

Target, shaper, implementor

Regional Administrative Behaviour in the Rescaling of Norway's Subnational Government Architecture

Thomas Margel Myksvoll

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD)
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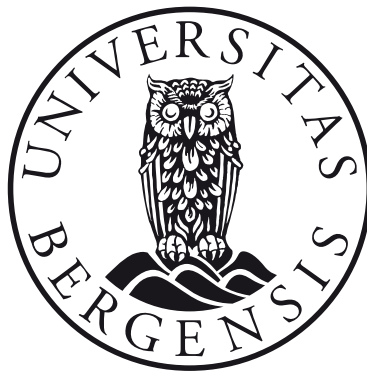
UNIVERSITY OF BERGEN



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Scientific environment

This Ph.D. was written and completed at NORCE, The Norwegian Research Centre, Social Sciences department, in the research group *Innovation in the public sector*. It was done in collaboration with the Department of Comparative Politics at the University of Bergen (UiB), Faculty of Social Sciences, as the degree-conferring institution.

The Ph.D. has been funded in part by NORCE, in part by the Norwegian Research Council, as part of the research project “*Reshaping the Map of Local and Regional Self-Government. A study of the Norwegian Local Government Reform (NLGR) processes 2014-2019*”.

Preface and acknowledgements

Sir Humphrey Appleby:

“My job is to carry out government policy.”

James Hacker

“Even if you think it’s wrong?”

Sir Humphrey Appleby:

“Well, almost all government policy is wrong. But frightfully well carried out.”

-Yes, Minster S03E06: "The Whisky Priest".

I know I may now risk treading dangerously close to, if not over, a certain line. A line which marks the distinction between objective scholarly reflections and personal political opinion. However, I feel it strangely pertinent to describe the 2014-2020 Norwegian Local Government Reform, and the 2015-2020 Regional Government Reform processes as a government sticking its hand into a hornet’s nest, shaking it vigorously, unleashing a belligerent swarm of latent historical, political, and societal cleavages, only to back away before reaping the promised spoils while acting as if they were never stung.

The two reforms are historic in their scope. They have altered decades- and centuries-old municipal and county structures and devolved a range of government competences. Despite this, they have also yielded fewer results than the reformers envisioned. The reforms have, since their inception, rested on shaky foundations. Though initially based on a historically large parliamentary support, it dwindled into non-existence throughout the process. Their opponents have surged to historic poll and election results. And despite their implementation in 2020, opposition at local, regional, and national levels have remained determined to reverse them. And so, it remains to be seen whether the reforms will stick, or become, as similar reform attempts have in times past, just another chapter in the ever-lurking, never-settled, and volatile debate on the optimal architecture of Norway’s subnational governments.

This Ph.D. thesis is a part of the Norwegian Research Council funded project *“Reshaping the Map of Local and Regional Self-Government. A study of the Norwegian Local Government Reform (NLGR) processes 2014-2019”*. The project has been headed by professor Yngve Flo, who has also taken the role as one of my supervisors in this Ph.D.¹ The purpose of the project has been to study the Norwegian Local and Regional Government Reform processes, from their inception in 2014/2015, to their implementation on 1 January 2020. To the project, my thesis has contributed with knowledge of the regional level and the regional reform, as well as the county governors’ role in the local reform. From the project, it has benefitted from already collected

¹ Flo is a professor at the Department of Archaeology, History, Cultural Studies and Religion, University of Bergen. At the start of the research project, he headed the project as lead researcher at the research institute Uni Research Rokkansenteret (which was reorganised to the Norwegian Research Centre, NORCE).

interview data of the county governors. Though the project technically ended with the reforms' implementation, this thesis has extended the project period, and as such acts as a final contribution to it.

I have long had an interest in the subnational. This interest grew and strengthened during my time at the University of Bergen. In my master thesis in Comparative Politics, I studied the Regional Government Reform. As luck would have it, I was from there able to jump straight into a Ph.D. and continue to sate my curiosity. From the offices at NORCE, The Norwegian Research Centre, this thesis has been undertaken in collaboration with the University of Bergen. Naturally, therefore, there are several people to thank from both places.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my main supervisor, prof. Anne Lise Fimreite. Her guidance, inputs and contributions have been invaluable throughout this process. I have always found myself eager to jump right back to work fresh with ideas and solutions to problems I encountered along the way.

I also thank my co-supervisors, profs. Michaël Tatham and Yngve Flo. Tatham was my supervisor when writing my bachelor thesis as well, and both from his lectures as well as meetings to discuss papers and data, he has always kept increasing my interest in studying the subnational levels. Flo was the concrete reason I got this opportunity in the first place, as he headed the research project in which a Ph.D. position opened. He has also contributed with important historical perspectives and knowledge concerning reforms; not to mention the bountiful data ripe for analysis he provided me on my very first day.

As for my colleagues at NORCE, my research group *Public Sector Innovation* deserves special thanks. First, I would like to thank Tord Linden for being an excellent group leader, always available and able to help with anything and everything. I would also like to thank all the other members of the research group, both previous and current. The bar has always been low for presenting my work and receiving excellent feedback, which has helped a great deal throughout this process.

Finally, I would also like to thank the other PhDs at the Comparative Politics department for the wonderful gatherings at Solstrand (and Zoomstrand). Discussing with and receiving feedback from others 'in the same boat' is an invaluable asset.

I don't know how many start out as a student with the goal of one day completing a Ph.D. I certainly didn't. But I am tremendously grateful I have been given the opportunity to do so – if not only for the sake of contributing new knowledge to a field one has a passion for, then at least for the many wonderful people one gets to meet, and to see in their eyes that same passion.

Abstract

The Norwegian 2014-2020 Local Government Reform, and the 2015-2020 Regional Government Reform reduced the number of municipalities from 428 to 356, the number of counties from 19 to 11, and transferred some political and administrative tasks from the national level to the local and regional levels. The two reforms contained both voluntary and coerced dynamics, where especially the latter was (and continues to be) the subject of controversy and debate. Reforms that amalgamate governments and decentralise tasks intricately involve the administrative sphere in the affected institutions. The effects of such reforms are often measured based on administrative changes. Literature relating to such reforms has followed trends of amalgamation and decentralisation reforms since the 1970s. What has remained relatively unknown, however, is administrative dynamics at play *during* such reforms.

In acknowledging that administrators play a role not only as implementors, but also shapers and contributors of policy, an important question has therefore lingered: what sort of behaviour can we observe among administrators undergoing, and involved in, significant institutional changes that amalgamation and decentralisation bring?

In this thesis, I study the regional administrative sphere during two of the most contested public sector reforms in Norway of the last few decades. In three individual research papers, I measure and analyse regional administrators' preferences towards coerced territorial amalgamation and decentralisation, and decision-making of municipal territorial structures by elite administrators. The three papers are connected through an overarching informative and interpretive framework of rescaling. The papers utilise rich survey and interview data, and subsequently involve both quantitative and qualitative methods for analysing them.

The findings show that the rescaling framework can help us to understand the preferences and decisions among regional administrators involved in rescaling reforms. But as the rescaling phenomenon is multifaceted, so too are the findings. Administrators' preferences and decisions are driven by arguments of functionality as well as issues of community and identity – but it depends on the particular form of rescaling.

The findings contribute to the rescaling literature by demonstrating how the logics of rescaling mobilise preferences in the administrative sphere. It also contributes to our understanding of the factors that drive preferences and behaviour among administrators generally, and our understanding of regional administrators specifically. By focusing on the various procedural dynamics (coercion and voluntary amalgamation) it also demonstrates the type of rationalisation that increase support for controversial policies. This is important to know, as these administrators were not only involved in shaping the reforms but were (and are) also directly affected by them.

List of Papers

Myksvoll, Thomas., Tatham, Michaël. and Fimreite, Anne Lise “Understanding Bureaucratic Support for Coerced Institutional Change”. *Governance, forthcoming* (accepted for publishing).

Myksvoll, Thomas. 2020. “Reserved but Principled – and Sometimes Functional: Explaining Decentralisation Preferences Among Regional Bureaucrats”. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Administration* 24 (3): 73-101.

Myksvoll, Thomas. “Discretionary Manoeuvrability: The Logics Behind Administrative Shaping of Territorial Rescaling”. Undergoing review in *Local Government Studies*.

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1. Introduction

Rescaling the architecture of government has once again entered the fray (though it perhaps never left (Bolgherini, Casula and Marotta 2018)) as a solution to confront a variety of challenges. In Europe, we currently find ourselves in the third and (so far) latest wave of rescaling reforms in which many governments seem to see territorial consolidation² and decentralisation as solutions to improve public service provision, and to increase, mobilise, and promote economic development and competitiveness from below. This is partly seen as a response to the 2008 financial crisis (Xu and Warner 2015, Bolgherini, Casula and Marotta 2018, 448).

Among the most recently implemented rescaling reforms in this latest wave are the Norwegian 2014-2020 Local Government Reform, and the 2015-2020 Regional Government Reform. The reforms have reduced the number of municipalities from 428 to 356, the number of counties from 19 to 11. Some political and administrative tasks have also been transferred from the national level to the local and regional levels. Though historic in their scope, the reforms have continually rested on shaky foundations. Parliamentary support has shifted over time, and opposition at local, regional, and national levels have expressed a desire to reverse the reforms if given the chance.

Beyond securing support for reform, changing the architecture of government is fraught with potential pitfalls. And there is no guarantee of its theorised effects, which, under the current rescaling wave, have mainly been said to be to reduce costs, optimise public service delivery, and rationalise decision-making processes (Swianiewicz, Gendzwil and Zardi 2017, 3). Effects of rescaling reforms are mostly measured in the administrative sphere (Dhimitri 2018, Tavares 2018).³ If imposed from above, the reforms may (also) upset local communities and identities, and invoke questions related to (local) democracy and legitimacy of decision-making processes. Desires for local

² “Territorial consolidation” may also be labelled “amalgamation”, or “mergers”, (De Vries and Sobis 2014). they all describe the process of combining two or more government units into a larger one. I use these terms interchangeably in this thesis.

³ Rescaling reforms may also be undertaken with the aim of improving conditions for local democracy, but studies claim that such an effect is ambivalent or adverse (Ebinger, Kuhlmann and Bogumil 2018, Erlingsson, Ödalen and Wångmar 2020, Swianiewicz, Gendzwil and Zardi 2017).³

self-rule⁴, individual rights, and even human rights have also been claimed to be at odds with such coercion (Erlingsson, Ödalen and Wångmar 2020).

Digging further into this topic, we may ask some stage-setting questions. Namely, if a reform is initiated at one level and implemented at another, what does it take to achieve its envisioned goals and effects? When such effects are intended to come from the administrative sphere, what do administrators – having to live in and with the new structures they themselves implement – value? How are structural and institutional reforms met by those whose daily lives and work will be affected directly, indirectly, short-term, and long-term? Can we expect a reform to reach its intended outcomes if those being reformed *and* responsible for its implementation do not agree to the means, or even the necessity of reaching those outcomes in the first place? What sort of territorial and administrative structures do these administrators seek? And how is their behaviour determined? Packing these questions into a coherent research agenda, I ask in this thesis how the rationales of rescaling resonated with Norwegian regional administrators undergoing historic institutional reform. My overarching research question is the following:

How can we understand behaviour towards territorial and competence rescaling among regional administrators involved in such reforms?

Three papers contribute to this question in distinct but related ways. One paper is co-authored with profs. Anne Lise Fimreite and Michaël Tatham, while the remaining two are solo authored. All three seek to address various aspects of rescaling reform from a regional administrative perspective. The three papers' research questions contribute to our understanding of:

1. Administrative preferences toward coerced territorial amalgamation,
2. Administrative preferences toward competence decentralisation, and
3. Administrative decision-making regarding territorial amalgamation.

⁴ I define the concept of self-rule in this thesis as the ability and extent of a local (or regional) government to exercise its authority independently of higher-level (central) authorities.

Each paper highlights a specific issue related to the two Norwegian reforms. What do administrators think of territorial amalgamation and decentralisation coerced from above? How are their preferences shaped? When set to shape territorial structures themselves, what sort of motivations and strategies underlie the decisions they make?

The papers employ both quantitative and qualitative methodology with novel empirical data. The data consists of a survey of administrators in the county governments' administrations, and in-depth interviews of every county governor. The papers contribute to existing literature as well as generate new insights of administrative behaviour.

The first (co-authored) paper, "*Understanding Bureaucratic Support for Coerced Institutional Change*", examines regional administrators' preferences toward the controversial process of coerced county amalgamations by the central government against the regional governments' wishes. Utilising original survey data of over 1200 regional administrators, statistical analyses explore the drivers of their preferences toward (and during) a highly contentious and controversial process.

The second paper, "*Reserved but Principled – and Sometimes Functional: Explaining Decentralisation Preferences Among Regional Bureaucrats*", focuses on the transfer of tasks (government competences) from the central to the regional level that took place synchronously with the county amalgamations. Using the same data as the first paper, paper no. 2 explores the drivers behind the administrators' viewpoints on competence transfers and investigates how various factors affect their ideas about (or wish for) extending their task portfolio in nine policy areas.

The third paper, "*Discretionary Manoeuvrability: The Logics Behind Administrative Shaping of Territorial Rescaling*", addresses the Local Government Reform. The focus is, however, still at the regional level as the paper analyses the county governors' interpretation of core elements of the Local Government Reform, and the discretion they utilised when proposing municipal amalgamations in their own counties. This paper analyses qualitative interviews conducted with all county governors. It focuses on how the logics of rescaling affected the governors' interpretations and their subsequent municipal amalgamation proposals.

Related to the three initiating questions presented above, the findings are multifaceted. I find that cleavages of functional pressures, as well as feelings of community and identity, both matter for the administrators' behaviour towards rescaling processes. But it depends on the type and form of rescaling:

Regarding *territorial* rescaling, administrators' support is dependent on arguments of functional legitimization of rescaling. This is the case among both county government administrators' preferences, and among county governors. An administrator who supports functional rescaling arguments is more likely to support territorial amalgamation, even if such amalgamation is coerced by central authorities. County governors acted as nominators of municipal amalgamations. Their proposals varied significantly, and among those who were willing to propose amalgamation against local interests legitimised their decisions through functional arguments. Arguments of community and identity, meanwhile, reduces administrators' support for amalgamation. Likewise, county governors who were more averse (or refused) to propose municipal amalgamations against local interests, related their decisions to issues of local community, identity, self-rule, and democracy.

Regarding *competence* rescaling, administrators are mostly moderate in their desire to expand the county government's managerial portfolio. However, support for decentralisation increases when put through arguments of community and identity. Specifically, if administrators desire increased regional self-rule, or are highly attached to their county, they become more positive towards regionalising competences.

Relating these findings to the overarching research question, we can understand these preferences and decisions through the framework of rescaling. Among regional administrators, territorial amalgamation is largely a functional matter. Decentralisation is a matter of community and identity at the regional level. But a logic of community and identity can also mobilise opposition against territorial amalgamation – at that point, it depends on the process (coerced or voluntary) by which the amalgamation is undertaken. The distinction between the logic of functionalism and community/identity has been described as a distinction between questions of policy preferences and questions of polity preferences, respectively (Hooghe and Marks 2016, 2, Tatham, Hooghe og Marks 2021). But for administrators to support rescaling reform, the question

of territory (or polity) is a matter of functionalism. The question of decentralisation (or policy) is a matter of community/identity.

Placed in the Norwegian setting, this thesis provides insights into administrative preferences and decision-making from a regional governance system characterised as a source of public services rather than a territorial manifestation of strong regional identity. Observing how arguments of functionality and issues of community and identity affect the Norwegian regional administrators' behaviour, offers novel insights into studies of regional governance (Hooghe and Marks 2016, Tatham and Bauer 2021, Tatham, Hooghe og Marks 2021).

But although the Norwegian regional system is distinct, the Local and Regional Government Reforms are not unique to Norway, nor are the rationales associated with them. Reforming subnational territorial structures and relocating government competences are international phenomena, with reform waves occurring every so often. Indeed, between 2008 and 2017, municipal amalgamation reforms were underway in fifteen European countries (Swianiewicz 2018). The rationale to undertake such reforms are comparable across countries and governance systems (Erlingsson, Ödalen and Wångmar 2020). The research undertaken in this thesis, and the insights it has yielded, are as such transferable beyond the Norwegian scene. Understanding the processes by which such reforms are taken forward, and the administrative sphere's role in them, increases our understanding of rescaling itself. It also increases our understanding of what matters to administrators regarding changes to their own environments, and regarding the broader architecture of government.

1.1 Subject, theme, and scope

In this thesis, I study administrative behaviour within a theoretical framework of rescaling literature. The Norwegian Local Government Reform (from here referred to as LGR) and Regional Government Reform (from here RGR) form the cases for this. Contained within this description are some assumptions and definitions in need of clarification. The first is that the LGR and RGR are complex phenomena. It is possible

to classify the reforms in various ways. They may for example be seen as instances of public administration reform (Askim, Klausen, et al. 2016) or as territorial reform (Swianiewicz 2018). But the reforms contained both administrative, geographical, and political elements. Territorial borders were redrawn, which necessitated a reorganisation of the affected governments' political and administrative institutions. Such reforms also affect the citizenry, for example through democratic processes and involvement, such as the creation of new elected political bodies.⁵ It may also affect citizens through the services that are provided for the new local and regional governments.⁶ Hence, the LGR and RGR are multifaceted reforms which can and should be scrutinised from multiple angles.

In my thesis, I view the LGR and RGR as instances of rescaling reforms. Decentralisation is a process in which one changes the scale at which a specific competence – fiscal, political, administrative – operates. Territorial amalgamation is a process that changes the scale at which a jurisdictional unit – with all its competences – operates.

Rescaling is a category of public sector reform. In the study of such reforms, scholars have a choice of subjects. The subjects may be the public (voters), the political, and/or the administrative world. Studies of the causes and effects of such reforms often point to the administrative sphere. Such studies also commonly take an institutional or organisational, rather than individual perspective. By omitting individual-level behavioural variation within an administration, such studies (perhaps unintentionally) take for granted a homogeneous group of individuals making up the administrations, impartial and noninfluential to the reforms they undergo.⁷ This is perhaps not too surprising, given normative expectations of the administrator as merely a politically loyal and objective implementer of pre-determined political decisions (K. D. Jacobsen

⁵ The effects territorial reforms have on quality of local democracy is both theoretically and empirically contested (Ebinger, Kuhlmann and Bogumil 2018, Keating 1995, Swianiewicz, Gendzwil and Zardi 2017).

⁶ Another contested topic is the effect of such reforms on public service quality. See for instance Oates (1972), Saito (2008), or Steiner, et al. (2018).

⁷ One problem such an approach has, is for example that the meaning of various effects of rescaling (such as efficiency) varies between subnational governments (Keating 1995).

2008). However, omitting those whom a reform directly involves, and from where the reform's effects are intended to come, risks leaving a knowledge gap regarding our understanding of the reform itself.

But rescaling reforms, like other public sector reforms, are ultimately choices made by politicians and depend on their priorities and goals. So why and how should the administrative sphere matter to us? To answer this, it is important to acknowledge a basic and central notion in public administration research: administrators are more than faceless implementors. They have preferences, they make decisions, contributing not only to implementation, but also formulation, shape, and design of policy (Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman 1981, Downs 1967, Egeberg and Stigen 2018, Læg Reid and Olsen 1978).

This somewhat abbreviated description of the administrator's role is an outcome of decades-long scholarly developments of the political-administrative relationship. This relationship was initially seen as clear-cut and characterised by strict hierarchy and divisions of responsibilities between politicians and administrators, as described in the Weberian model of bureaucracy (Demir and Nyhan 2008). A step away from this model was the thinking that administrators have individual preferences and attitudes, which in turn shape their behaviour (Downs 1967). In addition, due to growing size and complexities of the modern state throughout the 20th century, it became clear that politicians could not fully control the entire policy cycle or implement their visions and ideas alone. Instead, politicians could see fit to delegate some part of the decision-making process to the administrative sphere, subject to later inspection (Meier 1975, Keiser 2010).

Increasingly, administrators were seen to fill a role of 'negotiators and coordinators' among policy stakeholders, while also delivering on the policies desired by the politicians. The clear distinction between politicians and administrators thus faded (if it was ever there) (Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman 1981, D. I. Jacobsen 1997). An ever more complex machinery of government meant that different administrative bureaus could also have different priorities. It could then be the case that administrative and political priorities did not correspond, and, consequently, administrators could not always be expected to advise (K. D. Jacobsen 2008) or act (Eliassen and Sitter 2008)

fully in accordance with the priorities laid down by the politicians. Thus, competing models of administrative behaviour were elaborated, such as those viewing the administrator as self-maximising (be it regarding their bureau budgets (Niskanen 1971) or status (Dunleavy 1991)).

These insights have created a significant consensus, or a paradigm of research (Kuhn 1970) within public administration literature. Contemporary public administration research gives the administrative sphere – whether at the organisational or individual level – a much greater importance to the political cycle than earlier theories posited (Demir and Nyhan 2008, D. I. Jacobsen 1997).

This is where the relevance of the administrators comes in. Territorial amalgamation involves more than just relocating border signs. Significant organisational restructuring takes place inside the institutions that amalgamate. It may also entail geographically relocating government institutions (and their personnel) to new government headquarters. Decentralisation, for those at the ‘receiving end’, involves widening one’s managerial portfolio. The organisational changes that follow amalgamation and decentralisation may thus entail personnel change, promotions, redundancies, etc. Territorial and competence reforms, especially when coupled, thus have direct, indirect, short-term, and long-term consequences for the administrations in the affected government units. An important aspect of such reforms is therefore also the administrators’ willingness to and acceptance for dramatically changing their own environments, and the risks, both professional and psychological, that may be associated with such changes (Gains and John 2010, F. Ritchie 2014, Takagishi, Sakata and Kitamura 2012, Torugsa and Arundel 2017). And for a reform to succeed, especially when coerced from above, one depends on the willingness of those affected to comply and to make the new institutions work (Afonso and Venâncio 2019, 19). Understanding administrators’ behaviour toward such processes may therefore contribute to our understanding not only of the reforms themselves, but also provides us with insight of internal processes and the longevity and success of the new institutions.

In the RGR, county governments engaged in negotiations with their respective neighbours to assess the prospects of amalgamations. They also provided a list of competences they desired from the central level. In these processes, the county

government administrations provided expertise and input, thereby shaping the counties' stance on the reform. The many organisational effects the RGR had on the county administrations also made the administrators direct stakeholders in the reform. In the LGR, the county governors were, in their role as nominators of municipal amalgamations, made significant policy-shapers and influencers of the future municipal structure.

Hence, the regional administrators served, and continue to serve, an important role in the recent reform processes. Understanding their preferences and decisions is therefore an important part in understanding the reforms themselves. It makes up the core motivation for my thesis and my overarching research question.

1.1.1 Theme

After the 2013 general election, a minority coalition government consisting of the Conservative Party and the Progress Party was formed.⁸ The government signalled its intent to reform the public sector at all levels. In 2014, the LGR was initiated. In 2015, the RGR was initiated.⁹ The reforms became two of the government's most controversial reforms, sparking debates about central authority versus local autonomy. The local territorial structure has seen its greatest geographical alteration since the 1960s, while the regional territorial structure has not been changed so dramatically since the introduction of monarchical absolutism in the 1660s (Flo 2004). Municipal and county amalgamations, mixing voluntary and coercive means, have resulted in contentious debates and vocal opposition among citizens and political parties across all government levels.

The government intended to restructure subnational jurisdictions to achieve economically 'robust' government units, improve administrative capabilities, reduce administrative costs, and produce higher quality and more efficient provisions of services to the citizens (Government platform 2013, 2018). In the RGR, they have expressly targeted administrators and the administrations, most notably by intending

⁸ From hence referred to as "the Solberg government", "the central government", or simply "the government" where it does not cause confusion.

⁹ The specific layout of the reforms and their various stages are further laid out in sections 3.2 and 3.3.

size reduction, streamlining, and relocation of administrative (and political) personnel due to the county amalgamations (White paper 22 (2015-2016) 2016). However, the reforms' legacies are uncertain. To both the local and regional levels, competences have been allocated, though the number competences that were decentralised was watered down compared to earlier proposals. Though the reforms were implemented fully on 1 January 2020, opponents have stated their intention to reverse many amalgamations if given the chance. This intention has been restated and been a topic of debate during the 2021 September general election campaign.

During the reform processes, studies have documented and analysed reform design (Nygård 2021), future reform processes (Fimreite and Flo 2018), first-hand experiences (Larsen 2016), historical and comparative perspectives (Klausen, Askim and Vabo 2016), to name a few. Studies on the long-term outcomes of the reforms should be expected in the future. Relatively few of these studies have, however, focused on the administrative sphere. In the international literature, studies of similar reforms that do take an administrative focus, tend to (1) take a macro-level perspective, and (2) focus on outcomes. Typical examples include studying changes in administrative expenses as a result of amalgamation (Roesel 2017) or effects of decentralisation on local governance capacities (Steiner, et al. 2018). In short, the rescaling literature, whether it is concerned with conceptual/theoretical development or empirical investigation, mostly focuses on causes and effects of rescaling, less so the processes by which the rescaling is achieved.

Thus, my thesis adds and contributes to established literature by shedding light on the process of rescaling. I do so empirically through original survey and interview data collected after the LGR and RGR had been initiated but before all aspects of them were fully decided. This enables us to observe a unique 'snapshot' of administrative behaviour, because the collected data is 'untainted' by the regional administrators' knowledge of the reforms' outcomes. This is crucially important, because a consideration that those who study behaviour should keep in mind, is that behaviour towards a phenomenon cannot be entirely separated from the setting in which the individual operates. If a reform is set to change an administrative institution (for instance through territorial amalgamation or decentralisation), assessing the individual

administrator's preferences *during* this process opens a 'window of opportunity' for the researcher. After implementation, the administrators' preferences become more difficult to view as sufficiently independent from the decisions that were made by their political 'masters'. A concrete reason for this is that in the study of individual-level administrative behaviour, one must allow for motivations of a nature which could make the administrator less prone to criticise their administrative or political superiors' decisions.¹⁰ If the outcome of some future reform is uncertain, we may more easily see the administrator's behaviour as expressions of their own volitions. A very important characteristic of the empirical basis of the thesis is therefore its temporal dimension. Taken together therefore, the data's temporal dimension, and the use of rescaling as an overarching framework from which we can understand administrative behaviour, places this thesis in a novel position from which important and insightful information is generated.

1.1.2 Scope

The thesis' novel position can be further emphasised by its scope. Administrative preference research commonly measures elite administrators only. The rationale for this is understandable, as those in the upper echelons of the administrative agencies have more frequent contact with the political sphere (Bauer, Pitschel and Studinger 2010, Gains and John 2010, Studinger and Bauer 2012, Tatham and Bauer 2014a, 2014b, Tatham and Bauer 2015). Including all levels of the county governments' administrations, from street-level to elite, broadens our insights.

It should also be noted that in studies of Norwegian governance, the regional administrative level is a relatively neglected field of research. Further to this point, the Norwegian regional level comprises two different administrative bodies. The first, from which the survey data is drawn, is the institution underlying the directly elected regional bodies (the county government administrations). The second is the County Governor, an institution that represents the central government in every county and can be labelled *regional state authority*. They are a form of prefectural institution, comparable (with

¹⁰ A desire not to criticise decisions can for instance be explained by career ambitions (Downs 1967),

some variations in their specific mandates and competences) to the Swedish *Landshövding*, the Romanian *Prefect*, the French *Préfet*, or the Italian *Prefetto*. They are responsible for ensuring national policy is complied with and implemented at the local level, while also communicating local interests to the state. The county governor is appointed by the central government and is exclusively an administrative position, with no political/legislative authority (Flo 2021, Tanguy and Jean-Michel 2021).¹¹ A more detailed description of this institution is provided in the thesis' third paper. As the thesis includes data from both the county governments' administrations and the County Governors, its scope extends to the entirety of the regional administrative sphere.

1.2 Perspectives of administrative behaviour

An individual's behaviour is a function of values, attitudes, and preferences. But where and how are values, attitudes, and preferences generated? This is a vast question in the social sciences, encompassing many topics and disciplines (Banerjee 1995). In short, the answer depends on the discipline and on the researcher's perspective. The choice of theoretical framework informs the data one gathers, and the interpretations and inferences drawn from them. Such frameworks, or perspectives, contain a set of assumptions regarding the population one studies. It influences explanatory variables of interest, and how said variables are operationalised (Alexander 1982). A complete overview of the various perspectives on administrators' behaviour is too broad to be discussed at length here. I will instead briefly point to and comment on some recurring themes in public administration literature, before outlining my approach in this thesis.

A 'first order' categorisation of behavioural perspectives may be labelled contextual, which holds that public administration itself varies across time and political regimes.¹² Next, we may characterise perspectives, broadly speaking, as institutional on

¹¹ Non-capitalised version refers to the title of the individual office holder. They oversee the institution (and capitalised) County Governor.

¹² This represents too broad a discussion in this thesis. I rely on public administration (and its literature) as understood in western, liberal democratic systems.

the one hand, or individual on the other.¹³ The institutional vs. individual perspective is essentially a difference of the factors that are theorised to affect administrative behaviour.

The institutional perspective holds that the administrative milieu can enable or constrain the individual administrator's behaviour. For example, one may theorise a logic of appropriateness (March and Olsen 1996) which includes rule-based actions, control mechanisms, and individuals that fill their institutions with certain values, contributing to an office culture, which in turn affects the individuals' behaviour.¹⁴ This represents a description of institutional factors as behavioural influencers that can be both formal or informal, such as hiring rules, professional norms, or socialisation and training within the administration (Olsen 1978, 74).¹⁵

The individual perspective focuses on individual variation within administrative bodies, which may vary among several dimensions. Administrators' behaviour may in this sense for instance be driven by self-interest (Downs 1967). Such self-interest may for instance be a function of the individual's formal position within the organisation ("where you stand, depends on where you sit") (Miles 1978). It may also take an informal form, such as anticipation of others' reaction (Olsen 1978, 75). An administrative organisation may also be conceptualised as a social space consisting of cultural capital, and individuals will desire to position themselves advantageously within the hierarchy of that space (Bourdieu 1996). Other operationalisations into explanatory variables of the individual perspective include educational background (Yoo and Wright 1994),¹⁶ prior job experience (Egeberg and Stigen 2018), political

¹³ These may be described as more overarching perspectives, and each contains multiple distinct sub-categories of theoretical perspectives in the use of behavioural studies.

¹⁴ Originally conceptualised as a behavioural theory of political institutions, it may also be utilised in the public administration sphere (Christensen and Lægreid 2017).

¹⁵ Institutional perspectives have been used in studies of the LGR to frame analyses and analyse local amalgamation outcomes. Nygård (2021) demonstrates that reform design, and institutional organisation thereof, shape rules and consequently enabled and constrained involved actors, and intermunicipal negotiations. Bukve (2021) analyses negotiations between organisations at local, regional, and national levels, and finds that they shaped procedures and policy outcomes.

¹⁶ Education may also be seen as more of an institutional factor, as it relates to socialisation.

attitudes (Stensöta 2012), psychological dispositions (F. Ritchie 2014), task preference (Gains and John 2010), and (desires for) job security (Studinger and Bauer 2012).¹⁷

Institutional and individual perspectives need not be mutually exclusive as shapers of behaviour. Olsen (1978, 74) for instance, highlights how a mix of institutional and individual factors, understood as formal and informal, internal and external factors, shape administrative behaviour. Other mixed approaches include those informed by public/rational choice theories such as the budget maximising model (Niskanen 1971) or the bureau-shaping model (Dunleavy 1991) and point to the pursue of self- or bureau advancement within the government system.

1.2.1 Perspectives and classification

Studying behaviour towards a phenomenon and the inferences one draws from it, is not only dependent on one's choice of perspective. It is also dependent on the classification of the phenomenon itself. The LGR and RGR are complex phenomena. As described in section 1.1, I view the LGR and RGR as instances of rescaling reforms. This definition opens the possibility to study administrative behaviour through the lens of the rescaling literature. As such, it enables us to theorise and measure administrators' behaviour towards the LGR and RGR in a set theoretical framework in which not only the reforms, but also behaviour toward them can be understood. By translating the rescaling interpretations into attitudinal measurements, the administrators' preferences and behaviour are studied largely from an individual-level perspective, but also contains elements of institutionalism. An in-depth definition of the rescaling phenomenon, the logics associated with its interpretations, and how they applied to the Norwegian case are undertaken in chapters 2 and 3.

¹⁷ These studies have measured different phenomena and the individual-level factors have shown mixed results but have retained their theoretical (and sometimes empirical) prominence in administrative behavioural studies. The behaviour in question ranges from hypothetical governance preferences to specific case handling by individual administrators.

2. Rescaling: what, how, and why

2.1 Definitions and types

The study of public sector reforms encompasses a vast body of scholarly literature. It has both been moulded by and contributed to public sector developments over many decades, including new modes of governance and new paradigms of understanding how various public institutions operate and interact.

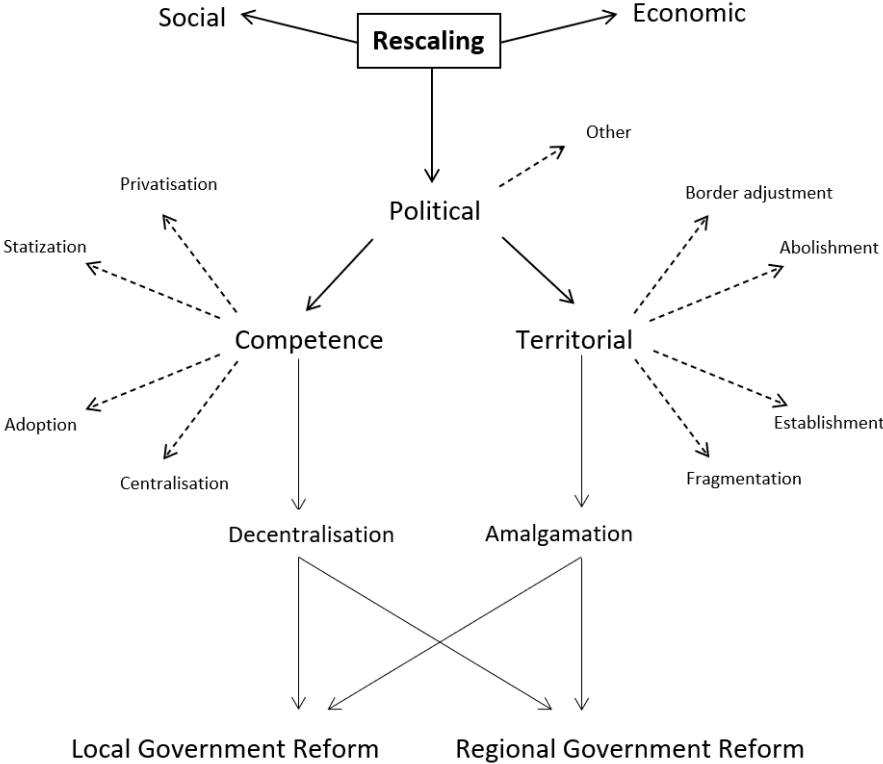
A branch of this literature, formally conceptualised by Neil Brenner (1999) by bringing spatiality into state and political analysis, concerns itself with the scaling of governance. Governance scalability refers to the mobilisation of resources across organisations and levels to reap scale benefits from the provisions of particular solutions aimed to meet needs and demands (Ansell, Sørensen og Torfing 2020, 953). *Rescaling*, therefore, concerns the way in which scale effects are achieved by transforming the scale of a particular system.

Brenner's insights stemmed from observing challenges in the post-1970s years of urban industrial decline, welfare state retrenchment, European integration, and economic globalisation (Brenner 2004). To respond to these challenges, including more recent ones such as the 2008 financial crisis, states have turned to rescaling governance structures to increase, mobilise and promote economic developments and competitiveness from below (Brenner 2004, 2, Xu and Warner 2015, Bolgherini, Casula and Marotta 2018, 448). But rescaling as an idea can be traced further back. The thinking that there exists some optimal size and structure for a government unit is traceable to the end of the nineteenth century (Keating 2020, 5). In the Norwegian case, this debate can be traced even further to the formation of municipal governments in 1837 (Flo 2004).

Brenner has argued that since its conceptualisation, the concept of rescaling has been stretched to a general descriptive category, an all-encompassing label for any sociospatial restructuring. He holds that rescaling “represents one among several key dimensions of contemporary state space, others being territorialization, place-making and networking/reticulation” (Brenner 2009, 131). It is, however, not the goal of this section to challenge the conceptualisation of rescaling itself. Rather, to place the LGR and RGR in a proper definitional framework within this literature, from which fruitful

investigations can be made. And so, it seems more fruitful to take a step up the ‘ladder of abstraction’ (Sartori 1970, 1040-1) and to define a concept at a sufficient level of resolution by suitably broadening its extension without over-weakening its intention. Indeed, such a definition can be found in related empirical literature. In investigating modes of intermunicipal cooperation as an alternative to amalgamation, Bolgherini, Casula and Marotta (2018) define rescaling as constituting a “reshuffling of scale in economic, social, and political systems”. Such reshuffling can take place both vertically and horizontally. In this sense, rescaling refers to the “migration of various systems to new levels above, below, and across the bounded state” (Keating 2020, 3). This allows us to categorise various forms of rescaling, and to place within those categories the LGR and RGR. In figure 1, I visualise a simplified conceptual taxonomy of rescaling and its sub-categories based on the utilised definition, and place the LGR and RGR within it.

Figure 1. Simplified conceptual taxonomy of rescaling



Rescaling a political system can take multiple forms. Within a political system, one may rescale competences and territories. My thesis is primarily concerned with these two forms, and I limit all further discussion of rescaling to these. Competence rescaling refers to the migration of administrative, fiscal, and/or political responsibilities to new scales. Territorial rescaling refers to altering the territorial architecture of or within a domestic polity, thereby altering the scale at which a jurisdictional unit, with all its responsibilities, operates. Beneath these two types of political system rescaling, we may add more categories still.

Competence rescaling takes several forms, such as policy learning and adoption across states and governments (Cairney 2012, Keating and Cairney 2012). It can also involve imposing new tasks on one government level by another. This can take the form of decentralisation or centralisation (Xu and Warner 2015). It may also include privatisation of services (Samson 2008), the creation of new agencies for public service delivery through intermunicipal cooperation (Bolgherini, Casula and Marotta 2018), or “statization” through the state creating or entering new fields of control (Li, Xu and Yeh 2014). Competence rescaling, in other words, involves the relocation or allocation – horizontal or vertical – of tasks and responsibilities to new levels in a variety of ways, thereby changing the scale at which they operate.

Among the various forms of competence rescaling, there has been observed a recurring trend of decentralization since the 1970s.¹⁸ Among democratic regimes, this has generally happened through increasing regional political, fiscal and administrative authority, with waves of regional empowerment taking place in the later decades of the 1900s (Marks, Hooghe and Schakel 2008, Hooghe, Marks and Schakel 2010). A trend of decentralisation has also been found to be the case on a global level regarding fiscal policies (Martinez-Vazquez and Timofeev 2009). Increased autonomy at the local level has also been observed taking place since the 1990s, though somewhat more modest (Ladner, Keuffer and Baldersheim 2016).

¹⁸ There has also been a strong and recurring international trend of privatisation since the 1980s (Roland 2008). Given the theme of this thesis, however, I limit the discussion of competence rescaling to that which is ‘contained’ within the public sphere.

Hence, the overall picture of competence rescaling the last few decades is one of downwards dispersion of authority.¹⁹

Turning to *territorial rescaling*, we can also describe several types. By far the most common is the restructuring of subnational territorial units within a domestic polity. Subnational units may amalgamate to form fewer, larger units. They may fragment into a larger number of smaller units. The geographical borders of neighbouring units may be altered, leading to no change in the total number of units. Or the number of subnational tiers may change by the abolishment of intermediate tiers or the introduction of new ones (Swianiewicz, Gendzwil and Zardi 2017).

As with competence rescaling, territorial rescaling in Europe has also gone through several observable waves. The first, occurring in the 1960/70s, the second in the 1990s, and the third roughly from 2008 onwards. The most common form of such rescaling has been the amalgamation of local (and sometimes regional) units, particularly so in the first and third waves. In the 1990s, there was a notable trend in Eastern European countries of territorial fragmentation (P. Swianiewicz 2018, Swianiewicz, Gendzwil and Zardi 2017). Some rationales have been linked to these trends. Amalgamations in the 1970s is viewed as a “quest for modernisation, rationalisation and above all ‘economies of scale’”. The fragmentation of local units in Eastern Europe in the 1990s are viewed as a democratisation process to counteract centralisation policies during the Soviet era. Finally, the third (and current) wave from 2008 onwards is seen as a response to the financial crisis, aimed at reducing public expenditures, improving service delivery, and rationalising decision-making processes (Swianiewicz, Gendzwil and Zardi 2017, 3;7-8).²⁰ The theorised explanations for these territorial reform waves, are, like the explanations behind the competence reform waves, linked to the interpretation of why rescaling takes place.

¹⁹ In Europe, authority has also dispersed upwards from the central to the EU level, which has partly been related to the downwards dispersion. It was this development, and the new modes of governance resulting from it, that in the early 1990s prompted Gary Marks to observe and conceptualise what is known as Multilevel Governance (Marks 1993).

²⁰ Theories of political gains from rescaling have also been posited (De Vries and Sobis 2014).

2.2 Why rescale?

Two distinct ‘camps’ have emerged to offer explanations and interpretations both for why rescaling takes place, (or why it should take place), and what the effects of rescaling are (or what they should be). Commonly labelled rescaling logics, they are known as *functionalism* and *community/identity* (Keating 2020, 4). They each point and respond to different issues and questions regarding governance. One distinction between them is that while functionalism regards questions of policy, community/identity relates to questions of polity (Hooghe and Marks 2016, 2). Both are, however, rooted in a deeper issue: determining the optimal architecture of government. And an important difference between them is how ‘optimal’ is understood.

The functionalism and community/identity logics are employed in scholarly work as theoretical concepts or operationalised measurements. They can be contested at theoretical/conceptual levels (Keating 2020) or used as frameworks for generating, measuring, and analysing empirical observables (Tatham and Bauer 2021). Contained within the two logics are arguments that may mobilise rescaling preferences. These may be used by governments or other rescaling advocates to legitimise reform. Such arguments are for instance that decentralisation improves public service quality (Saito 2008, Steiner, et al. 2018), that municipal amalgamation achieves economic benefits (Bjelland, et al. 2019), and that decentralisation and amalgamation can improve conditions for local democracy (Saito 2008, Swianiewicz, Gendzwil and Zardi 2017). It should be noted that these are here represented as normative positions of rescaling benefits. Empirical investigations into these theorised effects have shown mixed results.²¹

As with rescaling outcomes, the question of rescaling causes is a two-faced one. As Keating (2020, 6) points out, there is a difference between causes and reasons. On the one hand, one may search for some causal mechanism to explain the phenomenon. On the other, one may ask what the given reasons to undertake rescaling are. My focus

²¹ It is not directly relevant to scrutinise experiences of rescaling in this thesis. A more detailed discussion on outcomes of decentralisation and territorial consolidation is therefore omitted. For an extended discussion on these issues, see for instance Swianiewicz (2010), Houlberg (2010), Dhimitri (2018) and Tavares (2018).

in this thesis is firmly on the latter. Why are reforms like the LGR and RGR carried out? What do policymakers hope to gain? How can we understand their rationales? As such, the focus here is to discuss how rescaling is legitimised, from both a scholarly and a political standpoint, with the rescaling logics as an informative framework.

2.2.1 The logic of functionalism

If one asks what the optimal architecture of government is, the logic of functionalism will understand ‘optimal’ in an economic sense. The logic’s premise “is that the scale at which a public good is most efficiently provided depends on the costs and benefits of centralization for the public good in question” (Tatham, Hooghe og Marks 2021, 4). The functional interpretations of the causal mechanisms underlying rescaling reform, be they territorial, policy-related, administrative, or fiscal, or any combination of these, can in part be traced to public choice theories (Hooghe and Marks 2009) and literature bringing economic thinking into the public sector in the mid-20th century (Tiebout 1956, Oates 1972). It addresses questions such as the proper jurisdictional size for (economically) optimal public service delivery, fiscal advantages of decentralisation and amalgamation, or efficiency of administrative procedures (Dollery and Robotti 2008). As for the territorial aspect, the effect of jurisdictional size is also largely economically oriented (Swianiewicz, Gendzwil and Zardi 2017, 84-92, Tavares 2018, Dhimitri 2018).

Oates’ *Fiscal federalism* (1972) may be seen in context of the emergence of the post-Keynesian era, during which changes to government thinking and modes of public administration led to the New Public Management paradigm of governance. This brought with it further focus on the notion of effectiveness in the public sector and fit the functionalist interpretation by arguing for rescaling to reap scale benefits from rescaling territories and competences. The theory of functional federalism holds that optimally sized jurisdictions can be achieved through the allocation of administrative functions, reducing service costs while maximising the benefits of heterogeneous needs and demands across the subnational level (Dollery and Robotti 2008, 11, Saito 2008). In addition to scale effects, the functional logic also argues for scope effects. This is built on the assumption that more public services can be delivered in larger government

units, thus allowing decentralisation to accompany amalgamation (Swianiewicz, Gendzwil and Zardi 2017, 20-1)

Hence, optimal government architecture in a functional sense may for instance refer to public service quality, the efficiency by which they are provided, external service costs per capita, or net internal administrative costs. Typical examples of empirical literature within the functionalism logic is studying the effects municipal amalgamation has on administrative costs (Blesse and Thushvanthan 2016, Nakazawa 2013, Reingewertz 2011, Roesel 2017) or public service quality (Allers and Geertsema 2014) or how decentralisation affects public services (Saito 2008, Steiner, et al. 2018). And, perhaps boosted by the number of rescaling reforms undertaken in the last few decades, this is not a narrow research topic. Indeed, in 2018 alone, two systematic literature reviews on the relationship between municipal size and functional administrative effects were published (Dhimitri 2018, Tavares 2018).

Arguments stemming from the logic of functionalism can be said to have reached their peak around the turn of the millennium. Economic globalisation increased its pace, New Public Management had been firmly established as the reigning paradigm of the public sector, and the new, post-Soviet world order was emerging. Nation-states, therefore, as Ohmae (1995) argued, would give way to (economically) functionally determined regional units which would constitute the building blocks of the international economy. Nation-states, as a consequence, would weaken their status as important drivers and participants in the world economy. Alensia and Spolaore (2003) further argued that nation-states exist because of the functional capacities under given conditions of trade (Keating 2020).

The explanations for the rescaling trends in the 1960s/70s and from 2008 onwards have been argued to have taken place due to functional pressures and challenges that governments needed to meet. In the 1960/70s, this was due to new economic realities brought on by deindustrialisation in developed nations. The wave from 2008 has been due to strains resulting from the shockwave(s) of the financial crisis. These are explanations that can be said to lie in the functional camp and provide governments with reasons to undertake rescaling reforms. In the Norwegian case, rescaling– in particular municipal amalgamation – have historically mainly been legitimised through the logic

of functionalism (Baldersheim and Rose 2010). This was also the case with the LGR and RGR and is discussed in further detail in section 3.4.

2.2.2 The logic of community/identity

Where the logic of functionalism offers an economically based interpretation of rescaling, the community/identity logic is based on the *demos*. One may also begin here by asking what the optimal government structure is. But instead of functional and efficiency notions, the community/identity logic puts focus on the people inhabiting jurisdictions that operate at various scales. It “relies on the concept of ethnicity, nationality or national minority, seen as reified and unchanging entities seeking recognition and autonomy” (Keating 2020, 4). It is a logic that materialises from a *who* question: “who has the right to make collectively binding decisions for a particular group?” (Hooghe and Marks 2016, 1). The community/identity logic’s premise is that governance preferences are shaped by feelings of collective identities (Tatham, Hooghe og Marks 2021).

The concepts the community/identity logic invokes is by no means novel. It relates to historical legacies brought on by long-established territories. In a more contemporary setting, one can argue that the issue and importance of community and identity has been reified and reemphasised in part due to European governance developments from the 1990s onwards, which has increased the authority of subnational levels, empowering particularly the regional level (Hooghe, Marks and Schakel 2010).

Historical/cultural legacies bound by territory, and the desires this creates for those who inhabit those territories to seek recognition and self-rule is exemplified for instance by autonomous communities in Spain, the German Länder, the devolved nations of the UK, or the counties and municipalities in Norway. Their institutional setup and levels of authority vary (Hooghe, Marks and Schakel 2010), but a commonality between them regarding questions of governance is precisely the *who* question. Rather than functional thinking, it relates to a cultural homogeneity linked to territory (Alensia and Spolaore 2003), a feeling of ‘us’, and the desires it creates in defending these territories (Kymlicka 2007). Indeed, the explanation for Eastern European subnational territorial fragmentation in the 1990s can be seen as related to the issue of ethnic identity

groups within those countries (Kymlicka 2007, 185-6) seeking autonomy from centralist policies of the Soviet era.

The want for communities to ‘defend their territories’ may, at a more specific level, have to do with questions of self-rule and (local) democracy; of feelings of a collective unity with the people in the same area; of attachment to one’s neighbourhood. Indeed, the focus on community and the *who* question has developed into a *postfunctional* theory for regional governance (Hooghe and Marks 2016), which holds that the logic of functionalism alone cannot explain governance scales, rescaling, or rescaling preferences. We must also account for the communities and identities present in various territorial scales.

Economic and functionalist interpretations to rescaling issues have long tended to either downplay or outright ignore identity and community issues as important factors. While this might not be too surprising given historical and political contexts of the post-1945 era, as well as the years after the fall of the Soviet Union, the latter years of the twentieth century set the stage for the (re)emergence of community and territoriality of European policy and polity development. Marks (1993) observed that policymaking had spun away from the central level both upward to the EU and downward to regional and local bodies, giving rise to a new institutional setup, known as Multilevel Governance (Marks, Hooghe and Blank 1996).

These developments led to the thinking that functional interpretations alone could not fully explain policy development and demands for involvement at subnational levels. The increasing importance of the regional level in the EU system prompted further investigation into issues of community, identity, and their effect on policy, politics, and polities. Empirical investigations into the explanatory strength on various governance issues, the identity/community logic vis-à-vis the functional logic shows that functionalist explanations are useful for explaining preferences and interpreting developments of the structure of government. But the community/identity logic has repeatedly shown itself as a strong predictor of preferences as well, particularly at subnational levels (Keating 2013, Tatham and Bauer 2021). Those who study the architecture of government thus omit the issue of community and identity at their own peril.

There is a potential conceptual challenge regarding the community/identity logic. Scholars often base and relate notions of identity to characteristics of minority cleavages such as ethnicity, language, or religion within the domestic polity. In this sense, identity is a directly observable product of history. Identity may not necessarily depend on such dynamics, however. Community and identity may arise from long established territorially based communities. These may create common feelings of belonging, which may materialise as feelings of attachment, produced and reproduced through discourses relating to the territories and communities in question (Terlouw 2016). They may as such also be considered socially constructed collective feelings of shared notions, histories, and practices, passed down and selectively remembered. Measuring ‘identity’ can therefore become difficult in a comparative perspective, because you may measure different notions in different places (Keating 2020). Exactly what characteristics are necessary for a territorially bound group to share for the collective provisions of public goods? Language? Religion? Living in spatial proximity (Tatham, Hooghe og Marks 2021, 5)?

Moreover, the definition of identity may even depend on one’s stance on territorial reform. In the Norwegian reform setting, opponents of municipal amalgamation have argued that identity is a product of history, and changes (especially if coerced) threaten desires for local self-rule. Proponents have argued that identities are fluid rather than fixed, and may change over time, in part due to new means of communication (Flo 2015b).

Despite the contestation of the definition of identity, the community/identity logic may be operationalised and measured even if individuals within the same territory may give different answers when asked to define the origins of their identity. For instance, scholars have operationalised the community/identity logic by individual-level perceptions of the region as a (stateless) “nation”, the presence of a regionalist party, individual-level identification to the region, a regional language, or feelings of attachment (Studinger and Bauer 2012, 16, Tatham and Bauer 2014b, 246, 2021, 5).

Seeing the community/identity logic manifested as individual-level territorial attachment and a desire to increase the autonomy of one’s “own” government level

makes possible to measure and observe such subnational phenomena even among relatively homogeneous populations within a polity, like Norway.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to make a remark on the relationship between the logic of functionalism and the logic of community/identity. Though a jurisdictional design that reflects community may stand in tension to a design based on functional principles (Tatham, Hooghe og Marks 2021), the two logics are not necessarily dichotomously separated on a rational/non-rational dimension. The two logics as presented above may give the impression that while functionalism relates to rational thinking, community/identity represents 'mere (irrational) feelings'. While the latter does invoke shared feelings among a community, pressures the community/identity logic give rise to are a manifestation of community-based interests. Such interests may be entirely rational. A call for greater self-rule at the subnational level reflects a defence of one's territory. This is important to acknowledge, because the two logics should be viewed as two distinct logics that relate to scale, and scale-based interest formulation, not as rational/irrational opposites. Once articulated as logics that mobilise and drive preferences for the architecture of government, and operationalised into explanatory variables, they need not be mutually exclusive. One's attitudes towards the architecture of government may thus be predicted by both functional and community/identity type arguments. It should also not be the case that if both logics are able to predict certain behaviour, that those effects necessarily go in opposite directions.

3. Rescaling Norway

To underscore the relevance of the Norwegian case, this chapter is threefold. First, I frame Norway in an international context, describable as a typical yet distinct case to study rescaling reform. Next, I provide historical and political contexts of the LGR and RGR. Lastly, I discuss how the logics of rescaling materialised during the reforms' processes.

3.1 The Case of Norway – typical but distinct

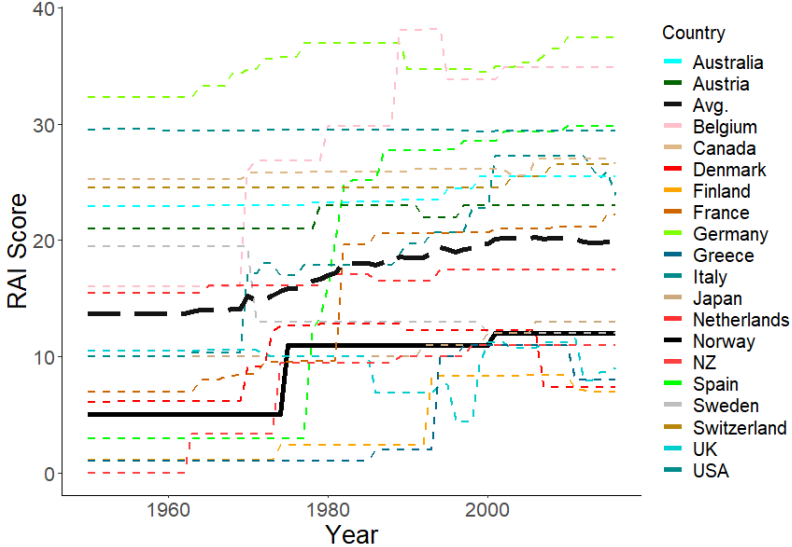
Norway is a unitary system, in which the central level is the ultimate sovereign authority. Local governments become, in this sense, both units of self-government as well as agencies charged with implementing national policies, mixing local capacities and supervision from above (Sellers, Lindström and Bae 2020, 193;6)

Norway's subnational levels stand out in their capacities as public service providers. Indeed, among unitary (OECD) countries, Norway is behind only Denmark, Sweden, and Finland in terms of subnational expenditures as a share of GDP ($\approx 17\%$ as of 2016, with OECD average at 9.2% among unitary systems) (OECD 2018). The norm for a unitary system is to combine it with more centralised forms of governance. Though public services are mostly decided by the central government, they are implemented by local governments. Norway's local level, therefore, "constitutes a major part of the public sector in terms of their task portfolio, the number of employees and in terms of financial resources" (Christensen, Fimreite and Læg Reid 2014, 441). Norway is hence best described as a decentralised unitary system; a description shared with Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and Japan (and the UK after 1998) (Lijphart 2012, 178).

The picture shifts somewhat when solely focusing on the regional level. The Regional Authority Index (RAI), conceptualised and operationalised by Hooghe, Marks and Schakel (2010), is a database covering 43 democracies / 45 countries from 1950 to 2016 (Schakel, Danailova, et al. 2018, Schakel 2021). The index consists of two domains: self-rule and shared rule. The former concerns the level of authority a regional government exercises within its own territory. The latter concerns authority a regional

government co-exercises in the country as a whole (Hooghe, Marks and Schakel 2010, 13). Figure 2 compares Norwegian regional authority levels with a selection of developed democratic countries. Norwegian regional authority (thick black line) has been consistently lower compared to many other democracies since 1950. It is also lower than average levels of regional authority (thick black dotted line) in this period.

Figure 2. RAI Scores Among Democratic Countries, 1950-2016

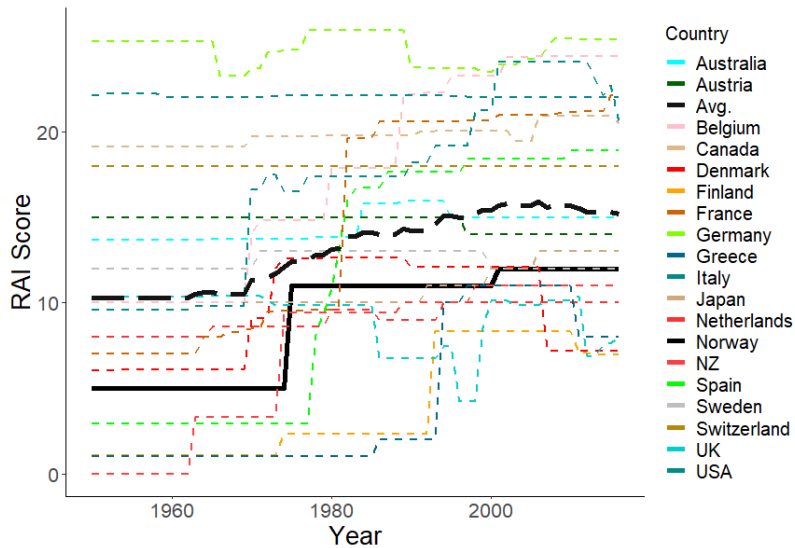


Source: <http://www.arjanschakel.nl/index.php/regional-authority-index>

The comparatively lower level of Norwegian regional authority is partly explained by a lack of any shared rule. The Norwegian form of decentralisation thus differs not only in its scope, but also form, of many other countries. As a unitary system, there is no regional “counter-authority” to the central level. Norway thus deviates from many of the countries in figure 2, for instance Spanish autonomous communities or German Länder, which enjoy greater levels of regional authority, in part due to their shared rule.

In figure 3, shared rule scores have therefore been omitted to more directly compare the levels of regional authority exercised within the regional territories in the same countries.

Figure 3. RAI Self-rule scores among democratic countries, 1950-2016



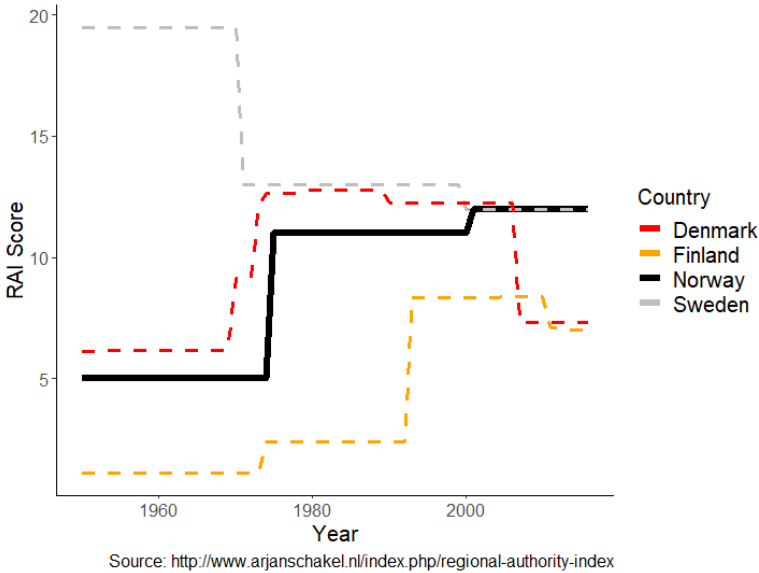
Source: <http://www.arjanschakel.nl/index.php/regional-authority-index>

Again, however, Norwegian regions exercise less authority than many of their counterparts. But what is important to notice, is that the level of regional authority has increased over time. Crucially, this regional empowerment took place in the mid-70s and around the 2000s, which places it in a very typical position comparatively, as waves of regional empowerment took place across democratic regimes in precisely those periods (Hooghe, Marks and Schakel 2010, 53). The increase in the 1970s is due to the introduction of a directly elected regional government (see section 3.3). In the early 2000s, specialist health services and the county governments' ownership and responsibility for hospitals were centralised. Though this could be seen as a downgrade of regional authority, it freed the county governments' capability to distribute resources their own way (Flo 2015a, 306;366). Indeed, in this period, the counties also increased their borrowing autonomy to no longer require central authorisation.²² Among the countries present in figures 2 and 3, therefore, Norway is placed in a very typical

²² For a detailed summary of specific Norwegian regional empowerment between 1961 and 2010, see Norwegian Official Report (NOU) (2005:6, 6; 27-8), and Lyftingsmo and Hjortland (2009).

position regarding historical developments. Moreover, Norway is one of only a few countries where regional authority scores have never shrunk. In figure 4, the selection of countries is reduced to only include the other Nordic unitary decentralised unitary systems.

Figure 4. RAI Scores Among Nordic Countries, 1950-2016



Among the Nordic states, Norway (thick black line) is the only one in which regional empowerment correlates with wider international trends, and where regional authority has not decreased at any point in time. Denmark also increased regional self-rule in the 1970s but reduced it with the structural reform of 2007, which among other things involved abolishing taxation rights of the regions (Vrangsbaek 2010, 27). Worthwhile to note is that Sweden’s drop in 1971 was due to a removal of regional shared rule. All countries’ RAI scores in figure 3 as of 2016 are solely self-rule (excepting Denmark, where 0.2 points of a total score of 7.3 is due to shared rule).

Norwegian regional authority is as such both distinct, but also typical. Another key motivation for focusing on the regional level in the Norwegian reform processes is that the regional sector finds itself pressured from above and below. From above, the

two dominant right-wing parties, The Conservative Party (2013, 63, 2021, 64) and Progress Party (2013, 6, 2021, 8) want to abolish the county governments entirely and reallocate its competences to the municipalities and the state where appropriate. This position has been reaffirmed for the 2021-2025 parliamentary period. From below, municipalities are responsible for a greater extent of responsibilities and public services, particularly so in larger ones. This is also true for the County Governors, which have faced prospects of losing competences to the county governments and the municipalities. This setting, and the prospects of changes the LGR and RGR would bring (which was unknown at the time of the data collection) effectively means that the administrators faced potentially threatening changes to their own environments. This makes studying the Norwegian administrators important and interesting, as it invokes a question (that is contained in the overarching research question) of what sort of behaviour we can observe among administrators who are facing reforms that are potentially threatening to their jobs, institutions, positions, tasks, internal culture, and the physical location of their offices.

The Norwegian case is interesting also due to the reforms' design. Territorial and competence rescaling reforms are international phenomena but vary in their design. Policy may be imposed upon or taken from a government tier wholesale, or they may be more partially transferred through adoption, adaption and learning between governments (Keating and Cairney 2012). Territorial rescaling may be undertaken voluntarily by the local level itself. Alternatively, a central government may initiate and impose such processes upon the subnational level(s). Some degrees of mixed dynamics may also take place (P. Swianiewicz 2010). In the 2007 Danish structural reform for instance, municipalities amalgamated "voluntarily", though backed up by threats of interventions, incentives, and with firm target demands by the central government (Vrangsbaek 2010, 38). In Switzerland, amalgamations are mainly voluntarily driven bottom-up, though has also seen some top-down coerced cases (Dafflon 2013).

The Norwegian reforms, on the other hand, have mixed coerced and voluntary dynamics to such an extent that their processes have been described rather paradoxically as "centrally controlled autonomy" (Nygård 2021). This is due to the voluntary characteristics of local referenda and local amalgamation negotiations, which were

simultaneously supervised by the central government and ultimately decided by the national parliament.

Another important characteristic of the reforms is their overarching goals. The Danish structural reform was undertaken to streamline tax systems, and to reallocate responsibilities for education, healthcare, transport, and culture (Vrangsbaek 2010, 27). In Greece, consolidation of local governments have long been seen as a tool to increase democratic legitimacy by hindering centralism (though is also accompanied by expectations of increasing public sector efficiency) (Hlepas 2010). In German Länder, municipal amalgamation has been seen as a response to functional criticisms against intermunicipal cooperation (Wollmann 2010). In Finland, local amalgamation efforts have mainly been about ensuring municipalities' ability to handle the responsibilities required of them (Sandberg 2015).

The Norwegian reforms, however, can be described as more 'all-encompassing'. Both reforms contained both amalgamation and decentralisation elements. Both reforms sought to reap both functional scale and scope effects, legitimised by the need to update outdated local structures to reflect and respond to societal, economic, and demographic developments. Amalgamation was seen also as an opportunity to increase local democracy through decentralisation and reduced state micromanagement (Kaldager 2015). Compared to rescaling reforms elsewhere, the LGR and RGR were undertaken with broader and 'all-encompassing' goals to improve the governance of the Norwegian local and regional levels. In other words, the LGR and RGR have targeted the subnational levels themselves, rather than any specific service or policy area, or any one particular governance value.

Finally, a particular characteristic of Norway itself should be highlighted. Norway's (political) history is strongly rooted in the local, and in the ideal of local self-government (Gustafsson 1998, Sellers, Lindström and Bae 2020). Despite its unitary nature, Norway has a strong periphery, and the centre-periphery cleavage stands as one of the most important and enduring cleavages in Norway's political history (Baldersheim and Rose 2010, Østerud 2005). This cleavage is explained by many historical factors, such as a language movement relating to Norway's union with Denmark and later Sweden, and that the Norwegian identity had to arise from the local

level because of it. Indeed, it is even claimed that in contemporary Norway, “the capital is perceived as the ‘least national’ place because it still reflects the influences of dominant foreign elites from the colonial and semicolonial past” (Østerud 2005, 707). The LGR and RGR were initiated, desired, and decided by the central government, often against local and regional preferences. The reforms therefore became direct manifestations of a tension between central authority and local autonomy, or the centre vs. the periphery. This is further discussed in the next section.

3.2 The Norwegian Local Government – Roots and Developments

The history of the Norwegian local government dates to 1837 with the introduction of the Alderman Act (*Formannskapsloven*), which applied to the local level the representative democratic principles of the national level. The act manifested existing historical and cultural roots and communities which had until then largely been based on church parishes (Sellers, Lindström and Bae 2020, 188). In this sense, the municipalities reflect centuries old communities, which still frames debates and reforms today.

3.2.1 Early developments

Prior to 1945, Norway’s municipalities underwent gradual changes, chiefly concerning their portfolio and status as a government tier. From 1837 and imposed by the central government, the municipalities gradually extended and expanded their fiscal and political portfolio (Sellers, Lindström and Bae 2020, 188). Alongside this development came a debate on the precise nature of the local-central relationship. The increasing importance of the local level resulted in discussions of peripheral autonomy and central authority – issues persisting to this day (Flo 2004, 39-42; 48-9). In Norway, the idea of local autonomy has strong positive connotations, which can largely be traced to this period. This is in part because the idea of “the Norwegian” had survived centuries of Danish (turned Swedish) rule, without a central government or culture-bearing elite of its own. Instead, “the Norwegian” had to base itself on identities found at the local level.

Local political units thus represented a continuity of communities dating back to the 13th century, even prior to the existence of a Norwegian state (Flo 2004, 43-8).

In the decades following the end of the 1800s, the municipalities underwent some structural and institutional changes, and from 1945 onwards, they became a central provider of welfare services. Work on reforming the territorial structure of the municipalities also started in this period (Flo 2004, 233-4).

In 1946, a commission was charged with considering the administrative division of the local level. It stated that municipalities should be capable of having “an autonomous life within the limits set by law”, and that local self-government presumed a certain economic capacity. Local units should retain self-government, while at the same time provide conditions for development, achieve economic stability, attain geographical tax equalisation, and develop a professional and efficient administrative apparatus (Baldersheim and Rose 2010, 81). This set the stage for a reform which reduced the number of municipalities from 744 in 1957 to 454 in 1967.

In the following decades, further reforms were attempted, as different governments still regarded several municipalities as too small. In 1989, a new commission was appointed. The commission’s fundamental concern regarding the municipalities' was that their structure should reflect their capabilities to facilitate the realisation of national policies and goals. Submitting its report in 1992, a majority in the commission concluded that a reform was needed, driven by geographic functionality, municipal size, physical access, as well as special needs and adaptability (Baldersheim and Rose 2010, 82-3). A key recommendation was that all municipalities should have a minimum of 5000 residents. This was met with almost unanimous scepticism from municipalities with fewer than 5000 residents, peripheral municipalities, and those in proximity to larger municipalities. Larger, centrally located municipalities were more positive to the idea.

Then the process took a somewhat unexpected turn. As a government white paper on municipal reform was submitted to parliamentary committee for consideration, a member of parliament proposed that as a principle, any municipal amalgamation should be based on the voluntary consent of the residents in the affected municipalities. The motion was passed, and a parliamentary majority thus opposed the government's

proposals of what would be coerced amalgamations, effectively making the principle of voluntarism official doctrine (Baldersheim and Rose 2010, 88).²³

In 2002, the Local Government Boundaries Act was enacted. It states that the national parliament has the final say on subnational structures. This did not overrule the principle of voluntarism, as it had not been codified formally into law. Consequently, a “political duality” concerning the authority to restructure subnational structures came into existence, in which principle and law ‘opposed’ each other (Klausen, Askim and Vabo 2016, 32). This tension between central authority and local autonomy created a setting of ambivalence for future reformers. Did the principle of voluntarism grant municipalities a veto against amalgamation, or did it merely give the freedom to organise local amalgamation processes their own way (Flo, 2017, p. 25)? This ambivalence had not been resolved by the time the LGR was initiated.

While governments in the following years continued to attempt reform, strategies changed from direct central control to focusing on economic incentives and penalisation measures (Baldersheim and Rose 2010, 85-90). In the two decades following the principle of voluntarism was enacted in 1995, 14 municipalities amalgamated to seven new municipalities, leaving a total of 428 at the start of the LGR. Table 1 provides a historical overview of changes to the number of municipalities.

Municipal structures and the question of amalgamations has almost been a political taboo subject since the mid-1990s. The Solberg government's initiative of the LGR created a debate which demonstrates the political volatility attached to asking what the appropriate municipal structure is. It also raises the question of central authorities’ limits in deciding public institutions’ organisational setup. Can the state force municipalities to ensure a local government structure sufficiently "robust" to execute the many responsibilities the required by them? The answer to this question varies from party to party and from municipality to municipality (Hansen 2016, 48).

²³ The proposal was made by a representative of the Centre Party, and was, amongst others, supported by the Conservative Party.

Table 1. Historical change in number of Norwegian municipalities

Year	No. of municipalities	Change
1838	392	
1930	747	+355
1957	744	-3
1967	454	-290
1974	443	-11
1978	454	+11
1994	435	-19
2014	428	-7
2020	356	-72

3.2.2 The Norwegian Local Government Reform (2014-2020)

Upon taking office in 2013, the Solberg government signalled its intent to initiate a new national territorial reform. The minority government consisting of the Conservative and Progress parties had parliamentary support from the Liberal and Christian Democratic parties. These four parties had stated their intent to reform the public sector, including territorial units, in the 2013 election campaign. In the early stages after the election, they were supported by the Labour Party as well.²⁴ All stated the necessity of amalgamating municipalities and expressed willingness to coerce amalgamations if necessary.²⁵

The platform for the Solberg government included a passage arguing for the initiation of a municipal reform. In it, they stressed the need to rescale both territories and competences based on functional arguments such as improving public services and administration.

"The government will implement a local government reform (...) a more robust municipal structure will ensure more professional expertise in the individual municipalities. It will improve for example challenging child protection cases, resource demanding services and the leadership and development of care- and educational services (...) The government will undertake a review of county, County Governor, and central government competences with the goal of transferring more

²⁴ Labour's position changed in the middle of the parliamentary period, when at the party conference they decided that all amalgamations should be based on mutual agreement between the affected municipalities (Klausen, Askim and Vabo 2016, 43). Without Labour's support, the government still had a parliamentary majority with one or both the Liberal and Christian Democratic parties in the 2013-2017 period. In the 2017-2021 period, both parties' support was needed.

²⁵ See manifestos of the Conservative Party (2013, 63) Progress Party (2013, 7), Liberal Party (2013, 77), Christian Democratic Party (2013, 99), and Labour Party (2013, 66).

authority to more robust municipalities" (Political platform for a government consisting of the Conservative Party and the Progress Party 2013, 47).

Members of parliament stated, however, that while decentralisation and territorial structures must be seen in conjunction, few could express precisely which tasks should indicate larger or smaller municipalities, and that this was a question of technicality, not principle (Klausen, Askim and Vabo 2016, 39). This reveals how especially the logic of functionalism motivated the desire for reform.

The government appointed a commission to assess the structure of local governments and the transfer of responsibilities to them. The commission stated that significant societal and demographic changes had taken place since the 1960s, and that while the municipal structure had not been changed over the last 50 years, the municipalities' portfolio had been significantly expanded, leading to an increase in the use of intermunicipal cooperation (Vabo, et al. 2014, 127). To meet the criteria they had outlined (Vabo, et al. 2014, 129), the commission recommended a minimum of 15.000 – 20.000 inhabitants in each municipality. They also recommended that the administrative divisions be better structured to fit "functional development areas" – commuting, working, living, recreation (in short, an individual's daily life) – in a single jurisdictional unit so that inhabitants would spend more of their day-to-day lives in a single municipality, rather than operating across several. Moreover, central government should reduce micromanagement and develop arrangements for local political participation (Vabo, et al. 2014, 129-38).

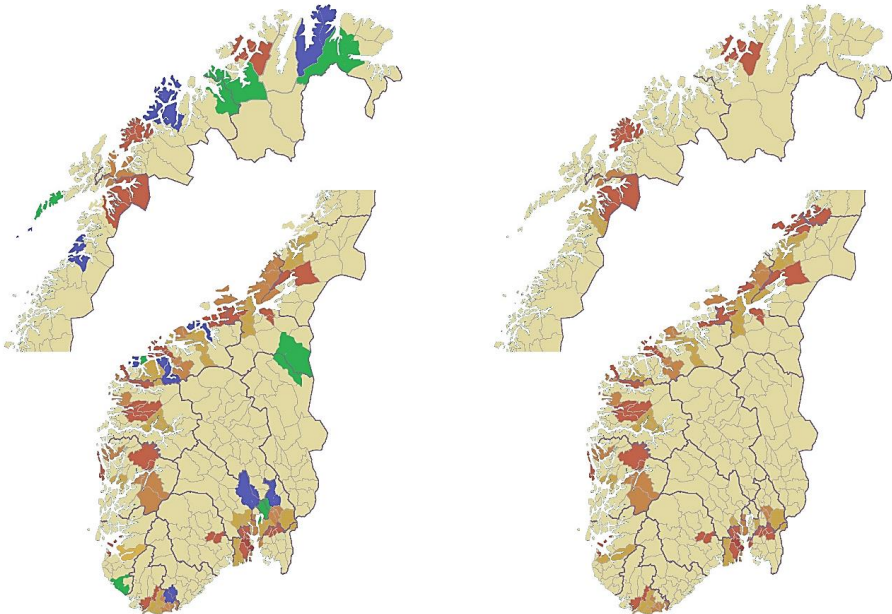
As part of the reform process, the Minister for Local Government and Modernisation instructed the County Governors to facilitate and review local processes. The county governors would then propose amalgamations to the central government. Table 2 describes the stages of the LGR, while figure 5 displays two maps. The left map displays amalgamation proposals the county governors made. On the right, the map displays amalgamations that were implemented by the parliament following the government's proposals, which were based on the governors' recommendations.

Table 2. Stages of the Norwegian Local Government Reform

Initiation	May 2014	Report to the parliament on local government reform
	2014-2016	Local negotiation processes
	March 2015	Report to the parliament on new tasks to larger local governments
Local phase	September 2015	Local and regional elections
	December 2015	Public hearing on revised income system for local government sector
	February 2016	First deadline for local decisions
	June 2016	Extended/final deadline for local decisions
	September 2019	Local and regional elections; municipal councils to the new municipalities form
Regional phase	October 2016	County governors' amalgamation proposals submitted to central government
National phase	April 2017	Proposal to the Parliament on new local government structure
	June 2017	Decision of the Parliament on new local government structure
Implementation	1.1.2017/1.1.2018	First round of amalgamations
	1.1.2020	Second round of amalgamations

Notes: Based on Swianiewicz, Gendzwill and Zardi's (2017, 35) description of the LGR process.

Figure 5. Municipal amalgamation proposals (left) and implemented (right)



Notes: Colours distinguish individual amalgamations, as several share immediate borders with other amalgamations. As such, they do not denote their nature as coerced or voluntary. Source: Edited (left) version of the original (right) map by The Norwegian Mapping Authority.

Table 3. Municipal population statistics pre- and post-LGR

Population size	Municipal structure 2019		Municipal structure 2020		
	<i>Population</i>	<i>Share</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Share</i>	<i>Change</i>
0 - 3000	271 271	5,1%	225 732	4,2%	-0,9
3000 - 5000	244 169	4,6%	185 486	3,5%	-1,1
5000 - 10 000	623 629	11,7%	481 163	9,0%	-2,7
10 000 - 20 000	768 749	14,4%	704 446	13,2%	-1,2
20 000 - 50 000	1 261 102	23,7%	1 265 232	23,7%	0
50 000 and above	2 159 292	40,5%	2 466 152	46,3%	+5,8

Notes: Statistics from The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities annual report (2019, 30).

The government did not officially express the number of municipalities they desired at the end of the reform²⁶. It could nevertheless be reasonably claimed that the reform did not entirely meet the government's desires. As table 3 shows, the share of municipalities with less than 20 000 inhabitants was reduced by roughly 5.8 percentage points. Opposition at the local level derailed many amalgamations. Some coerced amalgamations were enacted by the parliament, but further support for this dwindled, and after the Christian Democratic party withdrew their support for it, became unattainable in the following parliamentary period (2017-2021). Although the government was re-elected in 2017, the will to compel amalgamation was further reduced, leaving the 1995 principle of voluntarism the effective standard for future municipal restructuring (Fimreite and Flo 2018, 33). After the LGR's implementation, there are few indications that coerced amalgamation, or any large-scale territorial reform, will take place for the foreseeable future.

Regarding competence transfers to the local level, fewer tasks than initially proposed were decentralised. Table 4 provides an overview of competences proposed for decentralisation to local governments during the LGR. Among the notable of competences that were decentralised are the right for selected municipal representatives to marry couples, and the responsibility for public transport in some municipalities. Several proposals were withdrawn in the reform process. At the local level, many municipalities delayed their amalgamation decisions to observe decentralisation

²⁶ Some numbers were informally proposed, going as low as 77, but no number was officially declared as a goal for the reform (Iversen and Stensvaag 2017)

developments at the central level. As the list of potential competences gradually watered down, many municipal councils no longer saw the need to amalgamate, as they would not widen their managerial portfolio to such an extent that it, as they perceived, would necessitate larger local units.

Table 4. Competences proposed for decentralisation to municipal governments

Theme	Task	Status
Welfare	Grants for housing establishment- and adaptation	Implemented
	Dental services	Proposed, retracted
	Child protection reform	Proposed, retracted
	(trial) rural psychiatric centres	Proposed, not implemented
	(trial) arranged work	Proposed, not implemented
	Responsibility for financing patient transport	Undergoing review
	Grants for business- and environmental measures in the forest industry	Proposed, not implemented
Local development	Grants for grazing area measures	Proposed, not implemented
	Grants for world heritage sites and selected cultural landscapes in the agriculture sector	Proposed, not implemented
	Some tasks in the law concerning Pollution Control	Proposed, not implemented
	Administration of game and inland fishing	Proposed, not implemented
	Management of concessions of small hydropower plants. Separate proposal from the Ministry of Oil and Energy	
	Management of protected areas	Implemented
	Reduction of wind turbine power plants	Implemented
	Regulation of snowmobile tracks	Implemented
	Regulation of catskiing motoring	Undergoing review
	Grants for volunteer centres	Implemented
Regulation of water scooters	Undergoing review	
Naming- and address regulation	Undergoing review	
Public transport to large municipalities under certain conditions	Implemented	
Miscellaneous	Right for municipal representatives to marry couples	Implemented
	Notary businesses	Implemented
	Approval of swimming pools	Proposed, not implemented
	Lost property	Undergoing review

Notes: List compiled from government’s overview of tasks subject to decentralisation during the 2014-2020 period. Source: Norwegian Government Website containing press brief outlining tasks (2017).

The Liberal and Christian Democratic parties have since 2013 been key actors for ensuring the LGR’s implementation. Although being pro-reform, they were less keen

on coercing amalgamations. As such, their support for coercion was not unconditional. A condition – perhaps *the* condition – for their support to coerce some amalgamations was the initiation of a simultaneous and similar reform of the regional level. This ‘trade’ became the effective foundation for the Regional Government Reform.

3.3 The Norwegian Regional Level

The Norwegian counties are, in a sense, both older and more modern than the municipalities. Though they are traceable in some form as far back as the Viking age, the (pre-RGR) county borders mainly date to the middle of the 17th century (Selstad 2003). After institutionalising local government in 1837, the counties long served as a "joint" municipality, in which rural local governments elected representatives to discuss and deal with problems and politics of a regional nature. A central issue always lingered; what should the counties be and do? As with the municipalities, the counties could either be seen as autonomous units, or as ‘delivery systems’ for state policies (Flo 2004, 205).

In the 1970s, several decades’ worth of ideas of the counties resulted in a reform summarised as “democracy, decentralisation and efficiency” (Selstad 2003, 61-3). The reform established a system of directly elected county representatives in parallel elections to the local elections. In 1975, the first direct elections to the regional level were held, the newly formed county governments received some taxation authority, and the county governments’ administrations were set up. The reform did not specify further tasks to the county governments, however. Despite involving significant institutional changes, the reform did not specify any further competences, and the county governments effectively continued as implementers of the state's regional policies (Selstad 2003, 64).

With a newly established county government, the regional level consisted of two government authorities. The second being the County Governor, the state's representative in the counties. This led to a ‘tug of war’ between the two. The County Governor ‘triumphed’, and the county appeared more like a “special municipality” with just a few select tasks (Selstad 2003, 71, Flo 2004, 372). From the 1980s onwards, the

County Governor and the municipalities increasingly collaborated and increasingly, state and municipality “appeared almost as an alliance against county governments” (Selstad 2003, 73).

From the 1990s, a complex mix of functions across the various levels of government had arisen. By the turn of the millennium, the county governments faced legitimacy challenges and a democratic deficiency, evidenced for instance by low voter turnout (Baldersheim 2000). Since the first county election in 1975, turnout has steadily declined from 70.3% to 60.5% in 2019 (Aardal 2019).

In 1992, a public commission argued for larger and fewer counties, geographically structured to fit communication, commerce/industry and settlement areas (NOU 1992). In the following government white paper, the “need for larger units was strongly emphasized – to retain local democracy and self-rule. A rhetoric usually employed for small units was here used to argue for larger ones” (Selstad 2003, 77).

3.3.1 The 2010 almost-reform

After coming to power in 2005, the Labour-led (also known as the ‘red-green’) government announced its intention to reform the regional level with an intended implementation by 2010. The reform’s goals was to decentralise competences, and to amalgamate counties in order to achieve this on a large scale (Platform for government cooperation between the Labour Party, Socialist Left Party and Centre Party 2005). Though strikingly similar to the RGR, a significant difference was that a central condition for the reform was that amalgamation decisions were left to the counties themselves. A white paper (2007, 6; 85; 93) did state that should the government conclude that regional processes would not create a 'workable territorial structure', it could propose changes that deviated from counties’ preferences. However, with no counties desiring amalgamation, the government in the end did not use any coercion. Instead, some new tasks were transferred to the county governments. Lack of administrative and within-party agreement, as well as failed reform strategies have been claimed to explain why an intended large-scale territorial reform turned into a watered-down, administrative one (Blom-Hansen, et al. 2012, Blindheim 2013, 22-3).

3.3.2 The Norwegian Regional Government Reform (2015-2020)

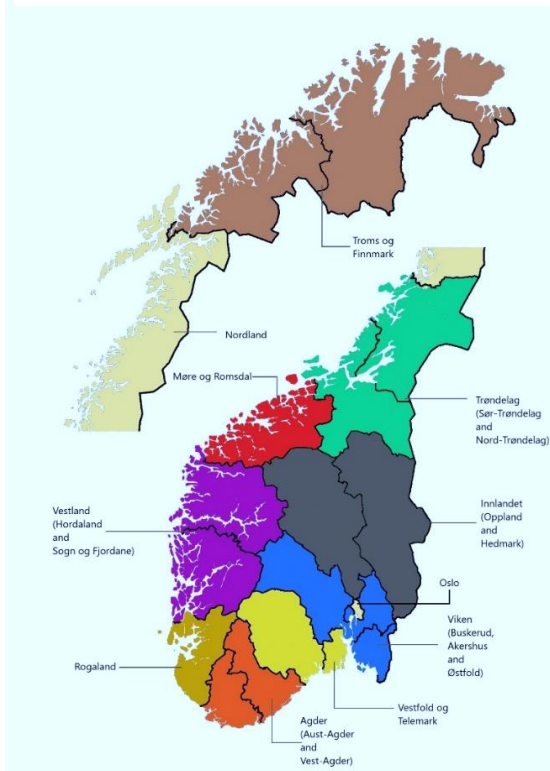
After giving their support for coerced municipal amalgamations to the Solberg government, the Liberal and Christian Democratic parties desired a similar reform of the regional level. This was initiated by a parliamentary vote which first asserted the continuation of the regional government level, and then instructed the government to initiate a reform of it.

The RGR process was run similar to that of the LGR. The Minister for Local Government and Modernisation had all county governments commence amalgamation negotiations with their neighbouring units to determine ‘viable matches’. Contrary to the LGR, the principle of voluntarism did not apply in the RGR. Instead, the new regional map would be decided exclusively by the central government, though with county governments expressing their preferences.

At the end of the amalgamation negotiations, counties either expressed a desire to remain intact or to amalgamate with one or more neighbouring counties. The counties’ amalgamation preferences did not always overlap, and thus county preferences could not always be followed.²⁷

²⁷ See government proposal on the new regional structure (Prop. 84 S (2016-2017) 2017) for each county’s specific preference).

Figure 6. County amalgamations in the RGR



Alongside the amalgamation negotiations, the county governments also worked to determine their competence desires. This process took place in three main stages.

First, the county governments decided and expressed their competence preferences to the central government. The competence preferences varied in both detail and scope. Some counties communicated only general policy areas, without specifying which responsibilities and tasks within those areas they would like. Others outlined specific tasks and responsibilities.

The policy areas themselves also varied. All counties expressed preferences for greater responsibility of competences relating to climate and environment. Many also desired greater involvement in agriculture, roads/transport, and cultural grant management. Several desired greater authority over culture policy, and some wanted to re-regionalise ownership of hospitals and specialist health care services, which had been centralised in 2002. For a more detailed summary of the counties' preferences, see Myksvoll (2018, 47-54).

Next, a government-appointed expert committee assessed and proposed transferable tasks to the new regions, based on the planned regional structure, along with hearings from central government institutions and other involved actors.²⁸ The

²⁸ Also known as the Hagen-committee. My main Ph.D. supervisor, prof. Anne Lise Fimreite, was a member of this committee. She was also my supervisor for my master thesis. Although she has contributed with in-depth knowledge concerning the RGR process, the information made available and her role as supervisor have not exceeded what would be considered academically ethical or appropriate in this work.

committee’s mandate was to base their suggestions on the generalist principle, which states that every county government has the same responsibilities (this principle also applies to the local level). In February 2018, the committee published its list of suggestions (table 5), which were summarised in five general policy areas:

Table 5. Competence transfers proposals by Hagen committee

Policy area	Responsibility
Commerce, Competence, and Integration ²⁹	Management and ownership of at least 50% of Innovasjon Norge Responsibility of ≈ half of industry/commerce-related research Regional commerce program Tasks and tools of the Rural Development Centre Responsibility of ≈ half of grants to <i>Arktis 2030</i> Tasks and tools for career guidance Increased financing for secondary and higher education Parts of IMDI's tasks
Culture and Cultural Heritage Protection	Assets for institutions and arrangements of local or regional character Responsibility for more cultural institutions Responsibility for more museums Investment funds to musical, performing arts and museum institutions Lottery revenue to cultural buildings and other cultural arrangements Management of lottery revenue to libraries, archives, and museums Most front-line cultural heritage task responsibility
Climate, Environment, And Natural Resources	Some environment tasks from County Governor Regional coordination in environmental law pursuance Decision-making authority on water and wind power plant concessions
Health and living	Public health efforts from County Governor, excluding supervision Grants relating to local and regional public health promotion Pedagogical-psychological services, municipal guidance and support Child protection institutions, foster homes and adoption Family counselling
Roads and Transportation	Internal and border-crossing railroad purchases Grants for expanded handicap transport Management for grants to broadband development

Source: Hagen-committee’s report outlining new regional competences (2018, 181-3).

The committee’s proposals involved significant responsibilities, especially regarding cultural policies and commerce, education, and immigrant integration management. After reviewing the proposals, the central government decided which competences would be subject for decentralisation. Following parliamentary

²⁹ Integration in this context denotes efforts to integrate immigrants into Norwegian society.

proceedings, the government, with the Christian Democratic Party³⁰, presented in September 2018 a final list of competences subject to regionalisation (table 6).

The list of competences approved for regionalisation contained smaller, more specific tasks than the Hagen committee proposed. However, from a historical perspective, a significant regionalisation of competences took place, and regional authority in several policy areas was widened.

A list of competences and policy areas subject for further review was also presented (table 7). These were not listed as definitive, and the government did not follow the committee's proposals to abolish any state agencies. Indeed, in the months after the reform's implementation, government ministers announced they would not transfer any authority to the regions regarding cultural institutions or child protection services (Ingebrethsen, et al. 2020, Elster and Fossen 2020).

³⁰ Then the only among the four parliamentary/government coalition parties not in government after the Liberal Party had joined the government earlier that same year.

Table 6. Final list of RGR competence transfers

Policy area	Competence
Agriculture	Grant management for assessment- and facilitation measures in agriculture Management of grants for coastal forestry Regional commerce program
Commerce, Competence, Integration	Industrial garden program Incubator program Some establishment grants for group 1 Corporate networks Expanded responsibility for regional competence policies Career guidance grants Grants for internal company training Plans to qualify immigrants to meet regional labour market needs Expanded responsibility for strengthened basic training to youth Grants for establishment training Grants for mentor- and trainee arrangements Grants for job chance B
Environment	Tasks relating to management of state-secured public ground areas Tasks relating to archipelago services Tasks within the cultural heritage area The Water-Energy Directorate shall consult counties in licensing procedures for building of water- and wind power plants
Healthcare	Grants for public health mastery and education Grants for interdisciplinary efforts in the drug field Funds for the program for public health work
Northern Norway	Grant management to Kven language and culture to Troms og Finnmark ≈ Half of grants to Arctic 2030 that involves northern Norwegian actors Clarified and strengthened involvement in planning of Arctic Council meetings Establishment of a northern secretariat
Regional planning	Incorporation of regional development funds into revenue system Community development participation for larger state infrastructure projects
Roads and transit	County share of Sams Road Administration Responsibility for state-run fishing ports Grants to fishing ports Acquisition of domestic flights Grants to non-state airports Grants to extended handicap transport after it's financed as a national service Grants for landslide prevention of county roads Grants for walking and cycling paths along county and municipal roads Extended coordination of public transit between counties and state Cooperation between the counties and the Railway Directorate extends to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Route change processes • Counties take responsibility for dialogue with municipalities • Production of transport services • Formation of demands for all or parts of the offered serviced • Urban growth agreements • Agreements for other parts of the counties • Cooperation between bus- and train services • Binding cooperation of route information

Note: Sourced from the government and Christian Democratic Party conference (2018) announcing the finalised list of competences subject to regionalisation.

Table 7. Tasks subject to further assessment for regionalisation

Policy Area	Task
Commerce, Competence, Integration	Assess whether tourism initiatives should be transferred
	Counties' role in the competence reform will be clarified in the municipal proposition
	Grants for educational associations will be studied, aiming to make transfer possible
	If counties should be given a larger role in cooperating competence policy to contribute to lower unemployment should be investigated
	Combining labour market training with skills development is being studied
Child protection	Minority counselling considered transferred
	Study of transferring resources for settlement in the regions and other integration policy
	<u>Assess whether further integration task strategies can be transferred</u>
Child protection	If transferring child protection tasks to the counties will improve services will be assessed
Culture	Competences were presented in a specific white paper (Meld. St. 8 (2018-2019) 2019).
Roads and transit	Aim to transfer grants for broadband construction

Table 8 summarises the various stages of the RGR, from its initiation to its implementation.

Table 8. Stages of the Norwegian Regional Government Reform

Initiation phase	June 2015	Parliament tells government to review county tasks parallel with municipal tasks
	July 2015	Minister for Local Government and Modernisation invites all county governments to participate in the reform process to determine their amalgamation stance
National and regional phases	September 2015	Local and regional elections
	April 2016	Nord-Trøndelag and Sør-Trøndelag decide to amalgamate
	April-June 2016	Government formally proposes the RGR; parliament supports establishing 10 new counties
	Autumn 2016- Spring 2017	Counties conclude processes of determining their amalgamation stance
	April-June 2017	Ministry for Local Government and Modernisation proposes new regional structure; expert committee appointed to assess competences transferable to the regional level, parliamentary decisions on county amalgamations
	January 2018	Nord-Trøndelag and Sør-Trøndelag amalgamate, forming Trøndelag
	February 2018 September 2019	Hagen committee proposes competence transfers Local and regional elections; county councils to the new county governments form
Implementation	January 2020	County amalgamations implemented

3.3.3 A conclusion or a chapter?

Since the RGR was initiated, its outcome has been uncertain in many ways. Both with respect to regional processes that have taken place since, as well as (lack of) continued national political support. In the autumn of 2018, the leader of the Christian Democratic Party stated his desire to form a new government coalition together with Labour and the Centre Party. The Centre Party's leader stated that for such a coalition to take place, the regional reform would have to be reversed. The Christian Democratic leader failed to win his party's support, and the party instead joined the Solberg government. Thought this ensured the continuation and eventual implementation of the reform (as expressly stated in the government's new declaration (2019, 57)), it also demonstrated the shaky foundations upon which it has rested.

The Centre Party, a continued opponent of the reform, has grown to historic levels in polls and elections during the reforms' processes. It has repeatedly stated its commitment to reversing significant parts of the reform, especially the coerced amalgamations that formed the counties Viken, and Troms og Finnmark. This stance is also supported by many regional politicians. Indeed, in both Viken, and Troms og Finnmark, county councils formed after the 2019 local and regional elections express their intent to reverse the amalgamations, should a parliamentary majority support it after the 2021 general election (Brenna, et al. 2019, 4, Mo, et al. 2019, 3).

Moreover, for the 2021-2025 parliamentary period, the Conservative (2021, 58) and Progress (2021, 7) parties have reiterated their stance that the county government level should be abolished. Hence, the jury is still out on the RGR's legacy, and whether the debate on the counties' role and place in the Norwegian government system will ever be settled.

3.4 Understanding rescaling in the Norwegian setting

As discussed in section 2.1, I view the LGR and RGR as two reforms composed of competence (decentralisation) and territorial (amalgamation) rescaling. In this section,

I discuss how we can understand the two reforms with the theoretical framework provided by the rescaling literature.

Political, cultural, and historical contexts vary between countries, and provide different settings in which rescaling may take place. Indeed, as described in section 2.1, both competence and territorial rescaling may vary on multiple dimensions. Territorial rescaling may be of a voluntary nature, driven by local units without instruction from central government. It can also be a top-down process initiated and directed by central authorities. Rescaling reforms can be set within a specific time frame with target dates for implementation or be continually ongoing. The third wave of territorial rescaling has seen a mix of voluntary, coerced, bottom-up, top-down, time-set, and ongoing dynamics (Swianiewicz 2018).

The LGR and RGR were set within a specific time frame, and contained both coercive and voluntary dynamics. Local referenda, though advisory, became de facto binding for many municipal councils, where most rejected amalgamation. The 1995 principle of voluntarism meant the central government would not overrule local decisions in most cases, though it possessed the legal authority to do so. Forced amalgamation was more prevalent at the regional level and no county-wide referenda took place.³¹ After initiating the reforms, the central government instructed municipal and county governments to commence amalgamation negotiations with neighbouring units. The central government thus initiated, framed criteria, and decided the reforms, while local and regional units shaped them by communicating their amalgamation and competence preferences.

The Conservative, Progress, Liberal, and Christian Democratic parties attained a parliamentary majority in the 2013-2017 and 2017-2021 periods.³² All parties' manifestos called for municipal amalgamation and decentralisation measures. For the Liberal and Christian Democratic parties, this also included the regional level. This call

³¹ A referendum was held in Finnmark after the parliament's decision to amalgamate the county with Troms. This referendum was not part of the official process as determined by the central government. Instead, it materialised by popular demand, and was approved by Finnmark's county council, which strongly opposed the amalgamation plans.

³² Between 2013 and 2017, the government consisted of the Conservative and Progress parties. In 2018, the coalition extended to include the Liberal Party. In 2019, the Christian Democratic Party entered the coalition. In 2020, the Progress Party left the government but continued to support it from the parliament.

was driven extensively and primarily by arguments related to the functional logic (see Conservative Party (2013, 63), Christian Democratic Party (2013, 99), Liberal Party (2013, 52;76-7), and Progress Party (2013, 6-7) manifestos). Some arguments have also related to notions underlying the community/identity logic, such as improving conditions for local democracy and increasing subnational levels of self-rule through reduction of central management and supervision. Mostly, the process of decentralisation was by the central government argued in terms of democracy and increasing local self-rule (see Norwegian government's press release on the LGR's initiation (2014)). However, as both the number of amalgamations and the number of tasks subject to decentralisation gradually watered down, a stronger emphasis on functional considerations remained.

On balance, therefore, the desire to reform has been based on perceived functional pressures due to demographic changes from lower than desirable birth rates, and a domestic migration trend where younger generations moved away from rural and toward urban areas. Jurisdictional units no longer reflected residents' professional and private activities, commuting patterns or recreational habits. This would in the longer term deprive peripheral municipalities of tax revenue, commerce, employment opportunities, etc., to the point where public service services would suffer. Rescaling local jurisdictions, they argued, would alleviate negative consequences of these trends. Municipal amalgamations would create "robust" units with larger economies and a professionalised administration equipped to deliver services more efficiently, with increased quality, and reduced bureaucracy through streamlining effects. Larger local units would also be able to increase their scope for handling services, enabling significant decentralisation. When the RGR was initiated, the same logic was applied to it, though also with some nuances of local democratic inefficiencies that decentralisation would improve.

It is perhaps not too surprising that the functional logic was prevalent among the four parties making up the right-wing block of Norwegian politics. One can argue that the traditional political right-wing hold economic and public sector views which embody many of the arguments advocated by the logic of functionalism and the rationalisation of public authorities (Roberts 2011). However, it must also be noted that though parties

on the economic right have been shown to be more prone to decentralisation measures and increasing local autonomy (Karlsson 2015, Toubeau and Massetti 2013), earlier reforms (and reform attempts) in Norway have been undertaken by the social-democratic Labour Party, which legitimised reform efforts through similar functional arguments (Baldersheim and Rose 2010). It is therefore not given that the arguments of functionalism pertain exclusively to right-wing parties or politics, at least in the Norwegian case. Instead, it may be that rescaling advocates turn to functionalism as a natural legitimising framework (which may in part be driven by actual functional pressures (Askim, Klausen, et al., What Causes Municipal Amalgamation Reform? Rational Explanations Meet Western European Experiences, 2004–13 2016)).

By being legitimised through the arguments associated with it, the logic of functionalism thus became a ‘reform-creating logic’ from which the government framed and initiated the LGR, and later the RGR.

The reforms were, however, not met with enthusiasm from below. In many places, local opposition hampered reform. Opponents of the reforms have primarily argued through the community/identity logic, in which local identities, self-rule, and democracy have been perceived as infringed and sacrificed by the central government’s quest for reaping functional effects.³³

Throughout this process, the central government faced local and regional resistance legitimised through the community/identity logic. Hence, while identity pressures can be used to explain rescaling and the territorial architecture of government (Hooghe and Marks 2016, Tatham, Hooghe og Marks 2021), they were here used to argue against reform. This ‘counter-effect’ based on identity issues is not entirely unexpected and is predicted in studies of regional authority. The identity logic can both spur and impede reform, depending on identity levels. This effect arises “because individuals prefer rulers who share their ethno-cultural norms”. Regional authority is thus strengthened where regional identity is strong. In countries where national identity

³³ Local opposition may also have stemmed from disagreements over specific amalgamation proposals. With 428 municipalities engaged in such processes, opposition reasons, like support, must be expected to vary. However, resistance towards reform was almost universally driven by a defence of local interests – and more often than not, particularly seen in public discourse, this defence materialised as arguments pertaining to local identity and attachment, and self-determination regarding territorial structures.

is strong and regional identity weak, one should find less regional authority (Marks, Hooghe and Schakel 2008, 175). In other words, the community/identity logic can both spur, but also impede reforms, as it did in Norway.

Public discourse at all levels frequently expressed concern that the reforms were imposed from above rather than being locally anchored. The strongest opposition has come from Finnmark, which organised a county-wide referendum following the parliament's decision to amalgamate the county with Troms. In it, 87% voted against the intended amalgamation (NTB 2018). The effects the community/identity logic thus had in halting reform, makes it describable as a 'reform-impeding logic'.

4. Data and methods

The thesis' papers employ both quantitative and qualitative data and methods. The first two papers make use of an original statistical data set from a survey sent to regional administrators. The third paper analyses transcribed interview data with county governors, collected by the Ph.D.'s research project head, professor Yngve Flo. Although the data is described in each paper, pertaining to the specific research question and variables of interest, complying with word limitations in such papers invariably involves omitting some information. To address this, further details regarding the data gathering process and the data itself are presented here.

4.1 A survey to regional bureaucrats

The data set of regional bureaucrats' attitudes toward the RGR was originally created as the empirical basis for my master thesis. The development of the survey began in August 2017 and by late October, a completed survey had taken shape. It was based on 10 primary sources for the variables, covering theories and empirical studies of rescaling (Myksvoll 2018, 30). I used the online survey tool SurveyXact to design the survey. The final version consisted of 41 factual and attitudinal questions, a mix of single and multiple-choice answers, and open-ended responses.

4.1.1 Sampling

The relatively small size of the Norwegian county governments makes it feasible to distribute the survey to the entire administrative population. The small size of the county government administrations, coupled with the fact that one cannot expect 100% response rates meant that a random sampling technique risked offsetting its methodological strengths (reducing bias and probability-based distribution of observables, for instance), and that some other form of sampling had to be undertaken.

The survey recipients were selected based on the criteria of *administrative employee in the county government's central administration*. With the administrations themselves acting as units, a clustered sampling took place, combined with a non-

probability-based approach close to a purposive sampling technique (Etikan and Bala 2017). The bureaucrats' professional titles and email addresses were publicly available on the governments' websites. Identifying, selecting, and registering individuals as recipients was thus relatively straight forward. The counties did (and do) not have a standardised organisation of their administrations, meaning there was some variation in the administrative departments and sectors from which the survey recipients were drawn. Despite this, a list was put together with as much overlap as possible, ensuring to the highest possible degree that respondents from each county would be drawn from similar departments.

Some questions in the survey involved giving information of a personal nature (individual characteristics and political leaning). As such, permission from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) and their Data Protection Services (*Personvernombudet*) was granted prior to distribution. This process also included contacting each county's administrative head by both phone and email, informing them of the project. To increase participation rates, I also made a request that they would inform the employees of the coming survey. Most were positive, some required more information regarding data usage and anonymity. Though I do not know whether this approach did increase the participation rate, it is not unreasonable to assume it had some effect.

One particular case in this process deserves mention, as it may have contributed to a lower rate of respondents. After having contacted and sent the information to the administrative head in Sør-Trøndelag county, a legal team assessed the proposed survey. They required more information and guarantees of data protection, beyond what had been assured by the NSD. Subsequently, further information regarding the authenticity and legality of the project was given through the head of the University of Bergen's Department of Comparative Politics. This information was then also included to all who received the survey itself. All letters, and the form in which the project information was conveyed to the respondents is provided in the master thesis' appendix (Myksvoll 2018, 110-9).

4.1.2 Testing the survey

Following recommendations in survey-methodological literature, the survey was tested prior to distribution (Presser, et al. 2004). As the survey was designed for a very specific target population, the rationale was that, being ‘targets’ of the reform, the regional bureaucrats might have information, thoughts or preferences they considered relevant that was not covered in the survey’s first version. To address this, a team in the Hordaland County administration tested the survey, which yielded valuable insights and resulted in some revisions.

4.1.3 Distribution and response

The survey was distributed to 3628 administrators between 22nd and 25th November 2017. This three-day interval took place as some of the administrative heads I had previously contacted desired an extra day or two to assess the project information and to inform their employees of the coming survey. Accompanying the link to the survey itself was additional information such as the purpose of the survey and the research project, estimated length (\approx 10 minutes), data treatment and that participation was voluntary. No incentives were provided to increase participation, but those who had not responded to the initial email received two reminders at two-week intervals. The data collection completed 16 January 2018.

A total of 1301 bureaucrats fully completed the survey, giving a response rate of just under 36%. At the county level, response rates varied from 25% to 48%. Removing missing values when conducting analyses reduced the no. of observations somewhat but retained above 30% overall. Though a decent response rate, nonresponse was, as expected, a significant issue, as roughly two thirds did not participate. The reason for this varied from technical issues (survey script not functioning on the respondent’s web browser) to being away at the time of receiving the survey, or that the regional government websites were not up to date regarding their employee contact information. Though nonresponse bias is a nontrivial challenge for those conducting survey research (Blom, et al. 2017). Having tested the data for such bias after its collection, I have found no empirical evidence of significant differences between respondents and non-

respondents that has led me to assume the data is unnaturally skewed (Myksvoll 2018, 40).

4.1.4 Construct validity

Making sure the questions accurately measured the concepts intended is a fundamentally important aspect of any survey (Fowler Jr. 1995, Groves, et al. 2009, 50-1).

Among the survey questions that are included as explanatory variable sin the thesis' papers, two variables stand out as potentially causing issues of interpretive incongruence between researcher and respondents:

To what degree are these factors important to you regarding the new county structure and governance system Norway receives through the regional reform?

Streamlining / Reduce bureaucracy

- Unimportant
- Somewhat unimportant
- Neutral
- Somewhat important
- Very important
- Unsure

Increased regional self-rule

- Unimportant
 - Somewhat unimportant
- Neutral
- Somewhat important
- Very important
- Unsure

In short, the notions of bureaucracy and self-rule can have multiple meanings. Reducing bureaucracy can be taken to mean a reduction of administrative personnel, or a reduction of bureaucratic processes (red tape). Self-rule can mean the extent to which a government can exercise its authority independently, or the extent of its competences.

Given the large number of individuals receiving the survey, it is not unreasonable to suspect a somewhat varied understanding among the respondents to these concepts. Such a varied understanding can be measured by the variables' standard deviation. Neither displayed significantly higher standard deviation than other variables, or to such an extent that I have considered this to be an issue empirically. In other words, the understanding of these concepts among the respondents has appeared satisfyingly congruent for us to use the variables as explanatories without strong construct validity concerns.

4.1.5 A point allocation method

A core part of the survey was to measure the administrators' preferences for the allocation of government competences across the national, regional, and local government levels. Sixteen policy areas were chosen, based on three primary sources: (1) the county government's stated preferences to the central government, (2) existing research on regional politicians' competence preferences (Lie 2006), and (3) international comparison by a paper draft (which has since been published, see Tatham & Bauer (2021)) (Myksvoll 2018). The original sixteen policies were reduced to nine in the thesis paper, as by that point the government had decided which competences to regionalise. The approach to measure the administrators' preferences were designed as a 9-point allocation system, mimicking Tatham and Bauer's (2021) design.

You are now given 9 points to distribute between three administrative levels in Norway – local, regional, and national. The more points you give to a level, the more important it is to you that that policy area is located at that level. For example: Climate and environment: 7 to state, 2 to county, 0 to municipality. 9 points are distributed in each case, meaning 9 for health, 9 for environment, etc. Be aware that the more points distributed to a level, the more this entails costs and financing, as well as rights and responsibilities to that level. If you are unsure, put 3 points in each level.

Primary healthcare service

- National
- Regional
- Local

Specialist healthcare service

- National
- Regional
- Local

Climate and environment

- National
- Regional
- Local

Education – elementary

- National
- Regional
- Local

Education – secondary

- National
- Regional
- Local

Education - higher

- National
- Regional
- Local

Agriculture

- National
- Regional
- Local

Roads and transportation

- National
- Regional
- Local

Cultural Institutions

- National
- Regional
- Local

Cultural arrangements and grant management

- National
- Regional
- Local

Sports

- National
- Regional
- Local

Labour market (incl. NAV)³⁴

- National
- Regional
- Local

Immigrant Integration

- National
- Regional
- Local

Regional planning

- National
- Regional
- Local

³⁴ The Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration

Community development

- National
- Regional
- Local

Area planning

- National
- Regional
- Local

The challenges to this part of the survey were more technical than conceptual. Limitations of the SurveyXact tool made it impossible to add an “unsure” option to each policy area. Moreover, the respondents could not skip past this section without allocating any points. This created a risk that respondents who were unsure of their point allocation would simply put 9 points in one level and 0 in the others, which, given a large enough number of unsure respondents, would significantly skew the data. To address this, I included in the preceding text that they should try their best, but if they really were unsure, allocate three points to each level.

Once the data was collected, a notable clustering around the 3-point range could be observed in many policy areas. It is difficult to ascertain whether this clustering was due to many respondents’ lack of opinion, or if it reflected their actual preferences. There were significant variations around the 3-point area despite this clustering, making probable both some uncertainty among the respondents, but also a genuine preference to place 3 points equally in several policy areas. The latter point is further strengthened when considering the types of policy areas in which this occurred. These were mostly policies where there indeed are several shared competences and responsibilities across the local, regional, and national levels.

4.1.6 Analysing the data

The survey data had gone through an extensive though mostly descriptive analysis in my master thesis prior to commencing the analyses in this thesis’ papers. Hence, we (co-authors and I) knew some considerations had to be made of the data. The most significant of which was the possibility that the administrators’ preferences varied according not only to their individual characteristics, but also to higher-level variables. The administrators are, after all, clustered together in their respective counties. With the county governments’ preferences toward both amalgamation and competences varying,

there was a theoretical possibility that this variance would also be present among the administrations.

Indeed, this was found to be the case in paper 1. Just under 10% of the administrators' preferences toward coerced county amalgamation is explained by their county clustering. This induced us to conduct a multilevel regression. Additionally, as the outcome variable takes the form of an ordinal variable, a multilevel ordinal logistic regression was run, so that our findings display the administrators' probability (in odds ratio terms) of supporting coerced amalgamation either increasing or reducing depending on the explanatory variable.

The first step of analysis in the second paper was to assume such a clustering regarding the administrators' competence preferences also. However, intraclass correlation tests revealed strikingly low levels of group variation. On average, regional clustering (again using county as the grouping variable) accounted for only 1.2% of the administrators' preferences toward regionalisation of competences in the nine selected policy areas. Though a significant drop from the group variation on the amalgamation question, it was not too surprising after having observed an indication of this in my master thesis. I compared competence preferences among administrators' preferences in each policy area and each county and found a strikingly high level of congruence among them (Myksvoll 2018, 53). Thus, with low levels of intraclass correlation and discrete outcome variables, I deemed a series of simple single-level OLS-regression analysis as sufficient.

4.2 Interviews of county governors

The data utilised to study the county governors' municipal amalgamation proposals consists of 17 in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted by my co-supervisor, professor Yngve Flo in the spring of 2017, for the research project of which this thesis is also a part. The first interview took place 17th March, the last took place 2nd May. The interviews were semi-structured, with a total of 47 questions covering six broader topics: (1) interpretation of instructions, and reform conditions at the national level; (2) local

processes; (3) the governor's role in the reform; (4) the proposals; (5) processes after proposals were submitted, and (6) status of the reform at the national level.

In Buskerud, the interview included both the county governor as well as the process facilitator the governors appointed to support local processes. In Agder, the interview also included the assistant governor, as the County Governor institutions of Aust-Agder and Vest-Agder merged a year prior. The assistant governor was also included in Møre og Romsdal, though no institutional mergers took place there.³⁵

After conducting the interviews, a team of research assistants transcribed the data, leading to some variance in the way in which they were transcribed. Additionally, they were transcribed in both Bokmål and Nynorsk, the two Norwegian written languages. Together, these variations made earlier attempts of quantitative text analysis more challenging and was subsequently abandoned in favour of the comparative qualitative content analysis in the final paper version. A thematic categorisation (Kuckartz 2019) of the governors' rescaling preferences is built from this analysis, based on the framework of the rescaling logics. The categorisation of the county governors was based on the degree to which the governors expressed preferences regarding municipal structures as reflecting the logic of functionalism or the logic of community/identity.

4.2.2 Interpreting interview data

The interviews were conducted after the governors had made their proposals to the government, but before the parliament had made its decisions. There is both a strength and a potential problem regarding this timing. A strength is that the governors lacked certain knowledge of the LGR's outcome and thus could not refer to the parliament's follow-up of the governors' proposals. A shortcoming, however, is that the governors could use local outcomes to legitimise their responses during the interview, rather than base their answers, such as interpretations of core elements of the reform (voluntarism, professionalism, instructions) on their own preferences and judgements. Because of this, there is, as is often the case with the interview method, an important consideration to

³⁵ At the beginning of the LGR, there were 18 County Governors. At the time of data collection, these were reduced to 17 by the Agder merger, a first step in merging the institutions to reflect the new regional map resulting from the RGR. In 2019, they were reduced to 10.

make regarding the researcher's and interviewee's roles. This has to do with one's perspective on the interview, as described by Kvale (in Ritchie and Lewis (2003, 139)): that of the interviewer (and researchers) as a 'miner', or a 'traveller'.

The 'miner' perspective sees the interview as a method for uncovering knowledge that is already given, ripe for picking, "uncontaminated by the miner". This view relates to a positivist notion (Ryen 2002, 35-7) in that the knowledge sought is objective and unchanged by the interviewer's presence. In this sense, the county governors had underlying values and preferences regarding issues of functionalism and community/identity, such as pre-existing interpretations of the voluntarism principle, that would affect the type of municipal amalgamations they were willing to propose. When asked to reflect on these issues, the governors merely had to state their 'timeless' preferences and interpretations, independently of local outcomes.

The 'traveller' perspective lies more in a constructionist or postmodern camp, in which "reality is constructed in the interview" (Ritchie and Lewis 2003, 140). In this sense, during the interview, the governors would "construct the reality" as they saw it, when other factors may have played into their decisions. An interview is, after all, a 'look back in time', and the governors' amalgamation proposals were made prior to the interviews. When faced with questions regarding those proposals, they then were able to construct a reality to legitimise their decisions.

While these possible ways of interpreting the data could be discussed at greater length, I leave it here as theoretical considerations. When conducting data analyses, one must make choices. In this regard, I analysed the governors' arguments closer to a positivist than constructionist understanding. But reflections of this data must still hold the door open to the possibility of a constructionist-type self-legitimising frame. My point is therefore to acknowledge alternative ways of understanding the governors' recollections, and in so doing, demonstrate at a more general level the challenges surrounding qualitative data analysis.

4.3 Operationalising theories into measurements

Chapters 2 and 3 described and discussed rescaling and rescaling logics as the thesis’ overarching theoretical framework, and the LGR and RGR processes. To understand the LGR and RGR processes, the logics of rescaling were translated into measurements as both attitudinal and factual data. Attitudinal measurements pertaining to the two logics of rescaling consisted most crucially of the three framing variables, which were presented in the survey as the following:

To what degree are these factors important to you regarding the new county structure and governance system Norway receives through the regional reform?

Increased regional self-rule³⁶	Improved regional public services	Reducing bureaucracy
Very important	Very important	Very important
Somewhat important	Somewhat important	Somewhat important
Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Not very important	Not very important	Not very important
Not at all important	Not at all important	Not at all important
Unsure	Unsure	Unsure

Additionally, the respondents were asked to consider their level of attachment to their respective counties on a 10-point scale:

On a scale from 1 (no attachment) to 10 (very strong attachment), to what degree do you feel an attachment to the region you are employed in?

- 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Unsure

Thus, among the variables of main interests in papers 1 and 2, two variables consisted of measurements of the logic of functionalism (*improved regional public services* and *reducing bureaucracy*), and two variables consisted of measurements pertaining to the logic of community/identity (*increased regional self-rule* and *attachment*).

Among control variables, several other measurements were also included. These were predominantly focused on scale effects at the regional level (county GDP, population, and unemployment level). But it also included one variable that could be

³⁶ The self-rule variable is in paper 1 titled autonomy.

considered a proxy of regional identities: the broader country region (east, south, west, middle, north).

In paper 3, translating rescaling logics into observable instances of rescaling preferences was more challenging due to two factors. The first was the nature of the data as qualitative. The second was the fact that the county governors were not asked questions directly related to “logics of rescaling”. However, several of the questions posed allowed me to observe such preferences indirectly. Examples of these questions includes the description of the LGR itself. Many governors expressed a strong support for the reform according to functional necessities. Another question concerned the governors’ interpretation of the principle of voluntarism. The governors were almost split in half on whether this principle was positive or negative for municipal governance and central-local relations. The supplementary appendix of paper 3 includes all interview questions. Questions that contributed to this analysis are highlighted. An extensive review of the data was therefore seen as necessary but also sufficient to analyse the governors’ preferences as pertaining to the rescaling logics in the LGR process.

5. Synopsis of papers

The thesis' research agenda is to understand preferences and decision-making among regional administrators involved in two historic rescaling reforms. I have approached this through the theoretical framework of the rescaling literature, which interprets both why such reforms take place, but also the reforms' effects. By using the rescaling literature as a theoretical framework, I extend the literature to the processes by which rescaling reforms are taken forward, and the ways administrative actors behave during such reforms. Each paper's focus is distinct but related to the thesis' overarching research agenda. In this chapter, the papers' findings are discussed to contribute to the main research question.

In paper 1, I discuss why functional explanations are suited (better than the community/identity logic) to explain support for coerced territorial amalgamation.

In paper 2, I shed light on the way the community/identity logic (rather than the logic of functionalism) explains support for regionalisation of competences. I also discuss why some policy areas are more strongly predicted by the community/identity logic than others.

In paper 3, I discuss the way we can understand the county governors' roles and rationales for approaching their instructions to propose municipal amalgamations, emphasising why and how they approached them so differently.

5.1 Understanding Bureaucratic Support for Coerced Institutional Change

How can we understand regional administrative preferences toward coerced territorial reform?

A wave of municipal amalgamation reforms has taken place in Europe since roughly 2008 (Swianiewicz 2018). Governments have sought to improve the subnational public sector through amalgamations, to reap scale and scope effects. But changing the territorial architecture of government is fraught with potential pitfalls. Altering territorial borders is to upend established communities and identities tied to those

territories. If imposed from above, such reforms may also invoke questions related to challenges for (local) democracy and legitimacy of decision-making processes. Coercion from above also challenges notions of local self-rule and has been claimed to be at odds with individual rights, and human rights too (Erlingsson, Ödalen and Wångmar 2020).

A recurring topic in political discourses regarding RGR has been the degree to which central authorities could and should overrule local amalgamation preferences. Earlier regional reform attempts did not overrule counties' decisions (see section 3.2.1). In the RGR, central authorities were willing to compel amalgamations. The 1995 principle of voluntarism did not apply to the county level. Consequently, as many counties were amalgamated against their stated preferences, meant that a significant part of the RGR involved coercion. This resulted in a highly contentious reform which has been contested on regional and national political levels by policymakers and citizens alike. Our (myself and cowriters Tatham and Fimreite) curiosity for this contentiousness was the motivator for the first paper. In short, we ask: what influences administrative preferences toward such a controversial process? And perhaps most interestingly, what increases support for it? By studying attitudes and preferences toward the perhaps single most controversial element of the LGR and RGR – the forced merger of counties – we shed light on the determinants for support towards a highly contested policy.

The administrators are largely sceptical toward coerced county amalgamations. This is to be expected, given the nature of such a process, and the negative connotations it carries. Analysing various drivers for their preferences reveals that both functional and community logics matter, but in opposite directions. Functional arguments of reducing bureaucracy increase the regional bureaucrats' support for forced mergers, while territorial attachment reduce it. It should also be noted that the substantive effect of the attachment is weaker than the functional, positive effects. Though higher attachment makes administrators more averse towards coerced amalgamation, the factors that make them less averse are much stronger.

This reinforces the role of the two rescaling logics and the way they were mobilised as arguments for or against the reforms in the Norwegian setting. It is also interesting to note that ideological placement plays a role by observing that right-wing

bureaucrats are more positive to forced mergers. This is explained through a “logic of discipline” (Roberts 2011), which may relate itself more generally to governance and rescaling preferences along the traditional political left-right-axis. By far the strongest predictor for coerced amalgamation support comes from the question of voluntary amalgamations. Administrators who support the latter, are roughly twice as likely to support the former, even though the two variables’ distributions are almost mirror images (they are positive to voluntary and negative to forced amalgamations). This finding further indicates a picture that administrators, in supporting territorial rescaling, do so from a functionalistic position. If you support the one you are less averse to the other. It is then no longer about process, but about outcome; to merge or not to merge, that is instead the question.

Taken together, the support for county mergers seems mostly functionally driven. Functional arguments for territorial rescaling often point to effects of such rescaling, a common measurement of which is increased administrative efficiency. Indeed, the “reducing bureaucracy” variable’s effect lends itself to support this. Descriptively, a majority of the administrators are in favour of the functionalistic framing arguments. Framing territorial rescaling as a functional endeavour, in other words, would mobilise regional administrators’ support. This is interesting when considering how functional arguments were mobilised to implement the two reforms. It indicates that administrators who perceive it important to alleviate functional pressures are more likely to support such measures even if the means by which such measures are implemented is controversial. However, the administrators’ support is not totally unconditional.

High levels of county attachment reduce support for coerced mergers. This is not surprising. The desire to increase regional autonomy – a second core argument in the community/identity logic – also shows a negative effect, but it is not significant. There is therefore something about the RGR process which is invoked by feelings of attachment but does not speak to the issue of regional autonomy as forcefully among the administrators. A plausible explanation is that while attachment derives from socially (and territorially) constructed shared notions, levels of a subnational unit’s autonomy is politically determined. And in a unitary system, it is determined by the central government. The lack of judicial protection from top-down institutional reform may thus

make the question of self-rule moot once a coerced process is already underway. Feelings of attachment, on the other hand, are less procedurally bound to such reforms. It is constructed and reinforced over time and represents, in the face of territorial alterations, a conservative stance against changes to a geographic unit one feels connected to.

5.1.1 Voluntary mergers – the alternative process

The chief focus of the paper was to determine the drivers of coerced merger preferences. But voluntary county mergers were also a part of the RGR. To reflect this, the survey contained questions on both forced and voluntary mergers, making it possible to study this process as well. The voluntary mergers were much less controversial. Though our curiosity mainly revolved around preferences regarding contentious processes, we included in the paper's online supplementary appendix some analyses of the voluntary mergers. These were run through the same regression models as in the paper.

In the case of forced mergers, the main sources of support have to do with bureaucracy reduction, support for voluntary mergers, right-wing ideology, and lack of attachment to one's region. In the case of voluntary mergers, the main sources of support have to do with increasing regional autonomy, reducing bureaucracy, and support for forced mergers.

Forced merger preferences are thus activated by more (and some different) cleavages among the regional administrators than voluntary mergers. Greater levels of attachment reduce their likelihood of supporting forced mergers, but it has no impact on voluntary mergers. Their ideological placement also does not affect voluntary merger preferences, which indicates that political cleavages do not matter where process is not contested. We can understand this to mean that political differences – and the logic of discipline that separate them – do not matter when the process of territorial rescaling is bottom-up. That support for increasing regional autonomy increases support for voluntary mergers (but not forced mergers) may be due to voluntary mergers being seen as a manifestation of self-determination on the counties' part, whereas forced institutional reform contradicts such principles.

Territorial rescaling also takes several forms, depending on their design. One significant dimension is for territorial amalgamation to take a voluntary or coerced form. In this paper, I have shed light on the determinants for regional administrators' support for the coerced amalgamation of counties. This was a hotly contested aspect of the RGR, and has been a continuing topic of political debate, including during the 2021 general election. But support from administrators, as direct stakeholders, may be gained through functional legitimisation of such contentious processes.

5.2 Reserved but Principled – and Sometimes Functional: Explaining Decentralisation Preferences Among Regional Bureaucrats

How can we understand regional administrative preferences toward competence decentralisation?

The numerous (theorised) effects of territorial rescaling are perhaps best captured by the term *scale effects*. But accompanying effects of scale through amalgamation, one may also seek to reap *scope effects*. Creating larger territorial units allows for decentralisation to accompany amalgamation (Swianiewicz, Gendzwil and Zardi 2017). This means public services may be tailored more specifically to the needs and demands of citizens, which become more homogeneous at disaggregated levels, thus increasing their quality (Saito 2008). Pressures from below to rescale competences downwards can be explained by arguments pertaining to the community/identity logic (Hooghe, Marks and Schakel 2010, Hooghe and Marks 2016, Tatham and Bauer 2021, Askim, Klausen, et al. 2016), though can be argued for in more functional terms also (Oates 1972). The second paper in my thesis contributes with further investigations into drivers of decentralisation preferences. Specifically, it does so in a setting where regional demands for empowerment were close to non-existent. Rather, the desire to regionalise competences stemmed from the central level. Hence, the second paper contributes to established literature by introducing a setting where decentralisation is pressured from above; what then, are the preferences among those at the receiving end of this?

With the first paper exploring amalgamations, it was natural to include the regionalisation of competences as a subject of analysis. Though the final list of tasks and responsibilities that was decentralised was substantially reduced from earlier intentions and proposals (see section 3.2.2, table 6), a significant number of tasks were transferred to the county governments. The survey included a point allocation system in which the competence preferences among the administrators could be measured. The point allocation included the local, regional, and national levels. Having included all levels in my master thesis, and given the overarching theme and research question, I focused exclusively on the regional level in this paper.

5.2.1 Analysing the data

Nine out of an original sixteen policy areas in the survey (Myksvoll 2018, 27) were selected for analysis, based on the government's decentralisation decision (see section 3.3.2, table 6, and section 4.1.5). I ran all nine policies through the same regression models to compare how they are each activated by various preference drivers.³⁷

I decided to individually analyse the nine policy areas because the Norwegian regional governance system can be characterised as multipurpose. Norwegian regions have a set number of tasks and responsibilities that fall within specific policy areas. In this respect, the Norwegian multilevel system resembles that of type I in the multilevel governance literature (Hooghe and Marks 2003). Hence, it makes more sense to study the policies individually. This way, we can observe whether and how they are each activated by certain explanatories among the regional administrators. Are some policies seen as more fit for regionalisation than others? Do the administrators see certain policies fit for regionalisation due to certain explanations, while others are explained in some other way?

A central finding in the paper is self-rule and attachment are the two most prevalent predictors for regionalisation support. Though the two variables measure

³⁷ In the paper's supplementary appendix, I also included index and factor analyses. This was primarily due to feedback from reviewers, but I had also conducted such analyses prior to receiving the feedback. The index analysis did not produce any significant findings that could convey more information than the individual approach. The factor analysis returned unsatisfying and unreliable results. This is discussed at greater length in the paper's appendix.

different concepts, they find a commonality which is effectively derived from the logic of community/identity. There is as such a potential relationship between the two variables. Subnational territorial attachments may motivate a desire for increased authority to that territory (as empirically demonstrated in this paper). But it may also lead to a desire for increased independence from higher authorities. The possibility of a moderating effect of attachment on self-rule was therefore tested through two-way interaction regressions. No change in the magnitude of the self-rule variable's effect on any of the policy areas was observed, leaving the explanatory variables' direct effects on the dependent variables as the main subject of analysis.

5.2.2 Understanding the findings

Regional administrators are largely moderate in their desires for increased responsibilities. Some factors increase their support for it, while very rarely reducing it.³⁸ Though the focus is primarily on factors pertaining to the logics of rescaling, the administrators' formal and informal positions within the administration also shows some degree of explanatory power.³⁹ However, the strongest mobilisers of regionalisation support are found in the community/identity logic. In short, administrators who want more self-rule, also want more to rule over, not 'just' more independent exercise of authority. The desire to increase their portfolio of responsibilities is also often driven by their regional attachment. The higher the administrator's attachment to their county, the more they want to empower the regional level.

The support for competence rescaling is in other words driven by issues of community and identity more than functionality. Indeed, the functional frame of improving the quality of regional public services only affects support for increasing regionalisation of secondary education competences. This resonates with related literature in that policy preferences are shaped by collective identity and the want and

³⁸ A negative correlation is observed only between the administrators' seniority and the immigrant integration policy area.

³⁹ The administrator's rank and seniority became a factor of interest in early analyses. These variables did show some degree of explanatory power, but less so in terms of the number of policy areas affected compared to rescaling logics framework. I therefore leave the discussion of these variables to the paper itself, and instead focus on the logics of rescaling here.

ability for a territorial group to exercise authority within its own borders (Tatham, Hooghe og Marks 2021). The findings show that though they are quite reserved to begin with, the county governments' managerial portfolio could – by the administrators' assessment – be widened, and that this is reasoned mostly through the logic of community and identity.

As with the first paper, noninfluential factors are also telling. The administrators' preferences are not functionalistic in assessing the potential for widening their own managerial portfolio. Tasks and responsibilities at the regional level, in other words, are not viewed as dependent on functional necessities. Instead, locating more tasks to the regional level seems more associated with increasing the status of the county government (as well as a potential increase in status that would entail for some in the upper echelons of the administrations' hierarchies, which can explain why the administrator's rank sometimes also increase support for regionalisation).

Analysing the policies individually and through the same regression models allows for valuable nuance. It allows us to observe how various explanatory affect support for regionalisation in some areas and not in others. So why are some policies affected, while others are not? Desires for increasing regional self-rule positively affects all policy areas. Higher levels of attachment, however, increase regional administrators' support for regionalisation in *secondary education, roads and transport, community development, climate and environment, and immigrant integration*. It does not affect *cultural institutions, cultural grants, agriculture, or regional planning*.

Though a factor analysis failed to produce any meaningful dimensionality between the policy areas, we may still attempt to classify the policies according to this effect divergence. I propose two. The first relates to the administrators' perception of the policies as 'visible' responsibilities. The second has to do with their wider regional governance preferences, or a desire to retain competences they already possess. These need not be mutually exclusive.

Firstly, a possible cleavage between the two groups of policies affected (and not) by attachment, is that those that are affected are policy areas which contain 'visible' responsibilities and services; in other words, there is a 'direct' line between the management of these policies, and the county's citizens. Secondary education regards

pupils, their admittance to schools, and the availability and quality of education in the county. Roads and transport have to do with accessibility for car owners, commuters, users of public transportation, and the maintenance of road networks. In short, the ability for citizens to get to their destination efficiently. This can also be said to be the case with community development, climate and environment, and immigrant integration. In their respective ways, they all contain responsibilities and services that directly and visibly engage and involve segments of the population down to the individual level.

Meanwhile, responsibility for cultural institutions and grant management, regional planning, and agriculture, involves more institutional and indirect, not-as-visible services, for instance funding of cultural institutions, allotment of funds to cultural events, development plans in a specific region of the county, or agronomy funding and competences related to agricultural sectors.

Secondly, the policies that are affected by the attachment variable include competences that make up a significant portion of the county governments' responsibilities. Indeed, secondary education and roads and transport (as of 2018) make up roughly 80 percent of the county governments' expenditures (Hagen, Knudsen, et al., *Regionreformen - Desentralisering av oppgaver fra staten til fylkeskommunene* 2018, 23). In this sense, high levels of attachment also contribute to a desire to retain the most important competences the counties (and administrators) already possess. Contextualising this interpretation to the wider governance structure and reform setting, it could also be a manifestation of the county government's placement as located in between the local and national levels, and thereby be an expression of confirming the importance of the regional level. This can further be emphasised in a historical context. The county governments have faced legitimacy challenges and the public has struggled to understand and know what the county government's portfolio consists of (Selstad 2003, 74). Indeed, the legitimacy of the county governments have been shown to be dependent on the services they offer (Baldersheim 2000).

Though the decentralisation of competences to the regional level was watered down compared to earlier proposals (see section 3.3.2, tables 5 and 6), the prospects of extending the number of tasks located with the county governments formed an important aspect of the RGR. Taken together, papers 1 and 2 contribute to the overarching research

question by fully examining regional administrators' preferences toward the rescaling contained in the RGR.

5.3 Discretionary Manoeuvrability: The Logics Behind Administrative Shaping of Territorial Rescaling

How can we understand administrative decision-making regarding territorial reform?

What are preferences, if not the precursor to decision-making? And once given decision-making capacities, what link do we see between preferences and decisions among administrators? The third paper analyses this link. It moves from the county governments' administrations to the county governors, and their role in proposing municipal amalgamations in the LGR. Though they formally represent the state government, the existence of the County Governor is a manifestation of a representation of the local level's interests. In this sense, the county governor is a state's representative, but also a local watchdog (Flo 2014). When rescaling interests between the central and local levels 'collide', as they often did, the preferences the county governors had concerning municipal amalgamations became an important influencer of the future municipal structure. The length the county governors were willing to go in proposing amalgamation, in other words, would be a function of the preferences mobilised by the two rescaling logics.

Figure 5 (section 3.2.2) displays the governors' proposed municipal amalgamations next to the amalgamations that the national parliament decided to implement. Two distinct observations can be made from it. The first is that the amalgamations varied significantly in scope and form between the counties. Secondly, there is a large overlap between the two maps, demonstrating that the governors' proposals were largely followed. This demonstrates that the governors were important contributors to the new municipal map. The variation in the governors' proposals, in other words, became an opportunity for analysing not only administrative rescaling preferences, but also how such preferences affect decision-making.

The governors all claimed that due to functional pressures, territorial changes to the municipalities were necessary, or outright inevitable, either during the LGR, or at some point in the future. Seeing a necessity to reform local structures and receiving instructions to undertake a review and proposing role to precisely that end, one would perhaps suspect the governors to propose changing the municipal map more widely than they (overall) did. The fact that they did not reveals a heterogeneous approach to their instructions and that other factors played into their decisions.

The central government's desire to reform was chiefly motivated by functional effects. At the local level, questions self-rule, local democracy, cultures, identities, and attachment to existing structures arose, often resulting in decisions against amalgamation by local governments. In other words, whereas the logic of functionalism came to be a representation of the central government's interests, the community/identity logic often expressed local interests. In effect, proposing an amalgamation, especially against local preferences, was to decide in favour of one logic or the other.

The governors were given a mandate with a wide discretionary room. This allowed for diverging interpretations and proposals whilst still retaining loyalty to the central government. An important cleavage among the governors became to lean on the instructions as given by the central government (that is, the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation), or the national parliament's decision to base the LGR on the principle of voluntarism. Functional criteria assessed from above thus faced local self-determination. The degree to which the governors would propose amalgamations of a coerced nature thus correlated with the degree to which they leaned on arguments of functionalism.

Relating the governors' rationales concerning the amalgamation proposals they produced to the rescaling logics framework, a threefold distinction between them could be seen. This distinction was based on the extent to which the governors argued based on functional needs, or on adhering to local interests. It manifested by the governors' willingness to utilise the discretionary room available to them, and to use that to propose coerced amalgamations. The willingness in question was whether they would propose new municipal structures that went against local interests. Most noted the necessity for

reform based on functional pressures, but not all followed this up with proposing amalgamations. Despite an admitted need to reform local structures, some governors held that top-down coercion would go against values of local self-rule and democracy, and risk overlooking local cultures, communities, identities, and feelings of attachment, making top-down coercion untenable. Amalgamations could in this way only be functional if they were also legitimate. This legitimacy, they argued, had to come from below.

When a group of administrators receive instructions to carry out the same task and are given a wide mandate in which to do so, it should perhaps not surprise us that they will interpret those instructions in somewhat different ways. The source(s) of such different interpretations can be identified based on the researcher's informative framework, of which a wide variety of theoretical factors exist (see section 1.2). It must be noted that reducing the governors' decisions to rescaling logic preferences is to reduce complex human behaviour to a few variables. Among other things, it also omits more traditional explanatories of administrative behaviour (socialisation, career experience, etc.). Indeed, early analyses of the governors' proposals tested such factors as possible influencers. Most notably their career background (political vs. administrative, and in the case of the former, government vs. opposition party affiliation). No correlations were ever observed. I therefore focused mainly on the logics of rescaling as a framework to understand their arguments and proposals.

The final paper contributes to the overarching research question by analysing not only preferences, but also understanding those preferences with respect to the decisions the administrators made. It also contributes by including the LGR into the thesis.

6. Concluding reflections

In this thesis, I have analysed administrative behaviour through the theoretical lens of the rescaling framework. I have done so with the Norwegian Local and Regional Government Reforms as typical, yet distinct cases. What, then, can the recent Norwegian reforms tell us of the wider rescaling phenomenon? The rescaling of territories and competences is an international phenomenon, occurring and recurring in waves across the developed world. The thesis' findings thus have implications beyond the Norwegian, the Nordic, and even the European scene. Though rescaling reforms' design can vary, such reforms are traditionally explained through two logics: functionalism and community/identity. I have analysed how those logics resonate within the administrative sphere, where such reforms are shaped, and from where their effects are intended to come.

The Norwegian case is as such an opportunity to learn more about administrative behaviour. It is an opportunity to learn more about how rescaling reforms materialise, and how they may be designed. It is an opportunity to learn more about how we may interpret rescaling, and how the logics of rescaling can inform us of various aspects of administrative involvement in the reform process. Indeed, by focusing on the administrative sphere involved with and in these historic reforms, it is the opportunity to see and study the administrator as a target, a shaper, and an implementor.

The rescaling of territories and competences involves significant changes to the institutional environment of the administrations in affected government units; administrators become targets of reform. Administrators serve important functions in the policy cycle, and can, through expertise and advice, or through decision-making capacities, contribute to influencing a policy's outcome; administrators become shapers of reform. Territorial and/or competence rescaling is often undertaken with the aim of achieving scale and scope effects in the administrative sphere. The extent to which such effects materialise thus in part depends on the administrators' support and willingness to accept the new institutions and making the new organisations work; administrators become implementors of reform.

How can we understand behaviour towards territorial and competence rescaling among regional administrators involved in such reforms?

This question has no one answer. Just as rescaling is a multifaceted concept, so are regional administrators' behaviour toward them. In short, it depends on the type and form of the rescaling in question.

Regional administrators' support for territorial consolidation, when coerced from above, increases when put through arguments of functionalism (and likewise reduces when put through arguments of community and identity). Some interesting information to further this finding was uncovered in the third paper. When asked where local support for reform most often and most strongly materialised, the county governors almost unanimously pointed to administrative leadership in the municipalities, who expressed the same functional concerns as the county governors. The conditions for support for county amalgamations among the county government administrators suggest this can also be said of the regional level. Territorial rescaling, in other words, in the absence of preference divergence, is a highly functional matter for administrators. Territorial amalgamation reforms are commonly legitimised through the logic of functionalism. If functional arguments resonate among administrators targeted by such amalgamation, they will be less averse to undergo reform, even if it is coerced from above.

Preferences for widening the regional level's managerial portfolio, is instead best captured by the logic of community and identity. Regionalisation is a form of regional empowerment, and the increased importance of the regional level follows it. The desire to increase one's 'own' government's importance should not be unexpected from politicians – now, it has been observed among administrators as well, driven by matters of community and identity.

Support for regional empowerment is, in other words, tied to their territorial attachment and the county government's ability to exercise its authority independently, to retain the responsibilities they already have, and to ensure the services they deliver are visible to the citizens. This can relate to a notion of legitimacy and status of the government one works in.

The distinction between the logic of functionalism and community/identity has been described as a distinction between questions of policy preferences and questions of polity preferences, respectively (Hooghe and Marks 2016, 2, Tatham, Hooghe og Marks 2021). But for administrators to support rescaling reform, the question of territory (or polity) has here been observed to be a matter of functionalism. The question of decentralisation (or policy) is a matter of community/identity.

All analyses in this thesis have been conducted with a primary eye on the conditions that *increase* administrators' support for the LGR and RGR. Given the thesis' findings, and the arguments for why it is important to understand preferences and behaviour among administrators, we may tweak the overall research question, and ask: If an institutional reform lacks support by the 'inhabitants' of that institution, to what degree can we expect the reform's intended effects to materialise? What can we expect of the reforms' legacies?

To understand this, we have to understanding the administrators' behaviour as contingent on the wider political and institutional environments. One obvious external factor is the 2021 September general election. During the two parliamentary periods 2013-2017 and 2017-2021, the political opposition has stated its commitment to reverse any amalgamations that local or regional governments desire. But should the 2021 election grant a parliamentary majority where parties taking this stance can form a government, how easy will that be? The LGR and RGR were fully implemented on January 1, 2020. The new territorial units' organisations and institutions have since then had over a year and a half to 'take roots'. Internal (read: administrative) adaptation to the new institutions, in other words, is an important factor to include, if we are to understand the ease with which one can return to a pre-reform institutional setup.

Government is a complex machinery. Territorial fragmentation, like amalgamation, involves much organisational and institutional restructuring. An expectation can therefore be made that if administrative resistance originally made amalgamation, implementation, and adaptation difficult, fragmentation will be more easily achievable. If, on the other hand, the administrations acknowledged functional needs to reform, and intended scale and scope effects are reached, it can make a 'break-up' process more difficult. If scale and/or scope effects did not materialise or has become

perceived as functionally untenable by not only politicians, but also administrators, it may make fragmentation easier.

The reforms' legacies, in other words, are affected by the rescaling logics' resonance within the institutions undergoing such restructuring and demonstrates why an administration's support is an important element for successful institutional reform. Whether functional effects will be reaped from the LGR and RGR is, however, yet to be seen. Such effects may take years to become observable and measurable. All the pro-reform actors can do in the meantime is hope no one will reverse the new structures before such effects (may) materialise.

The LGR and RGR materialised from functional thinking at the central level. The logic of community and identity diluted and impeded intended outcomes at the local and regional levels. Should a policy of fragmentation succeed the policy of amalgamation, it will stand as a testament to the strength and importance of the arguments pertaining to the community/identity logic where matters of rescaling are concerned. It will also serve to underline the importance of design and process when initiating a public sector reform.

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Reserved but Principled – and Sometimes Functional: Explaining Decentralisation Preferences Among Regional Bureaucrats

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Abstract

In recent decades, decentralisation measures have been implemented in most advanced democracies. While such reforms may be driven by subnational pressures and demands for empowerment, the central government usually has the deciding power to decentralise. Literature on regional preference has proliferated since the 1990s, though we know little of regional administrative preferences in relation to this process. As policy formulators and implementers, they are directly affected by dispersion of authority downwards, as it directly affects their organisational structures and portfolio of responsibilities. This article analyses decentralisation preferences among regional bureaucrats in Norway in the context of the 2015-2020 Regional Government Reform. Utilising an original survey and testing five explanations, the bureaucrats are generally reserved about taking on additional functions, with support for increasing their portfolio primarily explained by a principled motivation to increase regional autonomy, followed by feelings of regional attachment. Functional arguments also matter, though to a lesser extent. The bureaucrats' principled, rather than functional, attitude towards regionalisation deviates from theoretical premises of decentralisation literature, while also challenging more underlying notions of bureaucratic thinking, inviting further research into how these dynamics manifest themselves among members of the civil service.

Introduction

In most states today, competences – for instances a specific welfare service – are located at the government level where they are deemed best suited and most effective when provided to the citizens. A trend of regionalisation has been documented among most advanced democracies in the decades since 1950, with particular waves of reform in the 1970s and 1990s (Hooghe, Marks, & Schakel, 2010). Further regional empowerment has continued since then, accompanied by increased scholarly attention to the regional level. A common feature of this process has been the dispersion of competences downwards from the national level (and in some cases upwards from the local level). Such a reallocation of competences affects the administrative capacities of the government levels affected, through for instance, the reorganisation of budgetary and human resources. As their jobs consist of implementing and administering policies, political decisions and various forms of services, reforming their managerial portfolio makes regional administrations direct stakeholders in regionalisation reforms.

Upwards communication in the administrative chain of command, and the administrative-political contact at the upper echelons of a bureaucracy, is a (though not the only one) source of influence for policy formulation. In this regard, bureaucrats play important roles regarding not only policy

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implementation, but also its design, making it relevant and important to understand their reform motivations and preferences (Egeberg & Stigen, 2018). Bureaucrats' preference for certain kinds of tasks may have implications for how they respond to institutional reform. This is especially so when the design of the bureaucracy is altered, providing opportunities to shape their working environments (Gains & John, 2010, p. 456). Moreover, administrative resistance against structural reform can make implementation more difficult, and their post-reform working environments more uncertain (and vice versa). With reforms set to take place, do bureaucrats actually desire a broader portfolio of responsibilities, or do they prefer to preserve the status quo? And what factors explain such preferences?

With a documented trend of regional empowerment, particularly relating to institutional developments in the EU since the 1990s (Marks, 1993), scholars have sought to explain preferences of regional actors for a range of topics, and also developed models to explain these preferences. This literature has usually addressed topics related either to externalities, for instance regional preferences regarding the institutional arrangement of the supranational level (Tatham & Bauer, 2014b) or identifying drivers of preferences regarding norms of governance, such as what ought to be the government's role in the economy (Tatham & Bauer, 2015). It has to a lesser extent addressed preferences regarding regional institutions themselves, such as the role and scope of regional government, or attitudes towards regional institutional change.

This article seeks to address that. Utilising decentralisation theory and public administration literature, it explores Norwegian regional bureaucrats' preferences for the regionalisation of competences, plugging both a substantive and geographical gap by adding a Nordic setting to the literature, which thus far has been largely neglected.

In 2020, the Norwegian Regional Government Reform amalgamated 15 of 19 counties, forming 11 new regions, as well as transferring some new competences and administrative functions to the regional level. Initiated and implemented by the central government, and not explicitly driven by regional demands, this reform provides an opportunity to study decentralisation preferences among regional administrators outside an otherwise common setting in which such reforms are desired or demanded at the subnational level. While the attitudes of citizens and politicians towards the reform have been documented in both academic and non-academic literature, less is known about the regional bureaucrats, whose jobs, tasks, and positions were directly affected by the reform's outcome.¹

Utilising original survey data collected from Norwegian regional bureaucrats during the reform process, this article explores factors that affect their desire to increase the regional portfolio of responsibilities and competences in nine policy areas.

Overall, the regional bureaucrats do not display a great desire for large-scale regionalisation of competences, indicating instead a preference for (pre-reform) status-quo arrangements. Where a desire for regionalisation is observed, it is primarily driven by a principled rather than functional dynamics. Bureaucrats

desiring increased levels of autonomy, and those highly attached to their counties are largely positive towards widening the regional portfolio. This is also true, though to a lesser extent, for administrative elites. The bureaucrats' seniority does not matter much, and when it does, its effect is more ambivalent, representing the only case where they want fewer functions located at the regional level. While improving regional public service quality is considered highly desirable, it does not affect their regionalisation preferences. It is also unaffected by their attitudes towards increased regional autonomy, indicating an overall picture of bureaucrats driven more by principles of governance and logics of identity rather than arguments pertaining to functional effects. The relative importance of these two dynamics is somewhat surprising, challenging theoretical arguments for decentralisation as well as general notions of bureaucratic thinking.

The article is structured as follows: The next section briefly summarises the 2015-2020 Norwegian Regional Government Reform. Following this, the third section outlines theoretical expectations and hypotheses, before defining data collection and research designs in the fourth section. Results are then presented, followed by discussions of central findings, with concluding remarks. The article thus contributes to our empirical knowledge of administrative preferences, shedding light on the determinants of support towards downwards dispersion of competences.

The Norwegian Regional Reform

Since the mid-20th century, the territorial structure and competence portfolio of the Norwegian counties have been subject to debate, reforms and attempts at reforms. Although periodically, various central government-appointed commissions have stressed a need to reform, the outcome has usually been minor administrative responsibility transfers to or from the regional level.²

In 2013, the newly elected minority coalition government consisting of the Conservative and Progress parties initiated a municipal amalgamation reform, relying on the Liberal and Christian Democratic parties to secure a parliamentary majority. By creating larger municipal units, the government parties claimed the regional tier to be superfluous, preferring to abolish the county governments and transfer their functions to the local level. A parliamentary majority for the abolition of the regional level has historically been non-existent, however. Moreover, wanting to decentralise functions from the central level to the counties, the Liberal and Christian Democratic parties desired a similar reform of the regional level in exchange for backing the government's municipal reform.

The government agreed, and in 2015, the Minister of Local Government and Modernisation engaged the counties' elected officials to commence processes to determine their decentralisation and amalgamation preferences. Many counties held the former as conditional for accepting the latter. The counties' competence preferences ranged from broad and general policy areas to individual and specific administrative tasks and responsibilities, while also stressing the importance of retaining the competences they already held.

Since the 1970s, administrative reforms have reallocated competences both to and from the regional level – the most significant of which was the centralisation of hospital ownership and specialist healthcare services in 2002, which had until then grown to become the largest area of responsibility for the counties.³ Prior to the regional reform, the Norwegian counties' competences consisted of:

1. Secondary schools, including adult training and vocational education. This being the most significant policy area, amounting to roughly 47% of the county's expenses,
2. Public transport systems and county roads; following secondary education in significance, amounting to roughly 21% and 12% of the county's expenses, respectively,
3. Dental services,
4. Culture, including the management of lottery funds for sports facilities and cultural buildings as well as cultural heritage protection,
5. Environmental and water management authority, including allocation of fish farming licenses,
6. Regional research funds and innovation, and (7) Business and commerce related activities.

In addition to these, cross-sector and cross-level cooperation regarding the overall development and planning of the regional level also takes place.⁴

After the counties had expressed their decentralisation preferences, a government-appointed committee proposed a range of tasks to be transferred, which was summarised into five broad areas:

1. Commerce, Competence and Integration,
2. Culture and Cultural Heritage Protection
3. Climate, Environment and Natural Resources,
4. Health and Living, and
5. Roads and Transport.

After concluding hearings on the committee's report, the government issued a white paper laying out a list of functions they would transfer, which partly reflected those suggested by the committee. It also stipulated that further competences would be subject to review for decentralisation in the future. The government transferred functions within:

1. Business and Business-oriented Research,
2. Agriculture,
3. Roads, Transport and Related Infrastructure,
4. Competence and Integration,
5. Public Health,
6. Northern Norway (involving matters relating to the arctic area, and as such only applicable to the northern counties), and
7. Climate and Environment.

Competences subject to consideration in the future included:

1. Business and Business-oriented Research,
2. Competence and Integration,
3. Child Protective Services and
4. Culture

On 1 January 2020, the reform was implemented, amalgamating counties as well as transferring the competences. It is interesting to note that the reform was largely desired, initiated, designed, and implemented at the central level, without being grounded in regional desires. In fact, it was widely resisted at the regional level, largely due to the amalgamations, several of which happened against the counties' will. This created a context in which we may examine preferences towards regionalisation processes when they are not the result of subnational pressures, which has often been an important motivator and cause for regional reform elsewhere.

Theoretical Framework

Since the 1990s, theoretical and empirical literature relating to preferences of regional actors has proliferated. Consequently, scholars have developed models that capture the driving forces and logics behind the trend of the empowerment of regions (Bauer, 2006; Bauer, Pitschel, & Studinger, 2010; Gains & John, 2010; Studinger & Bauer, 2012; Tatham & Bauer, 2014a; 2014b).

This literature commonly views regionalisation as a consequence of subnational and supranational institutional developments, by for instance observing regional demands for control over power dispersion, or demands for having a greater say on supranational integration measures (Tatham & Bauer, 2014a; 2014b). However, the actual power to disperse authority away from the national level often rests with the national governments themselves (Tatham & Bauer, 2016).

Moreover, the Nordic regionalism debate draws on many similar arguments as those in other European countries, which were influenced by a growing institutionalisation of regional cooperation and integration since the 1990s. Among its core characteristics is an increased focus on the regional level as an arena for political decision-making (Baldersheim & Ståhlberg, 1999). To gauge the drivers of Norwegian regional bureaucrats' decentralisation preferences, therefore, a set of hypotheses are formed based on logics that have explained preference variation in other regions. These hypotheses combine decentralisation theory and public administration literature, utilising principles and functional aspects from both, to form an overarching view of how we should expect regional bureaucrats to respond to decentralisation measures.

Five Expectations

Descriptively, regional administrative preference literature has usually observed support for the status-quo, and no great desires to upend existing institutional arrangements and structures of governance. This is also found among Norwegian regional bureaucrats (Myksvoll 2018).

To assess the preferences among regional bureaucrats, the following section proposes five central explanatory factors. These have to do with theoretical and political motivations for decentralisation, the bureaucrats' positions within the administrations, and their feelings of regional territorial attachment.

Motivations to Decentralise

The underlying theoretical reasoning for undertaking subnational territorial and administrative reforms is usually focused on increasing both the subnational government's independent decision-making capacity, as well as improving its output (public service) quality. As functions are decentralised, it increases the autonomy of the subnational level, while public services become more tailored and suited to the needs of the citizens at the local levels. These logics largely find their origins in the works of Tiebout (1956) and Oates (1972) (Alibegović & Slijepčević, 2016, p. 54). More recently, scholars have operationalised the concept of such regional authority by constructing the Regional Authority Index (Hooghe, Marks, & Schakel, 2010), in which the region's *self-rule* consists not only of its competence portfolio, but more generally the regional government's capacities to exercise its authority independently of central government.

The desire to increase subnational autonomy has been an important driving force behind regional reforms across democratic regimes, as the notion of subnational autonomy has become a "panacea" – a popular principle of governance and a normatively justified policy with little room for criticism – since the 1970s (Saito, 2008).

This relates to the second rationale motivating decentralisation. As they become subject to political and administrative management closer to the citizens, public services are improved: a rationale drawing on the notion that in order to be as efficient and effective as possible, services should be delivered at the lowest level possible, so that they become better tailored to the needs of the citizens, who are more homogenous in their needs and interests at disaggregated levels (Saito, 2008; Tiebout, 1956).

Both of these motivations were expressed by the reform's political supporters.⁵ If we then put these arguments to regional bureaucrats as motivations to reform the regional level, how do they respond? Following general notions of bureaucratic pragmatic thinking (Aberbach, Putnam, & Rockman, 1981) and in keeping with the theoretical logics outlined above, we should expect that those who consider it important to increase regional autonomy – that is, the region's capacities for independent governance – and to improve regional public services, also support decentralisation measures.

H1.a: The more important regional bureaucrats consider *increasing regional self-rule* to be, the greater their desire to allocate competences to the regional level.

H1.b: The more important regional bureaucrats consider *improving public services* to be, the greater their desire to allocate competences to the regional level.

Professional Motivations

A central aspect of preference formation theory in the public administration literature relates to the professional motivations and self-interests of the individual bureaucrat.

These form important determinants regarding the preferences they have and/or decisions they make, be it on the role of government in the economy (Tatham & Bauer, 2015), the prospects of job security (Bauer, Pitschel, & Studinger, 2010), preferences when the design of their institution is altered (Gains & John, 2010) or decision-making behaviour generally (Egeberg & Stigen, 2018).

In other words, a bureaucrat's position is often held as a dominant and controlling factor for explaining their attitudes and behaviour (Yoo & Wright, 1994). These propositions may effectively be summarised in what has become known as "Miles' Law": where you stand depends on where you sit (Miles, 1978), and, when introducing this logic to decentralisation reform, effectively incorporates elements of the public choice literature and the budget-maximising premise of bureaucracies (Niskanen, 1971). While this premise has been challenged, and that senior and high-ranked bureaucrats instead may prefer smaller, elite bureaus rather than heading "heavily staffed, large budget but routine, conflictual and low status agencies" (Dunleavy, 1991, p. 202), empirical observations testing these assumptions among civil servants at the subnational level have found that such preferences depend on the type of task they want to undertake within the job they have (Gains & John, 2010). Moreover, the jury is still out on the explanatory power of these conflicting premises regarding subnational bureaucrats facing competence decentralisation.

The Regional Government Reform involved significant restructuring of the regional administrations, both in terms of their geographical location and organisational structure. Amalgamating administrative organisations and taking on a wider array of responsibilities creates a new "habitus" for the bureaus affected, in which individuals will seek to position themselves according to the values characterising the social and formal hierarchies within the new and enlarged bureaus.⁶

In this sense, the impact of structural reforms on the individual bureaucrat depends on their ability to navigate and position themselves within the administration, which in turn depends on the position they hold prior to the reform.

These logics also lean on the arguments that higher-ranked civil servants (1) have more frequent contact with the political sphere of government, and that (2) their 'overarching view' of the administration is more 'holistic' than that of the street-level bureaucrat's, thereby being able to see opportunities for altering or widening their institutions' managerial portfolio.

These logics may also apply to those without a formally higher rank than their colleagues, but with extensive experience in the administration. Based on these assumptions, the second set of explanatory tests the professional motivations of the bureaucrats in two distinct ways; through their seniority, and

their rank, assuming a relationship with decentralisation preferences in line with the budget-maximising model's premises.

H2.a: The higher the bureaucrat's *seniority*, the greater the desire to allocate competences to the regional level.

H2.b: The higher the bureaucrat's *rank*, the greater the desire to allocate competences to the regional level.

Theoretically, we should expect some level of correlation between these two factors, as higher-ranked members of the administration may also have greater seniority than their lower-ranked colleagues. To address this, issues of multicollinearity are empirically tested for in the data section.

Attachment

The last explanatory relates to the territorial dimension of regionalisation. Long-established territorially-based communities may create common feelings of identity or belonging, which may materialise as feelings of attachment, produced and reproduced through discourses relating to the territories and communities in question (Terlouw, 2016). This may produce demands for empowerment, cultivating a 'rise of regions' (Tatham & Mbaye, 2018).

This community logic, and its effect on increasing regional authority, may arise "because individuals prefer to choose rules who share their cultural/linguistic/political norms (...) where regional community is strong, one should find more regional authority" (Hooghe, Marks, & Schakel, 2010, p. 65). The territorial dimension of subnational empowerment has been documented as an important determinant in regionalisation literature, including regional elite preferences for competence allocation in the EU system (Tatham & Bauer, 2016).

As regional government employees, the regional bureaucrats are also members of the territorial communities in which they administrate, implement and provide services. Assuming a territorial attachment is present among the bureaucrats, this should be further strengthened by the fact that their daily work consists of managing and providing services on behalf of the regional level.

If one is strongly attached to one's territorial jurisdiction, one desires to strengthen the relative importance of that territory, in this case, through allocating more functions to it at the cost of the central level. Hence, bureaucrats strongly attached to the territory in which they administrate and implement policy, can be expected to want to increase the regional level's authority through a broadening of its managerial portfolio.

H3 – The stronger the feeling of *attachment* the bureaucrat has to their county, the greater the desire to allocate competences to it.

Data and Research Design

Original survey data collected between November 2017 and January 2018 captured a range of observables related to the bureaucrats' reform preferences.

Through the web-based tool SurveyXact, a total of 3628 county government employees in each county, excluding the capital Oslo, received a survey consisting of 41 questions by email.⁷ Of the recipients, 1239 responded in full, yielding a total response rate of 34%. Permission for the data collection was granted by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data's Data Protection Services, while the administrative leaders in each county were also made aware of the survey in advance. Those who had not responded after the initial distribution received two reminders at 2-week intervals. As a statistical dataset of reform preferences from all of Norway's county administrations, it is the first of its kind (Myksvoll, 2018).

To measure their decentralisation preferences, the respondents were given nine points to freely distribute between the local, regional and national government levels in nine policy areas (nine points to distribute in agriculture, nine points to distribute in climate and environment, and so on; a total of 81 points).⁸ The policy areas were chosen based on their prevalence in the reform as possible areas where regionalisation could take place.⁹ They were informed that the more points they allocated to a single level, the more it would entail costs and financing but also rights and responsibilities within that specific policy area. Table 1 summarises the respondent's point distribution to the regional level, and for contextual purposes also includes the number of county councils that desired competences within, or broader aspects of, each individual policy area when they made their preferences to the government.

Table 1. Summary of dependent variables

Policy Area	Min/Max	Mean (SD)	Median	Desired by (n/17 counties)
Agriculture	0/9	3.21 (1.81)	3	12
Climate and Environment	0/9	3.06 (1.47)	3	17
Community Development	0/9	3.67 (1.6)	3	11
Cultural Grants (Arrangements and Grant Management)	0/9	4.23 (1.85)	4	14
Cultural Institutions	0/9	3.57 (1.54)	3	9
Immigrant Integration	0/9	2.12 (1.37)	2	10
Regional Planning	0/9	5.9 (1.94)	6	8
Roads and Transport	0/9	3.82 (1.66)	3	15
Secondary Education ¹⁰	0/9	6.62 (2.2)	7	10

Descriptive summary statistics of regional bureaucrats' point allocation to the regional level. Nine points distributable in each of the policy areas. N = 1239 for all policy areas.

To measure their preferences regarding the importance of increasing regional self-rule and improving regional public services, the respondents answered on an ordinal scale ranging from 1: "not important" to 5: "very important". The position-based variables were captured by the respondents' seniority in terms of years (recoded to decades), while their rank was ordered into three levels: consultant/advisor (also known as 'street-level bureaucrat'), middle-management, and management. A 10-point scale measured the respondents' feelings of attachment to their county. Table 2 summarises the central explanatory variables.

Table 2. Summary of central explanatory variables

Explanatory Factor	Variable Description	Min/Max	Mean (SD)	Expected Sign
Theoretical arguments for reform	How important is increasing regional self-rule to you?	1/5	4.2 (0.94)	+
	How important is improving regional (public) services to you?	1/5	4.53 (0.75)	+
Administrative position	How many years have you been employed in the county's administration?	0/4.5	1 (0.88)	+
	What is your rank in the administration?	1/3	1.31 (0.61)	+
Identity	To what degree do you feel attached to your county?	1/10	7.8 (2.13)	+

N = 1239. Control variables reported in supplementary appendix.

To account for other possible causes of regionalisation preference variation, controls at both individual and regional levels are included.

At the individual level, the control variables draw on socialisation literature commonly employed in explanatory models in preference formation literature (Yoo & Wright, 1994; Tatham & Bauer, 2015; Egeberg & Stigen, 2018). These include the bureaucrat's characteristics and background (gender, age, ideological self-placement, educational level and pathways), as well as other career observables (previous experience in the public and private sectors, and the department in which they were employed at the time of the data collection).

Lastly, the competence transfers constituted one element of the reform, the county amalgamations the other. Thus, the bureaucrats' preferences towards the amalgamations are also controlled for.

Regional level controls include county level demographic, economic and geographic variables. Through the logic of scale economic effects, territorial, economic and government size of regions is perceived to affect the efficiency and capacity the government has to take on responsibilities and tasks (Studinger & Bauer, 2012, p. 16; Tatham & Bauer, 2016, p. 2). In this sense, demographic and economic variables are measured by county population and GDP/capita.

The geographical factor is linked to the reform's amalgamations. Territorial consolidation reforms invariably create new centres and peripheries within the territories affected. In other words, county amalgamations establish new regional capitals at the expense of old centres, now turned peripheries within the new region (Lie, 2006, p. 49; 90). As such, the central explanatory variables are also controlled for by assessing the status of each pre-amalgamated county as constituting either a regional centre or periphery within the new region.

While the bureaucrats represent their distinct counties, and thus sharing a number of (observed and unobserved) characteristics according to their geographical placement, empirically testing the level of regional clustering among the bureaucrats in each policy area reveals low levels (mean = .012, max = .03 in the empty models) of intraclass correlation. In other words, on average,

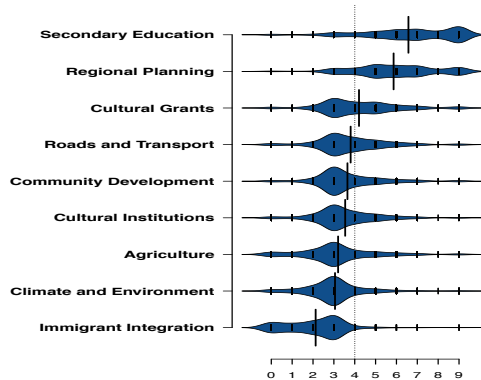
regional clustering only accounts for 1.2% of point allocation variance among the respondents. Hence, the bureaucrats' point allocation is analysed in two single level linear OLS- regression models: (1) a 'rudimentary' model, where only the central variables of interest are included (n = 1239), and (2) a model with 30 individual and regional level controls added (n = 1114).

Given the number of variables, the data was tested for possible issues of multicollinearity. The variance inflation factor for the full models returned overall (mean = 1.41) and individual (max = 2.73) values in all nine policy areas indicating that multicollinearity is not a problem when running the proposed models in any of them.

Results

Figure 1 displays the bureaucrats' point allocation to the regional level in the nine policy areas. Across all areas, the point distribution averages just above 4. Clustering their point allocation around the 3-4-point range in most of the policy areas, the regional bureaucrats display no great desire to empower the regional level in policy areas for which they are not already responsible. This shows as *Secondary Education* and *Regional Planning* tops the point distribution with 6.6 and 5.8 points, respectively, forming significant outliers in the point allocation, whilst also displaying a more even distribution rather than being heavily clustered around a single point.

Figure 1. Regional bureaucrats' point allocation to the regional level



Beanplot of regional bureaucrats' point allocation to the regional level in descending order. Dashed line represents overall mean, solid lines represent individual means. Larger "beans" represent higher densities. X-axis denotes points allocated by the regional bureaucrats. N = 1239.

It is important to note that these two are policy areas in which the county governments already have a relatively high number of responsibilities; as such, while they significantly differ from the rest, this is not surprising when considering the overall impression that the bureaucrats prefer a (pre-reform) status-quo arrangement of competence allocation.

The lower point allocation in *Roads and Transport*, which is the second most important area for the counties, could be explained as a manifestation of desiring specific tasks within the area, rather than a desire for a “complete takeover”. The wider distribution of points on the two most highly desired areas may also suggest a difference of opinion between desiring new competences and merely retaining what they already have.

The distribution of points in the various policies reveals varying degrees of congruence. *Immigrant Integration* clusters around 3 points, but a considerable number of bureaucrats have allocated fewer points, while very few have gone above, making this the policy area least desired by the bureaucrats. In between this and the two top outliers, we see that the bureaucrats have largely clustered their point distribution around the 3-4-point range, though the allocation skews mostly upwards, (*Cultural Grants, Roads and Transport, Community Development, Cultural Institutions*), suggesting that a significant amount of bureaucrats are positive to receiving additional tasks in these areas, while two (*Agriculture and Climate and Environment*) are more normally distributed around the 3-point cluster.

Agriculture and Climate and Environment are interesting cases as a number of tasks within them are located at the County Governor, a county-level central government institution. Hence, a transfer of tasks within these areas is a more complicated matter, as they would entail institutional decentralisation, but not, in the strictest sense, regionalisation, as they would move from one regional authority to another. Whether the bureaucrats’ point allocation reflects this is uncertain.

Overall, figure 1 presents a picture of somewhat reserved regional bureaucrats; policy areas already located at the regional level are desired kept (or expanded), while other policy areas are looked on with some reservation – though not without differences of opinion.

Drivers of competence desires

Addressing the drivers of their point allocation, the bureaucrats’ preferences are primarily driven by the “increasing self-rule” argument. In every policy area, those perceiving it important to increase regional autonomy are more positive towards regionalising competences. Following this, we see that stronger feelings of county attachment increases point allocation in just over half of the policies (*Secondary Education, Roads and Transport, Community Development, Climate and Environment, and Immigrant Integration*).

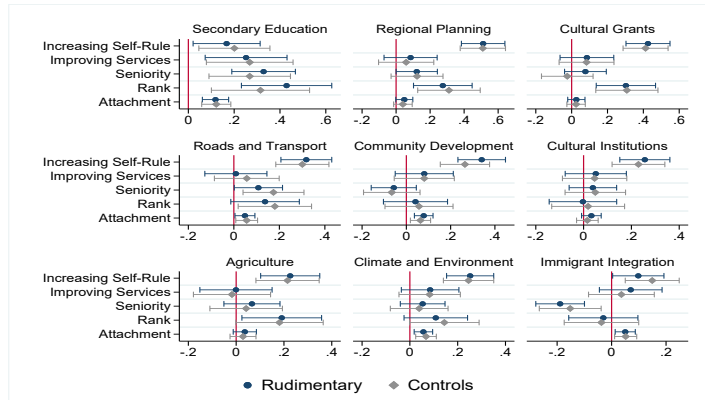
The higher the bureaucrat’s rank, the more positive they are towards increasing regional decision-making responsibilities in over half over the policy areas, though this depends on the presence of control variables in certain cases (*Secondary Education, Regional Planning, Cultural Grants, Roads and Transport* when controls are introduced, and *Agriculture* when they are not).

Just behind in prevalence, the seniority of the bureaucrats affects their point allocation in under half of the policies (*Secondary Education, Regional Planning* when controls are omitted, *Roads and Transport, and Immigrant Integration*). This is also the only instance in which we observe a negative effect. The greater

the bureaucrats' seniority, the less they desire regional responsibility of immigrant integration measures.

Finally, although valued highly by the bureaucrats (mean 4,53 / 5), the importance of improving public services at the regional level does not significantly affect any policy areas, except in the case of *Secondary Education*.

Figure 2. Effects of central explanatory variables on regional bureaucrats' regionalisation preferences



OLS-regression of central explanatory variables on bureaucrats' point allocation in nine policy areas. Central explanatories tested in two models: (1) a "Rudimentary" model (N = 1239 in all policy areas), containing only the central explanatories and (2) a "Controls" model (N = 1114 in all policy areas), which includes all 30 regional and individual level controls. Policy areas ordered in descending prevalence (left-right, top-bottom) according to the bureaucrats' point allocation in figure 1; regression coefficients on the x-axes; 95% confidence intervals displayed.

Given the number of dependent variables and the central explanatory variables' varying effects, it makes more sense to evaluate the hypotheses in a scale-like manner rather than dichotomously rejecting or failing to reject the null hypotheses. On one end of this scale, we see that H1.a is confirmed in all cases, while at the other end H1.b is mostly rejected, except in the case of *Secondary Education*. In between these extremes, H2.a, H2.b and H3 are rejected (or confirmed) to various degrees, depending on the policy.

Principled or Functional Autonomy?

The bureaucrats' perceived feelings of the importance to increase regional autonomy matters most to their desires to regionalise competences. This explanatory shows the most consistent and highest degree of influence on the bureaucrats' allocation of points to the regional rather than the local and national levels. However, its direct effects on the dependent variables cannot explain the type of correlation we are seeing.

The theoretical foundation for this explanatory variable is intricately linked with the ability for a subnational government to increase its capacities and

efficiency in administrating and delivering services (Tiebout, 1956; Oates, 1972; Saito, 2008; Hooghe, Marks, & Schakel, 2010). Adding to this the broadly accepted view in public administration literature that though they are not completely separated from the sphere of policy-making as earlier theory posited (Demir & Nyhan, 2008), bureaucrats are, through the necessity of their jobs, more pragmatically-than-ideologically thinking (Aberbach, Putnam, & Rockman, 1981). Combining decentralisation theory and public administration literature leads to an assumption that bureaucrats may support increasing levels of regional autonomy not necessarily as a principally valued good in and of itself, but rather as a function to achieve government effectiveness.

In other words, greater regional autonomy could be held as a means to an end; the assumption being that with greater autonomy comes greater effectiveness and improved services.

A way of empirically testing this assumption with the available data is through a series of two- way interaction regressions. These were run with the *increased autonomy* and *improving services* variables on the full models. Assessing if increased autonomy was seen a means to achieving improved service quality, the latter's effect on the point allocation was observed at the different values of the former. In none of the policies did it produce a significant change in the effect observed in figure 2, leaving the improved services variable non-significant (except in the *Secondary Education* case). This indicates that the bureaucrats are treating the two notions more independently than the underlying theory holds, suggesting that the regional bureaucrats view the autonomy argument as a determining factor on its own rather than as a function to achieve something else. The results of the interaction regression can only indicate, however, as there is a lack of overlap between those who strongly desire autonomy but do not at all desire to improve services. Controlling for this still gives an indication that an interaction between the two is not taking place.

Where increasing subnational autonomy through decentralisation has become a regarded as a normatively justified policy in and of itself (Saito, 2008), it may also be motivated through a desire to increase the importance and status of the regional territories. Indeed, the regional empowerment that have taken place the last few decades has been explained as a result of increased subnational pressures, driven in part by identity and community logics (Tatham & Mbaye, 2018). The observations in figure 2 and the lack of any significant interactions between the autonomy and services arguments disentangles the observed effects from a functional attitude among the bureaucrats, suggesting instead a principled one. This is further strengthened with the second most prevalent finding in the discussion: that higher degrees of regional attachment (sometimes) increases support for regionalising competences.

A Moderately Identity-Driven Desire

The identity and community-driven logics that have accounted for regionalisation pressures in a range of democratic polities is visible to some extent among the bureaucrats as well. Their county attachment does increase

support for competence regionalisation in several policies, though where there is a significant effect, its substantive size is somewhat moderate.

While the level of county attachment is relatively high among the bureaucrats (see table 1), the general level of regional territorial sentiment is comparatively weaker in Norway than in other European countries. Although calls for a ‘Nordic regionalism’ debate have been made (Baldersheim & Ståhlberg, 1999), community attachments in Norway is predominantly found at the local rather than the regional level (Baldersheim & Rose, 2010; Flo, 2015). This may help to explain the moderate effects we are seeing. Despite this, it should not be ignored as an explanatory factor, being the second most prevalent driver of the bureaucrats’ regionalisation preferences.

Carefully optimistic elites

The bureaucrats’ rank in the administrations does in some cases lead to increased support for regionalising competences. While the effect is robust independent of controls in Regional Planning, Secondary Education and Cultural Grant Management, its effect only becomes significant through controlling factors in Roads and Transport and is oppositely moderated towards non-significance in Agriculture.

Thought supported by the budget-maximising model’s premises, the underlying logic behind administrative elites being positive towards increasing regional responsibilities could be explained by somewhat different dynamics:

1. Widening managerial responsibilities leads to a feeling of increased status. Administrative elites, overseeing the responsibilities and provisions of the services and implementations of policies thus get a greater say on the government's functions and have opportunities to become, or stay, highly placed in the post- reform bureau’s new habitus.
2. As elites, placed in the higher echelons of the administrative institutions, they have more frequent contact with politicians than the street-level bureaucrat. They also have a more ‘holistic’ view of their departments or institution, and as such could argue through functional necessity the need for additional competences. As they may not deem every policy area functionally necessary to regionalise, it could explain why some of the policy areas are affected and others are not.

To gauge the bureaucrats’ task preferences in a more detailed manner, the survey also included an open-ended response option in which they could describe tasks and functions they desired at the regional level more explicitly. To address whether the effects of rank on point allocation was explained by motivations related to increased status or functional necessity, their open responses were compared across their ranks.

The bureaucrats do not display a substantial difference across the three ranks. Their answers are similar both regarding the policies and tasks they

mention, and the arguments they make, generally pointing towards functional necessity.

If we then treat their regionalisation justifications as a constant, yet the elites appear more positive in certain areas, the explanation may be found elsewhere, such as personal self-interest through increased status. The research design limits us from fully capturing this rationale, however, as the survey did not include questions relating to the bureaucrats' job motivations (and few would openly admit to being motivated by personal status and self-interest). Hence, the assumption that this finding is due to self-interests is mostly based on inductive inference, while our empirical observations point to a regionalisation justification based on functional necessity. Our understanding of the rank-effect is then perhaps best explained by returning to the overall picture of the bureaucrats' preferences.

Reserved but Principled (and Sometimes Functional)

For the bureaucrats to empower the regional level, the perceived importance of increasing regional autonomy matters most.

While the theoretical underpinning for this relation is interlinked with the regional governments' effectiveness, empirically testing this has revealed a more principled thinking among the bureaucrats than initially assumed.

This also relates to the community and identity logics observed in other regional preference studies, and the bureaucrats' attachment to their counties indeed plays a role when the bureaucrats distribute their points to the regional level, though to a lesser extent.

Following the principles and identity-based justifications for decentralisation, the bureaucrats' positions also matter somewhat, as higher-ranked officials are more positive to regionalising competences in certain areas, though their seniority rarely affects their preferences, and represents the only case in which we observe a negative effect.

The perceived importance of improving regional public services does not matter, neither directly as a cause of regionalisation desires, nor when treated as a functional end reached through increased levels of self-rule. This is interesting, as it conflicts with some theoretical assumptions of decentralisation and public administration theories. As the theoretical linkage between the two arguments fails to materialise empirically, the Norwegian regional bureaucrats instead seem to view increased autonomy as a desirable outcome in and of itself rather than as a function to improve public service qualities at the regional level. This leaves us with a picture of regional bureaucrats more driven by principles of governance and identity-logics rather than arguments pertaining to functional pressures, effects, and pragmatism, challenging aspects of decentralisation theories and notions of bureaucratic thinking.

Conclusions

Since 1950, the regional level has gradually increased its importance across democratic regimes. Subnational demands for regional empowerment have often driven this process. This has not been the case in Norway. Leaving out

subnational community pressures as a force for regionalisation, the underlying rationales for undertaking regional reforms are, however, similar to those found in other countries. As direct stakeholders of regionalisation, this article has explored the regionalisation preferences among Norwegian regional bureaucrats in context of the 2015-2020 Norwegian Regional Government Reform.

A continuous strand in the public administration literature is to understand and explain the behaviour and preferences of bureaucrats (Egeberg & Stigen, 2018). Contributing to this literature, the aim of this article has been to explore the drivers of regional bureaucrats' regionalisation preferences, addressing how various dynamics affect them based on a combination of decentralisation theory and public administration literature.

A historic alteration of the regional level, the Norwegian Regional Government Reform amalgamated counties and transferred a set of functions to the regional governments. To examine the regional bureaucrats' attitudes towards this process, an original survey captured and measured a range of observables related to their desires for increasing the scope of regional responsibilities.

Generally, the bureaucrats do not display a great eagerness to regionalise competences. Instead, the pre-reform arrangement of competence placement seems most desirable. Where the bureaucrats desire more functions to the regional level, they are primarily driven by governance principles and community logics, less so by arguments relating to functional effects and pressures.

For the bureaucrats to support widening responsibilities at the regional level, their desire to increase the level of regional autonomy matters most, being consistently and positively related with the allocation of competences to the regional level.

This explanatory factor serves as a more independent dynamic than the theoretical foundations for it would suggest. Although the bureaucrats feel it is important to improve the quality of the services they provide, it does not influence their desires to regionalise more responsibilities to the regional governments. This is somewhat surprising, as the notions of increased autonomy and improved services are theoretically linked. Testing this linkage empirically, however, shows that the effect of the "improved services" argument remains insignificant across all levels of desires for increased autonomy. This indicates a more principled approach rather than a functional line of thinking among the bureaucrats than is assumed in both decentralisation theory and broader public administration literature.

It is, however, supported by the second most prevalent finding. Playing into the same dynamics as a desire to increase regional autonomy, the bureaucrats' feeling of regional attachment also increases support for regionalising competences, though to a somewhat lesser extent. Taken together, we therefore see a strong explanation for regional administrative decentralisation preferences from principles and valued norms held by the bureaucrats.

Functional explanations for desiring competence regionalisation are more ambivalent, as administrative elites and more senior members of the

administrations sometimes, though to a lesser extent, support regionalising competences within certain policy areas, but also represent the only case of a negative effect.

This is not to say that these types of explanations don't matter. Higher ranked and more senior bureaucrats can be expected to have some knowledge of which competences could – or should – be transferred to the regional level. We do not fully know, however, whether these explanatories capture the desire for increased responsibilities due to purely functional necessity or professional self-interest, though empirical observations through open-ended responses suggest the former. However, these responses do not vary distinctly from their lower ranked colleagues; as such the validity of assuming that a purely functional and not personal motivation-based argument lies behind these explanatories may be debatable, as a widened managerial portfolio also may invoke a feeling of increased personal status within the new regional administrations.

Having explored various drivers of decentralisation preferences among regional bureaucrats, the findings in this article have shed light on a “principle-functional” dynamic, showing how, when faced with decentralisation measures, regional bureaucrats are driven by the former to a larger extent than the latter. This finding challenges some notions of bureaucratic functional thinking, and invites further research into how these dynamics motivate members of the civil service.

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Appendix

Table A1. Descriptive statistics of control variables

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max
Gender	1239	0.49	0.50	0	0	1
Age	1239	48.88	10.21	22	49	69
Left-Right Ideological Self-Placement	1149	2.49	1.30	1	2	5
Education: Level	1239	4.65	0.77	1	5	6
Education: Oslo	1239	1.45	0.73	1	1	3
Education: Law	1239	0.06	0.24	0	0	1
Education: Economy	1239	0.26	0.44	0	0	1
Education: Social Sciences	1239	0.30	0.46	0	0	1
Education: Humanities	1239	0.23	0.42	0	0	1
Education: Natural Sciences	1239	0.16	0.37	0	0	1
Job Experience Outside Public Sector	1238	0.71	0.46	0	1	1
Has Worked: Central State	1239	0.18	0.38	0	0	1
Has Worked: Regional State	1239	0.20	0.40	0	0	1
Has Worked: Local State	1239	0.05	0.23	0	0	1
Previous Employment in Local Government	1239	0.42	0.49	0	0	1
Current Employment: Planning	1239	0.11	0.31	0	0	1
Current Employment: Economy	1239	0.12	0.33	0	0	1
Current Employment: Legal Service	1239	0.03	0.16	0	0	1
Current Employment: IT	1239	0.06	0.25	0	0	1
Current Employment: Culture	1239	0.17	0.38	0	0	1
Current Employment: Enterprise/Industry	1239	0.10	0.30	0	0	1
Current Employment: Regional Development	1239	0.20	0.40	0	0	1
Current Employment: Education	1239	0.16	0.36	0	0	1
Current Employment: Traffic	1239	0.06	0.24	0	0	1
Current Employment: Environment	1239	0.07	0.25	0	0	1
Stance: Forced Amalgamations	1211	2.46	1.37	1	2	5
Stance: Voluntary Amalgamations	1218	3.80	1.17	1	4	5
Population	1239	293,549.63	1.61e+05	76,149	247,084	604,368
GDP per Capita	1239	398.48	57.81	311	396	528
County Status: Periphery/Centre	1239	0.59	0.49	0	1	1

Table A2. Correlation between central independent variables

	Increasing Autonomy	Improving Services	Seniority	Rank	Attachment
Increasing Autonomy	1				
Improving Services	0.47 (0.00)	1			
Seniority	0.11 (0.00)	0.01 (0.80)	1		
Rank	0.13 (0.00)	0.09 (0.00)	0.12 (0.00)	1	
Attachment	0.20 (0.00)	0.11 (0.00)	0.19 (0.00)	0.06 (0.04)	1

Correlation matrix of central independent variables. Correlation coefficients with significance levels in brackets.

Table A3. Correlation between dependent variables

	Regional planning	Agri- culture	Inte- gration	Cultural grants	Cultural Institu- tions	Roads and Trans- port	Climate and Environ- ment	Seco- ndary Educa- tion
Regional Planning	1							
Agri- culture	0.26 (0.00)	1						
Inte- gration	-0.02 (0.57)	0.20 (0.00)	1					
Cultural grants	0.41 (0.00)	0.31 (0.00)	0.08 (0.01)	1				
Cultural Institu- tions	0.29 (0.00)	0.26 (0.00)	0.14 (0.00)	0.51 (0.00)	1			
Roads and Transport	0.41 (0.00)	0.31 (0.00)	0.10 (0.00)	0.34 (0.00)	0.34 (0.00)	1		
Climate and Environ- ment	0.27 (0.00)	0.33 (0.00)	0.16 (0.00)	0.28 (0.00)	0.26 (0.00)	0.41 (0.00)	1	
Secondary Education	0.40 (0.00)	0.18 (0.00)	-0.05 (0.07)	0.31 (0.00)	0.23 (0.00)	0.30 (0.00)	0.10 (0.00)	1
Com- munity Develop- ment	0.45 (0.00)	0.27 (0.00)	0.12 (0.00)	0.37 (0.00)	0.35 (0.00)	0.40 (0.00)	0.29 (0.0000)	0.26 (0.00)

Correlation matrix of dependent variables. Correlation coefficients with significance levels in brackets.

Table A4. Regression tables

Model																	
Immigrant Integration	C	0.15**	(2.96)														
	R	0.10*	(2.04)														
Climate and Environment	C	0.25***	(4.58)														
	R	0.25***	(5.02)														
Agriculture	C	0.22**	(3.19)														
	R	0.23***	(3.59)														
Cultural Institutions	C	0.23***	(4.08)														
	R	0.26***	(4.80)														
Community Development	C	0.27***	(4.67)														
	R	0.34***	(6.22)														
Roads and Transport	C	0.30***	(5.06)														
	R	0.32***	(5.59)														
Cultural Grants	C	0.41***	(6.44)														
	R	0.43***	(6.81)														
Regional Planning	C	0.51***	(7.52)														
	R	0.51***	(7.85)														
Secondary Education	C	0.20*	(2.54)														
	R	0.17*	(2.24)														
Immigrant Autonomy	C	0.27**	(2.78)														
	R	0.25**	(2.77)														
Improving Services	C	0.12*	(1.96)														
	R	0.12**	(2.00)														
Seniority	C	0.31***	(3.49)														
	R	0.30***	(3.59)														
Rank	C	0.28**	(3.13)														
	R	0.28**	(3.32)														
Attachment	C	0.32**	(2.88)														
	R	0.43***	(4.27)														
Gender	C	0.12***	(3.76)														
	R	0.12***	(4.05)														
Age	C	-0.23	(-1.76)														
	R	-0.23	(-1.76)														
Immigrant Autonomy	C	0.05*	(2.50)														
	R	0.05***	(2.66)														
Attachment	C	0.07**	(3.07)														
	R	0.06**	(2.87)														
Seniority	C	0.17*	(2.55)														
	R	0.11*	(2.00)														
Rank	C	0.18*	(2.19)														
	R	0.18*	(2.19)														
Attachment	C	0.06*	(2.31)														
	R	0.05*	(2.18)														
Gender	C	0.06**	(2.75)														
	R	0.08***	(3.65)														
Age	C	-0.02*	(-2.58)														
	R	0.01*	(1.98)														

Model	LR Ideology	Education Level	Edu: SS	Edu: Hum	His: Worked: Central State	His: Worked: Local State	Prev: Emp: Local Gov.
Immigrant Integration	C					0.47* (2.50)	-0.23*** (-2.64)
Climate and Environment	R						
Climate and Environment	C					-0.24* (-1.99)	
Climate and Environment	R						
Climate and Environment	C						
Agriculture	R						
Agriculture	C					0.29*** (2.65)	
Cultural Institutions	R						
Cultural Institutions	C						
Community Development	R						-0.24* (-2.46)
Community Development	C						
Community Development	R						
Community Development	C						
Roads and Transport	R						
Roads and Transport	C						
Roads and Transport	R						
Roads and Transport	C						
Cultural Grants	R						
Cultural Grants	C						
Cultural Grants	R						
Cultural Grants	C						
Regional Planning	R						
Regional Planning	C						
Regional Planning	R						
Regional Planning	C						
Secondary Education	R						
Secondary Education	C						
Secondary Education	R						
Secondary Education	C						

Model	Emp. Plan	Emp. Culture	Emp. Reg Dev	Emp. Edu	Emp. Traffic	Emp. Env	Source: Voluntary Amalgamation	Population
Immigrant Integration	C		0.24* (2.13)	0.245 (2.03)	0.48** (-2.74)			
	R							
Climate and Environment	C	-0.31* (-2.00)			0.54*** (-2.94)	0.40* (2.05)		
	R							
Agriculture	C		0.31* (2.06)		-0.48* (-2.07)			
	R							
Cultural Institutions	C			-0.45*** (-3.26)	0.58*** (-2.97)			-0.00***
	R							
Community Development	C	-0.32* (-2.32)	0.33*** (2.60)	-0.46*** (-3.32)				-0.00*
	R							
Roads and Transport	C	-0.37* (-2.52)		-0.56*** (-3.85)	0.64*** (3.10)			
	R							
Cultural Grants	C			-0.77*** (-4.98)	-0.49* (-2.20)			-0.00*
	R							
Regional Planning	C			-0.83*** (-5.08)				
	R							
Secondary Education	C	-0.46* (-2.34)					0.13* (2.22)	
	R							

Model	GDP/ Capita	Periphery / Centre	Constant	N
Immigrant Integration	C 1.42* (2.27)		1.42* (2.27)	1114
	R 1.23*** (4.50)		1.23*** (4.50)	1239
	C 1.11 (1.67)		1.11 (1.67)	1114
Climate and Environment	R 0.97*** (3.39)		0.97*** (3.39)	1239
	C 1.88* (2.24)		1.88* (2.24)	1114
Agriculture	R 1.66*** (4.62)		1.66*** (4.62)	1239
	C (-3.54) 2.69*** (3.85)		2.69*** (3.85)	1114
Cultural Institutions	R 1.96*** (6.42)		1.96*** (6.42)	1239
	C (-2.07) 1.35 (1.91)		1.35 (1.91)	1114
Community Development	R 1.26*** (4.04)		1.26*** (4.04)	1239
	C 1.69* (2.28)		1.69* (2.28)	1114
Roads and Transport	R 1.77*** (5.44)		1.77*** (5.44)	1239
	C (-2.09) 0.00* (2.27)		-0.53 (-0.67)	1114
Cultural Grants	R 1.36*** (3.81)		1.36*** (3.81)	1239
	C (-0.33) 2.81*** (3.34)		2.81*** (3.34)	1114
Regional Planning	R 2.49*** (6.69)		2.49*** (6.69)	1239
	C -0.45*** (-2.60)		-0.45*** (-2.60)	1114
Secondary Education	R 2.95*** (6.93)		2.95*** (6.93)	1239

** p<0.05
* p<0.1
*** p<0.001

OLS-regression tables of figure 2 in paper. R = Rudimentary model; C = Controls model. Linear regression models of all nine policy areas. Non-significant effects omitted; t statistics in parentheses.
 LR Ideology: L Left-Right Ideological Self-Placement; Edu: SS = Education: Social Sciences; Edu: Hum = Education: Humanities; Emp: Plan = Current Employment: Planning; Emp: Culture = Current Employment: Culture; Emp: Reg Dev = Current Employment: Regional Development; Emp: Edu = Current Employment: Education; Emp: Traffic = Current Employment: Traffic; Emp: Env = Current Employment: Environment; Prev. Emp: Local Gov = Previous Employment in Local Government

Sector Dimensionality

The policy areas were chosen based on their prevalence in the reform. We should theoretically expect them to correlate to a certain extent, as they all relate to policy regionalisation. As table A3 shows, this is indeed the case. To explore this, an analysis of the central independent variables was rerun with a simple additive index constructed out of the nine policy areas as the dependent variable.

Table A5. Regression analysis of central explanatory and control variables on regionalisation index dependent variable

Variable	Rudimentary	Controls
Increasing Autonomy	0.29*** (0.03)	0.28*** (0.04)
Improving Services	0.08* (0.04)	0.08* (0.04)
Seniority	0.06* (0.03)	
Rank	0.16*** (0.05)	0.164*** (0.05)
Attachment	0.06*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)
Left-Right Ideological Self-Placement		-0.07*** (0.02)
Edu: SS		0.19*** (0.07)
Has Worked: Central State		-0.14* (0.08)
Prev. Emp.: Local Gov.		-0.13*** (0.06)
Emp. LS		0.33* (0.20)
Emp. Culture		-0.15* (0.09)
Emp. Reg. Dev.		0.14* (0.08)
Emp. Edu		-0.36*** (0.08)
Emp. Traffic		-0.20* (0.12)
Stance: Voluntary Amalgamations		0.046* (0.03)
County Status: Centre/Periphery		-0.19** (0.08)
Constant	1.739*** (0.19)	1.67*** (0.43)
N	1,239	1,114
R-squared	0.14	0.21

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

OLS-regression tables of independent variables effects on regionalisation index based on the nine policy area variables. Non-significant effects omitted; standard error in parentheses.

Edu: SS = Education: Social Sciences; Emp. LS = Current Employment: Legal Service; Emp.

Culture = Current Employment: Culture; Emp. Reg. Dev. = Current Employment: Regional

Development; Emp. Edu = Current Employment: Education; Emp. Traffic = Current Employment:

Traffic; Prev. Emp.: Local Gov. = Previous Employment in Local Government.

Overall, the effects do not significantly alter the paper's conclusions. A desire for increased autonomy still strongly affects their regionalisation preferences, while rank and attachment also do so, though to lesser extents.

In addition to a simple additive index analysis, a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test was run to determine whether the policy areas could be broken into distinguishable underlying categories. Returning a value of 0.84, this test demonstrates suitability for an explorative factor analysis.

Table A6. Explorative factor analysis of the nine policy areas (2-factor solution)

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Regional Planning	0.7602	
Agriculture		0.5260
Immigrant Integration		0.8198
Cultural Grants	0.6839	
Cultural Institutions	0.5803	
Roads and Transport	0.6582	
Climate and Environment	0.4692	
Secondary Education	0.6538	
Community Development	0.6502	
Variance explained (%)	34	16
Cronbach's α	0.77	0.32
Notes: Factor analysis, 2 factors with eigenvalues over 1. Analysis run specifying 2 factors after initial explorative analysis. Factor loadings > 0.4 omitted.		
Factor correlation	Factor 1	Factor 2
Factor 1	0.9422	0.3351
Factor 2	-0.3351	0.9422

The principal factor analysis returned nine components, with the two first displaying eigenvalues > 1 (3,3 and 1,2, respectively). They accounted for cumulatively 50% of the variance (37% and 14% respectively). Hence, a two-factor solution was chosen.

Although omitting factor loadings below 0.4, the initial two-factor solution returned some overlap between the two factors. This was the case in agriculture (0.41 and 0.53 loadings in factors 1 and 2, respectively), and Climate and Environment (0.47 and 0.44 in factors 1 and 2, respectively). To “clean” the factors, the lowest values of the two were omitted. Factor 1 thus retains seven of the policy areas, while factor 2 only consists of two.

Testing the internal consistency of the two factors reveals low levels of reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.77 and 0.32, suggesting the factors are somewhat heterogeneous. Theoretically, the nine policy areas could be viewed as pertaining to national or regional/local matters. The heterogeneous nature of the two factors weakens this suspicion, however, and no further analyses of the two factors were undertaken.

Notes

¹ See Lie (2006) and Blindheim (2013) for regional political preferences towards future county structures and competences. Moreover, research projects ongoing (as of 2020) are collecting data on politicians' and citizens' views on the reform, while non-academic documentation refers to a large body of media coverage and public debates relating to the reform.

² In the 1970s, a nation-wide reform established directly elected regional representatives and their administrations, though did not specify the functions they would receive. The regional level's portfolio was since periodically debated, and while some minor reforms have taken place, large-scale territorial reforms prior to 2020 failed to materialise (Blom-Hansen, Christiansen, Fimreite, & Selle, 2012; Flo, 2004; Selstad, 2003).

³ While some counties expressed a desire to 'retake' the hospitals in the reform, this never became a realistic part of the political discussion.

⁴ See government-appointed committee's report "Decentralization of tasks from the state to the counties" (2018, p. 23) for a more detailed summary.

⁵ Supporters of the reform frequently made use of these arguments in various discourses and debates. Additionally, the 2013-2017 Liberal and Christian Democratic parties' manifestos make arguments pertaining to increased autonomy and improved services. When the two parties entered government in 2018 and 2019 respectively, these same arguments were also included in the expanded government declarations.

⁶ See Bourdieu (1996) for a detailed discussion of how cultural and economic hierarchy systems affect group dynamics within the habitus (or social space).

⁷ Oslo is classified as both a municipality and a county. Hence, there is no separate regional administration, as local government institutions also undertake county responsibilities.

⁸ A method mirroring the design of Tatham and Bauer (2016).

⁹ Although the overall debate during the reform's process provided some of the policy selection, the primary source was the county government's letters to the central government which outlined the policies and responsibilities they desired, sourced from the counties' websites.

¹⁰ Although secondary education was an existing and important area of responsibility for the counties pre-reform, several of the tasks transferred in the reform have to do with "competence" – that is, tasks relating to adult training, education for immigrants, job training programs etc., falling within the secondary education area.



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