Changing Nordic Party Systems?
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Note to reader: this is an early draft of text which will go into my thesis in some form. Thus it is a work in progress, so please do not cite without explicit permission.
Changing Nordic Party Systems?
Something has apparently happened to the Nordic party systems: they used to be considered among the most stable party systems of them all. Up until the 1970s the Nordic party systems were known to be stable and rather similar (Berglund & Lindström 1978; Arter 2006). Almost no changes at all happened in these party systems from the 1920s and the establishment of parliamentary democracy to the 1970s and in some cases no significant changes happened until the 1990s (Pesonen 2001; Petersson 2005:54; Ware 1996:213ff). But since then these stable systems have over the last 40 years seemingly diverged and gained new parties (Arter 2011). The Nordic party systems have also been affected by external factors such as social change, the appearance of “new politics” (Flanagan and Lee 2003) and perhaps most discussed in recent years membership in the European Union. Yet despite all these the changes, most Nordic voters still give their votes to parties older than the electorate itself and these parties still dominate the political scene (Sundberg 1999; Arter 2011). Thus despite the presence of new parties, the Nordic party systems seem to have retained/regained a large measure of stability. On the other hand, more parties imply more complexity in the party systems (Sjöblom 1968:174), and different parties ought to imply different party interaction. Herein lays a Nordic puzzle: the stability of old parties, the at least partial stability of national party systems, but changing conditions and some new parties appearing.

This paper will provide an overview of the literature on the Nordic party systems and their development over the last decades, and by doing so attempts to identify gaps in our knowledge. Focus will rest on the rhetorical interaction of these parties with each other in the electoral arena, but other aspects of parties and party systems will be addressed if necessary in order to gain a more complete picture. Also, some studies which are actually addressing a broader range of party systems than just the Nordic ones will be discussed, as some methods require a broader range of cases. Based on the literature review, the notion of party system change and what this entails and some additional methodological issues will be examined.

Why rhetorical aspects of the electoral arena
This paper will focus on the rhetorical aspects of party systems change on the electoral arena. In this section it will be briefly explained what is meant by the electoral arena and its rhetorical aspects. Briefly, the argument in this paper is that even if there is one electoral party system, studying various aspects of it requires different methods, and when discussing party system change it is not certain that the same measurement or definition of change can be used for all these aspects.

The electoral arena refers to the battle for votes which occurs during each election season. The goal in this arena is simply to win votes. A distinguishing feature of the electoral arena is that it is “closed” analytically since it, according to Bardi and Mair, functions more in isolation than the other arenas (2008:158). Elections are held when they are, and this is done in accordance to clear rules. This also grants the electoral arena a special feature: usually there is no activity in any electoral arena, but when an election is called, campaigning will begin. But as already mentioned there are contacts with

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1 Following Arter (2011) Scandinavian and Nordic will be used interchangably in this paper.
2 See Sjöblom (1968) for a discussion on the arena-concept. Briefly, Sjöblom identifies three arenas on which a political party acts: the parliamentary, electoral and internal arenas. Other, later additions include a governing coalition controlling the executive as an arena (Bardi & Mair 2008) or a difference between the party-in-public-office and the party-on-the-ground (Katz & Mair 2002). Finally, with the increasing importance of media in politics, massmedia is sometimes view as an arena in its own right (Nord 1997:18-19).
other arenas – this isolation is not complete. Finally, some measure of success on the electoral arena is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for any political influence for a party (von Beyme 1985:276).

This view of parties as united actors is rather applicable on the Nordic party systems as all the Nordic nations use some sort of proportional electoral system combined with voting for party lists. Thus it is reasonable to consider the parties as having a mandate and not the parliamentarians as individuals (Sjölin 2005:46-52). Additionally it is the parties which adopt election manifestos, select candidates and get votes. Even if it is a simplification to assign specific goals – such as gaining votes – and agency to parties, it is a simplification which must be deemed acceptable in this context. From the outside a party appears to be quite united with one election manifesto, one list of candidates and one election result per party. Furthermore, this gives an increased weight to the party election manifestos, and program realization must thus be considered to be an important goal. Indeed, Nordic parties tend to fulfill their promises to a great extent (Klingemann, Hofferbert & Budge 1994; Naurin 2009).

By rhetorical aspects is meant the streams of propaganda the various parties direct towards each other, or rather the streams of propaganda directed to the electorate in order to win votes and limit competitors votes (Sjöblom 1968:174). It must also be noted that focusing on the party interaction on the electoral arena is not the same as studying elections and or the electorate even if parties are battling for their votes (Ware 1996:7). The complexity of the party systems is dependent on the number of parties present in the system, simply put: the more parties, the more streams of interaction (Sartori 2005:106; Sjöblom 1968:174-175). The most important form of interaction in the electoral arena is rhetorical or as Sartori puts it: “Politics is a war of words” (2005:298).

Studying parties is not the same activity as studying party systems, even if party systems are studied through observing the parties (Sartori 2005:passim; Ware 1996:7). Mair (1997:16) notes that adaptable and changing parties mean more stability in the party systems, because parties act “…to forestall new challengers and take advantage of new opportunities” (Mair 1997:16). Indeed the main reason for party system stability and freezing would be the ability of the political parties to adapt to shifting circumstances. This means party change and party system change is not the same situation (Ware 1996:7). Though there are five Nordic nations, Iceland will be left out in this paper since its party system is quite different from the others nations, also in terms of population Iceland stands out with only a 20th of any of the other four nations.

**Studies of Nordic party systems**

Though there of course are differences between the Nordic countries, in general they are fairly similar. If one takes the longer perspective of historical sociology, the Nordic states have very similar conditions for their process of state formation. (Rokkan & Urwin 1982) This similarity makes them ideal for a comparative analysis. This is true also in regards to electoral systems: the Nordic countries show not only great similarities, but also a large measure of continuity over time (Lijphart & Aitkin

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3 It is very common to speak solely of party competition, but as Ware notes, there is also cooperation in politics – officially, unofficially and implicit and this may well be as important as (1996:7). There are also coalitions, electoral alliances, block voting or coordinating propaganda against a third party (Sjöblom 1968:158). Additionally purposefully ignoring another party or complete incompatibility between two parties (Ware 1996:156). Note also Panebianco’s distinction between opposing and competing (1988:217-219).
In fact no matter what classification scheme is used, the Nordic party systems tend to be regarded as similar (Ware 1996:149).

From 1920s to the 1970s this stability takes the form of the classic Scandinavian five-party model, where you have five parties order left to right: the Communists, the Social democrats, Agrarians, Liberals and Conservatives, though there has been other parties present, the two most important examples being the Christian People’s Party in Norway and the Swedish People’s Party in Finland (Berglund & Lindström 1978; Arter 2006). As mentioned above, the so called “earthquake elections” changed the electoral outlook of the Scandinavian party systems. Party system change is “not only grammatically ponderous but also conceptually imprecise and operationally problematic” (Arter 2008:131). Arter also notes that there is surprisingly little agreement on what to measure in regards to party system change and even how to measure it. As mentioned above I will limit the discussion on party system change to the electoral arena, which excludes any studies of parliamentary party systems or coalition behavior.

Additionally, various methods require or are only possible with a certain number of cases: from single case studies to large quantitative or collaborative efforts. As has already been noted previously, quantitative methods usually require a larger number of cases – or at least does not increase the work burden by using more cases – and thus some studies will not be limited to just the Nordic party systems. This paper, however, will only address the Nordic party systems as they are discussed in those studies. Finally, there are the single case studies to consider. At first glance it may be hard to compare single case studies of different cases because different methodologies, theoretical aspects or indeed empirical material, but since there are quite a few case studies on the Nordic party systems – or indeed almost any party system – some of these will be addressed.

The natural starting point for any discussion about party system change in the electoral arena in Scandinavia is the 1970s. In their 1979 article Berglund and Lindström attempts to explain the upsets of the early 1970s. In addition to the new arrivals in Finland, Norway and Denmark, they also include the Swedish case due to the great success by the agrarians renamed the Centre Party in 1970 (25% of the votes). In all cases a large part of the losses were carried by the formerly dominant Social Democrats. The basic question asked is what was it that the losing parties failed to adapt to: changing social conflict structures, changing political realities, or both? Berglund and Lindström reach the conclusion that there is no straightforward relationship between the macro variables such as socio-economic change or expansion of the welfare state and the events on the electoral arena in the early 1970s. In their view only the rise of the Finnish Rural Party (a regionally confined agrarian splinter group) makes sense in a socioeconomic perspective, while Sweden never developed a petty bourgeois protest party like in Denmark and Norway even though Sweden should have been the most probable case. In the end the conclusion of Berglund and Lindström is that the left-right defended its position as the most important structuring factor of politics in the Scandinavian

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It seems as if this term was first used to describe the Danish election in 1973 where half the number of votes in parliament went to new or un-established parties. Later it seems to have spread in use to other elections with important electoral upsets.
countries, even though a centre-periphery dynamic remains important. Finally, Berglund and Lindström conclude that:

The drop in class voting was an asset to whatever party knew how to take advantage of it; and the realigning elections in the first half of this decade testify to the unwillingness rather than to the inability of most parties to do so (1979:204).

Connected to class voting is the concept of cleavages, and declining class voting would be a leading indicator of a lessening importance of cleavages. Over the last decades the persistence of the frozen cleavage systems identified by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) has been increasingly questioned and many comparative studies have pronounced the weakening of cleavages as determinants for party systems (see for example Lane and Ersson 1997 or Dalton 2008). There are also studies arguing that the cleavage-based frozen party systems have not melted as much as has been claimed (Mair 1997). A similar theme of persistence is highlighted by Sundberg (1999) who notes that the three “pole parties” – that is Agrarians, Conservatives, and Social Democrats – continue to dominate the Scandinavian party systems. Their total share of the votes is stable over time while changes in the Nordic party systems is mostly due to dropping vote shares for Liberals and Communists and increasing vote shares for what Sundberg terms “the others”. Though the vote share of the pole parties briefly drops below 50 % in Denmark, they recover lost ground over the next 20 years and in the other three countries the situation is even more stable. This leads Sundberg to conclude that:

Although the Scandinavian five-party model has vanished, the three original pole parties of the societal cleavage structure, originally emphasized by Rokkan, are still alive and well. — Although the Danish, Finnish and Norwegian party systems have suffered backlashes, durability is more prominent and the old parties seem to be more enduring than suggested during the 1970s. (1999:230)

Sundberg also speculates that opposition to EU membership may have reinvigorated the centre-periphery cleavage in Finland, Norway and Sweden. Additionally Sundberg discusses ways in which the growing middleclass can be subdivided: either publicly employed vs. privately employed or old middleclass (self-employed) vs. new middleclass (salaried). Sundberg also notes that it is the ability of Agrarians and Social Democrats to attract voters from the middleclass to supplement their declining class-bases which accounts for part of the stability of the pole party vote.

Arter (2011) explicitly attempts to update and complement Sundberg’s findings. Arter’s main argument is that the significant core persistence should not conceal the increasing support for new parties which have affected the Scandinavian party systems with an increasing polarization and more dimensions. The pole parties still have the support of approximately 60 % or more of the Scandinavian voters, but this support has party shifted from Agrarians and Social Democrats to

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5 Interestingly, Berglund and Lindström makes two predictions regarding party system dynamics: both in the issue of nuclear power in Sweden and links to the European integration in Norway are supposed to be of minor lasting importance. While the former issue may well be said to have lost its ability to attract voters to the Swedish Centre party, the second has still had some potential for the Norwegian party.

6 To this one could add that the Liberals and the Communists can be perceived as the most ideologically-based and least class-based parties. While the other three party families in the Scandinavian five-party model can be pretty closely connected to their respective class base, the Liberals and Communists have been harder to distinguish in this manner.
Conservatives. Additionally, the importance of pre-election governmental coalitions is also a new development in the Nordic party systems.

These studies referenced above testify to one particular aspect of the electoral party system: its result in the form of votes. Using concepts such as volatility or vote share and changes in these variables the output side of the electoral season can be analyzed. But what about the input? Basically there are three input factors into the electoral party system: the electoral system in itself and other institutional features, the voters and the parties. The electoral systems in Scandinavia and other institutional features have been rather stable over the years – and are fairly similar even if there are some slight differences, for example electoral thresholds (Grofman & Lijphart 2002). Besides noting that the Nordic systems are close enough for comparative studies this issue will not be further addressed in this paper. As for voters and their input in the electoral party system, this is mostly measured by survey data and to a great extent cannot be expected to show different results from the output of the electoral arena: after all it is the voters who vote and thus decide the outcome. Though more can be said on both the electoral system and study of voters, this is not the purpose of this paper and thus we turn to the parties input into the electoral arena, since it is the parties’ interaction which form the party system.

Party interaction, that is, interaction between parties in the electoral arena is mostly rhetorical. The actual voting and deciding the outcome is done by voters – not parties, but a party does attempt to persuade the voters to vote in for this specific party. Here the propaganda streams matter. This is not to say that the output side of the electoral party system is uninteresting, but it cannot tell the entire story. The interaction between parties in the electoral arena takes place before the voting results are presented.

The way parties interact with each other in the electoral arena before an election is foremost verbal. It is also rather complex with debates – in several different media, editorials, public meetings and more. The task of going through all of this material for one election would be daunting, especially in a multiparty system. In order to examine some sort of change or persistence several elections would have to be studied and the amount of material would be daunting. However, there is a rather good way to simplify this task: the election manifestos. These are documents written by the parties themselves explicitly to present party policy positions. As Budge and Bara (2010) puts it these documents have prominence in the election campaign and “[e]ven when not widely read they were adapted and launched with great publicity and picked up by the media” (2010:5). Budge and Bara also claim that the policy positions of parties are the most clearly and authoritatively stated in the election manifestos. In short manifestos give voters a general idea of what parties want to do. Furthermore as mentioned above the pledges in party manifestos are generally fulfilled (Klingemann, Hofferbert & Budge 1994; Budge & Bara 2010; Naurin 2009). Finally, party manifestos are text locked in time. Examining them makes it possible to see what the position of a specific party at a specific election actually was and for this task there is pretty much no better alternative (Laver & Garry 2000).

The information provided by these manifestos has been used in a great number of studies. Many of these have been single case studies or studies concerning just a few cases – such as the Scandinavian countries. These single or pair case studies generally do one out of two things:
1. Either they take in data from various different sources, where the manifestos and other rhetoric are but one source.
2. Or they dive deep into the data of a single system doing a large scale study of a particular aspect of rhetoric.

Examples of the first type would include Skidmore-Hess (2003) study of the Danish party system and the rise of the right, Johansson’s and Raunio’s (2001) study comparing Swedish and Finnish parties response to Europe or Aylott’s and Bolin’s (2007) examination of the significant 2006 election in Sweden.7

An example of the second type would be Boréus thesis Högervåg (1994) ( “Rightist wave”), even though it takes in much more text material and studies more than just the parties’ behavior on the electoral arena.

Perhaps the most well-known is the multi-national Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) which in its latest version covers data from 1945 for most Western democracies8. The CMP codes quasi-sentences from party manifestos into 54 different categories. This makes it possible to treat the data with various statistical methods and the large number of countries, parties and election manifestos included makes the database very large indeed. One very common way to use this data is to construct indexes via factor analysis which makes it possible to identify dimensions, where the Left-Right dimension is clearly the most used one. The problem with these factor analysis induced indexes is, as pointed out by several collaborators on the CMP, that “the Left-Right location of the Italian Christian Democrats in 1992 could be affected by what the Finnish Communists were saying in 1948” (Budge & Klingeman 2010:23). The CMP has also not been without criticism concerning bad quality of some of its data (Hansen 2008; Dinas & Gemenis 2010). Since Hansen (2008) discusses problems with the Danish manifestos coded within the CMP, his final warning that the Danish part of the CMP should not be used due to missing and faulty data is a rather serious warning against using the CMP data set when studying just the Scandinavian countries. Even so, the CMP is a powerful tool for estimating and comparing party policy positions and thus some of the interactions within the party system9. This has also been done with regards to the Scandinavian party systems, though these party systems mostly appear as part of other, larger studies.10

One example of this sort of studies would be Nanou’s (2009) thesis examining the extent of the European integration process limiting the possibilities of policy competition on a national level and thus leading to convergence of European parties on the Left-Right issues. The results of the study lead Nanou to claim that EU does constrict policy competition to some extent and that these policy areas get less attention in national election manifestos. Nanou closes her thesis with raising a couple of questions, among those:

7 There are of course also single case studies of party system change of sort or another which do not use manifesto data in any form. See for example Arter’s (2008) examination of party system change in Finland.
8 For a full presentation see Budge et al, 2010.
9 For further discussion on shortcomings and potential problems with the CMP data set and possible solutions to these problems see Benoit, Laver et al, (2009) and Laver (2001).
10 One such study is Green-Pedersen’s examination of the growing importance of issue voting in Western Europe (2007). In many ways it is typical of large scale quantitative studies based on CMP-data.
Finally, it would be of interest to see whether the findings from the statistical estimations undertaken here are confirmed by individual case studies regarding the constraining impact of EU policy commitments, for instance by focusing on a particular policy domain over time in a single or limited number of member states. While necessarily time-consuming, this could be undertaken by conducting qualitative analysis of party manifestos as well as detailed interviews with party officials and elected representatives. (Nanou 2009:230).

One should also note, however, that Nanou does mention some converging effects even in countries outside the EU (2009:126). Other studies, also using the CMP data set, concerning the issue of an eventual constraining effect of EU membership reaches other conclusions (Bernhard 2004; Harmel et al. 2005). For example, Bernhard concludes that EU membership do not limit, rather it changes. In a similar vein, Binnema (2009) notes that the EU is an issue which has the potential to upset party systems, but in practice this has not yet happened. These short examples are interesting, for they show that even using the same data and very similar theoretical frameworks and methods, researchers can reach different conclusions.

Another example of both the power of quantitative manifesto data, but also the limits, is Pennings 2006 article on the europeanization of national party systems. Pennings measures the co-mentions of 20 policy areas and aspects of Europe and the European Union, but what he cannot measure is what is said in connection to this policy area and the EU. For that, the manifestos must be read.

Middle-range studies

Even if the CMP dataset is most impressive, there are some issues which cannot be addressed by it. For one thing it is not always possible from CMP data to find out how positions are taken or what is actually said. Some points of reference used in political text such as the manifestos may disappear. By quantifying some data is necessarily lost. By quantifying data from such a large number of countries, the categories used must be sufficiently wide in order to encompass information from countries which may be very different in the way politics is talked. By selecting fewer, more similar cases a more fine-grained net can be cast, on the other hand, this does lessen the possibilities of generalizing results.

As an example, consider the Left-Right scale. Though it has long been seen as central in each and every discussion on party systems, there are some problems with it. Possibly, these problems stem from the fact that it is seen as so indispensable. First of all, the Left-Right scale is rather imprecise and especially trustworthy, to quote Sartori it is “...a hopelessly multidimensional dimension: the layman’s index of politics, so to speak” (2005:69-70). In effect Sartori claims that the Left-Right scale at its best is an unclear simplification based on very vague criteria. Even so, it is still the most common way of structuring party systems, which implies some usability. However, one should be aware of its shortcomings. Similarly Smith mistrusts the possibilities of reducing ideological distance to one dimension only, and even more the possibility of comparing this one dimension between countries (Smith 1989:350-351), or as Evans puts it:

To compare the ideological spaces across countries is thus potentially fallacious, as the scores used to map each country’s space will have been rationalized and ‘fitted’ to the scale as necessary. A simple example: a Communist Party will almost always have been placed at position 1 or 2 on a 10-point scale, whether its stance is antisystem and Stalinist, or quasi-integrated and Eurocommunist. How to operationalize elasticity of space is of course a good question, and one to which there is no ready answer. (Evans 2002:170)
In addition to Evans’ problem, one could add that a flank party which is seen as very extreme on a ten point-scale could very well be outflanked by a new party in the next election. This problem does not disappear when comparing more similar systems, but it does get greatly reduced. It is old news that comparing systems require some sort of similarity between the compared systems, but it is old news that needs to be kept in mind.

It is not controversial to state that qualitative case studies and quantitative statistical studies have their strengths and weaknesses. Thus they quite naturally work as complements to each other. So far, studies of party system change in Scandinavia tend to be either single case studies, sometimes focusing on a single, significant election or large scale quantitative studies based on statistical methods. There seems to be a relative dearth of qualitative comparative studies involving a few similar cases. If one attempts to study changes in rhetoric on a system level a comparative qualitative approach on similar cases seems to be the most reasonable course. This could be thought of as a Goldilocks-principle: not too few cases to rule out generalizing, but not too many cases to keep depth in the analysis while avoid comparing incomparable systems.

As an inspiration Külahci and other contributing authors (2012) in Europeanisation and party politics: how the EU affects domestic actors, patterns and systems have made an important contribution in form of a cross country comparison on EU impact on party systems, however, none of the Nordic countries are examined. Considering the similarities between the Nordic countries and the combination of stability and change in these party systems, there ought to be much to be learnt from a study of these four countries.

Other similar studies where several of the Nordic countries are compared with regards to party system change include Widfeldt’s (2000) study of the mixed success of the populist right in Scandinavia, Karvonen’s (1993) examination of the prospects of the Christian parties in Scandinavia (both of these studies featuring the appearance of a new party group) or Aylott’s (2002) study of the impact of Europe on three Social Democratic parties in Scandinavia.

Now finally, we turn to a discussion of what this notion of the rhetorical aspects of the electoral party system means for the concept of party system change.

**What is party system change?**

A final problem to be addressed in this paper is the problem of party system change. As mentioned above there is surprisingly little agreement on what to measure in regards to party system change and even how to measure it. (Arter 2008:131). Indeed, just to confuse matters further, in 1996 Ware concluded that only four states had a radically different party system in 1980 compared to 1950 (1996:213). A starting point for any discussion on what party system change is must start in a definition of party system. If the party system is defined as a system of interaction among parties, a change in vote share is not necessarily a sign of party system change in the electoral arena. Of course there should be some sort of mechanism transforming party system change at the electoral arena to the output of the electoral arena, but this does not mean that there are simple and identical effects (Mair 1997:214-216). Regarding the electoral arena, if the interaction of parties in this arena is mostly rhetorical, it follows that any party system change in this arena should also be rhetorical. Thus it should be found primarily in manifestos, not in electoral returns – even if the electoral returns is a reasonable proxy for impact of propaganda. In fact the trends of the electoral returns over the last few elections should have impact on the parties’ interaction in a given election campaign and should
thus be as important as the actual result. Likewise, the appearance of a new party is relevant in terms of the impact of its propaganda which may be measured post-election by election results, but the change in the electoral party system should primarily be searched for in the electioneering “war of words” and not primarily in the results of said election.

Though Smith (1989) places, in my view, a too large emphasis on the electoral returns when discussing party system change, he does make an important contribution in considering the extent of party system change. Basically Smith classifies party system change in four degrees:

1. Temporary fluctuations
2. Restricted change
3. General change
4. Transformation

Temporary fluctuations are short-term variations in support for individual parties. Deciding what is temporary is, as Smith acknowledges, often difficult even if “the normal ebbs and flows of party fortunes are easy to recognize” (1989:353). Likewise flash parties may come and go without any lasting effects.\(^\text{11}\) The party system is never fully static so some changes must be able to occur without any systemic effects.

Restricted change “is permanent, but it is also limited to the extent that most other features of the system remain unaltered” (1989:353). General change on other hand implies that these changes occur in quick succession or even at the same time. Before a new equilibrium is established it may be an unstable situation with quick changes. Arter (1999) also notes Smith’s comments on Denmark in the late 1980s that:

> The Social Democrats have not forfeited their position as a people's party... Even though they have been out of government for some years, they have stabilized their vote at around thirty per cent at the four elections during the 1980s. Taking the continuity into account, the Danish party system appears to have undergone no more than restricted change. (Smith quoted in Arter 1999)

Transformation, finally, means that the entire structure of the party system is changed. France in 1958 or Italy in the first half of the 1990s are presumably examples of transformations, though not all parties – or even any parties – need to disappear in order for a party system change to be classed as a transformation. Smith explicitly mentions the appearance of a Kirchheimeresque (1966) catch-all party as something that could change the logic of interaction even though no parties are added or disappear.

On a rhetorical basis a change would merely be a temporal fluctuation if concerned variation in the percentage of an election manifesto addressing certain issues. It would be a restricted change if a new issue dimension showed up, but if this new issue dimension gave rise to new party appearing to actually have a potential of entering parliament it would be a general change. Transformation would entail something that radically changed the interactions of the parties, such as semi-permanent

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\(^\text{11}\) For an example, the one-hit-wonder of the Swedish June List in the European election of 2004 and the complete collapse of its vote and relevance in 2009 will serve.
alliance. As Arter (2006) concludes: a mixture of persistence and change would be an example of a “restricted change” in Smith’s terminology.

Thus, any discussion on party system change should at least take care to distinguish between the degrees of change, degrees which should be possible to implement at other arenas as well, though that is not my purpose here. However, a discussion of party system change concerning rhetorical aspects should also distinguish between these degrees of change.

In his 1993 article "Policy Paradigms, Social Learning, and the State: The Case of Economic Policymaking in Britain" Hall identifies three types of change depending on how through these changes are. Though Hall examined changes in policy from the government, there are still possibilities to adapt that model of change to a discussion on party rhetoric. Hall distinguishes between three different degrees of change. A first-degree change is a change in direct behavior, the tools for reaching a goal and the goal in itself is still unchanged. A second-degree change is a change in tools, but the goal in itself remains unchanged. The third-degree change is a paradigm shift, where the very goal in itself is changed. This also includes changes in discourse or the structure of thinking. However, Hall’s model does not allow for a change of actors since this do not happen at state policymaking level. Since new parties appear and occasionally old parties disappear, such a possibility must be allowed in a party system change perspective.

All in all, a first-degree change is a change of tactics, that is, a simple change in how available tools are used. Actors, goals and methods are unchanged. This could be a party adopting a new position in order to attract votes. The competitors are the same, the goal the party is striving for is still the same, and there are no changes in the available tools to get there. The first-degree change is thus a tactical adaptation, a change in current actions. This is not a change in the patterns of interaction, merely an adjustment in time and space: the pattern of interaction – and thus the party system – remains intact. Thus a first-degree change is within the smithian temporary fluctuations.

The second-degree change is an operational change where the new is a change in available tools, for example a new cleavage or a new group of issues appearing. A new party could be of this degree if it has any impact. This is a change in modus operandi, which is how something is done. This mean the character of party system interaction changes, but the goal to be reached and the formal pattern of how to reach this goal remains the same. Within this degree of change both restricted and general change should be placed, since the difference between them is one of degree and not kind.

Paradigm shifts, finally, is a strategic change where the very goal of party interaction is changed. For example a new arena for politics opening up or a change of the kind Duverger’s (1967) cadre parties went through when universal suffrage was introduced. The third degree of change means a change of the entire system, for example that the barriers between different levels of the polity is change, a change in the electoral system, large scale changes in voting rights. The creation of a supra national European arena formally distinct from the national arena would be such an example; another would be full-scale cartelization which would mean that the parties now longer hold the same goal as before. A transformation into a catch-all model within a party system should also fall in this category and thus it should not be a daring move to equate a third-degree change with a smithian transformation.
Let us now briefly consider the three examples of reasons for party system change mentioned in the introduction and how these relate to the different levels of party system change. The four mentioned possible reasons were social change, the appearance of “new politics” and membership in the EU. Also the appearance of new parties should be mentioned.

As an example of social changes consider the situation with a decreasing share of population engaged in farming or industrial labor. If parties earlier have attempted to win vote through a class-based approach, a simple change in tactics and promoting newer standpoints may be a good enough solution, this would imply a first-degree change. However, if the basis for getting out the vote was class consciousness or close links to class based corporative interest organizations, parties using this approach probably must change their way of doing propaganda, and this would then be an example of a second-degree change. A third degree change based on social changes could be a total collapse of an important underlying cleavage in a party system.\(^{12}\)

Regarding “new politics”, the appearance of a new dimension of issues would quite naturally be a second-degree change, but it could as well lead to a third-degree change if the old structures of the party system brakes down because of the appearance of new dimensions. A first-degree change based on “new politics” could simply be the appearance of a new aspect in a formerly existing question, such as the gas price being an environmental issue as well as simply an economic one.

If we turn to new political parties, it is fairly obvious that the Scandinavian five party model is no longer only a five party model. Perhaps an eight party model would be more in order.\(^{13}\) That the appearances of new electorally relevant parties could in any case lead to first-degree changes should not be considered controversial at all: new parties can make old parties shift positions. As for second-degree change, a new party could well change functioning of a party system, see for example the attempts to create a cordon sanitaire towards certain new parties. A second-degree change does not necessarily need to happen because a new party appears, but it could very well occur. The interesting question with regards to new parties appearing would be if they can cause a transformation of the party system or shift the entire goal of the party system.

Finally, one of the currently most discussed reasons for party system change should be mentioned, since it is of special interest when examining the Nordic party systems and their development: the project of European integration. The reason the EU and its eventual effects are interesting in regards to the changing Nordic party systems is the variation in relations to the EU. The four nations here considered joined at different times – or not at all – Denmark in 1972, Sweden and Finland in 1995, and Norway remains outside the EU. Concerning adopting the Euro as currency, only Finland has done so, and presently it seems rather unlikely that either Sweden or Denmark will do so within the foreseeable future. Furthermore, when comes to even discussing membership in the European project, there are significant differences between the nations: in Denmark and Norway the question is first awakened in the 1960s/1970s, while in Sweden and Finland there are simply no discussions whatsoever on joining the EU until the 1990s for foreign policy reasons. Thus, considering the above-mentioned similarities between their party systems and the variation in position vis-à-vis the EU it is

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\(^{12}\) Though Best (2011) does not exactly predict the total and complete collapse of old cleavages, she does speak of a significant decline which should greatly affect European party systems.

\(^{13}\) The eight party families being left socialists, environmentalists, social democrats, liberals, agrarians, christians, conservatives and radical right.
possible to regard the Nordic nations as most similar cases for studying an eventual Europeanization\textsuperscript{14} of domestic party system.

With regards to a European influence, it should be added that even the thought or discussion of membership or the process of acceding to the EU could affect the party system in such a manner. At first glance, EU should automatically be counted as a third-degree change. In fact the EU may have effects of any of the three degrees, and this does not necessarily need to happen at the same time, even if creating a European arena is part of third degree change. In addition to creating a new arena and a potential conflict dimension – the EU may definitely create new issues and act as a focus for value, older conflict dimensions or issues – the EU also has the special property of withdrawing certain policy areas from national control (Mair 2007:156-157)

The EU may also act as a perfect object of blaming whenever any uncomfortable or difficult to defend decision has been made. It may also create a new world to relate to, compare with or refer to. These effects may also be highly diverging – both within and without a party system. As examples of EU affects, the hunting question in Sweden at the European election in 2004 is one possible example, operationally one may think of an increasing amount of empty rhetoric without any concrete suggestions of actions or policy and finally strategically which could mean that some interaction could “move up a level” to the European level or simply disappear.

**Conclusion**

The Nordic party systems have over the last 40 years gone through quite a few changes, one of the most important would be the impact of Europe. Since membership – and indeed even the onset of the debate on membership – came at different times for the different nations involved, there are reasons to believe that eventual European effects should come at different times for the nations involved. Thus, if there is any sort of Europeanization of the rhetorical part of party interaction on the electoral arena, these effects should be possible to isolate in a Scandinavian setting. In order to examine the possibilities of whether or not a party system has changed, it should be noted that party system change may be of different intensity and also that change in the rhetorical content may come at three different levels of change. Not only the intensity of a party system change, but also the level of change must be examined.

\textsuperscript{14} Europeanization should here be understood broadly, as any kind of change related to membership in the EU, or as Graziano and Vink (2007) puts it: “… we thus understand Europeanization very broadly as the domestic adaption to European regional integration” (2007:7). That is, how the European integration process has effects on a national level, in this case, how the political parties must respond to a changing environment.
References


