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Institutional Change and System Support – Reforming the Executive in Norwegian Cities and Regions

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Abstract

By studying the change from the alderman model to parliamentary rule in Norwegian cities and regions, this article analyses how and why reorganisation of political institutions influences support for the institutions reformed. We adopt a mixed methods approach consisting of a survey of politicians in all seven reformed Norwegian local governments, combined with a case study of reorganised governments with high and low levels of support for parliamentary rule. We find that support for the institutional model in the reformed local governments depends on the reform's effect on different political positions. Politicians in power are more positive towards parliamentary rule than members in opposition are, and politicians from the big parties are more positive compared to representatives from smaller ones. Institutional change affects the interests of these groups in different ways. In turn, the effects that reform has on different interests influence their support for the reformed institutions. System support is also affected by how the change process is implemented. An inclusive political leadership that builds oversized coalitions and allocates positions such as committee chairs to the opposition results in stronger support for parliamentary rule. The overall finding is that both "pure" institutional effects and contextual factors influence support for parliamentary rule. Support increases when there is a high level of readiness and capacity for change. The reform must also include relevant actors in a way meeting demands for procedural fairness. The practical implication for reformers is that they must communicate why the organisation needs reform, arrange for sufficient implementation capacity and include relevant participants in decision-making and change processes.

Introduction

How and why does reorganisation of political institutions influence support for the institutions reformed? Support for established institutions influences loyalty towards political decisions and consequently the legitimacy of a political system. Understanding the mechanisms that produce system support or distrust is therefore a vital question for researchers and policy makers alike.

The research question is analysed through a study of the change from the alderman model to parliamentary rule in Norwegian cities and regions. The literature on political institutions and organisational change tells us that both institutional and contextual factors influence support for the institutions reformed. Earlier research on Norwegian regions also shows that the level of support for parliamentary rule is lower in the opposition parties than in the parties in power (Bukve and Saxi 2014). The aim of this study is to provide a systematic discussion of the causal mechanisms behind these findings, using a new data set and extending the study to both regions and cities with parliamentary rule.

While the executive board in the alderman model is elected proportionally

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from the parties in the council, the parliamentary model has an executive board supported by the council majority. Traditionally, local and regional governments in Norway have been organised according to the alderman model. Parliamentary rule, with an executive board supported by the council majority, was introduced in the capital city Oslo through a special act in 1986. A new local government act was enacted in 1993, and from then the legislation permitted all local and regional governments to choose between the traditional model and parliamentary rule. Four of the 18 counties have switched to parliamentary rule. Of Norway's 428 local governments, only three of the larger cities have changed their government model. These seven regional and local governments form the empirical base for our study.

It is a common assumption in political science that the manner in which political institutions are organised influences both policy content and political processes. A number of empirical studies have thus compared the effects of parliamentary versus presidential systems. Several researchers have argued that presidential systems are less stable over time (Riggs 1997, Linz 1994). Studies of French institutions have shown how the combination of direct presidential elections and a majoritarian election system for the National Assembly has polarised the political system (Duhamel and Parodi 1985). Some empirical institutionalists have looked at the effects of "divided government" and at how coalition governments lead to decisions that differ from those made by governments formed from a single party (Peters 1999).

Other comparative studies of political institutions have discussed differences between various democratic systems. Lijphart's distinction between majority rule and consensus democracy is the point of departure for many studies of this kind (Lijphart 1984). We too utilise this distinction, however, our cases cannot be identified with Lijphart's pure types. According to the Norwegian Local Government Act, it is mainly the organisation of the executive board that varies between the alderman model and parliamentary rule. An executive in a parliamentary model is elected by majority vote in the council, and can be dismissed by a council majority. An executive of aldermen is elected proportionally according to strength in the council, and cannot be dismissed. Both models have a proportional election system, a multiparty system and a pluralistic structure of interest groups in common. While the alderman model is close to the consensus type of democracy, the model which was labelled parliamentary rule in the Norwegian Local Government Act is closer to Lijphart's majority rule (Baldersheim 1992, Saxi 2006, 2007, Bukve and Saxi 2014, Saxi et. al. 2014).

Generally, the literature raises questions about which institutional effects we should consider as improved performance. In some studies, the standard is simply the system's ability to survive. Others have underlined societal effects, whether the creation of economic growth, peace (Reynal-Querol 2002), or generalized trust in society (Rothstein and Stolle 2008). However, we can also look at the effects of different political institutions on political processes, on the implementation of political decisions, and on specific trust in the political system. Regarding political

processes, we can outline different expectations of pure consensus models and majority rule from Lijphart's discussion of those types (Lijphart 1984). We could expect that majority rule will result in clearer dividing lines between position and opposition, a more polarized political discussion, a higher level of conflict, and accountability demands more precisely directed towards the ruling majority. These aims also motivated the institutional reform in Norwegian cities and regions (Bukve and Saxi 2014, Gjerald and Bukve 2007).

Lijphart (1968) stressed that different institutions show properties that are suitable for different societies. In pluralistic societies with many crosscutting conflict lines, majority rule may increase government capacity. In segmented societies, where some groups are at risk of being in the minority on many issues, a consensus democracy can contribute to a greater understanding between groups and higher support for the political system. With this line of argument, Lijphart also takes into account that the operation of political institutions may depend on the societal context. They are "embedded institutions."

Students of electoral systems have also developed an understanding of these systems as embedded institutions. The effects of such systems are dependent on the context, and on other institutions and actors who influence the outcome of electoral processes. They have also shown empirically which contextual factors are relevant. Utilizing cross-national data, Shaun Bowler and his colleagues have found that politicians' evaluation of an electoral system depends on several factors (Bowler et al. 2006). Most notably, politicians' self-interest affects how they evaluate the institutions. Those in power are more positive than the opposition, and they are more sceptical toward institutional change. A similar finding was made in an earlier study of regional parliamentarism in Norway (Bukve and Saxi, Gjerald and Bukve 2007, Saxi 2007). Bowler and colleagues also show that representatives from major parties, which have a greater chance of acquiring power, are more positive toward existing electoral systems compared with representatives from smaller parties.

In a recent article on "Vested Interests and Political Institutions," Terry Moe (2015:1) claims "...vested interests are part of the everyday language of political science. But they are not part of its theories, at least not in any explicit or systematic way". Even if this statement takes things to extremes, it is easy to agree with Moe that theory building about institutions should provide a more integrated understanding of how interests may affect institutional stability and change. Vested interests can prevent change, but they can also be a dynamic force in institutional change. Even if vested interests gain advantages from the current institutional configuration, they may favour change if the risk of losing power is small. Hence, to understand how vested interests will act in the face of a proposed change in rules, we need to understand both how interests are positioned in an established institutional context and what risks they run from change. If the risk is low, they may introduce changes. The established majority is not necessarily resisting change, and in turn, institutional change may result in a reshuffling of positions and interests.

Self-interest is not the only factor affecting politicians' evaluation of an electoral system. Values and ideologies also play a role. Post-materialists more often support changes toward direct democracy and term limits for political positions. There are also some differences between politicians on the right and those on the left regarding reform support (Bowler et al. 2006).

Bowler and Donovan (2013) also reveal a difference between the findings from cross-national comparative studies, which show the effects of electoral systems on political attitudes and behaviour, and the findings from studies that focus on reform processes. What happens when institutional rules are changed is not always in accordance with the expectations on institutional design.

Such arguments correspond well with findings from reform studies in organisational science. A series of studies on organisational reforms show that reforms often fail and that contextual factors influence reform implementation. Even if institutional setups affect processes and outcomes, there is no guarantee of success if one implement a reform of a certain kind in a different context. The change processes are complex, and the results may be different from the ambitions of the reformers (Brunsson and Olsen 1993, Czarniawska 2009). Research on planned organisational change has aimed to establish frameworks for understanding why organisational reforms may produce different results in different contexts. The independent variables in such frameworks may include organisational readiness for change, leadership support, resource mobilization, and inclusive participation (Packard 2013). Organisational readiness for change is in itself a complex variable where several factors play together (Holt et al. 2007). Do the members of the organisation consider whether change is needed? Do they believe that change is possible, and that it will become supported by the leaders? Do they believe that a change will have positive effects for themselves? The actual capacity for change is dependent on leadership support for the process and mobilization of the necessary resources. . Inclusion of all relevant participants also strengthens support for change (Judge and Douglas 2009, Bukve and Hovlid 2014, Hovlid and Bukve 2014).

Whether the reforming organisation is a pioneer or latecomer has also attracted interest among organisational theorists. However, there is no consensus about the effects of this variable (Abrahamson, 1996). Neo-institutionalists argue that latecomers often copy popular templates in order to gain legitimacy, while the conditions for changing performance is not always addressed (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). On the other hand, the literature on organisational strategies points out that latecomers can have the advantage of learning from the pioneers, but also that this opportunity is not always utilized (Figueiredo, 2003; Mathews, 2002).

If we take the mentioned variables as a point of departure, it is reasonable to believe that leadership support and resources will show only a small variation between our cases, which are Norwegian cities and regions with parliamentary rule. Support from the political leadership was a vital factor in positive decisions on introduction of the reform. Resource differences will also be quite small between

regions and larger cities. Regarding other contextual factors, however, it is reasonable to expect greater variation. Overall readiness for change may vary. Even if the political majority was in favour of change in all our cases, the degree of support from the opposition may differ. The implementation process may also be different. The majority may choose a more or less inclusive strategy, regarding both process and the sharing of political power. The willingness to adjust the model in accordance with experience might also be different between cases. In our analysis, we want to direct attention toward the significance of variation in these factors.

There are several germane points when summing up the essential findings in research of relevance for our study. From ideal-typical reasoning and earlier research on parliamentary rule, we can assume that majority rule has other effects on political processes and results compared to consensus democracy. Since parliamentary rule in Norwegian cities and regions are more similar with majority rule than the alderman model, we can assume changes in accordance with the former. Research on electoral systems demonstrates that the actors' self-interest affects how they evaluate political institutions. Lastly, we need to take into account contextual factors. In our cases, the most important ones are probably organisational readiness for change and the inclusion of the opposition in institutional design and policy formulation. Taken together, the literature shows that the outcome of change in political institutions may be dependent on pure institutional effects, the actors' self-interest, values, and ideologies, and contextual factors in the reform process.

Our research does not provide data for exploring the effects of political values and ideologies. In terms of institutional effects, self-interest and contextual factors, however, we can specify the following propositions regarding the effects of parliamentary rule in Norwegian cities and regions:

- Institutional effects: Parliamentary rule results in clear dividing lines between political alternatives combined with concentration of power in the executive, leading to a loss of influence for members of the opposition.
- Self-interested political actors: Politicians belonging to the majority parties will have a more positive view of parliamentary rule than opposition members have. Politicians with greater chance to get in power are also more positive.
- Contextual factors: Support for parliamentary rule increases when organisational readiness for change is high, and when the opposition is included in policy formulation and adjustment of the institutional setup within the frame of parliamentary rule.

Design and method

We tested the hypotheses by means of a mixed design, using survey data together with qualitative interviews in reformed cities and regions. We collected survey data in 2013 through a study of all three cities and four regions that adopted parliamentary rule.

We first compared how members of the majority and the opposition evaluated parliamentary rule, using the variables power concentration, political dividing lines and own influence on policy. Afterwards we looked at the differences between members of large and small parties, using support for parliamentary rule as the dependent variable. Here we considered the Labour and Conservative parties to be major parties. All other parties are classed as small. Typically, there would be one party to the left of Labour (two in a couple of our cases), three centrist parties, and one to the right. This creates a political landscape where it is difficult to obtain a political majority without either Labour or the Conservatives. Since they can choose partners in different directions and are rarely dependent on the centrist parties, we consider that the small centrist parties do not have a significantly higher chance of entering position than the parties to the right or left.

We performed a multi-nominal regression analysis with support for parliamentary rule as the dependent variable. The regression allowed us to analyse the effect of self-interest among political actors together with contextual factors. Context is operationalised as case. Since we found significant differences between the cases, we needed to explore the cases in detail to reveal variation in the way the parliamentary reform was implemented. We did this via a comparative analysis of the two cases where support for parliamentary rule was highest, contrasted with the two cases where the system support was failing to the greatest extent.

The case study focuses on three sets of contextual factors. First, we discuss readiness for change. We can measure this variable by looking at voting numbers in the decision to change to parliamentary rule decided. However, we cannot estimate the readiness by voting numbers alone, since the final voting numbers may be a result of compromises and use of whip within the parties. Hence, we need to investigate the process over time in order to estimate readiness more accurately. Secondly, we discuss inclusiveness, operationalized as the use of oversized coalitions, sharing of positions and the persistence of specific cleavage lines between parties. The advantage of using a case study for this purpose is that it allows us to analyse how different combinations of the contextual factors produce a specific outcome (Beach, 2016). We also discuss change capacity. Since the organisations included are counties and bigger cities, we should not expect great variation in change capacity. However, a case study approach permits us to be open to any specific factors that may enhance or reduce change capacity.

The questionnaire was sent to all four counties (Hedmark, Nordland, Nord-Trøndelag, and Troms) and three cities (Bergen, Oslo, and Tromsø) with parliamentary rule. The response rate varied between cities and counties. Among the counties, we had a 51% response rate, against only 41% among the cities. We

checked the dropout rate for each party. In the counties, the dropout rate deviated significantly from the average only for some small parties with less than 3% of the total number of councillors. In the cities, we found a significantly higher drop-out rate for the Progress Party councillors, balanced by a drop-out rate below average for four other small parties, three centrist and one left-wing. We consider all these parties more sceptical toward parliamentary rule than the two major parties. Altogether, we felt justified in using the data in our analysis without weighting.

In order to trace the reform process, we made thirty case interviews with leading politicians. Altogether we interviewed a total of 50 top politicians, the rest through group interviews. The interviews were transcribed for analysis, with a more detailed presentation given in the project report (Saxi et al. 2014). We also utilized interview material from earlier case studies of the parliamentary model (Saxi 2002, Saxi and Stigen 2006, Gjerald and Bukve 2007)).

Results

Effects of parliamentary rule on political actors and processes

Table 1 shows that position and opposition conceive political work in the parliamentary system in different ways.

Table 1: Effects of parliamentary rule on politicians in position and opposition

	Position		Opposition		N	Significance
	Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev		
Voting in council follows dividing lines between position and opposition	4.40	0.771	4.54	0.824	151	.285
Concentration of power in the executive board#	-0.054	0.738	0.667	1.529	146	.000**
The council confirms executive decisions	2.69	1.433	3.74	1.464	152	.000**
I can do useful work in the council	3.89	1.203	3.22	1.382	151	.002**
How difficult is it to get your political initiatives through in the council?	2.72	0.865	3.43	1.210	146	.000**

Average 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree. **Significant at 1% level, * significant at 5% level.

Mean difference between executive board influence and council influence

Regarding the factual question on voting lines, there is no difference between position and opposition. The opposition members, however, mostly view the council as a body that confirms executive board decisions. Power is concentrated to the executive board. Politicians from the opposition parties regard their political work as less useful compared to politicians from the parties in power, and the difference is highly significant. Members of parties in power also consider it easier to push their own political initiatives through in the council.

Variation in system support

We looked at the opinion of different political actors by asking them whether they supported the parliamentary model or wanted to return to an alderman model. Below, we show the figures in bivariate tables for position vs. opposition and major vs. smaller political parties.

Table 2: Preferences for governance model in the future. Position vs. opposition and party size

	Parliamentary model %	No clear opinion %	Alderman model %	N
Position	78	12	10	73
Opposition	29	15	56	75
Pearson Chi-square 40.687 ^a		Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) .000		
Major parties	68	17	15	88
Small parties	32	8	60	60
Pearson Chi-square 32.957 ^b		Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) .000		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.86

b. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.11

There is an overwhelming preference for the parliamentary model among the politicians in power. Some 78% prefer parliamentary rule, while only 10% prefer the alderman model. On the other hand, more than half of the politicians from parties in opposition want to change back to an alderman executive. Only 29% of the opposition support the current model. These findings indicate that institutional reform affects different groups of politicians in different ways. The result is an overall low degree of support for the reformed model.

While politicians in position acquire more power in a parliamentary system, politicians in opposition lose power. A concentration of political power was an

intended aim for the reform. Yet as we have shown, members of the political opposition have also lost a sense of usefulness and meaning in their political work. This effect was unintended, and may be considered a democratic problem if it results in an enduring situation with low system support (Bukve and Saxi 2014).

We also compared support for parliamentary rule between large and small parties. Labour and the Conservatives count as major parties, while we group the remaining parties as small parties. We find a significant difference here too. While two out of three politicians from the major parties prefer the parliamentary model, only one of three from the smaller parties supports the model. This result can also be explained as an effect of self-interest among politicians. Politicians in the major parties may have a greater chance of entering into position. If they do, they will gain more power in a parliamentary system. Since the major parties can choose between different coalition partners, the smaller parties have fewer possibilities for being a partner in a ruling coalition.

There is one difficulty with discussing these effects by means of bivariate tables. Since it is more probable that members of the bigger parties are in a ruling coalition, there is a co-variation between the independent variables in these tables. Hence, we needed to perform a multivariate analysis in order to separate the causes of system support. Before we turned to that task, however, we looked at how system support varies between our cases.

System support in counties and cities

Support for the parliamentary system varies a lot between the seven cities and counties. In Oslo, as many as 85% of the respondents are in favour of the established model. There is also a clear majority for parliamentary rule in Bergen. In Tromsø opinion is divided. On the other hand, only 25% support parliamentary rule in the county of Hedmark. Here, 50% of the respondents want to change back to an alderman model. Among the four counties that have adopted parliamentary rule, Nordland is the only one where a clear majority of the politicians support the system. Politicians in Troms and Nord-Trøndelag divide in their opinions.

Table 3: Preferences for governance model in the future.

	Parliamentary model %	No clear opinion %	Alderman model %	N
Oslo	85	10	5	20
Bergen	64	16	20	25
Tromsø	42	16	42	19
<i>City total</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>64</i>
Nordland	67	4	29	24
Nord- Trøndelag	47	6	47	17
Troms	39	17	44	23

Hedmark	25	25	50	20
<i>County total</i>	45	13	42	84

Table 3 shows the difference in system support within the city group and the county group, but also between counties and cities. Internal differences between cities and between counties are greater than the aggregated differences between cities and counties. While the overall difference between cities and counties is 19%, the difference between cities amounts to 43% (Oslo vs. Tromsø) and between counties to 42% (Nordland vs. Hedmark). This prompts us look at contextual and process factors that can account for this variation in system support between individual cities and counties, but also at institutional differences between cities and counties. In the next section, we will use a multivariate analysis to explore these and other determinants for system support.

System support: A multivariate analysis

By means of a multivariate analysis, we look at the level of support for parliamentary rule. We include the four explanatory variables discussed above: political status (position vs. opposition), party size, institutional type (city vs. county), and case-specific contextual factors.

The dependent variable is preference for the parliamentary model vs. the alderman model. This variable has two values. Those who do not have a clear preference are excluded from the analysis. The analysis is carried out as a multi-nominal logistic regression. The explanatory power of the model is considerable, with the pseudo R² being 0.426 (Cox and Snell) and 0.578 (Nagelkerke).

Table 4: Preferences for governance model in the future. Multinomial logistic regression

Preference for an alderman model	B	Std. error	Wald	df	Sig.
Intercept	2.539	0.823	9.516	1	.002
Oslo	-4.211	1.368	9.468	1	.002**
Bergen	-2.365	0.972	5.916	1	.015*
Tromsø	-0.758	0.985	0.592	1	.442
Nordland	-2.174	0.961	5.114	1	.024*
Troms	-0.447	0.955	0.219	1	.640
Nord-Trøndelag	-1.089	1.002	1.181	1	.277
Hedmark	0 ^b	.	.	0	.
Major party	-0.551	0.712	0.599	1	.439

Small party	0 ^b	.	.	0	.
Position	-2.935	0.749	15.360	1	.000**
Opposition	0 ^b	.	.	0	.

a. The reference category is parliamentarism

b. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant

The analysis shows that the effect of institutional type, city vs. county, disappears. The effect of party size also disappears. The two remaining explanatory factors are position vs. opposition and case-specific context. Regarding the case-specific context, support for parliamentary rule is significantly higher in Oslo, Bergen, and Nordland when compared to Hedmark. Hedmark is the case with the lowest support for the parliamentary model. The question is what kind of case-specific factors might account for the revealed differences?

System support and contextual factors

To explore how contextual factors affect system support, we made a comparative case study where we chose the extreme cases regarding support for the parliamentary system. These are the cities of Oslo and Tromsø, and the counties of Nordland and Hedmark. We compare the cases regarding readiness for change, inclusiveness, and capacity for change.

Oslo

Oslo was a pioneer regarding parliamentary governance at the local level. Back in the 1980s the political leaders in Oslo struggled to bring about this arrangement. They considered parliamentary rule with a stronger executive board to be the best solution for improving the economic situation of the capital (Baldersheim 1992). Permission to introduce parliamentary rule was granted by the Norwegian parliament in 1986, with authorization in a special statute. The city’s history has led to a strong sense of ownership over the parliamentary model. The strong support for the parliamentary model has continued over time. Return to alderman rule has not been a big issue in Oslo, although there was some criticism from the opposition, particularly in the first years of parliamentary rule. Today, the criticism mostly focuses on a lack of transparency in political processes rather than on parliamentary rule as a governance model.

Earlier studies have characterized the parliamentary system in Oslo as a consensual system (Hagen et al. 1999, Saxi 2006). However, it is an open question whether this consensus is a deliberate choice by the political leadership or whether it mainly reflects the political situation. After most elections since 1986, it was difficult to establish a majority executive. The Conservative Party, which held the position of executive board leader in most of the executives, needed support from the right-wing Progress Party or from two of the centrist parties. The centrist parties refused to participate in the executive board together with the Progress Party. A rather special form of parliamentary rule has developed in which the city council has formally been in the minority but has ensured a majority with the help of agreements with parties in opposition.

The consensus characteristic has been strengthened by what may be viewed as a more deliberate leadership choice. The majority has been generous in distributing committee leadership positions to the parties in opposition. Working conditions are also good, with salaries for full-time politicians also given to the opposition. Several minor adjustments to the model have also been implemented.

Regarding change capacity, one particular factor deserves attention. Unlike the other cases, the city council in Oslo regularly includes members from the national parliament. Thus, Oslo has easier access to knowledge about parliamentary practice than the other cases. This may be part of the explanation for the successful implementation of parliamentary rule.

Hedmark

In 1987 Hedmark was first among the Norwegian counties to introduce a variety of parliamentary rule, however lacking the element of a no confidence vote. This was one of the experiments in the so-called “free commune” reform in Norway (Bukve and Hagen 1994). Parliamentary rule in Hedmark was introduced as a response to a national call for innovative experiments in local and regional government, and the preparation period was short. The experiment, however, did not result in the budget control that had been hoped for, and Hedmark returned to alderman rule after just four years. In spite of this, parliamentary rule was reintroduced in 2003 with the slenderest of majorities, with only 17 of 33 representatives voting in favor. The reform was not well anchored in the council, and readiness for change can be seen as low.

A county executive board was established, but it also had a slender majority and only consisted of three members. This means that power was very concentrated in the “troika,” as some opposition politicians called it (Saxi and Stigen 2006). The Labour Party has held a leadership position in the executive board since 2003. Voting in the county council is mainly block-dominated. A situation has developed where the opposition members claim that there is a democratic deficit in county politics. The whip principle is commonly used to keep the political majority together. Even though 20 of 35 council members voted for parliamentary rule in 2011, our survey shows a clear majority in favour of alderman rule among the respondents from the council. Altogether, the reform context in Hedmark is marked by a strong concentration of power and a lack of inclusiveness.

There seems to be a lack of adaptive capacity and learning within the political leadership. Even if the parliamentary model failed in the first attempt due to a strong concentration of power and collective responsibility in the executive board, these features are still present in the way parliamentary rule is practiced in Hedmark today.

Nordland

In 1999, Nordland was the first county to establish parliamentary rule after it was permitted by the Local Government Act. Even in light of the earlier experiences

from Oslo and Hedmark, Nordland can be characterized as a case of an early reformer. The preparatory work was solid, and a clear majority (35 of 53 council members) voted for establishing parliamentary rule (Saxi 2002). Readiness for change was quite high in Nordland, measured both by voting figures and by the preparatory work.

The first county council executive board was established as a majority board, but it included as many as five political parties and was supported by 68% of the representatives in the county council. Such “oversized cabinets” can be described as consensus-based. Even if the executive board has continued to be a majority executive, many different parties have supported the board. The Labour Party has been the board’s leadership for the whole period, but in varying coalitions. Over time, nearly all the parties represented in the county council have been included in the executive board. Due to oversized coalitions and shifting alliances behind the executive, Nordland can be viewed as a case of inclusive reform implementation.

Since many of the political parties have gained experience with executive work, they are able to evaluate the model and discuss the adjustment of the governance model from different angles. This was probably helpful during the multiple adjustments made to the model since 1999. At the council’s last vote on parliamentary rule, in 2011, the support figures were considerably higher than at the time of introduction; 43 of 53 members voted in favor, indicating a successful implementation (Saxi et al 2014).

Tromsø

Tromsø is the late reformer among our cases, introducing parliamentary rule in 2011. The introduction of the parliamentary system was characterized by a relatively good prior assessment and high support in the city council. Only 7 of the 43 city council representatives voted against parliamentary rule, indicating a high degree of readiness for change.

But the story is different regarding inclusiveness. In recent evaluations, parliamentary rule in Tromsø is characterized as a case where “the winner takes all” (Saxi et al., 2014:44). Representatives of the opposition who voted for the parliamentary system, view the concentration of power in the city executive board as not necessarily an effect of the parliamentary system as such, but rather as an effect of the city executive’s policy. The polarization of politics in Tromsø has deeper roots than the introduction of parliamentary rule in 2011, but it seems that parliamentary rule has strengthened this polarization. One informant mentioned that one now has a kind of “vulgarized parliamentarism, which is harmful for the public debate and also for democracy in the city.” Furthermore, the opposition politicians say that it is difficult to get information about political issues, and also hard to control the city executive board’s range of activities. Politics has been led out of the city council and committees and into the backrooms. As Table 4 shows, support for parliamentary rule is decreasing among the council members.

Since parliamentary rule has a shorter history in Tromsø than in our other cases, change capacity is more difficult to assess. Interestingly enough, it has been

expressed in recent interviews that even executive board members want more consensus-based political processes in Tromsø (Buck et al., 2015:26). The municipal election in September 2015 changed the political balance, and the former opposition could form a new executive. The junior parties in the coalition insisted on a changes in the political system, and the Labour party had to accept the demand in order to be able to form a majority executive. The reversing to the alderman model took place the 1st of July 2016.

The cases compared

As summarized in Table 5, the two cases with high system support are Oslo and Nordland. They are both characterized by high readiness for change, inclusive reform implementation, and sufficient capacity for change and adaptation during the reform period. The specific mechanisms for inclusion are different. In Oslo it is minority executives and power sharing with the opposition, while in Nordland it is oversized coalitions and shifting alliances.

Table 5: Comparison of cases

	Readiness for change	Inclusive-ness	Change capacity	System support
Oslo	High political support	High	Sufficient	High
	Political ownership	Minority executives Position sharing		
Hedmark	Slender majority	Low	Low	Low
	Response to national call	Power concentration		
Nordland	High political support	High	Sufficient	High
	Well prepared	Oversized coalitions Shifting alliances		
Tromsø	High political support	Low	Open	Low

	Well pre- pared	Power con- centration
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Tromsø is also characterized by high readiness for change, measured both by council voting and the solidity of the preparation process. But reform implementation in Tromsø has not been inclusive when compared to reform implementation in Oslo and Nordland. One result of this is decreasing support for the parliamentary system, and finally a return to an alderman model. Hence, our findings point to inclusiveness in the implementation phase as important for the successful implementation of a reform. Initial readiness for change is not enough. The initial drive for change has to be followed up during the implementation.

From the case comparison, Hedmark seems to be lacking most of the contextual conditions necessary for a successful reform process, as measured by broad system support. From the majority's point of view, however, Hedmark may be considered as more of a success case. A kind of Labour-led coalition has remained in power during all the years of parliamentary rule. The core partners of this coalition have increased their power through the reform. As long as they can get a majority in elections and the whip strategy works, it is in their interest to defend parliamentary rule.

The case study supports the initial propositions about readiness for change, inclusiveness in the process, and change capacity as contextual factors that influence reform implementation. Yet it also supports the idea that these contextual factors must be linked to each other. Initial readiness for change can be seen as a kind of capital that supports reform decisions. But to avoid squandering it, this capital must be managed well during the reform process. Inclusiveness and adaptive capacity are vital for this kind of management. As we see from the case of Tromsø, reform capital that is not well managed tends to diminish quite quickly. From these cases we can only speculate whether a tiny reform capital, as was the case in Hedmark, could have been increased through a better managed reform process.

Discussion and conclusions

Our research started from three propositions about institutional effects, self-interested political actors, and contextual factors. Regarding the effects of institutional change, we found that the change to parliamentary rule affected position and opposition members in different ways. Political power became more concentrated to the position and particularly to the executive, together with a corresponding loss of influence for the opposition.

Our second proposition suggested that support for parliamentary rule would depend on how the reform affected self-interested political actors. This proposition found strong support in the data. Politicians belonging to the majority parties have a more positive view of parliamentary rule than the members of the opposition. Politicians with a greater chance of acquiring power, operationalized as politicians from the two biggest parties compared with members of the small parties,

are also more positive. Both these findings are in accordance with earlier research focusing on electoral institutions (Bowler et al. 2006). Our research indicates that the interests of the involved actors also play a role in the support of political institutions more generally.

Our third proposition suggested that support for parliamentary rule also is affected by contextual factors. Support increases when organisational readiness for change is high, when the reform is implemented in an inclusive way, and when the capacity for change and adaptation is sufficiently high. The variables are linked, since they relate to different stages of a reform cycle.

We analysed contextual change drivers through a comparative case study. In both cases where the reform process had resulted in high support for the parliamentary model, we find high readiness for change, inclusive implementation, and sufficient capacity for change and adaptation. However, the mechanisms for inclusion were not identical. An including leadership was present, but the mechanisms for inclusion were partly produced by situational factors other than a deliberate effort by leadership. Our initial proposition is supported by the case study, but the study also shows that there may be different paths toward successful reform implementation.

Both successful reformers were also early adopters. In the literature on reforms, it is commonly accepted that early adopters had an advantage in implementing comprehensive reforms, since they were motivated reformers and were not merely copying others. However, our least successful case, with a turbulent reform history, was also an early adopter, and our last case combined a high initial level of readiness for change with a rapid loss of trust in the institutions reformed. It seems that no single variable can account for a successful process outcome. It is the interaction of the contextual variables that are decisive. Initial support is capital which may be lost in the course of the process. In general, our research supports a path dependent view of reform processes, with no uniform route to success (Streeck and Thelen 2005).

The relationship between interests and inclusive implementation is also worth an afterthought. Including implementation can be perceived as a tool for compromise between interests. However, it is more to the inclusiveness variable than a mere accommodation of self-interested actors. Some of the informants in the case studies argued against parliamentary rule not merely because it made them losers in the political process. Rather, they doubted the fairness of a political system that permitted the winners to take all without restrictions. In other words, they stressed procedural fairness rather than substantial fairness. This is in accordance with the findings of Tyler (1994) and Grimes (2006), who argued that procedural fairness is a factor behind the development of trust, and hence in system support.

The general implication of our work is that we need to analyse institutional change as embedded change. Pure institutional effects are abstractions, and in real-world change processes they are modified by a range of contextual factors. Process outcomes are shaped in a complex interplay between those factors. Ideas, interests,

capacity, and leadership all play a role in institutional change processes. The task is to understand the interplay and develop context-sensitive theory.

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