutes were not kept. Although Bondevik insisted that decisions be made formally in cabinet plenary sessions, the subcommittee sometimes in reality became a decision-making organ, and agreements made there were difficult to change in cabinet meetings. The use of the subcommittee in Bondevik I has been characterised as a deviation from the Norwegian tradition of having important political discussions in the full cabinet collective (Christensen & Læg Reid 2002: 74).

In Bondevik II (2005–2009), the subcommittee met more regularly and played a more important role than in Bondevik I. However, the informal status and discussion style continued, and minutes of subcommittee meetings were not kept. Prime Minister Bondevik initially wanted to use the cabinet collective also to solve conflicts. However, the subcommittee, consisting of prime minister, finance minister, and the three party leaders, quickly became an important arena to solve the most difficult issues in the coalition. The Bondevik II coalition held considerable political differences, and especially disagreements

over economic policy, tax cuts, and the economy of local government made cabinet conflicted. According to interviewed ministers, the subcommittee therefore became a necessary tool.

In Stoltenberg II (2005–present), the subcommittee quickly became extensively used.⁸ With the cabinet having a majority in parliament, several ministers considered the subcommittee to be the most important decision-making arena, and therefore wanted to present their cases there, before handling them in the cabinet meetings. However, the practice became so comprehensive that the Prime Minister’s Office had to limit ministers’ opportunities to discuss issues in the subcommittee before they were handled in the cabinet meetings. The subcommittee was also used to solve conflicts after cabinet meetings, and it became an organ where all sensitive cases and problematic issues had to be solved. This extensive use made cabinet decision-making processes time consuming, and the system nearly broke down. In 2006, the experienced Karl Eirik Schjøtt-Pedersen was named chief of staff in the Prime Minister’s Office, and was given a clear mandate to ease the subcommittee’s workload.⁹ Smaller disagreements could be solved bilaterally with the new chief of staff as an important broker, and the most difficult issues then remained for the subcommittee. According to a minister,

The tactic of the prime minister, and accepted by the two other party leaders, was to collect six or seven difficult issues, which in principle were totally unrelated. Some victories and defeats were then evenly distributed. Such horse-trading is not possible to do in the full cabinet.

Leading the biggest party in the coalition, Prime Minister Stoltenberg was central in these negotiations. However, according to interviewed ministers the use of the subcommittee could in fact benefit the small parties in the coalition, since Stoltenberg and the two other party leaders were on more equal footing in the subcommittee than in the full cabinet. In Stoltenberg II, the subcommittee also became increasingly institutionalized and formalized, having its own meeting papers and documents like cabinet minutes. Stoltenberg’s standing in cabinet decision-making was further cemented after 2009 elections, where the red-green coalition kept a slim majority, and the Labour Party was strengthened at the expense of the Socialist Left (Narud 2009). After elections, the chief of staff was also made minister without portfolio in the Prime Minister’s Office, further centralising the coordination of cabinet policy.¹⁰

Involvement of party actors

The increased importance of the subcommittee might be seen as a weakening of the full cabinet in the decision-making process. According to the presidentialisation thesis, prime ministers have also experienced increasing autonomy from parties. In coalitions, it is hypothesised in the present article that both prime ministers and coalition party leaders gain increasing autonomy from their respective parties.

In Stoltenberg I, party actors were heavily involved in cabinet decision-making, as they have been in former Labour single-party cabinets in Norway (Skjeie 2001). Party actors were especially important in the budgetary process, where cabinet priorities were discussed both in parliament and in the party's central board. The parliamentary leader and finance spokesperson participated throughout the cabinet's budgetary conference, and here they were included in the inner circle of prime minister, finance minister, party leader, and party secretary that eventually decided the final budget after line ministers had presented their priorities.

The involvement of party actors was more limited in both Bondevik's coalitions. Budgetary priorities were discussed in the parliamentary committees and in the different party organisations. However, Prime Minister Bondevik restricted how detailed the discussions should be, since the cabinet's budgetary proposals contained sensitive information. Bondevik also limited party actors' involvement at cabinet budgetary conferences. The financial spokespersons and the parliamentary leaders were allowed to participate only in the general discussion about the macroeconomic frames at the budgetary conferences. When the cabinet collective discussed the individual ministers' priorities, they had to leave. According to Prime Minister Bondevik,

It was important that the parliamentary group knew the financial situation. We thought it was wrong, however, if they should participate in the budget discussions of the single ministries. That is the case of the cabinet collective. It was the cabinet's budget, not the party group's budget.

However, parliamentary leaders and financial spokespersons were often well informed via telephone during latter stages of budgetary conferences when the subcommittee consisting of prime minister, finance minister, and party leaders made final decisions.

In the Stoltenberg II cabinet, party actors' importance in the decision-making process grew compared to the former coalitions. With the cabinet having a majority in parliament, it became more important both to discuss priorities beforehand, and to involve parliamentary leaders in the final decisions. Budget priorities were therefore thoroughly discussed in parliamentary committees and in the party caucuses, and parliamentary leaders and financial spokespersons participated throughout the budgetary conferences. According to a minister,

Their participation is extremely important to make the budget work. They have another feeling for where the limits are, and what is important for the party organisation. They can provide an overview that the line ministers lack in the budget negotiations.

Parliamentary leaders in the Stoltenberg II cabinet in fact often had more power over budget priorities than individual ministers did, since they were consulted when the cabinet subcommittee patched things together during the final negotiations.

Conclusions

The research question raised in this article, concern how the presence of coalition partners have affected changes in cabinet decision-making processes. Table a2.2 sums up the support for the hypothesised changes in Norway on the empirical elements of cabinet decision-making.

Table a2.2: Changes in cabinet decision-making in Norway

Empirical elements of cabinet decision-making	Empirical support in the Norwegian case
Collegiality in cabinet decision-making	Decreasing importance of the full cabinet, growing importance of inner cabinets
Involvement of party actors	Not decreasing; vary between cabinets

In Norway, the collegial nature of cabinet decision-making has changed over the last two decades. Some support exists for the assumption that the full cabinet has been weakened, as expected by the presidentialisation thesis. Comparatively, however, Norwegian cabinets still meet regularly, and cabinet meetings' importance has not been reduced as much as, for instance, in Sweden and Britain (Sundström 2009; Weller 2003).

The collegial nature of Norwegian cabinets has primarily been challenged by the increased importance and formalisation of the cabinet subcommittee. Interviews with involved ministers

reveal that the cabinet subcommittee has evolved from an arena primarily for informal discussions to an institutionalised decision-making organ, in the Stoltenberg II cabinet formalised with own meeting documents. In the studied cabinets, prime ministers do not only dominate coalition partners. As expected from the theoretical elaborations, the subcommittee functions as a strong coalition leadership, a functional equivalent of the powerful prime minister (Andeweg 2000: 383–4).

Having scrutinized the budgetary process, however, the hypothesised increased autonomy from party actors gets less support. In the studied Norwegian cabinets, there is no tendency of decreasing involvement of party actors. The cabinet collective's weakening has gone hand in hand with a continued, or perhaps even strengthened, involvement of party actors, limiting the prime minister's and coalition actor's autonomy. In Stoltenberg II, parliamentary leaders even seem to have been more strongly involved than were parliamentary leaders in other coalitions. In the Norwegian case, prime ministers and coalition leaders do not seem to govern entirely *past*, but still *with* parties. However, as power has moved upwards in the party organisations in Norway (Heidar & Saglie 2002), it is the party leadership, and especially parliamentary leaders, that have been involved in cabinet decision-making. Developments in Norway thus resemble what has been seen, for instance, in Sweden, where party elites have grown increasingly dominant (Aylott 2005: 184).

Intra-executive presidentialisation entails that prime ministers have been empowered at the expense of the full cabinet. However, it seems relevant to ask if presidentialisation depends on type of cabinet, because the presence of coalition partners might curb the prime minister's ability to decide more unilaterally in cabinet.

In the British case, it has recently been shown how Prime Minister Cameron's predominance is partially constrained by the Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg, although Cameron too constrains Clegg (Bennister & Heffernan 2012). The present article has shown that coalition partners are not only dominated in cabinet decision-making. The Norwegian case shows that coalition party leaders in fact are empowered together with the prime minister. Based on developments in Norwegian cabinets, the article has found support the assumption that presidentialisation depends on type of cabinet, although the evolving multi-party centre of cabinet is not autonomous from leading party actors.

The concept of presidentialisation is multifaceted, covering different types of societal changes. As Dowding has warned, to bundle centralisation and personalisation of politics might obscure rather than illuminate (2012: 16). The same might be true about empowerment and increased autonomy in the executive sphere. The empirical analysis of developments in

Norway at least suggests that is possible to have concentration of decision-making power, without increased autonomy from leading party actors.

The insight that coalition partners might be empowered together with prime ministers, do not question the entire well-developed presidentialisation thesis, as it is only related to one part, namely the process of intra-executive presidentialisation. However, the Norwegian case adds to the growing empirical literature on presidentialisation of cabinet decision-making in Western European parliamentary democracies, and supplement the theoretical understanding of how concentration of power can be manifested in decision-making in coalition cabinets.

This insight need not be confined to the case and these cabinets only, as the Norwegian case adds to a growing literature. Concentration of power around coalition partners has also been seen in other countries, although both the formalisation and the composition of such inner circles might differ between countries. For instance, in Belgium the 'kern-cabinet' has developed to an important forum for both conflict prevention and conflict resolution in cabinet (Fiers & Krouwel 2005:). In Denmark, the coordination committee, chaired by the prime minister and consisting of party leaders and core ministers, has functioned as an inner cabinet (Jensen 2003; Jensen 2008; Knudsen 2000).

Why then, does this concentration of power around prime ministers and coalition partners happen? Changes in the public sector have underlined the cabinet meetings' unsuitability to solve conflicts (Peters et al. 2000), and there has been an increased need to centralise decision-making both in single-party cabinets and in coalitions. In the Norwegian case, the growth in administrative and political personnel at the Prime Minister's Office has been seen as an effort to enhance horizontal coordination in cabinet (Christensen & Lægveid 2002: 121). The increased importance of the cabinet subcommittee and the new construction with a coordination minister can also be seen as a streamlining of coordination processes in cabinet, and a wish to create decision-making arenas that are more efficient than the cabinet meetings. The concentration of power around prime ministers and coalition partners, and the process of intra-executive presidentialisation should thus be seen as expressions of the same phenomenon, namely efforts to strengthen the political centre.

However, the need to strengthen the political centre does not only stem from long-term societal changes. Variation in decision-making between cabinets also has to be explained by short-term factors. In the Norwegian case, growing political differences between the coalition partners increased the need for the cabinet subcommittee. The interviews also show how the majority basis of the Stoltenberg II cabinet made the cabinet subcommittee a decisive

decision-making arena. This development resembles what was seen in Denmark in the 2000s, where the prominent role of the coordination committee partly can be explained by the fact that Anders Fogh Rasmussen's first cabinet had a stable majority through their permanent agreement with the Danish People's Party (Jensen 2008; Fuglsang & Jensen 2010).

How such features of cabinet might affect the decision-making process and increase the need for strengthening of the political core, is what has been called 'contingent causes' of presidentialisation (Poguntke & Webb 2005). For instance, van Biezen and Hopkin (2005) have shown how electoral strength, personal appeal, and inter-party dynamics have been important in explaining the variation in presidentialisation tendencies in Spain. Developments in Norway also seems to underline that concentration of decision-making power depend on short-term changes. According to Webb and Poguntke the political context, such as the size and cohesion of the cabinet's parliamentary support, 'constrains and shapes' executive leadership (Webb & Poguntke 2005: 337). As this article has suggested, the number of parties in cabinet might affect both the form and the degree of concentration of power. However, further research is needed to scrutinize how such features of cabinet affect the concentration of power in cabinet decision-making.

Notes

1. In the Scandinavian countries, the support for the presidentialisation thesis seems mixed. In the Swedish case, for instance, there are some signs of increased power for the Prime Minister, although the picture is not 'unambiguous' (Bergman & Bolin 2011: 273).
2. There are contributions using former prime ministers and leading party actors. See, for instance Paloheimo (2003).
3. There is an analytical difference between collegiality and collectivity, as Andeweg points out (1993; 1997). Collectivity concerns the responsibility of decisions, and collegiality concerns which actors that are central in the decision-making process.
4. Paloheimo (2003) uses Laver and Shepsle's (1994) models of cabinet decision-making to investigate prime minister empowerment. However, their taxonomy do not include examples of such oligarchic government (Andeweg 1993; 1997)
5. Poguntke and Webb (2005) also highlight internationalisation, and it has been shown how decision-making in the European Union has transferred authority and resources to chief executives (Damgaard 2000; Johansson and Tallberg 2010).
6. Although Norway is not member of the European Union, Norwegian prime ministers participate at several international arenas, potentially leaving them with important decisions at the expense of other cabinet ministers.

7. In Norway, the Prime Minister's Office serves both as office for the prime minister and for the cabinet. The office has been strengthened over the last decades, but remains comparatively small.
8. In Stoltenberg II, the three party leaders and coalition 'architects', constituted the subcommittee.
9. Schjøtt-Pedersen was former minister of finance and leader of the finance committee in parliament.
10. In Norwegian cabinets, it has been common to have some ministers with responsibility for limited areas within other ministries. Schjøtt-Pedersen, however, was the first minister without portfolio for over fifty years.

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Appendix: List of interviews

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Article 2

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APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

First interview round, summer 2010 (Ministers):

Party and budgetary process

- How are party actors involved in the budgetary process?
- What is the role of the parliamentary party fraction?
- What is the role of the party caucus (group meetings)?
- Do the party actors give a negotiation mandate to their party leader in the subcommittee?
- How is the contact with party actors during the budgetary conferences?
- How would you consider the overall anchoring in your party?

Budgetary conferences

- How does the budgetary conferences proceed?
- Does the 'macro round' have any significance?
- How are new policy proposals presented at the budgetary conferences?
- What is the importance of strategy and argumentation in the departmental round?
- What is the relationship between the full cabinet and inner circles like the cabinet subcommittee?
- When does a smaller group withdraw and negotiate?
- How does negotiations in the subcommittee take place?
- How closely are ministers and parliamentary leaders involved after the subcommittee has withdrawn?
- Was there a final round in plenum with room for new discussions?

Cabinet and subcommittee

- How does cabinet meetings proceed?
- Is the use of the cabinet subcommittee different in the budgetary process, than in other cabinet meetings?
- How has the use of the cabinet subcommittee evolved compared to former cabinets you have participated in?

- How would you describe the balance between cabinet collective and the cabinet subcommittee? A and B team? Inner circle?
- How would you describe the extent in your cabinet?
- How would you describe the significance in your cabinet?
- Did the use of the cabinet subcommittee change during the tenure?
- How did the parliamentary situation affect?

Second interview round, summer 2011 (Ministers and chiefs of staff)

Subcommittee and cabinet

- What was the primary function of the sub-committee in your cabinet? Primarily discussions in advance of cabinet meetings?
- Did you ever feel that issues were decided before the cabinet meetings?
- Was the subcommittee used in particular before elections, or was it evenly used?
- Is there a wear and tear during a cabinet tenure?
- Has the cabinet subcommittee become the most important arena for decision-making and conflict resolution in cabinet?
- Has the cabinet collective lost influence compared to former cabinets you have participated in?
- Has the strengthening of the Prime Ministers office contributed to more 'routine issues' being decided outside of cabinet, between involved ministers?

Possible explanations of the changed role of the subcommittee

- What can explain the claims that the subcommittee has become more central in decision-making and conflict resolution over the last 30 years?
- Have cabinet issues become more complex, making it difficult to agree in the full cabinet?
- Has the political differences between parties in the coalition increased?
- What significance does the prime minister's leadership style have?
- Has a division of labour evolved between the subcommittee and the Prime Minister's Office?
- How are developments related to the cabinet's parliamentary basis?

Overall coordination in cabinet

- How did the use of the subcommittee in your cabinet affect how the cabinet meetings were used?
- How did permanent cabinet committees and state secretaries committees contribute to coordination in cabinet?
- How did the strengthening of the Prime Minister's Office affect coordination in cabinet? Arbitrator and agenda-setter? Mapping of disagreements? Emerging policy-making role?
- What was the primary role of the chief of staff in your cabinet? Supporting the Prime Minister? Clarifying conflicts of interest between ministers?
- Did the chief of staff have delegated decision-making authority?
- What is the role of the coordination minister to solve conflicts (Only in Stoltenberg II)

Third interview round, spring 2012 (secretaries general)

Generally about the development of the PMO

- PMO has been strengthened administratively and through the political staff over the last 30 years. How has this affected coordination between the ministries' areas of responsibility?
- Does the PMO deal with more ministerial issues [mer saksbehandlende]?
- Is the PMO still a 'primus inter pares' compared to the ministries?

Coordination mechanisms in cabinet

- How does the cabinet meetings function as coordination arena?
- Are time limits too short and sectoral interests too strong for them to function properly?
- How has it affected the cabinet meeting agenda to reduce the number of weekly meetings from two to one?
- Can the cabinet collective use more time on political issues across sectoral interest, while disagreements between ministries are solved elsewhere?
- There seems to be a tendency of fewer permanent state secretary committees. Is this because they do not function as a coordination mechanism in cabinet?

- How have these developments contributed to making PMO more central in the coordination process?

Change in chief of staff-function at the PMO

- What significance has the appointment of Schjøtt Pedersen had for coordination in cabinet?
- Has the PMO taken over part some of the political steering and coordination?
- Is there a tendency to separate functional [faglig] and political coordination, and has there been a division of labour? Political clarifications in the subcommittee, while the more traditional [tradisjonelle, faglige] disagreements between ministries are solved with the PMO in a central role?

Alternative explanations for the increased importance of the subcommittee

- How does political differences in the coalition contribute? Difficulties reaching agreement in cabinet meetings?
- How did the parliamentary basis affect?

APPENDIX 2: OVERVIEW OF RESPONDENTS AND INFORMANTS

Respondents

(date of interview in parentheses)

- Bondevik, Kjell Magne (16.8.2010 and 21.9.2011): Christian Democratic Party. Prime Minister 1997–2000 and 2001–2005.
- Bekkemellem, Karita (29.9.2010); Labour Party. Minister of Children and Equality Affairs 2000–2001 and 2005–2007.
- Clemet, Kristin (5.9.2011): Conservative Party. Minister of Education and Research 2001–2005.
- Devold, Kristin Krohn (31.8.2010): Conservative Party. Minister of Defence 2001–2005.
- Djupedal, Øystein (25.8.2010): Socialist Left Party. Minister of Education and Research 2005–2007.
- Dørum, Odd Einar (23.8.2010): Liberal Party. Minister of Transport and Communications 1997–1999, Minister of Justice 1999–2000 and 2001–2005.
- Fevolden, Trond (1.3.2012): Secretary General, Ministry of Research and Education 1992–to date.
- Flatø, Lars Erik (31.5.2012): Chief of Staff, Prime Minister’s Office 2005–2006.
- Foss, Per Kristian (18.8.2010 and 15.9.2011): Conservative Party Minister of Finance 2001–2005.
- Eriksen, Tore (7.6.2012): Secretary General, Ministry of Finance 1999–2011.
- Haga, Åslaug (6.9.2010) Centre Party. Minister of Culture 1999–2000, Minister of Local Government and Regional Development 2005–07, Minister of Petroleum and Energy 2007–08.
- Halvorsen, Kristin (11.8.2010): Socialist Left Party. Minister of Finance 2005–2009.
- Hanssen, Bjarne Håkon (28.9.2010): Labour Party. Minister of Agriculture 2000–2001, Minister of labour and Social Affairs 2005–2008, Minister of Health and Care Services 2008–2009.
- Hareide, Knut Arild (30.9.2010): Christian Democratic Party. Minister of Environment 2004–2005.
- Hasle, Anne Kari Lande (1.9.2011): Secretary General, Ministry of Health 1999–2013.
- Haugland, Valgerd Svarstad (26.8.2010 and 8.9.2011): Christian Democratic Party. Minister of Children and Family Affairs 1997–2000, Minister of Culture and Church Affairs 2001–2005.
- Hildrum, Eva (22.3.2012): Secretary General, Ministry of Transport and Communication 2005–to date.
- Husøy, Kari (28.10. 2011): Chief of Staff, Prime Minister’s Office 1997–2000 and 2001–2005.
- Høybråten, Dagfinn (7.9.2010): Christian Democratic Party. Minister of Health 1997–2000 and 2001–2004. Minister of Labour and Social Affairs 2004–2005.
- Kleppa, Magnhild Meltveit (11.8.2010): Centre Party. Minister of Social Affairs 1997–2000. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development 2007–2009.
- Nybøen, Harald (8.5.2012): Secretary General, Ministry of Children and Equality 1996–2012.
- Pedersen, Helga (24.9.2010 and 12.10.2011): Labour Party. Minister of Fisheries 2005–2009.
- Ruud, Morten (29.5.2012): Secretary General, Ministry of Justice 1997–2012.

Schjøtt-Pedersen, Karl Eirik (13.10.2010 and 29.6.2011): Labour Party. Minister of Finance 2000–2001. State Secretary and Chief of Staff at the Prime Minister’s Office 2006–2009, Minister without Portfolio at Prime Minister’s Office 2009–2013.

Schou, Ingerd (13.9.2010 and 14.9.2011) Conservative Party. Minister of Social Affairs 2001–2004.

Solberg, Erna (19.8.2010): Conservative Party. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development 2001–2005.

Solhjell, Bård Vegar (11.10.2010 and 27.9.2011): Socialist Left Party. Minister of Education and Research 2007–2009.

Informants

(date of interview in parentheses)

Axelsen, Geir (22.9.10): Labour Party. State secretary Ministry of Finance.

Lekve, Kyrre (17.6.2010). Socialist Left Party. State Secretary Ministry of Education and Research.

Michaelsen, Torgeir (29.9.2010) Labour Party. Leader of Finance committee. Finance spokesperson.

Skei Grande, Trine (27.9.2010). Liberal Party. Parliamentary leader.

Willoch, Kåre (12.12.2011). Conservative party. Prime Minister. 1981–1986